

---

---

---

---

# **GERMANY AND THE SECOND WORLD WAR**

---

---

---

---

## **VOLUME VIII**

---

---

The Eastern Front 1943–1944: The War in  
the East and on the Neighbouring Fronts

---

---

OXFORD

# GERMANY AND THE SECOND WORLD WAR

## VIII

The Eastern Front 1943–1944: The War in  
the East and on the Neighbouring Fronts



# Germany and the Second World War

Edited for the  
Militärgeschichtliches  
Forschungssamt (Research  
Institute for Military History),  
Potsdam, Germany  
by  
KARL-HEINZ FRIESER

VOLUME VIII  
The Eastern Front 1943–1944: The War  
in the East and on  
the Neighbouring Fronts

KARL-HEINZ FRIESER  
KLAUS SCHMIDER  
KLAUS SCHÖNHERR  
GERHARD SCHREIBER  
KRISZTIÁN UNGVÁRY  
BERND WEGNER

Translated by  
BARRY SMERIN  
BARBARA WILSON

Translation editor  
BARRY SMERIN

CLarendon Press • oxford

**OXFORD**  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Great Clarendon Street, Oxford, OX2 6DP,  
United Kingdom

Oxford University Press is a department of the University of Oxford.  
It furthers the University's objective of excellence in research, scholarship,  
and education by publishing worldwide. Oxford is a registered trade mark of  
Oxford University Press in the UK and in certain other countries

© 2007 by Deutsche Verlagsanstalt, a division of Verlagsgruppe Random House

The moral rights of the authors have been asserted

First Edition published in 2017

Impression: 1

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in  
a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, without the  
prior permission in writing of Oxford University Press, or as expressly permitted  
by law, by licence or under terms agreed with the appropriate reprographics  
rights organization. Enquiries concerning reproduction outside the scope of the  
above should be sent to the Rights Department, Oxford University Press, at the  
address above

You must not circulate this work in any other form  
and you must impose this same condition on any acquirer

Published in the United States of America by Oxford University Press  
198 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016, United States of America

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

Data available

Library of Congress Control Number: 20105472259

ISBN 978-0-19-872346-2

Printed in Great Britain by  
Clays Ltd, St Ives plc

Links to third party websites are provided by Oxford in good faith and  
for information only. Oxford disclaims any responsibility for the materials  
contained in any third party website referenced in this work.

# *Contents*

<i>List of Illustrations</i>	xv
<i>List of Maps</i>	xvi
<i>List of Tables</i>	xx
<i>Notes on the Authors</i>	xxiii
<i>Abbreviations</i>	xxv
<i>Key to Symbols</i>	xxxi

INTRODUCTION	1
--------------	---

## PART I FROM STALINGRAD TO KURSK *by Bernd Wegner*

I. BASIC PROBLEMS IN GERMAN CONDUCT OF THE WAR AFTER STALINGRAD	7
1. Stalingrad a Turning Point?	7
2. Losses and Resources: The Changing Strategic Coordinates	12
(a) The Manpower Situation of the Eastern Army and the Failure of Total Mobilization	12
(b) Material Losses and Ostensible Successes in the War Economy	22
3. 'Fortress Europe' and the Problem of the Second Front	30
II. GERMAN ALLIANCE POLICY AND THE QUESTION OF A SEPARATE PEACE	44
1. The Erosion of the Axis Pact	45
2. The Illusion of a Separate Peace	53
III. THE GENESIS OF THE BATTLE OF KURSK	62
1. Basic Considerations	62
2. The Conflict over the Timing of the Attack	72

## PART II THE BATTLE OF THE KURSK SALIENT *by Karl-Heinz Frieser*

I. THE HOPELESS GERMAN STARTING POSITION	83
1. Disastrous Planning: A Frontal Attack without the Element of Surprise	84
2. Relative Strength: An Assault against an Avalanche	86
(a) The German Potential in the Kursk Salient	87
(b) The Soviet Potential in the Kursk Salient	93
(c) Ratio of Opposing Forces in Operation CITADEL	95
(d) Comparison of Total Potential in the Kursk–Orel Area	97

(e) The Bottom Line: Soviet Superiority and the Impossibility of a Decisive Battle	99
3. ‘Fortress Kursk’	101
 II. THE FAILURE OF OPERATION CITADEL	104
1. The Abortive Soviet Pre-emptive Strike	104
2. The Failed Attack by Ninth Army (5 to 13 July 1943)	106
3. The Advance of Army Group South up to 12 July	112
4. The Myth of Prokhorovka	118
(a) The Soviet Encirclement Plan	118
(b) Prokhorovka: Legend and Reality	120
(c) Balance-Sheet of the Soviet Debacle	128
(d) Epilogue: The Tank Battle that Never Took Place	134
5. Hitler’s Order to Halt the Offensive—‘Victory Thrown Away?’	138
(a) Operation ROLAND’s Chances of Success	142
(b) The Donets–Mius Offensive	143
(c) The Offensive in the Orel Bulge	144
(d) The Allied Landing in Sicily	145
 III. OPERATION CITADEL—A TURNING POINT?	147
1. Causes of the German Failure	147
2. Quantitative Balance-Sheet: Asymmetrical Losses	150
3. Technological and Tactical Balance-Sheet: The Qualitative Turnaround in Favour of German Armour	157
(a) ‘Tiger Shock’ and Soviet Armour’s ‘Technology Gap’	157
(b) Tactical Efficiency	164
4. Strategic Balance-Sheet: CITADEL—Only a Virtual Turning Point	168
 IV. THE SOVIET COUNTER-OFFENSIVES	171
1. The Orel Counter-Offensive (Operation KUTUZOV), 12 July to 18 August 1943	172
2. The Belgorod–Kharkov Offensive of 3 to 23 August (Operation RUMYANTSEV)	188
3. Balance of Losses in the ‘Greatest Battle in History’	200

PART III THE PERPLEXITIES OF WAR: THE SOVIET  
THEATRE IN GERMAN POLICY AND STRATEGY  
FROM THE SUMMER OF 1943

*by Bernd Wegner*

I. THE SOVIET THEATRE OF WAR IN GERMAN POLICY AND STRATEGY FROM THE SUMMER OF 1943	209
 II. FROM THE SETBACKS IN THE SUMMER OF 1943 TO A PERMANENT CRISIS OF LEADERSHIP	213

III. THE ABANDONMENT OF FOREIGN POLICY AND THE ISOLATION OF GERMANY	230
IV. WITHDRAWAL FROM THE EAST? ‘FORTRESS EUROPE’ AND THE DILEMMA OF INTERCONNECTED WAR	243
1. Führer Directive No. 51	243
2. Scorched Earth	253
3. The East Wall Debate	266
 <b>PART IV THE SWING OF THE PENDULUM: THE WITHDRAWAL OF THE EASTERN FRONT FROM SUMMER 1943 TO SUMMER 1944</b>	
PROLOGUE: THE ‘FORGOTTEN YEAR’	273
I. THE WITHDRAWAL OF ARMY GROUP NORTH FROM LENINGRAD TO THE BALTIC	274
<i>Karl-Heinz Frieser</i>	
1. Defence against Soviet Offensives in the Second Half of 1943	275
2. Withdrawal to the Panther Line in the Baltic (14 January to 1 March 1944)	280
3. Summary: The Beginning of the End in the North	290
II. THE WITHDRAWAL OF ARMY GROUP CENTRE TO BELORUSSIA UP TO THE SPRING OF 1944	293
<i>Karl-Heinz Frieser</i>	
1. Developments up to Mid-September 1943	293
2. Withdrawal to the Panther Line (16 September to 2 October 1943)	297
3. The Winter Battles of 1943–1944: An ‘Unknown War’	301
(a) Third Armoured Army in the Winter Battles of Vitebsk	307
(b) Fourth Army in the ‘Highway Battles’ near Orsha	318
(c) Ninth Army in the Defensive Battles to the East of Bobruisk	327
(d) Second Army and Protection of the Open Southern Flank	330
III. ARMY GROUP SOUTH’S WITHDRAWAL OPERATIONS IN THE UKRAINE	338
<i>Karl-Heinz Frieser</i>	
1. In the Shadow of Kursk: Defence against the Two Soviet Relief Offensives on the Southern Wing (17 July to 2 August 1943)	338
2. The Collapse of the Front to the East of the Dnieper (16 August to 15 September 1943)	343
(a) The Soviet Advance into the Donets Basin	351
(b) The Crisis on the Northern Wing	352
3. The Withdrawal to the Dnieper up to the End of September 1943	354
(a) The Dispute over Withdrawal	354

(b) The 'Panther' Withdrawal to behind the Dnieper (16 to 29 September)	356
(c) The Soviet Airborne Operation at Bukrin on 24–25 September	358
4. The Battle of the Dnieper Line (29 September to 23 December 1943)	361
(a) Fourth Armoured Army in the Kiev Sector	362
(b) Eighth Army in the Lee of the Wind	372
(c) First Armoured Army at Zaporozhye	374
5. The Start of the Soviet Dnieper–Carpathian Offensive at the Turn of 1943/4	379
(a) Fourth Armoured Army's Withdrawal and First Armoured Army's Counter-Attack	381
(b) Eighth Army at Kirovograd	387
6. The Breakout from the Cherkassy–Korsun Pocket (24 January to 17 February 1944)	388
(a) The Encirclement (24 to 31 January)	388
(b) The Relief Attacks (1 to 16 February)	391
(c) The Conflict about the Pocket and the Decision to Break Out	398
(d) The Breakout on 16–17 February	403
(e) Summing Up: 'No Stalingrad on the Dnieper'	409
7. The Withdrawal Battles of Fourth Armoured Army in the Northern Ukraine from the End of January to April 1944	413
(a) The Kovel Gap	414
(b) The Soviet Attack towards the South	415
(c) The Tarnopol Disaster	420
(d) The Behaviour of the Population in the Ukraine and Galicia	426
8. The Breakout by First Armoured Army from the Kamenets Podolsky 'Moving Pocket'	427
(a) The Encirclement of First Armoured Army	429
(b) Manstein's Ultimatum to Hitler	433
(c) The Breakout by First Armoured Army	435
(d) Outlook	439
9. Manstein's Dismissal and the 'End of Operations'	442
 IV. THE WITHDRAWAL OF ARMY GROUP A THROUGH THE CRIMEA TO ROMANIA	446
<i>Klaus Schönherr</i>	
1. The Kuban Bridgehead	447
2. From the Wotan Line to the Dnieper	454
3. The Crimea in the Winter of 1943/4	460
4. Nikopol	465
5. The Withdrawal to the Bug	474
6. From the Bug to the Dniester–Iași Position	476
7. The Loss of the Crimea	483

## PART V COLLAPSE IN THE EAST: THE WITHDRAWAL BATTLES FROM THE SUMMER OF 1944

I. ERRORS AND ILLUSIONS: THE GERMAN COMMAND'S MISCALCULATIONS IN THE EARLY SUMMER OF 1944	489
<i>Karl-Heinz Frieser</i>	
1. 'Attack or Perish': Hitler's Auto-Suggestive Victory Euphoria	490
2. 'Window of Vulnerability': The Risky Neglect of the Eastern Front in Favour of the Western	492
3. 'The Balkans or the Baltic': The Delusion of a Decisive Soviet Offensive	497
4. The Danger Ignored: German Enemy Intelligence and the Belorussian Balcony	501
(a) The Confusion about the Soviet Point of Concentration	501
(b) Army Group Centre's Inconsistent Assessment of the Enemy Situation	503
(c) The 'Trilemma' Faced by Foreign Armies East	509
(d) The Causes of the Erroneous Assessment by German Enemy Intelligence	511
5. Hitler's 'Fortified Places': The Doctrine of Self-Imposed Encirclement	514
II. THE COLLAPSE OF ARMY GROUP CENTRE IN THE SUMMER OF 1944	522
<i>Karl-Heinz Frieser</i>	
1. The Asymmetry of Forces	522
(a) The Soviet Potential: An Unprecedented Concentration of Force	522
(b) Army Group Centre: A House of Cards about to Collapse	524
2. The Military Planning	532
3. Opening Phase: The Operational Breakthrough on the Wings (22 to 28 June 1944)	534
(a) The Disaster of Third Armoured Army at Vitebsk	536
(b) The Withdrawal of Fourth Army at Mogilev	539
(c) The Encirclement of Ninth Army at Bobruisk	541
4. The Formation of the Pocket at Minsk (28 June to 4 July)	544
(a) The Counter-Attacks by 5th and 12th Armoured Divisions	546
(b) The Downfall of Fourth Army in the 'Moving Pocket'	548
5. The Fighting during Withdrawal to Poland and Lithuania (4 to 31 July)	555
(a) Model's Crisis Management	555
(b) The 'Zeitzler Plan' Controversy	557
(c) The Counter-Attack at Vilnius and Withdrawal to the Brest-Litovsk-Kaunas Line	560
(d) Danger on the Flanks: 1st Belorussian Front's Advance to the Vistula	563

6. The Stabilization of the Front between Warsaw and Riga up to the end of August	566
(a) The Tank Battle before Warsaw as an Operational Turning Point	566
(b) Operation DOPPELKOPF: Reconnection with Army Group North	585
7. Analysis of the Worst Defeat in German Military History	589
(a) Importance in the Framework of the Eastern Campaign	589
(b) The Causes of the Catastrophe	592
(c) Operation BAGRATION: The Soviet Missed Opportunity for a Swift End to the War	599
 III. THE DEFENSIVE SUCCESSES OF ARMY GROUP CENTRE IN THE AUTUMN OF 1944	 602
<i>Karl-Heinz Frieser</i>	
1. The Problem of the Vistula Bridgeheads	603
2. Prevention of the Breakout to the North in the Bug–Narew Sector	605
3. The Repulsion of the Soviet Thrust towards East Prussia (16 October to 5 November 1944)	610
Epilogue: Nemmersdorf, the Writing on the Wall	617
 IV. ARMY GROUP NORTH'S WITHDRAWAL BATTLES TO COURLAND	 621
<i>Karl-Heinz Frieser</i>	
1. The Dismal Starting Position in the Summer of 1944	621
2. The Withdrawal in the Baltic Region up to the End of August	624
(a) Hitler's Reasons for Holding on to the 'Baltic Fortress'	624
(b) The Open Southern Flank and the Danger of Enclosure	627
3. The Evacuation of Estonia	633
4. The Final Separation of Army Group North in Courland	639
(a) The Soviet Advance to the Baltic Coast in October	639
(b) The Plans for a Breakout to East Prussia	653
5. The Courland Battles	654
(a) The First Three Courland Battles up to the End of 1944	654
(b) The Fighting up to May 1945	658
6. Conclusion	661
(a) Military-Operational Analysis	661
(b) Hitler's Utopian Strategy: Courland as a Bridgehead for 'Final Victory'	665
 V. THE BATTLES FOR GALICIA AND THE BESKID MOUNTAINS	 675
<i>Klaus Schönherr</i>	
1. Army Group North Ukraine in Galicia	675
(a) The Army Group's Situation in the Spring of 1944	676
(b) The Enemy Forces and Their Plans	678
(c) The Operational Possibilities of Securing Galicia	680
2. The Withdrawal Battles in Galicia	683
(a) The Battles in the Army Group's Central Section (13 to 19 July 1944)	684

(b) The Enclosure of XIII Army Corps	688	
(c) The Loss of Unity in the Front North of Lvov	690	
(d) The Breakthrough on the Army Group's Northern Wing	693	
(e) Fourth Armoured Army's Withdrawal to the Vistula	699	
(f) The Crisis on the Middle San	702	
(g) The Developments on the Army Group's Southern Wing	705	
3. The Struggle to Establish a Defensive Front from the Vistula to the Northern Carpathians	709	
(a) The Establishment of a New Defensive Front	710	
(b) The Battles for the Baranów Bridgehead	713	
4. The Autumn Battles in the Beskid Mountains and Slovakia	716	
(a) The Slovak National Uprising	717	
(b) The Battles for the Dukla Pass and the Beskid Mountains	722	
(c) The Situation of Army Group A in the Autumn of 1944	726	
VI. THE WITHDRAWAL BATTLES IN ROMANIA AND TRANSYLVANIA IN THE SUMMER AND AUTUMN OF 1944		729
<i>Klaus Schönherr</i>		
1. Army Group South Ukraine on the Romanian Defence Front (Summer 1944)	730	
(a) The Situation in the Romanian Theatre of War	731	
(b) The Soviet Enemy on the Dniester and in Northern Romania	742	
2. The Fighting in Romania and Transylvania (Late Summer to Autumn 1944)	744	
(a) The Fighting in Moldavia and Bessarabia (20 to 23 August 1944)	745	
(b) The Events in Bucharest on 23 August 1944	771	
(c) The Battles in the Bucharest-Ploieşti Area	775	
(d) The Army Group's Reaction to the Political Changes in Romania	799	
(e) The Withdrawal to the Carpathian Ridge	802	
(f) The Destruction of Sixth Army	805	
(g) The Withdrawal to Bulgaria	813	
3. The Battles in Transylvania (Autumn 1944)	816	
(a) The Establishment of a Defensive Front in the Carpathians	816	
(b) The Battles in Central Transylvania	822	
(c) The Final Loss of Transylvania (October 1944)	834	
4. The Situation of Army Group South after the Loss of Transylvania (End of October 1944)	843	
VII. THE HUNGARIAN THEATRE OF WAR		846
<i>Krisztián Ungváry</i>		
1. The Hungarian Government's Foreign Policy after the German Defeat at Stalingrad	846	
(a) Equipment and Organization of the Honvéd Army between 1944 and 1945	848	
(b) The Hungarian Occupation Force	850	

2. The Occupation of Hungary and the Impact on Armaments	854
3. The Hungarian Theatre of Operations	863
(a) The General Situation in the Carpathian Basin in the Autumn of 1944	865
(b) The Soviet Offensives against Budapest	882
(c) The Fighting in Budapest	900
(d) The Relief Attempts	902
(e) The Final Battle in Budapest and the Breakout	917
(f) The Last Offensives	924
4. Hungary's Place in Hitler's Calculations: A Final Reckoning	955

## PART VI THE WAR ON THE NEIGHBOURING FRONTS

I. THE END OF THE WAR IN SCANDINAVIA	961
<i>Bernd Wegner</i>	
1. The Price of Peace: Finland's Situation in 1943/4	963
(a) Relations between Berlin and Helsinki in the Aftermath of Stalingrad	963
(b) First Peace-Feelers	972
2. German Reactions and Plans in the Event of Finland's Withdrawal from the War	979
3. From the June Crisis to Finland's Withdrawal from the War	984
4. The Lapland War	992
5. The End of the War in Norway	1000
II. THE YUGOSLAVIAN THEATRE OF WAR (JANUARY 1943 TO MAY 1945)	1008
<i>Klaus Schmider</i>	
1. Geographical, Topographical, Climatic, and Transport Conditions	1008
2. A Look Back (May 1941 to December 1942)	1010
3. Climax and Failure of the Fight against the National Liberation Army (January 1943 to September 1944)	1015
4. Serbia after the Defeat of the 1941 Uprising	1034
5. The Yugoslavian Theatre of War as the Cornerstone of the Southern Section of the Eastern Front (October 1944 to May 1945)	1046
(a) The Temporary Stabilization of the Front (October to December 1944)	1046
(b) The End of the War in Yugoslavia (January to May 1945)	1059
6. Excursus: War Crimes Committed by the Occupying Powers	1069
7. Conclusion	1080
Appendix: Yugoslavian Resistance and Collaboration Armed Formations	1082
III. THE WITHDRAWAL FROM GREECE	1089
<i>Klaus Schönerr</i>	
1. The Withdrawal Movement in Greece	1090
2. The Withdrawal Battles in Macedonia	1095
3. XXI Mountain Corps' Withdrawal from Albania	1098

IV. THE END OF THE NORTH AFRICAN CAMPAIGN AND THE WAR IN ITALY, 1943 TO 1945	1100
<i>Gerhard Schreiber</i>	
1. North Africa and Italy in the Strategy of the Anti-Hitler Coalition and the Axis Alliance at the Beginning of 1943	1101
2. The Finale in Tunisia	1103
3. The Attack on 'Fortress Europe': Sicily 1943	1109
4. Italy's Exit from the War	1115
5. The War in Italy (September 1943 to June 1944) (a) The Decisive Battle of Salerno	1126
(b) Back and Forth—Nearing the End	1127
6. The Italian Theatre of War on the Sidelines (June 1944 to May 1945)	1154
7. Conclusion	1162
PART VII GERMANY ON THE BRINK OF THE PRECIPICE	
<i>by Bernd Wegner</i>	
I. WAGING WAR 'AS IF...': GERMANY'S STRATEGIC POSITION FROM THE SPRING OF 1944 ONWARDS	1167
II. ORCHESTRATING THE END	1194
CONCLUDING SUMMARY	1212
<i>Karl-Heinz Frieser</i>	
<i>Bibliography</i>	1227
<i>Index of Persons</i>	1297



## *List of Illustrations*

### DIAGRAMS

II.I.1.	Order of battle for Operation CITADEL (5 July 1943)	88
II.I.2.	Luftwaffe deployment for Operation CITADEL on 5 July 1943	89
II.I.3.	Ratio of opposing forces in the Kursk–Orel Area on 5 July 1943	101
II.II.1.	Losses in the tank battle at Prokhorovka (12 July 1943)	132
II.III.1.	Total losses in Operation CITADEL (5 to 16 July 1945)	149
II.III.2.	Strength and losses in Operation CITADEL (5 to 16 July 1945)	155
II.III.3.	Development of the armour situation on the eastern front (April to December 1943)	156
II.III.4.	Tank comparison (status: July 1943): the T-34 and its German adversaries	159
II.III.5.	Tank duels, summer 1943 (comparison of penetration ranges)	160
II.IV.1.	Losses in the summer of 1943	199
III.IV.1.	Breakdown of Wehrmacht actual strength at 1 October 1943 (excl. birth year 1926)	249
III.IV.2.	Breakdown of the Eastern Army at 1 October 1943 (excl. SS and Luftwaffe field units)	250
V.II.1.	Strength ratios in the Belorussian balcony (22 June 1944)	531
VI.IV.1.	Forces under C-in-C South (status: 9 April 1943)	1108
VI.IV.2.	Major units under C-in-C South-West (status: 7 April 1945)	1157
VI.IV.3.	Senior command structure under C-in-C South-West (status: 9 April 1945)	1160
VII.I.1.	Comparison of actual strength of the German Eastern Army and the Soviet army on the European front (1 January to 1 October 1944)	1170
VII.I.2.	Comparison of the German and Soviet replacement forces moved to the German eastern front between January and October 1944	1171

## *List of Maps*

I.I.1.	Intelligence on enemy landing intentions in January 1943	34
II.IV.1.	The Kursk Salient on 4 July 1943	177
II.IV.2.	Comparative strength in the Kursk Salient on 4 July 1943	178
II.IV.3.	Ninth Army's failed thrust on Kursk (5 to 11 July 1943)	179
II.IV.4.	The thrust by the Southern Group towards Kursk (4 to 16 July 1943)	180
II.IV.5.	The Soviet encirclement plan for 12 July 1943 at Prokhorovka	181
II.IV.6.	The tank battle at Prokhorovka on 12 July 1943	182
II.IV.7.	The battle in the Kursk Salient (5 July to 23 August 1943)	183
IV.I.1.	The withdrawal of Army Group North from Leningrad to the Panther Line (14 January to 1 March 1944)	281
IV.II.1.	The withdrawal of Army Group Centre to the Panther Line (12 July to 2 October 1943)	309
IV.II.2.	The battles around Nevel and Vitebsk in the autumn and winter of 1943/4 (6 October 1943 to 17 February 1944)	310
IV.II.3.	The defensive battles of Army Group Centre (12 October 1943 to 31 March 1944)	311
IV.II.4.	The encirclement of Kovel and the relief offensive (15 March to 5 April 1944)	312
IV.III.1.	Army Group South's withdrawal operations to the Dnieper (17 July to 29 September 1943)	344
IV.III.2.	The failed Soviet airborne operation at Bukrin on 24–25 September 1943	345
IV.III.3.	Army Group South's battles for the Dnieper Line (24 September to 23 December 1943)	346
IV.III.4.	The Soviet offensives in the area of Zhitomir and Kirovograd at the turn of 1943/4	347
IV.III.5.	The Cherkassy–Korsun encirclement battle (24 January to 17 February 1944)	348
IV.III.6.	Battles during Army Group South/North Ukraine's withdrawal to the Carpathians (4 March to 12 April 1944)	349
IV.III.7.	The failed attempts to relieve the Tarnopol 'Fortified Place' (25 March to 16 April 1944)	350
IV.III.8.	The breakout from the Cherkassy–Korsun pocket on 16–17 February 1944	418
IV.III.9.	The breakout by First Armoured Army from the Kamenets Podolsky 'moving pocket' (27 March to 6 April 1944)	419
IV.IV.1.	The Kuban bridgehead (beginning of April to beginning of October 1943)	448

IV.iv.2. From the Wotan Line to the Dnieper (October 1943 to January 1944)	469
IV.iv.3. The battles in the Nikopol area (February 1944)	470
IV.iv.4. The withdrawal from the Ingul to Bessarabia and into Moldavia (March to April 1944)	471
IV.iv.5. The final battle in the Crimea (April/May 1944)	472
V.ii.1. The downfall of Fourth Army in the ‘moving pocket’ (29 June to 9 July 1944)	552
V.ii.2. Operation BAGRATION: the Soviet offensive against Army Group Centre (22 June to 29 August 1944)	570
V.ii.3. Assessment of Soviet offensive planning by Foreign Armies East	571
V.ii.4. Rival defensive concepts in the summer of 1944	572
V.ii.5. Comparative strength for Operation BAGRATION on 22 June 1944	573
V.ii.6. The collapse of Army Group Centre (22 June to 4 July 1944)	574
V.ii.7. The encirclement of LIII Army Corps (Third Armoured Army) in Vitebsk (22 to 27 June 1944)	575
V.ii.8. The encirclement and partial breakout of Ninth Army at Bobruisk (22 June to 1 July 1944)	576
V.ii.9. Zeitzler’s plan for saving the northern section of the eastern front (end of June 1944)	577
V.ii.10. The relief attack on Vilnius on 13 July 1944	578
V.iv.1. The offensive by the left wing of 1st Belorussian Front from Kovel to Warsaw (18 to 31 July 1944)	642
V.iv.2. The tank battle before Warsaw (1 to 4 August 1944)	643
V.iv.3. Armoured Operation DOPPELKOPF (16 to 27 August 1944)	644
V.iv.4. The defensive battles on the Vistula and the Narew (5 August to 30 October 1944)	645
V.iv.5. The defence against the Soviet advance on East Prussia (16 October to 5 November 1944)	646
V.iv.6. The temporary enclosure of Army Group North (developments up to the end of July 1944)	647
V.iv.7. Army Group North withdrawal operations in August 1944	648
V.iv.8. Operation ASTER: the evacuation of Estonia (18 to 27 September 1944)	649
V.iv.9. The enclosure of Army Group North in Courland in October 1944	650
V.iv.10. The six Courland battles (27 October 1944 to 28 March 1945)	651
V.iv.11. Hitler’s utopian two-front strategy (1944)	652
V.v.1. Army Group North Ukraine: course of the front in June 1944	677
V.v.2. The encirclement of XIII Army Corps at Brody (13 to 23 July 1944)	690
V.v.3. The Slovak national uprising (29 August to 31 October 1944)	720
V.vi.1. The Soviet breakthrough between Târgu Frumos and Iași (20 to 21 August 1944)	747

V.vi.2. The Soviet breakout from the Tiraspol bridgehead (20 to 21 August 1944)	760
V.vi.3. The battles in Ploieşti and Bucharest (end of August 1944)	781
V.vi.4. The battles in the central section of the front of Army Group North Ukraine (July 1944)	787
V.vi.5. The loss of a continuous front (19 to 31 July 1944)	788
V.vi.6. The establishment of a defensive front on the Vistula and in the Beskids (August/September 1944)	789
V.vi.7. The autumn battles in the Beskids and Slovakia (September/October 1944)	790
V.vi.8. The front in Romania (Spring/Summer 1944)	791
V.vi.9. The course of operations in Bessarabia and Moldavia (20 to 23 August 1944)	792
V.vi.10. The disposition of the Romanian Territorial Army (20 August 1944)	793
V.vi.11. The advance by 2nd and 3rd Ukrainian Fronts into Romania (20 to 31 August 1944)	794
V.vi.12. The course of the Carpathian Front (beginning of September 1944)	795
V.vi.13. The military operations in Transylvania (mid-September to beginning of October 1944)	796
V.vi.14. The withdrawal battles in Transylvania (end of October 1944)	797
V.vii.1. The battles round Debrecen in the first half of October 1944	933
V.vii.2. The battles in the Hungarian Lowland Plain (29 October to 18 November 1944)	934
V.vii.3. The encirclement of Budapest in December 1944	935
V.vii.4. Relief Operations KONRAD I to III (1 to 27 January 1945)	936
V.vii.5. The Soviet breakthrough at Lake Balaton (16 to 23 March 1945)	937
V.vii.6. The battles in Western Hungary, mid- to end of March 1945	938
V.vii.7. The battles in the area east of Vienna and the capture of Vienna in 1945	939
VI.i.1. The German withdrawal from Finland, September 1944 to January 1945	1005
VI.i.2. The major Soviet offensive on the Karelian Isthmus and in South Karelia (9 June to mid-July 1944)	1006
VI.i.3. Yugoslavia after occupation and partition in April 1941	1007
VI.ii.1. Extent of the Italian occupation zone in Croatia (October 1941 to September 1943)	1019
VI.ii.2. Operation SCHWARTZ (15 May to 16 July 1943)	1022
VI.ii.3. The Soviet breakthrough into Serbia (status: 9 October 1944)	1051
VI.ii.4. The course of the front in the western Balkans at the turn of 1944/5	1059
VI.ii.5. The course of the front in the area of Army Group E (C-in-C South-East) on 12 April 1945	1066
VI.iii.1. The withdrawal of Army Group E from Greece (September and October 1944)	1091

VI.III.2. The withdrawal of Army Group E (October to December 1944)	1097
VI.IV.1. The battles in Tunisia up to the surrender on 13 May 1943	1138
VI.IV.2. The battle for Sicily, 10 July to 17 August 1943	1139
VI.IV.3. German and Italian forces in Italy up to 5 September 1943	1140
VI.IV.4. Development of the situation in Italy, 3 to 20 September 1943	1141
VI.IV.5. Development of the situation in Italy, 21 September to 5 October 1943	1142
VI.IV.6. Development of the situation in Italy, 5 October 1943 to 31 August 1944	1143
VI.IV.7. Development of the situation in Italy, 31 August 1944 to surrender on 2 May 1945	1144

## *List of Tables*

I.I.1.	Monthly Army and Luftwaffe losses, 1941–1943 (average figures)	13
I.I.2.	Human reserves of Germany and the Soviet Union in early 1943 as estimated by Foreign Armies East	16
I.I.3.	Armaments expenditure of the warring camps from 1935 to 1944	23
I.I.4.	Eastern army booty figures (1 January to 31 December 1942)	25
I.I.5.	Soviet tank and aircraft production, 1942/3	26
I.III.1.	German estimate of relative strength on the eastern front (status: 1 April 1943)	66
II.I.1.	Relative German–Soviet strength on the eastern front at the beginning of July 1943	84
II.I.2.	Breakdown of VIII Air Corps (Air Fleet 4) at 5 July 1943: deployment with Fourth Armoured Army and Army Detachment Kempf/Army Group South ( <i>CITADEL</i> )	90
II.I.3.	Breakdown of 1st Air Division (Air Fleet 6) at 5 July 1943	92
II.I.4.	Troop breakdown of Central Front and Voronezh Front at 1 July 1943 (excl. Steppe Front)	94
II.I.5.	Relative strength in the Kursk–Orel area on 5 July 1943	100
II.III.1.	Tank losses during Operation <i>CITADEL</i>	151
II.IV.1.	Breakdown of Air Fleet 6 at 10 July 1943 (before the Soviet counter-offensive at Orel)	174
II.IV.2.	Breakdown of Air Fleet 4 at 3 August 1943 (before the Soviet counter-offensive at Kharkov)	193
III.IV.1.	‘Fortress Europe’: size and distribution of forces in October 1943	244
IV.I.1.	Army Group North: order of battle (status: 21 July 1943)	276
IV.I.2.	Breakdown of Air Fleet 1 (assigned to Army Group North) at 20 July 1943	277
IV.I.3.	Breakdown of Air Fleet 1 (assigned to Army Group North) at 10 January 1944	283
IV.II.1.	Army Group Centre: order of battle (status: beginning of October 1943)	305
IV.II.2.	Breakdown of Air Fleet 6 at 10 October 1943 (for deployment with Army Group Centre)	306
IV.III.1.	Breakdown of Air Fleet 4 at 10 October 1943 (for deployment with Army Groups South and A)	363
IV.III.2.	Breakdown of Air Fleet 4 at 20 January 1944 (for deployment with Army Groups South and A)	383

IV.iv.1. Army Group A: order of battle (status: 4 October 1943)	455
IV.iv.2. Seventeenth Army: order of battle (status: 2 February 1944)	462
IV.iv.3. Army Group A: order of battle (status: 26 March 1944)	479
V.i.1. Planned distribution of forces in ‘fortified places’ in the sector of Army Group Centre (29 March 1944)	516
V.ii.1. Breakdown of Soviet forces for the Belorussian operation (1st phase: 22 June to 4 July 1944)	523
V.ii.2. Number of major formations and independent troop units of the four Soviet army fronts at the start of the Belorussian operation (22 June 1944)	525
V.ii.3. Soviet strength for Operation BAGRATION	526
V.ii.4. Strength of Soviet air armies before the start of the Belorussian operation (20 June 1944)	526
V.ii.5. Army Group Centre: order of battle on 22 June 1944	527
V.ii.6. Strength of Army Group Centre on 22 June 1944	528
V.ii.7. Air Fleet 6: aircraft operational on 20 June 1944	529
V.iv.1. Air Fleet 1: aircraft operational in the summer and autumn of 1944	623
V.v.1. Army Group North Ukraine: order of battle (status: 8 July 1944)	682
V.v.2. Army Group North Ukraine: order of battle (status: 15 August 1944)	714
V.vi.1. Army Group South Ukraine: order of battle (status: 15 August 1944)	737
V.vi.2. Army Group South Ukraine: order of battle (status: 31 August 1944)	818
V.vi.3. Army Group South: order of battle (status: 28 August 1944)	833
V.vii.1. Subordination of Royal Hungarian Occupation forces as at 26 December 1943	852
V.vii.2. Breakdown of German–Hungarian units in the Carpathian Basin on 5 October 1944	869
V.vii.3. Relative strength of forces in Hungary at the beginning of October 1944	872
V.vii.4. Losses in the tank battle for Debrecen–Nyíregyháza	874
V.vii.5. Proportion of German and Hungarian troops in Army Group South	877
V.vii.6. The 2nd Ukrainian Front and the German–Hungarian forces of Army Group South at the beginning of December 1944	887
V.vii.7. Strength of the German and Hungarian forces defending Budapest (24 December 1944 to 11 February 1945)	897
V.vii.8. Relative strength of the German and Hungarian forces defending Budapest (status: 24 December 1944)	897
V.vii.9. Army Group South and 2nd and 3rd Ukrainian Front tanks and assault guns on 1 January 1945	906
V.vii.10. Relative strength of forces at the time of Operation KONRAD II in the southern section of the front (between 7 and 11 January 1945)	909

V.VII.11. Relative strength in respect of tanks and assault guns during Operation KONRAD III (18 and 27 January 1945)	912
V.VII.12. Soviet military losses in major offensive operations	923
V.VII.13. Relative strength of forces at the beginning of the offensive in Transdanubia on 6 March 1945	930
V.VII.14. Breakdown of German and Hungarian units in the Carpathian Basin on 6 March 1945	932
V.VII.15. Relative strength of forces at the beginning of the Vienna Offensive Operation between Lake Balaton and the Danube on 16 March 1945	943
V.VII.16. Losses in the Vienna Offensive Operation (16 March to 15 April 1945)	953
VI.III.1. Army Group E: order of battle (status: 28 September 1944)	1096
VI.IV.1. Losses incurred by the German Field Army in Italy, September 1943 to 31 March 1945	1162
VII.I.1. Distribution of Allied land and air forces (divisions and aircraft as per Wehrmacht Operations Staff estimates, status: February 1944)	1169
VII.I.2. Foreign Armies East's estimate of Soviet land forces (status: 1 June 1944)	1175
VII.I.3. Foreign Armies East's estimate of numbers of Soviet tanks and assault guns in the first half of 1944	1177

## *Notes on the Authors*

**Dr Karl-Heinz Frieser** (b. 1949), Colonel in the Bundeswehr. Studied political science and medieval and modern history at Würzburg (doctorate in 1981). From 1985 to 2009, research associate at the MGFA, lastly head of research on the world war era. Publications include *Krieg hinter Stacheldraht. Die deutschen Kriegsgefangenen in der Sowjetunion und das Nationalkomitee 'Freies Deutschland'*, Mainz, 1981; *Blitzkrieg-Legende. Der Westfeldzug 1940* (3rd edn.), Munich, 2005 (translated into several languages and awarded the *Prix Edmond Fréville* in Paris in 2004); *Ardennen—Sedan. Militärhistorischer Führer durch eine europäische Schicksalslandschaft* (2nd edn.), Frankfurt am Main and Bonn, 2006. Main research area: Operational history of the Second World War.

**Dr Klaus Schmider** (b. 1966). Studied medieval and modern history, political science, and public law at Mainz. Master's dissertation (1977) on 'Das erste Kriegsjahr im Mittelmeerraum 1940–1941'; doctorate in 2001. Publications include *Der Partisanenkrieg in Jugoslawien 1941–1944*, Hamburg, 2002. Since May 1999, senior lecturer at the Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst, UK. In July 2006, on exchange with the Academia de Guerra del Ejercito de Chile.

**Klaus Schönerr, MA** (b. 1947), First Lieutenant (ret.). Studied history, classical archaeology, and political science at the Justus Liebig University of Giessen and the University of Vienna. From 1980 to 2005, research associate at the MGFA. His numerous publications on the Second World War, especially concerning the Balkans, Slovakia, and Turkey, include *Luptele Wehrmachtului în România 1944* [The Wehrmacht's Battles in Romania 1944], Bucharest, 2004.

**Dr Gerhard Schreiber** (b. 1940), Frigate Captain (ret.). Studied medieval and modern history, ancient history, and history of art at the University of Hamburg (doctorate in 1978). From 1976 to 1996, research associate at the MGFA. His numerous publications on the National Socialist period, and especially on German–Italian relations, include *Revisionismus und Weltmachtstreben. Marineführung und deutsch-italienische Beziehungen 1919 bis 1944*, Stuttgart, 1978; contributions to *Das Deutsche Reich und der Zweite Weltkrieg*, vol. 3, Stuttgart, 1984; *Hitler-Interpretationen 1923 bis 1983. Ergebnisse, Methoden und Probleme der Forschung* (2nd amended edn., expanded by an annotated bibliography for the period 1984 to 1987); *Die italienischen Militärinternierten im deutschen Machtbereich 1943–1945. Verraten—Verachtet—Vergessen*, Munich, 1990 (awarded the Guareschi History Prize by the city of Acqui); *Kurze Geschichte des Zweiten Weltkriegs*, Munich, 2005.

**Dr Krisztián Ungváry** (b. 1969). Studied history and German philology in Budapest, Jena, and Freiburg im Breisgau (Roman Herzog Scholarship). Obtained his doctorate in 1999 and was awarded the 'Young Military Historian of the Year' prize by the Budapest Institute of War Studies in the same year; currently in post at the Institute for the History of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution. Publications include *Die Schlacht um Budapest* (4th edn.), Munich, 2005 (translated into several languages, 14 editions in all); *A magyar honvédség a második világháborúban* [The Hungarian Honvéd Army in the Second World War] (2nd edn.), Budapest, 2005; *A második világháború. Szövegyűjtemény* [The Second World War. Source Edition], Budapest, 2005. Main research areas: minority issues, Hungarian state security from 1945 to 1990, right-wing extremism, anti-Semitism, and nationalism in Hungary.

**Prof. Bernd Wegner** (b. 1949). Studied history, philosophy, and political science in Tübingen, Vienna, and Hamburg. Awarded doctorate (1980) and postdoctoral habilitation (1995) by the University of Hamburg; In 1979–80, Volkswagen Research Fellow at St Antony's College, Oxford. From 1980 to 1995, research associate at the MGFA. Since 1995, Professor of Modern History at the Helmut Schmidt University of the Bundeswehr in Hamburg. From 2000 to 2005, chair of the German Committee for the Study of the Second World War. Publications include *Hitlers Politische Soldaten: Die Waffen-SS 1933–1945*, Paderborn, 1982 (7th edn. 2006; English edn. Oxford, 1990); ‘Der Krieg gegen die Sowjetunion 1942/43’, in *Das Deutsche Reich und der Zweite Weltkrieg*, vol. 6, Stuttgart, 1990; as editor: *Zwei Wege nach Moskau. Vom Hitler–Stalin-Pakt zum Unternehmen Barbarossa*, Munich, 1991; *Wie Kriege entstehen*, Paderborn, 2000 (2nd edn. 2003); *Wie Kriege enden*, Paderborn, 2002. Co-editor of the series ‘Krieg in der Geschichte’ (Paderborn) and of *Militärgeschichtliche Zeitschrift* (Munich).

## *Abbreviations*

A.	army
AA (1)	Auswärtiges Amt: foreign ministry
AA (2)	anti-aircraft
A.A.	air army
Abn.	airborne (unit)
Abt.	Abteilung: battalion, detachment
A.C.	army corps
<i>ADAP</i>	<i>Akten zur deutschen auswärtigen Politik</i>
A.Det.	army detachment
A.Gr.	Armeegruppe: army group
AK, A.K.	Armeekorps: army corps
Anl.	Anlage(n): annex(-es)
A.O.	Abwehroffizier: security officer
AOK	Armeeoberkommando: army HQ
Arh.M.A.E.	Arhivele Ministerului Afacerilor Externe: Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Bucharest
Arh.M.Ap.N.	Arhivele Ministerului Apărării Naționale: Archive of the Ministry of National Defence, Bucharest
Armd.	armoured (unit)
Art.	artillery (unit)
Aslt.	assault (unit)
<i>ASMZ</i>	<i>Allgemeine Schweizerische Militärzeitschrift</i>
ASUSSME	Archivio Storico dell'Ufficio Storico dello Stato Maggiore dell'Esercito: Historical Archive of the Army General Staff
AT	anti-tank (unit)
BA	Bundesarchiv: Federal German Archives, Koblenz
BA-MA	Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv: Federal German Military Archives, Freiburg im Breisgau
BdE	Befehlshaber des Ersatzheeres: commander of the replacement army
BDO	Bund Deutscher Offiziere: Federation of German Officers
Befh.	Befehlshaber: commander
Bev.Gen.	Bevollmächtigter General: commanding general
BFL	Budapest Főváros Levéltára: Budapest City Archives
Bo	Boeing
Brig.	brigade
Btl.	battalion
Btry.	battery
Bulg.	Bulgarian
Bv	Blohm & Voß
C.	corps
CAB	Cabinet Papers
Cav.	cavalry (unit)
Cbt.	combat (unit)

C.Det.	corps detachment
Cdr.	commander
Chef des GenStdH	Chef des Generalstabes des Heeres: chief of the army general staff
ChefdGenStdLw	Chef des Generalstabes der Luftwaffe: chief of the Luftwaffe general staff
ChefdSt	Chef des Stabes: chief of staff
Chef HRüst und BdE	Chef der Heeresrüstung und Befehlshaber des Ersatzheeres: chief of army equipment and commander of the replacement army
Chefs	Chefsache: to be seen by senior officer only
C-in-C	commander-in-chief
comm.	comments, commentary
Comp.	company
corr.	corrected
Cos.	Cossack (unit)
DAK	Deutsches Afrikakorps: German Africa Corps
DDI	<i>I Documenti Diplomatici Italiani</i>
Div.	division
DM	Draža Mihailović
Do	Dornier
dt.	deutsch: German
F.A.Gr.	Fernaufklärergruppe: strategic reconnaissance group
FHH	Feldherrnhalle
FHO	Fremde Heere Ost: Foreign Armies East
Fi	Fieseler
Fld.	field (unit)
Flivo	Flieger-Verbindungsoffizier: flight liaison officer
FLO	flight liaison officer
Freiw.Geb.Div.	Freiwilligen-Gebirgsdivision: volunteer mountain division
Frhr.	Freiherr: Baron
Frtr.	fortress (unit)
Frtr.	frontier (unit)
FS	Fernschreiben: telex
F.T.D.	Field Training Division
Fus.	fusilier (unit)
Fw	Focke-Wulf
GD	Grossdeutschland
Gds.	guards (unit)
Geb.Div.	Gebirgsdivision: mountain division
Gen.d.Art.	General der Artillerie: artillery general
Gen.d.Inf.	General der Infanterie: infantry general
Gen.Kdo.	Generalkommando: corps HQ
GenQu	Generalquartiermeister: quartermaster-general
GenStdH	Generalstab des Heeres: army general staff
GFP	Geheime Feldpolizei: secret field police
g.Kdos.	geheime Kommandosache: top secret
Gr.	group
He	Heinkel

HG	Hermann Göring
HGr, H.Gr.	Heeresgruppe: army group
HL	Hadtörténelmi Levéltár: Military History Archives, Budapest
Hptm.	Hauptmann: captain
HQu	Hauptquartier: headquarters
Hs	Henschel
Hun.	Hungarian
Hvy	heavy
IfZ	Institut für Zeitgeschichte: Institute of Contemporary History, Munich
i.G.	im Generalstab: in the general staff
Inf.	infantry (unit)
Instr.	instruction (unit)
intr.	introduced [by], introduction
JCH	<i>Journal of Contemporary History</i>
J.G.	Jagdgeschwader: fighter Geschwader (wing)
Jg.Div.	Jäger-Division: light-infantry division
J.I.C., JIC	Joint Intelligence Committee (US-Brit.)
JSMS	<i>Journal of Slavic Military Studies</i>
JSS	<i>Journal of Strategic Studies</i>
Ju	Junkers
Kdr.	Kommandeur: commander
K.G.	Kampffliegergeschwader: bomber Geschwader (wing)
Komm.Gen.	Kommandierender General: commanding general
KPD	Kommunistische Partei Deutschland: Communist Party of Germany
KTB	Kriegstagebuch: war diary
LAH	Leibstandarte ‘Adolf Hitler’
Lfl.	Luftflotte: air fleet
Lfl.Kdo.	Luftfottenkommando: air fleet command
LSAH	Leibstandarte ‘Adolf Hitler’
Lt.Div.	light division
Lt.Inf.	light-infantry (unit)
Lw.	Luftwaffe
Lw.F.C.	Luftwaffe field corps
Me	Messerschmitt
mech.	mechanized (unit)
MGFA	Militärgeschichtliches Forschungsamt: Research Institute for Military History, Potsdam
MGM	<i>Militärgeschichtliche Mitteilungen</i>
MOL	Magyar Országos Levéltár: National Archives of Hungary, Budapest
mot.	motorized (unit)
Ms	Messerschmitt
MSg.	Militärgeschichtliche Sammlungen: military history collections
M.St.M.	Marele Stat Major: Great General Staff
Mtn.	mountain (unit)
MVAC	Milizia Volontaria Anticomunista: Anti-Communist Volunteer Militia

NA	National Archives, Washington, D.C.
N.A.Gr.	Nahaufklärergruppe: tactical reconnaissance group
n.d.	no date of publication
NDH	Nezavisna Država Hrvatska: Independent State of Croatia
N.J.	Nachtjäger: night fighter
N.J.G.	Nachtjagdgeschwader: night fighter Geschwader (wing)
NKFD	Nationalkomitee Freies Deutschland: National Committee for a Free Germany
NKVD	Narodnyi Komissariat Vnutrennich Del: People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs
N.S.Gr.	Nachtschlachtfliegergruppe: night ground-attack group
NSFO	Nationalsozialistische Führungsoffiziere: National Socialist Leadership Officers
NSKK	Nationalsozialistisches Kraftfahrkorps: National Socialist Motor Corps
OB	Oberbefehlshaber: commander-in-chief
ObdM	Oberbefehlshaber der Marine: commander-in-chief of the navy
Ob.Kdo.	Oberkommando: high command
OKH	Oberkommando des Heeres: army high command
OKL	Oberkommando der Luftwaffe: Luftwaffe high command
OKM	Oberkommando der Kriegsmarine: naval high command
OKW	Oberkommando der Wehrmacht: Wehrmacht high command
ÖMZ	<i>Österreichische Militärische Zeitschrift</i>
Op.Abt.	Operationsabteilung (des Generalstabes des Heeres): operations department (of the army general staff)
Op.Cmd.	operational command
O.Qu.	Oberquartiermeister: quartermaster-general
Org.Abt.	Organisationsabteilung (des Generalstabes des Heeres): organization department (of the army general staff)
OSS	Office of Strategic Services (US)
P.	People's (unit)
PA	Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes: Political Archives of the Foreign Ministry, Berlin
Pak	Panzerabwehrkanone: anti-tank cannon
Para.	paratroop (unit)
Pi.	Pionier: sapper
Pol.	police (unit)
PRO	Public Record Office, London
Pz., Pz	Panzer: armoured
Pz.AOK	Panzerarmeeoberkommando: armoured army HQ
Pz.Div.	Panzerdivision: armoured division
Pz.Jg.	Panzerjäger: anti-tank (unit)
Pz.K.	Panzerkorps: armoured corps
Pz.Rgt.	Panzerregiment: armoured regiment
QFIAB	<i>Quellen und Forschungen aus italienischen Archiven und Bibliotheken</i>
QMG	quartermaster-general
Qu	Quartiermeister: quartermaster
RAD	Reichsarbeitsdienst: Reich Labour Service

RAF	Royal Air Force
reinf.	reinforced
Repl.	replacement (unit)
repr.	reprinted, reproduced
Res.	reserve (unit)
ret.	retired
Rfl.	rifle (unit)
RFSS	Reichsführer SS: Reich Leader SS
Rgt.	regiment
RH	Reich–Heer (BA file reference)
R.Hun.	Royal Hungarian (unit)
RL	Reich–Luftwaffe (BA file reference)
RM	Reich–Marine (BA file reference)
Rom.	Romanian
R.S.I.	Repubblica Sociale Italiana: Italian Social Republic
RW	Reich–Wehrmacht (BA file reference)
Sap.	sapper (unit)
SD	Sicherheitsdienst: security service of the SS
s.d.	special duties
Sec.	security (unit)
S.G.	Schlachtflieger: ground-attack (aircraft, unit)
Skl	Seekriegsleitung: naval command
Slov.	Slovak, Slovakian
Sov.	Soviet
Span.	Spanish
StS	Staatssekretär: state secretary
Stuka	Sturzkampfbomber: dive-bomber
T.	training (unit)
Terr.	territorial (unit)
Trans.	translated [by], translator
u.f.	under formation
USSBS	United States Strategic Bombing Survey
Veh.	vehicle
VfZ	<i>Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte</i>
VIZh	<i>Voyenno-Istoricheskii Zhurnal</i>
Vol.	volunteer (unit)
W.B., WB, Wehrm.Befh.	Wehrmachtbefehlshaber: Wehrmacht commander
W.Cdr.	Wehrmacht commander
Wekusta	Wettererkundungsstaffel: weather reconnaissance squadron
WFSt	Wehrmachtführungsstab: Wehrmacht operations staff
WiAmt	Wehrwirtschaftsamt: war economy department
WIH	<i>War in History</i>
WiRü	Wehrwirtschafts und Rüstungsamt: war-economy and armaments department
WiStab	Wirtschaftsstab: economic staff
WoBSOE	<i>Wochenbericht Südosteuropa</i> , publ. by the Vienna office of the foreign ministry
WPr	Abteilung für Wehrmachtpropaganda: Wehrmacht propaganda department

WStb.	Wehrwirtschaftsstab: war economy staff
WWR	<i>Wehrwissenschaftliche Rundschau</i>
Yug.	Yugoslav
ZA	Zonen–Arbeitseinheiten (BA file reference)
z.b.V., zbV	zur besonderen Verwendung/Verfügung: for special duties
ZfG	<i>Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft</i>
Z.G.	Zerstörergeschwader: destroyer (heavy fighter) Geschwader (wing)

## SHORT DESIGNATIONS FOR DEPARTMENTS OF THE ARMY OPERATIONS STAFF

- Ia Führungsabteilung: operations department
- Ib Quartiermeisterabteilung: quartermaster department
- Ic Feindaufklärung und Abwehr; geistige Betreuung: intelligence and counter-intelligence; spiritual care
- Id Ausbildung: training
- IIa 1. Adjutant (Offizierpersonalien): 1st adjutant (officer personnel)
- IIb 2. Adjutant (Unteroffiziere und Mannschaften): 2nd adjutant (NCOs and other ranks)
- III Gericht: court of law
- IVa Intendant (Rechnungswesen, allgemeine Verwaltung): official in charge of financial matters and general administration
- IVb Arzt: medical officer
- IVc Veterinär: veterinary officer
- IVd Geistlicher: chaplain

# Key to Symbols

army operations staffs	Luftwaffe operations staffs	borders
	army group	— xxxx —
	army	— xxxx —
	corps	— xxx —
<b>Formations/Units</b>		
	division	— xx —
	brigade	— x —
	regiment	— III —
	battalion	— II —
	company	— I —
<b>Reserve Formations</b>		
	corps	
		division
		division under formation
<b>Additional Symbols</b>		
	armoured troops	
		mountain troops
		squadron (bombers)
	paratroops	
		motorized/armoured infantry
	artillery	
		cavalry



## Introduction

The main subject of the present volume is one of the most eventful phases of the Second World War: the battles on the eastern front in 1943 and 1944. In no other period of the war, apart from its concluding phase in 1945, did the Wehrmacht suffer such enormous losses. The land battles of those years, first and foremost the battle of Kursk in the summer of 1943, were among the biggest in world history. In the winter of 1943/4 the Red Army showed itself for the first time capable of conducting large-scale offensives against all German army groups simultaneously. It was no longer a matter of isolated flare-ups: the whole eastern front was in flames. The dramatic climax was reached in the summer of 1944, when the collapse of Army Group Centre led to what was then the heaviest defeat in German military history. It was nevertheless overshadowed by events on the western front, with the Allied invasion of Normandy in June 1944. And it is that which dominates perceptions in western societies to this day and has relegated the catastrophe in the east, despite its unprecedented proportions, to the rank of an almost ‘forgotten war’.

German historiography has contributed significantly to this one-sidedness of the collective memory. Until recently it had little to say about the war in the east after Stalingrad. Only the very last months of the war have again recently attracted the attention of professional historians. Moreover, the subject is dominated by self-justifying memoirs and a non-fiction literature of little scholarly value. The lack of research interest in the history of the operations of 1943 and 1944 is particularly striking. Numerous works on the general history of the war repeatedly suggest that, as far as the military course of events is concerned, everything has long been said and written. The fact that that view is totally untenable is one of the main reasons for the unusual size of the present volume. The contributors have benefited not least from a certain relaxation in German–Russian scholarly relations. For historians too, the Cold War was a decades-long ‘ice age’. Research was hampered by taboos and mental blocks on both sides, as well as by the fact that Soviet military history had to glorify the role of the Party and the army. In the Soviet Union, moreover, free access to archives was not possible even for Soviet historians, let alone their foreign colleagues. This restricted representation of the war from the German viewpoint too, since major collections of Wehrmacht documents were kept in Russian archives as ‘captured files’. Since then, a considerable amount of new knowledge has been acquired from those sources in the course of research by contributors to this volume.

The eighth volume in the *Germany and the Second World War* series begins with the starting situation after the battle of Stalingrad in the spring of 1943. Its central

topic is the Wehrmacht's retreat on the eastern front from the Kursk salient to the German border. This 'longitudinal' volume is essentially arranged chronologically and is the complementary equivalent of the seventh volume in the series, which was devoted mainly to the situation in western Europe. It also links up with the earlier volumes on the eastern war (Volume IV on 1941 and Volume VI on 1942) and continues the account of events up to the end of 1944. Only developments on the neighbouring fronts in northern, southern, and south-eastern Europe are described up to the end of the war, while the 'final battles' in the territory of the Reich will be the subject of the tenth and last volume in the series.

The specific characteristic of the present volume is that it is more strongly devoted to military operational issues than has generally been the case so far, although the political-strategic context is not neglected. Individual key episodes are repeatedly described down to the tactical level, so as to highlight the complexity of military operational procedures at the different levels. It was possible to devote so much space to the often dramatic combat operations not least because the general premisses and framework conditions had already been discussed in detail in the 'latitudinal' Volumes V and IX. A comprehensive understanding of the strategic, operational, and tactical developments discussed in the present volume can be achieved only by looking at them in conjunction with the analyses of mentality and ideology, and of domestic, economic, and occupation policy, undertaken in previous volumes.

The distribution of topics among the team of authors is as follows: Bernd Wegner discusses the overall strategic context (as well as developments in Finland), while Karl-Heinz Frieser analyses the bulk of military operations on the eastern front. Events in the states of south-eastern Europe are dealt with by Krisztián Ungváry for Hungary, Klaus Schmider for Yugoslavia, and Klaus Schönherr for combat operations involving Romanian troops, and for Galicia and the south-eastern Balkans. Gerhard Schreiber's contribution on Italy extends the analysis to the interdependences between the eastern front and the Mediterranean region. This topic is included here in a shortened form, while the full version is being published as an independent monograph in another MGFA series.

Given the complexity of the material, the authors' task was to develop issues and criteria permitting analysis of the subject areas. At the strategic level, the first issue was the interaction of various factors such as the war economy and armament. The analysis sought to determine the dynamics with which the disparity in the strength of the opposing sides made itself perceptible in the theatres of operations, and the extent to which German defeats were determined by the numerical and material superiority of the Allies. Even though the eastern front was the central concern, a decisive role was played by interrelations with other fronts, which constituted the main problem facing the German leadership in a war on several fronts. Thus, for example, a number of Hitler's inexplicable operational decisions only make any sense when the connection with other theatres of war is elucidated. At the same time there arises the question of the rationality of the military decision-making process within the National Socialist 'Führer state', and in relation to its Axis partners. As the hostilities shifted increasingly to the territory of Germany's allies,

there arose for the latter a conflict of aims between loyalty to the Axis Pact and national self-preservation. The examples of Italy and Finland, and Romania and Hungary, show the different conditions under which this conflict was managed, and the differing results.

For Germany the outcome of the war—in accordance with the initial postulate of this volume—was decided no later than the end of 1941 with the failure of the ‘blitzkrieg strategy’ before Moscow and Hitler’s declaration of war on the United States. But although Germany was no longer in a position to win with its own strength, the Führer continued the war in the years that followed. Repeatedly invoking the example of Frederick the Great in the Seven Years War, he too placed his hope in the collapse of the enemy coalition. As he declared to his generals, he would delay the end of the war until ‘one of our damned enemies gets tired of fighting’.<sup>1</sup> However, this hope too eventually proved wholly illusory. Why then did he continue the war until the final downfall? In response to this question, which runs through the present volume, Bernd Wegner, the author of the concluding chapter, offers an interesting interpretation.

In addition to the investigation of political-strategic issues, the task was to describe the course of the military operations. A number of events, for example the tank battle at Prokhorovka, remain clouded in myth to this day. In the eastern war there was also a series of now-forgotten battles whose drama and huge losses far overshadow the battles in the west about which so much has been written. The new statistical material uncovered in the Russian archives—a resource which researchers were lacking hitherto—enabled reliable estimates of comparative strength for a number of operations to be made for the first time. The figures sometimes yielded shocking results, not least with regard to comparative casualties. In that respect the German–Soviet war rightly counts as one of history’s bloodiest conflicts.

Beyond simple reconstruction of the facts, the aim was to analyse military events at the operational and tactical level. Here the question arises why the Wehrmacht was able to maintain such substantial superiority for years and why the Red Army did not succeed in toppling the ‘house of cards’ on the German eastern front at an early stage. Military efficiency proved a particularly important factor in a comparison of the different operational systems (assignment tactics versus command tactics) and the deployment principles of the two warring sides. This can also be seen in the interrelations between tank technology and tank tactics, for example in the battle of Kursk. The discussion also touches on the disputed issue of whether the fighting strength of the Wehrmacht rested on National Socialist ideology or on systemic efficiency (*inter alia*, primary group bonding).

One of the most important topics is the permanent dispute between Hitler and some of his generals, primarily over strategic priorities and preference for ‘rigid’ or ‘flexible’ defence. Although we must grant the German generals a high degree of professional competence in the conduct of operations, there nevertheless remains,

<sup>1</sup> Hitler’s *Lagebesprechungen* (31 Aug. 1944), 615.

in view of the hopelessness of the war, the question of their long-term strategic vision and their moral and ethical self-conception. This goes beyond their responsibility for the troops entrusted to them, since they must have been aware of the collateral damage which their conduct of the war was inflicting on the civilian population.

The authors extend their thanks to the editorial board of the MGFA, and in particular to the graphics department, whose many years of work resulted in the impressive illustrations. In addition to the inherent difficulty of the subject matter, the copy-editors were faced with the complicated task of finding an appropriate, practical, and as far as possible uniform transcription system for the names of places belonging to different political entities at different times. The objectively neutral solutions adopted by the MGFA editorial staff naturally differ from some which one or other of the authors might have preferred.

The contributors owe special thanks to many people and institutions in Germany and abroad who supported us in our research. Mention should be made, for example, of the German Academic Exchange Service, whose generous support enabled Bernd Wegner to spend several periods of time in Finnish archives. Special mention should also be made of the helpful collaboration of the Institute for Military History in Moscow and the Special Archive of the RGVA in the same city, as well as the Russian Central Military Archive (CAMO) in Podolsk. It is, among other things, a sign of the reconciliation between our two nations that is so encouraging.

Karl-Heinz Frieser

*Head of Research Department II  
(2002–2009)*

# PART I

## FROM STALINGRAD TO KURSK

*Bernd Wegner*



# I. Basic Problems in German Conduct of the War after Stalingrad

## 1. STALINGRAD A TURNING POINT?

Any discussion of German conduct of the war in the months and years after Stalingrad must start from the basic premise that, on any reasonable view, Germany was no longer able to win the war.<sup>1</sup> That fact was indeed already widely apparent to contemporary observers both inside and outside Germany. The tragedy on the Volga, as the SS security service reported in the second half of January 1943, had ‘most profoundly disturbed the whole nation’.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, it permanently transformed the public’s assessment of the overall war situation. ‘Universally,’ according to another situation report of 4 February 1943, ‘there is a conviction that Stalingrad marks a turning point in the war’.<sup>3</sup> Not surprisingly, the mood of the population had reached ‘the low point of wartime morale’.<sup>4</sup> New questions, hitherto repressed, characterized the expectations of the population after Stalingrad. Anxious hopes gave way to worries about ‘how it will all end’.<sup>5</sup> The question ‘How long will it be until victory?’ was replaced by ‘How long can we hang on in this war with the prospect of a favourable end?’<sup>6</sup> Even the person of the Führer, who, although his myth was wearing progressively thinner, had until then largely escaped direct grumbles, henceforth became a target of criticism.<sup>7</sup>

Against that background, the defeat of Sixth Army acted at the same time as a catalyst for the reviving non-leftist civilian and national-conservative military resistance movements.<sup>8</sup> The directly related calls for sedition issued by members

<sup>1</sup> This position, for which the present volume (like earlier volumes in this series) furnishes a great deal of supporting material, is disputed in international research. Thus Overy, *Why the Allies Won*, argues that the war was decided in favour of the Allies only over the period 1942 to 1944 (similarly Weinberg, *A World at Arms*). On the other hand, the opinion appears to be gaining ground, especially among German historians, that the ultimate failure of Germany’s blitzkrieg strategy in the late autumn of 1941 already put paid to its chances of final victory. This issue is further developed in the following discussion.

<sup>2</sup> *Meldungen aus dem Reich*, xii, No. 354, 4720 (28 Jan. 1943).

<sup>3</sup> ibid., No. 356, 4751 (4 Feb. 1943).

<sup>4</sup> Quoted in Kershaw, *The Hitler Myth*, 192.

<sup>5</sup> *Meldungen aus dem Reich*, xii, No. 358, 4784 (11 Feb. 1943).

<sup>6</sup> ibid., No. 357, 4761 (8 Feb. 1943).

<sup>7</sup> See Kershaw, *The Hitler Myth*, 193 ff.; further evidence in Steinert, ‘Stalingrad’, 175 ff., and Boberach, ‘Stimmungsumschwung’.

<sup>8</sup> Characteristically: Hassell, *Vom andern Deutschland*, 347–8 (14 Feb. 1943); see also the records kept by Hermann Kaiser, repr. in Roon, ‘Hermann Kaiser’, here 274 ff. On categorization of this

of the White Rose movement,<sup>9</sup> who were arrested shortly afterwards, testify to the effect of Stalingrad as a signal, as do the two assassination attempts on Adolf Hitler originating in Major-General Henning von Tresckow's circle in March.<sup>10</sup> Even if these were isolated actions by small groups, they were nevertheless symptomatic of the accelerating erosion of the *Volksgemeinschaft* (national ethnic community), 'which the National Socialist state had been striving to create but had managed to achieve only rarely and momentarily'.<sup>11</sup> While this process, which is to be explained as a psychological effect of Stalingrad, did not attain such proportions as to directly threaten the regime, it nevertheless forced a change in the course of Hitler's domestic policy in the months from the spring to the autumn of 1943—a change which culminated in the appointment of Heinrich Himmler as Reich minister of the interior and raised the task of securing the regime's rule inside the country to a level equal to pursuit of the war outside Germany.<sup>12</sup>

In the countries allied to Germany, the psychological effects of the Stalingrad catastrophe were no less serious than in Germany itself.<sup>13</sup> There too, as now became clear, the public mood was directly dependent on German military success. A particularly striking instance was Finland, where discreet investigations into the mood of the population revealed a quite dramatic collapse of confidence in victory, in sharp contrast to the continuing emphatic declarations of loyalty to Germany by the government and to the censored and self-censored press. In September 1942 the investigations had shown that 90 to 95 per cent of members of centre and right-wing parties were convinced of German victory; by February 1943 their numbers had shrunk to 40 to 50 per cent. The picture was even clearer on the Left: in the autumn, 65 per cent of Social Democrats and 80 per cent of Communists had reckoned with German victory; after the Soviet successes at Stalingrad and Leningrad, however, the figures dropped to only 19 and 14 per cent respectively. At the same time, belief in an Allied victory had grown considerably among members of all

period in the history of the resistance, see Müller, 'Nationalkonservative Eliten', 42–3; Roon, 'Widerstand und Krieg', 64–5; Messerschmidt, 'Militärische Motive', 1030 ff., and Hoffmann, *Claus Schenk Graf von Stauffenberg*, 270.

<sup>9</sup> Repr. in Steffahn, *Die Weiße Rose*, 131–44, and in Scholl, *Die Weiße Rose*, 119 ff.

<sup>10</sup> On this, see the accounts by the participants: Gersdorff, *Soldat im Untergang*, 126–33; Schlabrendorff, *Offiziere gegen Hitler*, 64 ff., and the accounts by Thun-Hohenstein, *Der Verschwörer*, 221–32, and Åretin, *Henning von Tresckow*, 301 ff.—Also of interest in this connection is an entry in the diary of Hermann Kaiser (KTB-Führer beim Chef HRüst und BdE), dated 18 Jan. 43: 'General Schmundt mit F[ührer?]. F told him he knew of plans to stage a coup. He was informed about them and prepared for them', BA-MA MSg. 1/1454. That the assassination attempts were only the tip of the iceberg, and that there was strong unrest below the threshold of resistance, even in the Führer's closest circles, is testified to, *inter alia*, by Engel, *Heeresadjutant*, 144–5 (entries for Feb. 1943); Speer, *Erinnerungen*, 267, 271, and Hassell, *Vom andern Deutschland*, 347–8 (14 Feb. 1943).

<sup>11</sup> Thus Steinert, 'Stalingrad', 182. The establishment of a central special court martial, imposed by Hitler on 21 June 1943, to deal with political offences in the Wehrmacht also shows how the situation had changed.

<sup>12</sup> Similarly Rebentisch, *Führerstaat*, 499.

<sup>13</sup> Japan was an exception, owing not least to the difference in political culture. There, especially in military circles, the German 'heroic battle' on the Volga was seen as a sign of strength rather than weakness; see Martin, 'Die Einschätzung der Lage Deutschlands', 133–4; id., 'Japan und Stalingrad', 231.

parties.<sup>14</sup> Matters were not very different with Germany's other Axis partners, especially when, like Romania and Hungary, they had suffered the loss of substantial parts of their national armed forces as a result of the Stalingrad enterprise and, moreover, found themselves subjected to massive accusations and blame by Berlin. It is not, therefore, surprising that during those weeks Germany's diplomatic representatives more than ever reported a 'growing war-weariness both among sections of the Romanian army and among the population'<sup>15</sup> and an 'unstable attitude of influential [Hungarian] circles with regard to the war and the determination to see it through'.<sup>16</sup>

The extent of the German defeat and the powerful momentum of the Soviet winter offensive were met with surprise, and usually also with concern, on the part of the neutral countries too. In Istanbul, as in Berne and Stockholm, they resulted in a thoroughly negative assessment of the Axis powers' remaining chances of victory.<sup>17</sup> As had been the case a year earlier, it was once again a Swedish observer who predicted Germany's position most accurately. On 16 March 1943 the Swedish military attaché in Berlin, who had long been convinced that German defeat was inevitable, wrote that 'it will probably take another two or three years for Germany to collapse'.<sup>18</sup>

The sobriety of these and similar assessments stands in notable contrast both to the self-comforting rituals of the German leadership and to the growing euphoria in the Anglo-Saxon world since the turn of 1942/3. For the British public, which until the late summer of 1942 had still feared a Russian collapse, the battle of Stalingrad marked a 'turning point in the war' which, despite only a vague knowledge of events in the Soviet Union, further boosted the Russophilia reigning in the country since 1941.<sup>19</sup> The situation in the United States was not much different. In America, as in Britain, those months were marked by a strikingly broad consensus that it was the military efforts of the Soviet Union, rather than those of one's own country, which justified hope in a victorious outcome to the war.<sup>20</sup>

The political and military leaderships of both countries, meeting in Casablanca in mid-January, also proceeded on the assumption that, provided the Allied coalition continued to exist, the Soviet Union would survive the war and Germany would lose it.<sup>21</sup> What is more, as the full scale of the destruction wrought by the

<sup>14</sup> Jutikkala, 'Mielialojen kirjo jatkosodan aikana', 131 ff., 145 ff.

<sup>15</sup> Report from the German general assigned to the Romanian army high command, 5 Mar. 1943, quoted in Förster, *Stalingrad*, 138 (app. 1).

<sup>16</sup> Report from the envoy in Budapest to the foreign ministry, 17 Feb. 1943, ADAP, Series E, v. doc. 136, 237.

<sup>17</sup> On this, see the articles by Böhme ('Stalingrad und Schweden'), Schönherz ('Die Türkei'), and Bourgeois ('Barbarossa').

<sup>18</sup> Quoted in Böhme, 'Stalingrad und Schweden', 385. At the same time, the Swedish military attaché in Berlin predicted the failure of the German U-boat campaign. See also Carlgren, 'Die Einschätzung der Lage Deutschlands', 178 ff.

<sup>19</sup> See Bell, *John Bull and the Bear*, 88 ff., and id., 'Großbritannien und die Schlacht von Stalingrad', here mainly 357 and 368.

<sup>20</sup> On the results of the relevant opinion surveys, see Bell, *John Bull and the Bear*, 92–3, and Kimball, 'Stalingrad', 332. In April 1943 a third of the British population expected the war to end within a year (see Bell, *John Bull and the Bear*, 96).

<sup>21</sup> Kimball, 'Stalingrad', 341, and id., 'Aus der Sicht Washingtons', 58.

Soviet success on the Volga became apparent,<sup>22</sup> the long-entertained fears of a collapse of Soviet resistance gave way to concern that the Red Army could achieve a rapid victory over Nazi Germany that was unconducive to British and American interests.<sup>23</sup> A report by the Joint Intelligence Committee dated 15 February 1943, which not only presented Germany's defeat in the east as irreversible but also doubted the possibility of an effective German defensive campaign, is characteristic of the temporary exaggeration of the situation:

For her campaign in Russia she [i.e. Germany] constructed the largest and most complex military machine that has ever existed. It has been hammered and damaged to such an extent that it is questionable if it can ever be repaired. The supply, maintenance and administration of her retreating armies may already be beyond Germany's capacity to control. We believe, therefore, that a situation may arise, and for which we must be prepared, in which the Germans will be unable to stabilise and hold a line in Russia for any length of time at all. If that should occur, organised German resistance in Russia might collapse.<sup>24</sup>

The widespread subjective feeling of contemporary observers that Stalingrad was the turning point in the war was raised in post-war writings—from the earliest testimonies of participants<sup>25</sup> to the later memoir literature<sup>26</sup>—to the rank of an eminently self-evident historical fact. From the historians' perspective, however, matters are much less clear, for the following reasons, which we shall simply indicate at this point.

The first is that irrefutable experience, since the First World War at the latest, shows clearly that modern, highly complex wars can no longer be decided by 'decisive battles'.<sup>27</sup> The manpower, material, logistic, and technological resources

<sup>22</sup> Although the American secret services, to the very end, greatly underestimated the number of German troops enclosed at Stalingrad (in mid-January they were still putting the figure at around 70,000), the OSS already reported, at an early stage, that this was 'perhaps in the truest sense, the turning point of the whole war'; quoted in Kimball, 'Stalingrad', 333.

<sup>23</sup> *ibid.* 338.

<sup>24</sup> J.I.C. (43) 64 (Final), *The German Military Situation*, 15 Feb. 1943, No. 17. A week later the report was submitted to the War Cabinet by the Chiefs of Staff Committee, with a few restrictive comments; PRO, CAB 80/39, doc. 27401. See also Hinsley, *British Intelligence*, ii. 615–27. The fact that German diplomatic observers were informed about the Anglo-American assessment of the situation, at least in a rudimentary fashion, is shown by a telegram from the envoy in Lisbon, 7 Mar. 1943, PA, R 29821, No. 729.

<sup>25</sup> Zeitzler himself gave his (unpublished) account of Stalingrad the subtitle 'The Turning Point of the War'.

<sup>26</sup> Witness the characteristic titles of articles written on various anniversaries of the battle: 'Stalingrad: "Wendepunkt des Krieges"' [Stalingrad: the turning point of the war] (*Der Spiegel*, 31 Jan. 1993); 'Kriegswende Stalingrad' [Stalingrad: the war changes course] (*Europäische Wehrkunde*, 32 (1983)); 'Die Schlacht um Stalingrad. Der Wendepunkt des Zweiten Weltkrieges' [The Battle of Stalingrad. The turning point of the Second World War] (*Das Parlament*, 48, 4 Dec. 1982). More serious than such quick-fire journalism is Alan Bullock's assertion, as late as 1991 and with disregard for more recent research, that 'nineteen forty-three was the decisive year of the war. At the end of it [...] it was as certain as anything can be in war that Germany could not win it' (*Hitler and Stalin*, 779). Similarly, Hubatsch (*KTB OKW*, iii. 1487 ff.), on the basis of an all-too-narrow operational understanding of the war, talks about 'Kulminationsjahr 1943' [1943, the year of culmination].

<sup>27</sup> Failure to recognize this was, as Hillgruber has already convincingly demonstrated ('Das Russlandbild der führenden deutschen Militärs', 258–9), one of the fundamental errors made by the

available to the parties, and their ability to deploy them effectively and coordinate them systematically, appear to be much more decisive factors, especially in a war of long duration. That being so, the outcome of individual battles is nevertheless an indicator of the infrastructure and performance potential of a political system, and of its ability or inability to organize war at the level of society as a whole.

Secondly, the turning-point argument is questionable in suggesting that after—and because of—Stalingrad the war took a fundamentally different course. With regard to Germany, this would mean that, with the outcome of the battle, it had finally abandoned the road to victory, and that a war until then still winnable had changed into one that was hopeless. But that is in no way the case. The boundless nature of Hitler's war aims, the early globalization of the war, the extremely asymmetrical distribution of human and material resources, America's lead in nuclear-weapons development, and finally the determination of all the Allied great powers not to end the war before total German capitulation—all these together, in retrospect, invalidate any thesis that Germany ever had a real chance of winning the war *as a whole* in the way Hitler understood it.<sup>28</sup> To speak of Stalingrad as a 'turning point' in general and without qualification is therefore misleading.

An entirely different question is whether the annihilation of Sixth Army marked a turning point in the war *in the east*.<sup>29</sup> There, at least, the Wehrmacht had twice been close to a decision of strategic import. Both in the autumn of 1941 outside Moscow and in the following summer on the southern sector of the front, a collapse of the Soviet defence, if not of Stalin's regime as such, was within the realm of possibility. Nevertheless, in both cases it was a constellation of relatively few factors, and in no way the 'inevitability'<sup>30</sup> invoked by Soviet historiography, that ultimately decided the outcome. With its defeat on the Volga, Germany's eastern army definitively lost its capacity to recreate comparable critical situations in the future. It lost forever the strategic initiative in this theatre of war, as indeed elsewhere. In that sense the events at Stalingrad mark the final conclusion of a gradual process of diminishing options of victory in the east. The crucial stages in this process were the battle of Smolensk in July 1941 and the resulting stoppage of the German advance, the failure before Moscow in December of the same year, the eastward relocation of substantial parts of Soviet industry, rightly described as the 'economic Stalingrad',<sup>31</sup> and Hitler's decision in July 1942 to split Operation BLUE in two. After each of these events the foundations of German victory in the east had

German general staff in the planning stage of Operation BARBAROSSA. Speer's conclusion in his post-war reflections is noteworthy in this respect: 'In the final analysis, modern wars are decided by superior technological capacity, and we didn't have that' (*Spandau: The Secret Diaries*, 48). On the traditional thinking of the German military leadership, which diverged strongly from the foregoing and was based entirely on operational success, see also Wallach, *Das Dogma der Vernichtungsschlacht*.

<sup>28</sup> See summary of the main arguments in Levine, 'Was World War II a Near-Run Thing?' For diverging historiographical views, see Overy, *Why the Allies Won*, and Weinberg, *A World at Arms*.

<sup>29</sup> See also Bullock, *Hitler and Stalin*, 778.

<sup>30</sup> For an example of such an interpretation, see Yakushevsky, 'Stalingradskaya bitva'.

<sup>31</sup> Thus Belikov, 'Transfert', 48.

become more fragile, and the number of options smaller. In this process of a cumulatively progressive turning point, the tragedy of Stalingrad represented the final military consequence. After it, there was no realistic hope left of victory in the east. Realization of this fact might have occasioned a turn in German war policy too. Why it failed to do so, and instead became the starting point for a further radicalization of the German war effort, is the subject of the following discussion.

## 2. LOSSES AND RESOURCES: THE CHANGING STRATEGIC COORDINATES

The fact that since the autumn of 1942 not only the global war as such but also the land war in the east were no longer winnable for Germany resulted from an ultimately irreversible constellation of medium-term situational and long-term structural circumstances. These were fundamental for elucidating the German leadership's remaining room for manoeuvre and defined the limits of what could still be achieved militarily.

### (a) The Manpower Situation of the Eastern Army and the Failure of Total Mobilization

Of the many sobering realizations which the spring of 1943 had in store for Germany's political and military leadership, perhaps the bitterest of all was that despite earlier hopes, the Soviet theatre of war, in which close on 3 million men—some 70 per cent of the total German land army—were tied up, would remain the great death-mill it had been since the beginning of the German offensive in June 1941.<sup>32</sup> As was already the case during Operation BARBAROSSA, in the second year of the German–Soviet war (i.e. in the period from May 1942 to April 1943 inclusive) over 95 per cent of all army losses—as well as 70 per cent of all Luftwaffe losses—were incurred on the eastern front. Worse still, limitation of the summer 1942 offensive to only one sector of the front had made practically no difference to the absolute casualty figures. Month after month the eastern army was still losing an average of almost 109,000 men, including more than 3,000 officers, killed, wounded, or captured.<sup>33</sup> The proportion of irreplaceable losses had actually risen,

<sup>32</sup> The following discussion is confined to those aspects that are directly relevant to an understanding of German conduct of the war in the spring of 1943. A detailed analysis of manpower policy and 'human resources management' by Bernhard Kroener is contained in volume v/II, part III of the present series.

<sup>33</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, the figures for losses are based throughout on contemporary estimates by the official departments. That these figures were by no means always reliable, and frequently tended to underestimate Germany's own losses, has been proven by recent research, in particular Overmans, *Deutsche militärische Verluste*.

**Table I.I.1.** Monthly Army and Luftwaffe losses, 1941–1943 (average figures)*Army losses*

(Number of officer losses in brackets)

	War year <sup>(a)</sup>	Army total	of which, on the eastern front <sup>(b)</sup>	
Killed	1941/2	23,975	(900)	23,094 (866)
	1942/3	19,570	(605)	18,687 (566)
Wounded	1941/2	84,793	(2385)	81,944 (2309)
	1942/3	71,428	(1726)	68,246 (1611)
Missing	1941/2	5,850	(97)	5,205 (80)
	1942/3	23,207	(878)	21,948 (854)
Total monthly losses	1941/2	114,618	(3382)	110,243 (3255)
	1942/3	114,205	(3209)	108,881 (3031)

(a) War Year 1941/2 = 22.6.1941–30.4.1942; War Year 1942/3 = 1.5.1942–30.4.1943; (b) excl. Finland.

Source: OKH/GenStdH/GenQu, Der Heeresarzt, Statistik ‘Personelle Ausfälle’, 6 July 1944, BA-MA, RH 2/1355.

*Luftwaffe losses*

(Number of officer losses in brackets)

	Period <sup>(a)</sup>	Luftwaffe total <sup>(b)</sup>	of which, on the eastern front <sup>(c)</sup>	
Killed	Summer 1941	1,146	(124)	798 (80)
	Winter 1941/2	1,195	(84)	864 (41)
	Summer 1942	1,327	(118)	717 (52)
	Winter 1942/3	2,475	(171)	1,588 (82)
Wounded	Summer 1941	2,257	(148)	1,994 (119)
	Winter 1941/2	2,333	(93)	2,089 (70)
	Summer 1942	2,937	(152)	2,228 (101)
	Winter 1942/3	5,249	(200)	4,232 (123)
Missing	Summer 1941	472	(84)	326 (61)
	Winter 1941/2	628	(71)	334 (41)
	Summer 1942	934	(102)	362 (44)
	Winter 1942/3	2,209	(157)	1,650 (99)
Total monthly losses	Summer 1941	3,875	(356)	3,118 (260)
	Winter 1941/2	4,156	(248)	3,287 (152)
	Summer 1942	5,198	(372)	3,307 (197)
	Winter 1942/3	9,933	(528)	7,470 (304)

(a) The following periods are defined as follows: Summer 1941 = 22.6.1941–30.11.1941; Winter 1941/2 = 1.12.1941–30.4.1942; Summer 1942 = 1.5.1942–30.11.1942; Winter 1942/43 = 1.12.1942–30.4.1943;

(b) the following figures refer to losses caused by enemy action. (c) only front losses

Source: OKH/WFSt/Org (Vb), Verlust-, Verbrauchs- und Bestandszahlen der Wehrmacht, 20 Sept. 1943, BA-MA, RW 4/v, 476.

mainly because of a leap in the numbers taken prisoner. Owing to massive deployment to supply Stalingrad, Luftwaffe losses had also risen considerably (see Table I.I.1. ‘Monthly Army and Luftwaffe losses, 1941–1943’).

As in the previous year, the altogether horrendous losses in the second year of the eastern war, totalling over 1.3 million men, were far from compensated by the arrival of replacement troops or recovered soldiers. Thus, despite the reduction in

divisional target strength in 1942,<sup>34</sup> the monthly shortfalls between gains and losses during the main operational phase from August 1942 to February 1943 amounted to no fewer than 825,000 unfilled posts.<sup>35</sup>

The situation of the armies of Germany's Axis partners fighting as part of the eastern army was equally catastrophic. The losses they suffered were no less exorbitant, and were not only downplayed by the German leadership for political reasons at the time,<sup>36</sup> but also long ignored in the German post-war literature. In the course of the winter battles on the Don (from December 1942 to February 1943) the Italian 8th Army lost over 114,000 men, and the Hungarian 2nd Army had close on 105,000 killed, wounded, or taken prisoner.<sup>37</sup> For November and December 1942 the combined losses of the two Romanian armies deployed in the Stalingrad area totalled over 109,000 men.<sup>38</sup>

Apart from the immeasurable human tragedies which lay behind these figures, their magnitude had major consequences both politically and militarily: politically—and we shall go into this in greater detail at a later stage<sup>39</sup>—because the inevitable questions, doubts, and recriminations contributed significantly to the internal collapse of the Nazi war coalition; militarily, because the extensive damage inflicted on the forces of Germany's Axis partners led in the spring of 1943 to the total withdrawal of Italian and Hungarian combat units from the eastern front<sup>40</sup> and an appreciable reduction in the deployment of Romanian troops. Despite the endless German complaints about the insufficient fighting capacity of the armies in question, their withdrawal certainly meant a painful weakening of the German eastern army, which now had to take upon itself the task of securing several hundred additional kilometres of the front.

The extent to which the size of the haemorrhage outlined above was strategically significant for Germany's further conduct of the war depended decisively on its estimates of the losses suffered by the Soviet Union at the same time and the human reserves available to both sides in the short and medium term. What was certain was

<sup>34</sup> In the spring of 1942 no fewer than 69 of a total of 75 infantry divisions of Army Groups Central and North were reduced from nine to six battalions. Similar reductions were made to the other forces, with the exception of units in Army Group South; see Müller-Hillebrand, *Das Heer*, iii. 62–3.

<sup>35</sup> See 'Gains and Losses of Personnel by the Eastern Army, December 1941–April 1943', repr. in *Germany and the Second World War*, vi. 865 ff.

<sup>36</sup> In this connection see also Chapter II.1.

<sup>37</sup> Figures given by Schreiber, 'Italiens Teilnahme am Krieg', 278, and Wimpffen, 'Die zweite ungarische Armee', 342–3. To the Hungarian losses must be added approx. 30,000 members of Jewish Labour Service units, large numbers of whom are presumed to have gone over to the Red Army. In any event, the total of around 70,000 men lost in the winter battles, as reported to the Hungarian Council of Ministers by Col.-Gen. Vilmos Nagy in February 1943 (see Gosztony, *Hitlers Fremde Heere*, 362), must certainly have been considerably understated.

<sup>38</sup> Of those alone, some 70,000 were missing or taken prisoner. The figures kindly made available to the author by Jürgen Förster (Freiburg i. Br.) are based on data from the Arhivele Ministerului Apărării Naționale (Archive of the Ministry of National Defence, Bucharest), Fond M.St.M., Dossier No. 160, doc. 5. The figure of 173,000 for total losses given by Gosztony (*Hitlers Fremde Heere*, 328), based on Soviet sources, would need to be corrected accordingly.

<sup>39</sup> See Chapter II.1.

<sup>40</sup> Of the remains of the Hungarian 2nd Army, only three light divisions and two security divisions were still deployed in the rear area; Müller-Hillebrand, *Das Heer*, iii. 113.

that in the past year the Soviet Union had again suffered casualties on a huge scale, far exceeding the German losses in absolute figures. In the calendar year 1942 the Red Army had lost at least 1.5 million men as POWs alone.<sup>41</sup> While that was fewer than in the catastrophic year of 1941, it was still around ten times the number of German troops who had fallen into Soviet hands up to the collapse of the Stalingrad cauldron.<sup>42</sup> That brought the total of Soviet prisoners reported by German army groups from the beginning of the war to the end of the winter battles of 1943 to nearly 5.4 million (status at 31 March 1943).<sup>43</sup> The Foreign Armies East section estimated that the Red Army's 'blood losses' over the same period were a million higher, totalling 6.4 million.<sup>44</sup> With its resulting combined estimate of 11.7 to 11.9 million for Red Army losses up to early 1943, Maj.-Gen. Reinhard Gehlen's section was apparently not far off the mark, although it may have underestimated Germany's own losses. More recent Russian research, however, puts the total losses of the Red Army and Soviet navy (excl. NKVD) over the period under discussion at almost 14 million, showing that, contrary to popular perception, the second year of the war (from May 1942 to March 1943 inclusive) by no means cost the Soviet Union fewer lives than the first ten months, which had been so critical for the country's survival.<sup>45</sup>

So was the Soviet military machine, despite its recent operational successes, on the brink of collapse? Or was it, perhaps, as Hitler never tired of repeating, really only a question of which of the opposing sides had stronger nerves and longer breath?<sup>46</sup> Remarkably, the German departments responsible for assessment of the enemy—in contrast to the optimism they had displayed only a year earlier—this time resisted the temptation to make the Soviet losses the basis for German

<sup>41</sup> Estimates of prisoners taken vary between 1.52 million (GenQu) and 1.65 million (Foreign Armies East): FHO (I), Gefangen- und Beutezahlen, 1 Jan.–31 Dec. 1942, 10 Jan. 1943, BA-MA RH 2/2621.

<sup>42</sup> According to Russian data, the Red Army had taken only around 171,000 prisoners in all from 22 June 1941 to 3 February 1943; Galicky, 'Vrazheskie voyennoplennye', 40 (Table 1). According to German estimates made to date, which are admittedly based on unconfirmed sources, the total number might have been higher by several tens of thousands; see Böhme, *Die deutschen Kriegsgefangenen in sowjetischer Hand*, 10–21.

<sup>43</sup> Liaison officer OKW/WPr, 22 June 1943, *re* prisoner and captured material figures of the army groups as reported by OKH/Foreign Armies East on the basis of Ic reports, BA-MA RW 4/v. 309 b; see also Streit, *Keine Kameraden*, 244 ff.

<sup>44</sup> See Table I.I.2. 'Human reserves of Germany and the Soviet Union in early 1943'. Although this table is based on a single document from October 1943, there are corresponding, only slightly divergent estimates from early 1943; see FHO diagram 'Personelle Wehrleistung und Menschenreserven der Sowjetunion ab 22 June 1941', status at 1 Mar. 1943, BA-MA RH 2/2089.

<sup>45</sup> See *Grif sekretnosti snyat*, 156–8, also, in an English summary, Krivosheyev, 'Military Casualties', 2 (table). This is the first published comprehensive statistical analysis of Soviet human losses, emanating from the circle of the former Soviet general staff. Although it encountered massive criticism on grounds of both methodology and content (see, e.g., the review by Boris Sokolov in *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 2 Feb. 1993), the figure cited here is, at least, unlikely to be an overestimation of Soviet losses.

<sup>46</sup> Characteristic of Hitler's attitude was his irritation on 11 March 1943 when juggling with the Soviet and German loss statistics for the benefit of the assembled generals of Army Group South: 'With that kind of loss ratio it will have to end soon' (H.Gr. Süd/Ia, KTB, 1092 reverse side, BA-MA RH 19 VI/41). For similar statements on other occasions, see also Goebbels, *Tagebücher*, pt. 2, vii. 292 (8 Feb. 1943); *Hitlers Lagebesprechungen*, 477 (27 Dec. 1943), and Manstein, *Verlorene Siege*, 475.

**Table I.i.2.** Human reserves of Germany and the Soviet Union in early 1943 as estimated by Foreign Armies East (in millions and as %)

	Germany (Birth Years 1888–1925)		Soviet Union (Birth Years 1888–1926)	
Total male population originally available	19.8	(100.0)	43.7 <sup>(a)</sup>	(100.0)
Deductions due to territorial losses	—	—	3.9	(8.9)
Unfit for military service	3.6	(18.2)	6.4	(14.7)
Exemptions	5.3	(26.8)	5.0	(11.4)
Total losses since 1939	2.4 <sup>(b)</sup>	(12.1)	12.2 <sup>(c)</sup>	(27.9)
Actual strength of land army on the German–Soviet front	2.7 <sup>(d)</sup>	(13.6)	5.7 <sup>(e)</sup>	(13.1)
Other combat troops	5.3 <sup>(f)</sup>	(26.8)	7.1 <sup>(g)</sup>	(16.2)
Remaining human reserves fit for military service at 1 March 1943	0.5	(2.5)	3.4	(7.8)

(a) Incl. 1.7 million from birth year 1926; (b) incl. 0.9 million convalescent or in infirmaries; (c) of which: 6.4 million casualties, 5.4 million POWs, 0.5 million losses in the Finno-Russian Winter War of 1939/40; (d) incl. Waffen-SS; (e) incl. Finnish front; (f) of which: 1.4 million army units in OKW theatres of war (incl. Finland), 0.8 million Replacement Army troops, 2.0 million Luftwaffe troops, 0.7 million naval troops, 0.4 million others (incl. SS); (g) incl. far-eastern troops, Luftwaffe troops, naval troops, NKVD, home units, construction and security troops.

*Source:* FHO (Ia), 'Bisherige Entwicklung des deutsch-sowjetrussischen Kräfteverhältnisses seit Kriegsbeginn und seine mögliche Weiterentwicklung bis Ende 1943', Ann. 1 and 2, 17 Oct. 1943, BA-MA RH 2/2566.

confidence in victory.<sup>47</sup> Rather, since the autumn of 1942 there was increasing realization that some of the parameters adopted for calculating Soviet 'defence capability' had been wrong. In particular, it had transpired that, in the Soviet Union, year groups eligible for military service were being conscripted earlier than had been assumed and were more rigorously exploited; that exemptions were incomparably rarer; and that the use of women in military functions (including combat) was much more frequent. On the basis of such new information, the Foreign Armies East section revised its calculations of the Red Army's capacity for human-resources regeneration in the spring of 1943 and reached very different, sobering conclusions (see Table I.i.2. 'Human reserves').

If the Red Army was now assumed to have an available human reserve of 3.4 million persons fit for military service (including birth year 1926), that is, an upward revision of 75 per cent from the previous year,<sup>48</sup> then this assumption, even bearing in mind the massive Soviet losses already discussed, allowed only the sobering conclusion that the Red Army could not be beaten for lack of human resources. The fact that in 1943 the Wehrmacht had human reserves of 0.5 million,

<sup>47</sup> On 20 March 1943 Hitler himself still maintained that 'this colossus [i.e. the Soviet Union] will begin to shake' and suffer 'world-historic collapse', but held the timing of that collapse to be a completely open question. He was convinced, however, that the key factor in triggering the process would be 'human, rather than material, reserves' (Goebbels, *Tagebücher*, pt. 2, 593). For an assessment of such statements by Hitler, see also Chapter I.3.

<sup>48</sup> At 1 April 1942 the corresponding reserve was estimated at a maximum of 1.93 million (with a downward trend); see *Germany and the Second World War*, vi. 885.

a mere fraction of that 3.4 million, for all the potential war theatres of ‘Fortress Europe’ taken together, made this conclusion all the more poignant.

The military implications of such a situation analysis could easily be calculated on the basis of past experience. Foreign Armies East accordingly proceeded on the assumption that around 1.7 million, that is, half of the available Soviet human reserve, would be needed for ongoing replacement, and a further 700,000 men would be used for the thorough rehabilitation of units. The remaining million fit for military service would nevertheless suffice to reconstitute 40 to 60 rifle divisions in the course of the summer, and a further 20 to 30 in the late summer or autumn, that is, around 75 rifle divisions in all, and a corresponding number of other large units.<sup>49</sup>

In this situation the central question for the top German leadership was how—‘whether’ was never an issue—to make available the forces needed to meet the impending danger. The question was by no means new. It had essentially arisen well before the Stalingrad debacle. In the weeks before the start of Operation BLUE in June 1942 the Army General Staff had announced that the army needed a further half a million conscripts by the summer of 1943, in addition to birth year 1924.<sup>50</sup> At the beginning of August, Col.-Gen. Franz Halder, then still chief of the Army General Staff, had likewise warned the chief of the Wehrmacht high command, Field Marshal Wilhelm Keitel, about the expected erosion of the strength of the eastern army, and had called for an increased supply of replacements.<sup>51</sup> Shortly afterwards, the unmistakable growing asymmetry of forces had impelled Col.-Gen. Friedrich Fromm, commander of the replacement army and head of army armament, to go so far as to attempt to persuade Hitler to enter into peace negotiations.<sup>52</sup> By early 1943, however, both generals had been wholly or partly disempowered and, for reasons to which we shall return, peace initiatives were entirely unacceptable to Hitler. There is no doubt, however, that the dictator was fully aware of the problem. ‘The manpower issue is our greatest concern and by far the most serious problem,’ he told the generals assembled in Field Marshal Erich von Manstein’s headquarters in March 1943.<sup>53</sup>

Since the beginning of the Stalingrad disaster, Hitler had become firmly convinced that, in view of the war to be waged in Europe on multiple fronts, Germany’s relative demographic inferiority henceforth required ‘total mobilization of the whole German nation in this our most decisive struggle for survival’.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>49</sup> The talk was of around 40 rifle divisions, 10 cavalry divisions, and tank units ‘according to available equipment’; FHO (IIa), diagram ‘Vermutete Neuauflstellungen und Ersatzlage in der SU. (auf Grund der Berechnung der personellen Wehrleistung)’, Status: 1 Apr. 1943, BA-MA RW 19/832.

<sup>50</sup> OKH/GenStdH, Org.Abt., KTB, 11–15 June 1942, BA-MA RH 2/821, 212.

<sup>51</sup> Müller-Hillebrand, *Das Heer*, iii. 77–8, and Kroener, ‘Nun, Volk, steh auf...!’, 153. At this time, of course, the OKW still believed the losses expected in the coming winter could be made good simply by recovered soldiers, internal savings, and the provision of ground combat units by the Luftwaffe (the subsequent Luftwaffe field divisions).

<sup>52</sup> See Kroener, *Der starke Mann im Heimatkriegsgebiet*, 457 ff., and Kroener’s treatment in *Germany and the Second World War*, v/I. 1101 ff.

<sup>53</sup> H.Gr. Süd/Ia, KTB, 11 Mar. 43, 1089 (reverse side), BA-MA RH 19 VI/41.

<sup>54</sup> Hitler on 25 Dec. 1942, quoted in Rebentisch, *Führerstaat*, 475.

Apart from the fact—as can be stated fairly certainly with historical hindsight—that even such a total mobilization of all forces would not have sufficed to turn the tide once again in a *strategic* sense, it seems worth pointing out that the Nazi regime, in contrast to the Soviet Union in 1941, was not capable of such an extreme war effort. After Joseph Goebbels and Albert Speer, the main proponents of that policy, had in the spring of 1942 already failed to achieve radical exploitation of all available population reserves, despite some minor initial success,<sup>55</sup> this experience largely repeated itself a year later despite the much greater pressure of the problem and propaganda that was now entirely geared to ‘total war’.<sup>56</sup> Since the beginning of the Soviet winter offensive, moreover, there had been no lack of preparatory initiatives on the part of the relevant ministries and departments.<sup>57</sup>

At the beginning of January Keitel put the Wehrmacht’s total manpower requirement for 1943 (as in the two previous years) at 2 million men, of whom 800,000 were ‘already available’ on the basis of earlier agreements and a further 500,000 were expected from the intake of conscripts from the 1925 birth year. Of the remaining ‘roughly calculated’ 700,000 posts, 200,000 could be covered by men whom Speer had promised to release from the armament industry. That left a minimum expected shortfall of 500,000.<sup>58</sup> Against that background Speer, and above all Goebbels (‘too much is expected from the front and not enough from the homeland’),<sup>59</sup> pleaded among other things for the introduction of a comprehensive female labour service, extensive shutdown of branches of the commercial economy not important for the war effort, and the cancellation of 10 to 15 per cent of military service exemptions in the administration and business sectors.<sup>60</sup> With the Führer decree ‘on the comprehensive deployment of able-bodied men and women on Reich defence tasks’,<sup>61</sup> signed by Hitler on 13 January 1943, the (quasi-)legal basis for the desired total mobilization appeared to be in place. To implement it, Hitler appointed a ‘Committee of Three’ composed of the chief of the OKW and the heads of the Party and Reich chancelleries, Martin Bormann and Heinrich Lammers. It is almost ideally typical of the polycratic nature of the Nazi regime that this ‘last attempt to base the Führer state on a rational form of government

<sup>55</sup> See *Germany and the Second World War*, v/I. 1101 ff.

<sup>56</sup> That propaganda effort and its culmination in Goebbels’ Sports Palace speech of 18 February 1943 have been frequently analysed; see the earlier studies by Moltmann (*‘Goebbels Rede’*), Boelcke (*‘Goebbels und die Kundgebung’*), Steinert (*Hitlers Krieg*, 325 ff.), and Balfour (*Propaganda in War*, 321–31), as well the more recent works, which do not go much further, by Reuth (*Goebbels*, 510–24) and Wette (*‘Das Massensterben’*).

<sup>57</sup> See in this connection the interesting in terms of material but ideologically rigid dissertation by Bleyer, *Staat und Monopolie*, 57 ff.

<sup>58</sup> Minutes of meeting in the Reich chancellery on 7 Jan. 1943 *re* deployment of men and women on Reich defence tasks, 12 Jan. 1943, BA R 43 II/655. This shortfall increased in the following weeks and months as the supply of replacements for the field army continued to lag behind its losses; see also Bleyer, *Staat und Monopolie*, 68.

<sup>59</sup> Quoted from the minutes of the meeting of 7 Jan. 1943, BA R 43 II/655, 3.

<sup>60</sup> Boelcke, *Goebbels und die Kundgebung*, 239; *Wollt Ihr den totalen Krieg?*, 318 (5 Jan. 1943), 322–3 (21 Jan. 1943); see also Eichholz, *Geschichte der deutschen Kriegswirtschaft*, ii. 226–7.

<sup>61</sup> Repr. in *Der Zweite Weltkrieg. Dokumente*, doc. 42; see also KTB OKW, iii. 46 (16 Jan. 1943); on the background to the decree and its content, see Rebentisch, *Führerstaat*, 476 ff.

coordinating the various operational tasks<sup>62</sup> failed within a few months. Although an additional few hundred thousand people were freed for tasks in the Wehrmacht and armament industry by means of rationalization, comb-out, and business closures, the actual goal of a ‘total’ war effort involving the whole of society was far from achieved in almost every respect.<sup>63</sup>

Compulsory service for women was not implemented to the desired extent,<sup>64</sup> nor did the ‘Armament Exchange 43’ programme function properly.<sup>65</sup> The business-closure programme, which destroyed a myriad of small commercial and artisan enterprises, also proved a ‘total failure’.<sup>66</sup> Measures intended to simplify administration often led to an increase in bureaucratic bustle, and even uncontroversial measures (such as the ban on horse-racing) frequently proved unenforceable. A multitude of circumstances contributed to the failure of the new policy: opposition from Gauleiters who feared losing the loyalty of their party-base membership and from the conservative ministerial bureaucracy; economy policy incompetence and departmental bickering on the part of authorities outside the Committee of Three; intrigues between Goebbels and Speer on the one hand, and Bormann and Lammers on the other; and, not least of all, arbitrary interventions by the dictator himself, whose determination to achieve ‘total mobilization’ was equally unshaken by reports of successes on the front (such as the recapture of Kharkov in mid-March 1943) and skilfully cultivated concerns about the mood of the German population.<sup>67</sup>

<sup>62</sup> Thus Rebentisch, *Führerstaat*, 493, whose detailed assessment of the work of the committee was the basis for the following exposition.

<sup>63</sup> The Reich Statistics Office itself bluntly admitted in a report on manpower in the war economy (Kriegswirtschaftliche Kräftebilanz 1943. Bearb. im Statistischen Reichsamt, bk. 1 and 2, n.p., 1944, 20 Jan. 1943, bk. 2, 12) that although ‘some features of total war could already be detected’ in the new economic and administrative structure, ‘the war economy [...] still had the appearance of a peacetime economy’. Despite a certain ideological undertone, the judgement of US Strategic Bombing Command a few months after the end of the war, which was based on a comprehensive analysis of German documents, is entirely accurate and agrees with the results of later research. Summarizing the upswing of the German war economy under Speer, the report argues that ‘the increase cannot be considered a testament to the efficiency of dictatorship. Rather it suggests the degree of industrial undermobilization in the earlier years. An excellent case can be made that throughout the war top government management in Germany was not efficient.’ USSBS, Summary Report (European War), September 30, 1945, 2. On the reasons for this failure, see also Rolf-Dieter Müller’s analysis in *Germany and the Second World War*, v/II.

<sup>64</sup> The number of German women in active employment, which had fallen in the first two years of the war from 14.6 to 14.1 million, rose to no more than 14.9 million in the period from 1941 to the autumn of 1944 (Wagenführ, *Die deutsche Industrie*, 139). In this connection, Col.-Gen. von Richthofen’s comment on Fritz Sauckel’s recruitment drive is also revealing: ‘May the German woman work as little as possible in factory production, since she is mostly ineffective and vulnerable, and is supposed to have children’ (Richthofen diary, 16 Mar. 1943, BA-MA N 671/10, 105). See also Winkler, *Frauenarbeit*, 134–42; Ránki, *The Economics of the Second World War*, 100 ff.; Hachtmann, ‘Industriearbeiterinnen’, 341 ff.

<sup>65</sup> Under that programme 150,000 men fit for active service in the field were supposed to be transferred from the armament industry in exchange for soldiers no longer fit for front-line duty; see *Deutschland im zweiten Weltkrieg*, iii. 184.

<sup>66</sup> Thus Rebentisch, *Führerstaat*, 488; similarly, Eichholtz, *Geschichte der deutschen Kriegswirtschaft*, ii. 229 ff.

<sup>67</sup> On this, see the clear description by Speer, *Erinnerungen*, 268–9.

With the provisional failure of the total social mobilization project, which revived only in the summer of 1944, came a shift in political power relationships within a Führer state now increasingly reduced to a propaganda façade in internal politics. As shown not only by the growing influence of Bormann but also by Himmler's rise to Reich minister of the interior, power shifted further towards the Party and SS and away from the military leadership and traditional administrative elites.<sup>68</sup> In those circumstances no commensurate response was found to the gravity of Germany's increasingly acute 'human resources crisis'. The 'system of expedients' developed in previous years therefore continued in 1943: birth year 1925, which was actually not due for conscription until the autumn, was called up in May. In February schoolboys aged 15 to 17 were being deployed on air-raid defence in the framework of the Wartime Auxiliary Service, to release anti-aircraft gunners for service at the front. But, above all, there was an increasing effort to compensate for the shortage of German personnel by employing foreign auxiliaries, forced labourers, and prisoners of war. So despite the difficult military situation and the growing resistance of those concerned, the number of Soviet civilian workers employed in Germany alone rose, from the end of November 1943 to the turn of 1943/4, by almost 700,000 to around 1.8 million, corresponding to an average deportation rate of more than 50,000 per month. In 1943, with a total of close on 1.83 million civilians and POWs, it proved possible to procure almost as many foreigners for labour deployment in the Reich as in the previous year.<sup>69</sup> But this success on the part of the general plenipotentiary for manpower, Fritz Sauckel, was attributable not only to the increasingly brutal methods used by his recruiting officers,<sup>70</sup> but also to the unhoped-for increase in Germany's manpower resources at the end of 1943 due to the capitulation of Italy and the ensuing deployment of hundreds of thousands of Italian military internees as forced labourers.<sup>71</sup> Apart from that special case, it was obvious that Germany's possibilities of exploiting the population of the subjected countries had peaked with the culmination of its military expansion.<sup>72</sup>

<sup>68</sup> Rebentisch, *Führerstaat*, 499 ff.; Kroener, 'Nun, Volk, steh auf...!', 161–2.

<sup>69</sup> See Herbert, *Fremdarbeiter*, 255–8; also Ránki, *The Economics of the Second World War*, 94 ff.; Müller, 'Menschenjagd'.

<sup>70</sup> The impression reported by the foreign ministry's representatives with the eastern army forces at the end of 1942 is characteristic: 'In the massive deportation of workers to Germany, no account whatever is taken of their state of health or family circumstances. The aim of meeting the prescribed quota is pursued mechanically' (Dr Megerle, summary report to Reich foreign minister, 27 Nov. 1942, *re* assessment of the situation in the east by foreign ministry representatives, BA Potsdam, 09.01.60988). See a similar complaint about Sauckel by Alfred Rosenberg, 21 Dec. 1942, repr. in *Die faschistische Okkupationspolitik*, doc. 147, 368–9. Sauckel was totally unimpressed and announced that he was certain of the Führer's approval and was instead determined to divest himself of 'the last vestiges of our humanitarian weakness': 'Where voluntary commitment is lacking (and experience shows that it is lacking everywhere), it shall be replaced by compulsory service. That is now the iron rule of labour deployment for 1943.' Address by Sauckel, 6 Jan. 1943, quoted in Blaich, *Wirtschaft und Rüstung*, doc. 16a, 106.

<sup>71</sup> For a detailed account, see Schreiber, 'Die italienischen Militärinternierten im deutschen Machtbereich', 341 ff.

<sup>72</sup> See also Eichholz, *Geschichte der deutschen Kriegswirtschaft*, ii. 237 ff.

It is all the more remarkable that Hitler strictly rejected, on grounds of political ideology, the effective exploitation of still-available reserves precisely where they were most urgently needed, namely on the eastern front. Several of the front's commanders-in-chief (Hans-Günther von Kluge and Georg von Küchler, among others) were emphatically in favour of building up an anti-Communist Russian national army within the ranks of the German eastern army. According to Hitler, that would never happen; it was 'a phantom of the first order'.<sup>73</sup> While that put paid for the time being to the role of Andrei Andreyevich Vlasov and the 'Smolensk Committee' he had set up only a few months earlier, and shattered his German benefactors' dream of turning Germany's war in the east into a Russian civil war,<sup>74</sup> Hitler's restrictive attitude had, in some ways, already been overtaken by events. The units of Germany's eastern army had long been unable to function without massive replenishment with local auxiliaries.<sup>75</sup> What is more, eastern troop units of 'foreign volunteers'—organized in 176 battalions (infantry, cavalry, artillery) and thirty-eight labour, guard, and training companies—had already reached a total of 130,000 to 150,000 men by the beginning of 1943. That this upward trend continued despite Hitler's dictum is shown by the striking example of Army Group North, where the strength of the eastern troop units—excluding auxiliaries!—rose from 28,668 to 68,672 in the period from February to July 1943 alone.<sup>76</sup>

Germany's desperate, indeed hopeless situation in the spring of 1943 with regard to human resources was thus marked by an extremely complex crisis syndrome. To attribute that situation to Germany's demographic weakness relative to its enemies, or even to the Stalingrad losses, is far too limited an explanation. Rather, the situation resulted from a twofold blunder on the part of the regime:

<sup>73</sup> Thus to Keitel and Zeitzler on 8 June 1943 (*Hitlers Lagebesprechungen*, 256). A little later, on 1 July, the dictator broached the same subject in the middle of his address to army group commanders (extract repr. in Krausnick, 'Zu Hitlers Ostpolitik'). Both documents clearly reveal the motive for Hitler's negative attitude. Apart from what he considered the doubtful military value of such a national army, he feared above all that its existence would arouse expectations of the continuation of Russian statehood: 'I can set no future objectives that will build up independent, autonomous states' (*Hitlers Lagebesprechungen*, 260). A more concrete background to Hitler's fears were the trips to the front by Vlasov to Army Groups Central and North in the spring of 1943, which made the basic lines of his Russian national policy clear; for details see Andreyev, *Vlassov and the Russian Liberation Movement*.

<sup>74</sup> The ideas expressed by the foreign ministry representative at Seventeenth Army HQ in the spring of 1942 are characteristic in this respect; see Hoffmann, *Die Ostlegionen*, 22–3.

<sup>75</sup> Since units often kept quiet about the deployment of auxiliaries, their total number is hard to estimate. What is certain is that in 1942/3 individual armies (e.g. Sixth and Eighteenth) employed up to 50,000 auxiliaries, mostly in ordnance, supply, and repair units, and the like. The total figures found in contemporary sources and in the literature, which are almost impossible to verify, range from 220,000 (probably too low) to 600,000 auxiliaries in the early summer of 1943; see *Hitlers Lagebesprechungen*, 252 (n. 2.), and Hoffmann, *Die Geschichte der Wlassow-Armee*, 14. For the new type of infantry division introduced in October 1943, 2,500 auxiliaries per unit were officially provided for; that brought them to 15% of the total strength of each German infantry division; see statistical overview 'Breakdown of Inf. Div. n.A', 29 Oct. 1943, BA-MA RH 2/1432.

<sup>76</sup> See the detailed breakdown of units in Müller-Hillebrand, *Das Heer*, iii. 114, and the figures given in Mulligan, *The Politics of Illusion*, 150. According to general indications in Hoffmann, *Die Geschichte der Wlassow-Armee*, 14, 'on 5 May 1943 the volunteer units in the Wehrmacht totalled 90 Russian battalions, 140 units of company strength, 90 eastern legion field battalions, and a non-negligible number of smaller units'.

on the one hand, it harboured the totally unfounded expectation that it could wage and win a continental and ultimately global war *without* taking account of existing demographic structures; on the other, it proved incapable of optimally mobilizing the human potential available within the Reich and beyond its borders for the purposes of its own conduct of the war.

### (b) Material Losses and Ostensible Successes in the War Economy

The material situation with regard to Germany's conduct of the war was similar to the human resources situation. There too, there was an unbridgeable gap between the volume of consumption and wear on the one hand, and the reproduction rate indispensable for waging war successfully on the other.<sup>77</sup> The munitions sector is a good example. In the first year of war in the east (up to and including April 1942) the firing statistics, at a monthly average of 90,000 tonnes, far exceeded the experts' worst fears.<sup>78</sup> In the following year, moreover, they rose to an average of 117,000 tonnes per month.<sup>79</sup> Over that period the consumption of infantry ammunition had as much as doubled—particularly as a result of the Stalingrad battles—leading the army's quartermaster-general, Gen. Eduard Wagner, to demand an immediate drastic increase in manufacturing output at the end of 1942. But only two months after the start of Operation BLUE, the firing statistics for most of the other ammunition categories were already such as to make long-term stockholding illusory and permit replenishment only from ongoing production.<sup>80</sup>

Despite widespread awareness of the dangerous extent of such munition losses on the part of the German top leadership, the simultaneous increase in industrial output figures seemed to give reason for cautious optimism. Indeed, Germany's finished munitions production index rose from 100 in 1942 to 149 in the following year and 184 in 1944.<sup>81</sup> More importantly, that increase was by no means achieved at the expense of other war-related production areas; it was entirely in accordance with the general upswing in the German armament industry since early 1942 under Speer's management.<sup>82</sup> The fact that the total output of armament goods more than doubled in two years from the beginning of 1942 to the end of 1943<sup>83</sup> as part

<sup>77</sup> The following discussion is confined to those aspects that are directly relevant to an understanding of German conduct of the war in the spring of 1943. A detailed analysis of the German armament economy in the second half of the war by Rolf-Dieter Müller can be found in volume v/II, part II, of the present series.

<sup>78</sup> See *Germany and the Second World War*, vi. 873 ff.

<sup>79</sup> This was equivalent to the content of 260 ammunition trains a month; GenQu, Gruppe Mun./IIa, statistical overview *re* munitions consumption (east), 10 Dec. 1944, BA-MA RH 3/v. 135.

<sup>80</sup> See Donat, *Der Munitionsverbrauch im Zweiten Weltkrieg*, 35–6; also *Deutschland im zweiten Weltkrieg*, iii. 94.

<sup>81</sup> Based on constant unit prices; see *The Effects of Strategic Bombing on the German War Economy*, 275 (Appendix, Table 100).

<sup>82</sup> On the nature of the restructuring process involved, see Janssen, *Das Ministerium Speer*, chs. 4, 6, and 7; Milward, *German Economy*, ch. 4; and Rolf-Dieter Müller's discussion of the subject in *Germany and the Second World War*, v/I. 773–86, and v/II. 293 ff.

<sup>83</sup> The total index for German finished armament production rose from 100 in January/February 1942 to 222 in December 1943; see Donat, *Der Munitionsverbrauch im Zweiten Weltkrieg*, and

**Table I.I.3.** Armaments expenditure of the warring camps from 1935 to 1944 (annual expenditure in US \$ billions)<sup>(a)</sup>

	1935–9 <sup>(b)</sup>	1940	1941	1942	1943	1944
USA/UK/USSR	2.4	10.0	19.5	40.5	63.0	69.0
Germany/Japan	2.8	7.0	8.0	11.5	18.0	23.0
Ratio	0.9:1	1.4:1	2.4:1	3.5:1	3.5:1	3.0:1

(a) at 1944 American prices; (b) cumulative annual average.

Source: Goldsmith, 'The Power of Victory', 75; Harrison, 'Resource Mobilization', 172 (Table 1).

of this upswing is all the more impressive as that success was achieved under the most difficult infrastructure conditions (Allied air raids, labour shortage, scarcity of raw materials, etc.). It was indisputably an extraordinary organizational achievement on the part of the regime and a significant contribution to prolongation of the war. It is, however, quite another matter—and the decisive question for the present investigation—whether that success made any difference to Germany's hopeless prospects of winning the war.

The answer to that question can only be a clear 'no'. For despite all the German (and Japanese) efforts, the discrepancy between the armament industry output of the Axis powers and that of the 'anti-Hitler coalition' remained, and even increased. In 1941 the volume of German production was only 31 per cent of that of its main adversaries, and it fell in each of the two following years, despite considerable system-immanent rates of increase, to no more than 21 per cent.<sup>84</sup> Even if Japanese production, which was also developing dynamically, though at a lower level,<sup>85</sup> is included in the calculation, the ratio changes only insignificantly. Both in 1942 and in 1943, the three main powers in the 'anti-Hitler coalition' spent three-and-a-half times more money on weapons and ammunition than their two strongest adversaries together (see Table I.I.3. 'Armaments expenditure of the warring camps from 1935 to 1944').

The discrepancy between the production capacities of the two alliances should actually be much greater, since unlike that of Germany and most of the other belligerent states, the armament-industry capacity of the increasingly internationally dominant American economy was far from exhausted even at the peak of the war.<sup>86</sup>

*Deutschland im zweiten Weltkrieg*, iii. At the same time, the share of armaments production in total industrial output increased significantly (from 26% in 1942 to 37% in 1943). It is indicative of the half-hearted nature of the supposedly 'total' war effort that in 1943 the results for the civilian consumer-goods industry, in terms both of production volume and of employment numbers, remained close to those for the previous year; see Henning, *Das industrialisierte Deutschland*, 177–8; Eichholz, *Geschichte der deutschen Kriegswirtschaft*, ii. 384 ff.; Milward, 'The End of the Blitzkrieg', 505 (graph).

<sup>84</sup> See Goldsmith, 'The Power of Victory', 75; Harrison, 'Resource Mobilization', 172 (Table 1).

<sup>85</sup> For a detailed analysis, see Cohen, *Japan's Economy*, here, esp. ch. 4.

<sup>86</sup> See Smith, *The Army and Economic Mobilization*.

Against that background, the fact that in the space of one year Germany's eastern army lost 5,500 tanks (including assault guns), 8,000 cannon (including anti-tank cannon), and 240,000 motor vehicles—and the Luftwaffe, two-thirds of which was also deployed in the east, around 20,000 aircraft<sup>87</sup>—needs considerable clarification. For example, the above-mentioned tank and aircraft losses in the second year of the war in the east were roughly equivalent to a whole year's production in each case. More precisely, they were higher than the finished production figures for 1942 but lower than those for 1943.<sup>88</sup>

Here too, as in the munitions sector, Speer's successful restructuring of production relations was reflected in output figures that increased by leaps and bounds.<sup>89</sup> Whereas in 1942 a total of 4,224 combat tanks came off the production line, the figure for the following calendar year was 5,947. What is more, for the first time a significant proportion (40 per cent) consisted of the legendary 'Tiger' and 'Panther' models, which went into series production in August and November 1942 and were greatly superior in quality to conventional Type III and Type IV tanks.<sup>90</sup> The development of the 'Sturmgeschütz' assault gun, particularly suitable for close infantry combat, was even more rapid: while only 828 were produced in 1942, almost four times as many, namely 3,245, came off the production line in 1943. The increase in the number of military aircraft produced, from 15,546 to 25,668, was also extremely impressive.<sup>91</sup>

In the spring of 1943 the production successes were by no means firmly established, however, although they were speculated upon with some justification.<sup>92</sup> In any case, in those months the experts in the central military leadership bodies were primarily faced with other findings that brought disillusionment. Among these was the realization that material losses incurred during unsuccessful defensive operations or retreat, which had been accumulating since the battle of Stalingrad and

<sup>87</sup> Eichholtz, *Geschichte der deutschen Kriegswirtschaft*, ii. 120. Putting it another way, monthly aircraft losses from May 1942 to April 1943 were from 6.7% to 16.1% of all available planes; see Murray, *Strategy for Defeat*, 115 and 184.

<sup>88</sup> Detailed statistical reviews of output were published, the most reliable of which ought to be those produced by Speer's ministry in March 1945, repr. in Eichholtz, *Geschichte der deutschen Kriegswirtschaft*, ii. 645–69, and in *Deutschlands Rüstung*, 22–5 (as well as the following figures based on data in both those publications). See also Bleyer, 'Der geheime Bericht'.

<sup>89</sup> The expansion of tank and assault-gun production was carried out mainly at the expense of naval construction. At the beginning of January 1943 Hitler decided to halt all work on large surface vessels and ordered them to be taken out of service. In view of the increased need for tanks in the east, he had to 'scrape together all available forces'; Ständiger Vertreter des ObdM beim Führer an Chef Skl, 17 Jan. 1943, BA-MA RM 7/260. See also Milward, *German Economy*, 135; Salewski, *Die deutsche Seekriegsleitung*, ii. 209 ff.; *Lagevorträge*, 457–70 (10 Jan. 1943).

<sup>90</sup> On the technical qualities of the tank models in question, which will not be discussed in detail here, see Spielberger, *Der Panzerkampfwagen IV*; id., *Der Panzerkampfwagen Tiger*; id., *Der Panzerkampfwagen Panther*.

<sup>91</sup> Here, too, things look different from a comparative perspective, as can be seen from John Morrow's assessment: 'All in all, a comparison of the German aircraft industry in the First and Second World Wars leads to the conclusion that, in relation to the industry of the enemy states, it was both quantitatively and qualitatively more productive in the First World War than in the Second' (Morrow, 'Die deutsche Flugzeugindustrie', 77).

<sup>92</sup> A typical example of such speculation is provided by Goebbels, *Tagebücher*, pt. 2, viii. 63 (6 Apr. 1943).

Table I.I.4. Eastern army booty figures (1 January to 31 December 1942)

	Tanks	Guns	Anti-tank cannon	Anti-aircraft guns	Aircraft
Sov. losses as per FHO <sup>(a)</sup>	21,728	13,457	7,204	1,066	1,018
Sov. losses as per QMG	8,036	7,938	3,685	348	371
Difference	13,692	5,519	3,519	718	647

(a) Data from troop reports.

Source: FHO (I), Statistik 'Gefangenens- und Beutezahlen 1.1.–31.12.1942', dated 10 Jan. 1943, BA-MA RH 2/2446.

evacuation of the Caucasus, weighed particularly heavily since they were generally irreparable,<sup>93</sup> whereas damage and losses incurred during an advance could often be repaired by the army's own maintenance units.

The fact that this advantage now lay increasingly with the Red Army was sufficient reason for Foreign Armies East to view incoming troop reports of enemy losses with increasing scepticism. Thus, army group reports of Soviet tank losses were reduced by 50 per cent from December 1942, while from January calculations of enemy losses had already been reduced by 20 per cent to allow for inevitable duplication.<sup>94</sup> As can be seen from Table I.I.4, there was nevertheless a substantial discrepancy between the losses reported by Gehlen and the booty calculations of Quartermaster-General Wagner. However questionable the compilation methods may have been, this discrepancy shows what a small proportion of Soviet material actually fell into the hands of the German troops.<sup>95</sup>

The fact that in 1942 the Red Army's material losses, like its human losses, were again several times greater than the corresponding Wehrmacht losses was anything but reassuring for German observers. Rather, it was striking proof that the assumptions still held in the spring of 1942 about the ailing state of the Soviet war economy after the loss of the Donets Basin and other industrial centres had been fundamentally wrong.<sup>96</sup> Otherwise, how could the enemy's huge losses, month after month, have been replaced time and again and many new divisions equipped, so that the Red Army was now superior to the German units on almost every sector of the front (see Chapter 3, Table I.III.1. 'German estimate of relative strength on the eastern front')?

Clearly, the organizational strength of the Stalin regime and the potential of the Soviet industries transferred to the east<sup>97</sup>—and to some extent the enemy's extensive self-sufficiency in raw materials—had been grossly underestimated. On the basis of this insight, which had been slowly maturing since the summer of the

<sup>93</sup> Such concerns were of considerable importance to Hitler, as was already apparent during the battle of Stalingrad; see, e.g., *Hitlers Lagebesprechungen*, 84 (12 Dec. 1942).

<sup>94</sup> See also Wilhelm, 'Die Prognosen der Abteilung Fremde Heere Ost', 24.

<sup>95</sup> Wilhelm (*ibid.*) overlooks the difference in the standpoints from which Foreign Armies East and the quartermaster-general viewed enemy losses: Gehlen's department was concerned with total losses, while the quartermaster-general was interested in the booty acquired by the German army.

<sup>96</sup> See *Germany and the Second World War*, vi. 889–903.

<sup>97</sup> This was acknowledged by Gehlen even in his otherwise whitewashing address to the Military Academy on 5 Jan. 1943; 'Rußlands Wehrkraft, Rüstungsumfang und Wehrmacht an der Jahreswende 1942/1943', BA-MA RH 2/2534, here 23–4.

previous year, the relevant German departments finally arrived, after two unsuccessful campaigns, at a new and at least quantitatively realistic picture of the material basis for Soviet conduct of the war.

Starting from the premiss that the collapse of the German offensive in 1942 provided the Soviet Union with an opportunity to further consolidate its war-economy infrastructure,<sup>98</sup> the Wehrmacht high command's war economy department (WiAmt) assumed in the spring of 1943 (in sharp contrast to the expectations it had expressed a year before) that the Soviet Union's situation in the raw-materials sector would improve continuously. It assumed, quite correctly, that in the current year both coal and oil production, as well as the production of pig iron, aluminium, and other militarily important materials, would increase in practically all industrial urban areas controlled by Moscow. The implication for German conduct of the war was—though not directly stated by Gen. Georg Thomas, chief of the war economy and armaments department—clearly apparent. Even if Germany were again in a position to launch a large-scale offensive on the eastern front in 1943, the Soviet economy, because of its geographical situation and the dispersion of its production facilities, would be less vulnerable than in the first year-and-a-half of the war.

The changed German prognosis of the Soviet Union's capacities in the armaments sector appears even more decisive than the reassessment of the raw-materials industry. In March 1943, in obvious compensation for its striking underestimate of the previous year,<sup>99</sup> the war economy department assumed, for both tanks and aircraft, a threefold increase in monthly production compared with the previous year. It thus arrived at results which, though not correct, were of a reasonable order of magnitude (see Table I.I.5).

**Table I.I.5.** Soviet tank and aircraft production, 1942/3 (unit figures for average monthly production in the first six months of the year)

	Tanks <sup>(a)</sup>		Front-line aircraft <sup>(b)</sup>	
	1st half of 1942	1st half of 1943	1st half of 1942	1st half of 1943
Prognosis of the OKW war economy department <sup>(c)</sup>	500	1,500 (950)	550	1,660
Data from Soviet research	1,837 (ca. 1,013)	2,019 (ca. 1,388)	1,378	2,290

(a) Figures in brackets = number of medium and heavy tanks; (b) excl. transport planes; (c) the relevant memoranda from WiRü- und WiAmt are dated 31 Mar. 1942 and 1 Apr. 1943.

*Source:* BA-MA, RW 19/832 and Wi/ID 138; *Geschichte des zweiten Weltkrieges*, v. 56 and 63, and vi. 428; Simonov, *Voyenno-promyshlennii kompleks SSSR*, 171 ff.; Harrison, *Accounting for War*, 180.

<sup>98</sup> For the Soviet Union the assessment was—not incorrectly—pessimistic only in regard to the food situation; see Gehlen's address to the War Academy on 5 Jan. 1943, BA-MA RH 2/2534, 29 ff., and OKW/WiStab, 'The Food Situation in the USSR 1943/44', 10 July 43, BA-MA RH 2/2349; also, for comparison, Barber and Harrison, *The Soviet Home Front*, 78 and 213 (Table 1).

<sup>99</sup> See *Germany and the Second World War*, vi. 898 ff.

If the figures derived from the changed perception of the Soviet Union are compared with the development of German armaments manufacture, the finding is unambiguous. That is particularly true in the case of tanks, a weapon which Hitler considered decisive for victory in the east. The new construction capacity of 18,000 tanks attributed to the Soviet Union for 1943 by German experts was three times higher than the manufacturing rate on German side. Even if the comparison is confined to the heavy and medium tanks at the centre of Germany's armament efforts, there was a Soviet superiority ratio of 2 to 1.<sup>100</sup> From the German viewpoint, the aircraft production ratio might have seemed more favourable at first sight, since the anticipated Soviet finished manufacture of 25,520 military and transport planes for 1943 corresponded fairly closely to the average German output for 1942 and 1943.<sup>101</sup> However, the balance was only apparent. For one thing, the Soviet Union actually produced considerably more aircraft than the Germans expected (see Table I.I.5. 'Soviet tank and aircraft production, 1942/3'). Moreover, the aircraft manufactured by the Soviet Union were deployed almost exclusively against the German enemy, whereas German production had to cover the total requirement for the defence of 'Fortress Europe' on all its many fronts.

Given such sobering statistics on the Soviet armaments situation, the relevant German departments—already vulnerable to suspicions of defeatism because of their findings—were understandably little inclined to engage in systematic comparisons of output potential that included Anglo-American armaments production. Where a start was made on such comparisons, however,<sup>102</sup> the results were devastating. For the year 1943, mainly because of the American arms build-up already referred to,<sup>103</sup> they showed an Allied (American–British–Soviet) superiority ratio in armaments production of around 9.5 to 1 for tanks and 5.5 to 1 for aircraft. Even if Japanese production was included,<sup>104</sup> the corresponding ratios were still 8.5 to 1 and 3.3 to 1 respectively.<sup>105</sup>

Although such figures were, by their nature, known only to a few experts, and the conclusions drawn from them were in any case discussed only in a small circle, one may rightly assume that concern about the danger represented by the American

<sup>100</sup> Undated WiAmt 'Monatliche Ausbringung', early 1943, BA-MA RW 19/832.

<sup>101</sup> Most of these were assumed to be fighter and ground-attack aircraft; see *ibid.*

<sup>102</sup> The only known *all-inclusive* review of that kind by the war economy department dates, significantly, only from the last months of the war, and the columns intended for German production figures were left unfilled, which can hardly be considered coincidental. It can therefore be adduced for assessing German self-estimates in the spring of 1943 only with some reservations; see BA-MA RW 19/832.

<sup>103</sup> On the general dimensions, see Smith, *The Army and Economic Mobilization*, 6–7, Tables 2 and 3 (US War Program for World War II, 1 July 1940 to 31 Aug. 1945). On American armaments production in 1943 specifically, see Coakley and Leighton, *Global Logistics and Strategy 1943–1945*, 115 ff.

<sup>104</sup> Details in Cohen, *Japan's Economy*, here 208–12 and 237 (Table 31).

<sup>105</sup> According to WiAmt 'Monatliche Ausbringung', Spring 1943, BA-MA RW 19/832, Allied aircraft production in 1943 was estimated (retrospectively) at around 140,000 planes, as against a German–Japanese output of 42,000 (similar figures in Ránki, *Economics of the Second World War*, 175, Table 40). For armoured vehicles, the corresponding figures were 57,300 Allied tanks to 6,723 German and Japanese; if the production of anti-tank assault guns, which was particularly significant in Germany, is included, the Allied superiority ratio in armoured vehicle construction is reduced to approximately 6 to 1.

armaments potential was felt very strongly by the German military leadership and by Hitler himself.<sup>106</sup> All the more so as the United States was strikingly demonstrating its willingness and ability to put its material superiority into operational effect. This was apparent not only from the snowballing American air raids on German cities and in support of the Allied landing in North Africa, but also from the growth of American armaments aid to the Soviet Union.<sup>107</sup>

While the initially vague knowledge of the 'lend-lease' arms deliveries played no significant part in German estimates of Soviet resistance potential in the first half of 1942, in this respect too the situation was entirely different a year later. The material consequences of the failure of Germany's 1942 summer offensive to block the supply route leading from the Persian Gulf to the Soviet Union via Iran were now factored in—unspectacularly but with remarkable accuracy. By December 1942 the competent departments—the OKW's war economy department and the Foreign Armies South-East group in the Army General Staff—had concluded that the estimated volume of 6 million tonnes delivered by that route in 1942 would probably double in the coming year, and that a further increase in the medium term could not be ruled out.<sup>108</sup> That estimate corresponded fairly closely to the volume of material which the western Allies had promised to deliver to the Soviet Union via the Gulf route from July 1942 to June 1943 under the terms of the Second Protocol.<sup>109</sup> But the German estimates hold good even with respect to the volume of material actually delivered in 1942 and 1943,<sup>110</sup> despite the fact that the further significant increase in deliveries following the entry into force of the Third Protocol was not foreseeable at the beginning of the year.<sup>111</sup>

The German assessment of the amounts of Allied war materials transported to the Soviet Union via the northern route (Murmansk–Arkhangelsk), and via

<sup>106</sup> See e.g. statements on the subject by Rommel (quoted in Krumpelt, *Das Material*, 221) and Tresckos (Heusinger, *Befehl im Widerstreit*, 215), as well as Hitler's own comment, which can be understood only in this connection: 'If there is any winner in this war, it will only be America' (Hitler, *Monologe*, 199, 15 Jan. 1942).

<sup>107</sup> The total value of such aid rose from \$1.38 billion in 1942 to \$2.44 billion in 1943 and \$4.07 billion in 1944; see Schlauch, *Rüstungshilfe*, 149, Table 3.

<sup>108</sup> FHO briefing notes for 7 Jan. 1943 on the WiAmt position *re* trend in material support for the Soviet Union by the Anglo-American powers, 3 Dec. 1942, BA-MA RH 2/2092; GenStdH/Gruppe Fremde Heere Südost, study *re* predicted American and British deliveries of war material to the USSR via the Persian Gulf in the first quarter of 1943, 20 Dec. 1942, BA-MA RH 2/1522.

<sup>109</sup> Goods worth \$3 billion were promised, two-thirds consisting of military equipment, with a total volume of 7 million short tons (= 6.35 million tonnes). The volume to be transported from the Anglo-American side was 4.4 short tons (= 3.99 million tonnes), a quarter of which via the southern route. See Butler, *Grand Strategy*, iii. 2, 587; Jones, *The Roads to Russia*, 118–19.

<sup>110</sup> Thus, in December 1942 the Foreign Armies South-East group predicted total deliveries of 276,000 tonnes via the southern route for the first quarter of 1943; the amount actually delivered was around 262,000 tonnes (= 258,000 long tons). See GenStdH/Gruppe Fremde Heere Südost, study *re* predicted American and British deliveries of war material to the USSR via the Persian Gulf in the first quarter of 1943, 20 Dec. 1942, BA-MA RH 2/1522; Coakley and Leighton, *Global Logistics and Strategy 1940–1943*, 591, Table 16). For a detailed presentation of deliveries via the southern route, see Motter, *The Persian Corridor*, here esp. Appendix A, 481–9 (Tables 1–4).

<sup>111</sup> See Schlauch, *Rüstungshilfe*, 153; Coakley and Leighton, *Global Logistics and Strategy 1940–1943*, 731; id., *Global Logistics and Strategy 1943–1945*, 847.

Vladivostok and the ports on the Sea of Okhotsk, was also in line with the trend.<sup>112</sup> Even the rapidly increasing importance of the far-eastern route for the development of the lend-lease programme was essentially correctly predicted by the experts in the war economy department.<sup>113</sup> On the other hand, the assumption that deliveries via Arkhangelsk and Murmansk would increase substantially in the medium term was wrong: in view of the heavy losses suffered in the convoy battles of 1942, the western Allies decided to call a complete halt to transport via the Barents Sea as from March 1943.<sup>114</sup>

Finally, the German side formed no correct ideas about the kind of material that was delivered to the Soviet enemy under the lend-lease programme and overestimated the proportion of heavy weaponry. In any event, the war economy department's assumption at the turn of 1942–3 that 'deliveries of tanks, guns, and aircraft are equivalent to some 20 to 30 per cent of the Soviet Union's own production' is quite out of the question.<sup>115</sup> On the other hand, the German experts seem to have continuously underestimated the importance of lend-lease material less noticeable in front-line deployment—such as trucks and machine tools, special steels and explosives, military boots and tinned food—in relieving the burden on the Soviet war economy.<sup>116</sup>

If these figures are examined in relation to the human and material situation of Germany in the months following Stalingrad, the picture is unequivocal in every respect. Its three defining characteristics are as follows:

- By the spring of 1943 the strategic balance determined by the reciprocal relationship of the belligerents' losses and resources had—largely independently of the Stalingrad events—shifted to a grotesque extent to Germany's disadvantage. The discrepancy in the availability of human resources, raw materials, and military equipment that had developed between Germany and the Soviet Union—and reached its full extent only at the global level—was now so great in purely *quantitative* terms that it was largely unaffected by the persisting, though relatively moderate, *qualitative* imbalances in troop training and motivation, and the technology and operation of weapon systems.<sup>117</sup>

<sup>112</sup> FHO briefing notes for 7 Jan. 1943 on the WiAmt position *re* trend in material support for the Soviet Union by the Anglo-American powers, 3 Dec. 1942, BA-MA RH 2/2092.

<sup>113</sup> In this case the assumption was that deliveries would increase to a maximum of 2 million tons per year; the actual amount delivered was 2.39 million long tons (= 2.42 million tonnes). See Schlauch, *Rüstungshilfe*, 153; Coakley and Leighton, *Global Logistics and Strategy 1940–1943*, 731; id., *Global Logistic and Strategy 1943–1945*, 847; FHO briefing notes for 7 Jan. 1943 on the WiAmt position *re* trend in material support for the Soviet Union by the Anglo-American powers, 3 Dec. 1942, BA-MA RH 2/2092.

<sup>114</sup> On the background to this, see Roskill, *The War at Sea*, ii. 400–1; Schofield, *The Arctic Convoys*, 100–1.

<sup>115</sup> Deliveries of such material did not amount to even 10% of the corresponding Soviet production in the period 1941 to 1944; see Jones, *The Roads to Russia*, 229.

<sup>116</sup> For a survey of the categories of goods delivered to the Soviet Union, see Schlauch, *Rüstungshilfe*, 154–5 (Tables 10 and 11).

<sup>117</sup> Possession of a wealth of resources is not, of course, in itself a decisive factor for the outcome of a war. It becomes so only in conjunction with a multitude of other less quantifiable conditions, including such things as technical know-how, proper economic management mechanisms, a well-trained and

- Despite the language current in the ruling circles of the Nazi state, which countered the increasingly obvious quantitative inferiority of the Wehrmacht by all-embracing references to the alleged qualitative superiority of ‘the German soldier’ and his equipment, there can be no doubt that the departments responsible for strategic analysis at the level of the top leadership were fully aware, or at least suspected, the extent of the disaster. For the first time in the war, there was now a near realistic appreciation—furthered psychologically, though not imposed, by the shock of the Stalingrad defeat—of the demographic, economic, administrative, and military capacity of the Soviet adversary.
- While the policy of gearing society and the economy rigidly to the demands of ‘total war’, which grew out of the realization of Germany’s own desperate situation, did mobilize considerable reserves, especially in the area of armament technology, it nevertheless failed in its actual aim of preserving Germany’s chance of ‘final victory’. While that failure may have been practically inevitable in view of a distribution of human and raw-material resources that was extremely unfavourable to Germany and its allies, it was by no means a process determined by unavoidable external circumstances. Rather, the internal and external situation facing the National Socialist system at the beginning of 1943 was in all major respects the logical consequence of its own policy. And that policy increasingly resembled the efforts of a man struggling to lift himself by his own bootstraps out of a swamp into which he had jumped of his own free will and in full knowledge of its depth.

### 3. ‘FORTRESS EUROPE’ AND THE PROBLEM OF THE SECOND FRONT

Turning from the structural framework conditions of Germany’s strategic situation to its situational characteristics, we are struck by the fact that, after the repeated failure of its military efforts in the east, Germany had fallen hopelessly behind not only with respect to mobilization of its human and material resources. It might appear, upon superficial examination, that Field Marshal Erich von Manstein’s brilliant successes in March 1943 had restored the *status quo ante* at least on the eastern front. Indeed, by the beginning of the muddy season the front line, with a few exceptions such as the Soviet breakthrough at Leningrad, again corresponded by and large to that of the spring of 1942. Nevertheless, the situation was now totally different, and the responsible experts in the Army General Staff were fully

well-motivated work force, a well-developed logistics system, and, not least of all, military planning that deploys human and materials resources rationally and purposefully. The argument in the present contribution that the distribution of resources was decisive for the outcome of the war is based on the premiss, which will not be discussed here in more detail, that in none of those areas were Germany’s adversaries so inferior as to compensate for their enormous advantage in human and material resources.

aware of this. The decisive difference with regard to continuation of the war, as compared with the previous year, was that Hitler's fundamental strategic calculation until the summer of 1942, that is, that the war in the east would be brought to a conclusion before the feared American armament potential had fully materialized,<sup>118</sup> had now definitely proved wrong. Although the European land war on multiple fronts—which Hitler, remembering the First World War, wanted to avoid at all costs—had not yet even begun, the towering Anglo-American superiority in armament and transport capacity was already everywhere apparent. It was shown by the expanding lend-lease programme and the practically unhindered increase in Allied air raids on German cities, as well as by the collapse of the German U-boat campaign and the capitulation of the German–Italian forces in North Africa, an army no smaller than that enclosed at Stalingrad. The two last-mentioned events in particular, both of which occurred in May, had major psychological and strategic consequences. The termination of the U-boat campaign in the previous year's only successful theatre of war<sup>119</sup> signalled the realization that the tonnage race between German sinking successes and Allied construction capacities, in which such great hopes had been placed, was lost. That, however, removed the last great barrier to the establishment of Anglo-American bases for the liberation of continental Europe. At the same time, as the OKW Operations Staff apprehended in a memorandum dated 10 December 1942, the Allied victory in North Africa made the Mediterranean an ideal starting position for an 'actual attack on the southern flank of the European land mass'.<sup>120</sup> It gave the adversary an abundance of strategic options which the relevant German departments were no longer able to calculate.

Any historian looking today at the situation analyses made by the Naval War Staff, the OKW Operations Staff, Foreign Armies West, and Commander-in-Chief South-West in the first half of 1943<sup>121</sup> finds his head spinning. Norway and Jutland are treated as *possible* targets for a major Allied landing, on a par with the Channel coast, the French Atlantic coast, the Iberian peninsula, southern France, Sardinia and Sicily, the Balkans (where the Romanian oilfields at Ploieşti were seen as particularly threatened), and Greece; here the Peloponnese and the offshore islands, as well as Crete and the Dodecanese, were seen as the main target. Furthermore, active military intervention by Turkey on Britain's side was no longer excluded.<sup>122</sup> All these options, of which an invasion of Greece was taken most

<sup>118</sup> See *Germany and the Second World War*, vi. 1206–7.

<sup>119</sup> For details see Salewski, *Die deutsche Seekriegsleitung*, ii. 293 ff., and *Germany and the Second World War*, vi. 379–405.

<sup>120</sup> OKW/WFSt, 'Denkschrift über die strategische Lage', 10 Dec. 1942, repr. in Förster, 'Strategische Überlegungen', 100.

<sup>121</sup> See, above all, C-in-C South-West, 30 Jan. 1943, BA-MA RH 2/680; Naval War Staff 3rd Division, 20 Feb. 1943, BA-MA RM 7/260; Foreign Armies West Dept., Enemy Situation Report No. 7/43, 1 Apr. 1943, BA-MA RM 2/1481; OKW Operations Staff, 10 June 1943, BA-MA RH 2/502, as well as the Naval War Staff's situation reviews of 20 Feb. 1943 and 20 May 1943, both repr. in Salewski, *Die deutsche Seekriegsleitung*, iii, docs. 16 and 17, 338–56. See also the OKW Operations Staff's annexed sketch map (Map I.I.1. Intelligence on enemy landing intentions in January 1943).

<sup>122</sup> WFSt/Op., Study of Possible Turkish–Allied Operations in the Balkans, 4 Feb. 1943, BA-MA RH 2/716. The OKW's concern led in the weeks following to German–Bulgarian consultations on

seriously by Hitler and that of Italy by the OKW Operations Staff,<sup>123</sup> were not some kind of abstract mental exercise. They were concrete expectations that were planned for realistically in the coming months, that is, until the summer of 1943. What is more, some of the relevant departments argued that Allied shipping capacity was quite sufficient for the enemy to carry out simultaneous landings in different peripheral areas of German-ruled territory, for example on the Atlantic coast and in the Mediterranean.<sup>124</sup> Here too, the disillusionment is unmistakable. The hopes nurtured in the first months after Pearl Harbor that war in the Pacific would lead to a fragmentation of American military capacity, restrict the United States' operational possibilities in Europe at least temporarily, and thus give the German military leadership time to build up adequate defence resources<sup>125</sup>—all these hopes were shattered once Germany understood, somewhat belatedly, that the battle of Midway in June 1942 had marked the turning point in the war in the Pacific.<sup>126</sup>

The German leadership was thus faced with a strategic situation in which, fifteen months before the start of the Normandy invasion, the European land war on multiple fronts was already a reality of sorts—a reality in the sense of a threat to 'Fortress Europe' that was perceived as directly imminent and could no longer be averted by any means at Germany's disposal. The threat weighed all the more heavily as its location could not be determined, so that defensive preparations needed to be made along more or less the whole perimeter of the vast territory under German rule. The need to do so was compounded by the geographical conditions of a European continent that stretched from Norway to Italy and Greece, which made the swift redeployment of large units in case of need extremely difficult. In those circumstances, the advantage which Germany had been hoping for—that of being able to conserve its strength by defending along an 'inner line', unlike its adversaries, who had to contend with transport over long distances<sup>127</sup>—was out of the question. It was therefore entirely logical that Hitler sought to reinforce the least accessible of the threatened border areas of his empire. His room

possibilities for joint preventive measures; WFSt/Op., briefing notes, 1 Mar. 1943, BA-MA RH 2/716. In this connection, see also Hoppe, *Bulgarien*, 143–4.

<sup>123</sup> Minutes of Hitler's meeting with Keitel on 19 May 1943, repr. in *Hitlers Lagebesprechungen*, 205–20; Goebbels, *Tagebücher*, pt. 2, viii. 532–3 (25 June 1943); file note re C/Skl visit to Führer HQ, 30 Apr.–2 May 1943, app. 1 (Situation Discussion at the Berghof) and 3 (Discussion with Gen. Jodl), BA-MA RM 7/260.

<sup>124</sup> This was emphasized, for example, by Foreign Armies West in Enemy Situation Report No. 7/43, 9, BA-MA RH 2/1481.

<sup>125</sup> See *Germany and the Second World War*, vi. 116–24.

<sup>126</sup> Foreign Armies West, situation report on the Pacific region, 10 Jan. 1943, BA-MA RH 2/754, and briefing to ObdM on 'the Indo-Pacific area', 2 Mar. 1943, BA-MA RM 7/254. See also *Germany and the Second World War*, vi. 182–3, and Martin, *Deutschland und Japan*, 144–51.

<sup>127</sup> The OKW Operations Staff had already emphasized that advantage in its memorandum of 14 December 1941 on the significance of the entry into the war of the United States and Japan, BA-MA RH 2/1521, 18–19. In his address to Reichs- and Gauleiters on 8 May 1943, Hitler presented that hope as a factor decisive for the outcome of the war: 'He who possesses the organizational strength to solve the problems of movement in this war will be the winner. In that respect we are superior to our adversary: he has to attack on the outer line, while we defend on the inner line' (Goebbels, *Tagebücher*, pt. 2, viii. 239).

for manoeuvre was minimal, however, as can be seen from the tug of war over the release of a single armoured division for deployment in the Peloponnese.<sup>128</sup>

Rapid constitution of an adequately extended and deeply fortified defensive front was already ruled out by the severe limits on the amount of forces that could be withdrawn from the east. According to a briefing by Foreign Armies East in April 1943, the Red Army was engaged in preparations for a renewed large-scale offensive.<sup>129</sup> As to the direction of the offensive, Gehlen's department was not prepared to commit itself: what seemed most likely was an attack on Army Group South in the direction of the Dnieper, so as to create the conditions for cutting the army group off and pushing on towards the Balkans. Significantly, the Army General Staff already considered that Stalin was deliberately leaving the decision on the timing and direction of his offensive open, so as to be able to coordinate it with potential Anglo-American plans for an offensive in southern, northern, or western Europe.<sup>130</sup>

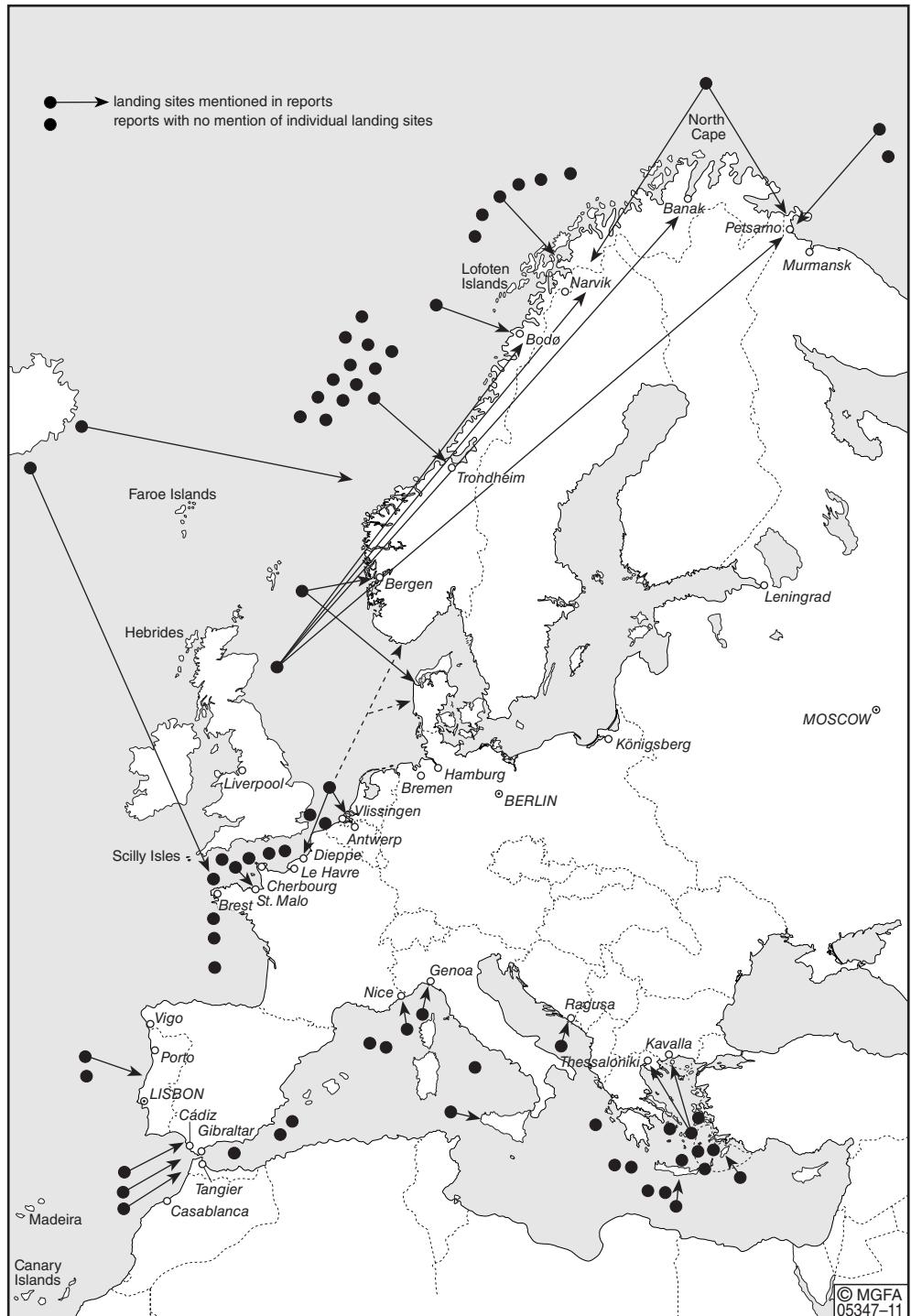
The possibility of such a constellation points to a circumstance decisive for the further development of the war. In itself, Germany's situation on the eastern front already bore all the hallmarks of a serious crisis. But the same applied to the other theatres of operations, to the Mediterranean as well to the sea and air war, and to German alliance policy, the war economy, 'manpower management', and many other sectors directly relevant to conduct of the war. The German leadership was thus faced with a multitude of parallel strategic, operational, economic, and political crises. Worse still, all these crisis areas showed an increasing tendency to interconnect and aggravate each other. Should the Allies manage to coordinate their military operations in eastern Europe with those in the west or south of the continent, this would inevitably further accentuate Germany's already chronic lack of resources, which did not admit of simultaneous defence in several theatres of war.

Furthermore, the interconnection between the various crisis areas, which had been perceptible since the end of 1941 but was now accelerating by leaps and bounds, placed greater demands on the strategic conduct of the war. It was less than ever possible to solve problems in isolation and overcome operational crises in individual front sectors from within. In view of the Allies' increasingly concerted war efforts and Germany's worsening material and human resources situation, it was to be assumed that even subordinate operational decisions (on, for example, the deployment or transfer of a single troop contingent) could have serious strategic consequences. However, a leadership which—rightly or wrongly—had not yet wholly abandoned hope of playing a part in determining the further course of the war could cope with the resulting heightened pressure on decision-making only if it

<sup>128</sup> Hitlers Lagebesprechungen, 205 ff. (19 May. 1943). The problem was very similar in Norway, where Hitler wanted to transfer a mountain division from the east to deter the Allies from attempting an invasion and force Sweden to maintain its policy of neutrality; see KTB OKW, iii. 199 (10 Mar. 1943) and 207 (13 Mar. 1943).

<sup>129</sup> FHO briefing note *re* reports of an apparently intended, mainly defensive campaign by the Soviet Union in the summer of 1943, 19 Apr. 1943, BA-MA RH 2/2089.

<sup>130</sup> See *ibid.*, as well as FHO, Entwurf Chefvortrag, pt. 3, assessment of the enemy [ca. 21 June 1943], BA-MA RH 2/2115.



**Map I.I.1. Intelligence on enemy landing intentions in January 1943. Annex to WFSt/V.O., Aus/Ic No. 00767/43 g.K.**

Source: Klink, Das Gesetz des Handelns 26

managed to engage in *overall* strategic analysis and planning commensurate with the complexity of the threat.

After Stalingrad, however, the political and military leadership of the Third Reich was less than ever in a position to do so. The segmentation of the top German leadership had become so advanced that an authority with overall strategic responsibility existed only in the person of the Führer. Since the crisis in September of the previous year, the OKW Operations Staff, to which that function should most appropriately have fallen, had degenerated to become a mere work force of the dictator, partly because of the persistent belief in the Führer on the part of its chief, Gen. Alfred Jodl, and partly because of Gen. Kurt Zeitzler's ambition to represent the eastern theatre of operations independently.<sup>131</sup> This was compounded by the fact that the already difficult personal relations between Jodl and Zeitzler, who was chief of the Army General Staff, deteriorated further in the course of 1943. In those circumstances it was out of the question for the two chiefs of staff to sit down together to discuss the overall situation, coordinate the requirements of the individual theatres of operations, and resolve any other persisting tensions. Even during the daily conferences at Führer headquarters, they took care to avoid each other.<sup>132</sup>

Thus it was no accident that the OKW Operations Staff memorandum of 10 December 1942, to which we have already referred, remained the last German situation analysis covering all theatres of the war. It was also the last starting point for an overall strategic concept for 1943. That document, drawn up at the height of the Stalingrad crisis and a few months before the German collapse in North Africa and the Atlantic, reflects very clearly the awareness that Germany was henceforth strategically on the defensive, as well as the conviction that 'the war cannot be brought to a victorious conclusion only by maintaining the gains made so far'. Yet what the OKW Operations Staff had to offer as the key to victory was simply more of the same: continuation of the U-boat campaign and a new large-scale offensive in the east. The main goal of the latter, in addition to the repeated aim of capturing Leningrad, should be to 'finally cut off the Soviets from their economic energy sources in the Caucasus' so as to compel the British and Americans to commit stronger forces in the Middle East and strike at them there.<sup>133</sup> How this calculation, which had determined the failed German strategy of 1942, was to be put into effect in the considerably worsened conditions of the new year—to that question even the OKW Operations Staff gave no answer.

In its situation analyses of December 1942 to June 1943, the Naval War Staff proceeded from an opposite assessment of the eastern war situation.<sup>134</sup> In its view, experience in 1941 and 1942 showed clearly that belief in the defeat of Russia was—as the chief of the Naval War Staff put it in May—'utopian'.<sup>135</sup> A strategic

<sup>131</sup> See *Germany and the Second World War*, vi. 1048–59.

<sup>132</sup> See Warlimont, *Im Hauptquartier*, 272 ff.; Schmundt, *Tätigkeitsbericht*, 97–8 (27 Sept. 1943); Meyer, *Adolf Heusinger*, 225 and 859 (n. 244).

<sup>133</sup> Quoted in Förster, 'Strategische Überlegungen', 104–5.

<sup>134</sup> Repr. in Salewski, *Die deutsche Seekriegsleitung*, iii. 313–63, doc. 14–18.

<sup>135</sup> Quoted *ibid.* 347, n. 5.

rethink was necessary, that is, a change to defensive conduct of the war on all land, air, and sea fronts. A strength-saving defensive strategy should be adopted in the east, and all the efforts of both the navy and the Luftwaffe should be concentrated on the tonnage war, so as to lastingly demonstrate to the Anglo-American naval powers the hopelessness of their invasion plans and thus force them to make peace.

Despite all the Naval War Staff's efforts at clear-sighted assessment of the situation, it is quite obvious that their proposals too did not constitute a royal road out of the dilemma. Not only do they seem to have overestimated the potential effective radius of German weapons in the tonnage war, given the decisive improvements in Allied radar technology, but the situation on the eastern front was also seen far too simplistically. A withdrawal on the eastern front on a scale large enough to release a significant amount of forces would have been possible only at the cost of considerable strategic disadvantages. In the north, for example, a pullback from the area around Leningrad would have significantly accelerated Finland's withdrawal from the war, which had been threatening since the beginning of 1943.<sup>136</sup> It would also have endangered German naval command of the Baltic, the most important U-boat training area. In the south, the German conquerors would have lost the Donets Basin, the very heartland of Soviet heavy industry, which the German leadership considered indispensable for its own conduct of the war.<sup>137</sup>

Although its responsibility was limited to the war in the east, the Army General Staff was also giving thought to Germany's overall strategic position. Like Hitler and the OKW Operations Staff, the chief of the OKH operations division, Lt.-Gen. Adolf Heusinger, maintained that 'Fortress Europe', under attack on all sides, must be held at all costs, and its political erosion, which was beginning to be apparent in Italy and Hungary above all, must be prevented by all possible means. He differed from the planners at Führer headquarters, however, in his comparatively more flexible view of the defensive possibilities. While it was important to adjust the borders of the defence area to the forces available and thus avoid the risk of overextension, Germany should not allow itself to be forced into defending an area that was much too small. Secondly, it was decisive to establish an operational 'central reserve', with the help of which sectors of the front under threat of enemy breakthrough could be stabilized rapidly at any time. Although Heusinger no longer believed in final military victory, he remained confident that flexible defence would enable Germany to maintain for the foreseeable future an area of rule stretching in the west and north to the Atlantic coast, in the east more or less to the Riga–Kiev–Crimea line, and in the south roughly to Thessaloníki, Tirana, and Florence, the Apennines, and the south coast of France.<sup>138</sup>

<sup>136</sup> For more on this, see Chapter II.2.

<sup>137</sup> See comment by OKW/Chef WStb. Ausl., 31 Mar. 1943, BA-MA RH 2/2344. On the expected and actual importance of the Donets area for German conduct of the war, see also the memoranda from Chef WiRü, 13 Feb. 1941, *re* effects of an operation in the east on the military economy, and raw-materials stocktaking for the Donets area as at 24 Sept. 1943, both repr. as app. 1 and 78 to the final report by Economic Staff East in *Die deutsche Wirtschaftspolitik*, 387–401 and 581–4.

<sup>138</sup> See Heusinger, *Befehl im Widerstreit*, 247, and Meyer, *Adolf Heusinger*, 222–3.

As for Hitler himself, he could warm neither to the idea of flexible defence nor to the proposals of the Naval War Staff. Nevertheless, from early 1943—and not, as generally assumed, only after the collapse of Operation CITADEL—the dictator began to take a more relative view of the originally predominant importance of the eastern front. Since the fall of Tunis, in particular, his eyes were turned no less to the west than to the east. In addition to an Allied landing in Greece, Hitler feared above all a change of course by Hungary and Italy. Even before the launch of Operation CITADEL, the Führer had already made up his mind to transfer considerable forces from the east (the talk was of eight armoured and four infantry divisions) in order to stabilize the situation in Italy. As he said in May with reference to possible developments in that country, he was glad he had not yet begun the offensive in the east.<sup>139</sup> Quite clearly, Operation CITADEL, then in preparation, did not have for Hitler the character of a strategically decisive battle which later historiography was to ascribe to it.<sup>140</sup> In those critical early months of 1943, for the first time since the beginning of the war against the Soviet Union, defence in the west, rather than the offensive in the east, gained priority in the dictator's strategic thinking. Preventing the formation of a second front in Europe was the order of the day, he declared to his military advisers on 15 May 1943. Europe must be defended 'in the forward area' and 'no front must arise on the borders of the Reich'.<sup>141</sup> It is characteristic of Hitler's thinking on the (provisional) focus of his military efforts that he went no further than this vague negative objective. But it is no less characteristic of the Führer's military advisers that apparently neither at that meeting on 15 May nor on any other occasion did anyone ask the dictator how the defensive strategy thus formulated was to be realistically implemented with the forces available—not to mention how on that basis 'final victory', still officially taken as self-evident, was to be achieved. Nowhere, it seems, was any further thought given to the efforts required simply to maintain the status quo. Strategic helplessness, as well as the physical and psychological wear and tear of years of unrelenting tension and increasingly frustrating staff work, was everywhere apparent. Baron Ernst von Weizsäcker, appointed German ambassador to the Vatican, described the atmosphere of those weeks in May 1943 as 'a kind of military, political, and mental exhaustion'.<sup>142</sup> And Gen. Georg von Sodenstern, then still chief of the general staff of Army Group South, remarked that 'nowhere was any operational sense of direction apparent, not even the will for strategic reformulation of the overall situation'.<sup>143</sup> As early as April,

<sup>139</sup> Private letter from Capt. Junge to Grand Admiral Dönitz, 15 May 1943, on the content of that day's conference at Führer headquarters, BA-MA RM 7/260. See also Hitler's discussion with Keitel on 19 May 1943, *Hitlers Lagebesprechungen*, 205–12.

<sup>140</sup> For details, see Chapter III.1.

<sup>141</sup> Quoted in the letter from Capt. Junge to Grand Admiral Dönitz, 15 May 1943, on the content of that day's Führer headquarters conference, BA-MA RM 7/260.

<sup>142</sup> Weizsäcker, *Die Weizsäcker-Papiere*, 339 (30 May 1943).

<sup>143</sup> Thus in his manuscript, completed in June 1943, entitled 'Der Feldherr Adolf Hitler' [Adolf Hitler as Commander], BA-MA N 594/9, 76.

Heusinger had also noted that Zeitzler was beginning to tire and that Jodl too had 'broken down'.<sup>144</sup>

Since there is not the slightest basis for the illogical assumption that Hitler sought to keep his strategic ideas secret from his own military advisers where possible, the only reasonable conclusion is that Hitler was now literally finished as 'commander'. At least on one occasion the Führer, otherwise so careful in his choice of words, gave direct expression to his strategic helplessness. On 8 July, at the height of the Kursk offensive, he admitted to Grand Admiral Dönitz: 'You say it's just muddling through. I'm muddling through from one month to the next.'<sup>145</sup> Here we see a decisive difference compared with the situation in the previous year. Whereas behind the summer campaign of 1942 there lay an overall, albeit highly questionable, concept for a victorious conclusion of the war, after the failure of that campaign the German leadership was no longer able to cope with the constantly growing pressure of problems at strategic level.<sup>146</sup> The impressive operational dimensions of the battles for Kharkov and Kursk in March and July should not distract us from the absence of a coherent grand strategy.

All the more so as—from a historical standpoint at least—it is hard to see in what such a strategy could still have consisted, given that all the strategic expectations of the German leadership since the beginning of the war against the Soviet Union had failed to materialize: the Soviet Union had not collapsed under the assault of the Wehrmacht, Britain had not given in, and the United States had not been prevented from entering the war in Europe. The industrial and raw-materials centres considered indispensable for a long war had either not been conquered or had not been exploited as hoped. It had not proved possible to halt transatlantic shipping connections. Nor had Germany managed to establish North Africa as a strategic shield, or even to protect the territory of the Reich itself against the effects of the Allied air war. Not only had the threat of a second land front in Europe not been averted: it had increased acutely. At the same time, the war in the Pacific had taken a turn that vitiated all hopes of waging a transcontinental war in conjunction with Japan. Since the great crisis of September 1942, when Hitler had finally realized that his war was unwinnable,<sup>147</sup> there had been a whole series of defeats and not a single encouraging event of strategic significance.

Although the sources give no one direct access to the dictator's innermost thoughts, it seems highly unlikely that in the spring of 1943 he still seriously harboured illusions as to the expected outcome of the war. There might have been grounds for assuming the existence of such illusions if Hitler had been unable to form a realistic picture of the overall situation because of wrong information from

<sup>144</sup> Quoted in Meyer, *Adolf Heusinger*, 221. The remark concerning Jodl apparently refers to a cure he had undertaken at Bad Gastein.

<sup>145</sup> KTB Skl, pt. A, xlvi, 635-A. I am grateful to my colleague, Werner Rahn, for drawing my attention to this long-unnoticed quotation, which was significantly not included in the published situation reports of the navy's C-in-C (here 520).

<sup>146</sup> For a similar argument, though based on partly different grounds, see Percy E. Schramm, *Hitler als militärischer Führer*, esp. 57 ff., 67 ff.

<sup>147</sup> See *Germany and the Second World War*, vi. 1048–53.

his support staff or an inability to make strategic connections. But precisely that is out of the question. On the contrary, however inadequate he may have been as supreme military commander, Hitler had repeatedly displayed an instinctive grasp of strategic opportunities and risks. There is no reason whatever to deny him that faculty at the very moment when all the available information showed, more unambiguously than ever, that Germany's position was hopeless.<sup>148</sup>

At first sight, this picture of a supreme commander lacking a strategic solution and conscious of the hopelessness of his situation seems hardly to match that of Hitler the ideologist. On the one hand, we see an inclination, quite understandable in the circumstances we have described, to register and now even talk about the possibility of German defeat and its disastrous consequences.<sup>149</sup> On the other, the dictator's various orders of the day, proclamations, addresses, and discussions in the months between Stalingrad and Kursk still show a degree of strategic optimism. While much of it, especially in declarations intended for a wide public, may all too obviously have been whistling in the dark,<sup>150</sup> we already find the 'fixed ideas' which were to serve right into the final phase of war as the set pieces of an increasingly bizarre 'final victory' propaganda: the already mentioned trust in the strategic advantage of the 'inner line';<sup>151</sup> hope in 'the existence of unknown, unique weapons';<sup>152</sup> expectation of the ultimately inevitable collapse of the Soviet Union as a result of manpower and food crises;<sup>153</sup> and, not least of all, speculation about increasing disagreement within the enemy coalition that would eventually split it apart.<sup>154</sup>

Whether Hitler really believed he could still win the war thanks to circumstances such as these cannot be determined with absolute certainty, but it seems unlikely.<sup>155</sup>

<sup>148</sup> Even for the months following Stalingrad there is no lack of testimony to Hitler's sober eye for strategic developments. As early as January, for example, he calculated that North Africa could not be held (see Goebbels, *Tagebücher*, pt. 2, vii. 176, 23 Jan. 1943; also Below, *Als Hitlers Adjutant*, 334). His assessments of Allied operational possibilities in the Mediterranean area and the risk of Italian withdrawal from the war were also thoroughly realistic; see private letter from Capt. Junge to Grand Admiral Dönitz, 15 May 1943, on the content of that day's Führer headquarters conference, BA-MA RM 7/260. See, in similar vein, Hitler's discussion with Keitel on 19 May 1943, *Hitlers Lagebesprechungen*, 205–12. Percy E. Schramm has also rightly warned that 'it would be a mistake to belittle Hitler as a strategist' (*Hitler als militärischer Führer*, 57).

<sup>149</sup> Expressed in particularly striking terms to Antonescu on 10 Jan. 1943 (*Staatsmänner und Diplomaten*, ii. 202–3). See also the evocations of possible defeat which now cropped up regularly in Hitler's public utterances, e.g. in his order of the day at the beginning of 1943 (Domarus, *Hitler. Reden und Proklamationen*, 1970). In his proclamation of 30 January (*ibid.*, 1978) Goebbels also directed official press propaganda against the hitherto propagated dogma that the war could not be lost; see *Wollt Ihr den totalen Krieg?*, 317–18, and Goebbels, *Tagebücher*, pt. 2, vii. 177–8 (23 Jan. 1943).

<sup>150</sup> See Hitler's routine expressions of confidence, e.g. in his order of the day, 1 Jan. 1943 (Domarus, *Hitler. Reden und Proklamationen*, 1970), and to Goebbels, *Tagebücher*, pt. 2, ii. 171.

<sup>151</sup> See Goebbels, *Tagebücher*, pt. 2, viii. 239 (8 May 1943).

<sup>152</sup> Hitler's proclamation to the troops of Army Group South and Air Fleet 3, 19 Feb. 1943, quoted in Domarus, *Hitler. Reden und Proklamationen*, 1989.

<sup>153</sup> Goebbels, *Tagebücher*, pt. 2, vii. 593 (20 Mar. 1943).

<sup>154</sup> *ibid.* 173–4 (23 Jan. 1943).

<sup>155</sup> If, for example, Hitler had seriously speculated on taking advantage of growing discord among the Allies to achieve a favourable exit from the war for Germany, then nothing would have been of greater concern to him than sowing further discord by putting out feelers for a separate peace. In fact, Hitler strictly rejected any such contacts. (see also Chapter II.3).

Not only because such an assumption implies a strategic foolishness on the part of the dictator which is implausible in the light of his earlier conduct,<sup>156</sup> but also because it ignores the specific context of Hitler's speech behaviour. Only relatively few of his statements from those years can have been uninhibited expressions of opinion or personal confessions.<sup>157</sup> Rather he spoke as a rule—whether in a larger or smaller circle, or in a dialogue—in full consciousness of his position as solely responsible leader. In his understanding, however, to admit to not knowing what to do—or, worse still, to acknowledge that a situation was hopeless—was wholly incompatible with that function. 'What a disastrous impression it would make,' he said, comparing his own role significantly with that of a military superior, 'if a commanding officer told his troops, in a difficult situation, that he himself did not know what to do now.'<sup>158</sup> Given this conception of his own role, the strategic optimism displayed by Hitler even after Stalingrad can confidently be seen as an instrument for strengthening belief in the possibility of final victory, which was crumbling on all sides, and for preserving the most important psychological precondition<sup>159</sup> for resolute continuation of the war.<sup>160</sup> In that context, invocation of the disastrous consequences of a German defeat served primarily to justify the absolute necessity of continuing the war.<sup>161</sup>

<sup>156</sup> The fact that Hitler, irrespective of his ideologically determined policy objectives, was a man with a remarkable instinct for strategy, was proven at an early stage, especially by Hillgruber, *Hitlers Strategie*. It has since also become clear that the dictator's particular grasp of strategic realities, which distinguished him from the mass of his military retinue, was grounded in a world-view that was in many respects strikingly modern; see Zitelmann, *Hitler: The Policies of Seduction*, esp. ch. 5.

<sup>157</sup> Zeitzler's judgement is interesting in this respect, since he had the opportunity to observe Hitler daily during the period under discussion: 'No utterance—even in private discussion!—without calculation. Hardly ever an emotive act or statement. Seemingly emotive acts are mostly calculated! A monstrous performance' (Müller-Hillebrand, note, 11 Mar. 1943, on a conversation with Zeitzler the previous day, BA-MA N 553/v.42).

<sup>158</sup> Quoted in *Staatsmänner und Diplomaten*, ii. 379 (meeting with the Bulgarian regency councillor on 16 Mar. 1944). Later too, Hitler decidedly maintained the view that 'military leadership is quite impossible without optimism' (*Hitlers Lagebesprechungen*, 614, midday situation, 31 Aug. 1944).

<sup>159</sup> During the same discussion with the Bulgarian regency councillor on 16 Mar. 1944, Hitler declared: 'one can wage this war the more resolutely, the less one imagines that there might be other ways to conclude it'. He would therefore 'never allow' a discussion on that subject among the German people (*Staatsmänner und Diplomaten*, ii. 376).

<sup>160</sup> This predominantly tactical use of arguments naturally led easily to contradictory statements, especially when Hitler was expressing his 'real' opinion. An important example in this context is his repeatedly expressed contempt for comparative strategic statistics (see *inter alia* Halder, *Kriegstagebuch*, 329, 6 Dec. 1941). That this was by no means Hitler's conviction, but a tactically motivated rejection of unwelcome arguments, is revealed by an indisputable statement in a very small circle on 20 August 1942, which also documents Hitler's incipient inkling at that time that the war was lost: 'There is no example in the history of war where, despite a grossly disproportionate distribution of forces, final victory went to the smaller number. Frederick the Great was always lucky that we managed to cheat our way through Europe' (Hitler, *Monologe*, 354). The last sentence is also interesting in that it shows Hitler's later attempts to portray the Prussian king's situation in the Seven Years War as an encouraging precedent (e.g. in his address to Reichs- and Gauleiters on 8 Feb. 1943; see Goebbels, *Tagebücher*, pt. 2, vii. 292 and 294–5) to be a propaganda ploy which he himself did not take very seriously.

<sup>161</sup> 'The Führer drew the Reichs- and Gauleiters a shattering picture of the possibilities facing the Reich in the event of a German defeat. Such a defeat must therefore have no place in our thoughts. We must consider it impossible a priori and resolve to fight against it to our last breath [...] We live today in a world of destroy or be destroyed. We did not create that world. But we are far in advance of our enemies in having understood that this world is the real world, and that all we can do is use it to

This picture of Hitler as a supreme commander who had a relatively sober appreciation of the overall military situation but was determined to continue the war and acted accordingly would risk being an over-rationalization if we failed to shed light on what might be called the other side of the coin. The tension between his own awareness that the war was unwinnable and his ceaseless invocation of the opposite imposed an extraordinary psychological burden on the dictator,<sup>162</sup> which he sought to overcome by increasingly irrational, sometimes downright bizarre behaviour. He took refuge more frequently than before in utopian hopes, sought consolation in historical reminiscences or gratuitous words of wisdom, and got carried away by reports of second- and third-rate successes. It was already a psychological disaster when Hitler, in an almost hopeless situation, raised holding Stalingrad and Tunis to the level of a decisive existential issue of 'to be or not to be'.<sup>163</sup> The hopes he still expressed at the turn of the year—of reconquering North Africa from Tunisia and throwing the invading enemy back into the sea,<sup>164</sup> for example, or relieving Stalingrad after all and turning the Russian advance 'into a catastrophic defeat'<sup>165</sup>—had nothing to do with any rational calculation, even his own. The same is true of the dictator's remarkable tendency to belittle Allied operational successes, in East Asia for example,<sup>166</sup> or to make statistically absurd comparisons concerning the war-economy potential of individual powers.

Thus he attempted to convince the Romanian prime minister Ion Antonescu, during the latter's visit to the 'Wolf's Lair' on 10 January 1943, not only that the situation of the Soviet Union's war economy was desperate (which was an exaggeration but at least partially true)<sup>167</sup> but also, and in all seriousness, that Germany's own economic production potential was superior to that of Britain and the United States.<sup>168</sup> Nor did he refrain from 'proving' to his interlocutors that the Allied sea powers were at best able to rebuild 50 per cent of the tonnage sunk by the Axis powers.<sup>169</sup> That, however, was a childish fallacy, as the Führer must have known at the latest from the Naval War Staff's situation report of 1 December 1942, which showed that the figures for new construction were coming dangerously close to those

achieve our political goals. [...] In this connection we can naturally admit no questions of right or wrong in the discussion. The loss of this war would constitute the greatest wrong to the German people, and victory would give us the greatest right' (Goebbels, *Tagebücher*, pt. 2, viii. 238).

<sup>162</sup> It cannot be proven here that the frequently attested rapid decline in Hitler's health from 1943 was closely related to this psychological burden, but it seems a plausible assumption; see Irving, *The Secret Diaries*, 52 and 119; Schenck, *Patient Hitler*, 388 ff.; Linge, *Bis zum Untergang*, 267; Carr, *Hitler: A Study*, 144 ff.; Maser, *Adolf Hitler*, 339.

<sup>163</sup> *Staatsmänner und Diplomaten*, ii. 190–1 (meeting with Count Ciano on 19 Dec. 1942).

<sup>164</sup> ibid., n. 2. <sup>165</sup> ibid. 201 (meeting with Antonescu on 10 Jan. 1943).

<sup>166</sup> See ibid. 205.

<sup>167</sup> See Barber and Harrison, *The Soviet Home Front*, 86 ff.; Segbers, *Die Sowjetunion im Zweiten Weltkrieg*, ch. X.

<sup>168</sup> *Staatsmänner und Diplomaten*, ii. 206, and, in very similar vein, Goebbels, *Tagebücher*, pt. 2, viii. 239 (8 May 1943): 'We are practically the world's largest industrial state.' In fact, Hitler was fascinated by industrial development in the USA; see Zitelmann, *Hitler*, 355 ff. At all events, even before the war there was no lack of attempts by Hitler to play down the differences in economic potential between Germany and its Anglo-American competitors; see Thies, *Architekt*, 110–11.

<sup>169</sup> *Staatsmänner und Diplomaten*, ii. 205; similarly to Ciano on 20 Dec. 1942 (ibid. 195).

for tonnage sunk.<sup>170</sup> It was even more bizarre when on 8 May 1943, that is, at the very time when the fate of the Axis in North Africa was being decided (and two years, to the day, before Germany's total capitulation) he proclaimed to the assembled Reichs- and Gauleiters his 'unshakeable certainty' that 'Germany will eventually rule the whole of Europe', thus 'paving the way for world domination': 'he who holds Europe will wrest world leadership for himself'.<sup>171</sup>

All such and similar ritually invoked interpretations and visions did not only act upon the consciousness of those who heard them;<sup>172</sup> quite obviously they also affected their originator. In particular, they provided him with an escape from the almost unrelentingly oppressive daily war routine. This flight from reality would seem to be the price paid for Hitler's 'fanatical determination', in a strategically hopeless situation, 'not to capitulate under any circumstances'.<sup>173</sup> His tendency to auto-suggestive reinforcement of his own 'stick-it-out' mentality, which was so characteristic towards the end of the war, was already clearly perceptible. During military conferences, even at the height of the Stalingrad crisis, the dictator would lecture his listeners for hours on the meaning of history,<sup>174</sup> invoke the role of 'fate' and 'providence', and compare the present fight for existence with 'the movement's period of struggle'<sup>175</sup> or, as the fancy took him, with the West's centuries of resistance to Huns, Moors, and Mongols.<sup>176</sup> World history, as the Führer now put it, had 'a deeper meaning', and that meaning could not possibly be that 'we, as Europe's highest race, should finally fall prey to the technology of a half ape-like people'.<sup>177</sup>

These formulations took shape at a much more irrational level of the dictator's consciousness, a level at which Hitler the ideologist clearly refused himself the very insights which imposed themselves on him as a strategist.<sup>178</sup> He forced himself into a state of stubborn determination, with the aid of an exaggerated regard for strength

<sup>170</sup> See Salewski, *Die deutsche Seekriegsleitung*, iii. 322–3 (doc. 14).

<sup>171</sup> Goebbels, *Tagebücher*, pt. 2, viii. 238 (8 May 1943); see also Weizsäcker, *Erinnerungen*, 354 (mid-June 1943): 'Hitler painted me a picture of the war situation so rosy that he could hardly have believed it himself.'

<sup>172</sup> An equally bizarre example is provided by Keitel, who, when asked by Field Marshal Gen. Fedor von Bock (relieved of his command) how the further conduct of the war was envisaged, replied laconically: 'The others are collapsing! Even the Russians!', Bock, diary ('Osten III'), 33 (22 Mar. 1943), BA-MA N 22/15 A.

<sup>173</sup> *Staatsmänner und Diplomaten*, ii. 207.

<sup>174</sup> See Hitlers *Lagebesprechungen*, 453 (6 Jan. 1943).

<sup>175</sup> See Salewski, 'Von Raeder zu Dönitz', 105; Goebbels, *Tagebücher*, pt. 2, vii. 172–3 and 177–8 (23 Jan. 1943).

<sup>176</sup> *Staatsmänner und Diplomaten*, ii. 203.

<sup>177</sup> By 'a half ape-like people' he meant Soviet Russia. Address by Hitler to Reichs- and Gauleiters, 8 Feb. 1943, quoted in Goebbels, *Tagebücher*, pt. 2, vii. 291. In very similar vein, Jodl concluded his lecture to the same audience on 7 Nov. 1943 with the affirmation 'from the deepest bottom of my heart' that 'we shall win because we must win, for otherwise world history will have lost all meaning', BA-MA RW 4/v. 38.

<sup>178</sup> Split consciousness of this kind is by no means a rare phenomenon. It is frequently exhibited by the incurably ill, for example, whom knowledge of their imminent death forces into a mode that permits them to maintain an outwardly normal life.

of conviction and will-power<sup>179</sup> and a frequently demonstrated tendency to take risks.<sup>180</sup> 'We are still in danger of annihilation,' Hitler had already suspected in August 1942, and had drawn the conclusion that 'in most cases the only thing left' is to attack: 'If I don't hit out in the east, the enemy will.'<sup>181</sup> This too was precisely the mood in Hitler's circle in the spring of 1943, as Weizsäcker, who was staying in Berlin after a visit to headquarters at the beginning of May, pithily described it: 'What they were saying was this: We shall win. If not, we shall go down with honour, fighting to the last man. That was also Frederick the Great's motto.'<sup>182</sup>

Six weeks previously, in an address to the officer corps of the 9th Infantry Regiment, the state secretary and designated German ambassador to the Vatican had made it fairly plain that he by no means shared that view. Making peace at the right time, he said, was 'the great test of a statesman'.<sup>183</sup> Why Hitler did not stand that test despite the urging of most of his allies is one of the fundamental questions in need of elucidation.

<sup>179</sup> Thus, according to Goebbels (*Tagebücher*, pt. 2, vii. 285), Hitler began his address to Party functionaries on 8 February 1943 'with the affirmation that, today more than ever, he believed in victory and neither wanted, nor would permit, any event to undermine that belief'. One of the advantages of such (auto-)suggestive statements of belief was that they left no room for discussion or argument: the only alternatives were to agree or be excluded.

<sup>180</sup> Hitler's famous saying that he had always gone for all or nothing is found in less poignant form but with a similar meaning in many of his statements in 1942 and 1943; see, e.g., Hitler, *Monologe*, 359 (21 Aug. 1942) and 364–5 (25 Aug. 1942): 'In war, he who risks nothing can win nothing [...] Life is one constant gamble.'

<sup>181</sup> ibid. 367 (26 Aug. 1942).

<sup>182</sup> Weizsäcker added laconically: 'I think Frederick the Great was referring to himself, not the Prussian state' (Weizsäcker, *Die Weizsäcker-Papiere 1933–1950*, 337, entry of 2 May 1943).

<sup>183</sup> ibid. 332 (18 Mar. 1943).

## II. German Alliance Policy and the Question of a Separate Peace

Seldom in recent research on the history of the Second World War has an event which never took place aroused so much attention as the idea of a separate German–Soviet peace.<sup>1</sup> This interest, stimulated by the vision of a change of course of world-historical importance and accompanied by wild public speculation,<sup>2</sup> has contributed significantly to a general overestimation of the topic. On the other hand, there is scarcely any disagreement among serious authors that the supposed ‘change of course’ was not understood as such by at least one of the potential treaty parties, namely Adolf Hitler, and that the option of a separate peace with Joseph Stalin was never considered seriously by him.<sup>3</sup> The question is interesting from the point of view of the subject under discussion, however, since it sheds light on how those responsible for Germany’s conduct of the war used their remaining room for manoeuvre.

If, despite Hitler’s negative attitude, the emotive term ‘separate peace’ became a theme in German policy after Stalingrad, over and above its exploitation for propaganda purposes, the impetus came far less from Berlin (or the various German HQs) than from the capitals of Germany’s Axis partners. For the phase of the war under discussion here, the question of a separate peace is inextricably and fatally linked with the erosion of Germany’s system of alliances. In the following section we shall therefore begin by taking a look at the state of those alliance relationships after Stalingrad, and go on to consider why political initiatives to end the war stood no chance of success in Berlin.

<sup>1</sup> For a fundamental study of the issues involved, see Martin, *Friedensinitiativen*. On the phase of the war discussed here, see *id.*, ‘Verhandlungen über separate Friedensschlüsse’ and ‘Deutsch-sowjetische Sondierungen’; Koch, ‘The Spectre of a Separate Peace’; Schröder, ‘Bestrebungen’; Fleischhauer, *Die Chance des Sonderfriedens*.

<sup>2</sup> Above all, the rumour—raised by Liddell Hart, *History of the Second World War*, 623, to the level of historical fact—of a meeting between Ribbentrop and Molotov supposed to have taken place in Kirovograd in June 1943 (similarly Koch, ‘The Spectre of a Separate Peace’, 547). That rumour, for which no proof has ever been adduced, is completely implausible, if only because Ribbentrop did not make the slightest mention of it during the Nuremberg trial, although such a mention would have considerably alleviated his position and might even have spared him the death penalty; see also the critical views in Schröder, ‘Bestrebungen’, 26, and Bloch, *Ribbentrop*, 385–6.

<sup>3</sup> As to whether Stalin considered it seriously, see Fischer, *Sowjetische Deutschlandpolitik*, 38, 45; Martin, ‘Deutsch-sowjetische Sondierungen’; and Weinberg, *A World at Arms*, here esp. 609 ff., 655–6. For the opposing view, see Fleischhauer, *Die Chance des Sonderfriedens*, 285; Einsiedel, ‘Bridge mit Madame Kollontaj’; Sokolov and Fetisov, ‘Byl i nebyl’, 137.

## 1. THE EROSION OF THE AXIS PACT

The coalition of states in the Tripartite Pact differed fundamentally from the opposing anti-Hitler alliance in several respects. The greatly divergent geostrategic interests of its individual members, their markedly disparate political stature, and the peculiarities of their different systems of government had impaired the cohesion of the Tripartite Pact from the outset. From 1942, as the fortunes of war turned increasingly against them, those disparities put a growing strain on relations between the treaty partners. The full extent of the disparities is clearly shown by the fact that the states in the Tripartite Pact lacked a common war aim of the kind which, like their opponents' shared objective of overthrowing Nazi Germany, would have bridged the differences between them.

In fact, Hitler and his allies had not even been able to agree on a common principal enemy. Japan was very anxious to preserve its neutrality vis-à-vis Russia, Germany's mortal enemy, while Hitler hoped to keep Japan's chief adversary, the United States, out of the European theatre as long as possible and to conclude a compromise peace, at little cost to Germany, with Britain, which was Italy's main adversary in the Mediterranean. Among the lesser partners, Hungary and Romania supported Germany's war effort primarily with a view to securing a favourable starting position for a future war against each other. Finland alone shared (for the moment) Germany's view of the immediate life-and-death importance of the war against the Soviet Union, but it was precisely Finland, the only parliamentary democracy on the German side, which endeavoured to avoid any formal alliance with the National Socialist dictatorship and any hostilities vis-à-vis the western powers by describing its conflict with the Soviet Union as an independent 'parallel war'.<sup>4</sup> Quite apart from these disparate interests, the effectiveness of the Tripartite Pact was strictly limited because—again in contrast to the anti-Hitler coalition—none of the partners ever had at its disposal the capacities and resources for global warfare that alone would have made it possible to realize fully the latent potential of such a transcontinental alliance. Even Germany's engagement in the Mediterranean area, the only place where the beginnings of genuine coalition warfare had been taking place since 1941,<sup>5</sup> already exceeded the human, material, and logistical potential of the German armed forces, which, month after month, were suffering ever-increasing losses on the eastern front.

In addition to the severely limited possibilities of cooperation with the Tripartite Pact owing to the divergence of interests and scarcity of resources, it must also be remembered that the Pact was in any case not a coalition of more-or-less equal partners comparable, in terms of integration, to the Anglo-American alliance. Unlike that alliance, relations within the Tripartite Pact lacked any kind of functioning consultative bodies or procedures that might have served to harmonize interests and resolve conflicts, and to facilitate joint planning and the preparation of

<sup>4</sup> For that reason Finland had not joined the Tripartite Pact. For more on this, see Part VI, Chapter I.1 of the present volume.

<sup>5</sup> *Germany and the Second World War*, vi. 631–840.

decisions. This was largely due to the fact that the typical virtues of an alliance, such as cooperation and consultation, power sharing and compromise, were fundamentally alien to the authoritarian regimes linked by the Tripartite Pact. Moreover, the distribution of political weight within that alliance was so asymmetrical that Germany, the most powerful member along with distant Japan, could assume that it was entitled to assert its own vital interests over those of its European partners. The fact that those partners were dependent on Berlin in many political, economic, and military respects proved an effective mechanism for containing, if not entirely preventing, serious discord within the Pact. The German leadership also managed to avoid the eruption of conflicts of interest by evading open discussion with its allies of its strategic plans, or indeed its long-term thinking about the post-war order in Europe; it preferred to keep them in line by vague statements of intent, promises on detailed issues, or veiled threats.

From the German viewpoint, the main value of the Tripartite Pact was not the opportunity for an internationally agreed strategy, but its use as a propaganda platform, a strategic forefield, and a reserve of manpower and raw materials for Germany's own war effort.

Despite various German concessions, the alignment of interests within the 'Hitler coalition' was ultimately asymmetrical; it functioned only as long as the partners' confidence in Germany's political and military primacy on the continent of Europe remained unshaken. As this confidence waned with the increasingly unfavourable turn of the war, Germany's relations with its partners inevitably entered a crisis precisely because of that asymmetry, and this eventually led to the total erosion of the alliance. The process extended over several years, but 1942 represented a transitional stage marked by Germany's endeavours to cement the cracks in the alliance which had become unmistakable after the reverses of the first winter of the war in the east, and to induce its European partners to make even greater efforts.<sup>6</sup> Outwardly successful as these efforts may have been, culminating during the first half of 1942 in Hitler's repeated summit meetings with Benito Mussolini, Ion Antonescu, and Carl Gustaf Mannerheim, the commander-in-chief of the Finnish armed forces, they in no way changed the fundamental vulnerability of their relations to developments at the fronts.

This was never clearer than at the end of the winter battles on the Don and the Volga, which had turned into a mass graveyard for the armies of Germany's allies too.<sup>7</sup> The fact that this aspect of the tragedy—unlike the downfall of Germany's Sixth Army, which was described as 'heroic'<sup>8</sup>—was passed over in silence in German published opinion, while the 'total failure' of the Axis partners

<sup>6</sup> See *Germany and the Second World War*, vi. 904–28.

<sup>7</sup> On the figures for the losses incurred by Germany's allies, see Schreiber, 'Italiens Teilnahme am Krieg', 278; Wimpffen, 'Die zweite ungarische Armee', 342–3; Gosztony, *Hitlers Fremde Heere*, 328.

<sup>8</sup> For details, see Wette, 'Das Massensterben', and esp. Kumpfmüller, *Die Schlacht von Stalingrad*, pt. 1.

was proclaimed as the real reason for the Stalingrad disaster,<sup>9</sup> contributed decisively to the deterioration in the climate of relations within the alliance in those weeks and months. All the more so as Joseph Goebbels, in his judgement that ‘our bakery units and the last supply train [would have] performed better than the Italian, Romanian, and Hungarian elite divisions’,<sup>10</sup> could be confident of expressing a view widely shared in all strata of the population thanks to reports from the front, rumours, and prejudices.<sup>11</sup> The strength of the resentment felt by the troops of Germany’s Axis partners as a result of the experience of the winter battles was reflected, among other things, in a growing number of disciplinary offences. In an order issued in mid-February following reports on the situation, Hitler felt obliged to point out that ‘decency and comradeship also require proper behaviour vis-à-vis defeated allies; moreover, Germany has an interest in the rapid reorganization of those units, and no material should be given for agitation by opposition forces in the allied countries’.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, the series of painful incidents continued unabated. The troops of the Royal Hungarian Army deployed to guard the railway lines in the Ukraine—whose reliability, in Hitler’s view, was ‘not worth a powder shot’<sup>13</sup>—continued to be insulted from passing German trains and ‘bombarded with manure’; sometimes they were even shot at or had hand grenades thrown at them.<sup>14</sup> The remnants of both Romanian armies had already been subjected to similar assaults during their westward retreat.<sup>15</sup>

The German top leadership seems to have more or less accepted this damage to Germany’s alliance relations, or at least to have made no resolute attempt to contain it. Only the outer façade of the alliance was spared. In May, for example, the OKH forbade all command headquarters and officers to ‘deliver opinions regarding the combat value and combat performance of Hungarian or other allied troops directly to foreign applicants’.<sup>16</sup> Shortly afterwards, Hitler also prohibited all public discussion of the operations of the winter of 1942/3 on the grounds that they could not be described ‘without a value judgement concerning our allies’.<sup>17</sup> Although the dictator himself had employed similar terms in previous months, wanting the alleged cowardice of his alliance partners to be ‘clearly established only

<sup>9</sup> Hitler, quoted in Goebbels, *Tagebücher*, pt. 2, vii. 162 (23 Jan. 1943) and, in the same words, 285 (8 Feb. 1943). For Goebbels too it was clear that the Sixth Army ‘has only our alliance partners to thank for its bitter fate’ (167, 23 Jan. 1943).

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 163 (23 Jan. 1943).

<sup>11</sup> This applied particularly to the Italians. See *Meldungen aus dem Reich*, xii, No. 357, 4762 (8 Feb. 1943), and xiii, No. 376, 5125 (15 Apr. 1943).

<sup>12</sup> *KTB OKW*, iii, 124 (14 Feb. 1943).

<sup>13</sup> Goebbels, *Tagebücher*, pt. 2, vii. 172 (23 Jan. 1943). An order from the Hungarian commander-in-chief, Lt.-Gen. Gustav Jány, dated only a day later, which began with the words ‘The Hungarian 2nd Army has lost its honour’, appears to confirm that impression (army order of 24 Jan. 1943, BA-MA RH 2/720) but is put into perspective by other statements by Jány himself and others; see Helmert and Otto, ‘Zur Koalitionskriegsführung’, here, above all, doc. 13, 336 ff.; also Wimpffen, ‘Die zweite Ungarische Armee’, 333 ff.

<sup>14</sup> Letters from OKW/WFSt to GenStdH/Op.Abt., 5 and 10 Apr. 1943 *re* shooting from German trains at Hungarian guards (with appendices), BA-MA RH 2/720.

<sup>15</sup> See Förster, *Stalingrad*, 53; Ancel, ‘Stalingrad und Rumänen’, 204–5.

<sup>16</sup> GenStdH/Op.Abt., 12 May 1943, BA-MA RH 2/720.

<sup>17</sup> Fld. Marsh. Keitel to Gen. zbV beim OKH, Gen.d.Art. Müller, 1 June 1943, BA-MA RW4/v. 309 b.

by later historiography,<sup>18</sup> his consideration for his allies was motivated only by the minimum demands of *raison d'état* and in no way by a genuine desire to preserve the prestige of his partners in Budapest, Bucharest, and Rome.

Quite the opposite: in personal discussions and private talks Hitler willingly broached the subject of his alliance partners' behaviour during the winter crisis and made no secret of his 'absolute contempt' for them, specifically inviting his listeners to make his judgement known internally.<sup>19</sup> In all of this, the dictator and his entourage were quite clearly not concerned to engage in self-critical assessment of errors, mistakes, and omissions in coalition conduct of the war,<sup>20</sup> but wholly and exclusively to propagate language that would relieve Hitler as 'Führer', and the central bodies of his regime, of responsibility for Stalingrad.<sup>21</sup> Open, though not public, denigration of the allies involved in the disaster on the southern wing of the eastern front was a way to shift blame for the defeat and thus preserve the authority of the Führer, at least formally.<sup>22</sup> The propaganda minister would not allow even the fundamental decision to include the foreign armies in the planning for Operation BLUE to be attributed to the Führer. On the contrary, Hitler had 'actually never wanted our Axis partners to be deployed on the eastern front; but Alfred Jodl had talked him into it, obviously from the best of motives'.<sup>23</sup> In an unparalleled contradiction of the actual course of events leading to that campaign, he went on to assert that 'if the Führer had renounced deployment of our Axis partners' divisions from the outset, he would obviously have organized operations in the previous summer quite differently. He would have attacked in the centre and, above all, not have burdened himself with the campaign in the Caucasus'.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Goebbels, *Tagebücher*, pt. 2, vii. 163 (23 Jan. 1943). As Goebbels noted elsewhere (172), Hitler accordingly had 'all the documents collected for historical research. Should those documents ever be published, it would put an end, once and for all, to the military honour of Italy, Romania, and especially Hungary.' In fact, the reports of the collapse of the armies of Germany's allies, even those by German observers, give a differentiated picture; see, e.g., VO/OKW/WPr to Romanian 3rd Army HQ (1st Lt. Steininger), 'Report on the collapse of the 3rd Romanian Army', 13 Jan. 1943, BA-MA RW 4/ v. 309 a; Stab Art.Rgt. (mot) zbV 618, 'Report on the causes of the breakthrough at the 7th Hungarian Army Corps', 13 Feb. 1943, BA-MA RH 2/720, and the report by the chief of the Royal Hungarian Army General Staff, 5 May 1943, on the conduct of the Hungarian 2nd Army in the war against Bolshevism (German trans. in MGFA, M 2/2, App. D./IV-c).

<sup>19</sup> Goebbels, *Tagebücher*, pt. 2, vii. 285–6 (8 Feb. 1943), and similarly 163 (23 Jan. 1943). Ambassador Dino Alfieri's complaint that anti-Italian feeling in the German population was 'fomented by the highest circles' was a typical reaction (*ibid.* 628, 23 Mar. 1943).

<sup>20</sup> Significantly, at the height of the Stalingrad crisis Hitler had already ruled out any complaints by his allies about German leadership; see Förster, *Stalingrad*, 47 (n. 142).

<sup>21</sup> An exception was the Luftwaffe, about which Hitler, as Goebbels credibly reports, 'complained very bitterly'. According to that source, the Luftwaffe was directly responsible for 'rushing the Führer into the situation'—meaning the orders establishing the Stalingrad cauldron—with its false promises (Goebbels, *Tagebücher*, pt. 2, vii. 168–9, 23 Jan. 1943).

<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless, this succeeded only to a very limited extent. Ulrich von Hassell, for example, noted on 14 Feb. 1943: 'Recent weeks have seen the most serious crisis in the war so far, in fact the first real crisis, unfortunately not only a crisis for the leadership and the system, but for Germany itself. It is symbolized by the name Stalingrad. *For the first time Hitler has failed to shift responsibility elsewhere, for the first time the critical rumblings are aimed directly at him*' (Hassell, *Vom andern Deutschland*, 347—author's emphasis).

<sup>23</sup> Goebbels, *Tagebücher*, pt. 2, vii. 162 (23 Jan. 1943).

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.* 163. On the absurdity of this claim, see also *Germany and the Second World War*, vi. 843–63.

Inevitably, the unilateral attempts to exonerate the German leadership completely destroyed any remaining basis for trust in their alliance relations. Destabilization of the alliance was the necessary price for stabilizing Germany's own claim to leadership. It seemed a small price to pay, especially as, in Hitler's view, the defeats at Stalingrad and Tunis anyway marked the end of active German coalition warfare. 'We can no longer count on our allies,' the Führer told the assembled generals on his visit to Manstein's Army Group South headquarters on 11 March 1943. 'They only cost us supplies. We must cold-bloodedly write them off for our further conduct of the war.'<sup>25</sup>

In other words, following the wholly disastrous end to the second year of the war in the east, the governments in Budapest, Rome, and Bucharest almost completely lost their value to Germany—which had never been highly estimated in any case—both as military partners and as political allies.<sup>26</sup> The value of their countries for Germany's conduct of the war was now increasingly reduced—as even observers favourably disposed towards Germany did not fail to remark<sup>27</sup>—to that of a strategic forefield (Italy and Hungary) and a supplier of raw materials (Romania). Although the above-mentioned Axis partners continued for the time being to be spared ruthless unilateral economic exploitation by Germany, their function within German-controlled Europe began dangerously to resemble that of the occupied countries.<sup>28</sup> The fact that the Wehrmacht was at the same time making contingency plans for the occupation of Italy (code-names ALARICH and ACHSE), and a few months later also for that of Hungary (MARGARETHE I) and Romania (MARGARETHE II),<sup>29</sup> confirms the increasing fluidity of the boundary between alliance and occupation status.

The development just described corresponded to a further decline in German foreign policy, now barely worthy of the name. The German government's ability to wage any kind of political warfare,<sup>30</sup> which had been waning continuously since the attack on the Soviet Union, or at the latest since the events of December 1941, vanished from the beginning of 1943 in an almost total lack of initiative that was by

<sup>25</sup> H.Gr. Süd/Ia, KTB, 11 Mar. 1943, 1092 (reverse side), BA-MA RH 19 VI/41. Similarly Goebbels, *Tagebücher*, pt. 2, viii. 234 (8 May 1943).

<sup>26</sup> Goebbel's agile argumentative linking of the military and political aspects is significant: 'Our alliance partners claimed a leading role in Europe, which they wanted to assume together with us. In the battles in the east, however, they have lost their honour to such a degree that after the war there will no longer be any doubt about who is to lead Europe and who is not. We shall be to Europe what Prussia was to the North German Confederation' (Goebbels, *Tagebücher*, pt. 2, vii. 167, 23 Jan. 1943).

<sup>27</sup> e.g. Ambassador Alfieri's conclusion—admittedly reached only in the shadow of the collapse of Operation CITADEL—that Germany considered 'the territory of its allies and the occupied states only as a bastion for its own country'; letter to Under-Secretary of State Bastianini, 14 July 1943, quoted in Schröder, *Italiens Kriegsaustritt*, 51.

<sup>28</sup> See *Germany and the Second World War*, v/II, 5–291.

<sup>29</sup> For details on ALARICH, see Schröder, *Italiens Kriegsaustritt*, 176 ff.; on MARGARETHE I, see Door, 'Zur Vorgeschichte', and on the subsequently abandoned plans concerning Romania, see Hillgruber, *Hitler*, 177 ff.

<sup>30</sup> Fleischhauer, *Die Chance des Sonderfriedens*, 284; similarly Goebbels, *Tagebücher*, pt. 2, vii. 454 (2 Mar. 1943).

no means lost on Germany's Axis partners.<sup>31</sup> Even the few remaining options for political stabilization of the European area under German control were not seriously taken into account by Hitler. Thus, despite demands from the competent military and civilian agencies,<sup>32</sup> no fundamental rethink of German occupation policy took place, nor was a concept of Europe elaborated which the powers dependent on Germany could discuss as a counter-model to the Atlantic Charter. Instead, in both cases, mainly because of the personal resistance of the Führer, attempts to initiate a change of direction resulted in nothing more than vague propaganda slogans with no political consequences.<sup>33</sup> Quite obviously, the German dictator was fixated on handling the war by military means (and by use of the police in internal political affairs);<sup>34</sup> two years before the collapse of his regime he was plainly consumed by the distaste for politics which he later openly admitted.<sup>35</sup>

Under these circumstances there was no longer any question of a German alliance policy that took account of the specific interests of the individual partners. Instead, as will be shown in more detail through the example of Finland,<sup>36</sup> that policy was reduced to a set of instruments—promises, threats, and sanctions—by which the leading figures in the partner states and their governments could be bound hand and foot to Germany. Hitler's assessment after a talk with Pierre Laval in January 1943, as put about by Goebbels, indicates the general principle of that policy: the French prime minister was said to have understood that, 'if the Führer wins the war, his [Laval's] policy will have proved correct, and, if he loses it, he [Laval] will have his throat cut. That is a sound basis for partnership. Then we need have no fear that he and his government will suddenly turn away from us.'<sup>37</sup>

The erosion of the Axis Pact, which began even before Stalingrad and was sharply accelerated by defeat on the Volga, was not a unilateral process triggered solely by the war-weariness and peace efforts of Germany's Axis partners. Rather, the German government's hostile attitude to the Pact, perceptible since the end of 1942, contributed greatly to the fact that the governments in Rome, Budapest, and Bucharest, suddenly branded as scapegoats for the bungled military situation, now sought to defend their own national interests.<sup>38</sup> The rapid rebuilding of the

<sup>31</sup> On this, see Weizsäcker, *Die Weizsäcker-Papiere*, 339 (30 May 1943); on criticism of this by Mussolini, see Schröder, *Italiens Kriegsaustritt*, 58.

<sup>32</sup> For specific examples, see Mulligan, *The Politics of Illusion*, 47 ff., and Umbreit, 'Das unbewältigte Problem', 138 ff.

<sup>33</sup> Many sources for this are given in Salewski, 'Ideas'. A comprehensive discussion of new approaches to European politics in National Socialism still remains a desideratum.

<sup>34</sup> A typical example is Hitler's statement to Count Galeazzo Ciano on 20 Dec. 1942 that the 'eastern problem' was for him 'an exclusively military matter'; ADAP, Series E, iv, doc. 315, 582.

<sup>35</sup> See Haffner, *Anmerkungen zu Hitler*, 180; Binion, *Hitler among the Germans*, 106.

<sup>36</sup> More details in Part VI, Chapter I.1.

<sup>37</sup> Goebbels, *Tagebücher*, pt. 2, vii. 171–2 (23 Jan. 1943). What Hitler said to Laval on 29 Apr. 1943 is also interesting in this respect (*Staatsmänner und Diplomaten*, ii. 281).

<sup>38</sup> Even Antonescu, who was fundamentally determined to continue the war against the Soviet Union alongside Germany, pointed out in a memorandum to Hitler on 11 Jan. 1942 that this was 'Romania's own war' and that his country had 'its own national issues and historical responsibilities'; quoted in Ancel, 'Stalingrad und Rumänien', 207.

Romanian army in the spring of 1943,<sup>39</sup> kept strictly secret from the Germans, testifies to these efforts, as do the Hungarian and Romanian governments' increasing contacts with the western Allies.<sup>40</sup> Although these feelers were also supposed to be secret, they did not remain hidden from German diplomats and helped to aggravate the crisis in the Axis Pact.<sup>41</sup>

Among the counter-productive consequences of the German leadership's strategy of shifting the blame was that it further weakened the position of Antonescu, Horthy, and Mussolini and their hitherto willingly cooperative governments, which was already undermined by military developments. The humiliating treatment and unjust denigration of their armed forces strengthened anti-German resentment in the countries concerned. Realization of the fragility of German alliance policy also led to a cooling off in personal relations between the dictators. At the same time, it strengthened the domestic opposition circles, which had never been completely silenced and had always warned against too close a tie with Germany.<sup>42</sup> Given these tendencies, which were due not least to Germany's own policy, it is hardly surprising that the German government succeeded neither in its barely veiled demands for dismissal of the politicians who in its view were most to blame (the Hungarian prime minister Miklos Kállay and the Romanian foreign minister Mihai Antonescu)<sup>43</sup> nor in effectively preventing the continuation of Bucharest's and Budapest's diplomatic contacts with the western powers.<sup>44</sup>

Despite the swiftly progressing internal collapse of the 'Hitler coalition' since the end of 1942, Germany still managed to prevent its external breakdown.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>39</sup> See the analysis based on Romanian sources that are now accessible, *ibid.*, 208–9.

<sup>40</sup> For details, see Förster, *Stalingrad*, 107 ff.; Juhász, *Hungarian Foreign Policy*, 218 ff.; Fenyo, *Hitler, Horthy, and Hungary*, 110 ff. and 131 ff.; Hillgruber, *Hitler*, 167 ff.

<sup>41</sup> The 'register of sins' read out by Hitler to Antonescu and Horthy during their visits to Klessheim Castle in April 1943 was by no means unfounded; *Staatsmänner und Diplomaten*, ii, 217 ff. (12 Apr. 1943) and 241 ff. (16 Apr. 1943). This was the context of the German foreign ministry's memorandum to the Hungarian Government dated 18 Apr. 1943, repr. in *Allianz Hitler—Horthy—Mussolini*, doc. 119, 346–50.

<sup>42</sup> See Förster, *Stalingrad*, 48–9; Deakin, *The Brutal Friendship*, 244 ff.; Ancel, 'Stalingrad und Rumänen', 206, 210.

<sup>43</sup> In the case of the Romanian deputy prime minister, Germany's demand for dismissal had already been preceded in October 1942 by various diplomatic démarches aimed at 'amicably' dissuading Antonescu from his contacts with the western powers; see Ribbentrop's telegram to the legation in Bucharest, 14 Oct. 1942, Deutsches Zentralarchiv Potsdam, AA/Polit. Abt., 'Friedensfrage', i; see also documents repr. in ADAP, Series E, v, doc. 86, 156–7, and doc. 140, 241 ff. Despite that, Antonescu had encouraged the Italian government in mid-January, on behalf of Germany's Axis partner, to make contact with the western powers; he had not succeeded because the Duce was more interested in reaching a settlement with Moscow. See also Deakin, *The Brutal Friendship*, 134 ff., and Förster, *Stalingrad*, 72 ff. On Ribbentrop's unsuccessful attempts to draw Italy into a common front against Antonescu and Kállay, see also Schröder, *Italiens Kriegsaustritt*, 55 ff.

<sup>44</sup> According to Romanian sources, in September 1943 Antonescu offered the western Allies '45 wagonloads of gold, huge quantities of grain, and a million armed troops' (Ancel, 'Stalingrad und Rumänen', 210).

<sup>45</sup> Since the peak of the Stalingrad crisis, Hitler had been cautiously optimistic in this respect (see Goebbels, *Tagebücher*, pt. 2, vii. 171, 23 Jan. 1943), but from May he began to be seriously concerned about Italy and Hungary's loyalty to the Axis Pact (see private letter from Capt. Junge to Grand Admiral Dönitz, 15 May 1943, on the content of that day's conference at Führer headquarters, BA-MA RM 7/260. See also Hitler's discussion with Keitel on 19 May 1943, *Hitlers Lagebesprechungen*, 205–12).

The renewed stabilization of the military situation on the southern wing of the eastern front in March, in the immediate run-up to the summit meetings at Klessheim Castle,<sup>46</sup> helped in this respect, as did the anti-Soviet anxiety and fears which had flared up in Romania, Hungary, and other countries since Stalingrad.<sup>47</sup> While the western powers could do little to dispel those fears except recommend capitulation,<sup>48</sup> Germany still had its impressively strong Wehrmacht ranged against Russia. This military factor was taken into account by the Romanian and Hungarian governments all the more seriously as it not only promised protection against the Red Army for the time being but also served as an insurance for Berlin against an all-too-abrupt change of course on the part of its two allies. Ferenc Szombathelyi, chief of the Hungarian general staff, warned the Supreme National Defence Council as late as September 1943 that, despite the heavy defensive battles in which the Wehrmacht was engaged, it was still strong enough to 'inflict terrible blows on those who rebel against it. For that reason the idea that we should leave the Germans to it, even at the risk of their occupying us, is extremely dangerous'.<sup>49</sup> The danger evoked, which materialized for Hungary within half a year, was all the more serious as Berlin also held two political trump cards it could play against the rulers in Budapest and Bucharest. The first was the sizeable ethnic German minority in both countries,<sup>50</sup> which could be mobilized politically at any time. The right-wing opposition movements were the second. Although the opposition around Bela Imrédy, Ferenc Szálasi and his 'Arrow Cross' supporters in Hungary,<sup>51</sup> and Horia Sima and his 'Iron Guard' in Romania<sup>52</sup> represented no real threat to the ruling order in those countries without German support, nevertheless, in the game of power politics between the unequal Axis partners they were jokers in Germany's hand that were played more than once for disciplinary effect.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>46</sup> See *Staatsmänner und Diplomaten*, ii, docs. 29 und 36.

<sup>47</sup> Stoking those fears was a declared aim of German propaganda after Stalingrad; see *Wollt Ihr den totalen Krieg?*, 336 (12 Feb. 1943), 339 (16 Feb. 1943), and 341 (20 Feb. 1943).

<sup>48</sup> See Quinlan, *Clash over Romania*, 90–100.

<sup>49</sup> Quoted in Borus, 'Stalingrads Widerhall', 221; see also Borus, 'Die Einschätzung der Lage Deutschlands', 165 ff.

<sup>50</sup> This is true despite the fact that, in the months following Stalingrad, Budapest and Bucharest made at least half-hearted attempts to improve mutual relations; see ADAP, Series E, v, doc. 62, 122, and doc. 253, 449–50.

<sup>51</sup> With an eye to that opposition, the German envoy in Bucharest, in a telegram dated 3 Apr. 1943, called for a 'stronger gathering of national forces' to be promoted by Germany and incorporated in a 'concentration cabinet' under the leadership of Heinrich Werth, former chief of the Hungarian general staff; ADAP, Series E, v, doc. 276, 525–6. See also Nagy-Talavera, *The Green Shirts*, 186 ff., and Szöllösi-Janze, *Die Pfeilkreuzlerbewegung*, here esp. 274–82.

<sup>52</sup> On the history of those movements, see the comprehensive work by Heinen, *Die Legion 'Erzengel Michael'*.

<sup>53</sup> e.g. the diplomatic agitation and rumours relating to Horia Sima's escape from German custody; see telegram from the German envoy in Bucharest, 28 Dec. 1942, re 'expressions of opinion from the Romanian general staff', PA, R 28884, and 2 Jan. 1943, ADAP, Series E, v, doc. 4, 3–5, here 4. After he was recaptured in January 1934, Sima was transferred to Sachsenhausen concentration camp, where he remained interned in privileged conditions until the overthrow of Marshal Antonescu in August 1944, when the Germans appointed him head of a Romanian 'government-in-exile'. See also Heinen, *Die Legion 'Erzengel Michael'*, 460–1.

## 2. THE ILLUSION OF A SEPARATE PEACE

The state of the ‘Hitler coalition’ outlined above was highly unconducive to any expression within the Axis Pact of the desirability of German peace-feelers, whether to the Soviet Union or the western powers. The German government, and Hitler in particular, considered their European partners (with the exception of the Finns) more or less as a ‘bunch of cowards’,<sup>54</sup> and were at no point prepared to listen to any suggestions of a political conclusion to the war. While the dictator was still not fundamentally opposed to an ‘understanding’ with Britain, he considered it totally impossible to reach such an understanding with the government of Winston Churchill, given the Allies’ demand for unconditional surrender.<sup>55</sup> Moreover, he firmly rejected the idea of negotiating from a position of weakness, although it must have been clear to him that the time when he was in a position of strength had gone forever.<sup>56</sup>

Hitler’s rejection of putting out feelers to Moscow was even more peremptory—and by no means only after the loss of Stalingrad and the Caucasus. Even the idea of a second Brest-Litovsk peace settlement, put to Hitler by Mussolini *before* the start of the Soviet winter offensive and *before* the collapse of the Italian 8th Army on the Don—that is, for the first time on 6 November 1942 via Lt.-Gen. Enno von Rintelen, the liaison officer at the Italian HQ, and scarcely a month later via Hermann Göring—was ignored by the Führer.<sup>57</sup> On 18 December, that is, at the unfortunate moment when both the collapse of Hoth’s relief offensive and the defeat of Sixth Army became clear at Führer headquarters, foreign minister Galeazzo Ciano came to inform Hitler personally of the Duce’s view. He nevertheless brought an alternative proposal with him: should the desired political settlement with Russia ‘prove too difficult to achieve, it would be advisable in the Duce’s view to adopt a position in Russia that would allow large troop contingents to be transferred from east to west as soon as possible’.<sup>58</sup>

Hitler roundly dismissed both proposals, which Ciano had prudently formulated as vague ‘hypotheses’. The dictator’s reasoning was threefold.<sup>59</sup> First, he invoked his vain attempts in the winter of 1940/1 to divert Russia’s imperial interests from Europe to Asia, when it had become clear that Moscow’s ambitions were in reality directed at the area between Finland and the Dardanelles that was also central to Germany’s interests. Given these conflicting interests, an armistice with the Soviet Union would simply give it time to ‘regroup its forces’ and would soon impose on Germany the need for a new war in less favourable circumstances.

<sup>54</sup> Thus Goebbels, *Tagebücher*, pt. 2, vii. 168 (23 Jan. 1943).

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., ix. 582 and 586 (23 Sept. 1943). With regard to the Americans, German envoys did have discreet contacts with men close to Roosevelt (George H. Earle, Allan Dulles, and others) on Turkish and Swiss soil, but they did not go beyond sounding out each other’s views. On this, in addition to Schellenberg’s memoirs (*Aufzeichnungen*, 294–5), see above all Martin, ‘Verhandlungen über separate Friedensschlüsse’, 99–100, and Höhne, *Canaris*, 461 ff.

<sup>56</sup> Goebbels, *Tagebücher*, pt. 2, ix. 566 (23 Sept. 1943).

<sup>57</sup> Schröder, ‘Bestrebungen’, 18–19; Deakin, *The Brutal Friendship*, 61 and 141 ff.

<sup>58</sup> Minutes of the meeting between Hitler and Ciano on 18 Dec. 1942, repr. in *Staatsmänner und Diplomaten*, ii, doc. 22, 170.

<sup>59</sup> On what follows, see *ibid.* 170–4.

Second, the Führer argued that there was no line 'on which Germany and Russia could agree, given their nutritional and raw-material requirements'. Germany could not be content merely with the Baltic and Poland. Its existence, and that of other European states, depended 'on supplies from the area of Russia now occupied by the Axis, in particular oil from the Caucasus. There is no line that would give both Russia and the Axis a basis for existence in terms of coal, iron, and grain'.<sup>60</sup>

Finally, according to Hitler, military considerations also spoke against Mussolini's proposals. Given the permanent threat represented by the mere existence of the Red Army, it would be hard to withdraw significant contingents of German forces from the eastern front in the event of a political agreement with Russia, since a renewed German deployment, which would be necessary when Moscow sooner or later broke the agreement, would take no less than eight months. Not even the Luftwaffe was free for immediate deployment in the west. Its units had first to be reorganized, their crews retrained, and their equipment refurbished. Furthermore, removal of all airbases in the east was much too risky.

Hitler repeated these main arguments in different variants in the following weeks and months. In addition, sometimes in conversation with Ciano but also on other occasions, he gave further reasons for opposing a political settlement with Moscow and a withdrawal from the eastern front.<sup>61</sup> Among the more striking of these was his warning of defection by Finland and a worsening of the German position in Norway, as well as his assumption that 'even very low-key political talks with Russia' would cause the western Allies to speed up their invasion preparations and 'take massive reckless action against the Axis'.<sup>62</sup> But even the idea of an East Wall that would bring Soviet attacks to a standstill seemed to the dictator 'pure theory, since in winter any East Wall, even if equipped with the largest tank-traps, would be covered in snow and ice and thus cease to exist as a barrier'.<sup>63</sup>

<sup>60</sup> ibid. 171–2; similarly to Goebbels on 23 Sept. 1943 (see Goebbels, *Tagebücher*, pt. 2, ix. 582). According to American communication surveillance reports, Hitler also made Russian withdrawal from the Ukraine a precondition for peace with the Soviet Union at a meeting with Oshima on 29 July 1943. Both Weizsäcker and Ribbentrop had already expressed themselves in similar terms to the Japanese ambassador in November and December 1942 respectively, when there was also talk of a transfer of the Caucasus area and of arms limitations on Russia. As late as January 1944 Japan attempted to persuade Germany to give up its demand for withdrawal from the Ukraine. On this, see Krebs, 'Japanische Vermittlungsversuche', 249 and 261; Martin, *Deutschland und Japan*, 188.

<sup>61</sup> The demand for unconditional surrender raised by the western powers in Casablanca played practically no part in the reasons for continuing the war which Hitler propounded during those months. According to Warlimont, 'by all accounts, it was virtually ignored at that time inside German headquarters' (Warlimont, *Im Hauptquartier*, 333). Goebbels too gave it barely more than a passing mention; see Goebbels, *Tagebücher*, pt. 2, vii. 208 ff. (28 Jan. 1943), and *Wollt Ihr den totalen Krieg?*, 327 ff. (27 and 28 Jan. 1943). This suggests that the importance attributed by contemporary observers and historians to the formulation 'unconditional surrender' as a reason for the uncompromising continuation of the war (see the many examples in the otherwise uncritical work by Armstrong, *Unconditional Surrender*, ch. 3) is considerably exaggerated, at least with respect to the period under consideration here. See also Kettenacker, 'Unconditional Surrender'.

<sup>62</sup> Thus to Ciano on 18 Dec. 1942 in *Staatsmänner und Diplomaten*, ii. 173.

<sup>63</sup> Thus in conversation with Horthy on 16 Apr. 1943; see ibid. 236. Despite this, planning for construction of the 'Ostwall' was started after the failure of Operation CITADEL.

The Japanese peace initiatives, whose beginnings went back to the first months of the German–Soviet conflict,<sup>64</sup> fared no better than those of Italy. From the beginning of October 1941, despite differences of opinion within the Japanese leadership,<sup>65</sup> the German Axis partner received repeated signals from Tokyo that it considered a political settlement of the war against the Soviet Union desirable since it would clear the way for a transcontinental coalition war against the Anglo-American powers, and that Japan was prepared to act as a mediator for that purpose. These recommendations brought no reaction at first. They were repeated in the spring of 1942 and firmly rejected, but that did not permanently deter Tokyo from continuing its diplomatic efforts.<sup>66</sup>

On the contrary: not only the military news from Europe, but above all the reports from the Japanese ambassador in Kuibyshev—who was becoming progressively more influential than Hiroshi Oshima, his counterpart in Berlin—gave the impression that the Soviet Union was increasingly gaining the upper hand.<sup>67</sup> This caused considerable concern in Tokyo and strengthened Japan's efforts to consolidate its neutrality.<sup>68</sup> Given this background, it is not surprising that Hitler's demand, in the final phase of the Stalingrad disaster, for a Japanese relief offensive against the Soviet Union<sup>69</sup> was rejected by Japan.<sup>70</sup> Instead, in the following months Tokyo continued to offer its good offices for the establishment of communication between Berlin and Moscow.<sup>71</sup> Hitler's counter-proposal of a renewed German offensive in the east<sup>72</sup> not only failed to dispel Japan's concern but was interpreted in Tokyo, given its rather sceptical view of Germany's situation on the eastern front, as a dangerous erosion of forces.<sup>73</sup>

The fact that it was mainly Italy and Japan who were pressing for a diplomatic settlement of the German–Soviet conflict was no coincidence. On the contrary,

<sup>64</sup> On Japanese mediation efforts, see above all Martin, *Deutschland und Japan*, 110 ff. and 172 ff.; Schröder, 'Bestrebungen', 8 ff.; and finally, with regard to the Japanese sources, Krebs, 'Japanische Vermittlungsversuche'.

<sup>65</sup> Krebs, 'Japanische Vermittlungsversuche', 242, and id., 'Japan und der deutsch-sowjetische Krieg 1941', 575 ff.

<sup>66</sup> Schröder, 'Bestrebungen', 8 ff.

<sup>67</sup> A typical example is the assessment of Russian military strength by the Japanese naval attaché in Kuibyshev, appendix to B. No. 1. Skl I Op. a 13879/43 g.Kdos., 12 May 1943, BA-MA RW 4/v. 886. See also Krebs, 'Japanische Vermittlungsversuche', 254–5.

<sup>68</sup> FHO (IIa), briefing note *re* Russia–Japan relations, 14 Mar. 1943, BA-MA RH 3/1481; telegram from German ambassador in Tokyo No. 1296, 24 Apr. 1943, PA, R 29 721. See also the instructive memoirs of the Japanese foreign minister, Shigemitsu Mamoru, *Japan and Her Destiny*, 295–6.

<sup>69</sup> ADAP, Series E, v. doc. 145, 255–62. On the typically uncoordinated steps taken by Hitler and Ribbentrop in this matter, see also Schröder, 'Bestrebungen', 15–16.

<sup>70</sup> ADAP, Series E, v. doc. 188, 362–8.

<sup>71</sup> The Japanese naval command, in accordance with the German naval attaché, Adm. Paul Wenneker, was also active along these lines. As shown by a letter from Skl (1/Skl 1144/43 g.Kdos. Chefs) to OKW/WFSt, 17 Apr. 1943 (BA-MA RM 7/254), these signals certainly reached the OKW Operations Staff and did not, as Krebs assumes ('Japanische Vermittlungsversuche', 256), get stuck in the naval agencies concerned. See also Martin, *Deutschland und Japan*, 172 ff.

<sup>72</sup> See his letter to Mussolini, 16 Feb. 1943 (ADAP, Series E, v. doc. 135, 227–36), the content of which Rome conveyed to the Japanese.

<sup>73</sup> Krebs, 'Japanische Vermittlungsversuche', 252.

it reflected a fundamental similarity in the strategic interests of the two countries.<sup>74</sup> For them the enemy was Anglo-American sea power, not the continental land power of the Soviet Union, and the most important European theatre of war was not eastern Europe but the Mediterranean. Like Mussolini, the Japanese leadership saw an urgent need to 'transfer the German centre of gravity to the western Mediterranean'. Consolidation of the Tunis bridgehead should be the basis for 'a subsequent concentrated attack on Anglo-American forces in Algiers'.<sup>75</sup> Like the failure of the German–Italian plans regarding Malta,<sup>76</sup> the Tunis operation was also judged extremely seriously in Tokyo because of the possible repercussions in the Asian theatre of operations, since it opened up for the Allies a practically unimpeded passage through the Mediterranean and an overland route from Casablanca via Suez and Basra for supplying the Burma front.<sup>77</sup> In Japanese general staff circles it was suspected that, notwithstanding the 'no separate peace' agreement in force since December 1941, this increased the risk of a German–British settlement, since Germany's position in the Mediterranean had been weakened but it still held a number of cards in its hand. Moreover, a peace settlement with Britain would give Hitler better prospects for continuing his war against Russia.<sup>78</sup> By contrast, a separate peace between Berlin and Moscow would not only secure the desired concentration of German military efforts against the Anglo-American enemy, but would also, given favourable circumstances, open up the possibility of forming a transcontinental block together with the Soviet Union against the western powers.<sup>79</sup>

Quite obviously, these strategic concerns of the Japanese partner, like those of Italy, differed fundamentally from Hitler's strategic interests. And this fundamental difference must have contributed significantly to the failure of the various peace initiatives of both those countries. From the viewpoint of both Rome and Tokyo, a peace settlement in the east should serve to intensify the war against the western powers. That, however, was a war which Hitler had never seen as his own but had always regarded as forced upon him, a war which Germany, because of its geographical position, would be able to wage in the long term only with the support of an eastern empire (Ukraine and the Caucasus) rich in food produce and raw

<sup>74</sup> Amt Ausl./Abwehr, briefing note *re* Japanese assessment of the military situation, 2 Jan. 1943, BA-MA RM 7/254.

<sup>75</sup> Mil.Att. Tokio, Meldung No. 67/43 g.Kdos.Chefs., 14 Apr. 1943, BA-MA RH 2/755. The Japanese general staff accordingly called for rapid establishment of a German military presence in Spanish Morocco, the Balearics, and Spain, for the capture of Gibraltar, and for a strong airbase to be established in the area by transferring half of the Luftwaffe forces deployed on the eastern front (see further Martin, 'Japan und Stalingrad', 239 ff.). The opposition of these strategic concerns to those of the Reich thus came sharply to the fore, and the reaction of the general staff in Tokyo to the news of plans for a new German offensive in the east was decidedly negative. According to a report from the German military attaché dated 27 Apr. 1943, the Japanese military leadership feared 'resounding consequences for the whole Mediterranean region' (BA-MA RH 2/5222, fos. 90–1).

<sup>76</sup> Skl, 'Niederschrift über die Besprechung beim Chef des Stabes der Seekriegsleitung am 22.1.1943', BA-MA RM 7/254. On the Malta plans themselves, see Reuth, *Entscheidung im Mittelmeer*, 135 ff., and, with a somewhat different emphasis, *Germany and the Second World War*, vi. 654–60.

<sup>77</sup> FS Marineatt. Tokio to OKM, 14 May 1943, BA-MA RM 7/254, fos. 124–5.

<sup>78</sup> See Krebs, 'Japanese Vermittlungsversuche', 253–4.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid. 255.

materials. To give way to the urgings of his Axis partners would, from the German dictator's viewpoint, have meant nothing else than a return to the war of false fronts which had supposedly been forced on Germany in 1939, and whose direction had been corrected only in June 1941 by the attack on the Soviet Union.<sup>80</sup>

So were all efforts at a separate peace hopeless from the outset? Given the unequivocal nature of the German sources, this question can hardly be answered in the negative. Nevertheless, a positive answer must be subject to certain qualifications, which we shall now briefly indicate. The first is that an interpretation of the *Soviet* attitude to the peace question based on a wide range of sources remains impossible to this day.<sup>81</sup> Nevertheless, a number of circumstances give reason to believe that, in the months between the battles of Stalingrad and Kursk, Moscow might have been interested in peace-feelers to Germany. The fact that such feelers might have been seen as a means of exerting pressure on the western powers and persuading them to make political concessions and intensify their military efforts is not the only reason for such a belief. The military superiority proven by Stalingrad, in conjunction with the realization—confirmed by Manstein's defensive successes in the east and the repeated postponement of the Allied invasion in the west—that the Red Army's road to Berlin would be long and bloody, could have been sufficient motives for Stalin, especially as he must have feared that a victory which sapped Russia's strength would ultimately benefit the western powers most of all.<sup>82</sup>

In the case of Hitler's attitude, however, things were also not quite as clear-cut as they seem. In particular, one should not attach too much significance to the brusqueness with which Hitler, in his political negotiations with foreign statesmen, swept the peace issue off the table. Verbal tactics, whereby wavering allies can be influenced only by firmness, played a part in this, as did the dictator's concern about the uncontrollable dynamics by which even the smallest signals were picked up and processed in the rumour mill of international diplomacy.<sup>83</sup> While his

<sup>80</sup> See Hillgruber, *Der Zweite Weltkrieg*, 43 ff.; Förster, 'Hitlers Wendung nach Osten'.

<sup>81</sup> The subject was completely taboo in Soviet historiography and is still difficult to work on because of the competent Moscow archive's decidedly restrictive attitude, even to Russian historians. The recent Russian publication on the subject by Sokolov and Fetisov, 'Byl i nebyl', is also disappointing.

<sup>82</sup> How strong Moscow's interest in a separate peace with Berlin actually was is still a matter of dispute. That it existed—at least in the period under discussion, between Stalingrad and the Teheran Conference—is argued plausibly by Fischer, *Sowjetische Deutschlandpolitik*, 38 and 45, Martin, 'Deutsch-sowjetische Sondierungen', and Weinberg, *A World at Arms*, here esp. 609 ff. and 655–6. The opposite view is taken by Fleischhauer, *Die Chance des Sonderfriedens*, 285, and Einsiedel, 'Bridge mit Madame Kollontaj'. On the basis of an analysis of documents in the archives of the Russian foreign ministry which they do not otherwise identify, Sokolov and Fetisov permit themselves the following conclusion: 'Thus we can state today, in all certainty, that no discussions about a separate peace, nor any kind of contacts with Germans, were conducted by Soviet diplomats in Stockholm [...] The psychology of the Soviet diplomats of the time was wonderfully expressed by A.M. Kollontaj when she stressed that without an order from the centre—and no such order ever existed—she would never have taken such a step' (Sokolov and Fetisov, 'Byl i nebyl', 137).

<sup>83</sup> Goebbels' observation of 6 Feb. 1943 (*Tagebücher*, pt. 2, vii. 270), that 'the question of the supposed peace-feelers [...] is now being aired with exceptional force in neutral and, above all, enemy countries by our side too', is confirmed impressively by reports from German diplomatic representatives; see the numerous examples in PA R 29 721, and Deutsches Zentralarchiv, AA/Polit. Abt. 'Friedensfrage', i.

comments on the peace issue in one-to-one conversations with Goebbels were also dismissive, they were nevertheless noticeably more conciliatory and less dogmatic than on other occasions. If the testimony of the propaganda minister is to be believed, Hitler showed himself ‘more ready to negotiate’ with Stalin than with Churchill, but did not rule out talks with the latter on principle, since ‘no political principles apply in matters of personality’. The Führer remained convinced that ‘conservative England’ would ‘rather end the war today than tomorrow’—a war in which ‘the English people take as little pleasure as the Germans’—and that, once peace was concluded, ‘they will not take up arms again in the next twenty years’. What is more, Hitler saw ‘some chance of a political review’ in the autumn, if ‘calm had been restored on the fronts’.<sup>84</sup>

If we are to assume, as already argued, that Hitler’s psychological make-up was not characterized solely by irrational wishful thinking but that he was fully open to rational strategic considerations, then we must ask whether the causes of the complete failure of all efforts for a separate peace are really to be found only in the dictator’s personality. This question arises not *although* but *because* Hitler himself was the decisive obstacle to the initiation of diplomatic feelers going beyond purely conspiratorial attempts at contact.<sup>85</sup> Not only was the usefulness of such feelers pointed out by almost all of Germany’s Axis partners—it was recognized by many, perhaps even most, of the politicians, officials, and military officers in the Führer’s inner and outer circle.<sup>86</sup> The civilians known to have spoken internally in favour of a political exit from the war—whether by agreement with the western powers or together with Moscow—include, in addition to foreign minister Joachim von Ribbentrop and his state secretary Count Ernst von Weizsäcker,<sup>87</sup> above all Fritz Todt, Reich minister for armament and munitions, Goebbels, Bormann, and

<sup>84</sup> All quotations from Goebbels, *Tagebücher*, pt. 2, ix. 582 and 586 (23 Sept. 1943). Admittedly, the authenticity of these statements by Hitler, made only after the failure of Operation CITADEL, cannot be considered entirely certain. Nor can it be ruled out that Goebbels embellished the Führer’s comments in line with his own views, or that Hitler chose his words ‘*ad usum delphini*’, i.e. to appease his political *compagnon de route*, who had different views on the peace issue. Be that as it may, Goebbels’ observations are confirmed by Ribbentrop’s testimony to the Nuremberg Military Tribunal on 30 Mar. 1946, according to which Hitler, after the collapse of Italy, was ‘resolved on such a peace [with Moscow] and was already sketching out a possible common demarcation line’, IMT, x. 338–9. The foreign minister’s memoirs read similarly: Ribbentrop, *Zwischen London und Moskau*, 264.

<sup>85</sup> Mention should be made, first and foremost, of the Stockholm contacts of counter-intelligence agent Edgar Klaus. Because of the long-overrated memoirs (*Zwischen Hitler und Stalin*) of Peter Kleist, an SS Standartenführer and diplomat who was also involved, it was only in recent years that these contacts were reassessed and their significance greatly diminished; see in particular the meticulous, though not entirely convincing, analysis by Fleischhauer, *Die Chance des Sonderfriedens* (here esp. 114 ff.), and, with a different emphasis, Martin, ‘Deutsch-sowjetische Sondierungen’.

<sup>86</sup> According to Weizsäcker, *Die Weizsäcker-Papiere*, 321 (4 Feb. 1943), ‘thinking Germans, too, held different views as to whether there was any need at all for us to wage war on Russia’.

<sup>87</sup> Ribbentrop, *Zwischen London und Moskau*, 260 ff., even claimed to have sent the Führer a memorandum to that effect via the diplomatic envoy Walther Hewel. See also Goebbels, *Tagebücher 1945*, 118 (5 Mar. 1945); Fleischhauer, *Die Chance des Sonderfriedens*, 111 and 313, n. 103; and, less informative, Bloch, *Ribbentrop*, 361–2, as well as the irritatingly vacuous Weitz, *Hitler’s Diplomat*, 302. What is certain is that Ribbentrop covered discreet contacts between his envoys and the Allies; in this connection, see also Hesse, *Das Spiel um Deutschland*, 314 ff. On Weizsäcker’s attitude, see further Chapter I.3.

even Himmler.<sup>88</sup> As for the generals, some, like Erhard Milch<sup>89</sup> and Friedrich Fromm,<sup>90</sup> Erich Fellgiebel and Wilhelm Canaris,<sup>91</sup> later also Gerd von Rundstedt<sup>92</sup> and Erwin Rommel,<sup>93</sup> took initiatives on the peace issue, though no one from the close circle of Hitler's operations advisers. Nevertheless, given the disillusionment as to Germany's remaining chances of 'final victory' which was perceptible precisely among the military leadership after Stalingrad,<sup>94</sup> we are entitled to conclude that a political initiative would have been welcomed with great relief.<sup>95</sup>

In these circumstances it is noteworthy that Hitler was not subjected to any significant pressure on the peace issue, either from within Germany or from outside. In the case of the rather loose relationship with Japan, which was based on the principle of mutual non-interference, this may be seen as understandable, and Tokyo's policy of repeated reminders as 'decidedly un-Asiatic directness'.<sup>96</sup> All the same, closer coordination of Japan's diplomatic initiatives with the government in Rome would have made sense in view of the two countries' basically similar strategic interests,<sup>97</sup> but no efforts to achieve such coordination seem to have been made by the Italian side either. Rather, Italy avoided putting its powerful German partner under pressure. Not being prepared to call the alliance with Hitler seriously into question, the Duce could bring himself only to present Berlin with vague suggestions and 'hypotheses'. As the failure of his own imperial policy became apparent, Mussolini shied away from threatening a change of course in his alliance policy, which might have had some effect at least until the Allies proclaimed their

<sup>88</sup> In the case of Todt, the sources are not entirely unequivocal; see most recently Kroener, 'Zwischen Blitzsieg und Verhandlungsfrieden', 354. In the case of Goebbels, considerations in favour of a political conclusion to the war are already perceptible in July 1942 (see ADAP, Series E, iii, doc. 138, 237; also Heiber, *Goebbels*, 368). On Bormann's pessimistic assessment of the war situation after Stalingrad, see Bormann, *The Bormann Letters*, 6–7; on Himmler's attitude, see Schellenberg, *Aufzeichnungen*, 278 ff.

<sup>89</sup> See the discussion, based on Milch's own testimony, in Toland, *Adolf Hitler*, 736; also Speer, *Erinnerungen*, 229.

<sup>90</sup> See Kroener, *Der starke Mann im Heimatkriegsgebiet*, 409 ff. and 457 ff., and id., 'Zwischen Blitzsieg und Verhandlungsfrieden'.

<sup>91</sup> See Höhne, *Canaris*, 456 ff. and 460 ff. A denunciation of which Fellgiebel, chief of the intelligence troops, was the victim in early 1943 sheds light on his attitude; on this, see, *inter alia*, a letter from A. Teme to SS-Sturmbannführer G. d'Alquen, 22 Apr. 1942, IfZ, MA 297/2573659. I am grateful to Doron Arazi for drawing my attention to these proceedings.

<sup>92</sup> See the description of Rundstedt in Speidel, *Aus unserer Zeit*, 173–4.

<sup>93</sup> See ibid. 162 and 169; Irving, *Trail of the Fox*, 283, 371 and 375; Reuth, *Erwin Rommel*, 49 ff.

<sup>94</sup> According to Hassell, *Vom andern Deutschland*, 347 (14 Feb. 1943), 'the generals are finally also waking up and realizing what the Wehrmacht has been brought to, and what Germany itself is being brought to'.

<sup>95</sup> According to an SD report on public opinion in May 1943, 'in certain strata (industry, the intelligentsia, part of the middle classes, officers in homeland agencies) people are counting only on a "compromise peace"' (*Meldungen aus dem Reich*, xiii. 5215, 6 May 1943). See also the diary entries in Engel, *Heeresadjutant*, 144–5, Feb. 1943; Sodenstern, 'Der "Feldherr" Adolf Hitler', 70, BA-MA N 594/9; and Heusinger, *Befehl im Widerstreit*, 247 ff. The fact that the chief of the OKH operations division thought an understanding was possible not with Britain but with Russia can be seen from a private letter from Heusinger to his wife, dated 22 May 1943 (copy in the author's possession).

<sup>96</sup> Thus Martin, 'Die politischen Rückwirkungen', 193.

<sup>97</sup> In fact, Rome and Tokyo had no more than a loose understanding on the matter. On the reasons, see ibid. 196.

Casablanca ultimatum.<sup>98</sup> A personal discussion of the peace issue between the two dictators finally took place only in the second week of April, five months after Mussolini's first initiative on the matter—thus much too late to make any fundamental difference to the course of events. Buoyed up by the successful restabilization of the eastern front and the start of preparations for Operation CITADEL, Hitler seems to have had no problem bringing the physically and mentally stricken Duce 'firmly back into line'.<sup>99</sup>

While the peace issue had still figured on the agenda in Germany's negotiations with foreign countries, in internal briefings and situation reviews at Hitler's headquarters it was clearly taboo and was mentioned neither by civilian or military participants. Memoranda on the subject from individuals, such as Fromm or Ribbentrop,<sup>100</sup> disappeared without trace. Spoken references to the issue were made, if at all, only in one-to-one conversations.<sup>101</sup> Even the chief of the Army General Staff seems to have been wholly in the dark about a possible political solution to the conflict. He does not appear to have raised it himself nor, as Hitler's military adviser—his closest military adviser on the war in the east!—does he ever appear to have been confronted with it. As Zeitzler admitted years later, 'Hitler never mentioned to me Mussolini's suggestion of coming to an agreement with Stalin. Indeed, he did everything to keep it from me. I heard of it only after the war.'<sup>102</sup>

And herein lies what was so extraordinary and so characteristic of the National Socialist Führer state: the option of a political conclusion to the war was discarded *without* ever being discussed in the leading circles of the Party, state, and armed forces. What is more—since there was no autonomous leadership of the Wehrmacht, the daily situation conferences were confined to operational issues, and no meetings of either the cabinet or the Council of Ministers for Defence of the Reich took place. In the second half of the war there no longer existed a forum competent to deal with what was perhaps the most important issue for the survival of the regime and the very existence of the Reich. Instead, a process in which the old centres of power had largely dried up and been overgrown by new structures had resulted in a fragmentation of remits such that each was responsible for something, many for the same thing, but no one—except Hitler himself—for the whole. In this situation it would have required a united front of leading personalities, acting in concert and deliberately overstepping

<sup>98</sup> See Schröder, Italiens *Kriegsaustritt*, 47–8. German circles that were counting on a political termination of the war also seemed to have placed hopes in Mussolini during that period, expecting him to push strongly for a separate peace in the east; see Deakin, *The Brutal Friendship*, 245 ff.

<sup>99</sup> Goebbels, *Tagebücher*, pt. 2, viii, 225 (7 May 1943). Hitler's impression that Mussolini, on his arrival in Salzburg, was 'a broken old man' is confirmed by Junge, 'Ostfeldzüge', ch. 8, 36, MGFA M 16/1. No official minutes of the German–Italian talks held at Klessheim Castle from 8 to 10 Apr. 1943 are known to us, but their content can be deduced from numerous indirect sources (see Schröder, 'Bestrebungen', 40, n. 58). Later, at the dictators' meeting in Feltre on 19 July 1943, Mussolini no longer brought up the question of a separate peace.

<sup>100</sup> See Ribbentrop, *Zwischen London und Moskau*, 264; Kroener, *Der starke Mann im Heimatkriegsgebiet*, 409 ff.

<sup>101</sup> As in the above-mentioned cases of Goebbels, Ribbentrop, und Milch.

<sup>102</sup> Letter from Zeitzler, 14 Jan. 1954, replying to questions from Heinrici, BA-MA N 63/15, 8.

their remits, to force the Führer into political settlement of a conflict that could no longer be resolved by military means. If virtually all the conditions for such concerted action were lacking in 1943, it was not only because rivalry and mistrust among the leadership were too great and the commanders-in-chief at the front were light years removed from the centre of power and totally absorbed by the problems confronting them on the spot. Rather, it now also became apparent that those leading personalities who possessed the independence of mind necessary for such action had long since been forced from positions of responsibility, taken the path of resistance, or, for the most part, simply resigned themselves to the situation.

On 20 April 1943, Hitler's fifty-fourth birthday, one of the most clear-sighted leaders of the conservative resistance noted that the longer the war lasted, the worse his opinion of the generals: 'They have technical ability and physical courage, certainly, but little civil courage, no overall understanding or world view, and no inner independence of mind or power of resistance based on real culture, which is why they are entirely subservient and given over to a man like Hitler.'<sup>103</sup> And so, despite a war situation that was both politically and strategically hopeless, the way was clear for a new—and last—military offensive in the east.

<sup>103</sup> Hassell, *Vom andern Deutschland*, 360 (20 Apr. 1943).

# III. The Genesis of the Battle of Kursk

## 1. BASIC CONSIDERATIONS

The starting point for consideration of the basic principles that should apply to the further conduct of the war in the east in the spring of 1943 was the realization, shared by Hitler, the OKW Operations Staff, and the Army General Staff, that for the foreseeable future Germany was condemned to strategic defence, and that a further, third campaign against the Soviet Union was, for the time being, beyond its capabilities. On his first visit to Army Group South HQ in Zaporozhye on 18 February 1943, Hitler left no doubt in the matter, stating that he was ‘unable to undertake any large-scale operations this year’ but ‘only small forays’.<sup>1</sup> On his second visit, barely four weeks later, he expressed himself in similar terms.<sup>2</sup> This realization of the need to move onto the defensive would have been appropriate a year earlier, but at that time it was prevented by overestimation of Germany’s own strength, underestimation of Soviet endurance, and not least the hope that the United States’ relative lag in arms production and mobilization would give Germany a further breathing space in which to conclude the war in the east victoriously before establishing a second land front in Europe. That was all out of the question now. The psychological shock of Stalingrad had boosted willingness to recognize the limits of Germany’s offensive strength just as thoroughly as it had demolished the expectation, which was already becoming increasingly shaky in the second half of 1942, of a rapid collapse of the Red Army. Meanwhile, the western Allies’ successful seizure of the African forefield of ‘Fortress Europe’ signalled the end of the time frame in which it would still have been possible to place the centre of gravity of the German war effort in the east.

All this bitter experience led the German leadership to the realization that defensive conduct of the war was, by and large, inevitable. Hitler, however, was by no means ready for large-scale retreat in the east. For him it was impossible both psychologically and for reasons of alliance policy, but above all on war-economy grounds. To give up the Donets Basin, from which the Soviet Union had derived a quarter of its steel production, seemed to him ‘untenable’ from the outset, since ‘the enemy would also be too strong materially’. Furthermore, control of that area was essential for the maintenance of Germany’s own armament ‘at its present level’. And, not least of all, Donets steel was the raw-material precondition for defence

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Schwarz, *Die Stabilisierung der Ostfront*, 255 (Appendix C1).

<sup>2</sup> H.Gr. Süd/Ia, KTB, 11 Mar. 1943, 1091 (reverse side), BA-MA RH 19 VI/41.

against Allied air attacks in the west. Hitler considered the Stalino coalfield, the Zaporozhye hydroelectric plant,<sup>3</sup> and the manganese deposits in the Nikopol area<sup>4</sup> ('they cover our manganese requirements for more than 500 years!') of decisive importance. Loss of the ore output alone, he warned his generals, 'would mean the end of the war'.<sup>5</sup>

It is clear from the assessments outlined above that, for the German leadership in 1943, no withdrawal or offensive operations of *strategic* significance were on the table. With regard to operational planning for the German offensive against the Kursk salient (code-name CITADEL), this means that less importance was attached to it from the outset than is suggested by epithets like 'the greatest tank battle in history', which were subsequently commonly ascribed to it in the literature.<sup>6</sup> In terms of its objective and the resources invested in it, CITADEL was not an undertaking comparable to the previous year's Operation BLUE, let alone Operation BARBAROSSA in 1941. It was intended not as an offensive campaign of strategic proportions but as a 'limited offensive'<sup>7</sup> of purely operational importance. Its main purpose was to 'retain the initiative' while conserving Germany's own scarce manpower reserves.<sup>8</sup>

While the planned operation was thus similar to the attacks carried out in the spring of 1942 on a smaller scale in the Crimea and on a larger scale in the Kharkov–Izum area,<sup>9</sup> it nevertheless differed from them in that CITADEL was not intended to serve in the preparation of a strategic offensive comparable to Operation BLUE. In 1943 concrete plans for such an operation simply did not exist. As Goebbels noted ten days before the attack began, the Führer was 'in essence, determined to persist. He wants to make some important adjustments in the coming weeks and deal the Bolsheviks a couple of blows that will cost them a few armies, not to say a whole army group'.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>3</sup> The Dnieper power plant, which had a continuous output of around 100,000 kW in peacetime, had been largely destroyed during the Red Army's retreat and had resumed production only in January 1943, after costly reconstruction; see *Die deutsche Wirtschaftspolitik*, 233. The strongest support for Hitler's position came in a statement by the chief of the OKW war economy staff (foreign countries), 31 Mar. 1943, that 'the loss of Zaporozhye means not only the loss of the war-economy resources of the area east of the Dnieper, but those of the area west of the Dnieper also', BA-MA RH 2/2344.

<sup>4</sup> Although in 1942 Nikopol produced only about a half of the Soviet pre-war output, that amount more than covered the whole of Germany's manganese requirements; see *Die deutsche Wirtschaftspolitik*, 233–4, and Eichholtz, *Geschichte der deutschen Kriegswirtschaft*, ii. 470.

<sup>5</sup> All quotations from H.Gr. Süd/Ia, KTB, 11 Mar. 1943, 1091–2 (reverse side), BA-MA RH 19 VI/41. Hitler had already expressed himself in similar terms on 18 Feb. 1943 (see Schwarz, *Die Stabilisierung der Ostfront*, 255, Appendix C1) and during the midday situation conference on 1 Feb. 1943 (*Hitlers Lagebesprechungen*, 122).

<sup>6</sup> With typical titles such as Jukes, *Kursk: The Clash of Armour*; Piekalkiewicz, *Unternehmen Zitadelle. Kursk und Orel: Die größte Panzerschlacht des 2. Weltkrieges*; Engelmann, *Zitadelle. Die größte Panzerschlacht im Osten 1943*.

<sup>7</sup> Quoted in Goebbels, *Tagebücher*, pt. 2, viii. 225 (7 May 1943).

<sup>8</sup> H.Gr. Süd/Ia, KTB, 11 Mar. 1943, 1091 (reverse side), BA-MA RH 19 VI/41. See also 'Die Vernehmung von Generaloberst Jodl', here 540.

<sup>9</sup> See *Germany and the Second World War*, vi. 929–54.

<sup>10</sup> Goebbels, *Tagebücher*, pt. 2, viii. 531 (25 June 1943).

There was something to be said for such an approach, which was strikingly similar to that of Stalin a year earlier.<sup>11</sup> For if, in the course of an attack designed to straighten the front, Germany succeeded in weakening the Red Army to such an extent that it was no longer capable of a decisive summer campaign, that would serve, all the better, the main purpose of strategic defence, which was to conserve Germany's own strength. The condition for such success was to avoid excessive losses by its own attacking units while leaving the enemy no chance to escape destruction by means of timely retreat or deeply staggered defence.<sup>12</sup>

But that was precisely where the problem lay, as soon became apparent. Basic consensus on the need for a limited offensive in the context of a strategic defensive objective was one thing, whereas agreement on the place and timing of the planned operation, and the resources to be devoted to it, was quite another. These latter questions were the subject of serious divergences among the competent operations staffs throughout the first half of 1943—divergences which are all the more difficult to reconstruct as, after its failure, the Kursk operation confirmed the adage that victories have many fathers but defeats are orphans. As in the case of Operation BLUE, the German generals who survived the war (and controlled the military historiography of the early post-war period) denied all responsibility for the planning of CITADEL.<sup>13</sup> Zeitzler, for example, stated categorically as late as 1960: 'It was undoubtedly Hitler himself. He was determined to go ahead with the offensive on political grounds and for reasons of prestige, although it was operationally unjustified.'<sup>14</sup> This statement is correct insofar as the dictator's decision to launch the Kursk offensive was taken not only on operational grounds but was, as we have seen, also guided by strategic—especially war-economy and political—considerations<sup>15</sup> for which his military advisers showed little indulgence. As on previous occasions,<sup>16</sup> it again became apparent that the Führer, who alone had overall responsibility, and the military men, who were responsible only for specific departmental issues, theatres of operations, or sectors of the front, reasoned on completely different levels. This increased the dictator's de facto freedom of action (which was anyway unlimited *de jure*) and made his decisions difficult to contest, since he was always able to counter the unwelcome contrary views of military experts with political or strategic arguments.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>11</sup> See Zhukov, *Erinnerungen*, 356 ff.

<sup>12</sup> Zeitzler, 'Abwehrschlachten', 57–8, BA-MA N 63/80.

<sup>13</sup> Unfortunately, the otherwise so thorough work by Klink, *Das Gesetz des Handelns*, pays as little attention to this aspect as does Zins, *Die Operation Zitadelle*.

<sup>14</sup> Zeitzler, statement of position, 17 Feb. 1960, on Ziemke's manuscript 'The German Campaign in Russia, 1942–45', ch. 4 and 5, BA-MA N 63/94.4. Heinrici also states unequivocally that the failure of CITADEL had its root cause in Hitler's operational planning (MGFA, Study T-9, 'Der Feldzug in Rußland. Ein operativer Überblick', Heinrici, Zitadelle, pt. 3, 603); for an opposing view see Töppel, 'Legendenbildung in der Geschichtsschreibung'.

<sup>15</sup> During the battle for Kharkov, Zeitzler had already pointed out to Manstein that, 'for the Führer the capture of the city is highly desirable on *political* grounds'; H.Gr. Don/Süd, KTB, ii., app., 109, telephone conversation, 7 Mar. 1943, BA-MA RH 19 VI/43.

<sup>16</sup> In this respect, matters stood similarly in the run up to Operation BLUE and during the discussion of withdrawal from Stalingrad and the Caucasus.

<sup>17</sup> See the comments on this in Stahlberg, *Die Verdammte Pflicht*, 277 (6 Feb. 1943).

A typical example was Hitler's rejection of the principle of the 'backhand blow' urged by Army Group South HQ. The basic idea of Manstein's proposal was to evade the Soviet attack on the southern wing anticipated at the end of the muddy season, which would probably be directed mainly against the Donets Basin,<sup>18</sup> 'so as to allow the enemy's attacking armies to advance westwards more or less to the Melitopol–Dnepropetrovsk line. Meanwhile, strong forces would be made ready behind the Army Group's northern wing. They would be used to defeat the anticipated enemy attack and then push south or south-west deep into the flank of the enemy armies advancing through the Donets region towards the lower Dnieper and destroy them on the coast.'<sup>19</sup> The advantage of this type of flexible conduct of operations, which, by freeing the way to the lower Dnieper, actually invited the Red Army to attack, was that it gave Germany the opportunity to launch its own attack at a time when the enemy 'had already largely committed his attacking forces and partially used them up'.<sup>20</sup> Hitler, however, was not prepared to accept the two essential preconditions for the success of the Manstein plan, which probably also had the initial support of the Army General Staff,<sup>21</sup> that is, temporary withdrawal from the Donets region and radical concentration of forces on the southern wing of the eastern front at the expense of all other front sectors and theatres of operations.<sup>22</sup> He based his position first of all on the importance of the area between the Donets and the Dnieper for the war economy, which had been strongly impressed on him once again by Speer and Paul Pleiger at a meeting on 4 February. Both had stated that without 6 to 7 million tonnes of Donets coal per year, 'no increase in armaments is possible'.<sup>23</sup> Secondly, neither Hitler nor the Army General Staff thought it possible to send Army Group South reinforcements in the numbers requested, without regard to other threatened sections of the front, such as Velikiye Luki/Pskov.<sup>24</sup>

However brilliant Manstein's ideas might have appeared from a purely operational viewpoint, Hitler's counter-arguments—given Germany's overall strategic situation and its shortage of defensive forces, plus the almost incalculable multitude of offensive options open to the Allies—were not to be rejected out of hand. Precisely on the eastern front, all the army groups were in a highly precarious situation in terms of strength at the beginning of the muddy period. If, as Foreign

<sup>18</sup> As Manstein acknowledged (*Verlorene Siege*, 477), the Red Army had other offensive options, e.g. in the Orel bulge, in the Kharkov area, or in front of the southern wing of Army Group North; see also 'Der Feldzug in Rußland', pt. 2, ch. 12, 16–17, MGFA, Study MS T-9.

<sup>19</sup> Manstein, *Verlorene Siege*, 480. <sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> 'Der Feldzug in Rußland', pt. 2, ch. 12, 17–18, MGFA, Study MS T-9.

<sup>22</sup> In a telephone conversation with Zeitzler on 8 Mar. 1943, Manstein first asked for no fewer than 16 additional divisions, a request which Zeitzler had laughed off; H.Gr. Süd/Ia, KTB, appendix, *Ferngespräche des OB*, ii. 111, BA-MA RH 19 VI/43. In his written situation analysis on the same day, Manstein still called for at least 14 infantry divisions to be made available by the beginning of May; see Schwarz, *Die Stabilisierung der Ostfront*, 225.

<sup>23</sup> Quoted in Schwarz, *Die Stabilisierung der Ostfront*, 69; see also Gibbons, 'Soviet Industry', 232 ff.

<sup>24</sup> H.Gr. Süd/Ia, KTB, 11 Mar. 1943, 1092 (reverse side), BA-MA RH 19 VI/41. In its 'assessment of the enemy situation facing the German eastern front', 19 Feb., Foreign Armies East had already pointed to the threat of a Soviet offensive in the Velikiye Luki–Pskov area, BA-MA RH 2/2047.

Armies East estimated, the Red Army had on average nearly twice as many men as Germany's eastern army, and three to four times as many cannon and tanks (see Table I.III.1. 'German estimate of relative strength on the eastern front'), then the German army leadership had practically no leeway in regard to the transfer of combat-worthy units, unless it was prepared immediately to expose whole sections

TABLE I.III.1. German estimate of relative strength on the eastern front (status: 1 April 1943)

Front section	German strength <sup>(a)</sup>			Soviet strength <sup>(a)</sup>		
	Reserves	Front-line/ near-front <sup>(b)</sup>		Front-line/ near-front <sup>(c)</sup>	Reserves	Total
Army Group A	—	8 <sup>(d)</sup>	Inf. div.	44	2	46
	—	1	Armoured units	2	7	9
	—	321,800	Troops	388,000	23,500	411,500
	—	43 (35)	Tanks	45	100	145
		581	Cannon	1,749	87	1,836
Army Group South	4 <sup>(e)</sup>	22	Inf. div.	97	43	140
	—	13	Armoured units	51	43	94
	—	548,000	Troops	1,008,000	524,500	1,532,500
	—	887 (389)	Tanks	765	655	1,420
		928	Cannon	3,799	1,815	5,614
Army Group Centre	—	70 ½	Inf. div.	152	10	162
	—	8	Armoured units	56	11	67
	—	1,221,000	Troops	1,429,000	131,000	1,560,000
	—	396 (181)	Tanks	1,210	165	1,375
		2,732	Cannon	6,327	508	6,835
Army Group North	—	42 ½	Inf. div.	115	5	120
	—	—	Armoured units	34	18	52
	—	642,000	Troops	1,166,000	51,000	1,217,500
	—	10 (7)	Tanks	735	165	900
		2,119	Cannon	4,771	172	4,943
Total Eastern Front	—	147	Inf. div.	408	60	504 <sup>(f)</sup>
	—	22	Armoured units	143	79	251 <sup>(g)</sup>
	—	2,732,000	Troops	3,992,000	730,500	5,152,000 <sup>(h)</sup>
	—	1,336 (612)	Tanks	2,755	1,085	6,040 <sup>(i)</sup>
	—	6,360	Cannon	16,646	2,582	20,683 <sup>(j)</sup>

(a) near-front strength = army group reserves; reserves = 'in-depth' reserves, army reserves; (b) figures in brackets = number of combat-ready tanks; (c) The following terms denote:

Inf. div.: German infantry divisions and Soviet rifle divisions

Armoured units: German tank divisions and Soviet tank brigades

Troops: actual strength

Tanks: incl. assault guns

Cannon: artillery;

(d) incl. units stationed in Crimea; (e) undergoing overhaul; (f) incl. 36 rifle divisions, of which the number remaining is unknown; (g) incl. 29 tank units, of which the number remaining is unknown; (h) incl. 429,500 troops, of whom the number remaining is unknown; (i) incl. 400 tanks, of which the number remaining is unknown and 1,800 tanks newly produced or transported to the troops in March 1943; (j) incl. 1,455 cannon, of which the number remaining is unknown.

Source: FHO Ia, 80/43 g.Kdos, 17 Oct. 1943, App. 4b, BA-MA, RH 2/2566.

of the front.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, it was by no means certain that, at the end of the muddy season, the enemy would actually launch the offensive for which Manstein was hoping. In any case, according to Gehlen's department, 'no unequivocally clear picture' could be formed in that respect in February and March.<sup>26</sup> While the Red Army might well conduct two operations simultaneously in the southern and central or northern sectors, it was also conceivable that the Soviet leadership would remain on the defensive until the winter or until the start of a large-scale Allied landing in the west.<sup>27</sup>

Clearly, the controversies within the German leadership about rigid versus flexible defence and the effectiveness of a 'backhand' or 'forehand' offensive, which lasted throughout the first half of 1943, cannot be explained simply by stubbornness and lack of military professionalism on the part of the Wehrmacht's supreme commander. As during the leadership crises of the previous year, the lines were much less clearly drawn. There were, for example, considerable differences of view between the OKW and the OKH about the situation on the eastern front in general and the planned offensive in particular. In accordance with their different remits, the OKW Operations Staff called for the acceleration of defence preparations in western and southern Europe (which, given the shortage of reserves, was possible only at the expense of the eastern army), whereas the Army General Staff was primarily concerned to create an operational reserve in the east for defence against the threatened attacks and for the preparation of its own operations.

In this tug of war, strongly conditioned by departmental interests,<sup>28</sup> Hitler himself stood between the lines. He was inclined to leave the operational centre of gravity in the southern wing of the eastern front for the time being, so as to regain the initiative in one place at least, but he also believed he could not afford to weaken the other threatened fronts of his empire excessively or to make force reductions there at the cost of territorial losses.<sup>29</sup> No doubt Hitler's wish to do the one thing without abandoning the other was unrealistic in the given situation, but it accurately reflected the dictator's need to meet the intrinsically justified but ultimately contradictory demands of his various military operations staffs. Here, perhaps more clearly than ever, the Führer showed himself to be a prisoner of the structures he himself had created. In particular, now that far-reaching operational decisions had to be taken under unfavourable strategic conditions, the absence of a

<sup>25</sup> The best remaining way to achieve a significant saving of forces would have been to abandon entirely the 'Kuban bridgehead' on the Taman peninsula (Army Group A), where 10 German divisions were tied down in a costly war of position. The fact that Hitler shied away from such a step and was prepared to consider only a reduction of the bridgehead (which ultimately did not happen either) should be ascribed primarily to political concern about Turkish neutrality.

<sup>26</sup> FHO/IIa, 'Beurteilung der Feindabsichten vor der deutschen Ostfront im Großen', 22 Feb. 1943, BA-MA RH 3/680.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.; see also Wilhelm, 'Die Prognosen der Abteilung Fremde Heere Ost', 51–2.

<sup>28</sup> See Warlimont, *Im Hauptquartier*, 347, also Zeitzler, statement of position, 17 Feb. 1960, on Ziemke's manuscript 'The German Campaign in Russia, 1942–45', chs. 4 and 5, 2 ff., BA-MA N 63/94.

<sup>29</sup> In this respect Hitler's approval of the 'Buffalo' movement (see *Germany and the Second World War*, vi. 1199) was an exception to the rule.

body of military experts with *overall* responsibility caught up with him. Unlike the Churchill government, which based its decisions on the recommendations of the Chiefs of Staff Committee, Hitler was obliged to take his decisions *alone* and in the midst of conflict between the opposing interests of various military departments. These conflicts of interest grew, and they did not make Hitler's situation any easier—by no means only because of the differing operational views, but also owing to increasingly sharp competition over remits between the Wehrmacht Operations Staff and the Army General Staff,<sup>30</sup> whose chief, Zeitzler, unlike his predecessor Col.-Gen. Franz Halder, enjoyed the unbroken trust of his Führer even after Stalingrad.<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, in the process of reaching a decision Hitler was faced time and again with the consequences of purely personal animosity and rivalry among the top generals.<sup>32</sup> In particular, in Manstein's relations with some of the front commanders subordinate to him or with whom he had to cooperate, there were complications<sup>33</sup> of which Hitler too was aware.<sup>34</sup> Even more troublesome were the dictator's own relations with the generals, about whom, as Goebbels noted with some malice, he 'had nothing positive to say' and whom he accused of 'deceiving him at every opportunity'.<sup>35</sup>

Accusations of this type, by no means entirely unjustified,<sup>36</sup> were nothing new. What distinguished the 'serious crisis of confidence'<sup>37</sup> following Stalingrad from earlier crises of a similar kind was that it was more strongly reciprocal. 'The crux of the matter', the propaganda minister noted with regard to the generals' difficult relations with the Führer, 'is that they do not believe in him'.<sup>38</sup> In substance, this judgement by Goebbels, who was meanwhile himself losing faith 'in Hitler's star and thus in his victory',<sup>39</sup> was not entirely wrong. At all events, reservations about Hitler as a military leader were more widespread after Stalingrad than ever before.

<sup>30</sup> It is significant in this respect that Zeitzler used to leave the daily situation conferences at Führer HQ before Jodl made his report; see also previous note.

<sup>31</sup> See the relevant comments by Goebbels, *Tagebücher*, pt. 2, vii. 180 (23 Jan. 1943) and 502 (9 Mar. 1943).

<sup>32</sup> e.g. the conflict between Guderian and Kluge, which went so far as a challenge to a duel, and Kluge's greatly deteriorated relationship with Model; see Guderian, *Erinnerungen eines Soldaten*, 279; Macksey, *Guderian Panzer General*, 188; Görlitz, *Model*, 120.

<sup>33</sup> e.g. with Kleist, Kluge, and Richthofen; see Stahlberg, *Die verdammte Pflicht*, 303; Richthofen, 'Tagebuch', ii. 137 (10 Mar. 1943), BA-MA N 671/10. In the difficult weeks after the failure of Operation CITADEL, the conflict between Kluge and Manstein became even sharper, as the latter openly accused Second Army HQ, which belonged to Kluge's army group, of executing the evasion manoeuvre 'too quickly', and thus of responsibility for the crisis that had arisen at the interface of the two army groups; see letter from Chef des GenSt. der H.Gr. Mitte to AOK 2, 22 Dec. 1943, Moscow Special Archive, f. 1275/op. 2/d.380.

<sup>34</sup> See accounts by Stahlberg, *Die verdammte Pflicht*, 305–6, and Richthofen, 'Tagebuch', ii. 137 (10 Mar. 1943), BA-MA N 671/10, 117 and 137.

<sup>35</sup> Goebbels, *Tagebücher*, pt. 2, vii. 503 (9 Mar. 1943); see also 514.

<sup>36</sup> There comes to mind in this connection the 'OKH position' of restraint with respect to a troop build-up recommended to the Army General Staff without Hitler's knowledge; see *Hitlers Lagebesprechungen*, 189 (ca. mid-March 1943). To what extent this concerns 'Führer Order No. 8', 5 Mar. 1943, drawn up by the operations department with reference to Hitler's recommended 'reserve positions', must remain an open question, BA-MA RW 4/v. 708.

<sup>37</sup> Goebbels, *Tagebücher*, pt. 2, vii. 453 (2 Mar. 1943).

<sup>38</sup> Ibid. 176. <sup>39</sup> Thus Speer, *Erinnerungen*, 271.

While none of the front commanders, and scarcely any other generals, saw this as sufficient reason to yield to the increasing attempts at recruitment by the military resistance circle,<sup>40</sup> the view was widespread that it was time to relieve Hitler of his military functions, which were hardly manageable any longer, and return to the principle of overall operational responsibility based on professional criteria. The main idea put forward by Manstein and others was to replace Keitel<sup>41</sup> by a chief of the Wehrmacht General Staff endowed with extensive full powers and responsible for conducting the war autonomously in the framework of general instructions from Hitler.<sup>42</sup> However overdue reform of the Wehrmacht top leadership might have been, it is hardly surprising that all efforts to convince the dictator himself of its necessity literally fell on deaf ears.<sup>43</sup> Quite apart from the resistance to such reform that was to be expected from individual components of the Wehrmacht, Hitler continued to see the liquidation of a unified Wehrmacht leadership as a major achievement and 'a considerable facilitation' of his political leadership role.<sup>44</sup>

The increased personal and institutional friction within the German leadership after the defeat at Stalingrad strengthened Hitler's existing inclination to take fundamental decisions on the basis of intuition rather than planned preparation. That in no way excluded prior consultation in a small circle—in this case, with Zeitzler in particular—but it shielded the dictator to some extent from all the information, objections, and demands with which 'the military leaders made the Führer [...] somewhat apprehensive'.<sup>45</sup> It was no accident that, during his recurrent visits to the supreme commanders of the army groups and armies, Hitler avoided any serious discussion of operational plans beyond the day ahead.<sup>46</sup> Instead of which, on 13 March 1943, only two days after his last visit to Manstein's headquarters, there appeared a Führer order prepared by the operations department of the Army General Staff, entitled Operations Order No. 5, 'on the conduct of combat operations in the coming months'.<sup>47</sup> According to that order, the purpose of the forthcoming operations was to 'lay down the law on at least one section of the front' by means of a pincer attack on the Kursk salient—after the end of the muddy

<sup>40</sup> Mention should be made, *inter alia*, of Carl Friedrich Goerdeler's visits to Kluge (late autumn of 1942) and Guderian (Apr. 1943), and of Claus Schenk von Stauffenberg's visit to Manstein (late Jan. 1943); see Guderian, *Erinnerungen eines Soldaten*, 272–3; Stahlberg, *Die verdammt Pflicht*, 262 ff.; and Aretin, 'Henning von Tresckow', 301.

<sup>41</sup> According to Goebbels (*Tagebücher*, pt. 2, vii. 507, 9 Mar. 1943), Keitel was 'not exactly in the Führer's good books' and was clearly considered 'totally useless and not to be taken seriously' (453, 2 Mar. 1943).

<sup>42</sup> See Manstein, *Verlorene Siege*, 437–8; Stahlberg, *Die verdammt Pflicht*, 278–9; Guderian, *Erinnerungen eines Soldaten*, 266–7.

<sup>43</sup> See Manstein, *Verlorene Siege*, and Schwarz, *Die Stabilisierung der Ostfront*, 49 and 70.

<sup>44</sup> File note by Rudolf Brandt (secretary of the Reich Leader SS) on a remark by the Führer to Himmler, 7 Sept. 1943, NA, Serie T-175/roll 88/... 1418).

<sup>45</sup> Goebbels, *Tagebücher*, pt. 2, vii. 166–7 (23 Jan. 1943).

<sup>46</sup> Thus Stahlberg, *Die verdammt Pflicht*, 301 and 320. Stahlberg's account is confirmed by the minutes of Hitler's visits to Army Group South on 18 Feb. and 10 Mar. 1943 (repr. in Schwarz, *Die Stabilisierung der Ostfront*, 254 ff. and 259 ff.), insofar as they too make no mention of medium- and long-term considerations.

<sup>47</sup> Repr. in Klink, *Das Gesetz des Handelns*, 277–8 (App. I, 1), from which the following quotations are taken, unless otherwise stated.

season, but if possible before the beginning of the new Soviet offensive—and then let the enemy ‘run up and bleed to death’ against a suitably expanded and strengthened German front.<sup>48</sup> In preparation for the attack, the immediate build-up of a strong armoured army on the northern wing of Army Group South was ordered, together with a corresponding offensive regrouping of Army Group Centre in the area of Second Armoured Army. The necessary forces would consist of troops obtained by reducing the Gothic head (Army Group A) and units freed by the ‘Buffalo’ movement,<sup>49</sup> which was still under way.<sup>50</sup> It was hoped that this two-pronged attack, northwards from the area of Kharkov and southwards from the Orel area, would result in the destruction of the Soviet forces arrayed against Second Army.

The idea behind what was to become Operation CITADEL, outlined in Operations Order No. 5, actually had a great deal going for it. The planned encirclement of the Kursk salient, which protruded westwards like a balcony some 120 kilometres deep and around 200 kilometres wide, promised—in addition to the destruction of the enemy units deployed there in preparation for the Soviet offensive—above all a shortening of Germany’s own front line by a good 240 kilometres. Perhaps even more important was that the Red Army would lose suitable positions for launching attacks on the flanks of the two German army groups, which would make an advance towards the Dnieper in the south and the Orel bulge in the north considerably more difficult.<sup>51</sup>

Given its obvious advantages, it is not surprising that the concept of Operation CITADEL, although it superseded alternative concepts under consideration in Army Group South HQ and elsewhere,<sup>52</sup> was at first welcomed by all the staffs involved as very promising, or at least not called into question by any of them.<sup>53</sup> Confident in the momentum gained by his own operations, but also concerned about his army group’s exposed northern flank, Manstein even argued for an immediate move against Kursk. At the beginning of March he had already instructed Fourth Armoured Army HQ (Col.-Gen. Hermann Hoth) that the Donets bridges taken undamaged must be held without fail with a view to a further operation,<sup>54</sup> and in the following weeks he lobbied for rapid exploitation of his army group’s mounting successes.<sup>55</sup>

<sup>48</sup> Only a further operation against Leningrad was envisaged ‘in the second half of the summer’ (meaning from the beginning of July), but that operation, intended mainly to keep the Finns happy, was abandoned in the light of subsequent developments. On this see the various planning documents in BA-MA RH 2/454 and 455. Ganzenmüller, *Das belagerte Leningrad*, 81–2, mentions these plans only in passing, and Glantz’s systematic descriptions of operations, *The Battle for Leningrad*, sheds light almost exclusively on the Soviet side.

<sup>49</sup> On the ‘Buffalo’ movement, i.e. the withdrawal of Fourth and Ninth Armies to the Kirov–Velizh shortened defensive line, see *Germany and the Second World War*, vi. 1199.

<sup>50</sup> In addition, orders were given to transfer several infantry divisions (15th, 38th, and 257th) from the west, as well as sections of Brandenburg Special Unit; see Klink, *Das Gesetz des Handelns*, 60.

<sup>51</sup> See also ‘Der Feldzug in Rußland’, pt. 2, ch. 12, 21–2, MGFA, Study MS T-9.

<sup>52</sup> For details see Klink, *Das Gesetz des Handelns*, 60.

<sup>53</sup> Guderian, *Erinnerungen eines Soldaten*, 282, speaks of the planned pincer attack quite self-evidently as a ‘Zeitzler plan’.

<sup>54</sup> H.Gr. Süd/Ia, app. to KTB, Ferngespräche OB, ii. 103 (1 Mar. 1943), BA-MA R 19 VI/43.

<sup>55</sup> *Germany and the Second World War*, vi. 1184–93.

'The Russians are no longer capable of much on our left flank or on the right flank of Army Group Centre', he reported to Zeitzler on 18 March. 'I believe Army Group Centre could take Kursk now without any problems.'<sup>56</sup>

If Manstein did not succeed in imposing his idea of an immediate operation against Kursk, it was not only because of the onset of the spring mud and—as Manstein saw it—the excessive passivity of Second Army and Second Armoured Army under Kluge's responsibility, but also, and above all, because of Hitler's disapproval. Concerned that the offensive army being assembled in the Kharkov area could be attacked in the rear in a push towards the south-east, Hitler now argued for the rapid establishment of a shortened defensive line from Chuguyev (south of Belgorod) to Izyum—an operation to which Manstein was prepared to agree only if security on the northern flank of his army group, where he considered there was a greater danger of enemy breakthrough, was guaranteed by units from Army Group Centre.<sup>57</sup>

Hitler, however, had already taken his decision. On 21 March he instructed Army Group South HQ to stop the intended operation in the direction of Kursk and prepare an operation towards the south-east.<sup>58</sup> The objective, as specified the following day in an addendum to Operations Order No. 5, was 'to gain a shortened Lisichansk–Kupyansk–Volchansk defensive line<sup>59</sup> and thereby secure the necessary freedom in the rear for the subsequent offensive in the direction of Kursk [i.e. Operation CITADEL].'<sup>60</sup>

The new instruction formed the basis for Operation HAWK, executed in the following weeks by Army Group South, and for a further offensive reaching further southwards, code-named PANTHER. Neither of these operations, which we shall not describe in detail here,<sup>61</sup> had an independent operational objective. They were both conceived only as preparations for CITADEL. Although they were perfectly defensible as such, they were abandoned at the end of the second week in April, and preparations for PANTHER were continued solely for the purposes of deception. It had proved impossible to make the necessary attacking forces available in time without compromising the ongoing rehabilitation. Not least of all, the decision to call off these operations was a long-overdue concession to the condition of the troops.<sup>62</sup> The relevant HQs (Army Detachment Kempf, Fourth Armoured Army) were now warning insistently against overtaxing the men. On 21 March (the day on which Zeitzler had notified Army Group South of Hitler's decision to attack across the Donets towards the east) Col.-Gen. Hoth had already informed his army group HQ that:

<sup>56</sup> Telephone conversation with Zeitzler, 18 Mar. 1943, H.Gr. Süd/Ia, app. to KTB, *Ferngespräche OB*, ii. 115 (1 Mar. 1943), BA-MA R 19 VI/43.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid. 117 (telephone conversation with Zeitzler, 31 Mar. 1943, 11.28 a.m.)

<sup>58</sup> Ibid. 118 (telephone conversation with Zeitzler, 21 Mar. 1943, 5.45 p.m.)

<sup>59</sup> In this Hitler went far beyond the Chuguyev–Izyum line he had targeted only a few days earlier!

<sup>60</sup> Addendum No. 1 to Operations Order No. 5, 22 Mar. 1943, repr. in Klink, *Das Gesetz des Handelns*, 279 (App. I, 2).

<sup>61</sup> For detailed descriptions see Klink, *Das Gesetz des Handelns*, 63 ff., and Ziemke, *Stalingrad*, 126 ff.

<sup>62</sup> According to Karl Adolf Hollidt, the average strength of his divisions on 11 Mar. 1943 was 2,000 to 2,500 men; H.Gr. Süd/Ia, KTB, 11 Mar. 1943, 1090 (reverse side), BA-MA RH 19 VI/41.

the troops, who have been in battle night and day for months without any rest, are under great strain. The latest Führer order, among other things, led them to believe there will now be a period of respite. It would be a severe disappointment for the troops if, having settled as best they can in their present positions, they now had to go into action again. A series of reports from troop commanders known to be 'daredevils' make it clear that the troops are in part apathetic, and only managed to reach the objective—the Donets—under extreme pressure from their officers. The vehicle situation was bad enough before the start of the counter-offensive, and stocks are now even lower. In the event of renewed deployment without a break, armoured divisions like the 11th and 17th, for example, as well as the Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler armoured division, would suffer so badly that in-field rehabilitation, as currently intended, would no longer be possible.<sup>63</sup>

## 2. THE CONFLICT OVER THE TIMING OF THE ATTACK

The cancellation of Operations HAWK and PANTHER would, one might have thought, have speeded up rehabilitation and deployment of the units intended for CITADEL and made possible an early start to the main operation. All parties in principle agreed that the choice of the right moment would be crucial for the success of the offensive. The weaker side—as was known at least since Clausewitz<sup>64</sup>—could gain the upper hand only by means of surprise. In the case at hand, however, surprise could only be temporal, not spatial. The benefits to be expected from an attack on the Kursk salient were so obvious, and the geographical situation of the bulge so inviting, that there were no grounds for hope that the target of the German offensive could come as a surprise to the Soviet leadership.<sup>65</sup> On the other hand, it did not seem unreasonable to suppose that an early attack, as soon as possible after the spring mud had dried, could succeed against an enemy who had not yet completed the rehabilitation of his forces and was not fully prepared for defence.<sup>66</sup>

On the basis of such considerations, the Army General Staff operations division was still assuming in March that it would launch CITADEL in the second half of April 1943.<sup>67</sup> This time frame, however, soon proved illusory. On 22 March Army Group South HQ reported that the required armoured army could be made ready in the envisaged assembly areas by mid-April as ordered, but that, because of the

<sup>63</sup> Response by C-in-C Fourth Armoured Army, 21 Mar. 1943, to an inquiry from C-in-C Army Group South, repr. in Schwarz, *Die Stabilisierung der Ostfront*, 285 (App. F).

<sup>64</sup> Clausewitz, *Vom Kriege*, 209 ff.

<sup>65</sup> So too Zeitzler, 'Abwehrschlachten', 60, BA-MA N 63/80. That the German plans were indeed no surprise for the enemy can be seen from a report by Zhukov to Stavka, 8 Apr. 1943; on this, see Shtemenko, *The Soviet General Staff at War*, i. 216–17, and Andronikov, 'Gitlerovski "fakel"', 2–3.

<sup>66</sup> See 'Der Angriff "Zitadelle" im Osten 1943', MGFA, Study T-26, 10.

<sup>67</sup> As late as 16 March 1943, Count Johann Adolf von Kielmansegg, then Ia of the Army General Staff operations division, refers in his daily schedule to 'the April operation' (doc. in private hands).

need to rehabilitate of the divisions, the army would ‘nevertheless not be operational before the beginning to middle of May’.<sup>68</sup>

The problems were even greater in the north, in the area of Col.-Gen. Walter Model’s Ninth Army, where the necessary deployment preparations were much more extensive than in the case of Manstein’s army group. Among other things, ten of the divisions released in the course of the ‘Buffalo’ movement still had to be transferred to the Orel bulge. Rail transport was needed for a total of around 300,000 troops and 1,000 tanks and assault guns, all of which had to be transferred to the northern deployment area in the shortest possible time and with maximum secrecy.<sup>69</sup>

In the opinion of the general in charge of transportation for Army Group Centre, the railway could not meet that requirement by the originally envisaged date of the attack, if only because of the limited handling capacity of the goods terminals.<sup>70</sup> In addition, there were delays due to increasing partisan activity precisely in the area of Army Group Centre.<sup>71</sup> In the period from February to June, the monthly figure for that area (with a marked upward trend) was 400 to 840 disruptions of the rail network by partisan attacks, in addition to 100 to 150 air raids per month.<sup>72</sup> Some of these attacks had very serious consequences. In March, for example, transports of Ninth Army troops between Minsk and Bryansk were interrupted for periods of five and nine days after a partisan band succeeded in blowing up two bridges over the Desna.<sup>73</sup>

In mid-April a new operations order set the earliest date for the attack at 3 May,<sup>74</sup> but because of all the above-mentioned factors—and others, including weather conditions—that date was unrealistic from the outset. Above all, Model, the commander-in-chief of Ninth Army, kept repeating, with increasing insistence, that his forces were insufficient, both numerically and in terms of mobility and training, to achieve the desired rapid breakthrough.<sup>75</sup> Nonetheless, it is questionable

<sup>68</sup> H.Gr. Süd/Ia to GenStdH/Op.Abt., 22. Mar. 1943, quoted in Klink, *Das Gesetz des Handelns*, 282 (App. I, 3).

<sup>69</sup> For details, see Gläser, ‘Die Schlacht um Kursk’, 36–7.

<sup>70</sup> Teske, ‘Die Bedeutung der Eisenbahn’, 125. In its report to the Army General Staff operations department, 24 Mar. 1943 (repr. in Klink, *Das Gesetz des Handelns*, 284–6, App. I, 4), Army Group Centre HQ still assumed it would be able to complete deployment ‘by around 1 May’.

<sup>71</sup> For details of the consequences, see Klink, *Das Gesetz des Handelns*, 127 ff., and, on the situation in Army Zone Centre, Mulligan, ‘Reckoning the Cost’.

<sup>72</sup> Teske, ‘Die Bedeutung des Eisenbahntransportwesens’, MGFA, Study D-369, 13. From July the number of partisan attacks rose to well over 1,000 per month. Given this development, the OKW Operations Staff, in a ‘report on the partisan situation in April–June 1943’, first reached the sobering conclusion that ‘pacification of the eastern area cannot be expected from our further measures’; *KTB OKW*, iii. 775 (13 July 1943).

<sup>73</sup> Teske, ‘Die Bedeutung der Eisenbahn’, 126. Whether or not the attacks in question are to be attributed to Soviet knowledge of the German deployment plans is a question that cannot be answered here with certainty. On this and subsequent cases, see also Klink, *Das Gesetz des Handelns*, 128–9.

<sup>74</sup> GenStdH/Op.Abt., Operations Order No. 6, 15 Apr. 1943, repr. in Klink, *Das Gesetz des Handelns*, 292 ff. (App. I, 6), here 293.

<sup>75</sup> In the last week of April, AOK 9 still classified only one of its 10 infantry and 6 armoured divisions as ‘fit for any offensive task’; for details, see Klink, *Das Gesetz des Handelns*, 110 ff., here esp. 113–14.

whether Model would have succeeded in imposing his views if he had not had the opportunity to put them to Hitler personally on 27 April. Clearly impressed by Model's arguments, Hitler decided to postpone CITADEL by two days, and then by a further four, until 9 May.<sup>76</sup>

The original hope of a swift victory by surprise over an unprepared enemy was thus undermined at an early stage, much to the chagrin of the Army General Staff operations division,<sup>77</sup> for reasons that had little to do with Hitler himself. Not least important in this respect was the realization, which was gaining ground from week to week, that 'the enemy has recognized the German preparations for an attack and has adopted a defensive position in line with his overall strategy', as Army Group Centre's enemy intelligence department had already suspected on 17 April,<sup>78</sup> and Foreign Armies East conjectured two weeks later in the light of 'new information, partly from a reliable source'. In this connection, Gehlen's department pointed to the 'rehabilitation of Red Army units that have been withdrawn in depth, which has been under way since March', and to the ongoing deployment of new forces opposite the northern wing of Army Group South and the southern wing of Army Group Centre. The German forces thus had to reckon with a constant increase in enemy numbers and combat strength and an even higher level of defensive preparation against possible German attacks than already existed.<sup>79</sup> According to Foreign Armies East, however, none of this meant that Germany should abandon its own offensive intentions, but only that 'the enemy is for the time being waiting to achieve his offensive objectives by means of a counter-thrust, using the reserves he is holding back'.<sup>80</sup>

In their assumption that the Red Army might have adopted the very principle of the backhand blow for which Manstein had been arguing so insistently and unsuccessfully on the German side, Gehlen's department was not far off the mark. Although the final Soviet plan of operations for the defence of the Kursk salient was not adopted officially until the beginning of June, an important preliminary decision was taken at a meeting of Stavka on 12 April, three weeks

<sup>76</sup> Ibid. 114 ff.

<sup>77</sup> See Kielmansegg, 'Bemerkungen eines Zeitzeugen', 143 ff. The fact that the OKH was pushing for acceleration of the preparations for attack is also confirmed by Weichs, 'Tagenotizen', pt. 2, fo. 143, 17 Apr. 1943, BA-MA N 19/15.

<sup>78</sup> H.Gr. Mitte/Ic, 'Befehl über die Durchführung von T-Maßnahmen für das Unternehmen "Zitadell"', 17 Apr. 1943, CAMO Podolsk, Fond 500/op. 12 454/d. 648.

<sup>79</sup> Precisely that point had been made by AOK 9's enemy intelligence department (code-named 'Gruppe Weiss') in an assessment of the enemy dated 25 Apr. 1943, which drew particular attention to the enemy's 'deep, extensively developed defensive line, [...] numerically strong artillery, strong tank defences, and strong mobile reserves'; see *ibid.*

<sup>80</sup> FHO (I, IIa), 'Assessment of enemy situation opposite the north wing of Army Group South and the south wing of Army Group Centre', 2 May 1943, BA-MA RH 2/2047. Richthofen's situation assessment deviates from the picture painted here in that he considered the enemy forces assembled at the Kursk salient front ('300,000 to 400,000 men in all') sufficient 'neither for an attack to the west or south, nor for defence against a pincer attack by strong German forces from north to south'. Nevertheless, he too thought successful destruction of the enemy forces 'questionable', since the Soviet blocking positions could hold back a German attack long enough to enable the enemy to retreat; see Chief of Air Fleet 4, 'Assessment of situation facing Air Fleet 4', 1 May 1943, BA-MA N 671/10, 118–25.

before the situation assessment by Gehlen which we have just quoted. In line with a proposal by Georgii Zhukov,<sup>81</sup> the idea of the Soviet side launching an attack of its own as quickly as possible was set aside in favour of warding off the anticipated offensive by the German enemy deployed to the north and south of Kursk, and then destroying his exhausted and decimated forces in a counter-attack supported by fresh reserves. Only then should the main thrust in the direction of Kharkov, Poltava, and Kiev begin.<sup>82</sup>

Celebrated by Soviet military history for decades as an example of superior art of war, it was only half a century after the end of the war that the Stavka decision was caught in a crossfire of criticism from a new revisionist-oriented Russian historiography.<sup>83</sup> The new studies pointed out, among other things, that the Soviet units located in the Kursk salient facing the German troops assembled in the same area had already achieved a numerical superiority of 1.8 to 1 in the first ten days of April.<sup>84</sup> Assuming that this balance of forces (which can only be conditionally verified) is by and large correct, it only confirms Model's doubts about the potential effectiveness of Operation CITADEL.

Clearly, Hitler had entertained very similar doubts even before his discussion with Model. At any rate, on 18 April he had ordered the preparation of a possible alternative operation based on the idea of carrying out, instead of the planned pincer attack, a concentrated frontal attack on Kursk from the west—from the area of Second Army (the Rylsk area)—with the intention of splitting the enemy forces assembled in the salient.<sup>85</sup> Whether this proposal, based on the hope of avoiding the enemy's most strongly fortified section of the front and breaking through at a relatively weak point, was really so wrong-headed as some commentators considered it<sup>86</sup> is a question that cannot be reliably settled here. It is worth noting, however, that Zeitzler, who flew to the Berghof two days later to talk the Führer out of his 'remarkable variant',<sup>87</sup> wildly exaggerated the logistic difficulties that would be involved in its preparation,<sup>88</sup> and thereby succeeded in changing the mind of a dictator hardly conversant with such matters.

<sup>81</sup> On Zhukov's position statement of 8 Apr. 1943, see also Gurkin, 'Dokumenty i materialy', and Glantz, *The Role of Intelligence*, 92 ff.

<sup>82</sup> See Zhukov, *Erinnerungen*, 423–9; Shtemenko, *The Soviet General Staff at War*, i. 216 ff., and Andronikov, 'Gitlerovski "fakel"', 2–4.

<sup>83</sup> See, above all, Sokolov, 'The Battle for Kursk'.

<sup>84</sup> According to the same source, Soviet superiority at that time was 3.2 to 1 in artillery and 1.3 to 1 in tanks and assault guns. Only the ratio of aircraft numbers was less clear, but was probably more or less even (see *ibid.* 76). The crux of Sokolov's argument is that an earlier Soviet offensive 'on the forehand' in the summer of 1943 would probably have been more successful and, above all, less costly in terms of losses.

<sup>85</sup> *KTB OKW*, iii. 750 (5 July 1943). Zeitzler ('Abwehrschlachten', unpubl. manuscript, BA-MA N 63/80, 66 ff.) and all subsequent authors, with the exception of Irving (*Hitler's War*, 513 and the corresponding footnote), dated this measure of Hitler's incorrectly to the end of May and, already for that reason, considered it not feasible in terms of time.

<sup>86</sup> Thus, e.g., Weichs, 'Tagesnotizen', pt. 2, fo. 145 (19 Apr. 1943), BA-MA N 19/15.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>88</sup> Zeitzler, 'Abwehrschlachten', unpubl. manuscript, 67–8, BA-MA N 63/80. In fact, the transport chief of Army Group Centre reported on 19 Apr. 1943 that, given good loading performances on the

The Chief of the Army General Staff's claim that he proposed 'completely abandoning' CITADEL at that meeting<sup>89</sup> seems highly unlikely, given that in the following weeks Zeitzler continued to speak very decidedly in favour of the offensive. He had a further opportunity to demonstrate his position on 4 May, when Hitler, provoked by Ninth Army HQ's repeated requests for postponement, convened a meeting of commanders-in-chief and chiefs of general staffs in Munich. There, at the latest, it became apparent that views as to the most effective timing for CITADEL differed among the professional military too. Insofar as it is at all possible to reconstruct those views from the partially divergent recollections of the generals who were present,<sup>90</sup> it was only Zeitzler and Kluge who, invoking the daily growing strength of the adversary and the danger of a Russian preventive strike, spoke vehemently against any postponement of the German offensive. The chief of the Army General Staff thought the attack should start 'in the last days of May or at the beginning of June at the latest'.<sup>91</sup> Manstein, on the other hand, appears to have been less unequivocal,<sup>92</sup> while Heinz Guderian, the inspector-general of armoured troops, concerned about premature wear and tear on the new tank weaponry under construction, was sceptical about the planned offensive in general, and at least about its timing and the forces assigned to it.<sup>93</sup>

Paradoxically, it was precisely the arrival of new tank weaponry announced by Guderian for May and June which ultimately persuaded the Führer to postpone the attack, in the first instance to 12 June. Technical and organizational problems in the extremely tight tank-production process led to a further postponement in the first week of June, when the attack was provisionally set for 20 June. Immediately before that date it was again postponed to 3 July, and on 25 June it was finally scheduled for 5 July.<sup>94</sup>

relevant stretch of railway, Ninth Army could be assembled in the new deployment zone in eight to ten days; see Teske, 'Die Bedeutung der Eisenbahn', 126.

<sup>89</sup> Zeitzler, 'Abwehrschlachten', unpubl. manuscript, 67–8, BA-MA N 63/80, 68.

<sup>90</sup> In addition to the chiefs of the army and Luftwaffe general staffs, the meeting of 4 May 1943 was attended by Manstein, Kluge (and his deputy), Guderian, Schmundt, and Scherff (appointed by Hitler to compile the history of the war), but not, as Guderian wrongly asserts, Speer and Thomale; Model, who was also absent, had presented his arguments in writing. In addition to Manstein, *Verlorene Siege*, 488–9, and Guderian, *Erinnerungen eines Soldaten*, 276 ff., the following evaluation of the sources draws mainly on Zeitzler's unpublished documents ('Abwehrschlachten', unpubl. manuscript, 67–8, BA-MA N 63/80, 63 ff.) and statements (esp. on Ziemke, 'Stalingrad', BA-MA N 63/94), as well as the opinions collected in Study P-114c, pt. 5, app. 16.

<sup>91</sup> Zeitzler, 'Abwehrschlachten', unpubl. manuscript, 67–8, BA-MA N 63/80, 64.

<sup>92</sup> See the contradictory testimonies in Study P-114c, pt. 5, app. 16. In a letter dated 16 June 1958, Zeitzler wrote: 'It is possible that he [Manstein] voiced certain misgivings [...], but he did not combat the postponement' (*ibid.* 44).

<sup>93</sup> See also the contradictory accounts by Guderian, *Erinnerungen eines Soldaten*, 278 ff., who claims to have fundamentally rejected the offensive, and Zeitzler, who, in a statement of position dated 17 Feb. 1960 (on Ziemke's manuscript 'The German Campaign in Russia', 1942–45, chs. 4 and 5, BA-MA N 63/94) wrote explicitly: 'Guderian did not reject CITADEL. He wanted the disastrous postponement in order to be able to deploy even more tanks' (9).

<sup>94</sup> KTB OKW, iii. 749–50 (5 July 1943); for further details, see Klink, *Das Gesetz des Handelns*, 142 ff.

It was not, however, technological euphoria alone which determined Hitler's repeated postponement of the offensive. His exaggerated hopes in the superiority of the new generation of German tanks and assault guns<sup>95</sup> should rather be understood as a typical reaction on his part to the great uncertainties with which he was confronted. Above all, the now clearly foreseeable collapse of the German–Italian position in North Africa augured military and political dangers with regard to further developments in the Mediterranean for which Hitler believed he had to keep forces in reserve.<sup>96</sup> He was all the more reluctant to commit those reserves prematurely to the Kursk offensive as it was now becoming clear, contrary to initial expectations, that CITADEL would be a major battle and would take up a great deal of time and material. Faced with that prospect, the Führer, as he admitted to Goebbels a few days after the general discussion of 4 May, was 'inclined to wait and see whether the Bolsheviks move against us. We would then have an even better chance than if we take the initiative'.<sup>97</sup> The prospect that German offensive strength would be improved in the meantime by the supply of new weapons to the front fitted seamlessly into the dictator's strategic considerations.

During the tortuously long weeks of May and June, marked by repeated delays, disagreement in the military agencies and staffs involved as to the viability of Operation CITADEL grew more intense. Against a background of increasingly alarming assessments of the enemy situation by Foreign Armies East,<sup>98</sup> scepticism about the ultimate decisive success of the operation also increased in the Army General Staff. In June, Gehlen's department already calculated that, unless the enemy undertook major relief offensives in other sections of the front, a German attack in the Kursk area could expect to encounter enemy forces of no fewer than 138 rifle divisions, 64 armoured brigades, and a total of over 2,350 tanks.<sup>99</sup> Barely three weeks later, on the eve of the attack, Gehlen came to the conclusion that the operation could 'no longer be justified on any grounds', since both essential preconditions—numerical superiority at the decisive point, and the element of surprise—were no longer met:

<sup>95</sup> Hitler already made no secret of his euphoria about the new weaponry during his visits to Zaporozhye in February and March, when he had promised Army Group South that it would receive—if not as many divisions as it wished—tanks and anti-tank weapons 'preferentially, and the best there are', H.Gr. Süd/Ia, KTB, 11 Mar. 1943, 1091–2 (reverse side), BA-MA RH VI/41. In this connection see the rapturous exclamations of Goebbels, *Die Tagebücher*, pt. 2, vii. 174 (23 Jan. 1943), and viii. 531–2 (25 June 1943).

<sup>96</sup> See the chapters by Schreiber in the present volume.

<sup>97</sup> Goebbels, *Die Tagebücher*, pt. 2, viii. 225 (7 May 1943). In view of this and other testimony (FHO, I, II a, 'Beurteilung der Feindlage vor dem Nordflügel der Heeresgruppe Süd und dem Südflügel der Heeresgruppe Mitte', 2 May 1943, BA-MA RH 2/2047; position statement bearing Gehlen's signature, 4 July 1943, BA-MA RH 2/2586), Seaton's view that 'Hitler and the German High Command had little idea that the Soviet enemy was by then almost ready to assume the offensive' (Seaton, *The Russo-German War*, 367) seems unsustainable. In fact Stalin was also repeatedly toying with the idea of a pre-emptive strike; see Glantz, *The Role of Intelligence*, 95 ff.

<sup>98</sup> For details, see Klink, *Das Gesetz des Handelns*, 194 ff.

<sup>99</sup> FHO (I), 'Statistische Aufstellung', 15 June 1943, BA-MA RH 2/2089, fo. 97. That assessment, however, by no means covered all the large Soviet units; see Glantz, 'Soviet Operational Intelligence', 72.

The Russians have been expecting our attack in the relevant sections of the front for weeks and have done everything, with characteristic energy, to absorb it at an early stage both by building several successive defensive positions and by an appropriate deployment of forces. There is therefore little likelihood of a German breakthrough. Nor can it be expected, given the quantity of reserves at the Russians' disposal, that CITADEL will inflict such great losses on them as to prevent them from pursuing their general intentions at the desired time owing to insufficient numbers. On the German side, the reserves which will be sorely needed at a later stage in view of the overall position (situation in the Mediterranean!) would be deployed and used up. I consider the envisaged operation a critical error of the highest order that will have very serious consequences.<sup>100</sup>

It is no longer possible to ascertain whether the chief of the Army General Staff, who must have shared this concern, or at least tended to do so,<sup>101</sup> warned Hitler against the offensive in similarly unequivocal terms, but it seems doubtful, given that he still considered a starting date viable up to the beginning of June. Despite all the delays, however, the commanders-in-chief of both army groups involved did not advise Hitler against proceeding with the operation—which, as Manstein later admitted, ‘might have been a mistake’.<sup>102</sup> Rather, Army Group South HQ remained to the last ‘convinced that our attack would be difficult but ultimately successful’.<sup>103</sup>

Army Group Centre HQ also continued to argue in favour of proceeding with CITADEL even when it was clear that it could not be launched until the beginning of July.<sup>104</sup> Since a Russian offensive could not be avoided anyway, the CITADEL attack, with the distribution of forces now decided, was ‘in my opinion still the best’ of all conceivable options. ‘It forces the enemy into our pincer attack. The attack itself will and must be carried out swiftly, thanks to the armoured strength of both army groups. Its impact will hold all the Russian forces spellbound, including those north of the Orel, and lead to a great success. That is the decisive consideration.’<sup>105</sup>

Admittedly, the preconditions for success were a rapid start to the offensive, actual supply of all the tank and air forces conceivable for the purpose, as well as provision of the manpower and material replacements needed to sustain the battle, which, in view of the massive forces assembled on both sides, would ‘be long and particularly arduous, and demand corresponding sacrifices’. If these preconditions were not met, then in Kluge’s view the only remaining option was a purely defensive operation, which must then, however, ‘under no circumstances

<sup>100</sup> Position statement bearing Gehlen’s signature, 4 July 1943, BA-MA RH 2/2586. At the top edge of this wholly informal document (without departmental heading or file reference) there is a (contemporaneous?) marginal comment by Gehlen: ‘I have informed the chief of the General Staff of my opinion. Outwardly, the Führer’s view must be put forward.’

<sup>101</sup> This is stressed at least by Zeitzler himself (*‘Abwehrschlachten’*, unpubl. manuscript, BA MA N 63/80, 65 and 68) and by Kielmansegg, ‘Bemerkungen eines Zeitzeugen’, 145.

<sup>102</sup> Manstein, *Verlorene Siege*, 494. <sup>103</sup> Ibid. 495.

<sup>104</sup> H.Gr. Mitte, Ic/A.O., 18 June 1943, CAMO Podolsk, Fond 500/op. 12 454/d. 648.

<sup>105</sup> OB H.Gr. Mitte to Chef des GenStdH, 18 June 1943 ‘with the request that it be submitted to the Führer’, 2–3, H.Gr. Mitte, Ic/A.O., 18 June 1943, CAMO Podolsk, Fond 500/op. 12 454/d. 648.

be interrupted by a demand for an offensive that would not be feasible in that scenario'.<sup>106</sup> In their situation assessments of 20 June, Ninth Army and Fourth Armoured Army HQs agreed with Kluge in arguing for execution of the German forces' own offensive without waiting any longer for the enemy to attack.<sup>107</sup>

Hitler was thus by no means alone in his views on the timing and deployment of forces for the planned offensive. At any event, as regards disagreement on the part of the military, which was increasing as a result of the repeated delays, he was more a victim than an initiator. As an untrained autodidact only partly capable of weighing up the frequently contradictory demands of the relevant operations staffs for a rapid start to the offensive on the one hand, and a massive build-up of forces on the other, the Führer displayed throughout those weeks considerable uncertainty, which, as so often in the past, he sometimes tried to overcome by stubbornness. As Officer Ia in the operations department of the Army General Staff complained, 'things are just muddling along until the worst is over. Why is there still a chief of the Army General Staff anyway? Don't ask me.'<sup>108</sup>

Hitler was torn this way and that. As he admitted to Guderian: 'Whenever I think of this attack my stomach turns over.'<sup>109</sup> Meanwhile, things had taken on a dynamic of their own. The absence of Allied offensives in both east and west, and the completion of Germany's own preparations, put the dictator increasingly on the spot. On 18 June, after the Wehrmacht Operations Staff had once again voiced its concern about the situation in the Mediterranean, Hitler finally decided to stick with Operation CITADEL.<sup>110</sup> But that by no means dissipated his worries. A week later he was still stressing to Goebbels the need to 'keep our reserves in hand' in view of the certainty of an Anglo-American invasion.<sup>111</sup> On the other hand, as he explained to the commanders-in-chief and commanding generals summoned to Führer headquarters once again on 1 July, Hitler was now clear that 'we cannot wait until the enemy goes on the attack, which may not happen until the winter or the opening of a second front'.<sup>112</sup>

<sup>106</sup> Ibid. 3; Kluge expressed himself in similar terms a week later (see Klink, *Das Gesetz des Handelns*, 170–1).

<sup>107</sup> Both situation assessments are reproduced in Klink, *Das Gesetz des Handelns*, 306–7 (app. I, 10) and 325 ff. (app. I, 14).

<sup>108</sup> Kielmansegg, pocket diary, entry for 19 May 1943 (in private hands).

<sup>109</sup> Guderian, *Erinnerungen eines Soldaten*, 280. Hitler's vacillation with regard to the Kursk operation, as described here, was also confirmed by Jodl immediately after the war ('Die Vernehmung von Generaloberst Jodl', 540). Zeitzler's later contention that Hitler 'never expressed any doubts about CITADEL to the Army General Staff' therefore deserves little credibility and should be attributed to the chief of the General Staff's efforts to portray Hitler as the sole author of the failed operation; see Zeitzler's statement of position, 17 Feb. 1960, on Ziemke's manuscript, 'The German Campaign in Russia, 1942–45', chs. 4 and 5, BA-MA N 63/94, 9–10.

<sup>110</sup> KTB OKW, iii. 750 (5 July 1943); Warlimont, *Im Hauptquartier*, 347.

<sup>111</sup> Goebbels, *Tagebücher*, pt. 2, viii. 532 (25 June 1943).

<sup>112</sup> Quoted in Manstein, *Verlorene Siege*, 496. On the balance of forces on the eastern front at the beginning of July, see Table II.I.1 (chapter by Frieser at the beginning of Part II of the present volume).

Four days later, on the morning of 5 July, the units of Army Group South and Army Group Centre began their last major offensive. In a proclamation on the previous evening, the Führer informed his troops that this attack must ‘be decisive and lead to a turnaround in the war’.<sup>113</sup> No one knew better than Hitler that this would not be the case even if the battle had a favourable outcome.<sup>114</sup>

<sup>113</sup> Quoted in Domarus, *Hitler. Reden und Proklamationen*, ii. 2021–2.

<sup>114</sup> A clear indication of this is provided, not least, by the fact that German propaganda kept noticeably silent about the German offensive despite its massive dimensions, and the initial successes were cautiously interpreted as defensive victories; see the analysis in Zins, *Die Operation Zitadelle*, 190 ff.

# PART II

## THE BATTLE OF THE KURSK SALIENT

*Karl-Heinz Frieser*



# I. The Hopeless German Starting Position

The battle of Kursk is considered the biggest land battle of the Second World War, indeed the biggest in all of military history.<sup>1</sup> During the fighting the two sides deployed more than 4 million troops, 69,000 cannon and launchers, 13,000 tanks and self-propelled guns, and almost 12,000 aircraft.<sup>2</sup> Even the battle of Stalingrad seems small-scale in comparison. The bitterness of the fighting is shown by the fact that the Red Army lost a total of at least 6,064 tanks.<sup>3</sup> A further, more questionable superlative is that the battle of Kursk must surely rank as one of the most misinterpreted battles of the war, and one of those most obscured by legend. That applies above all to the dramatic climax of the armoured encounter at Prokhorovka, which resulted in a disaster for the Soviet tanks.

For many years Soviet historiography managed to hide the magnitude of the Soviet Union's own errors and losses, until the opening of the archives finally revealed the reality. But myths proliferated on the German side too. According to Erich von Manstein, for example, Operation CITADEL was a 'victory thrown away', since Hitler supposedly broke off the offensive too soon. Most of the erroneous assessments of CITADEL resulted from the fact that it was repeatedly considered in isolation. A correct analysis of the operation is possible only when it is placed in the wider context of the battle of Kursk, including the two Soviet counter-offensives at Orel and Kharkov. Above all, it must be seen in strategic relation to other theatres of war—mainly Italy, where the Allies were landing at the same time. The most important question that needs to be examined is whether the failed German offensive really was—as is maintained in the literature—the turning point of the Second World War or even the decisive battle. In this connection, an accurate comparison of relative strength seems essential. That alone will make it possible to determine what options still remained for Germany, faced with the armament colossus of the Soviet Union.

<sup>1</sup> The battle in the Kursk salient in the summer of 1943 consisted of three partly overlapping operations: Germany's CITADEL offensive (5 to 16 July) and two Soviet counter-offensives at Orel (12 July to 18 August) and Belgorod/Kharkov (3 to 23 August).

<sup>2</sup> Shutov and Ramanichev, 'Ognennaya duga', 284; Venkov, 'Archivbestände', 233.

<sup>3</sup> *Grif sekretnosti sniat*, 370.

**Table II.I.1.** Relative German–Soviet strength on the eastern front at the beginning of July 1943

	Troops	Tanks/assault guns	Cannon*/grenade launchers	Aircraft
(a) Red Army (excl. other military districts)				
Main front	5,745,800	9,888	91,791	6,532
Finnish front	320,100	311	4,571	299
Southern front/Far East	1,955,000	3,200	18,800	4,500
Stavka reserves	1,111,000	2,688	16,782	662
Total:	9,131,900	16,087	131,944	11,993
(b) German forces				
Eastern front	3,138,000	3,524	25,000**	1,833***
Finnish front	80,000	25	600**	167***
Finnish army	230,000	100	—	250
Other Axis partners	225,000	—	—	99***

\* artillery, anti-tank guns, anti-aircraft guns; \*\* estimate based on target strength; \*\*\* excl. courier, liaison, and transport aircraft.

*Source:* Zetterling and Frankson, *Kursk 1943*, 5, except for German aircraft on the eastern and Finnish fronts, and the aircraft of Axis partners, for which the source is ‘Einsatzbereitschaft der fliegenden Verbände an der Ostfront am 30.6.1943’, BA-MA RL 2-III/725 (compiled by Ulf Balke).

## 1. DISASTROUS PLANNING: A FRONTAL ATTACK WITHOUT THE ELEMENT OF SURPRISE

Operation CITADEL was one of Hitler’s riskiest undertakings. The attack was directed not only against a stronger adversary but against its strongest bastion, the ‘anti-tank fortress’ of Kursk. Generations of officer cadets had it dinned into them that ‘only a bull attacks head on’. Yet no other German offensive went so much against that maxim. Above all, the German onslaught, in the manner of a battering-ram, was the opposite of the successful methods used in earlier ‘blitzkrieg’ operations. Those were based on the ‘shock-troop procedure’ developed by the Germans during the First World War to overcome the rigidity of positional warfare, a procedure in which small elite formations sought to penetrate enemy positions via the path of least resistance and gain the enemy’s rear. It was Col.-Gen. Heinz Guderian who had combined that method with modern technology, above all tanks.<sup>4</sup> So he was all the more appalled when he learned that Hitler wanted to risk a frontal attack on the Kursk fortress. That was the path of greatest resistance—as if the Germans during the western campaign in 1940 had not attacked the weakest point in the French lines at Sedan but the Maginot Line’s strongest position. On that occasion, in accordance with Manstein’s ‘sickle-stroke’ plan, the Germans had drawn the enemy into empty space, like a bull with a sweep of

<sup>4</sup> Frieser, *Blitzkrieg-Legende*, 419–20.

the matador's cloak,<sup>5</sup> and then unleashed their armoured divisions against his flank, like a sword thrust in the side. At Kursk, however, the bull was to be taken by the horns. Whereas tank forces had hitherto been deployed in free-operation mode in accordance with Guderian's principles, they were now to be misused in a rigid manner for a purely tactical purpose. What threatened was an attempt to 'eat one's way' through enemy defences, so typical of the First World War, and this time in the form of a rolling battle of material attrition. Astonishingly, the planners were prepared to do without the very factor that had guaranteed the success of tank attacks from the very beginning, namely the element of surprise. Finally, the start of the German offensive was postponed so many times that the German preparations for an operation against this sector of the front were no longer a secret.

The strangest thing of all was that Soviet intelligence had determined exactly where the Germans were going to attack, and the Germans knew that the Russians knew it. Hitler was shown aerial photographs which revealed that the Red Army had established deeply staggered defences exactly in the planned direction of the German attack.<sup>6</sup> But the dictator was so convinced of the penetrative force of the new tanks that he nevertheless had the offensive carried out exactly as planned. Soviet intelligence was able to determine not only the direction of attack, but even the time of the German offensive. Large-scale offensives normally begin with a burst of artillery fire on the defence positions which takes the defender by surprise. In the battle of Kursk it was the other way round. The Soviet artillery opened fire first, and the Soviet aircraft were also the first in the air.

As the German tank warfare expert Maj.-Gen. Friedrich Wilhelm von Mellenthin explained in his analysis of the battle of Kursk, the weakness of the Soviet enemy lay precisely in 'his limited ability to cope with surprise attacks'; that was where he was 'most vulnerable'.<sup>7</sup> That had been shown in February 1943, when the Soviet armoured units stormed westwards after the fall of Stalingrad, seemingly unstoppably, and suddenly fell into a trap set by Field Marshal von Manstein.<sup>8</sup> With regard to the tank battles in the first period of the campaign, Mellenthin wrote that the German armoured units 'were unbeatable, in the truest sense of the word, if they were allowed to manoeuvre freely on the vast Russian plains. But instead of trying to create conditions in which mobile warfare was possible [...] the German high command found nothing better to do than have our [...] armoured divisions storm the area around Kursk, which had meanwhile become the strongest fortress in the world!'<sup>9</sup> The German leadership thereby committed exactly the same mistake as at Stalingrad the year before. It sought a direct trial of strength in a restricted space with a quantitatively superior enemy who had no regard for losses. Like Erich von Falkenhayn at Verdun in the First World War, it engaged in a battle of attrition.

<sup>5</sup> Liddell Hart, *The German Generals Talk*, 117.

<sup>6</sup> Guderian, *Erinnerungen eines Soldaten*, 278; BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2071, 80.

<sup>7</sup> Mellenthin, *Panzerschlachten*, 139.

<sup>8</sup> See Klein and Frieser, 'Mansteins Gegenschlag', 12–13.

<sup>9</sup> Mellenthin, *Panzerschlachten*, 147.

The offensive was actually intended to make it possible to conserve forces in future. The aim was to achieve a more favourable defensive line by cutting off the Kursk bulge, so that the OKW could subsequently transfer troops from the east to other theatres. Against that background, an attack based on brute force, which had hitherto been more typical of the Red Army's offensive tactics, must have seemed counter-productive since, even in the event of a successful breakthrough, the best that could be expected was a pyrrhic victory. The mood within the military leadership before the start of the attack was neatly summed up in retrospect by Maj.-Gen. Carl Wagener: 'No one on the German side still had any enthusiasm for the offensive. Even Hitler was now wavering.'<sup>10</sup> This 'makeshift operation',<sup>11</sup> which in fact had only limited aims, threatened to turn into a display of strength that would necessarily overstretch the German forces. Hitler was faced with a dilemma in view of the imminent Allied landing in Italy, but saw Kursk as a chance to regain the initiative. This time, however, he committed his troops in an offensive in which there was little to gain but a great deal to lose.

## 2. RELATIVE STRENGTH: AN ASSAULT AGAINST AN AVALANCHE

A military rule of thumb says an attacker should have a superiority of 3 to 1 in order to have a chance of success. While this vague principle applies only at tactical level, the superiority should be even greater if the defender is entrenched behind fortifications. Given the Kursk salient's fortress-like defences, that was precisely the case. In the summer of 1943 the absence of the element of surprise—a factor which had contributed greatly to the success of the German offensives of 1941 and 1942—also played a part. As Carl von Clausewitz stressed, there is a correlation between the element of surprise and economy of force. The more unexpected an attack, the less the defender is able to prepare for it, and the fewer forces the attacker needs to use in order for the attack to succeed.<sup>12</sup> At Kursk, however, the German intentions had long been understood, so that each focal point was countered by a corresponding focal point at which the defender's forces were always far superior to those of the attacker. The Germans could muster only two-and-a-half armies for their offensive, whereas eighteen Soviet armies were concentrated in the Kursk salient alone (Voronezh Front and Central Front, with Steppe Front positioned in the rear). At the same time, further armies with strong armoured units were stationed on the flanks, especially at Orel, ready to move onto the counter-attack once the German offensive had been repelled.

<sup>10</sup> Wagener, *Heeresgruppe Süd*, 236.

<sup>11</sup> Schreiber, *Der Zweite Weltkrieg*, 102.

<sup>12</sup> According to Clausewitz, surprise 'lies more or less at the foundation of all undertakings, for without it superiority at the decisive point is really not conceivable' (*Clausewitz, Vom Kriege*, 379).

### (a) The German Potential in the Kursk Salient

The northern sector of the front in the area around Orel belonged to Army Group Centre (Field Marshal Günther von Kluge). The plan was for Ninth Army, under the command of Col.-Gen. Walter Model, to break through the salient from there, advancing southwards in the direction of Kursk. A symmetrical northward attack by units of Army Group South (Field Marshal von Manstein) was planned, to be carried out by Fourth Armoured Army under Col.-Gen. Hermann Hoth and Army Detachment Kempf. The two pincer forces were to unite concentrically in the Kursk area and enclose all the Soviet units in the salient. The western apex of the salient was covered defensively by Second Army, belonging to Army Group Centre.

Model's Ninth Army formed the northern group.<sup>13</sup> It comprised six armoured divisions, one armoured infantry division, and 14 infantry divisions, i.e. 21 divisions in all, of which only 14 were actively deployed during the offensive.<sup>14</sup> The ration strength is given as around 335,000,<sup>15</sup> but the daily strength of the front-line units<sup>16</sup> must have been only around two-thirds of that figure. At the start of the offensive 599 battle tanks, 299 assault guns, and 90 'Ferdinand' tank destroyers were operational,<sup>17</sup> though some units, for example 12th Armoured Division, did not take part in Operation CITADEL. The operational artillery consisted of 752 cannon and 165 rocket launchers.<sup>18</sup> Air Fleet 6 (Col.-Gen. Robert Ritter von Greim), deployed in Army Group Centre's sector of the front, was tasked with aerial support. It disposed of 640 operational aircraft in the 1st Air Division (Maj.-Gen. Paul Deichmann).<sup>19</sup>

Army Group South was considerably stronger, consisting of one-and-a-half armies: Fourth Armoured Army (Col.-Gen. Hoth) was to attack directly northwards towards Kursk, while to its right Army Detachment Kempf (Gen. Werner Kempf) had to

<sup>13</sup> A detailed breakdown of the German attacking units is reprinted in Klink, *Das Gesetz des Handelns*, 331–4.

<sup>14</sup> Those which did not take part in the offensive were the four infantry divisions of XX Army Corps, the 102nd and 383rd Infantry Divisions, and the 12th Armoured Division.

<sup>15</sup> AOK 9: report by Abt. IVa to Qu., 27 June 1943, BA-MA RH 20-9/409.

<sup>16</sup> No information is given under 'daily strength of divisions and other units'.

<sup>17</sup> 'Panzerlage "M"', Zitadelle: Einsatzbereit am 5.7 im Orëlboogen' [Armour Situation "M", Citadel: Operational on 5 July in Orel Salient] (fo. 6), BA-MA RH 10/65. The 42 assault vehicles added to the overall strength in this report have been excluded, since they consisted of armoured artillery. On the armour situation in detail, see also the statistics given in the documentation, volumes RH 10/60–4, 141, 143, 148, 150, 155, 157, 220, and 246.

<sup>18</sup> Zetterling and Frankson, *Kursk 1943*, 32. The figure quoted includes only the artillery's field guns and heavy grenade launchers (203 mm). In the Wehrmacht, unlike the Red Army, light and medium grenade launchers played only a minor role and were classified as 'infantry' rather than 'artillery' weapons. A completely different strength figure is obtained if, in accordance with the Soviet method of calculation, all barrelled weapons (artillery cannon, grenade launchers, anti-tank and anti-aircraft cannon) are included. Zetterling and Frankson (*Kursk 1943*, 18) estimate that figure, on the basis of the German target strength for Ninth Army, at 3,630 barrelled weapons.

<sup>19</sup> Operational Status Report, 30 June 1943, BA-MA RL 2-III/725; edited by Ulf Balke in the light of further documents from his private archive. Air Fleet 6 did not put all its 708 operational aircraft (excl. liaison and transport planes) at the disposal of 1st Air Division for the support of Ninth Army. Instead, Tactical Reconnaissance Groups 3, 5, 10, and 15 (a total of 68 operational aircraft) were assigned directly to the other four armies of Army Group Centre.

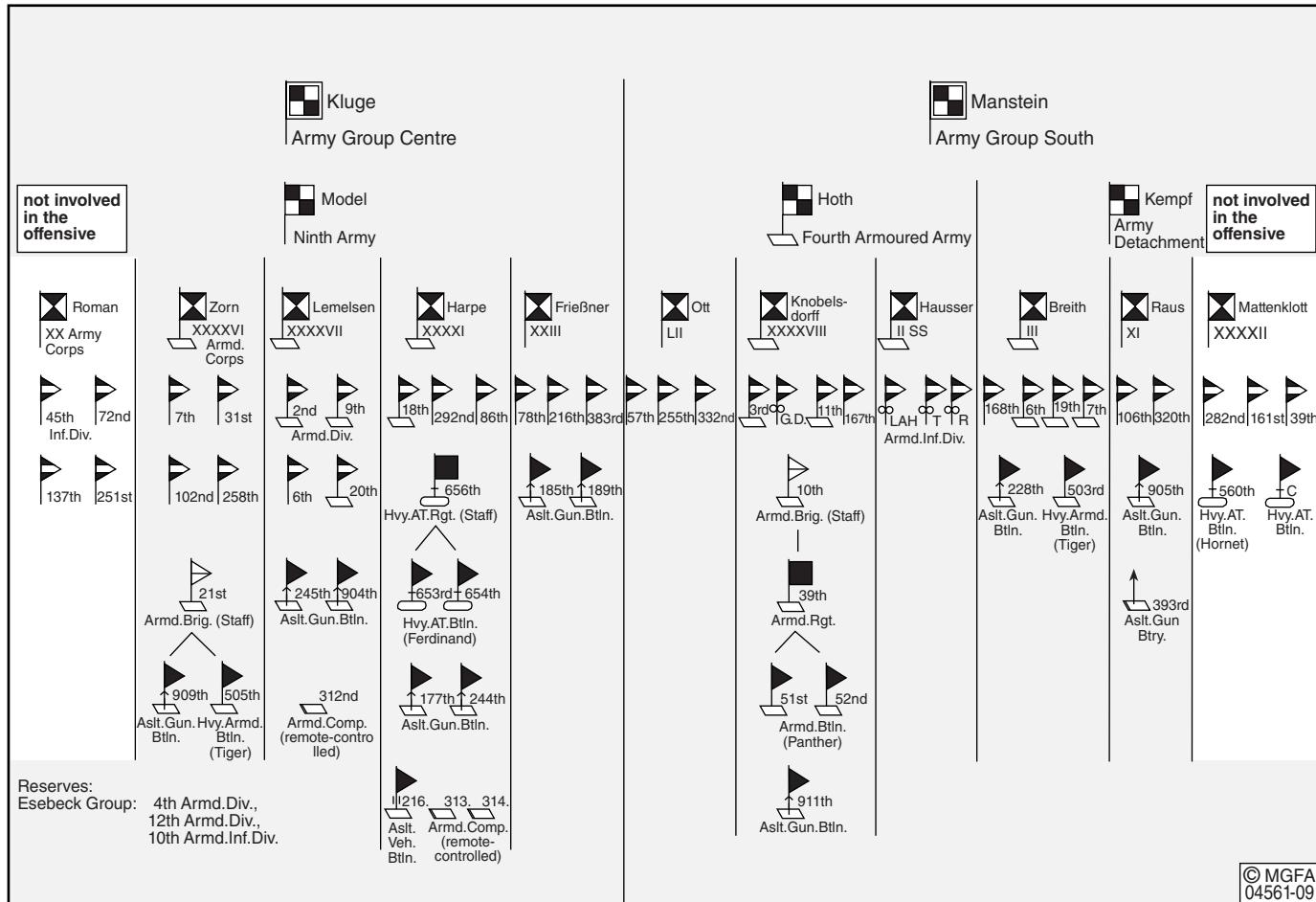
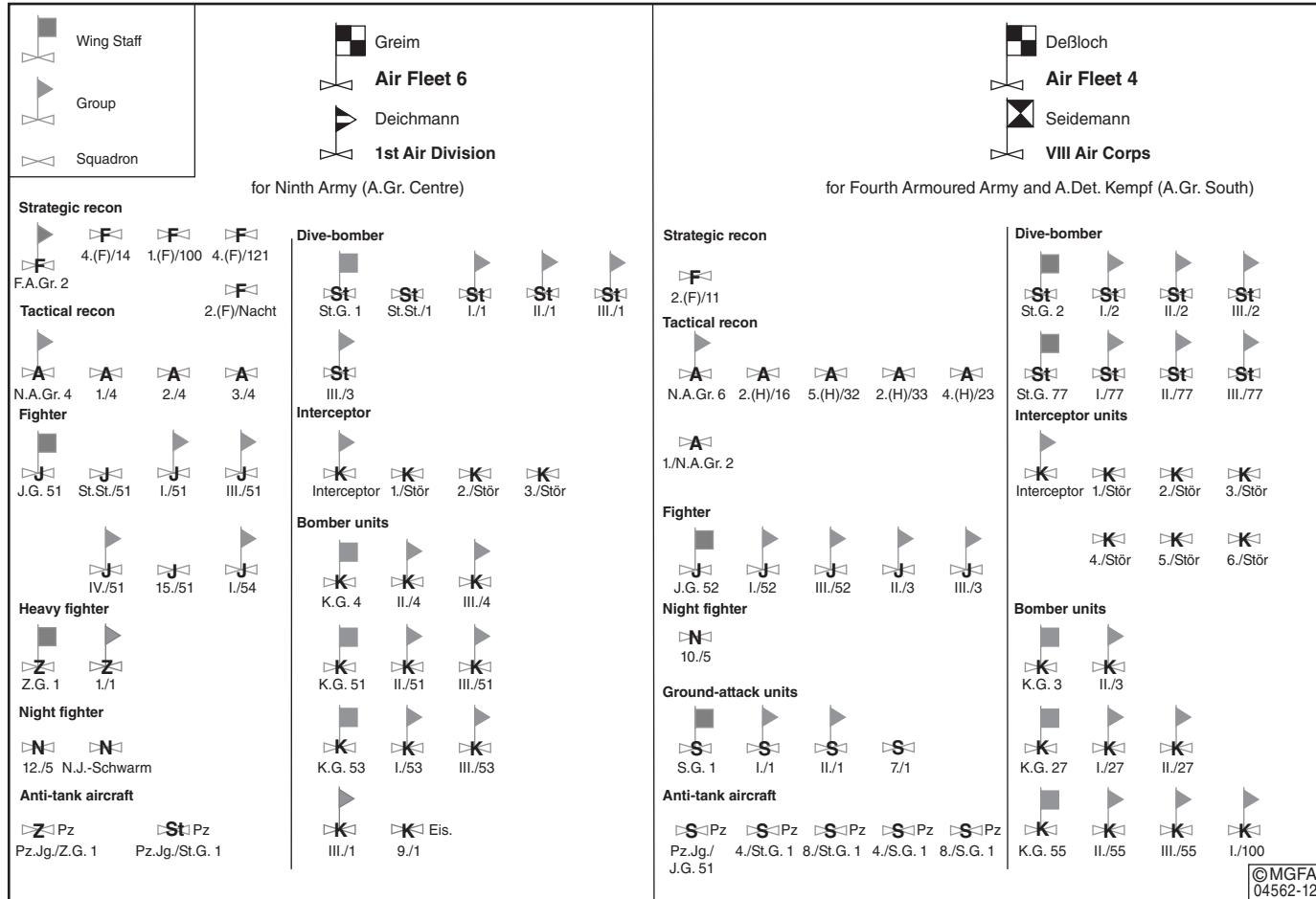


Diagram II.i.1. Order of battle for Operation CITADEL (5 July 1943)

Source: Wagener, *Heeresgruppe Süd*, 237



**Diagram II.I.2.** Luftwaffe deployment for Operation CITADEL on 5 July 1943

Source: Ulf Balke collection

**Table II.I.2.** Breakdown of VIII Air Corps (Air Fleet 4) at 5 July 1943: deployment with Fourth Armoured Army and Army Detachment Kempf/Army Group South (CITADEL)

Category	Unit	Aircraft type	Target strength	Actual strength	Operational
Strategic reconnaissance	2.(F)/11	Ju 88	12 12	10 10	8 <b>8</b>
Tactical reconnaissance	1./N.A.Gr. 2 (with Fourth Armoured Army) Stab/N.A.Gr. 6 (with A.Det. Kempf) 2.(H)/16 5.(H)/32 2.(H)/33 4.(H)/23	Bf 109 — Fw 189 Hs 126 Bf 110 Hs 126	16	13	4
Fighters	Stab/J.G. 52 I./J.G. 52 III./J.G. 52 II./J.G. 3 III./J.G. 3	Bf 109 Bf 109 Bf 109 Bf 109 Bf 109	4 40 40 40 40	4 34 42 33 40	— 32 35 21 30
Night fighters	10./N.J.G. 5	Bf 110	15 15	10 10	2 2
Anti-tank aircraft	Pz.Jg.St./J.G. 51 4./Pz.Jg.St./St.G. 1 8./Pz.Jg.St./St.G. 1 4.(Pz.)/S.G. 1 4.(Pz.)/S.G. 2	Hs 129 Hs 129 Hs 129 Hs 129 Hs 129	16 16 16 16 16	15 17 16 17 17	12 14 16 14 16
Ground-attack aircraft	Stab/S.G. 1 I./S.G. 1 II./S.G. 1 (ohne 7. St.) 7./S.G. 1	Fw 190 Fw 190 Fw 190 Hs 123	6 42 30 12	— 51 34 16	— 42 31 14
Dive-bombers	Stab/St.G. 2 I./St.G. 2 II./St.G. 2 III./St.G. 2 Stab/St.G. 77 I./St.G. 77 II./St.G. 77 III./St.G. 77	Ju 87 Ju 87 Ju 87 Ju 87 Ju 87 Ju 87 Ju 87 Ju 87	3 39 39 39 3 39 39 39	3 37 36 35 3 40 41 36	3 37 33 28 3 31 31 36
Interceptors (night ground-attack)	Stab/Störkampf Lfl. 4 1./Störkampf 2./Störkampf 3./Störkampf	misc. He 46 Ar 66 Go 145	3 16 16 16	— 14 16 14	— 12 8 10

	4./Störkampf	Ar 66	16	17	12
	5./Störkampf	He 46	16	7	4
	6./Störkampf	Go 145	16	15	15
			99	83	61
Bombers	Stab/K.G. 3	Ju 88	4	1	1
	II./K.G. 3	Ju 88	37	37	19
	Stab/K.G. 27	He 111	4	2	2
	I./K.G. 27	He 111	37	21	17
	II./K.G. 27	He 111	37	21	17
	Stab/K.G. 55	He 111	4	4	4
	II./K.G. 55	He 111	37	32	27
	III./K.G. 55	He 111	37	46	33
	I./K.G. 100	He 111	37	38	26
			234	202	146
VIII Air Corps	Total strength		986	923	732
Allied Hungarian (Deployment in the area of VIII Air Corps):					
	(H)/Staffel	Fw 189	12	12	10
	(F)/Staffel	Ju 88	12	7	6
	1./Jagdstaffel	Bf 109	12	9	8
	2./Jagdstaffel	Bf 109	12	6	6
	Kampfstaffel	Ju 88	12	6	6
	Kurierstaffel	misc.	12	5	5
			72	45	41

Sources: Operational status reports, 30 June 1943, BA-MA RL 2-III/725, and documents from the Ulf Balke collection.

cover the threatened flank against attack from the east. In the original formation, Army Group South disposed of five armoured divisions, four armoured infantry divisions, and ten infantry divisions, of which only six were actively involved in the fighting.<sup>20</sup> The ration strength of Fourth Armoured Army was 223,907,<sup>21</sup> while that of Army Detachment Kempf can be estimated at around 100,000.<sup>22</sup> Here too, the actual ‘daily strength of divisions and other units’ must also have been only two-thirds of the ration strength. On 5 July Manstein was in a position to send a total of 1,377 operational fighting vehicles<sup>23</sup> into action, supported by 831 artillery cannon and 303 rocket launchers.<sup>24</sup> Air Fleet 4 (Gen. Otto Dessloch) provided the tried and

<sup>20</sup> In addition, 198th Infantry Division was assigned to the front on 9 July.

<sup>21</sup> Armeeintendant Pz.AOK 4, 532/43 geh. Kdos., 5 July 1943: Ration Strengths at 1 July 1943, BA-MA RH 21-4/422.

<sup>22</sup> This estimate is based on comparative calculations. Zetterling and Frankson (*Kursk 1943*, 18) arrive at a similar figure of 108,000, whereas Gläser in his Master’s dissertation (‘Die Schlacht um Kursk’, 30–1) puts the figure at 80,000 to 90,000.

<sup>23</sup> They consisted of 409 Panzer IIIs, 426 Panzer IVs, 200 Panzer Vs (Panther), 102 Panzer VIs (Tiger), and 240 assault guns. See ‘Panzerlage “S” Zitadelle’: Pz.-Ausgangslage Süd 5.7.1943 (fos. 15 and 23), BA-MA RH 10/64. For details, see also the statistics given in the documentation: RH 10/60–3, 65, 70, 142, 145–7, 149, 156, 209, 220, 246, and 312–14.

<sup>24</sup> Zetterling and Frankson, *Kursk 1943*, 32. The total number of barrelled weapons (artillery cannon, grenade launchers, anti-tank and anti-aircraft cannon) must have been 1,774 for Fourth Panzer Army and 1,073 for Army Detachment Kempf (*ibid.* 18).

**Table II.I.3.** Breakdown of 1st Air Division (Air Fleet 6) at 5 July 1943

Category	Unit	Aircraft type	Target strength	Actual strength	Operational
Strategic reconnaissance	4.(F)/14	Ju 88	12	14	14
	1.(F)/100	Ju 88	12	16	6
	4.(F)/121	Ju 88	12	11	7
	2.(F)/Nacht	Do 217	12	11	5
			48	52	32
Tactical reconnaissance	Stab/N.A.Gr. 4 (bei 9. Armee)	Bf 109 G	4	3	3
	1./N.A.Gr. 4	Bf 109 G	16	15	15
	2./N.A.Gr. 4	Bf 109 G	16	13	9
	3./N.A.Gr. 4	Bf 110 F	9	8	8
			45	39	35
Night fighters	N.J.-Schwarm Lfl. 6	misc.	5	8	5
	12./N.J.G. 5	Do 217	15	14	9
			20	22	14
Fighters	Stab/J.G. 51	Fw 190	4	4	2
	Stabsstaffel/J.G. 51	Fw 190	12	12	12
	I./J.G. 51	Fw 190	40	40	25
	III./J.G. 51	Fw 190	40	36	27
	IV./J.G. 51	Fw 190	40	38	31
	15.(span.)/J.G. 51	Fw 190	16	18	16
	I./J.G. 54	Fw 190	40	38	32
			192	186	145
Heavy fighters	Stab/Z.G. 1	Bf 110	4	4	4
	I./Z.G. 1	Bf 110	40	37	37
			44	41	41
Anti-tank aircraft	Pz.Jg.St./Z.G. 1	Bf 110	12	13	12
	Pz.Jg.St./St.G. 1	Ju 87 G	9	11	8
			21	24	20
Dive-bombers	Stab, Stabsstaffel/St.G. 1	Ju 87	9	9	9
	I./St.G. 1	Ju 87	39	32	31
	II./St.G. 1	Ju 87	39	42	39
	III./St.G. 1	Ju 87	39	42	42
	III./St.G. 3	Ju 87	39	39	27
			165	164	148
Interceptors	Stab/Störkampf	misc.	3	—	—
	1.-3./Störkampf	misc.	73	50	34
			76	50	34
Bombers	III./K.G. 1	Ju 88	26	12	6
	9.(Eis.)/K.G. 1	Ju 88	11	13	11
	Stab/K.G. 4	He 111	4	2	1
	II./K.G. 4	He 111	37	39	33
	III./K.G. 4	He 111	37	42	20
	Stab/K.G. 51	Ju 88	4	2	1
	II./K.G. 51	Ju 88	37	44	22
	III./K.G. 51	Ju 88	37	19	14
	Stab/K.G. 53	He 111	4	6	4
	I./K.G. 53	He 111	37	34	31
	III./K.G. 53	He 111	37	28	28
			271	241	171
Citadel	Air Fleet 6	Total strength	882	819	640

Sources: Operational status reports, 30 June 1943, BA-MA RL 2-III/725; Ulf Balke collection.

tested VIII Air Corps (Maj.-Gen. Hans Seidemann), which had over 732 operational aircraft at its disposal.<sup>25</sup>

Second Army was deployed between Ninth Army and Fourth Armoured Army, and had only the defensive task of tying down enemy units. Its strength can be estimated at a maximum of 120,000 men (ration strength).<sup>26</sup> It had no fighting vehicles of its own, only 100 self-propelled guns.<sup>27</sup> The number of field guns, 242 barrelled weapons, also seems very modest.<sup>28</sup>

In military history Kursk is associated with a ‘tank battle’ in which the legendary Tiger tanks are immediately conjured up. Yet on that occasion they constituted only a fraction of the German tanks. On 5 July only 328 out of a total of 2,465 operational fighting vehicles were modern battle tanks: 128 Tigers and a maximum of 200 Panthers.<sup>29</sup> Although the units deployed at Kursk were the best-equipped of the German army, horses were still predominant in many of them. On 5 July Ninth Army possessed only 26 Tiger tanks<sup>30</sup> but 85,000 horses.<sup>31</sup> This semi-modern state of affairs assumed worrying proportions in front-line units not belonging to elite divisions. At the same time, the Red Army was being supplied by the western Allies with hundreds of thousands of trucks.<sup>32</sup> Soviet industry was thus able to concentrate fully on the mass-production of tanks, which already gave the Soviet forces a decisive advantage at Kursk. Although the Germans deployed 70 per cent of all the tanks located on the eastern front in the battle of Kursk,<sup>33</sup> at the risk of neglecting other sectors, the Red Army nevertheless had a clear quantitative armoured superiority.

### (b) The Soviet Potential in the Kursk Salient

In the Kursk salient two German armies and one army detachment attacked three Soviets fronts (army groups) comprising a total of 18 armies. In the north Germany's Ninth Army had Central Front against it, and in the south Fourth Army and Army Detachment Kempf were faced by Voronezh Front. To the east, directly behind the

<sup>25</sup> Operational Status Report of 30 June 1943, BA-MA RL 2-III/725; calculated by Ulf Balke taking into account documents from his private archives. Air Fleet 4 had a total of 913 operational aircraft at its disposal, excluding the 252 courier, transport, minesweeper, and air-sea rescue planes. For Operation CITADEL it had only 732 operational aircraft in the framework of VIII Air Corps (excluding 41 Hungarian planes stationed in this sector). The remainder were deployed on the southern wing of Army Group South (Sixth Army and First Armoured Army) and with Army Group A (Crimea and the Kuban bridgehead). This figure does not include the 71 operational Romanian aircraft.

<sup>26</sup> Zetterling and Frankson, *Kursk 1943*, 18.

<sup>27</sup> See the various lists in the file ‘Anlage zum KTB AOK 2, Ia: Kampfstärken, 22.9.42 bis 25.7.43’, BA-MA RH 20-2/494.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.; the total number of barrelled weapons (artillery cannon, grenade launchers, and anti-tank and anti-aircraft cannon) is estimated at 940 (Zetterling and Frankson, *Kursk 1943*, 18).

<sup>29</sup> On this, see the above-mentioned statistical information in BA-MA RH 10/64 and 65.

<sup>30</sup> ‘Panzerlage Heeresgruppe Mitte: Einsatzbereit am 5.7.1943’ (fo. 28), BA-MA RH 10/65. When the reconstituted 3rd Company was deployed on 8 July, it raised the actual number to 42; see Schneider, *Tiger im Kampf*, i. 272.

<sup>31</sup> AOK 9: Report Abt. IVa to Qu., 27 June 1943, BA-MA RH 20-9/409.

<sup>32</sup> By June 1943, 107,000 off-road vehicles had been delivered. See Glantz and House, *The Battle of Kursk*, 37.

<sup>33</sup> Zetterling and Frankson, *Kursk 1943*, 15.

**Table II.I.4.** Troop breakdown of Central Front and Voronezh Front at 1 July 1943 (excl. Steppe Front)

	Central Front	Voronezh Front	Total
General armies	5	5	10
Armoured armies	1	1	2
Air armies	1	1	2
Rifle corps	11	11	22
Rifle divisions	41	35	76
Fighter divisions	1	—	1
Rifle brigades	4	—	4
Fortified areas (security)	3	—	3
Indep. armoured corps	2	2	4
Indep. armoured brigades	3	6	9
Indep. armoured regiments	15	7	22
Indep. self-propelled gun regiments	4	3	7
Artillery corps	1	—	1
Artillery divisions	3	—	3
Anti-aircraft divisions	5	4	9
Indep. artillery brigades	1	4	5
Anti-tank brigades	3	7	10
Indep. grenade-launcher brigades	1	1	2
Indep. artillery regiments	3	9	12
Indep. tank-destroyer regiments	8	26	34
Indep. anti-aircraft regiments	12	9	21
Indep. grenade launcher regiments	10	11	21
Guards rocket artillery divisions	1	—	1
Guards rocket artillery regiments	10	11	21
Indep. armoured train detachments	1	3	4
Indep. sapper brigades	4	5	9
Indep. sapper battalions	21	14	35
Corps areas: ground-to-air defence	—	1	1
Divisional areas: air defence	1	—	1

Source: Koltunov, 'Kurskaya bitva v tsifrakh', 62.

base line of the Kursk salient, another army group, Steppe Front, was kept ready as a strategic reserve. The three Soviet fronts were made up of the following forces:

- The northern sector of the Kursk salient was defended by Central Front, under the command of General Konstantin Konstantinovich Rokossovsky. It consisted of five general armies, an armoured army, and numerous unattached units. On 5 July it had 711,575 men,<sup>34</sup> 1,607 tanks and assault guns, and 12,453 barrelled weapons and launchers<sup>35</sup> at its disposal.<sup>36</sup> The 16th Air Army, with 1034 aircraft, was assigned to it for air support.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Of these, 510,983 were combat troops.

<sup>35</sup> These included, among other things, 3,140 cannon, 5,792 grenade launchers, and 246 rocket launchers.

<sup>36</sup> These and the following strength statistics are taken from Koltunov, 'Kurskaya bitva v tsifrakh', 61.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid. 63.

- Voronezh Front in the southern sector of the Kursk salient had the same composition. Its commander-in-chief, General Nikolai Fedorovich Vatutin, had 625,591 men,<sup>38</sup> 1,699 tanks and assault guns, and 9,751 barrelled weapons and launchers<sup>39</sup> under his command, as well as the 2nd Air Army with 881 operational aircraft.<sup>40</sup>
- Steppe Front, under General Ivan Stepanovich Konev, was stationed directly behind Central Front and Voronezh Front, ready for action. From its well-established defensive position it was to prevent an operational breakthrough in depth, while its strong armoured units would enable it to launch a massive counter-attack. For those tasks it had five general armies, one armoured army, and numerous unattached units at its disposal, comprising 573,195 men,<sup>41</sup> 1,632 operational battle tanks and assault guns, and 9,211 barrelled weapons.<sup>42</sup> In addition, 5th Air Army, with 470 operational aircraft, was assigned to Steppe Front.<sup>43</sup>

### (c) Ratio of Opposing Forces in Operation CITADEL

We turn now to a fundamental problem that will arise repeatedly in the course of this analysis, namely the calculation of personnel strength. For Operation CITADEL—including Second Army, which was only passively deployed—there were 778,907 men available.<sup>44</sup> However, this figure denotes the ‘ration strength’, not the ‘daily strength of divisions and other units’ (hereinafter ‘daily strength’), which is anyway not given in the archive files.<sup>45</sup> The absurdity of taking ration strength as the yardstick for measuring relative strength is shown clearly by the following example: Army Group North calculated its ration strength at 1 June 1944 as 1,012,000,<sup>46</sup> but its daily strength was 331,025 men and its combat strength only 158,297.<sup>47</sup> The discrepancy is explained by the fact that ration strength included wounded, prisoners of war, construction troops, security units, and so on, as well as the

<sup>38</sup> Of these, 466,236 were combat troops.

<sup>39</sup> These included, among other things, 2,327 cannon, 4,596 grenade launchers, and 272 rocket launchers. See Koltunov, ‘Kurskaya bitva v tsifrakh’, 61.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid. 63.

<sup>41</sup> Of these, 449,133 were combat troops.

<sup>42</sup> Koltunov, ‘Kurskaya bitva v tsifrakh’, 62 f. The number of barrelled weapons includes, *inter alia*, 1,756 artillery cannon and 4,902 grenade launchers. On the other hand, the number of rocket launchers cannot be determined.

<sup>43</sup> Koltunov and Solovev, *Kurskaya bitva*, 76.

<sup>44</sup> This is the sum of the above-indicated ration strengths for Second Army, Ninth Army, Fourth Armoured Army, and Army Detachment Kempf.

<sup>45</sup> For the official definition of these terms, see OKH GenStdH/Org.Abt., No. I/1620/44 geh., 24 Feb. 1944, *re* ‘Festlegung der Stärkebegriffe’, 1–4, BA-MA RH 2/60; see also OKH GenStdH/Org. Abt. (I) No. 25 865/42 geh., 13 Oct. 1942 (fos. 36–7), BA-MA RH 2/1107, as well as the other orders contained in the same file. The problem has also been discussed in the literature; see Zetterling and Frankson, ‘Analyzing World War II’, 176 ff.

<sup>46</sup> OKH Organisationsabteilung (I), No. I, 18280/44 g.Kdos., 23 July 1944 (fo. 29), BA-MA RH 2/1341.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 26 July 1944, 31–2.

Wehrmacht's civilian retinue in the hinterland, among which there were numerous local auxiliaries. Moreover, since marching rations and special rations were given out just before an offensive, ration strength was of importance to field cooks, but it can by no means serve as a criterion for historians. In the case of Operation CITADEL the actual daily strength must have been at most two-thirds of the ration strength, that is, around 518,000 men.<sup>48</sup> Not all of these took part in the attack on Kursk, however, since strong forces were deployed in the hinterland to deal with the threat from partisans.

There are detailed discussions of the partisan struggle in the Soviet literature, but whenever a comparison of strength is drawn up, the partisans are non-existent. In reality, partisan units directed by the Red Army played such an influential part that, alongside the army, the Luftwaffe, and the navy, they functioned as a 'fourth branch' of the armed forces. At the height of the battle of Kursk they made a spectacular appearance, when some 100,000 partisans in Operation 'Rail War' paralysed German rail communications throughout the country by blowing up a claimed total of more than 42,000 tracks in a single night.<sup>49</sup>

The statistics on the Soviet side raise the opposite problem. The figures given in official accounts of the operation are mostly too low because they refer only to the first phase of the operation and do not include the squadrons and reserves brought in later. With regard to the defence of Sevastopol, for example, *Grif sekretnosti sniat*, which is the standard Russian work on strength and loss statistics, gives the figure of 52,000 men for 'personnel strength at the beginning of the operation'. Yet in the same statistics the figure for total losses is given as 156,880.<sup>50</sup> In theory this would mean that each Red Army soldier was killed three times in succession.

A comparison of German and Soviet potential with regard to Operation CITADEL shows a striking asymmetry: the attacker was numerically inferior to the defender in every respect. The German front-line units had approximately 518,000 men (daily strength)<sup>51</sup> at their disposal, compared with 1,426,352 men in the combat units of Central Front, Steppe Front, and Voronezh Front.<sup>52</sup> That gave the Soviets a superiority in personnel of 2.8 to 1. For the Germans the most favourable ratio was in tanks, where Soviet superiority was 'only' 2 to 1. The German side (excluding Second Army)<sup>53</sup> had 2,365 battle tanks, assault guns, and tank destroyers ready for combat. But after they managed to break through the anti-tank defences and minefields of the enemy's foremost positions, an armada of 4,938 Soviet tanks

<sup>48</sup> A much lower figure of 300,000 men (excl. Second Army) is given by Gläser, 'Die Schlacht um Kursk', 32. According to his estimate, the deployment strength of the German attacking units amounted to only about half the ration strength. The figure suggested by the present author thus seems by no means too high.

<sup>49</sup> *Geschichte des zweiten Weltkrieges 1939–1945*, vii. 201 and 366–7; Solovev, *Wendepunkt*, 150.

<sup>50</sup> *Grif sekretnosti sniat*, 224.

<sup>51</sup> The combined ration strength of the German armies (Ninth Army, Fourth Armoured Army, Army Detachment Kempf, and Second Army) was 778,907 men.

<sup>52</sup> The total personnel strength of the three Soviet fronts was 1,910,361 men. See Koltunov, 'Kurskaya bitva v tsifrakh'.

<sup>53</sup> The 100 fighting vehicles of Second Army, which was deployed to the west of the Kursk salient, did not take part in the attack.

and assault guns was waiting for them.<sup>54</sup> A comparison of artillery strength is more difficult. On the Soviet side grenade launchers were dominant, whereas they played only a minor role in the German units and were therefore (apart from heavy grenade launchers) counted as infantry weapons rather than artillery. This is further complicated by the fact that in the Soviet units all long-range weapons were included: artillery cannon, grenade launchers, anti-tank and anti-aircraft cannon, and rocket launchers. The three Soviet fronts deployed in the Kursk salient possessed 31,415 weapons in that category.<sup>55</sup> A similar estimate (based on target strengths) gives the German armies a maximum total of 7,417 barrelled weapons,<sup>56</sup> which means an inferiority of 1 to 4.2. This gives some idea of the wall of fire which the attackers had to cross. The German air units had 1,372 aircraft available and were faced with Soviet superiority of 2.5 to 1. Each of the three opposing Soviet fronts had its own air army, in addition to which 17th Air Army on the south-western front (with 735 planes) was also deployed during Operation CITADEL. Including the 320 long-range bombers and 208 fighters<sup>57</sup> of the Kursk air defence zone, this gives a total of 3,648 aircraft.<sup>58</sup>

#### (d) Comparison of Total Potential in the Kursk–Orel Area

The huge battle in the Kursk salient did not consist only of Operation CITADEL. As already mentioned, it was a combination of three operations overlapping in space and time.<sup>59</sup> For that reason some Ninth Army units assigned to CITADEL were not used in that operation but had to be deployed in defence against the Soviet counter-offensive at Orel (Operation KUTUZOV), which began a few days later. In reality the ‘Kursk salient’ was an S-shaped double bulge, with the Soviets enclosed in the southern part at Kursk and the Germans in the northern part at Orel. If the Red Army succeeded in breaking through the German Second Armoured Army’s positions to the north of Orel, it could fall on Ninth Army, which was attacking in the direction of Kursk, in the rear. In view of this operational interdependence, a comparison of strength should logically include the units stationed in the Orel area.

Second Armoured Army was the left-hand neighbour of Model’s Ninth Army and had to cover the northern part of the Orel bulge, which extended far to the east. However, its front-line strength had been considerably reduced to the benefit of the offensive units assembled for Operation CITADEL.<sup>60</sup> The name ‘Armoured Army’ is

<sup>54</sup> Koltunov, ‘Kurskaya bitva v tsifrakh’. This figure refers to fighting vehicles operational on 1 July 1943.

<sup>55</sup> Koltunov, ‘Kurskaya bitva v tsifrakh’, 61 and 63.

<sup>56</sup> A corresponding estimate is given in Zetterling and Frankson, *Kursk 1943*, 18.

<sup>57</sup> Bitva na Kurskoi duge, 124.

<sup>58</sup> Koltunov and Solovev, *Kurskaya bitva*, 76 (5th Air Army), 77 (Table with strength statistics for 2nd, 16th, and 17th Air Armies, as well as long-range aircraft).

<sup>59</sup> In July/August 1943 the following operations took place in the Kursk area: the CITADEL offensive (5 to 16 July) and two Soviet counter-offensives at Orel (12 July to 18 August) and Belgorod/Kharkov (3 to 23 August).

<sup>60</sup> Glantz and House (*The Battle of Kursk*, 283) estimate the ration strength as 160,000 men. By analogy, the daily strength of the front-line units should be put at a maximum of two-thirds, i.e. 107,000.

also misleading since the unit itself possessed no battle tanks, although 5th and 8th Armoured Divisions were subsequently assigned to it in view of the Soviet counter-offensive. Even including those reinforcements, however, Second Armoured Army had only 234 fighting vehicles<sup>61</sup> and 622 field guns.<sup>62</sup> The total number of all barrelled weapons (including grenade launchers, anti-tank cannon, and anti-aircraft cannon) can be estimated at 2,050 on the basis of target strengths. Moreover, this army had no special air unit assigned to it but had to rely extensively on the units of Air Fleet 6, which were already assigned to the support of Ninth Army at Kursk.

Second Army was opposed by a superior force of one-and-a-half Soviet army groups, namely Bryansk Front and the left wing of West Front—a total of five armies, two tank armies, four unattached armoured corps, and numerous other unattached units, comprising 719,074 men (561,111 combat troops),<sup>63</sup> 3,262 tanks and assault guns,<sup>64</sup> approximately 16,000 barrelled weapons and launchers,<sup>65</sup> and 2,317 aircraft.<sup>66</sup>

This massing of forces to the north of the Kursk salient represented no threat to Second Armoured Army but hung like a sword of Damocles over Ninth Army. That also explains Model's apparently strange deployment of forces, since he dared not bet everything on the single card of Operation CITADEL. Instead of advancing on Kursk with all his tanks like a battering-ram, he kept a large part of his armour in reserve so as to be able to respond to a threat to his army's rear from the area north of Orel.

<sup>61</sup> These consisted of 144 battle tanks, 23 assault guns, and 67 anti-tank guns on self-propelled carriages. See 'Panzerlage 11.7.1943 (Stand 30.6)', 58, BA-MA RH 10/60. Command vehicles and Panzer IIs armed only with a 2-cm cannon were not included, since they were not used in tank battles. On the operational status of Assault-Gun Battalion 270, see 'Sturmgeschütz-Lage, 11.7.1943 (Stand 30.6)', 93, BA-MA RH 10/62. With regard to anti-aircraft guns on self-propelled carriages, see the strength statistics for 5th and 8th Armoured Divisions, 25th Armoured Infantry Division, and Anti-Tank Battalion 561 in 'Pak (Sf.)-Lage, 13.7.1943 (Stand 30.6)', fos. 63 and 65, BA-MA RH 10/63.

<sup>62</sup> See the strength statistics of 3 July 1943 for LV Army Corps (incl. 5th Armoured Division), LIII Army Corps, and XXXV Army Corps in 'Pz.AOK 2, Ia: Kriegsgliederungen 1943', BA-MA RH 21-2/v. 444a. On the artillery strength of 8th Armoured Division, see 'Meldung 8. Panzerdivision, 1.7.1943', BA-MA RH 10/147.

<sup>63</sup> Koltunov, 'Kurskaya bitva v tsifrakh', 80. To these must be added 74,000 men of 3rd and 4th Guards Armoured Armies. See Glantz and House, *The Battle of Kursk*, 342.

<sup>64</sup> As at 10 July, Bryansk Front possessed 794 operational fighting vehicles (Koltunov, 'Kurskaya bitva v tsifrakh', 80). These were reinforced by the 731 tanks and assault guns of 3rd Guards Armoured Army (Glantz and House, *The Battle of Kursk*, 342). The left wing of West Front, including 4th Armoured Army and two armoured corps assigned to it, had a total of 1,737 fighting vehicles (Glantz and House, *ibid.* 347).

<sup>65</sup> Bryansk Front had over 6,795 artillery cannon and grenade launchers at its disposal, including 492 belonging to 3rd Guards Armoured Army. In addition, it possessed 160 BM-8 and BM-13 rocket launchers, and 1,582 M-30 rocket launchers. Including anti-tank and anti-aircraft cannon, this gave a total of 10,199 barrelled weapons and launchers; see Koltunov, 'Kurskaya bitva v tsifrakh', 80. The 492 artillery cannon and grenade launchers of 3rd Guards Armoured Army are also included. The two armies of West Front's left wing possessed 4,286 cannon, grenade launchers, and rocket launchers (Koltunov, 'Kurskaya bitva v tsifrakh', 80). Together with anti-tank and anti-aircraft cannon, that gives a total of 5,312 weapons. No data is available concerning the artillery weapons possessed by 4th Armoured Army. Since its other strength statistics are almost identical with those of 3rd Guards Armoured Army, however, an artillery strength of around 490 weapons has been assumed by analogy. The left wing of West Front thus had over 5,802 barrelled weapons and launchers at its disposal.

<sup>66</sup> 15th Air Army, assigned to Bryansk Front, could deploy 995 aircraft. In addition, West Front was supported by 1st Air Army, with 1,322 (operational) planes (Koltunov, 'Kurskaya bitva v tsifrakh', 82–3).

### (e) The Bottom Line: Soviet Superiority and the Impossibility of a Decisive Battle

Previous descriptions of the battle of Kursk generally provide an unrealistic assessment of relative strength since they concentrate on the narrower area of the Kursk salient and leave the Soviet reserves out of the picture. How great the Red Army's superiority in the Kursk–Orel area actually was can be seen from Table II.I.5 and Diagram II.I.3. In reality, however, its superiority was even more overwhelming, since further reserves of strong armoured units were stationed in the depths of the area and were thrown into the battle by the Soviet high command during the two counter-offensives. The 11th Army, for example, was subsequently put into action at Orel, as were 4th Guards Army and 47th and 57th Armies at Belgorod/Kharkov. While the Germans were unaware of the full extent of the Soviet units which were staggered in depth, the sheer numbers of the forces reported by German intelligence in areas near to the front seemed to Maj.-Gen. Reinhard Gehlen, chief of Foreign Armies East, so worrying that he sounded the alarm.<sup>67</sup> The real danger lay in the fact that on the rest of the eastern front the balance of forces was even more unfavourable than at Kursk, since large sections had been emptied of armoured units needed for Operation CITADEL.

It is a mistake to assume that Hitler wanted to force a decision at Kursk in order to give a new turn to a war which looked like being lost.<sup>68</sup> That assumption was already rejected in the first part of the present volume.<sup>69</sup> Further evidence is provided by the sober figures for relative strength, since the factual superiority of the Red Army in the Kursk salient shows such theories to be questionable. Neither the German general staff nor Hitler was aiming at decisive victory in a 'battle of destruction' in Schlieffen's meaning of the term. Besides which, the Red Army was preparing a powerful summer offensive and had concentrated in the Kursk–Orel area an offensive potential unparalleled in military history. Given the inevitability of war on multiple fronts, Hitler and the OKW actually wanted to withdraw forces from the eastern front in order to be able to counter the impending Allied invasions in southern Italy and later in western Europe. This, however, seemed impossible in view of the Soviet summer offensive, which threatened to burst through the German front like an avalanche. The OKH therefore decided to take the bull by the horns and attack the stationary avalanche before it was unleashed. In terms of physics, the aim was to prevent the enemy's superior mass from being multiplied by velocity. For it seemed hardly possible that the Soviet avalanche could be brought to a standstill once it had got under way.

In recent Russian literature there is criticism of Stalin's 'wise' decision to strike on the backhand rather than forestall the German offensive by attacking in the

<sup>67</sup> Position statement by Gehlen, 4 July 1943 (fo. 16), BA-MA RH 2/2586; see also 'Fremde Heere Ost (I), Statistische Aufstellung', 15 June 1943 (fo. 97), BA-MA RH 2/2089.

<sup>68</sup> See, e.g., the revealing title of Solovev's monograph *Wendepunkt des Zweiten Weltkrieges. Die Schlacht bei Kursk* [Turning point of the Second World War. The battle of Kursk]. On this, see Part II, Chapter III.4 of the present volume.

<sup>69</sup> See Part I of the present volume (Wegner).

Table II.I.5. Relative strength in the Kursk–Orel area on 5 July 1943

	Personnel strength (ration strength)	Deployment strength of combat troops*	Tanks/assault guns (operational)	Barrelled weapons and launchers**	Aircraft (operational)
<b>(a) German strength:</b>					
Ninth Army	335,000	223,000	988	3,630	640 (1st Air Division)
Fourth Armd. Army	223,907	149,271	1 ] 1,377	1,774	732 (VIII Air Corps)
A.Det. Kempf	100,000	66,000	1 ]	1,073	
Second Army	120,000	80,000	100	940	
<b>Citadel:</b>	<b>778,907</b>	<b>518,271</b>	<b>2,465</b>	<b>7,417</b>	<b>1,372</b>
Second Armd. Army	160,000	107,000	234	2,050	
<b>Total:</b>	<b>938,907</b>	<b>625,271</b>	<b>2,699</b>	<b>9,467</b>	<b>1,372</b>
<b>(b) Soviet strength:</b>					
Central Front	711,575	510,983	1,607	12,453	1,034 (16th Air Army)
Voronezh Front	625,591	466,236	1,699	9,751	881 (2nd Air Army)
Steppe Front	573,195	449,133	1,632	9,211	470 (5th Air Army) 735 (17th Air Army)
Luftwaffe reinforcements:				320 (long-range aircraft) 208 (air defence Kursk)	
<b>Citadel:</b>	<b>1,910,361</b>	<b>1,426,352</b>	<b>4,938</b>	<b>31,415</b>	<b>3,648</b>
Bryansk Front	470,616	335,068	1,525	10,199	995 (15th Air Army)
West Front	248,458	226,043	1,737	5,802	1,322 (1st Air Army)
<b>Total:</b>	<b>2,629,435</b>	<b>1,987,463</b>	<b>8,200</b>	<b>47,416</b>	<b>5,965</b>

\* Deployment strength means 'daily strength of divisions and other units'; \*\* total of artillery, anti-tank, and anti-aircraft cannon, grenade launchers, and rocket launchers.

spring of 1943.<sup>70</sup> As a result, it is argued, the Soviet forces unnecessarily let themselves in for a duel with the qualitatively superior German armour at Kursk and suffered horrendous losses. Thus weakened, the subsequent Soviet offensives lacked the necessary impetus and fell far short of the objectives set for 1943. Our

<sup>70</sup> Sokolov, 'The Battle for Kursk', 75–8 and 86–7. The decision to remain on the defensive instead of attacking was also contested within the Red Army leadership. Both front commanders-in-chief, Vatutin and Konev, called for a first strike. Nevertheless, Stalin finally agreed with Zhukov's proposal to strike on the backhand. That decision is criticized by Boris V. Sokolov in retrospect. He argues, among other things, that from April to July the balance of forces had changed qualitatively in favour of the Germans, who had meanwhile been able to bring modern tanks and aircraft to the front. In his view, postponement of the Soviet offensive originally planned for May to 12 July and 3 August had also considerably delayed the liberation of Russia.

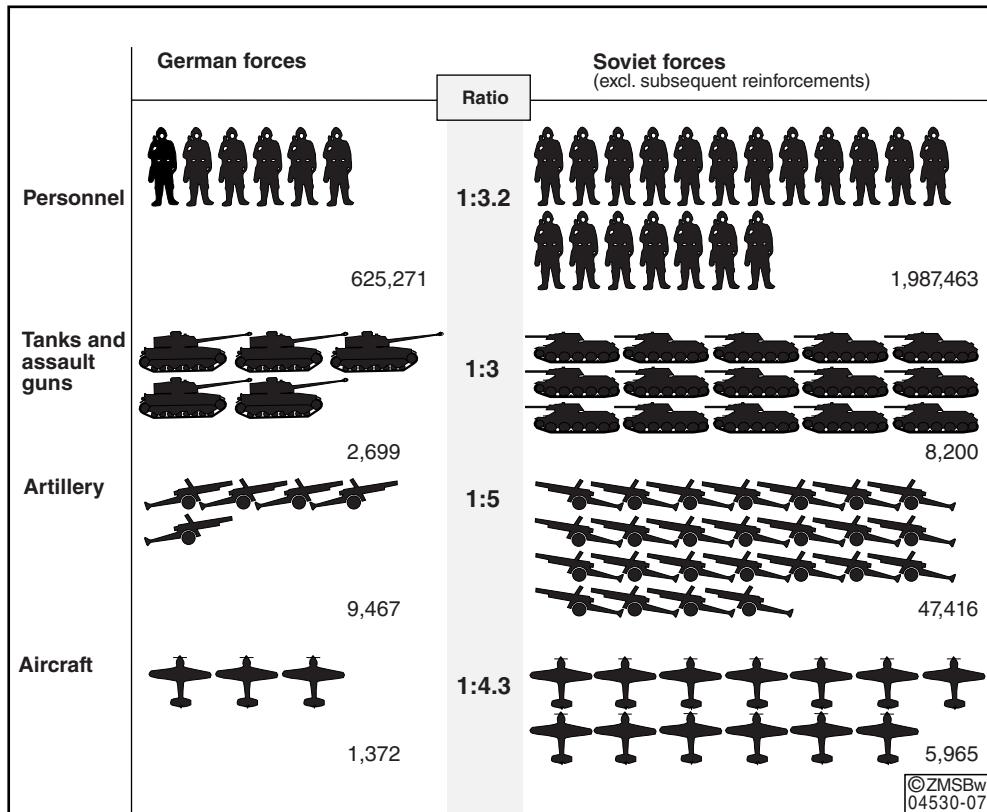


Diagram II.I.3. Ratio of opposing forces in the Kursk–Orel area on 5 July 1943

intention here is not to intervene in this Russian historians' dispute but to clarify the intentions of the German leadership. On the eastern front the Wehrmacht was no longer strategically on the offensive, so that Operation CITADEL constituted only a preventive attack with limited aims within an overall defensive strategy.

### 3. 'FORTRESS KURSK'

The German plan to attack the Soviet concentration of forces at Kursk before the Red Army could launch a concerted offensive with the western Allies seems entirely plausible. However, repeated postponement of the start of the attack gave the enemy sufficient time to develop the Kursk salient into a huge fortress. The code-name 'CITADEL' thus took on an ominous significance. An officer with 503rd Heavy Armoured Battalion, which was equipped with Tiger tanks, reported: 'What took place at Kursk was unbelievable. I've never seen anything like it in the war either before or since. The Soviets had prepared a defensive system of a depth that was

inconceivable to us. Whenever we broke through a position after bitter fighting, we again found ourselves facing a new defensive line.<sup>71</sup> The German attackers encountered a maze of ditches, tank-traps, wire obstacles, anti-tank fronts, minefields, blocking positions, flamethrower barriers, and strongpoints with built-in cannon. Again and again they had to pass through the fire-wall of the enemy artillery, behind which masses of tanks awaited them. In the words of Marshal Georgii Konstantinovich Zhukov, the Soviet defence preparations were 'truly titanic'.<sup>72</sup> The system consisted of eight staggered defensive lines with a total depth of 300 kilometres (including Steppe Front).<sup>73</sup> Inside the Kursk salient the troops of the two Soviet fronts, supported by 300,000 civilians, had worked feverishly on the construction of the defences.<sup>74</sup> In less than three months 500,000 railway wagons loaded with war material had rolled into the salient.<sup>75</sup> In the sector of Voronezh Front alone, 83,912 cannon emplacements and machine-gun positions, 5,322 command and observation posts, 17,505 shelters and earth bunkers had been built, as well as 593 kilometres of wire obstacles. The total length of the gun and communication trenches was 4,240 kilometres.<sup>76</sup> A similarly huge amount of construction work had been done in the sector of Central Front. Most dangerous of all, however, were the Soviet mines. Voronezh Front and Central Front together had laid 503,663 anti-tank mines and 439,348 anti-personnel mines.<sup>77</sup> The most important sectors contained 1,500 anti-tank and 1,700 anti-personnel mines per kilometre,<sup>78</sup> and the single mines scattered between irregularly laid minefields proved particularly treacherous.<sup>79</sup> The German sappers put in a tremendous amount of work, but even after an advance of 60 kilometres they were still faced with minefields.<sup>80</sup>

It turned out, moreover, that the Soviets were surprisingly well informed about the direction of the German attack. As a result, in their very first push forward on 5 July the German tanks ran straight into minefield systems several kilometres deep. In addition, the Red Army had positioned a particularly large mass of forces directly in the anticipated path of the enemy's main thrust. The concentration of artillery in Central Front at the main point of defence was as high as 124 cannon per kilometre.<sup>81</sup> Whereas during its large-scale offensives in the second half of the war the Red Army's artillery strength was often exponentially greater than that of the enemy in the breakthrough sector<sup>82</sup> and literally pulverized the German

<sup>71</sup> Report by Maj.-Gen. (ret.) von Rosen.

<sup>72</sup> Zhukov, *Erinnerungen* (8th edn.), 164.

<sup>73</sup> *Geschichte des Großen Vaterländischen Krieges*, iii. 299.

<sup>74</sup> *Geschichte des zweiten Weltkrieges 1939–1945*, vii. 165.

<sup>75</sup> Werth, *Russia at War*, 681.

<sup>76</sup> *Geschichte des zweiten Weltkrieges 1939–1945*, vii. 165.

<sup>77</sup> Koltunov, 'Kurskaya bitva v tsifrakh', 66 (Table 9). <sup>78</sup> Ibid. 58.

<sup>79</sup> Mellenthin, *Panzerschlachten*, 167. <sup>80</sup> BA-MA, Study ZA 1/1234, 5.

<sup>81</sup> Koltunov, 'Kurskaya bitva v tsifrakh', 65 (Table 7).

<sup>82</sup> For example, in the defeat of Army Group Centre in the summer of 1944: on the German side an average of two to three artillery cannon were deployed per kilometre in the Belorussian salient, whereas the Soviet average in the breakthrough sector was 178. In the second phase of that operation, as many as 356 cannon per kilometre were massed on the left wing of 1st Belorussian Front; see Niepold, 'Die Führung der Heeresgruppe Mitte', 62; 'Belorusskaya operatsiya v tsifrakh', 77 and 80.

positions, at Kursk the German units did not succeed even once in gaining superiority. On the contrary, in the breakthrough sector of Ninth Army, as stressed in the Soviet accounts, the defender's artillery density was one-and-a-half times greater than that of the attacker.<sup>83</sup>

<sup>83</sup> *Geschichte des Großen Vaterländischen Krieges*, iii. 298; see also Heinrici and Hauck, 'Zitadelle', 589.

## II. The Failure of Operation CITADEL

### 1. THE ABORTIVE SOVIET PRE-EMPTIVE STRIKE

Operation CITADEL was ill-starred from the outset. The Red Army had discovered both the direction and the time of the German attack. And so, paradoxically, it was not the attacker but the defender who began the battle, by launching a preventive strike with artillery and air-force units. This is the source of the first myth about the battle of Kursk, which goes as follows: in the night of 4 to 5 July 1943 a group of sappers from 6th Infantry Division was surprised clearing a path through a Soviet minefield. A certain Lance-Corporal Formella had no time to get away and was taken prisoner. Under interrogation he revealed that the German forces would begin the offensive at 02.00 (03.00 Moscow time). Thereupon the commanders-in-chief of the two Soviet army fronts ordered their artillery to open fire on the suspected German marshalling areas 40 minutes earlier than the appointed time, subjecting the Germans to a powerful 30-minute-long artillery barrage which pre-empted the German artillery by ten minutes.<sup>1</sup> The enemy was supposedly taken completely by surprise and suffered ‘enormous losses’. In the northern sector, 90 batteries of Ninth Army were said to have been destroyed, while in the southern sector the artillery of 6th Guards Army is supposed to have wiped out more than 4,000 German soldiers and a large number of tanks and cannon.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, the story continues, the Germans were so disorganized by the pre-emptive strike that they had to postpone the start of the offensive for two hours.<sup>3</sup>

Yet, strangely enough, German war diaries make no mention whatever of such an event. There are only reports from a few divisions of occasional harassing fire on as yet unoccupied marshalling areas. In the area of III Armoured Corps a bridge was hit, somewhat delaying the start of the attack at that location. With that exception, however, all the units on the whole front launched the offensive punctually to the minute. The Soviet ‘artillery counter-strike’ was thus, despite the huge effort, a blow into empty space. Moreover, it seems improbable that a German

<sup>1</sup> Rokossovsky, *A Soldier’s Duty*, 195.

<sup>2</sup> Telpukhovsky, *Die sowjetische Geschichte des Großen Vaterländischen Krieges*, 236.

<sup>3</sup> The crassest exaggeration of all is Martin Caidin’s assertion that the battle of Kursk would probably have turned out differently if the surprise strike by the Soviet artillery had not taken place; see Caidin, *The Tigers are Burning*, 172.

lance-corporal, sent out in advance on a dangerous mission in enemy territory, would have been initiated into secret offensive plans. He probably named a time at random in order to escape the robust Soviet interrogation methods. In any case, it was the wrong time, so the lance-corporal misled the commanders-in-chief of the two Soviet army fronts. In fact the time that had been set for the start of the attack by Ninth Army was 03.30 (04.30 Moscow time), not 02.00.<sup>4</sup> The fact that the pre-emptive artillery strike had no great effect is confirmed by Marshal Zhukov in his memoirs: ‘Observation of the fighting and interrogation of prisoners made me realize that Central and Voronezh Fronts had begun their pre-emptive strike too soon, when the [German] troops were still asleep in the trenches and shelters.’<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, the failed ‘pre-emptive artillery strike’ was portrayed in Soviet official historiography as a great success.

There is a similar myth concerning the allegedly successful preventive strike by the Soviet air force. On the German side the plan was that the Luftwaffe would not carry out an advance attack on this occasion, in order to avoid undermining the surprise effect, but would go into action only once the army units had begun the offensive. It was also planned to send the bombers in first and the fighters afterwards. In the early hours of the morning the front airfields were overcrowded with planes and would have been an ideal target for the Soviet air force. At that very moment hundreds of approaching enemy aircraft suddenly appeared on the radar screens. Alarm spread in the VIII Air Corps operations staff. Clearly, the Luftwaffe’s plan of attack was known to the Soviet leadership, since the enemy bombers would reach the German airfields at exactly the most unfavourable moment and destroy the German aircraft on the ground. But the wing commanders reacted immediately and changed the deployment plan. Instead of starting with the bombers, they sent the fighters into action first.

Now the element of surprise from which the Soviet side was aiming to benefit was suddenly reversed, as the Soviet bomber squadrons were suddenly faced with German fighters. Those early hours witnessed one of the biggest air battles of the Second World War. Maj.-Gen. Seidemann, the commanding general of VIII Air Corps, reported: ‘Everywhere you could see aircraft burning and crashing: it was a massive spectacle of an air battle such as is very rarely seen [...] Around 120 Soviet aircraft were shot down during the attack. Our own losses were so minimal that we could speak of total victory.’<sup>6</sup> The Soviet air operation was planned with precision and extremely boldly executed. Its failure was a question of a few minutes.

<sup>4</sup> KTB AOK 9, 5 July 1943 (fo. 114), BA-MA RH 20-9/134; BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2071, 121–2. Ninth Army attacked with 1st Squadron at 3.30 a.m. and with 2nd Squadron at 6.30 a.m. As for Army Group South, the advance attack by III Armoured Corps of Army Detachment Kempf began at 02.25 a.m. and Fourth Armoured Army went into action at 4.00 a.m.; on this, see Töppel, *Die Offensive gegen Kursk*, 30–1.

<sup>5</sup> Zhukov, *Erinnerungen* (8th edn.), 167.

<sup>6</sup> ‘Der Einsatz der deutschen Luftwaffe im Osten 1943’, 138, BA-MA, Study ZA 3/746. See also Bekker, *Angriffshöhe 4000*, 383 ff.; Klink, *Das Gesetz des Handelns*, 210.

On 5 July a total of 425 Soviet aircraft were shot down at Kursk,<sup>7</sup> while the Germans lost only 36 planes.<sup>8</sup>

The balance of losses could have been very different, however, if the Luftwaffe had not managed to counter the Soviet surprise attack at the last moment. That it was able to do so was mainly due to superior electronic intelligence. For one thing, German radio surveillance was able to pick up the take-off signals of most of the Soviet air units. The decisive factor, however, was deployment of the Freya long-range radar system. When the approaching Soviet aircraft suddenly appeared on the radar screens, the German officers in charge were able to react in time. The outcome of the air battle at Kursk on 5 July was that the German planes gained command of the air against a quantitatively much stronger enemy. They retained that dominance in the following days during the advance of the German army units, but for the last time in the war.

## 2. THE FAILED ATTACK BY NINTH ARMY (5 TO 13 JULY 1943)

Col.-Gen. Model had five corps at his disposal. He sent three of them into attack in a wedge formation with XXXXVII Armoured Corps at the apex, covered on the left flank by XXXXI and on the right by XXXXVI Armoured Corps, both of which had relatively few tank units. XXIII Army Corps was to carry out holding attacks on the left wing, while XX Army Corps on the right wing was entrusted only with security tasks.

Whereas in Manstein's units the tanks were deployed in the front line for breakthrough, Model sent his units into attack in a deeply staggered formation. The first wave contained only a few armoured divisions, instead of which Model used infantry divisions, mainly supported by assault guns, to achieve an initial breakthrough. In the second wave he intended to send three armoured divisions forward to widen the breach. He did not, however, deploy the especially powerful Esebeck Group, consisting of two armoured divisions and an armoured infantry division, to maintain the momentum of the attack, but kept it in reserve, to be sent forward in the event of a successful breakthrough.

This procedure proved to be a mistake, since in the first phase, when the aim was to reduce Soviet artillery fire, the infantry units had to struggle through wire-encumbered terrain. When they were finally left lying there, the tanks were

<sup>7</sup> Of these, 260 were claimed by VIII Air Corps and 165 by 1st Air Division; see 'Tägliche Einsatzübersichten der Luftflotte 4, 3.7 bis 10.12.1943', BA-MA RL 7/667; on Air Fleet 6, see 'Tagesmeldungen des Flivo 2. Armee, 1.7 bis 30.9.1943', BA-MA RH 20-2/1337; calculated by Ulf Balke in the light of documents from his private archive. According to other calculations, the number of planes downed was 413; see BA-MA, Study ZA 3/746, 141; BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2071, 124; BA-MA Study ZA 3/748, 75.

<sup>8</sup> VIII Air Corps lost 24 planes and 1st Air Division(Air Fleet 6) 12; see the tables of losses in files BA-MA RL 2-III/1191–1193 (Gen.Qu.Mstr., 6. Abt.: 'Flugzeugunfälle und Verluste bei den fliegenden Verbänden'). According to Klink (*Das Gesetz des Handelns*, 337–8), the Luftwaffe units deployed at Kursk on 5 July lost only 26 planes.

launched on a frontal attack on fortified positions, which partly resulted in unnecessary losses. Model chose not to deploy his armoured units in closed formation—a fundamental violation of Guderian's concentration principle. Such half-hearted, timid use of armour must have seemed surprising on the part of a man who had become Hitler's 'favourite general' on account of his determined—not to say reckless—deployment of his troops. How can this contradiction be explained? An initial answer has already been given: Model had to attack the central front with his army in a southerly direction, but he had Bryansk Front to the north, ready to attack his units in the rear. That was why he positioned Esebeck Group so far back, so that it could be deployed not for an advance towards Kursk but as firepower against Bryansk Front. The second reason was that he himself was clearly not convinced that the offensive would succeed.<sup>9</sup> Of all the top generals, Model had the most realistic view of the situation, owing, among other things, to the fact that he was in the very front line more often than all the others. Nevertheless, he never openly opposed Hitler with regard to Operation CITADEL, but constantly put forward new demands for reinforcements which resulted, on each occasion, in postponement of the date of attack. He almost succeeded in putting off the offensive altogether, since only five days remained from its beginning until the western Allies' landing in Sicily.<sup>10</sup>

How right Model was to slip into the unwonted role of 'ditherer' is shown by a comparison of his army with the real potential of Central Front. An unbiased observer would have concluded that the German units were the defender and the Soviets the attacker, if not for the fact that Central Front was entrenched behind such huge defensive installations. The Soviet army front had massed so many forces in the path of the anticipated German main thrust that it seemed as if it itself intended to launch a breakthrough attack. Thus 13th Army had 4,500 men and 45 tanks deployed per kilometre.<sup>11</sup> Model's attack units possessed only 752 artillery cannon (excluding grenade launchers),<sup>12</sup> while Central Front had 3,140 artillery cannon and 5,792 grenade launchers at the ready.<sup>13</sup> A similar imbalance had also existed during earlier successful German offensives, but the Wehrmacht had generally managed to achieve relative superiority by using the element of surprise at the main point of attack. This time, however, the artillery density of the Soviet defender was 50 per cent higher than that of the Germans.<sup>14</sup> In addition, on both sides of the Orel–Kursk railway line where the main thrust of the German attack was anticipated, 13th Army was reinforced by IV Artillery Corps, with over 700 cannon and grenade launchers.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>9</sup> This was confirmed by his son, Bundeswehr Brig.-Gen. (ret.) Hans Georg Model, in a personal communication to the author.

<sup>10</sup> Klink, *Das Gesetz des Handelns*, 271; Guderian, *Erinnerungen eines Soldaten*, 278; Weinberg, *A World at Arms*, 602 and 604.

<sup>11</sup> Glantz and House, *The Battle of Kursk*, 64.

<sup>12</sup> Zetterling and Frankson, *Kursk 1943*, 32.

<sup>13</sup> Koltunov, 'Kurskaya bitva v tsifrakh', 63.

<sup>14</sup> *Geschichte des Großen Vaterländischen Krieges*, iii. 298; see also Heinrich and Hauck, 'Zitadelle', 589.

<sup>15</sup> *Geschichte des Großen Vaterländischen Krieges*, iii. 298.

The Wehrmacht's last major offensive on the eastern front began at 03.30 on 5 July. 'It was a laborious and costly process of grinding our way through a huge and seemingly endless defensive system whose intervening spaces were strewn with mines and bristling with weapons of every kind.'<sup>16</sup> Model's aim of saving the precious armoured divisions for the Red Army's imminent summer offensive seemed thoroughly reasonable, but without the penetrative power of armoured units in closed formation it proved impossible to achieve a rapid breakthrough through the enemy's deeply staggered defences. The density of fire from the Soviet direct-fire weapons was so great that eight anti-tank shots per minute, and over 1,000 shots per minute from hand weapons, could be fired on every hundred metres of the front.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, the enemy artillery fire proved so impenetrable that the infantry finally lagged behind the accompanying assault guns. Model's conduct of the attack also proved fatal to some of the 90 Ferdinand tank destroyers, whose thick armour reputedly made them invulnerable. Suddenly these huge vehicles, weighing almost 70 tonnes, seemed lost in the maze of the enemy's defensive system. According to Soviet accounts too, the fighting was 'unimaginably fierce'<sup>18</sup> from the outset. On 5 July Model's troops managed to penetrate 8 kilometres into the Soviet defensive system, but they paid a high price for that success. Casualties at the end of the first day of battle totalled 1,063 dead, 5,921 wounded, and 215 missing.<sup>19</sup>

Konstantin Rokossovsky, the commander-in-chief of Central Front, had so many reserves at his disposal that he was already able to launch an operational counter-attack on the second day of the battle in order to throw the Germans back on their starting position. To this he committed 2nd Armoured Army, plus XIX Armoured Corps and several infantry divisions. The attack was supported by 900 cannon, 637 grenade launchers, and 200 rocket launchers.<sup>20</sup> This counter-strike took place far too early, however, since the German offensive was still far from its culmination. Hasty and uncoordinated, the operation failed from the outset. Moreover, for the Soviet armoured units fighting in the direction of the main thrust, the push ended with a shock. They came up against German Tiger tanks, with which the crews of the Soviet T-34s recklessly sought a duel. Within minutes 107th armoured brigade lost 46 of its 50 tanks, and 164th armoured brigade, which had joined in the attack, lost a further 23.<sup>21</sup> Central Front HQ immediately withdrew the armoured units and ordered the mass of fighting vehicles on that section of the front to dig in so that the enemy could see and attack only the turrets. The remaining tanks were to be deployed only against infantry and light vehicles. Rokossovsky observed in retrospect: 'This order had been prompted by circumstances.

<sup>16</sup> BA-MA, Study ZA 3/746, 147.

<sup>17</sup> Shutov and Ramanichev, 'Ognennaya duga', 261.

<sup>18</sup> Komsomolskaya Pravda, 10 July 1943, quoted in *Geschichte des Großen Vaterländischen Krieges*, iii. 321.

<sup>19</sup> Medical officer AOK 9, 10 July 1943, activity report for the period 4 to 10 July 1943, BA-MA RH 20-9/409.

<sup>20</sup> Zetterling and Frankson, *Kursk 1943*, 87.

<sup>21</sup> Glantz and House, *The Battle of Kursk*, 93; see also Andronikov, 'Gitlerovskii fakel', 8.

I remembered only too well the time when our tankmen had hastily launched a head-on attack against Tigers. They had suffered substantial casualties and been hurled back behind the infantry lines.<sup>22</sup>

The quantitative role of the Tiger is nevertheless overestimated in the Soviet accounts. At the start of the offensive, Ninth Army had available only 505th Heavy Armoured Battalion, comprising two companies with a total of 26 operational Tigers.<sup>23</sup> While the Tigers were generally victorious in all their encounters with Soviet tanks, a far more dangerous enemy awaited them. On 5 July, six Tigers were taken out of battle after driving onto mines. On 6 July no fewer than 12 Tigers fell victim to mines and also needed repairing.<sup>24</sup> All in all, however, Ninth Army HQ considered the second day of the offensive a success. Not only had the German forces managed to fight off Central Front's surprise counter-attack but, above all, new ground had been gained on the wings.

During the next two days too, Ninth Army made difficult but steady progress. It had now reached Central Front's main bastion, the strongly fortified village of Ponyri<sup>25</sup> on the Orel–Kursk railway line and the Olkhovatka upland, a natural barrier 18 kilometres south of the starting line of the offensive. Both sides were conscious of the operational importance of the upland, from which the whole battlefield could be observed as far as Kursk. Hence the saying: 'Whoever holds Olkhovatka holds the gates of Kursk.'<sup>26</sup> Nowhere were the fortifications harder to penetrate, and nowhere was there a greater concentration of strength. Apart from Prokhorovka, this was where the heaviest fighting in the battle of Kursk took place. Many metaphors have been applied to the fighting in the Kursk 'inferno', as the salient later came to be known. The battle has been called 'a second Verdun',<sup>27</sup> with Ponyri figuring as 'a new Douaumont'.<sup>28</sup> Ponyri has also been described as 'the Stalingrad of the Kursk salient'.<sup>29</sup>

Almost all accounts of the eastern campaign make the erroneous assumption that a Soviet infantry division was numerically weaker than a German one. That was true only on paper. Wehrmacht divisions were theoretically stronger, but they normally had at their disposal only units that were hierarchically assigned to them. By contrast, the Red Army had two components: on the one hand, units structured hierarchically from army to company; on the other, a large available mass of unattached units. In deployment both components were mixed, so that a Soviet division was often several times stronger than a German equivalent. However, 307th Infantry Division, the division assigned to the defence of Ponyri, topped them all. The forces in its zone of action included 51st, 103rd, and 129th Armoured Brigades, 27th Guards Heavy Armoured Regiment, 1422nd Assault

<sup>22</sup> Rokossovsky, *A Soldier's Duty*, 198.

<sup>23</sup> The reconstituted 3rd company did not go into action in the Kursk salient until 8 July.

<sup>24</sup> Schneider, *Tiger im Kampf*, i. 271. The following day, 7 July, 14 Tigers were still operational; see 'Panzerlage Heeresgruppe Mitte', 7 July 1943 (fo. 28), BA-MA RH 10/65.

<sup>25</sup> There are in fact two localities with this name. The legendary battle took place at the Ponyri located directly on the Orel–Kursk railway line. Ponyri 2 lies a few kilometres to the south-west.

<sup>26</sup> John, *Kursk*, 72.

<sup>27</sup> Zins, *Die Operation Zitadelle*, 24.

<sup>28</sup> John, *Kursk*, 72.

<sup>29</sup> Carell, *Verbrannte Erde*, 38.

Gun Regiment, 13th Anti-Tank Brigade, 5th Artillery Assault Division, 11th Grenade Launcher Brigade, 22nd Guards Rocket Launcher Brigade, and parts of 1st Guards Infantry Brigade.<sup>30</sup> It possessed a total of over 380 barrelled weapons, a concentration never again amassed in the course of the war.<sup>31</sup> What awaited the German tanks at Ponyri can be seen from the enormous density of anti-tank cannon, no fewer than 70 guns per kilometre.<sup>32</sup>

On 7 July, 86th and 292nd Infantry Divisions attacked Ponyri, with support from parts of 18th Armoured Division. After taking control of the place in fierce house-to-house combat, they were driven back by a Soviet counter-attack. There followed a series of German attacks and Soviet counter-attacks, with the centre of the village repeatedly changing hands. Both sides brought in reserves. Finally, the place was shelled by ten Soviet artillery regiments. It was only in the evening of 8 July that the Germans managed to take Ponyri, except for the southern tip. The following day, with the help of the huge 'Ferdinand' tank destroyers, the hotly contested Hill 253.5 was stormed.<sup>33</sup> But that exhausted XXXXI Armoured Corps' attacking strength, whereas the Soviet enemy continued to bring in new forces, such as XVII Guards Rifle Corps and units of III Armoured Corps. There now began a positional battle with high losses on both sides.<sup>34</sup>

The attack on the Olkhovatka upland proved even more difficult.<sup>35</sup> Dug-in tanks and artillery cannon lay in wait, firing directly at the German fighting vehicles. The Soviet XVI and XIX Armoured Corps, which had taken up position on both flanks of the upland, were a further threat. On 9 July Model had to call a pause for the first time to regroup his exhausted units and await the arrival of fresh reserves. The attack was resumed the next day with the support of additional aerial forces from Army Group South. However, Rokossovsky too had regrouped and threw his last reserves, IX Tank Corps, into the battle. Despite its considerable force, the German attack led only to localized breaches, above all at Teploye. The Ninth Army war diary records significantly that the fighting had the 'novel character of a "rolling battle of material attrition"'.<sup>36</sup> Model broke off the attack once again in order to regroup on the following day. He realized that, with the

<sup>30</sup> Rokossovsky, *A Soldier's Duty*, 199; Zetterling and Frankson, *Kursk 1943*, 87 and 91.

<sup>31</sup> Zetterling and Frankson, *Kursk 1943*, 87.

<sup>32</sup> Piekalkiewicz, *Unternehmen Zitadelle*, 154.

<sup>33</sup> Depending on the map, this hill is also numbered '257'.

<sup>34</sup> KTB 9. Pz.Div., 7 to 12 July 1943 (fos. 56–80), BA-MA RH 27-9/14; KTB 18. Pz.Div., 7 to 12 July 1943 (fos. 9–16 and 19–25), BA-MA RH 27-18/139; Paul, *Geschichte der 18. Panzer-Division*, 249–54; Schmidt, *Geschichte der 10. Division*, 177–81; Nitz, *Die 292. Infanterie-Division*, 133–9; Zins, *Die Operation Zitadelle*, 47–59; Glantz and House, *The Battle of Kursk*, 115 ff. and 120–1; Carell, *Verbrannte Erde*, 38–9; Rokossovsky, *A Soldier's Duty*, 199 ff.; *Geschichte des Großen Vaterländischen Krieges*, iii. 313–14; Shutov and Ramanichev, 'Ognennaya duga', 263–4; Healy, *Kursk 1943*, 50–1.

<sup>35</sup> KTB 4. Pz.Div., 7 to 12 July 1943 (555–63), BA-MA RH 27-4/76; 'Erfahrungsbericht 4. Panzerdivision: I./Pz.Rgt. 35', 21 Aug. 1943: 'Russische Panzertaktik' (fos. 26–7), BA-MA RH 27-4/77; KTB 20. Pz.Div., 5 to 12 July 1943 (fos. 10–18), BA-MA RH 27-20/163; 'Sommerschlacht im Orël-Bogen' (fos. 6–9), BA-MA RH 27-20/234; Neumann, *Die 4. Panzerdivision*, 21–39; Zins, *Die Operation Zitadelle*, 47–59; Hinze, *Hitzte*, 207–9.

<sup>36</sup> KTB AOK 9, 9 July 1943 (fo. 128), BA-MA RH 20-9/134.

forces available so far, he would make no progress in the present direction of thrust. But he by no means acknowledged himself beaten and intended to resume the offensive on 12 July. He had not yet played his trump card, 12th Armoured Division, and had also been promised the transfer of 36th Infantry Division and 5th and 8th Armoured Divisions from the reserve forces of Army Group Centre.<sup>37</sup> Above all, Model fundamentally altered his plan of operation. He abandoned the idea of advancing directly towards Kursk, since that meant a frontal attack on the almost untakeable Olkhovatka upland position. Instead, he planned to shift the point of maximum effort from XXXXVII Armoured Corps in the centre to XXXXVI Armoured Corps on the right flank and avoid the fortified upland plateau by advancing in a south-westerly direction. In this offensive his armoured units were to be deployed for the first time in closed formation.<sup>38</sup> They were still surprisingly intact, owing to Model's restrained use of armour, having suffered total losses of only 63 battle tanks, assault guns, and tank destroyers up to 11 July.<sup>39</sup> Ninth Army's total losses of only 77 fighting vehicles<sup>40</sup> during Operation CITADEL were relatively low anyway, compared with 526 on the Soviet side.<sup>41</sup>

At this precise moment, the culminating point of the attack, when the last reserves were thrown into the balance, an event of major importance occurred to the north of Ninth Army's zone of action. It was exactly what Model had feared from the outset. Bryansk Front and the left wing of West Front launched an offensive in the rear of Ninth Army against the hopelessly inferior Second Armoured Army. The preliminary attacks on 11 July still seemed to be only holding attacks, but on 12 July the Soviet units began an offensive on a broad front and immediately achieved deep breakthroughs. If they succeeded in advancing on Orel, Ninth Army would be cut off from its major supply lines and threatened with encirclement. Since Second Armoured Army was unable to close the breaches with its own forces, on 12 July Army Group Centre HQ ordered Ninth Army to detach a number of armoured and infantry divisions and send them to the neighbouring army at forced march. The initial hope was that it would be possible to bring them back after a rapid intervention and resume the offensive against Kursk. However, the critical situation of Second Armoured Army deteriorated further 'at the pace of an avalanche'.<sup>42</sup> It was now clear 'that the enemy's operational objective was to achieve

<sup>37</sup> Zins, *Die Operation Zitadelle*, 58.

<sup>38</sup> KTB AOK 9, 12 July 1943 (fo. 135), BA-MA RH 20-9/134; see also 'Gefechtsbericht der 9. Armee', 2, BA-MA RH 20-9/155.

<sup>39</sup> 'Geheime Kommandosache: Panzerausfälle "Zitadelle"', Heeresgruppe Mitte, Stand 5.-7.7.1943, nur Totalverluste' (fo. 16), BA-MA RH 10/65. This figure did not include 10 listed assault guns, which were classified as artillery.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 14 July, 12; see also 'Geheime Kommandosache: Pz. Totalverluste (Orël-Bogen), Stand 14 July 1943 (berichtigt)', 71, BA-MA RH 10/64. Assault guns, classified as artillery, were not included in these statistics.

<sup>41</sup> From 5 to 15 July Central Front lost 651 armoured vehicles, 526 of which were irreplaceable: 'Spravka o poteryakh voisk frontov, poteryakh, nanesennykh imi protivniku, i vydovy o deistviyah tankovykh voisk protivnika v operatsiakh s 5-go po 15-e iulya 1943 goda' (source: Central Archives of the Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation, CAMO, doc. 21, 2).

<sup>42</sup> KTB AOK 9, 12 July 1943 (fo. 133), BA-MA RH 20-9/134.

the collapse of the whole Orel bulge by means of a large-scale offensive'.<sup>43</sup> For Ninth Army, after the failure on 10 July of the planned rapid advance on Kursk, this new development meant the end of Operation CITADEL. On the morning of 13 July Model realized that it was pointless to resume the attack. It was finally ended on the same day by Hitler's decision to halt the offensive, taken at his headquarters in Rastenburg, East Prussia.<sup>44</sup> With that, the northern pincer of the overall operation ceased to exist.

### 3. THE ADVANCE OF ARMY GROUP SOUTH UP TO 12 JULY

The attack in Army Group South's sector had much greater penetrative force, owing to various factors. For one thing, the units deployed were better equipped, both quantitatively and qualitatively. While Ninth Army in the north had only 988 tanks and assault weapons, Fourth Armoured Army and Army Detachment Kempf together possessed 1,377, including 102 Tigers and 200 Panthers.<sup>45</sup> But the different way in which armour was employed was also a factor. In the initial phase Model mainly attacked with infantry divisions, endeavouring to save his tanks to widen the breakthrough at a later stage. Manstein, on the other hand, deployed his armoured units at the spearhead of the attack in the manner of earlier 'blitzkrieg' operations.

Army Group South's forces were deployed as follows. Fourth Armoured Army under Col.-Gen. Hoth attacked with two wedge formations next to each other: XXXVIII Armoured Corps on the left and II SS Armoured Corps on the right, with the left flank secured by LII Army Corps. The right flank, however, was to be covered offensively by Army Detachment Kempf. For this General Kempf committed III Armoured Corps and XI Army Corps (the Raus Corps).<sup>46</sup>

Fourth Armoured Army had already carried out preliminary attacks in the afternoon of 4 July to seize possession of the intervening ridge of hills. The main attack began at 04.00 on 5 July. From the outset, attention focused on the performance of the new Panzer V (Panther), from which wonders were clearly expected. Hitler, in his technology frenzy, had postponed the Kursk offensive from June to July to wait for the first models to be ready. Western specialist historians generally consider the Panther to be the most successful tank design of the Second World War.<sup>47</sup> At Kursk it already showed itself far superior to the Soviet battle tanks in duel situations. Nevertheless, its first deployment proved a false start. Col.-Gen. Guderian, the inspector-general of armoured troops, had protested strongly but in vain against hasty front-line deployment of this technically immature model. Although testing had by no means been completed, the factory-new vehicles were

<sup>43</sup> 'Gefechtsbericht der 9. Armee', 2, BA-MA RH 20-9/155.

<sup>44</sup> Zins, *Die Operation Zitadelle*, 63.

<sup>45</sup> 'Panzer-Ausgangslage Süd 5.7.1943' (fo. 15), BA-MA RH 10/64.

<sup>46</sup> Kempf also had XXXXII Army Corps under his command, but it took no active part in Operation CITADEL.

<sup>47</sup> For an analysis of armour deployment at Kursk, see Part II, Chapter III.3 of the present volume.

rushed to the front. Their very first deployment—before the attack had even started—ended in fiasco. During the march to the marshalling area in the night of 4 to 5 July, 45 Panthers, almost a quarter of the total number, dropped out because of technical problems.<sup>48</sup> Among the tanks left standing on both sides of the march route, some had caught fire as a result of leaking fuel-pumps. As if that were not enough, this first deployment was also a failure from the tactical viewpoint. At the beginning of the attack, 10th Armoured Brigade, which included the Panthers, set out in the direction of Cherkasskoye and immediately got stuck in a minefield.<sup>49</sup> With the Panther brigade showered with fire from the Soviet artillery, the sappers began their thankless task. Armoured Infantry Division ‘Grossdeutschland’, to which 10th Armoured Brigade also belonged, had 25 tanks put out of action by mines on the first day of the attack. Most of them were Panthers.<sup>50</sup>

The other attacking units encountered lesser difficulties in general, but everywhere they came up against ‘fortress-like defensive positions studded with dug-in tanks, anti-tank cannon, and flamethrowers’<sup>51</sup> As one Soviet tank commander recalled: ‘The scale of the battle was beyond human imagination. [...] The sun was hardly visible through the clouds of smoke and dust raised by thousands of grenades and aerial bombs exploding almost simultaneously. There was a hellish crunching and crashing of grenades striking armour.’<sup>52</sup> In addition, repeated rainfall had turned the few roads into a morass. Despite everything, the German tanks rolled slowly but inexorably forward. On 6 July, the second day of the offensive, the major communications hub of Yakovlevo was taken. On the same day, II SS Armoured Corps, deployed on the right wing, broke through the second Soviet defensive line and its foremost sections reached Kalinin, south of Teterevino.<sup>53</sup> Its units had thus already advanced 25 kilometres, fighting their way through minefields and other obstacles, and were still 17 kilometres from Prokhorovka. But the operation had not gone according to plan. The original idea had been for XXXXVIII Armoured Corps, deployed on the left wing, to carry the main thrust of the attack. That was why it had been given the 200 new Panthers in addition to its normal contingent. Since more of them were quickly to be found in repair shops than on the battlefield, XXXXVIII Armoured Corps hung back, while II SS Armoured Corps made faster progress, shifting the main thrust of the offensive towards the north-east.<sup>54</sup>

The attack on the right wing by Army Detachment Kempf proved the most difficult. The original intention was that it should also attack towards the north, shoulder to shoulder with II SS Armoured Corps, to cover the latter’s right flank. But Kempf’s III Armoured Corps had problems crossing the Donets. The Soviet positions to the east of Belgorod were so strongly constructed that 6th Armoured

<sup>48</sup> BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2071, 121.

<sup>49</sup> *Die Geschichte des Panzerkorps Großdeutschland*, ii. 186.

<sup>50</sup> Zins, *Die Operation Zitadelle*, 73; Zetterling and Frankson, *Kursk 1943*, 85.

<sup>51</sup> Agte, Michael Wittmann, 52. <sup>52</sup> Quoted in Solovev, *Wendepunkt*, 100.

<sup>53</sup> KTB II. SS-Panzerkorps, 6 July 1943, BA-MA RS 2-2/17; KTB 4. Pz.Armee, 6 July 1943, 127, BA-MA RH 21-4/104; Stadler, *Die Offensive gegen Kursk*, 205.

<sup>54</sup> Gläser, ‘Die Schlacht um Kursk’, 48.

Division, which was supposed to form the connecting link to the Waffen SS units advancing on the left, could make no progress. It had to be detached and deployed further to the right (eastwards) in 7th Armoured Division's zone of action. For that reason, the attack gained ground eastwards rather than northwards. A gap arose, with the two attacking wedges of Fourth Armoured Army and Army Detachment Kempf threatening to move away from each other at right angles. At the same time two (unplanned) open flanks formed on the inner wings of the two formations and had to be covered by units which were supposed to advance at the spearhead of the attack. In the meantime, the shortage of infantry had become so acute that armoured units had to be used to provide some flank protection.

On the Soviet side, however, the situation was becoming much more critical. Clearly, the Soviets had felt too secure behind their apparently impenetrable defences and had trusted to their numerical superiority. When after only one-and-a-half days the SS Armoured Corps had already broken through the second defensive line, the Soviet staffs became greatly agitated. The commander of 4th SS Armoured Infantry Regiment, for example, reported:

Soon after Luchki had fallen, that is at noon on 6 July, one of our tactical radio reconnaissance units picked up Russian radio reports which clearly showed the enemy was completely unhinged. One corps general kept desperately calling for reserves and help from his army. [...] By the second day of the attack, the top leadership was also completely overwhelmed and in total confusion [...] We were surprised and [...] directed our attack towards the closer targeted radio transmitter, overwhelmed the enemy, who was already getting weaker, and towards 19.00 reached a small farmhouse to the west of Kalinin. And there we found a Russian general with his corps staff. The enemy was taken prisoner without resistance. There was not even a guard in front of the command post, since our arrival took them completely by surprise.<sup>55</sup>

The nervousness of the Soviet leadership was due to the results of the first tank duels, almost all of which they lost. In the area of tank technology, it became obvious that the advantage now lay with the modernized German armour: 'The T-34 crews' earlier feeling of superiority over the German tanks now gave way to a kind of panic as soon as they saw Tigers deployed against them.'<sup>56</sup> As well as the Tiger heavy tank, the Panther medium tank also became a nightmare for the Soviet tank crews. It too proved invulnerable to frontal fire from T-34/76s, while its high-speed cannon could pierce the frontal armour of a T-34/76 from a distance of over 2,000 metres.<sup>57</sup> After the battle of Kursk, tank commander Gen. Pavel Alekseyevich Rotmistrov had to admit to Stalin that 'the T-34 is powerless against the T-V [Panther].'<sup>58</sup> In the meantime, however, a new series of Panzer IVs (H version) had been deployed at the front. Their silhouette was somewhat similar to that of a

<sup>55</sup> Stadler, *Die Offensive gegen Kursk*, 205.

<sup>56</sup> Kleine and Kühn, *Tiger*, 111.

<sup>57</sup> Zetterling and Frankson, *Kursk 1943*, 178. See ibid. 213–15 for an excellent tabulated overview of the penetrative force of tank cannon deployed at that time. See also Glantz and House, *The Battle of Kursk*, 19, and Jentz, *Der Panther*, 133. The latter work reproduces, on pages 129 ff., an interesting occurrence report by Guderian on the first deployment of Panthers at Kursk.

<sup>58</sup> Zetterling and Frankson, *Kursk 1943*, 70, n. 10. On this, see Zamulin, *Prokhorovka*, 664–5.

Tiger, which caused considerable confusion among Soviet tank crews. The majority of German tanks actually consisted of older Panzer III and IV models. But because the modern tank types were always deployed at the spearhead of the attack, the Red Army at first believed that the German armour would largely consist of Tigers, which were virtually invincible, and Panthers, which were also hard to defeat.

Two major decisions were taken by the Soviet operational staffs right at the beginning of the battle. The first was the surprisingly early deployment of the strategic reserve. General Vatutin, the commander-in-chief of Voronezh Front, had sent almost all the operational reserves into action on 6 July. In addition to 1st Armoured Army (VI and XXXI Armoured Corps and III Motorized Corps), they consisted of II and V Guards Armoured Corps and several unattached tank and assault-gun units. The Soviet high command (Stavka) was consequently obliged to throw large parts of the strategic reserve into the balance. Considering that there was almost uninterrupted fighting on the southern half of the eastern front from 5 July 1943 to 6 May 1944, it is astonishing that on 6 July, the second day of the battle of Kursk, the Soviet leadership already called upon the strategic reserve. The intention had been to deploy that reserve only after the defensive battle was over, keeping it for the subsequent summer offensive so as to lend added impetus to the Soviet thrust. II and X Armoured Corps and 5th Guards Armoured Army were already put on the march on 6 July. In the next few days the order was extended to other major formations of Steppe Front, which was stationed in the hinterland, such as 5th Guards Army, 27th and 53rd Armies, and finally 4th Guards Army.<sup>59</sup> This resulted in a huge increase in Soviet strength, especially armour. Voronezh Front, including the reserves which had joined it by 20 July, now had a total of 2,924 fighting vehicles at its disposal.<sup>60</sup>

The second major decision was Vatutin's order to dig in a large part of his armour. The commander-in-chief of Voronezh Front had actually planned an operational counter-attack for the second day of the battle, for which 1st Armoured Army and V Guards Armoured Corps stood ready with total of around 1,000 tanks and assault guns.<sup>61</sup> On the same day, Central Front conducted an operational counter-attack against Germany's Ninth Army in the northern part of the Kursk salient. As already described, this ended in fiasco when the Soviet tanks clashed with the German Tigers. Vatutin, however, called off his own counter-attack on the evening of 5 July because of alarming reports of the first encounters with Tigers and Panthers.<sup>62</sup> Instead, he proposed to dig in most of his tanks up to the turrets so as to form a compact anti-tank front side by side with the infantry. Such static deployment of large armoured units was against all the rules and contrary to the 'cavalier spirit' of the tank forces. But the thinking of the commander-in-chief of the Voronezh Front was based on the conviction that only defensive deployment of

<sup>59</sup> Zetterling and Frankson, *Kursk 1943*, 88 and 92; Shutov and Ramanichev, 'Ognennaya duga', 266–8.

<sup>60</sup> See CAMO Collection, doc. 20, 'Spravka o poteriakh tankov po deistvuyushchim frontam v boyach s 5.7.43 g. po 20.7.43 g.',

<sup>61</sup> Glantz and House, *The Battle of Kursk*, 102.

<sup>62</sup> Shutov and Ramanichev, 'Ognennaya duga', 266.

the operational armoured reserve could hold back the German advance long enough for the strategic reserve to arrive.

Vatutin's proposal was entirely appropriate to the situation, but it nevertheless met immediately with strong protest. Above all Marshal Zhukov, as representative of the Soviet high command, protested against such a 'preposterous use' of armour and demanded a vigorous counter-attack. This, however, would have led to an open-field battle which, given the Germans' tactical superiority, would have resulted in painful decimation of the Soviet armour. And that would probably have cleared the way for a rapid advance on Kursk. The fact that Stalin dropped his opposition and finally decided in favour of defensive deployment was due not least to the energetic intervention of the man who was later to become his successor, Nikita Sergeyevich Khrushchev, then a member of Voronezh Front's military council. So there was no change to Vatutin's decision to deploy the mass of his tanks statically as a dike against the German armour,<sup>63</sup> which was pushing forward 'like a steel wedge'.<sup>64</sup>

The commander-in-chief of Voronezh Front was unequivocally proved right by the course of battle in the following days, when the impetus of the German attack was slowed appreciably. In the words of a German study: 'Each of these [dug-in] tanks was itself a strongpoint whose destruction or removal was very time-consuming'.<sup>65</sup> The Soviet tanks were mostly buried deep in the earth in reverse slope position, with only the turret showing. That made them a difficult target to hit. The German fighting vehicles had to come very close, thus losing the advantage of their longer range. This would normally have been no problem for the Tigers and Panthers, since their frontal armour could not be pierced by Soviet tank weapons. However, the Red Army deployed a number of tanks as 'concealed weapons'. Their crews let the German tanks roll by their camouflaged positions and then opened fire on them from the side or the rear. In that way they could be dangerous even for a Tiger, since it had weaker armour on the sides and back. Such deployment, however, was usually a death sentence for the crews of the hidden tanks. They gave away their position as soon as they fired their first shot.

Even though Vatutin deployed most of his fighting vehicles statically, the continuous arrival of fresh reinforcements still left him with huge masses for counter-attacks on the German flanks. Nevertheless, the following example clearly shows how dangerous it was to get into a duel with a Tiger, despite numerical superiority. On 8 July a Soviet armoured regiment managed a surprise advance on Teterevino, where there was an important concentration of logistic installations. The German tank units were deployed far away, but there was just one Tiger in the repair shop. Its commander, SS-Unterscharführer (Sergeant) Franz Staudegger, decided to take on the 50 to 60 Soviet tanks with the Tiger, even though it was not yet fully repaired. He and his crew, who belonged to 14th Company, 1st SS

<sup>63</sup> *Geschichte des Großen Vaterländischen Krieges*, iii. 320–1; Glantz and House, *The Battle of Kursk*, 102–3; Carell, *Verbrannte Erde*, 82–3.

<sup>64</sup> Shutov and Ramanichev, 'Ognennaya duga', 267.

<sup>65</sup> BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2071, 126.

Armoured Regiment, began what seemed a hopeless fight, but the Tiger's superior range and better armour prevailed. After 22 T-34s had been shot down, the remaining tank crews fled in panic. For that single action, which he carried out 'on his own initiative', Staudegger, an Austrian Unterscharführer, was awarded the Knight's Cross.<sup>66</sup>

The slowdown of the German attack was not, however, due solely to Vatutin's wise decision to dig his tanks in. Another reason was the sudden drop in air support. As already mentioned, during Operation CITADEL the Luftwaffe enjoyed air superiority for the first time on the eastern front, but this was only occasionally of use to the attacking units of Army Group South. On 7 July VIII Air Corps had to release 30 per cent of its bombers and 40 per cent of its ground-attack aircraft for the support of Model's Ninth Army in the north. But things got even worse. On 10 July VIII Air Corps' bombers were placed entirely at the disposal of Ninth Army, and numerous fighters were sent to the far distant Mius front. This meant that Army Group South was now left with only a third of its original air strength.<sup>67</sup>

Nevertheless, the armies fought their way doggedly forward through minefields and barriers in the face of a much stronger enemy, with the numerical superiority of the Soviet artillery particularly perceptible. Yet in this phase of the battle the German tanks were unstoppable. On 9 July the first units reached the River Psel, the last natural obstacle before Kursk. The next day the infantry succeeded in crossing the river. Meanwhile, despite Vatutin's defensive deployment, the Soviet armour had suffered catastrophic losses. The tank units of 6th and 7th Army were largely destroyed in the first two days. By 10 July, 1st Armoured Army had shrunk from an original 646 to 100 tanks and assault guns.<sup>68</sup> Up to and including 13 July, Voronezh Front (together with the reserves brought in) lost a total of 1,223 tanks and assault guns.<sup>69</sup> A large proportion of those losses were incurred in the first days of the battle. By contrast, up to and including 10 July the attacking units of Army Group South lost only 116 tanks and assault guns in all, although they had to fight their way through the enemy positions under the most adverse conditions.<sup>70</sup>

The 11th of July was the most successful day of the attack so far. Several breakthroughs were made as the resistance of the Soviet defenders gradually weakened.<sup>71</sup> Manstein's main problem till then had been Army Detachment Kempf's failure to advance on the right wing. But that was now where the decisive breakthrough was achieved. That day III Armoured Corps drove a breach in the Soviet defensive system and pushed forward in depth. The following night a

<sup>66</sup> Since the Knight's Cross was awarded seldom and only after painstaking investigations, this gave rise to extensive correspondence. See Agte, *Michael Wittmann*, 63–7; Wendt, *Tiger*, 18–19.

<sup>67</sup> BA-MA, Study ŽA 1/2071, 130 and 145; Klink, *Das Gesetz des Handelns*, 221.

<sup>68</sup> Glantz and House, *The Battle of Kursk*, 336 und 15; see also 147.

<sup>69</sup> See CAMO Collection, doc. 23, 'Svedenia o bezvozratiykh poteriakh tankov, imevshikhsya na vooruzhenii bt i my Voronezhskogo fronta za period oboronitel'nogo srazheniya Kurskoi bitvy (s 5.7.43 goda po 23.7.43 goda)'.

<sup>70</sup> 'Geheime Kommandosache: Ausfälle H.Gr. Süd, 5.7 bis 10.7.1943 (nur Totalverluste)', app. to 417/43 gK, Pz Offz b Chef GenStdH (fo. 22), BA-MA RH 10/64. According to these figures, the losses consisted of 25 Panzer III, 51 Panzer IV, 28 Panthers, 4 Tigers, and 8 assault guns.

<sup>71</sup> Nipe, *Decision in the Ukraine*, 46 and 356.

combat unit of 6th Armoured Division reached Rzhavets, 10 kilometres away, and seized the bridge over the Donets. The unit consisted of two armoured companies, parts of 503rd Heavy Armoured Battalion (17 Tigers), and an armoured infantry battalion. A special role was played by two captured T-34s deployed at the head of the German tank column. Since they were marked with the German emblem, the *Balkenkreuz* (beamed cross), this measure did not formally contravene the laws of war. In the dark of night, however, the captured tanks were easily mistaken for Soviet T-34s, giving rise to strange scenes in which Soviet and German units advanced in the same direction on the same road. During brief halts, soldiers from the two columns stood next to each other without a shot being fired.<sup>72</sup> Shortly after midnight the German tanks approached Rzhavets, where Soviet fighting vehicles moved out towards them. Only now were they recognized. Fierce fighting ensued until the Germans finally managed to take the bridge. When reinforcements arrived, a bridgehead was established on the far bank of the Donets.

The operational importance of this action was twofold. The Soviet 69th Army was now almost encircled in the Donets triangle between III Armoured Corps and II SS Armoured Corps. Moreover, the spearhead of Army Detachment Kempf was now only 17 kilometres from the southern edge of Prokhorovka and in a position to launch a flanking attack on the units of 5th Guards Armoured Army, which were themselves poised to attack Fourth Armoured Army in the flank. Meanwhile units of II SS Armoured Corps had also swung east to reach the rear of 69th Army and meet the expected Soviet counter-attack.<sup>73</sup> Hill 252.2, some 2.5 kilometres from Prokhorovka, was taken on 11 July—an event which later assumed legendary importance. There was already widespread euphoria on the German side. As Manstein wrote in his memoirs, the success of III Armoured Corps marked ‘the final breakthrough through the last enemy position. The way was clear to engage the enemy’s reserves in battle in unfortified terrain.’<sup>74</sup> Not a single German soldier then suspected that the Soviet high command planned to encircle and destroy Army Group South’s attacking forces on the following day, 12 July, to the south-west of Prokhorovka.

#### 4. THE MYTH OF PROKHOROVKA

##### (a) The Soviet Encirclement Plan

Over the first two years of the war the Red Army had made considerable progress in terms of quality. But the extent of its tactical inferiority to the Wehrmacht was already apparent in the initial phase of the battle of Kursk. At a strategic level, however, it pulled off a master-stroke before the first tactical action had even begun. It managed to hide not just several armies but a whole army group from

<sup>72</sup> Paul, *Brennpunkte*, 311.

<sup>73</sup> On the operational planning of this swing to the east, see KTB OpAbt OKH, 11 July 1943 (fo. 225), BA-MA RH 2/3060; BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2071, 145–7.

<sup>74</sup> Manstein, *Verlorene Siege*, 500.

German intelligence in the depths of the interior. That strategic reserve consisted of Steppe Front.<sup>75</sup> Without a doubt, this was one of the war's most striking examples of 'maskirovka' (camouflage and deception). The original plan was to hold back the strategic reserve until the start of the Soviet summer offensive, and then let it sweep like an avalanche over the German formations defeated in the defensive battle for Kursk. However, when Voronezh Front seemed about to collapse after only a few days, the avalanche had to be launched earlier—in the direction of Prokhorovka. The aim was not to stop the German attacking forces but to 'envelop and destroy' the three German armoured corps that had surged forward.<sup>76</sup> In other words, the Red Army high command was seeking not an 'ordinary' victory but a victorious battle of annihilation, the 'Cannae' which the encirclement strategist Alfred von Schlieffen always had in mind—Stalingrad in the form of a tank battle.

The shape of the front invited a pincer operation, since the attack by Fourth Armoured Army had pushed northwards in the form of an arrowhead. Behind the thick wedge of tanks, however, a narrow corridor with overstretched flanks had formed. Vatutin, who drew up the operational plan in accordance with Stavka directives, intended to attack concentrically with four thrust wedges: one armoured army as the shock group on each flank, so as to close the pincer in the Yakovlevo–Bykovka area in the rear of XXXXVIII Armoured Corps and II SS Armoured Corps, plus two frontal thrusts, each using one general army. The two German armoured corps, advancing unsuspectingly into the trap, were to be attacked from four directions:

- from the west by 1st Armoured Army (VI and XXXI Armoured Corps and III Motorized Corps), including V Guards Armoured Corps and the newly arrived X Armoured Corps, reinforced by infantry and artillery units;
- from the north-west by units of 6th Guards Army;
- from the north-east by 5th Guards Army, newly brought in from Steppe Front;
- from the east by 5th Guards Armoured Army (XVIII and XXIX Armoured Corps and V Guards Motorized Corps), also brought in from Steppe Front, reinforced by II Armoured Corps and II Guards Armoured Corps, plus a number of unattached units.<sup>77</sup>

However, III Armoured Corps of Army Detachment Kempf, which was further to the south-east, was also threatened. According to Vatutin's operational plan, the Soviet 7th Guards Army had the task of breaking through the front on the armoured corps' right flank and advancing in its rear towards Razumnoye (in the direction of Belgorod).

<sup>75</sup> Glantz, 'Soviet Operational Intelligence', 72.

<sup>76</sup> On this, see the Soviet general staff's wartime study of the battle of Kursk in *Sbornik materialov po izucheniiu opyta voiny*, No. 11, 68, quoted in Glantz and House, *The Battle of Kursk*, 159.

<sup>77</sup> The operational plan, which was repeatedly amended, is presented here in outline. See the Soviet General Staff study in the English translation by Glantz and Orenstein, *The Battle for Kursk 1943: The Soviet General Staff Study*, 99, 219 and 223. See also Glantz and House, *The Battle of Kursk*, 159–60 and 179; Rotmistrov, *Tankovoye srazhenie*, 43; Shutov and Ramanichev, 'Ognennaya duga', 268; Markin, *Die Kursker Schlacht*, 113–14; *Geschichte des Großen Vaterländischen Krieges*, iii. 324.

The Stavka envisaged 12 July as the decisive day in the battle of Kursk. To the north of the Kursk salient, Bryansk Front and large parts of West Front launched an offensive against Germany's thinned-out Second Armoured Army. When the front collapsed, Model's Ninth Army would have to halt its advance on Kursk. A destructive strike on the attacking formations of Army Group South was also planned for the same day. The strongest weapon was 5th Guards Armoured Army, whose total of 909 tanks and 43 assault guns<sup>78</sup> were intended to smash the battle-worn II SS Armoured Corps at Prokhorovka.

### (b) Prokhorovka: Legend and Reality

The battle of Kursk is often described as the 'turning point' of the Second World War, in which the 'greatest tank battle' of the war at Prokhorovka on 12 July was the decisive factor. This thesis is found primarily in the Soviet historiography.<sup>79</sup> The outcome of the Second World War was supposedly still balanced on a knife-edge and was, according to that exaggerated narrative, decided at Prokhorovka in a strip of land only 4.5 kilometres wide between the River Psel and the railway line to Belgorod. There, in 'a truly titanic duel between two steel armadas',<sup>80</sup> at least 1,500 tanks are said to have clashed in the narrowest of spaces.<sup>81</sup> According to Soviet accounts, 850 Soviet and 700–800 German tanks rolled towards each other like two steel avalanches.<sup>82</sup> In that encounter on 12 July, 400 German tanks are said to have been destroyed and the units of the SS Armoured Corps crushed.<sup>83</sup> Marshal Konev described the battle melodramatically as the 'swan-song' of the German armoured troops.<sup>84</sup>

The originator of the myth of Prokhorovka must be considered to be Lt.-Gen. Rotmistrov,<sup>85</sup> whose reconstituted 5th Guards Armoured Army suffered losses of unprecedented proportions during its first deployment on 12 July. Subject to an acute need to justify himself to Stalin, he took refuge in the fiction of a crushing victory over II SS Armoured Corps. That myth was also taken over by western historians and persists to this day:

By chance, at exactly the same time, the German tanks moved on the far side of the plain. Two vast armoured forces rushed into head-on collision. [...] The T-34 crews took advantage of the mêlée to attack at point-blank range, blasting the Tigers and

<sup>78</sup> At 17.00 on 11 July, 101 of these were still in transit and 24 under repair; see Zamulin, *Prokhorovka*, 337, Table 23.

<sup>79</sup> As to whether the battle of Kursk really was the decisive turning point of the war, see Part II, Chapter III.4 of the present volume.

<sup>80</sup> Vasilevskii, *Sache des ganzen Lebens*, 308.

<sup>81</sup> See, e.g., *Geschichte des Großen Vaterländischen Krieges*, iii. 325 ff.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.; see also Rotmistrov, *Tankovoye srazhenie*, 72; Andronikov and Mostovenko, *Die roten Panzer*, 102.

<sup>83</sup> Rotmistrov, *Tankovoye srazhenie*, 86; Telpukhovsky, *Die sowjetische Geschichte des Großen Vaterländischen Krieges*, 240.

<sup>84</sup> Konev, *Aufzeichnungen eines Frontoberbefehlshabers*, 43.

<sup>85</sup> See Rotmistrov's accounts in his books *Tankovoye srazhenie* and *Stalnaya Guardia*, as well as his article 'Bronetankovye i mekhanizirovannye voiska'.

Panthers at the side and rear, where the ammunition was stored [...] The German failure to seize Prokhorovka marked the end of Citadel [...] Over three hundred German tanks were destroyed on the 12th alone [...] The struggle for Kursk tore the heart out of the German army [...] Soviet success at Kursk, with so much at stake, was the most important single victory of the war.<sup>86</sup>

In German historiography too, the encounter was overdramatized. In the ‘greatest tank battle in world history’, ‘two closely packed tank formations comprising over 1,500 tanks’ supposedly clashed ‘in open battle’ in ‘a section 500 metres wide and 1,000 metres deep’.<sup>87</sup>

So what was the battle of Prokhorovka really like? First of all, there is no way that II SS Armoured Corps could have lost 300 or (according to Rotmistrov)<sup>88</sup> 400 tanks on 12 July. The fact is that during the whole of Operation CITADEL it lost only 33 tanks and assault guns in all, as the German files show beyond any doubt.<sup>89</sup> Nor could it have lost any Panthers or Ferdinands—despite the fact that they are evoked by contemporary Soviet witnesses—simply because it did not possess any. Rotmistrov’s claim to have destroyed 70 Tigers is also a fiction. On the date in question only 15 tanks of that type were operational, and only five of them were deployed at Prokhorovka.<sup>90</sup> On 12 July the whole of II SS Armoured Corps had at its disposal a total of 211 operational battle tanks, 58 assault guns, and 43 tank destroyers (self-propelled anti-tank guns).<sup>91</sup> However, since SS Armoured Infantry Division ‘Totenkopf’<sup>92</sup> was attacking northwards on that date on the far side of the River Psel, there remained only SS Armoured Infantry Divisions ‘Leibstandarte’ and ‘Reich’, with a total of 117 battle tanks, 37 assault guns, and 32 tank destroyers, that is, 186 fighting vehicles in all,<sup>93</sup> which could be deployed against 5th Guards Armoured Army.

On the morning of 12 July Rotmistrov possessed 838 operational fighting vehicles, and a further 96 tanks were brought in.<sup>94</sup> Of his five corps, he kept V Guards Motorized Corps in reserve and deployed around 100 of its tanks to secure his left flank against the German III Armoured Corps approaching from the

<sup>86</sup> Overy, *Why the Allies Won*, 95–6.

<sup>87</sup> Ostertag, ‘Die größte Panzerschlacht’, 424; the quoted source (Zins, *Die Operation Zitadelle*, 114) makes no mention of such a tight concentration in an area measuring 500 by 1000 metres.

<sup>88</sup> Rotmistrov, *Tankovoye srazhenie*, 86.

<sup>89</sup> ‘Geheime Kommandosache: Ausfälle Heeresgruppe Süd, Stand 17.07.1943’ (fo. 74), BA-MA RH 10/64.

<sup>90</sup> As shown by the daily divisional reports (see next note), on 12 July Armoured Infantry Divisions ‘Leibstandarte’ and ‘Reich’ possessed, respectively, four and one operational Tigers. The other 10 Tigers were with SS Armoured Infantry Division ‘Totenkopf’, which was in action on that day in another section of the front.

<sup>91</sup> For a detailed list of the individual tank types possessed by the three SS Armoured Infantry Divisions, see their daily reports on the evening of 11 July: BA-MA RS 2-2/18, pt. 2 (A 255–8). The cross-reference for 10 July (assault guns and anti-tank cannon) is on page A 248 (reverse side). See also the daily report of II SS Armoured Corps, 11 July 1943, 18.35 (fo. 99 and reverse side), BA-MA RH 21-4/118. The four Panzer IIs not available for the tank battle, as well as the command tanks, are not included in this figure.

<sup>92</sup> BA-MA RS 2-2/18, pt. 2 (A 255–8). On the evening of 11 July, SS Armoured Infantry Division ‘Totenkopf’ possessed 94 operational battle tanks, 21 assault guns, and 11 Marder tank destroyers.

<sup>93</sup> BA-MA RS 2-2/18, pt. 2 (A 255–8).

<sup>94</sup> Zamulin, *Prokhorovka*, 611.

south.<sup>95</sup> Thus, 672 Soviet fighting vehicles were effectively engaged that day in action against the 186 tanks and assault guns of Divisions 'Leibstandarte' and 'Reich'.<sup>96</sup> Rotmistrov's operational plan involved thrusts in two directions:

- The main thrust was directed from the north-east frontally against SS Armoured Infantry Division 'Leibstandarte' through the Prokhorovka corridor between the railway embankment and the River Psel. But the riverbank was boggy and there were several ribbon villages along it, leaving a strip about only 3 kilometres wide in which to manoeuvre. In this section of the main thrust, XVIII Armoured Corps was to attack on the right along the River Psel, and XXIX Armoured Corps on the left along the railway embankment. This meant that, in the very first phase of the battle, more than 400 fighting vehicles<sup>97</sup> advanced on Division 'Leibstandarte', which had only 56 battle tanks, 10 assault guns, and 20 tank destroyers at its disposal.<sup>98</sup> The superiority was around five to one.
- Another thrust was to be directed simultaneously from the east at the German flank, against Armoured Infantry Division 'Reich', which was deployed on the right alongside 'Leibstandarte'. Here the attack was to be carried out by II Guards Armoured Corps, supported by II Armoured Corps. Altogether 200 Soviet tanks stood ready,<sup>99</sup> against which the German division could deploy 61 battle tanks, 27 assault guns, and 12 tank destroyers.<sup>100</sup>

Account must also be taken of Voronezh Front formations, especially 69th Army, which were fighting in this sector anyway. In addition, units of 5th Guards Army, which was also part of the strategic reserve, were deployed in the zone of action of 5th Guards Armoured Army, for example 9th Guards Paratroop Division. Vatutin further supported Rotmistrov with five artillery regiments, two grenade-launcher regiments, and, above all, anti-tank artillery units such as 10th Anti-Tank Artillery Brigade.<sup>101</sup> In the Prokhorovka corridor the mass of barrelled weapons produced such a density of fire that in some phases of the battle there was hardly any chance of survival outside armoured protection. The Soviet counter-attack was supported by

<sup>95</sup> Rotmistrov removed 26th Guards Armoured Brigade from the fighting on 12 July and sent it also to the south. This brigade nevertheless took part in the first phase of the battle of Prokhorovka.

<sup>96</sup> Zamulin, *Prokhorovka*, 611.

<sup>97</sup> That day XXIX Armoured Corps sent 192 battle tanks and 20 assault guns into action; see CAMO Collection, doc. 35, 'Otchet o boevykh deistviakh 29 tankovogo korpusa za period s 7.7. po 24.7.43 g.', 8. On the other flank, XVIII Armoured Corps had over 190 fighting vehicles; see Glantz and House, *The Battle of Kursk*, 180; Zetterling and Frankson, *Kursk 1943*, 106.

<sup>98</sup> See the daily report on the evening of 11 July, BA-MA RS 2-2/18, pt. 2 (A 255 and 258). See also the daily report of II SS Armoured Corps, 11 July 1943, 18.35 (fo. 99 and reverse side), BA-MA RH 21-4/118.

<sup>99</sup> Rotmistrov, *Tankovoye srazhenie*, 43. See also *The Battle for Kursk 1943. The Soviet General Staff Study*, 222.

<sup>100</sup> See daily report on the evening of 11 July, BA-MA RS 2-2/18, pt. 2 (A 256 and 258). See also the daily report of II SS Armoured Corps, 11 July 1943, 18.35 (fo. 99 and reverse side), BA-MA RH 21-4/118.

<sup>101</sup> *The Battle for Kursk 1943. The Soviet General Staff Study*, 222; Glantz and House, *The Battle of Kursk*, 169 and 181.

two air armies,<sup>102</sup> while at the culmination of the battle the German forces could rely on only sporadic aerial support, since VIII Air Corps had to withdraw two-thirds of its aircraft for deployment on other fronts, mainly in the sector of 9th Army.

The psychological aspect should not be neglected. II SS Armoured Corps was not only showing signs of material attrition. The troops had been in action continuously since 5 July, and they were now facing fresh Soviet forces, the elite formations of 5th Guards Armoured Army, led by Rotmistrov, the Red Army's foremost tank-warfare specialist. What the Germans had always feared about Russian armies was their massive, avalanche-like attacks without regard to losses. It was not only the oppressive numerical superiority that was threatening. The onrushing troops often attacked in a trance-like state, as if totally impervious to danger. That vodka played a part in this was no secret to German combatants on the eastern front, although Russian historiography has broached that subject only recently.<sup>103</sup> In the view of two American military historians, this psychotropic agent was also used to 'inspire' the attacking forces at Prokhorovka on 12 July.<sup>104</sup> That may provide a partial explanation for the incomprehensible events which took place on Hill 252.2. The successful use of the element of surprise also deserves attention. It was a considerable achievement of Rotmistrov and his staff to bring an armada of tanks and other vehicles to the front so quickly and almost unnoticed. It required a march of 330 to 380 kilometres in three days.<sup>105</sup> German intelligence was expecting a counter-attack, but by no means one of such dimensions.

Things had gone very well for SS Armoured Infantry Division 'Leibstandarte' on the previous day, 11 July. During its advance through the steppe it had to overcome a tank ditch which was to play an important role the following day. Beyond it stretched Hill 252.2, 'like an enormous wave'. After managing to capture the heights and the Oktyabrski state farm on the far side against the resistance of 9th Guards Paratroop Division, Leibstandarte was only 2.5 kilometres from Prokhorovka. At the same time, however, it had manoeuvred itself into a very exposed position with open flanks. Only a loose connection remained to its right-hand neighbour, SS Armoured Division 'Reich'. An even more dangerous situation had developed on the left wing, which was hanging in the air. Since SS Armoured Infantry Division 'Totenkopf' had attacked northwards rather than eastwards, the two thrust wedges had drifted apart, leaving a gap which Leibstandarte's reconnaissance battalion could only monitor but by no means secure. At that moment an enemy push along the River Psel would inevitably have disastrous consequences. For that reason Leibstandarte was instructed to halt its advance for the time being. II SS Armoured Corps ordered the attack by Division 'Totenkopf' on the dominating Hill 226.6 in the Psel bridgehead to be pressed forward the next day with 'all the artillery available' to the corps. Only when this upland north of the Psel had been taken in its entirety should the other two divisions resume their attack.<sup>106</sup>

<sup>102</sup> Solovev, *Wendepunkt*, 109.

<sup>103</sup> Veniaminov, 'Narkotovskie grammy', 95–6.

<sup>104</sup> Glantz and House, *The Battle of Kursk*, 173, 181, and 416 (n. 33).

<sup>105</sup> See Rotmistrov, *Tankovoye srazhenie*, 21.

<sup>106</sup> Soldaten, Kämpfer, Kameraden, 379.

Meanwhile the Leibstandarte units had been torn far apart. On the right wing, south of the railway embankment, stood 1st SS Armoured Infantry Regiment, and on the left, far forward in the wake of Hill 252.2, 2nd SS Armoured Infantry Regiment. The Armoured Regiment, on the other hand, was recovering from its exertions in a dip behind Hill 252.2. In reality, this regiment consisted of only one battalion of three companies, to which a heavy armoured company with four operational Tigers had been attached. The other battalion was back in Germany undergoing conversion to Panthers.

It must therefore be stated clearly at this point that in the Prokhorovka corridor between the railway embankment and the River Psel there was by no means a German armoured army with 800 battle tanks, as claimed in the Soviet accounts, but only a single armoured battalion. So it is a myth that on the morning of 12 July two tank armadas, each in a closed phalanx, attacked simultaneously and clashed like knights in armour. When Rotmistrov launched the attack at 07.30 (08.30 Moscow time), most of Leibstandarte's tank crews were still fast asleep: 'Utter silence reigned [...] Since an attack on Prokhorovka seemed unthinkable without catching up with the neighbouring units, everyone was sleeping the sleep of exhaustion. We had seven days of tough offensive combat behind us, during which there is generally very little time for sleep.'<sup>107</sup>

The foremost German unit at that moment was 2nd SS Armoured Infantry Regiment's III Battalion, whose commander, Sturmbannführer Jochen Peiper, became known for his exploits in the later course of the war (the offensive in the Ardennes). The previous day its infantry had taken Hill 252.2 and occupied the captured trenches. On the morning of 12 July the following scene took place on that hill: 'We were all fast asleep when they were suddenly all over us with aircraft and an endless mass of tanks with infantry riding on them. It was hell. They were around us, over us, and among us. We fought man to man.'<sup>108</sup> The first German tank officer to see the Soviet tank avalanche approaching was Obersturmführer Rudolf von Ribbentrop. Looking up at Hill 252.2 that morning he saw violet signal flares, meaning 'tank alarm'. While the other two armoured companies remained behind the tank ditches, he set off up the hill with his company's seven Panzer IVs. Suddenly he saw a huge column of tanks approaching: 'About 100 to 200 metres in front of us there emerged from a slight dip in the terrain 15, 20, 30, 40 Russian T-34s, and then too many to count [...] The wall of tanks rolled towards us. Tank by tank, wave upon wave, an unimaginable mass of armour approaching at top speed.'<sup>109</sup> The seven German tanks stood no chance against such overwhelming odds. Four were hit immediately, but the other three got away.

<sup>107</sup> Ribbentrop, 'Neu geboren—bei Prochorowka', 53.

<sup>108</sup> Report by Untersturmführer Erhard Gühr, quoted in Agte, *Jochen Peiper*, 132. On this fight, see also KTB II. SS-Panzerkorps, 12 July 1943, BA-MA RS 2-2/17; daily reports, 12 July (A 271 ff.), BA-MA RS 2-2/18, pt. 2; *Chronik der siebenten Panzerkompanie*, 43–4; Agte, *Michael Wittmann*, 69 ff.; Lehmann, *Die Leibstandarte*, iii. 262 ff.; Stadler, *Die Offensive gegen Kursk*, 100 ff.; Glantz and House, *The Battle of Kursk*, 180, 182 ff., and 189 ff.; Töppel, *Die Offensive gegen Kursk*, 36 ff. and 42 ff.

<sup>109</sup> Ribbentrop, 'Neu geboren—bei Prochorowka', 54.

The attacking formation which had appeared so suddenly was the mass of XXIX Armoured Corps, led by Maj.-Gen. Kirichenko, consisting of 212 fighting vehicles.<sup>110</sup> The attack at this location was carried out by 31st and 32nd Armoured Brigades and 53rd Motorized Rifle Brigade, supported by a self-propelled gun regiment and 26th Guards Paratroop Regiment. Once the tanks had passed the crest of Hill 252.2, they raced down the incline towards the two German armoured companies, which opened fire on them from the declivity. Mistaking the Germans tanks for Tigers, they wanted to eliminate their range superiority as quickly as possible. According to a German eyewitness report, ‘to anyone seeing the whole thing, it looked like the Russians were carrying out a kamikaze attack’.<sup>111</sup> If the Soviet tanks broke through in depth, it could only result in the collapse of the German front. Then, in a few minutes, the whole picture changed, and the seemingly inevitable victory turned into a catastrophe for the attackers. All because of an incredible Soviet oversight. They had forgotten about their own tank ditch! This 4.5-metre-deep obstacle, which we have already mentioned, had been dug by Soviet infantry and stretched across the declivity of Hill 252.2 at right angles to the German—now the Soviet—direction of attack.<sup>112</sup> The German defenders watched in amazement as ‘more and more T-34s came over the crest, raced down the slope, and overturned in the tank ditch behind which we were positioned’.<sup>113</sup> Ribbentrop had got away by moving along together with the Soviet fighting vehicles in a thick cloud of dust:

Now the T-34s recognized the tank ditch and tried to veer left to the road, in order to get across the ditch via the bridge, which had been repaired. What happened then is indescribable [ . . . ] As they converged on the bridge, the Russians were exposed on the flanks and made easier targets. Burning T-34s ran into and over each other. An inferno of fire, smoke, burning tanks, dead and wounded!<sup>114</sup>

On the other side of the ditch there were only two German armoured companies, who would normally have stood no chance of stopping the avalanche of steel. Now it was simply ‘target practice at moving targets’.<sup>115</sup> Finally, the four Tigers came rushing up and were deployed on the division’s left wing.

By noon 2nd SS Armoured Infantry Regiment had recaptured Hill 252.2 and the Oktyabrski state farm. The front slope of the hill looked like a tank graveyard, covered with the still-burning wrecks of some 100 Soviet tanks and a few infantry fighting vehicles from Peiper’s battalion.<sup>116</sup> On 12 July, according to the logistics files, SS Armoured Infantry Division ‘Leibstandarte’ seized 190 Soviet tanks abandoned in the areas which it had temporarily lost and then recovered.<sup>117</sup>

<sup>110</sup> See CAMO Collection, doc. 35, ‘Otchet o boevykh deistviakh 29 tankovogo korpusa za period s 7.7. po 24.7.43 g.’, 8.

<sup>111</sup> Mutterlose, ‘Artillerie’, 26.

<sup>112</sup> The author was able to take part in a visit to Prokhorovka in April 2005. Today the tank ditch is largely filled in, but its course at the time of the battle is still recognizable with the help of sketches on German situation maps (BA-MA RH 26-1005/47, K-6).

<sup>113</sup> Report by Johannes Bräuer, quoted in Agte, *Jochen Peiper*, 132.

<sup>114</sup> Ribbentrop, ‘Neu geboren—bei Prochorowka’, 55. <sup>115</sup> Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid. 56; Mutterlose, ‘Artillerie’, 26.

<sup>117</sup> LSAH KTB Ib, 12 July 1943, BA-MA RH 3-1/36.

Most of them were found close together on the front slope of the hill. Yet the figure reported seemed so incredible that SS Obergruppenführer Paul Hausser, the commanding general of II SS Armoured Corps, drove to the front in person to see for himself.<sup>118</sup> According to the most recent Russian information, on 12 July XXIX Armoured Corps alone lost 172 of 219 tanks and assault guns, of which 118 were total losses.<sup>119</sup> Casualties totalled 1,991, including 1,033 dead or missing.<sup>120</sup>

At the same time as Hill 252.2 was being defended against frontal attack, the situation was becoming critical on Leibstandarte's left flank. There Maj.-Gen. Bacharev's XVIII Armoured Corps attacked along the Psel with 170th, 181st, and 110th Armoured Brigades, supported by 32nd Motorized Rifle Brigade and several unattached units such as 25th Guards Armoured Regiment, which was equipped with British 'Churchill' tanks. This sudden thrust occurred at the most unfavourable moment for the Germans, and in the most unfavourable place, that is, right in the gap between SS Armoured Infantry Divisions 'Leibstandarte' and 'Totenkopf' to which we have already referred. The Soviet XVIII Armoured Corps penetrated deep into the gap with almost no opposition. In the left-hand section of 2nd Armoured Infantry Regiment's zone of action, tactical coordination dissolved into chaos. There was no longer any stable front. On both sides the leadership lost control, and the combat disintegrated into a multitude of individual clashes in which it was difficult to see 'which side was attacking and which was defending'.<sup>121</sup>

The Soviet accounts are full of myths, of which the following episode is the theatrical epitome. On the morning of 12 July, II Battalion of 181st Armoured Brigade, part of XVIII Armoured Corps, was advancing along the River Psel at Petrovka when the T-34 of the battalion commander, Guards Captain Skripkin, was hit by shells from a Tiger. The captain was badly wounded, but the tank driver, Aleksandr Nikolayev, managed to get him out of the burning tank. Then the following act of heroism supposedly took place:

As a Tiger rolled straight towards them, tank driver Aleksandr Nikolayev leaped back into his stricken, burning tank and stormed the enemy. The T-34 raced across the field like a blazing fireball. The Tiger stopped, reversed, and tried to turn. But it was too late. The burning T-34 smashed into the German tank at full speed. An explosion shook the earth. The Germans were so struck by the Soviet tank driver's courage in ramming the Tiger that they beat a speedy retreat.<sup>122</sup>

Accounts of this episode have also become commonplace in western literature about the battle of Kursk.<sup>123</sup> Painters have captured the dramatic scene on canvas

<sup>118</sup> Ribbentrop, 'Neu geboren—bei Prochorowka', 56; Lehmann, *Die Leibstandarte*, iii. 268.

<sup>119</sup> Zamulin, *Prokhorovka*, 401 and Table 26. On this, see the combat report of XXIX Armoured Corps (CAMO Collection, doc. 35, 'Otchet o boevykh deistviakh 29 tankovogo korpusa za period s 7.7. po 24.7.43 g', 8). Zamulin's figures differ from this somewhat, but he also drew on other sources.

<sup>120</sup> Zamulin, *Prokhorovka*, 401 and Table 26.

<sup>121</sup> *Geschichte des Großen Vaterländischen Krieges*, iii. 326.

<sup>122</sup> Rotmistrov, *Stalnaya Guardia*, 190; quoted in German translation in *Geschichte des Großen Vaterländischen Krieges*, iii. 326.

<sup>123</sup> For relevant evidence from the literature, see Töppel, *Die Offensive gegen Kursk*, 49 ff.

and film directors have portrayed it on the screen. So what is the truth of the matter? The commander of the Tiger that was allegedly blown to pieces, Sergeant Georg Lötzsch, experienced the event as follows: 'In the morning, the company was on the left wing of II Armoured Battalion when about 50 enemy tanks, from the cover of copses and hedges, came storming towards us in broad wedge formation [...] I shot two T-34s, one of which drove towards me in flames. At the last moment I managed to avoid the burning bomb.'<sup>124</sup> The push by XVIII Armoured Corps failed with considerable losses, including (according to Soviet reports) 55 tanks.<sup>125</sup> After all the attacks had been repelled, the corps was withdrawn in the early afternoon and thereafter essentially deployed only defensively.

The Soviet attacks in the right-hand section of the front to the south-east of the Prokhorovka–Belgorod railway embankment were even less successful. 1st SS Armoured Infantry Division held Leibstandarte's right wing near the Stalinsk state farm, where it had to manage largely without support from battle tanks and was reinforced only by a few Marder tank destroyers.<sup>126</sup> The attacking forces consisted of 25th Armoured Brigade of XXIX Armoured Corps, supported by 1446th Self-Propelled Guns Artillery Regiment and 28th Guards Paratroop Regiment, as well as parts of 169th Armoured Brigade of II Armoured Corps.<sup>127</sup>

The right flank of II SS Armoured Corps, which curved back far to the south, was defended by SS Armoured Infantry Division 'Reich'. In that sector the attacking forces were II Guards Armoured Corps and II Armoured Corps.<sup>128</sup> Their attacks, in the direction of Yasnaya Polyana and Kalinin, were repelled after heavy fighting, after which the German units went on the counter-attack and captured Storozhevoye on the left wing.<sup>129</sup>

<sup>124</sup> Report by Sergeant Georg Lötzsch (13. Kp./Pz.Abt. II), quoted in Wendt, *Tiger*, 19–20. From the German files (see next section) it is quite clear that on 12 July not a single Tiger was reported as written off. Mr Werner Wendt, who fought in this encounter on board a Tiger, told the author that on that day another Tiger was left heavily damaged. It could not be hauled away the following day because of strong enemy fire, and later had to be written off. But in any case the damage had been caused by a shell shot. He said there was definitely no question of a Tiger having been blown up by ramming.

<sup>125</sup> On the losses, see Combat Report No. 38 of XVIII Armoured Corps, 13 July, 08.00, CAMO Collection, doc. 33, 'Boevye donesenia shtaba 18-go tankovogo korpusa za period s 11. iyulia po 15 iyulia 1943 goda'. On the course of the fighting in general, see the report of 5th Guards Armoured Army, CAMO Collection, doc. 30, 'Iz otcheta o boevykh deistviakh 5-i Gvardeiskoi Tankovoi armii za period s 7 iyulia po 24 iyulia 1943 goda', 8 ff.; KTB II. SS-Panzerkorps, 12 July 1943, BA-MA RS 2-2/17; daily reports, 12 July (A 271 ff.), BA-MA RS 2-2/18, pt. 2; Glantz and House, *The Battle of Kursk*, 180 and 188 ff.; Töppel, *Die Offensive gegen Kursk*, 40–1 and 46 ff.

<sup>126</sup> On this fighting, see KTB II. SS-Panzerkorps, 12 July 1943, BA-MA RS 2-2/17; daily reports, 12 July (A 271 ff.), BA-MA RS 2-2/18, pt. 2; BA-MA N 756/107 (Vopersal collection), 'Panzer Schlacht am Kolchos Stalinsk'; Frey, *Ich wollte die Freiheit*, 279 ff.; Lehmann, *Die Leibstandarte*, iii. 262 ff.; Töppel, *Die Offensive gegen Kursk*, 37 ff. and 44 ff.

<sup>127</sup> Glantz and House, *The Battle of Kursk*, 187 and 191.

<sup>128</sup> 26th Armoured Brigade of II Guards Armoured Corps was withdrawn in the course of the fighting and deployed to secure the southern flank. For the Soviet view, see Rotmistrov, *Tankovoye srazhenie*, 85–6; CAMO Collection, doc. 30, 'Iz otcheta o boevykh deistviakh 5-i Gvardeiskoi Tankovoi armii za period s 7 iyulia po 24 iyulia 1943 goda', 9 and 13–14.

<sup>129</sup> Weidinger, *Division Das Reich*, iv. 199 ff.; KTB II. SS-Panzerkorps, 12 July 1943, BA-MA RS 2-2/17; daily reports, 12 July (A 271 ff.), BA-MA RS 2-2/18, pt. 2.

The most significant territorial gains on 12 July were achieved by SS Armoured Infantry Division ‘Totenkopf’.<sup>130</sup> In this connection we must take issue with the Soviet accounts, according to which tanks of the Totenkopf Division were involved on that day in the battle against Rotmistrov’s 5th Guards Armoured Army in the Prokhorovka corridor. In fact, all of Totenkopf’s fighting vehicles were in the bridgehead on the far side of the Psel and attacked from there in a northerly direction. It is true that during the engagement one tank unit received an order to cross the Psel at Mikhailovka and strike the rear of the Soviet tanks that were attacking the Leibstandarte Division. But that attempt failed because of the boggy riverbanks. It was only at Kozlovka that infantry units of 6th SS Armoured Infantry Regiment remained on the south bank to secure the engineer’s bridge. Rotmistrov’s claim that on 12 July he stopped the Totenkopf Division’s advance by deploying his reserve (V Guards Motorized Corps) is also incorrect. He did indeed send 24th Guards Armoured Brigade and 10th Guards Motorized Brigade into the section north of the Psel, but their advance proceeded slowly and they were able to attack only on the following day. Accordingly, he has been accused by American historians of bringing the action forward in his memory.<sup>131</sup>

On the day in question, the Totenkopf Division actually attacked General Aleksei Semenovich Zhadov’s 5th Guards Army, as well as XXXI Armoured Corps and parts of 6th Guards Army.<sup>132</sup> After beating off heavy Soviet attacks in the morning, it succeeded in pushing forward as far as the Prokhorovka-Kartshevka road, which made Rotmistrov very nervous. He was afraid of being outmanoeuvred, since his units were now threatened in the rear as well as on the flanks. Totenkopf’s advance—the northernmost thrust of the offensive—symbolizes the course of events on 12 July. The German units, surprised by the strength of the Soviet counter-attack, were at first forced onto the defensive. But they inflicted such heavy losses on the over-hastily attacking Soviet formations that they were already able to resume their own offensive in the afternoon.

### (c) Balance-Sheet of the Soviet Debacle

General Rotmistrov painted a picture of a colossal battle, in which he described the defeat of II SS Armoured Corps and the destruction of 400 German tanks. This epic inspired many authors, who quoted it extensively. It is nevertheless surprising that there is not the slightest atmosphere of disaster in the German reports. For the day in question, Hausser, the commanding general of the supposedly annihilated armoured corps, mentions only ‘a large-scale tank battle’, and comments laconically: ‘The enemy was unable to break through; many tanks were shot down.’<sup>133</sup> Similarly, a tank commander who was deployed on 12 July on Hill 252.2 writes:

<sup>130</sup> Ibid. (*Akten des SS-Panzerkorps*); see also *Soldaten, Kämpfer, Kameraden*, 381 ff.; Ullrich, *Wie ein Fels*, 240; Sydnor, *Soldiers of Destruction*, 288 ff.

<sup>131</sup> Glantz and House, *The Battle of Kursk*, 195.

<sup>132</sup> Riasanskii, ‘Prokhorovka’, 108; Zhadov, ‘5-ya gvardeiskaya armia’, 64 ff.

<sup>133</sup> Hausser, *Waffen-SS im Einsatz*, 101.

'When I returned to the tank ditch in the evening, we were convinced we had achieved a great victory.'<sup>134</sup> In view of the 100 or so Soviet tank wrecks, mostly still burning, right in front of the hotly contested tank ditch, his subjective impression is entirely understandable.

The files in the German archives, in which historians were strangely uninterested until a few years ago, contain meticulous assessments of Army Group South's tank losses. Examination of those files results in the conclusion—as surprising as it is unequivocal—that, on 12 July, II SS Armoured Corps did not record a single write-off for battle tanks and assault guns.<sup>135</sup> This is also confirmed by the corps' logistics files, for example, an entry in the war diary of the quartermaster's department on the evening of 12 July: 'Dept. V informs the Quartermaster that there are no tank write-offs today'.<sup>136</sup> Admittedly, the evaluation of other sources leads to the conclusion that three tanks left immobilized on the battlefield could not subsequently be recovered because of enemy fire, so that the write-off figures had to be adjusted later.<sup>137</sup> But even if those losses are backdated to 12 July, that still gives a maximum total of three write-offs. There is one plausible explanation for the low loss figures: II SS Armoured Corps remained 'master of the battlefield', and as such it was able to put the enemy's immobilized fighting vehicles out of action and haul its own (except for three) to the repair shops. The latter had a great deal of heavy work to do during Operation CITADEL, but on 12 July the number of losses remained within normal limits as measured by the previous days. Only 41 battle tanks of the Leibstandarte and Reich Divisions were under repair for 'long-term damage', and that figure included several tanks damaged in previous days.<sup>138</sup> Speed of repair gave the German armoured force a decisive advantage. In that respect the successive figures for daily operational strength are particularly telling. On 11 July the two German divisions had over 186 operational tanks, assault guns, and tank destroyers (self-propelled guns),<sup>139</sup> while on 13 July, that is, after the battle of Prokhorovka, the figure was 190.<sup>140</sup> The comparison thus shows an increase of four fighting vehicles, which does not exactly point to the alleged destruction of II SS Armoured Division on 12 July.

<sup>134</sup> Zumpe, 'Unternehmen Zitadelle', 55.

<sup>135</sup> 'Geheime Kommandosache: Ausfälle Heeresgruppe Süd, Stand 12.7.1943' (fo. 48), BA-MA RH 10/64. See also map with tabular overview in appendix RH 10/64, K1 'Panzerlage Süd, Stand: 11–13 July 1943'.

<sup>136</sup> KTB No. 6, Gen.Kdo. II. SS-Pz.Korps Qu.Abt., 12 July 1943, 23, BA-MA RS 2-2/25.

<sup>137</sup> The tanks in question were two Panzer IVs from 6th Company, 1st SS Armoured Regiment (Ribbentrop), and one of the heavy armoured company's Tigers.

<sup>138</sup> 'Geheime Kommandosache: Ausfälle Heeresgruppe Süd, Stand 12.7.1943' (fo. 48), BA-MA RH 10/64. On that day there were also 67 battle tanks undergoing short-term repair, mostly for minor damage, especially to antennas, which could be repaired immediately.

<sup>139</sup> Deployment reports on the evening of 11 July 1943, BA-MA RS 2-2/18, pt. 2 (A 255–258). See also the daily report of II. SS Armoured Corps, 11 July 1943, 18.35 (fo. 99 and reverse side), BA-MA RH 21-4/118. The four Panzer IIs not available for the tank battle, as well as the command tanks, are not included in this figure.

<sup>140</sup> Daily report, 13 July 1943, BA-MA RS 2-2/18, pt. 2 (A 291, reverse side); see also the daily report of II SS Armoured Corps, 13 July 1943, 19.35 (fo. 117 and reverse side), BA-MA RS 2-2/18.

The term ‘apocalyptic’ is more appropriate to the disaster which overtook 5th Guards Armoured Army on that day. Although Rotmistrov wrote several accounts of the battle of Prokhorovka, he was remarkably reticent about his own losses. He gave figures only for the number of damaged fighting vehicles. Thus, in the first phase of the battle, 420 tanks were put out of action owing to ‘damage requiring repair’. Of those, 112 were only slightly damaged and could be repaired immediately.<sup>141</sup> Why, then, did he remain silent on the decisive question of write-offs? As can be calculated from the (albeit incomplete) Russian archive documents that have since become available, on 12 July 5th Guards Armoured Army lost around 235 fighting vehicles as write-offs.<sup>142</sup> The Russian historian Valerii Zamulin comes to the conclusion, partly based on other sources, that at least 207 of Rotmistrov’s fighting vehicles were ‘burned’ on that day.<sup>143</sup> In fact, both figures are probably too low.<sup>144</sup> The Soviet reporting system was decidedly defective. How could it have worked perfectly in the chaotic conditions of 12 July? A frighteningly large number of tank officers had been killed, and the survivors no longer had an overview of the numbers of damaged tanks scattered all over the battlefield. Moreover, the battlefield was in the hands of the Germans, who had succeeded in pushing the Soviet attacking forces back to their starting positions, and some even further back. On the evening of 12 July the damaged Soviet tanks were totally destroyed by special squads. It was only on 17 July, when II SS Armoured Corps was withdrawn from the front, that the approaching Soviet troops were able to see the extent of the debacle that had taken place. Thus the first reliable report of losses also bears that date. It is a statement of fighting vehicles lost from 12 to 16 July, signed by the chief of staff of Fifth Guards Armoured Army, according to which the army had written off 334 tanks and assault guns.<sup>145</sup> However, almost all those losses must have been incurred on 12 July, since immediately afterwards the hard-hit 5th Guards Armoured Army was largely withdrawn and, as is also evident from German reports, took hardly any further part in the fighting. An exception was V Guards Motorized Corps, which was deployed on 12 July, but only as a reserve. In any case it suffered only 73 write-offs, so that 261 were incurred by the remaining four corps.<sup>146</sup>

<sup>141</sup> Rotmistrov, *Tankovoye srazhenie*, 100–1.

<sup>142</sup> See combat report of the Soviet XXIX Armoured Corps, CAMO Collection, doc. 35, ‘Otchet o boevykh deistviakh 29 tankovogo korpusa za period s 7.7. po 24.7.43 g.’, 8; Combat Report No. 38 of XVIII Armoured Corps, 13 July, 08.00, in CAMO Collection, doc. 33, ‘Boevye donesenia shtaba 18-go tankovogo korpusa za period s 11. iyulja po 15 iyulja 1943 goda’. With regard to II Armoured Corps and II Guards Armoured Corps, the author received additional information from the Russian military historian Col. (ret.) Eliseyev (Moscow), based on the following archive files: CAMO F. 332, Op. 4948, d. 51, L. 6, d. 82, L. 2; F. 3400, Op. 1, d. 23, L. 44; F. 3407, Op. 1, d. 108, L. 202 and 207; also ‘Prokhorovskoye pole’, C. 376–81, 384–5. Admittedly, in a few cases it is impossible to be sure whether the figure refers to write-offs or repairable losses. However, as explained below, a number of damaged Soviet tanks had to be written off later since they were destroyed by the Germans on the evening of 12 July.

<sup>143</sup> Zamulin, *Prokhorovka*, 401 (Table 26), 508–9, and 628–9.

<sup>144</sup> As can also be seen from Zamulin’s discussion, *ibid.* 635.

<sup>145</sup> CAMO Collection, doc. 30a, ‘Svedenia o sostoyanii, poteriakh i trofeyakh czastei i soединenii 5 gvardeiskoi tankovoi armii na 16.7.43 g.’ (signed 17 July 1943 by Chief of Staff, Fifth Guards Armoured Army, Maj.-Gen. Baskakov, and his deputy, Lt.-Col. Torgalo), 2.

<sup>146</sup> See *ibid.*

That being so, the author's calculation of 235 write-offs for 5th Guards Armoured Army on 12 July seems by no means too low.<sup>147</sup> In addition, there were 308 fighting vehicles 'in need of repair', not counting the 112 described by Rotmistrov as 'slightly damaged', which could be repaired immediately.<sup>148</sup> A publication by the Military History Institute in Moscow contains the following laconic assessment: 'Despite its [...] numerical superiority, 5th Guards Armoured Army did not manage to give the battle a decisive turn. Towards evening, after losing 500 tanks and assault guns, its units went over to the defensive.'<sup>149</sup>

Rotmistrov's report has many shortcomings, but on one point at least it is possible to agree with him without reservation: 'On 12 July the troops of 5th Guards Armoured Army fought with death-defying heroism.'<sup>150</sup> That is also proven by the figure of 3,563 casualties, of whom over 1,500 dead or missing (not including V Guards Motorized Corps).<sup>151</sup> The corresponding figure on the German side was 522, of whom 97 dead or missing.<sup>152</sup> The casualty figures for Rotmistrov's units as at 16 July (including late reports) are more complete. Total casualties were 7,107, and the figure of 3,597 for dead and missing was higher than that for the wounded.<sup>153</sup> Zamulin comments: 'Our tank losses were enormous, but there was something worse: the crews were burned alive along with their vehicles.'<sup>154</sup> Despite the huge losses, 5th Guards Armoured Army gained no ground at all on 12 July, and Hill 252.2 was lost once again. The only success of the troops of 5th Guards Armoured Army was a moral one. Even the soldiers of the Waffen SS, who often fought fanatically, were shocked by the enemy's readiness for sacrifice. But the tragedy of this 'mass heroism' so frequently conjured up in the Soviet accounts was that it was wasted in a senseless attack. Normally such a mass of armour and fiercely determined troops should have achieved a decisive victory.

Although Lt.-Gen. Rotmistrov was hailed as the victor of Prokhorovka during the Soviet era, there was clear criticism within the Red Army. In a confidential

<sup>147</sup> Another document on 'irreplaceable losses' suffered by 5th Armoured Army gives the figure of 350 tanks for 13 July, which must have been mainly update reports of losses incurred on 12 July; see CAMO Collection, doc. 24, 'Svedenia o bezvozvratnykh poteriakh tankov (vsekh tipov), imevshikhsha na vooruzhenii 5. gvardieiskoi tankovoi armii, pridannoi iz rezerva Stavki VGK Voronezhskomu frontu za period oboronitel'nogo srazheniya Kurskoi bitvy (5.7.43–23.7.43 gg.)'. Given the chaotic situation, update reports played an important part on the German side too. The figure of 244 enemy tanks shot down, given on 12 July in the war diary of II SS Armoured Corps, is described as 'provisional', since it was far from complete (BA-MA RS 2-2/17). On the other hand, the enemy situation report for 13 July gives the surprisingly high figure of 249 tanks shot down, although there were few tank battles compared with the previous day (BA-MA RS 2-2/18, pt. 2, A 295, 3). This gives a total figure of 493 tanks reported destroyed (including those shot down by the Totenkopf Division in the neighbouring combat zone).

<sup>148</sup> Rotmistrov, *Tankovoye srazhenie*, 100–1.

<sup>149</sup> The publication in question was a new edition of the standard work *History of the Great Patriotic War* which appeared in the 1990s; see Shutov and Ramanichev, 'Ognennaya duga', 269.

<sup>150</sup> Rotmistrov, *Tankovoye srazhenie*, 72; quoted from a partial translation by the MGFA, Potsdam.

<sup>151</sup> Zamulin, *Prokhorovka*, 508 and Table 26.

<sup>152</sup> Total casualties were 279 for Leibstandarte and 243 for Reich; see II SS Armoured Corps HQ, medical officer, 22 July 1943: 'Personelle Verlustmeldung, 11. bis 12.07.1943', BA-MA RS 2-2/17.

<sup>153</sup> See CAMO Collection, doc. 30a 'Svedenia o sostoyanii, poteriakh i trofeyakh czastei i soedinenii 5 gvardieiskoi tankovoi armii na 16.7.43 g.'

<sup>154</sup> Zamulin, *Prokhorovka*, 397.

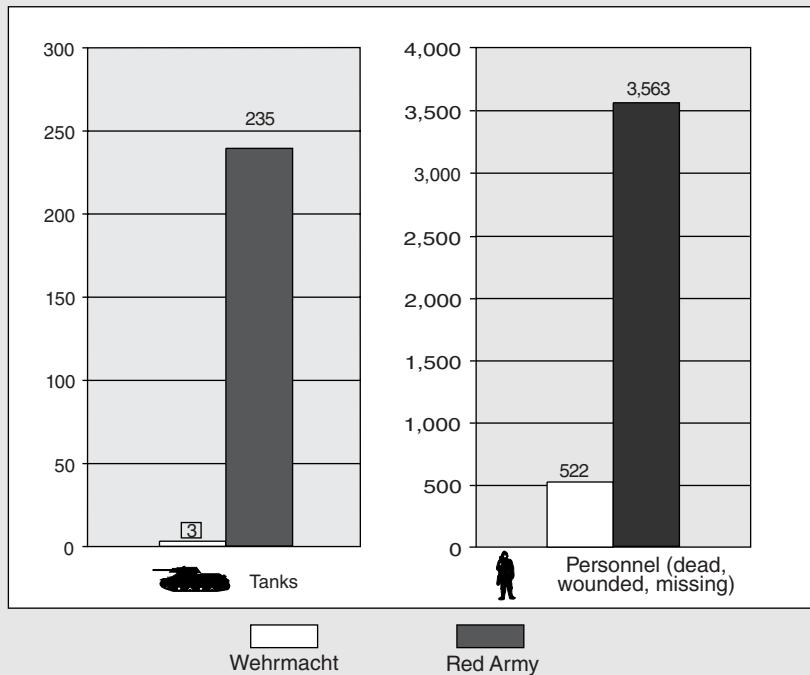


Diagram II.II.1. Losses in the tank battle at Prokhorovka (12 July 1943)

study by the Soviet General Staff drawn up during the war, we find the following judgement: 'On 12 July 5th Guards Armoured Army thus failed to fulfil the task assigned to it.'<sup>155</sup> The newly formed army was torn to pieces on the very first day of battle, so that its commander-in-chief had to come up with an explanation. 'What have you done to your magnificent armoured army?' Stalin demanded.<sup>156</sup> He was so furious that he wanted to sack Rotmistrov and have him court-martialled.<sup>157</sup> Rotmistrov nevertheless persisted in his version of events and created the heroic myth of an epic tank battle on 12 July that supposedly resulted in the annihilation of II SS Armoured Corps and the destruction of 400 German tanks, including 70 Tigers. More accurately, it was a case of a concerted cover-up by a group that included, in addition to Rotmistrov, General Vatutin, the commander in chief of Voronezh Front, and his military adviser Khrushchev, later to be party leader and Soviet head of state. Stalin, meanwhile, took care not to call those responsible to

<sup>155</sup> See *The Battle for Kursk 1943. The Soviet General Staff Study*, 226.

<sup>156</sup> Quoted in Glantz and House, *The Battle of Kursk*, 428.

<sup>157</sup> Zamulin, *Prokhorovka*, 643.

account, since he, after all, was the one mainly to blame.<sup>158</sup> It was he who had originated the abundantly optimistic idea of going over to the offensive on 12 July not only in the north at Orel but also in the south at Prokhorovka. But Manstein's attack had not yet passed its climax, so Stalin sent the newly formed 5th Guards Armoured Army straight into the trap. Had Rotmistrov, a competent tank commander, been free to deploy his troops as he saw fit, such hair-raising mistakes would hardly have occurred. In the event, the battle became a perfect example of how tank formations should never be used. The actual intention was to break through the front at the weakest point and surround the German tank units that had pushed forward. But the Germans did not follow the Soviet scenario: on 11 July they themselves broke through the front and advanced on Prokhorovka. The unintended effect for the Red Army, as correctly described in the revised wording of the *Great Patriotic War*, was that 'the strongest Soviet group attacked the strongest German group, not in the flank, however, but frontally'.<sup>159</sup>

Since the Stavka had underestimated the pace of the forward thrust by the supposedly exhausted German armoured forces, the arrival of German tanks in the marshalling area planned for the Soviet attack came as a complete surprise. This gave rise to a grotesque scene on the eve of the battle. On 11 July Marshal Aleksandr Mikhailovich Vasilevsky had been sent by Stalin to Rotmistrov as a representative of the Stavka and was driving with him south-west of Prokhorovka to the front in the late afternoon. Suddenly a column of tanks came rolling towards them in the distance. Vasilevsky complained to Rotmistrov that the Soviet tanks were supposed to advance undetected, and here they were 'driving about in broad daylight in full view of the Germans'.<sup>160</sup> At that moment the tanks opened fire and both of them realized they were German. Vasilevsky, who was completely under the influence of Stalin's orders, overreacted and ordered the attack to begin that same evening at 20.00 (German time). It was, however, postponed to 02.00 and finally scheduled for 07.30 the next morning.<sup>161</sup> As a result, 5th Guards Armoured Army found itself forced to attack without sufficient intelligence and reconnaissance. Not even the huge tank ditch on the other side of Hill 252.2 was taken into account. As Zamulin comments: 'How it happened that our brigade and battalion commanders were completely unaware of the existence of that ditch is incomprehensible'.<sup>162</sup> The attack was carried out hastily, in a hectic rush. Instead of the properly prepared attack that had been planned, an unnecessary immediate attack was launched in which it was impossible to coordinate the action of the various forces. In a report by XXIX Armoured Corps we read: 'The attack began without artillery fire [...] and with no aerial support'.<sup>163</sup> On the Soviet side it came to

<sup>158</sup> Ibid. 598. <sup>159</sup> Shutov and Ramanichev, 'Ognennaya duga', 269.

<sup>160</sup> Rotmistrov, *Stalnaya guardia*, 182.

<sup>161</sup> CAMO Collection, doc. 35, 'Otchet o boevykh deistviakh 29 tankovogo korpusa za period s 7.7. po 24.7.43 g.', 4.

<sup>162</sup> Zamulin, *Prokhorovka*, 386.

<sup>163</sup> CAMO Collection, doc. 35, 'Otchet o boevykh deistviakh 29 tankovogo korpusa za period s 7.7. po 24.7.43 g.', 4; see also ibid. 6.

'duels between our own tank troops and artillery troops'.<sup>164</sup> Criticism was directed above all at the Soviet air force: 'Coordination between air force units and ground troops was deficient. Bomber pilots frequently bombed their own front-line troops and even the second line and staff HQs'.<sup>165</sup> To be fair to Rotmistrov, he himself was relatively little to blame for the chaos, since he had no alternative but to obey Stalin's absurd order. Nevertheless, his idea of engaging the German tanks 'at close quarters' had disastrous consequences.

An assessment of the tank battle from the Soviet viewpoint shows that:

- *Tactically* it was not only a defeat but a fiasco which became, for many tank crews, a 'flaming inferno'.
- *Operationally* it stopped the advance of the German tanks, at least temporarily. However, what had been planned was not a defensive battle but a breakthrough followed by encirclement and destruction of the enemy. That 'Cannae' failed in all respects.
- At the *strategic* level it was a failure, because Rotmistrov's tanks were supposed to have played the main role in the coming summer offensive. The Stavka had been forced to play its trump card too soon and to no effect.

All this notwithstanding, the myth of Prokhorovka as the 'graveyard of German armour' seems ineradicable. Even today we can read on all sides that at Prokhorovka, thanks to their superior operational expertise, the Soviet tank troops celebrated their greatest triumph of the war. And so Hill 252.2, on which there stands today an enormous monument, is still seen as the legendary place at which the tide of the Second World War turned.

#### (d) Epilogue: The Tank Battle that Never Took Place

Rotmistrov's heroic epic was even surpassed in western historiography, above all by the account of a second tank battle which his units are supposed to have fought at the same time on 12 July against III Armoured Corps to the south of Prokhorovka. The origin of this fanciful embellishment is as follows: during the night of 11 to 12 July, 6th Armoured Division had pushed forward in a 'ghost column' far to the north towards Rzhavets, so that its spearhead was now only 17 kilometres from Prokhorovka. Vatutin feared that III Armoured Corps would strike from the south at the exposed flank of 5th Guards Armoured Army, which was attacking in a westerly direction.<sup>166</sup> So he ordered Rotmistrov to send out a part of his reserve against the supposedly advancing German tanks. This scenario fired the imagination of the German military author Paul Carell, for example, who conceived of a race to Prokhorovka by III Armoured Corps: 'Once again, as so often in the history of war, the outcome of a fateful military encounter which was to determine the

<sup>164</sup> Zamulin, *Prokhorovka*, 392.

<sup>165</sup> CAMO Collection, doc. 35, 'Otchet o boevykh deistviakh 29 tankovogo korpusa za period s 7.7. po 24.7.43 g.', 14. See also Zamulin, *Prokhorovka*, 347, 389, and 392.

<sup>166</sup> Glantz and House, *The Battle of Kursk*, 202.

further course of the whole campaign depended on a race against the clock, on a day or even an hour. The “World Minute of Waterloo” repeated itself at Prokhorovka.<sup>167</sup> Carell was referring to the race to Waterloo between Blücher, the Prussian field marshal rushing to the aid of the British commander Wellington, and Napoleon’s Marshal Grouchy, who was trying in vain to prevent that intervention. General Kempf supposedly arrived at Prokhorovka just as late as Marshal Grouchy at Waterloo.

It is clear from German archive documents, however, that this race on 12 July never took place, and still less did the tank battle south of Prokhorovka described by Rotmistrov.<sup>168</sup> In the sector in question there was only 6th Armoured Division, with 44 tanks at most.<sup>169</sup> After the ‘the ghost column march to Rzhavets’, the other parts of the division had to be brought up. But above all, the night-time advance had further increased the length of the open flanks, exposing them to counter-attacks by the Soviet 59th Army and 7th Guards Army. Because of the course of the front, which resembled a stretched-out finger, III Armoured Corps had to fight in three different directions simultaneously. Hermann Breith, the commanding general, wrote about the situation on 12 July: ‘In the course of the day it became apparent that a swing to the north-west [in the direction of Prokhorovka] was out of the question.’<sup>170</sup> On the German side, therefore, the ‘race’ never took place.

Rotmistrov sent parts of his reserve against the German tanks supposedly advancing from the south.<sup>171</sup> If he is to be believed, on 12 July there was also a battle to the south of Prokhorovka: ‘a bitterly fought tank battle with the enemy’s 6th Armoured Division that lasted until after dark [...] The massed tank attack was repelled with great losses for the enemy.’<sup>172</sup> However, as already mentioned, there is no reference to this in the German files. Instead, the war diary of 11th Armoured Regiment of 6th Armoured Division reports what really happened at the alleged tank battle on the evening of 12 July: ‘Towards 18.00 the Russians tried to attack Rzhavets, but they pulled back again after three T-34s were shot down.’<sup>173</sup>

As in the case of the fighting against SS Armoured Infantry Division ‘Totenkopf’ north of the Psel, which did not take place until 13 July, Rotmistrov also ascribed

<sup>167</sup> Carell, *Verbrannte Erde*, 68. On this, see Stefan Zweig’s miniature ‘Die Weltminute von Waterloo’ in Zweig, *Sternstunden*, 108 ff.

<sup>168</sup> See the entries for 12 July 1943 in the war diaries of Army Detachment Kempf (BA-MA RH 20-8/83) and III Armoured Corps (RH 24-3/78); also Töppel, *Die Offensive gegen Kursk*, 52–5.

<sup>169</sup> In the case of 6th Armoured Division (including 503rd Heavy Armoured Battalion) there are no figures available for 12 July 1943, so the figure for the previous day has been adopted. Since there had been heavy fighting in the meantime, the actual strength of the armour deployed must have been somewhat less. See ‘Panzerlage am 11.07.1943’ (BA-MA RH 20-8/97).

<sup>170</sup> Breith study, BA-MA ZA 1/1601, 9; Paul, *Brennpunkte*, 313.

<sup>171</sup> CAMO Collection, doc. 30, ‘Iz otcheta o boevykh deistviakh 5-i Gvardeiskoi Tankovoi armii za period s 7 iyulia po 24 iyulia 1943 goda’, 10 and 14–15; Rotmistrov, *Tankovoye srazhenie*, 64 ff. While Rotmistrov claims that 26th Guards Armoured Brigade was sent southwards in the morning, Glantz and House (*The Battle of Kursk*, 192–3) reached the conclusion that this measure was not taken until the late afternoon.

<sup>172</sup> Rotmistrov, *Tankovoye srazhenie*, 67–8.

<sup>173</sup> Quoted in Schadewitz, *Panzerregiment 11*, 403. See also Paul, *Brennpunkte*, 312; Töppel, *Die Offensive gegen Kursk*, 52–5.

the fighting in the Rzhavets area to the previous day. By his self-justifying account of events he sought to counter criticism that he had fragmented his forces and not deployed them at the right time in the right place. The conclusion is that on 12 July at Prokhorovka 5th Guards Armoured Army fought only against two SS Armoured Infantry Divisions (each with a single armoured battalion),<sup>174</sup> apart from an insignificant skirmish at Rzhavets.

There is, however, another interpretation, in which the tank battle of Prokhorovka is seen as the sum of all the fighting that took place from 12 to 16 July in the larger Prokhorovka–Rzhavets area.<sup>175</sup> Accordingly, II SS Armoured Corps and III Armoured Corps fought against the following major Soviet formations: 5th Guards Armoured Army, 5th Guards Army, 69th Army, and parts of 6th and 7th Guards Army, supported by numerous unattached units such as XXXI Armoured Corps and 96th Armoured Brigade. Strictly speaking, however, the fighting on 13 July was no longer about Prokhorovka.<sup>176</sup> Rather, Army Group South abandoned its original plan of a swing to the east after the Red Army set up densely staggered anti-tank lines in front of the town.<sup>177</sup> The new objective was to finally close the gap between the SS Armoured Corps and III Armoured Corps, and box in the Soviet 69th Army standing between them. At midday on 15 July the junction of the two armoured corps was successfully achieved at Maloye Yablonovo.<sup>178</sup> In any case, the mass of 69th Army had meanwhile managed to extricate itself, leaving only a few units encircled. Moreover, after 12 July there were no more Soviet tank attacks worth mentioning.<sup>179</sup> 5th Guards Armoured Army was no longer much in action, except for V Guards Motorized Corps, which had been spared on the first day of the fighting. This restraint seems plausible, as Rotmistrov's units incurred a total of 334 write-offs from 12 to 16 July,<sup>180</sup> the vast majority of them on 12 July. In contrast, from 10 to 16 July the SS Armoured Corps suffered only 13 total write-offs.<sup>181</sup>

Finally, the picture must be extended to the whole southern front. Rotmistrov, the 'Lion of Prokhorovka',<sup>182</sup> also met with criticism from within the Red Army about the glorification of his 5th Guards Armoured Army. The claim that his army alone had attacked on 12 July played down the role of the other armies,<sup>183</sup> whereas

<sup>174</sup> In fact, both these divisions normally possessed two armoured battalions. However, during Operation CITADEL each of them had one battalion back in Germany being re-equipped with the new tank.

<sup>175</sup> Thus, e.g., Zetterling and Frankson, *Kursk 1943*, 107 ff., where a fine calculation is made of the forces and losses on both sides.

<sup>176</sup> On the morning of 13 July, Armoured Battalion 'Leibstandarte' attempted one last short push, but broke it off immediately when it encountered an anti-tank gun position.

<sup>177</sup> KTB II. SS-Panzerkorps, 13 July 1943, BA-MA RS 2-2/17.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid. 15 July 1943; see also Breith, 'Der Angriff des III. Panzerkorps', 546.

<sup>179</sup> KTB 4. Pz.Arme, 13 July 1943 (fo. 160), BA-MA RH 21-4/104.

<sup>180</sup> CAMO Collection, doc. 30a, 'Svedenia o sostoyaniu, poteriakh i trofeyakh czastei i soedinenii 5 gвардейской танковой армии на 16.7.43 г.', 2.

<sup>181</sup> 'Geheime Kommandosache: Ausfälle H.Gr. Süd (nur Totalverluste), Stand 10.07 bzw. 16.07.1943' (fos. 22 and 73), BA-MA RH 10/64.

<sup>182</sup> Tsuras, *The Great Patriotic War*, 107.

<sup>183</sup> Rotmistrov, *Tankovoye srazhenie*, 69 and 81.

in fact most of the units of Voronezh Front went on the attack that same morning. To give the whole picture once again: what was planned for the tank units of Army Group South on 12 July was total destruction. In this, 5th Guards Armoured Army was given the main role, in which it was a total failure. Instead of pushing forward more than 30 kilometres to just south of Bykovka and joining up with 1st Armoured Army, which was advancing from the west, it was thrown back even further than its own starting positions. Although 5th Guards Army, deployed north of the Psel, attacked equally unsuccessfully, it was at least able to prevent the Totenkopf Division from striking Rotmistrov's units in the rear. Its southern neighbour, 69th Army, which was literally ground to pieces between two German armoured corps, fought with notable courage. It was 69th Army's few tank units which attacked the German bridgehead at Rzhavets on 12 July and prevented a rapid push forward by III Armoured Corps. The attempt by 7th Guards Army to attack III Armoured Corps in the rear was a failure, but Germany's 7th Armoured Division was tied down and subsequently unable to take part in the northward thrust.

XXXXVIII Armoured Corps advanced in the western sector of Germany's Fourth Armoured Army. On 12 July it had 183 operational battle tanks, assault guns, and self-propelled cannon at its disposal.<sup>184</sup> It was supposed to be attacked in the flank by Mikhail Yefimovich Katukov's 1st Armoured Army, while 6th Guards Army attacked frontally at the same time. The Soviet armoured forces deployed in this sector had been extensively decimated in the last few days and possessed no more than 420 or so fighting vehicles, including recent reinforcements.<sup>185</sup> Unlike the Germans, however, they had more than enough infantry, artillery, and anti-tank guns. What was decisive, in any case, was the fact that, while Rotmistrov attacked frontally at the strongest point, Katukov's 1st Armoured Army struck at the weakest German position. 5th Guards Armoured Corps, X Armoured Corps, and, in reserve, VI Armoured Corps (a total of 270 tanks)<sup>186</sup> attacked deep in the flank of the German XXXXVIII Armoured Corps at Berezovka–Verkhopenye. Their task was to push forward in the rear of the German armoured units eastwards towards Yakovlevo, where they were to join with the pincer arm of 5th Guards Armoured Army. The thrust struck at the seam between XXXXVIII Armoured Corps and LII Army Corps, putting 332nd Infantry Division into difficulties. As a result, 3rd Armoured Division and Armoured Infantry Division 'Grossdeutschland' had to interrupt their advance and send strong armoured units back towards the south to prevent a Soviet breakthrough on the left flank.<sup>187</sup> At the same time, in the north, Germany's 11th Armoured Division was attacked by 6th Guards Army, supported by III Guards Motorized Corps and XXXI Armoured

<sup>184</sup> Daily report of XXXXVIII Armoured Corps, 11 July 1943, 20.45 (fo. 100, reverse side), BA-MA RH 21-4/118. With regard to the (self-propelled) anti-tank guns deployed, it should be noted that no figures are available for Armoured Infantry Division 'Grossdeutschland' for the period 4 to 11 July. For that reason, the number of self-propelled guns on 12 July is given as 17 (*ibid.* 109, reverse side).

<sup>185</sup> Glantz and House, *The Battle of Kursk*, 415, n. 23.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>187</sup> KTB 4. Pz.Armee, 12 July 1943 (fos. 153–4), BA-MA RH 21-4/104; Daily report of XXXXVIII Armoured Corps, 12 July 1943, 20.10 (fo. 109), BA-MA RH 21-4/118.

Corps. The Germans nevertheless succeeded in repelling the Soviet attacks along the whole front, and in the evening of 12 July the Soviet forces went back on the defensive.<sup>188</sup> From the tactical viewpoint, such an offensive was questionable. The Voronezh Front formations had to leave their defensive positions and were driven towards the cannon of the more powerful German tanks, where they suffered painful losses. In terms of its operational effects, however, 1st Armoured Army's flanking attack proved more successful than the frontal attack by 5th Guards Armoured Army.<sup>189</sup>

So while Rotmistrov described a tank battle at Rzhavets that never took place, he ignored another that was perfectly real. In the German operations staffs, the battles against 5th Guards Armoured Army at Prokhorovka were considered an 'outstanding success'.<sup>190</sup> On the other hand, the attack by the Soviet 1st Armoured Army led to a temporary crisis which completely disrupted the timing of the operation. News of it also reached the OKH, where Lt-Col. Count Johann Adolf von Kielmansegg, head of the General Staff's operations division, anxiously confided to his diary that the attacking units in the south had 'come to a standstill'.<sup>191</sup> Although the crisis was overcome the same day, the news of this temporary setback reached Führer headquarters just when a decision-making process with major strategic implications was imminent.

## 5. HITLER'S ORDER TO HALT THE OFFENSIVE—'VICTORY THROWN AWAY'?

Whether Kursk was the turning point or even the decisive battle of the war seems very questionable. On the other hand, another event which occurred at the same time was unequivocally a decisive break. On 10 July 1943 the western Allies landed in Sicily.<sup>192</sup> From now on, Germany was forced to fight a multi-front war on the continent of Europe. This event, which took place 3,000 kilometres from Kursk, caused Hitler, almost automatically, to order a halt to Operation CITADEL.<sup>193</sup> As already discussed, the dictator's attitude to that offensive was in any case very ambivalent. Neither its opponents nor its proponents among the generals had really convincing arguments. At the time, Hitler's closest advisors in the OKW, especially Alfred Jodl, had clearly come out against it. Owing to their rivalry with the OKH, they were not willing to see Germany's precious reserves of armour sacrificed in the OKH's eastern theatre for tactical operational purposes, when they would be lacking in the OKW theatres of operations in southern and western Europe for a

<sup>188</sup> *The Battle for Kursk 1943. The Soviet General Staff Study*, 219–20; Glantz and House, *The Battle of Kursk*, 159 ff. and 204–8; Töppel, *Die Offensive gegen Kursk*, 55–7.

<sup>189</sup> Töppel, *Die Offensive gegen Kursk*, 57.

<sup>190</sup> Thus Field Marshal von Manstein on the evening of 12 July; see Stadler, *Die Offensive gegen Kursk*, 104.

<sup>191</sup> Kielmansegg, 'Bemerkungen eines Zeitzeugen', 146.

<sup>192</sup> See Part VI, Chapter IV, below.

<sup>193</sup> This strategic mechanism was already pointed out by Wegner in the introductory chapter to the present volume. See also his articles 'Das Ende der Strategie', 226, 'Defensive ohne Strategie', 201, and 'Im Schatten', 124 ff.

strategic purpose, namely the prevention of a multi-front war. Unlike the campaigns in 1941/2, in 1943 Hitler was not seeking a 'knock-out blow'<sup>194</sup> on the eastern front, but wanted to make—as he put it—'only small forays'.<sup>195</sup>

Hitler was confirmed in this intention by a new crisis which developed on 13 May 1943 following Army Group Africa's capitulation in Tunis. Now the southern flank was open for an attack on 'Fortress Europe'. The Führer was beset by doubts as to whether his Italian Axis partner was still prepared to fight on. Pressed by Jodl, he seriously considered giving up CITADEL altogether.<sup>196</sup> At the least, as he stated at a conference on 15 May, he was determined to withdraw strong combat units from the eastern front as soon as Italy was threatened. In that event, 'eight good armoured divisions, as well as four infantry divisions', were to be transferred to the southern flank.<sup>197</sup> According to a later account by General (ret.) Walter Warlimont, who at the time was deputy chief of the OKW Operations Staff, they included 'three named SS armoured infantry divisions [II SS Armoured Corps], which Hitler expected to have a strong recruiting effect on the fascist element in the Italian armed forces and civilian population'.<sup>198</sup> However, Hitler feared not only the loss of Italy but also the vacuum that the withdrawal of Italian troops from the Balkans would leave behind, which could lead to a further invasion by the western powers and the adhesion of the Balkan states and Turkey to the western alliance.<sup>199</sup> Within the OKH it was firmly assumed that in the event of a successful Allied landing in Sicily the dictator would immediately put a stop to Operation CITADEL.<sup>200</sup>

This marked a shift of priorities in Hitler's strategy. For the first time since the beginning of the campaign against the Soviet Union, defence in the west took priority over the offensive in the east.<sup>201</sup> During the above-mentioned conference the dictator declared evocatively that 'no front can be allowed to come into being on the borders of the Reich'.<sup>202</sup> A later statement by Hitler on 26 July also tells us much about his worries at the time about launching Operation CITADEL despite the threat of a turnaround in Italy: 'That was the whole reason why I was afraid to start in the east too early, since I always thought that everything would happen immediately in the south.'<sup>203</sup>

<sup>194</sup> Weinberg, *A World at Arms*, 602.

<sup>195</sup> Situation conference at Army Group South HQ in Zaporozhye on 18 Feb. 1943, quoted in Schwarz, *Die Stabilisierung im Süden der Ostfront*, 255.

<sup>196</sup> Philippi and Heim, *Der Feldzug gegen Sowjetrussland*, 210–11.

<sup>197</sup> Private (handwritten) letter from Capt. [Wolf] Junge to Grand Admiral [Karl] Dönitz, 15 May 1943, on the content of that day's 'Führer conference' (fo. 194 reverse side), BA-MA RM 7/260. On the general situation, see also Hitler's conference with Wilhelm Keitel on 19 May 1943, in *Hitlers Lagebesprechungen*, 205–20.

<sup>198</sup> Warlimont, *Im Hauptquartier*, 336.

<sup>199</sup> Seaton, *The Russo-German war 1941–45*, 281.

<sup>200</sup> Communication from General (ret.) von Kielmansegg to the author.

<sup>201</sup> Wegner, 'Das Ende der Strategie', 226.

<sup>202</sup> Private (handwritten) letter from Capt. Junge to Grand Admiral Dönitz, 15 May 1943, on the content of that day's 'Führer conference' (fo. 194 reverse side), BA-MA RM 7/260.

<sup>203</sup> *Hitlers Lagebesprechungen*, 369.

On 10 July American and British troops landed in Sicily in what was then the largest combined air, sea, and land operation in military history. That event triggered, almost as a reflex, Hitler's decision to withdraw large armoured units and thereby end the offensive. There was, however, a far more serious reason than the landing itself which caused the German dictator to send troops to the aid of Benito Mussolini. Given the failure of the Italian troops, Field Marshal Albert Kesselring's prognosis that Sicily could be successfully defended proved an illusion.<sup>204</sup> The Italian defence collapsed after only two days.<sup>205</sup> On 12 July (the day of the battle of Prokhorovka) there could no longer be any doubt that Sicily, and Italy as a whole, could no longer be held without effective German support.<sup>206</sup>

The next day the commanders-in-chief of Army Groups Centre and South, Field Marshals von Kluge and von Manstein, were summoned to Führer headquarters. There Hitler informed them that, in view of the critical situation in Italy, he wished to stop Operation CITADEL and transfer II SS Armoured Corps to that country. Manstein protested vigorously, arguing that 'the battle had now reached the decisive point'. Victory was 'within reach. Breaking off action now would be throwing away victory.'<sup>207</sup> As commander-in-chief of Army Group South, he took an optimistic view of the situation and argued that the decisive breakthrough was imminent. The enemy had been forced to deploy a large part of his operational reserve at a very early stage, and the counter-attack could be repelled. Manstein, on the other hand, had not yet committed any of his own reserve, XXIV Armoured Corps. His confidence was based above all on the huge losses sustained by the enemy, who, he said, had already lost 1,800 tanks.<sup>208</sup>

To avoid any misunderstanding, it must be stated that at this point in time Manstein no longer believed in the success of Operation CITADEL as originally conceived. The field marshal by no means wanted to continue the thrust towards Kursk with his tanks alone, when Ninth Army was no longer in place as the second arm of the pincer movement. On the German side it had already been realized that there would be greater difficulties in the northern sector, and the main force of the attack had therefore been switched to Army Group South.<sup>209</sup> On orders from the OKH, that was where the mass of aircraft and tanks had been deployed. As a strict adherent of the concentration principle, Guderian had declared in favour of 'massing all armoured forces in one place, either with [Army Group] South or with Centre, so as to achieve overwhelming superiority'.<sup>210</sup> Manstein now put forward an alternative plan for securing partial success, dubbed Operation

<sup>204</sup> Schröder, *Italiens Kriegsaustritt*, 130 and 151–2.

<sup>205</sup> On the fighting in Sicily and the strategic implications, see *ibid.* 158 ff.

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid.* 165–6. <sup>207</sup> Manstein, *Verlorene Siege*, 502.

<sup>208</sup> This figure was clearly no great exaggeration. According to information from the Russian Military Archive, Voronezh Front had written off a total of 1,223 tanks from 5 to 13 July, to which must be added the damaged fighting vehicles. See CAMO Collection, doc. 23, 'Svedenia o bezvozvratnykh poteriakh tankov, imevshikhsya na vooruzhenii bt i my Voronezhskogo fronta za period oboronitel'nogo srazheniya Kurskoi bitvy (s 5.7.43 goda po 23.7.43 goda)'.

<sup>209</sup> Communication from General (ret.) von Kielmansegg to the author. See also Kielmansegg, 'Bemerkungen eines Zeitzeugen', 146.

<sup>210</sup> KTB HGr Süd, 4 May 1943 (162 and 164), BA-MA RH 19-VI/45.

ROLAND.<sup>211</sup> The idea was that his armoured units would no longer attack northwards—and certainly not north-eastwards in the direction of Prokhorovka—but would swing sharply to the west so as to encircle all the Soviet troops positioned in the south-western section of the Kursk salient in a one-armed pincer movement. The direction of thrust which suggested itself was along the east-to-west-flowing River Psel. A precondition, however, was the deployment of Manstein's reserve, XXIV Armoured Corps, so as to be able to intervene against new Red Army forces approaching from the east. The field marshal, however, did not have freedom of action since the dictator had made deployment of the army group reserve subject to his personal authorization. The corps was led by General Walther Nehring, an experienced tank-warfare commander, and consisted of SS Armoured Infantry Division 'Viking' and 17th and 23rd Armoured Divisions. It comprised 181 operational tanks and assault guns,<sup>212</sup> as well as 13 motorized infantry battalions,<sup>213</sup> which was even more important in the given situation. Manstein asked for the immediate deployment of only the first two divisions, which together possessed 115 fighting vehicles, but Hitler refused. What is more, the dictator ordered the withdrawal of a further third of the air-force units, leaving Army Group South with only 250 fighters and ground-attack aircraft, but no bombers or dive-bombers.<sup>214</sup>

From 13 to 17 July a strange war took place on the southern front of the Kursk salient. Following their attempted attack on 12 July, the Voronezh Front formations were so badly hit that they remained passive in most sectors. The Germans, for their part, conducted attacks of dubious legality behind Hitler's back, as it were. Pressed by Manstein, the dictator had agreed to the half-hearted compromise that while Operation Citadel would have to be broken off, Army Group South should continue to strike at the enemy troops, which were partially entangled with its own units, to the extent necessary to create 'the possibility of withdrawing troops from the front'.<sup>215</sup> What now ensued at operational level was conspiratorial collusion between the OKH, which sought to evade Hitler's decision, and Army Group South HQ. The OKH General Staff's operations division deliberately delayed passing on Hitler's order to halt the offensive, in order to give the Army Group time to launch Operation ROLAND.<sup>216</sup> Since attacks in a northerly direction were no longer allowed, the opportunity was taken to encircle and destroy parts of the Soviet forces that had been threatening the flanks. This was successful mainly in the eastern sector. At the same time, the first SS Armoured Corps units were withdrawn from the front to prepare them for Operation ROLAND. In the OKH, Gen.

<sup>211</sup> File 'Operation ROLAND', BA-MA RH 21-4/171. See also KTB 4. Pz.Armee (fos. 164, 168, 170 and 174), BA-MA RH 21-4/104; BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2341, 79; BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2373, Part B, 18–19; Manstein, *Verlorene Siege*, 503.

<sup>212</sup> Tank situation report, 11 July 1943 (as at 30 June), 57, BA-MA RH 10/60; Assault-gun situation report, 11 July 1943 (as at 30 June), 92, BA-MA RH 10/62.

<sup>213</sup> Zetterling and Frankson, *Kursk 1943*, 139.

<sup>214</sup> BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2071, 174–5; BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2341, 80 and 86.

<sup>215</sup> Manstein, *Verlorene Siege*, 503.

<sup>216</sup> Communication from General (ret.) von Kielmansegg to the author.

Kurt Zeitzler and Lt.-Gen. Adolf Heusinger still hoped to win Hitler over to a partial operational solution by facing him with accomplished facts. What the generals were doing did not remain hidden from Hitler, however, and on 16 July he issued Special Führer Order No. 100.<sup>217</sup> On 17 July, at 08.55, Fourth Armoured Army received the order to withdraw the SS Armoured Corps and assemble it in the Belgorod area.<sup>218</sup> This decision aroused dismay in the OKH. Von Kielmansegg, then a lieutenant-colonel in the General Staff, wrote despairingly in his diary: 'There's "Roland" finished before it even started. It's enough to make you weep.'<sup>219</sup> The officers of the armoured units, still fully geared to attack, could not see the sense of the order either. They were convinced they remained 'victors over an enemy vastly superior in men and material'.<sup>220</sup>

Like the order to stop before Dunkirk, Hitler's forced halt to Operation CITADEL aroused emotional reactions. It gave rise to a controversy among historians which continues to this day. Manstein wrote in his memoirs that Army Group South 'had been forced to abandon the battle before the outcome was decided, perhaps just before victory, at least on its own front'.<sup>221</sup> He was convinced both that the operation had begun too late and that it had been ended too soon. Some historians agree with him. The offensive against the Kursk salient has been described as 'a battle abandoned half way, a victory thrown away just before the climax'.<sup>222</sup> Since what is at issue here is the fundamental understanding of Operation CITADEL, the 'victory thrown away' thesis will be now be examined from the operational and strategic viewpoints.

### (a) Operation ROLAND's Chances of Success

Considered in isolation, a limited operation of that kind would probably have been successful. That is the view taken, for example, by General (ret.) von Kielmansegg, who was responsible at the time for examining Army Group South's corresponding plan in the operations division of the OKH General Staff.<sup>223</sup> After all, there were only relatively weak Soviet forces in the exposed south-western corner of the Kursk salient, which had so far been overshadowed by events elsewhere. Manstein argued that the Red Army's counter-attack had already been repelled on 12 July. At the following day's conference at Führer headquarters, gripped by a kind of 'Prokhorovka euphoria', he took a thoroughly optimistic view of the situation. However, the field marshal was unaware that more Steppe Front formations were on their way, namely 27th, 53th, and parts of 47th Army. Those forces were actually intended for the Red Army's following summer offensive and could not have been deployed immediately, but the approximately 400 tanks and assault guns of 4th Guards

<sup>217</sup> BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2071, 170.

<sup>218</sup> KTB 4. Pz.Arme, 17 July 1943, BA-MA RH 21-4/104, 176; KTB Op.Abt. OKH, 16 July 1943, BA-MA RH 2/3060, 242; BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2071, 170.

<sup>219</sup> General (ret.) von Kielmansegg kindly allowed the author sight of the diary he kept at the time.

<sup>220</sup> BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2373, Part A, 28. <sup>221</sup> Manstein, *Verlorene Siege*, 504.

<sup>222</sup> Engelmann, *Zitadelle*, 5.

<sup>223</sup> Communication from General (ret.) von Kielmansegg to the author.

Armoured Corps and I Motorized Corps posed an immediate threat.<sup>224</sup> Manstein would probably not have been greatly impressed by the newly arrived armoured units, however, given that his forces had just succeeded in immediately repelling an attack by the 951 fighting vehicles of 5th Guards Armoured Army. Here it should be noted that although the Red Army's numerical superiority at Kursk was very impressive, the balance of forces was never again so 'advantageous' for the Wehrmacht. Almost all the available German reserves were concentrated in the area—something which would never again be possible in this war, since Germany had henceforth to disperse its military resources over several different theatres of operations. With the help of III Armoured Corps and his Army Group reserve, XXIV Armoured Corps, Manstein would have been in a position to provide protection on the east for the westward-directed Operation ROLAND. He could then have appeared once again as the great victor.

At this point we must take issue with the myth of a 'stab in the back'. It was by no means the case that German armoured forces, 'undefeated in the field', were robbed of victory by Hitler's order to stop the offensive, as had happened in the western campaign of 1940 before Dunkirk. Manstein's thesis of a 'victory thrown away' may have been perfectly correct, but it would have been yet another 'lost victory', to quote the title of his memoirs. He could have aimed only at a temporary partial operational success, which, given the Red Army's imminent summer offensive, would soon have evaporated. With 27 armies concentrated in this section of the front, the enemy enjoyed such superiority that, even if the Germans had had some initial success, Manstein's forces would finally have been overwhelmed.

### (b) The Donets–Mius Offensive

The Red Army had such an abundance of forces that it was superior not only in the Kursk salient but could launch attacks at the same time at other places on the eastern front, such as the Donets–Mius offensive on 17 July against the southern wing of Army Group South. Although that offensive had not yet started at the time of the Führer headquarters conference on 13 July, it had been reported as imminent by German intelligence. Manstein had weakened the southern wing of his Army Group in favour of the northern wing at Kursk. Between Kharkov and the Sea of Azov, over a breadth of 400 kilometres, there were only 483 fighting vehicles in all (223 tanks, 145 assault guns, and 115 self-propelled cannon), even including the three armoured and armoured infantry divisions of the Army Group's reserve,<sup>225</sup> whereas the units of the Soviet South and South-West Fronts facing them possessed more than 1,846 tanks.<sup>226</sup> Such an imbalance of forces was

<sup>224</sup> Glantz and House, *The Battle of Kursk*, 221–3.

<sup>225</sup> 'Panzerlage 11.7.1943 (Stand 30.6)', 57, BA-MA RH 10/60; 'Sturmgeschützlage' (same date), 92, BA-MA RH 10/62; 'Pak (Selbstfahrlafette)-Lage' (same date), 62, BA-MA RH 10/63

<sup>226</sup> CAMO Collection, doc. 20 'Spravka o poteriakh tankov po deistvuyushchim frontam v boyach s 5.7.43 g. po 20.7.43 g.', 2.

not unusual.<sup>227</sup> At this time, for example, Army Group North did not have a single armoured division.

Manstein wanted to take SS Armoured Infantry Division 'Viking' and 17th Armoured Division from his Army Group's reserve for the purposes of Operation ROLAND. In May he had already firmly assumed that the Red Army would launch a relief offensive against the Donets Basin immediately after the beginning of Operation CITADEL in order to force Army Group South to withdraw some of its forces. Determined not to be provoked, however, he declared in advance that, 'in the case of CITADEL the decisive factor is the battle for Kursk, and that battle must be fought out even at the risk of a serious crisis in the Donets area. It must therefore be assumed at the outset that the enemy will succeed in making deep breaches in the Army Group's widely stretched front in the sectors of Sixth Army and First Armoured Army.'<sup>228</sup> Manstein developed the brilliant idea that the battle on the Mius had to be fought at Kursk. There, by tying down and destroying the largest possible amount of enemy forces, the risk of offensives on other sections of the front could be averted. His idea was to force the Red Army to throw so many tanks into the Kursk cauldron that it would be unable to launch its planned summer offensive or would be able to do so only with insufficient forces.<sup>229</sup> That this was by no means absurd is shown by the strikingly high number of Soviet losses. The Soviet colossus was dangerous only if it was able to throw its numerical superiority into the balance—especially its strongest weapon, the artillery—in a properly prepared attack. At Kursk, however, there was a chance of entangling the Soviet armoured units in meeting engagements in which the German tank commanders would be able to exploit their tactical superiority, as on 12 July at Prokhorovka. The Führer, however, considered possession of the Donets Basin as indispensable for reasons of armament strategy. He therefore persisted in his refusal and terminated Operation CITADEL on the evening of 16 July. The next day the Red Army began its offensive in the Donets–Mius sector. This, however, was 'spectacularly unsuccessful'<sup>230</sup> and foundered from the outset. Manstein's risky idea of fighting the battle on the Mius at Kursk by means of Operation ROLAND would probably have succeeded, since never in the course of the war was the balance of armoured forces so favourable.

### (c) The Offensive in the Orel Bulge

Army Group Centre faced an entirely different situation to the north of Kursk. Ninth Army's offensive had quickly got bogged down, but the real problem was that the Soviet counter-attack on Second Armoured Army in the Orel bulge was making rapid headway. Whereas, as later became clear, Army Group South in the Donets–Mius sector had only two small fires to put out, Second Armoured Army

<sup>227</sup> To give a contrary example: at the time of the collapse of Army Group Centre in the summer of 1944, Soviet superiority was 23 to 1 in battle tanks and 3.6 to 1 in assault guns.

<sup>228</sup> KTB HGr Süd, 24 May 1943, 234 (fo. 117), BA-MA RH 19-VI/45.

<sup>229</sup> On this, see Mellenthin, *Panzerschlachten*, 164.

<sup>230</sup> Glantz and House, *When Titans Clashed*, 352, n. 13.

was threatened with a general conflagration. Although Hitler was unable to foresee the further development of the situation clearly at the conference on 13 July, he nevertheless feared that the German defence in the Orel bulge might collapse. In those circumstances he had to decide whether he ought to terminate not only Army Group Centre's offensive in the north but Operation CITADEL as a whole, even if Manstein had success in view. However, the dictator did not immediately renounce any further offensive by Army Group South. Instead, he decided that it should no longer attack in a northerly direction towards Kursk but against the south-western section of the Kursk salient. This meant that Manstein's units would be halted only temporarily. Hitler nevertheless switched the main focus of action by the Luftwaffe clearly to Army Group Centre and also transferred some of Manstein's armoured units to it. It is important to note, however, that he did not put an end to further offensive action by Army Group South until 16 July, when he banned Operation ROLAND.

#### (d) The Allied Landing in Sicily

For Hitler, the imminent crisis in the Orel bulge was thus at first a reason to terminate only the northern wedge of the attack (Ninth Army). On 13 July that development alone, which could not yet be clearly assessed, did not necessarily require halting the whole offensive. Rather, the compromise suggestion of a small-scale operation by the southern wedge of the attack (Operation ROLAND), as proposed by Manstein and the OKH General Staff, seemed thoroughly plausible. Meanwhile, however, a crisis had arisen in the new theatre of war in southern Europe which necessarily led to the termination of Operation CITADEL. Hitler had decided from the outset to break off the operation if an Allied attempted landing in Sicily were successful. At the time, however, the front commanders were unaware of the connection. From their point of view, the withdrawal of II SS Armoured Corps came far too late for Italy and far too soon for the Kursk offensive. In view of the great distance, the units withdrawn could not possibly reach the Sicilian theatre of operations in time to intervene effectively. That, however, was a purely military argument. What Hitler wanted was to give a political signal that would prevent the defection of his Italian Axis partner.

Although Hitler then sent only part of II SS Armoured Corps to Italy, he was 'in the position of a man who had taken a tiger by the tail and dared not let go'.<sup>231</sup> Since the German forces were so closely engaged with the superior forces of the Red Army advancing rapidly from different directions, it seemed scarcely possible to withdraw such a powerful major formation from the fighting immediately without risking the collapse of the front. When taking this decision, moreover, Hitler could not have foreseen that the situation would become so critical at various places on the eastern front simultaneously.

<sup>231</sup> Mellenthin, *Panzerschlachten*, 164.

To summarize: Manstein was right in operational terms (but only with regard to his own army group), while Hitler was right from the strategic and political viewpoint. There was not one but several reasons for his order to stop the offensive, and the decision was predetermined by developments in Sicily. However, the reason given as decisive in Soviet historiography, namely the alleged destruction of the SS Armoured Corps on 12 July, can be definitely ruled out. It was not the supposed German defeat at Prokhorovka but the collapse of Italian defence in Sicily—3,000 kilometres away—that caused Hitler to terminate Operation CITADEL on that day and withdraw the armoured corps. But the disappearance of the SS Armoured Corps from the Kursk sector of the front immediately afterwards, which was simply a chronological coincidence, enabled Rotmistrov to claim that his valiant troops had destroyed the enemy. The situation is similar with regard to a propaganda myth that was subsequently repeated in, for example, the official history of the Great Patriotic War: ‘The German top leadership hurriedly put the blame for this defeat on the commander of the SS Armoured Corps, Obergruppenführer Hausser, and relieved him of his post.’<sup>232</sup> In reality, on the evening of 12 July Field Marshal von Manstein expressed ‘thanks and recognition’ to Hausser,<sup>233</sup> who not only retained command of his corps but was later promoted to commander-in-chief of an army and ultimately of an army group.

<sup>232</sup> *Geschichte des Großen Vaterländischen Krieges*, iii. 327

<sup>233</sup> Stadler, *Die Offensive gegen Kursk*, 104.

# III. Operation CITADEL—A Turning Point?

## 1. CAUSES OF THE GERMAN FAILURE

The termination of Operation CITADEL was pre-programmed, since Hitler had decided from the outset to stop the operation if the Allies landed in Sicily at the same time. But even if there had been no invasion of Sicily, the Wehrmacht would have had no chance of winning the battle of Kursk. It failed to do so for five main reasons:

- The most important reason was the *law of numbers*. The Red Army's numerical superiority was such as to induce an attitude of resignation on the part of some German officers. No matter how many Soviet tanks were destroyed, more and more kept coming. Field Marshal von Manstein had this to say about the enemy's endless regenerative ability: 'We were facing a hydra that seemed to grow two new heads for every one we cut off.'<sup>1</sup> But what the German army lacked was not so much tanks as infantry to secure its flanks following a breakthrough. On the Soviet side, however, manpower seemed superabundant<sup>2</sup> and was thrown onto the battlefield without consideration. The mass deployments of Soviet air power came as a surprise, however, since Soviet planes had been swept from the skies at the start of the Russian campaign and in a very short time the original 20,000 aircraft had been reduced to a few remnants.<sup>3</sup> From then on the Luftwaffe had been in control of Soviet air space; in the spring of 1943 it had still played a decisive role in Manstein's counter-attack on the Donets. Yet by July 1943 the Red Army again had some 12,000 aircraft at its disposal, of which 6,532 (not counting reserves) were directly deployed against the German forces.<sup>4</sup> At the beginning of Operation CITADEL the Luftwaffe managed to regain control of the skies, mainly as a result of the failed Russian preventive strike. But then strong air units had to be redeployed in the Orel bulge and on the Mius, which finally left the attacking units of Army Group South with only 250 fighters and ground-attack aircraft. The lack of aircraft was compounded by the fuel shortage, with the result that CITADEL was the first large-scale operation on

<sup>1</sup> Manstein, *Verlorene Siege*, 509.

<sup>2</sup> See Kroener, 'Der Kampf um den Sparstoff Mensch'.

<sup>3</sup> *Grif sekretnosti sniat*, 350. Of the 20,000 Soviet aircraft available on 22 July 1941, only 9,200 were at the front at that time.

<sup>4</sup> Zetterling and Frankson, *Kursk 1943*, 5.

the eastern front in which the Luftwaffe did not play a decisive role. The Soviet armament industry was able to achieve superiority—mostly many times over—in other areas too, and supplies from the Allies also had an impact. To put the German leadership's main problem in a nutshell: it had no more reserves. The OKH had no operational reserve on the eastern front, nor did the OKW have a strategic reserve that could have intervened in Italy, for example. The individual Soviet army fronts, on the other hand, possessed considerable operational reserves, in addition to which the Stavka had, in Steppe Front, a strategic reserve of the size of an army group. The German potential, however, was exhausted.

- Hitler's *constant postponement of the start of the offensive* had a detrimental effect. Manstein had demanded that the enemy be hit 'as soon as possible, while still in a state of weakness'.<sup>5</sup> He wanted to attack before the Soviet formations had recovered from the defeat at Kharkov. Now, however, every day that passed was a gain for the Red Army, which was able to build the Kursk salient into an ever-stronger fortress. The Wehrmacht lost the race not only against the Red Army, but against the Allies too. General Zeitzler, chief of the OKH General Staff, had called for a strike as quickly as possible to prevent coordinated action by the Allies. So the Allied landing in Sicily—at the very height of the battle—was also a stab in the back of the German eastern front. The date set for the attack by Hitler was thus 'the most unfavourable that could possibly have been imagined'.<sup>6</sup>
- *Forgoing the element of surprise* was a further shortcoming. It turned out that the Red Army knew not only the direction of thrust but also the timing of the offensive. The German tanks ran into deep minefields laid out exactly in the planned direction of attack. They encountered a well-prepared defender.
- The stereotypical attack was directed *frontally* against the enemy's strongest position. Instead of exploiting the tactical superiority of their armour in free combat, the Germans embarked on a *direct trial of strength in a very restricted space*, that is, a 'rolling battle of material attrition', a 'mechanized Verdun'.
- The *Allied landing in Sicily* was the beginning of a war on two fronts for the Wehrmacht. From then on, it had to divide its forces among several different theatres of operations. In reality, however, the multi-front war had already begun much earlier. Germany had long been waging war with the western powers at sea and in the air. For that reason the mass of German fighters and anti-aircraft cannon was concentrated on the 'home front' to counter the strategic air war conducted by British and American bombers. Since March 1943 losses of fighter aircraft deployed in defending Germany had clearly exceeded those on the eastern front. Even at the height of the battle of Kursk, the losses on the home front were considerably greater. For the Luftwaffe, the

<sup>5</sup> Manstein, *Verlorene Siege*, 494.

<sup>6</sup> Magenheimer, *Die Militärstrategie Deutschlands 1940–1945*, 244.

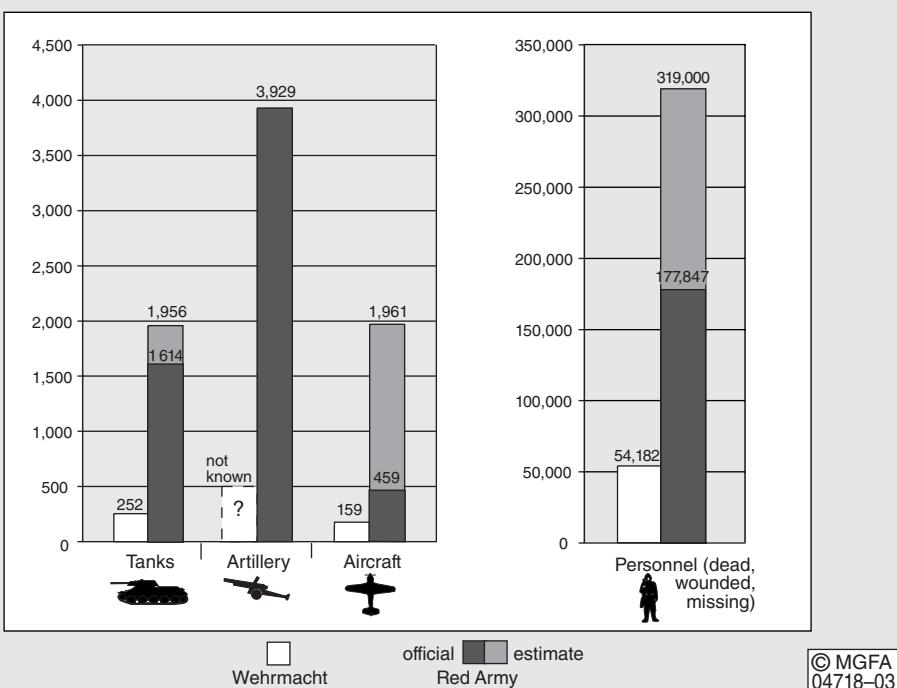


Diagram II.III.1. Total losses in Operation CITADEL (5 to 16 July 1945)

Allied landing in Sicily meant the *opening of a third front* and a concomitant sharp increase in aircraft losses. In July and August, for example, it lost only 702 planes on the eastern front, compared with a total of 3,504 losses on all other fronts (including Germany itself). These figures include heavily damaged aircraft. So, although ‘the greatest battle of all time’ was raging at Kursk, and fighting was taking place at the same time on many sections of the eastern front, the share of total German aircraft losses was only 16 per cent.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Gen.Qu.Mstr., 6. Abt., ‘Flugzeugunfälle und Verluste bei den fliegenden Verbänden’ (see, above all, the reporting days 2 Aug. and 2 Sept.), BA-MA RL 2-III/1191-1192; ‘Monatliche Flugzeugverluste’ (reporting days 7 Aug. and 7 Sept.), BA-MA RL 2-III/1025; ‘10-Tages-Meldungen’, BA-MA RL 2-III/725-726; ‘Monatsmeldungen über Zu- und Abgänge’, BA-MA RL 2-III/877-878; ‘Monatsmeldungen an OKW’, BA-MA RL 2-III/1008; ‘Gesamtübersicht der Verluste 1939–1945’, BA-MA, Study ZA 3/407. Update reports received in the following weeks and months are also taken into account. The calculation was made by Ulf Balke using further documents from his private archive.

## 2. QUANTITATIVE BALANCE-SHEET: ASYMMETRICAL LOSSES

The British military correspondent Alexander Werth was able to visit the Prokhorovka battlefield. Reporting on the inferno, he wrote:

It was a concentrated carnage within a small area more terrible than had yet been seen. [...] I could see how the area to the north of Belgorod (where the Germans had penetrated some thirty miles into the Kursk salient) had been turned into a hideous desert, in which even every tree and bush had been smashed by shell-fire. Hundreds of burned-out tanks and wrecked planes were still littering the battlefield, and even several miles away from it the air was filled with the stench of thousands of only half-buried Russian and German corpses.<sup>8</sup>

The Operation CITADEL offensive against the Kursk salient has been classified by some historians as the turning point of the war mainly because of the irretrievable losses which the Germans allegedly suffered there. According to Soviet sources, the Wehrmacht lost 3,572 tanks<sup>9</sup> (700 of them Tigers),<sup>10</sup> 844 field guns,<sup>11</sup> 1,392 aircraft,<sup>12</sup> and 80,000 to 100,000 men.<sup>13</sup> That indeed would have 'broken the backbone'<sup>14</sup> of the German army, since it had only 3,524 tanks and assault guns available for the whole eastern front,<sup>15</sup> of which 2,465 were deployed for Operation CITADEL.<sup>16</sup> However, there is a great difference between the figures given in the Soviet propaganda fiction and those contained in the German archives. In reality, total German losses were not 3,572 tanks and assault guns, but only 252.

Up to and including 14 July (one day after Hitler halted action by the northern group), Model's Ninth Army lost 41 battle tanks, 17 assault guns, and 19 tank destroyers.<sup>17</sup> The total losses of Army Group South, up to and including 16 July, when Hitler finally terminated the offensive, were 161 tanks and 14 assault guns.<sup>18</sup> Interestingly, only 10 Tigers were lost during the whole of Operation CITADEL.<sup>19</sup> So

<sup>8</sup> Werth, *Russia at War*, 684.

<sup>9</sup> Venkov, 'Archivbestände', 238, according to whom, from 5 to 15 July 1943, the Germans lost 928 tanks against Central Front and 2,644 against Voronezh Front.

<sup>10</sup> Soviet leaflet, repr. in Piekalkiewicz, *Unternehmen Zitadelle*, 214.

<sup>11</sup> Telpukhovsky, *Die sowjetische Geschichte des Großen Vaterländischen Krieges*, 241; Werth, *Russia at War*, 684.

<sup>12</sup> Telpukhovsky, *Die sowjetische Geschichte des Großen Vaterländischen Krieges*, 241.

<sup>13</sup> Shutov and Ramanichev, 'Ognennaya duga', 271.

<sup>14</sup> *Velikaya Otechestvennaya Voyna* (Telpukhovsky), 229, quoted in Sokolov, 'The Battle for Kursk', 74.

<sup>15</sup> Zetterling and Frankson, *Kursk 1943*, 5.

<sup>16</sup> See Table II.I.5. 'Relative strength in the Kursk–Orel area on 5 July 1943'.

<sup>17</sup> Since the information given in the files as at 13 July is incomplete, the loss figures as at 14 July have been adopted. See 'Geheime Kommandosache: Ausfälle H.Gr. Mitte, Stand 14.7.1943 (berichtigt)', fo. 12, BA-MA RH 10/65; 'Geheime Kommandosache: Pz. Totalverluste (Orël-Bogen), Stand 14.7.1943 (berichtigt)', fo. 71, BA-MA RH 10/64. Assault guns were not included, since they counted as artillery.

<sup>18</sup> 'Geheime Kommandosache: Ausfälle H.Gr. Süd, Stand 16.7.1943' (fo. 73), BA-MA RH 10/64.

<sup>19</sup> Army Group South lost six Tigers, and Army Group Centre (Ninth Army) four. See 'Geheime Kommandosache: Ausfälle H.Gr. Kommandosache: Ausfälle H.Gr. Mitte, Stand 14.7.1943 (berichtigt)', fo. 12, BA-MA RH 10/65.

Table II.III.1. Tank losses during Operation CITADEL

## Ninth Army (5–14 July 1943)

	Flame tanks	Panzer IIIIs	Panzer IVs	Panthers	Tigers	Self-propelled Aslt. Guns	Total
2nd Armd.Div.			14				14
4th Armd.Div.			6				6
9th Armd.Div.			2				2
12th Armd.Div.			1				1
18th Armd.Div.		2	9				11
20th Armd.Div.			3				3
505th Armd.Btl.				4			4
177th Aslt.Gun Btl.					1		1
185th Aslt.Gun Btl.					3		3
189th Aslt.Gun Btl.					1		1
244th Aslt.Gun Btl.					5		5
245th Aslt.Gun Btl.					2		2
904th Aslt.Gun Btl.					2		2
909th Aslt.Gun Btl.					3		3
656th AT Rgt. (Ferdinands)					19		19
<b>Total Ninth Army:</b>							<b>77</b>
<hr/>							
Army Group South (5–16 July 1943)							
3rd Armd.Div.		6	3				9
11th Armd.Div.		2	3				5
Grossdeutschland		3	16			1	20
Leibstandarte		1	9		1	1	12
Reich		1	6		1	1	9
Totenkopf		2	8		1	1	12
6th Armd.Div.	3	6	11				20
7th Armd.Div.		8	2				10
19th Armd.Div.		7	16				23
503rd Armd.Btl.				3			3
10th Armd.Brig.				42			42
228th Aslt.Gun Btl.					1		1
905th Aslt.Gun Btl.					3		3
911th Aslt.Gun Btl.					3		3
393rd Aslt.Gun.Btry.					3		3
<b>Total A.Gr. South</b>							<b>175</b>
<b>Total losses in Operation CITADEL:</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>109</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>252</b>

Source: BA-MA, RH 10/64 and 65.

it is paradoxical that one of the best-known books about that battle appeared under the suggestive title ‘The Tigers are Burning’.<sup>20</sup>

For many years the Red Army’s losses were a state secret and were made public only after the end of the Soviet era. In the standard work *Grif sekretnosti sniat* the

<sup>20</sup> See the monograph of that name by Martin Caidin.

figure given for irretrievable losses for the period of defence against the German offensive<sup>21</sup> is 1,614 tanks and assault guns.<sup>22</sup> Although that work is a milestone in the historiography of the Second World War, it has since become evident that many of the loss figures are too low.<sup>23</sup> Further assessment of Russian archive materials reveals that Central Front wrote off 526 tanks from 5 to 15 July,<sup>24</sup> while Voronezh Front had already lost 1,223 tanks up to and including 13 July.<sup>25</sup> According to another source, it lost 1,397 battle tanks and 33 assault guns in the defensive phase up to 22 July.<sup>26</sup> The total losses incurred by Central Front, Voronezh Front, and the reinforcements from Steppe Front were thus between 1,614 and 1,956 fighting vehicles. At all events, they far exceeded the 252 losses suffered by the German attacking forces. Interestingly, this balance-sheet tallies with estimates made by American historians, who worked out as a rule of thumb that at Kursk eight Soviet tanks were destroyed for every German tank lost.<sup>27</sup>

According to its own reports, the Red Army lost 3,929 artillery cannon and grenade launchers,<sup>28</sup> but no corresponding loss figures are available on the German side. On the other hand, German aircraft losses can be clearly ascertained. The figure was not 1,392, as claimed by the Soviets,<sup>29</sup> but 159.<sup>30</sup> Soviet losses are given

<sup>21</sup> The Soviet ‘defensive phase’ corresponded to Operation CITADEL. According to the Russian periodization, it lasted from 5 to 11 July for Central Front in the north, and from 5 to 23 July for Voronezh Front in the south. According to the German periodization, Operation CITADEL lasted for the northern group (Ninth Army) from 5 to 13 July, and for the southern group from 5 to 16 July. The southern group then withdrew to its initial starting positions, which it reached on 23 July. During the withdrawal phase there was no longer any heavy fighting or serious losses.

<sup>22</sup> *Grif sekretnosti sniat*, 370.

<sup>23</sup> See, e.g., the criticism by Boris V. Sokolov, to whom reference is made repeatedly in the following discussion. It should be mentioned in this connection that the Research Institute for Military History greeted Krivosheyev’s *Grif sekretnosti sniat* with great euphoria and had it translated into German. It subsequently distanced itself from the intended publication, however, since many loss figures had proved to be clearly too low. The problem lies less with the Russian editor and more with the deficiencies of the Red Army’s reporting system. Discreditable operations involving heavy losses were partly hushed up during the Stalin era, so that no loss figures are available. For some battles, the number of Red Army soldiers taken prisoner by the Germans is higher than the official Soviet figure for total losses.

<sup>24</sup> See CAMO Collection, doc. 21, ‘Spravka o poteriakh voisk frontov, poteriakh, nanesennykh imi protivniku, i vydovy o deistviach tankovykh voisk protivnika v operatsiakh s 5-go po 15-e iyulja 1943 goda’, 2.

<sup>25</sup> See CAMO Collection, doc. 23, ‘Svedenia o bezvozvratnykh poteriakh tankov, imevshikhsya na vooruzhenii bt i my Voronezhskogo fronta za period oboronitelnogo srazheniya Kurskoi bitvy (s 5.7.43 goda po 23.7.43 goda)’. According to another archive document, Voronezh Front incurred 1,708 tank losses up to 20 July, of which 1,254 were write-offs: CAMO Collection, doc. 20, ‘Spravka o poteriakh tankov po deistvuyushchim frontam v boyach s 5.7.43 g. po 20.7.43 g.’.

<sup>26</sup> Report by the C-in-C of Voronezh Front (CAMO, F. 15, Op. 1160, d. 1424, L. 6); for this information the author is indebted to the Russian military historians Col. Vladimir T. Eliseyev, Col. Shabayev, and Lt.-Col. Sergei Lipatov.

<sup>27</sup> Glantz and House, *The Battle of Kursk*, 135 and 274.

<sup>28</sup> *Grif sekretnosti sniat*, 370.

<sup>29</sup> See, e.g., Telpukhovsky, *Die sowjetische Geschichte des Großen Vaterländischen Krieges*, 241.

<sup>30</sup> 1st Air Division (Air Fleet 6) lost 45 aircraft from 5 to 11 July 1943, and VIII Air Corps (Air Fleet 4) lost 114 from 5 to 16 July. See Gen.Qu.Mstr.: 6. Abt., ‘Flugzeugunfälle und Verluste bei den fliegenden Verbänden’, BA-MA RL III/1191–1193; calculated by Ulf Balke, taking into account other documents from his private archive. Klink, on the other hand (*Das Gesetz des Handelns*, 337–8), puts the figure at 193 German losses, although his calculation for the deployment of Air Fleet 6 is based on

in the standard Russian work *Grif sekretnosti sniat* as only 459 aircraft. This, however, is even lower than the figure given in Soviet historiography, which even then put the number of Soviet aircraft shot down in aerial combat at around 1,000.<sup>31</sup> However, there is no information available about other losses due to anti-aircraft fire, crashes, and so on. In this unsatisfactory situation one can only fall back on the relatively reliable estimates of the Luftwaffe Operations Staff's intelligence division (Ic), which reported the destruction of 1,961 Soviet aircraft from 1 to 15 July.<sup>32</sup>

German personnel losses were heavy, even if well below the Russian estimates of 80,000 to 100,000.<sup>33</sup> From 5 to 13 July, Ninth Army lost a total of 23,345 men (4,064 dead, 18,414 wounded, 867 missing). For Army Group South the figure for the period 5 to 16 July was 30,837 (4,999 dead, 24,745 wounded, 1,093 missing).<sup>34</sup> The total number of German troops lost in Operation CITADEL was thus 54,182 (9,063 dead, 43,159 wounded, and 1,960 missing).<sup>35</sup> The numbers of dead and missing nevertheless amounted to only 2.51 per cent of the daily strength of the three German attacking armies, and as little as 1.67 per cent of their ration strength.<sup>36</sup> There can be no question of a catastrophic haemorrhage that left numerous German formations 'bleeding to death' and unable to recover. The numbers are also put into perspective by the fact that the Germans had to attack a prepared system of defensive positions in the face of fire from an enemy several times superior in artillery. By way of comparison, in 1916 the British army lost 60,000 men out of a total of 120,000 on the first day of the battle of the Somme, including 20,000 dead.

Most surprising of all is that the losses incurred by the Soviet troops, as defenders, were considerably higher than those of the German attackers. According

the period 6 to 15 July. In fact, Operation CITADEL ended for Ninth Army on 11 July. From 12 July on, the great majority of Air Fleet 6's aircraft were deployed in resisting the Soviet counter-offensive in the Orel bulge.

<sup>31</sup> Even the official Soviet account, *Geschichte des zweiten Weltkrieges 1939–1945* (vii. 187), mentions 1,000 Soviet aircraft lost in aerial combat. For further sources, see Sokolov, 'The Battle for Kursk', 83.

<sup>32</sup> On this, see Muller, *The German Air War*, 144. Different figures for aircraft shot down are given in 'Luftflotte 4, Tägliche Einsatzübersichten vom 3.7. bis 10.12.1943', BA-MA RL 7/667, and 'Luftflotte 6, Tagesmeldungen des Flivo 2. Armee vom 1.7. bis 30.9.1943', BA-MA RH 20-2/1337. These figures, supplemented by information from Ulf Balke's private archive, result in a total of 1,700 aircraft shot down. However, the BA-MA files in question are documents from the Luftwaffe's operations division (Ia) only, whereas Muller bases himself on intelligence documents (Ic), which are clearly more conclusive with regard to enemy losses. The file quoted by Muller (NARS T971/45/351) is held by an American archive and could not be consulted. The difference of more than 200 in the number of aircraft shot down may possibly be due to inclusion, in the documents consulted by Muller, of additional losses caused by anti-aircraft fire.

<sup>33</sup> Shutov and Ramanichev, 'Ognennaya duga', 271.

<sup>34</sup> Fourth Armoured Army lost 16,168 men in all (2,686 dead, 13,042 wounded, 440 missing) and Army Detachment Kempf 14,669 (2,313 dead, 11,703 wounded, 653 missing).

<sup>35</sup> On this, see the statistics given in the following German documents: BA-MA RW 6/v. 558 and 564; RH 20-8/97; RH 20-9/339; RH 20-9/409; RH 20-9/441; RH 24-52/159; RS 2-2/17. These tables are reproduced in part in Zetterling and Frankson, *Kursk 1943*, 113 ff. and 199 ff.

<sup>36</sup> Not including Second Army, the daily strength on 5 July was 438,271 men and the ration strength 658,907.

to official records, the Red Army lost 177,847 men during the defensive phase,<sup>37</sup> of whom 70,330 dead or missing.<sup>38</sup> That would mean that the defenders, protected by a system of fortified positions, suffered almost seven times as many ‘irrecoverable losses’ as the attackers. In reality, however, the Red Army must have incurred considerably higher personnel losses. As one Russian historian has convincingly demonstrated, the official loss statistics are full of gaps and inherent discrepancies.<sup>39</sup> He estimates that Central Front lost not 33,897 but some 90,000 men, while the losses of Voronezh Front and Steppe Front should be put at 229,000.<sup>40</sup> That would raise the official figure from 177,847 to 319,000 for total personnel losses during the defensive phase. Give the huge Soviet losses, the question arises as to how the Red Army finally emerged victorious. The answer lies in a comparison of the strength and losses of the two sides. As can be seen from Diagram II.III.2, Soviet quantitative superiority was so great that the occurrence of many times more losses than the enemy could make no difference to its supremacy.

A sober analysis of the comparative figures makes nonsense of many clichés. The German losses were by no means so high and irreplaceable as to warrant describing Operation CITADEL as the ‘decisive battle’ or ‘turning point of the war’. They provide even less justification for such a description when compared with Soviet losses that were many times higher. While the German armed forces—as already shown—lost 11,023 dead and missing, as well as 43,159 wounded, a total of 89,480 men were brought to the eastern front in July in replacement.<sup>41</sup> The German divisions had not been ‘bled dry’, nor had ‘the blossoming German army withered once and for all’.<sup>42</sup> The German forces lost 252 tanks and assault guns, but it must be borne in mind that 817 new fighting vehicles were produced in the same month.<sup>43</sup> As can be seen from Diagram II.III.3 ‘Development of the armour situation on the eastern front’, there was by no means a statistical collapse of German armour, a large part of which had allegedly been ‘burnt to cinders’.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>37</sup> As already stressed, the German offensive phase and Soviet defensive phase are not fully congruent in the respective national historiographies. By German reckoning, the fighting in the northern sector lasted from 5 to 13 July, but only from 5 to 11 July according to the Soviet interpretation. Hitler ended offensive operations in the southern sector on the evening of 16 July, while the Soviet view is that defensive operations lasted there until 23 July. In this chronological grey area, however, there was no longer any serious fighting, since the units of Army Group South had voluntarily withdrawn to their starting positions. From 17 to 23 July Fourth Armoured Army recorded only 347 more deaths, mainly of soldiers who succumbed to previously inflicted wounds.

<sup>38</sup> *Grif sekretnosti sniat*, 187–8.

<sup>39</sup> Boris V. Sokolov gives the following calculation as an example: according to official data (*Grif sekretnosti sniat*, 187–9), Central Front had 738,000 men on 5 July and lost 33,897 up to and including 11 July. It would therefore have had around 704,000 men on 12 July. But for that date, the beginning of Operation KUTUZOV, Central Front’s strength is given as only 645,300. That means a further shrinkage of around 60,000 men, despite the fact that Central Front had received considerable reinforcements in the meantime because of its losses (Sokolov, ‘The Battle for Kursk’, 79; id., ‘The Cost of War’, 158).

<sup>40</sup> Sokolov, ‘The Battle for Kursk’, 79–81.

<sup>41</sup> See diagram in file BA-MA RH 2/1343.

<sup>42</sup> Mellenthin, *Panzerschlachten*, 165 and 171. Even some German generals overdramatized the supposedly irreplaceable losses, but closer examination shows that they were decided opponents of Operation CITADEL who sought to prove, with hindsight, how right they had been.

<sup>43</sup> Müller-Hillebrand, *Das Heer*, iii, table ‘Fertigung’ (following 272).

<sup>44</sup> Warlimont, *Im Hauptquartier*, 348.

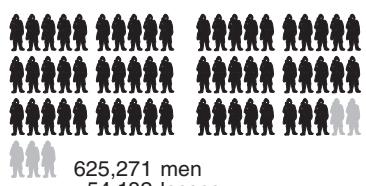
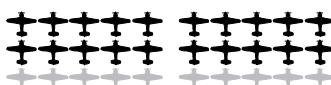
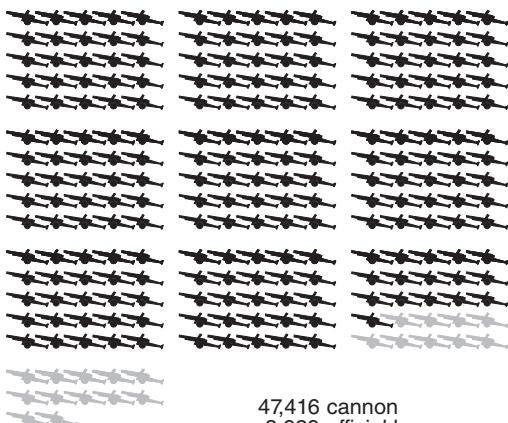
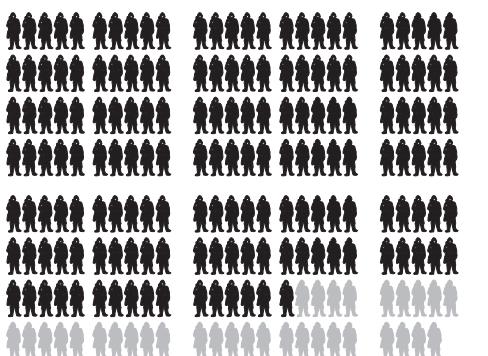
**German forces****Soviet forces  
(excl. reserves brought in)**

Diagram II.m.2. Strength and losses in Operation CITADEL (5 to 16 July 1945)

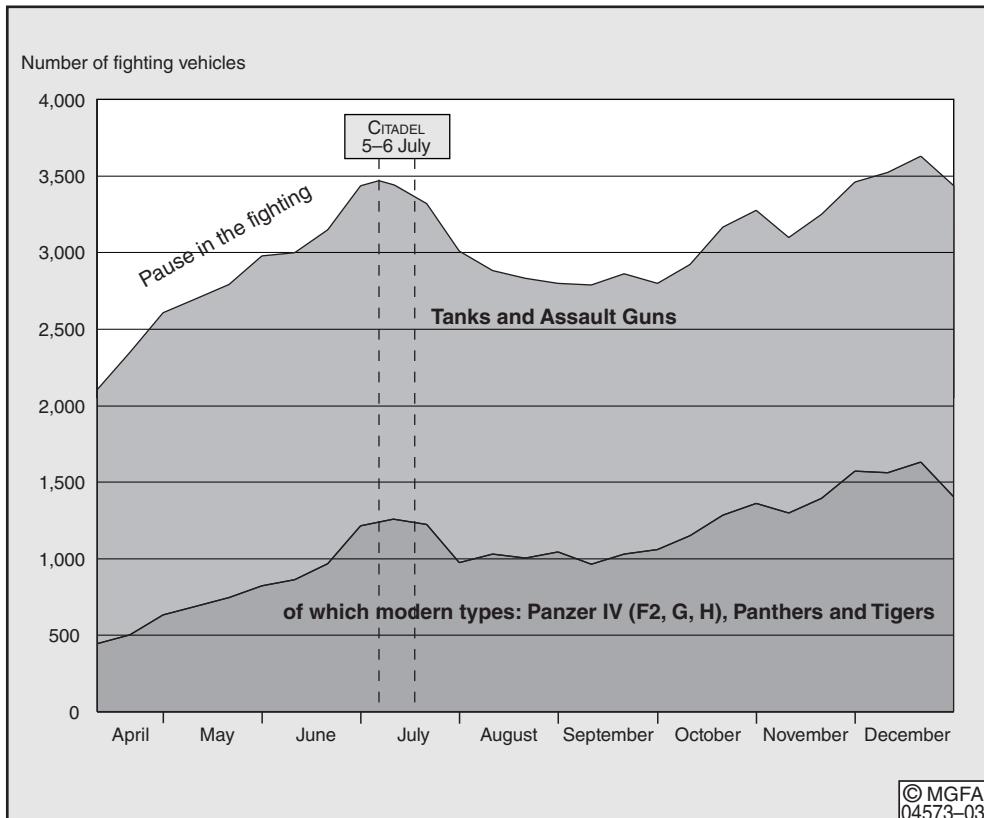


Diagram II.III.3. Development of the armour situation on the eastern front (April to December 1943)

Source: Zetterling and Frankson, *Kursk 1943*, 146.

Instead, the ‘greatest tank battle in history’ took a surprisingly small toll of the German attacking forces. The losses during the ensuing Soviet counter-offensive also lowered the curve of the graph only slightly. In the second half of 1943 the German armament industry produced a monthly average of 908 tanks and assault guns (some of which were, of course, intended for other fronts), so that the number of fighting vehicles on the eastern front in December was higher than at the beginning of July. The percentage increase in modern battle tanks like Panthers and Tigers, as well as the improved-performance Panzer IVs, was particularly important. At the end of the year German armour was stronger than ever before. The thesis of Kursk as a ‘turning point’ can be refuted by statistics alone.

Prokhorovka was not the ‘graveyard of German armour’; instead it became a burial ground for Soviet tanks. Nor was Kursk in any way the ‘swan-song’ of the

German tank forces, as Marshal Konev claimed.<sup>45</sup> On the contrary, as shown in the next chapter, at Kursk they were able for the first time to outperform the hitherto technically superior Soviet tanks.

### 3. TECHNOLOGICAL AND TACTICAL BALANCE-SHEET: THE QUALITATIVE TURNAROUND IN FAVOUR OF GERMAN ARMOUR

#### (a) ‘Tiger Shock’ and Soviet Armour’s ‘Technology Gap’

It seems like an irony of history that an operational German armoured force would hardly have existed at the beginning of the war, had it not been for support from the subsequent Soviet enemy. The restrictive provisions of the Versailles Treaty prohibited Germany from manufacturing tanks, but during the Weimar Republic the German armed forces were able to conduct their first tank tests in secret on Soviet territory thanks to the Rapallo treaty of friendship. In 1935 Hitler initiated a hasty programme of tank construction, which was faced, however, with the task of overcoming a technology gap of one or two generations in comparison with the armies of neighbouring countries. During the western campaign of 1940 it became frighteningly clear that the German fighting vehicles had virtually no chance in duels with the heavy French and British models.<sup>46</sup> Only by adopting revolutionary tactical methods was it possible to outmanoeuvre the tanks of the western powers, which were still deployed in the manner of the First World War.<sup>47</sup>

Hitler’s ‘blitzkrieg’ adventure against the Soviet Union faced the 3,350 attacking German tanks<sup>48</sup> with a superpower which had been building up a huge stock of tanks for many years. The Red Army not only had 22,600 fighting vehicles in its arsenals,<sup>49</sup> but of all the armed forces in the world it had the most experience in the development of technically advanced models. The result was the T-34 ‘supertank’, an ideal combination of mobility, armour, and weaponry. To the German tank officers, elated by their success in the western campaign, the encounter with the Soviet fighting vehicles came as a shock. It was only tactical inefficiency that prevented the Soviet tank troops from turning their technical superiority to proper account on the battlefield. In direct one-to-one combat the German tanks could do little.

The decisive technological turn came at the battle of Kursk, where it became apparent that German armour had not only caught up in the meantime, but was now a generation in advance. This qualitative turnaround was evidenced repeatedly by Germany’s Tiger battle tank. Yet considering that at the start of Operation CITADEL only 128 Tigers were ready for deployment, it is cause for wonder that Soviet reports raised that model to the level of a metaphor for German armour.

<sup>45</sup> Konev, *Aufzeichnungen eines Frontoberbefehlshabers*, 43.

<sup>46</sup> Frieser, *Blitzkrieg-Legende*, 44–52. <sup>47</sup> Ibid. 413 ff. and 424 ff.

<sup>48</sup> See *Germany and the Second World War*, iv. 318.

<sup>49</sup> *Grif sekretnosti sniat*, 350.

The Tiger was a 57-tonne colossus with armour up to 120 mm thick, equipped with a long-range 88-mm cannon. That made it a nightmare for Soviet tank crews. While it was able to pierce the frontal armour of a T-34/76 at a distance of over 2,000 metres, it proved practically invulnerable to frontal fire from Soviet battle tanks. It could be attacked only from the side or the rear at very close range, but in the steppe country around Kursk tank duels were usually fought frontally and at long distance. The Tiger's appearance on the scene also had a considerable psychological impact and repeatedly caused panic.<sup>50</sup> There were cases where Soviet tank crews jumped from their T-34s and ran away as soon as they saw Tigers facing them. The Red Army set up court martials to deal with them.<sup>51</sup> On 12 July alone, 15 Tigers from the SS Armoured Corps put 120 Soviet fighting vehicles out of action at Prokhorovka.<sup>52</sup>

While the Tiger also held the role of 'king of the battlefield' in Anglo-American perceptions,<sup>53</sup> its deployment at Kursk is tainted by the odium of mechanical failure. The new tank was still in the testing stage and not yet considered ready for the front. Hitler, however, ordered deployment despite protests from the tank specialist Guderian and armament expert Albert Speer. He even put the start of the offensive back several weeks so that he could throw the 'wonder tank' into the battle on time. The result was that some of the new tanks—in most cases without any involvement by the enemy—were out of action owing to technical defects. On 9 July only 19 of the 200 Panthers were still operational, and not until 13 July had the number risen to 43.<sup>54</sup> Nevertheless, although the majority were in the repair shops, the few operational Panthers shot down 268 Soviet tanks by 15 July. That was almost as many as were shot down by all the other battle tanks, assault guns, and tank destroyers of XXXXVIII Armoured Corps put together.<sup>55</sup>

Once the technical teething problems had been overcome, the Panther proved to be an excellent fighting machine. Many military historians have described it as the best tank of the Second World War.<sup>56</sup> Unlike the Tiger 'heavy tank', the Panther was actually classified as a 'medium tank'. Its frontal armour, however, was just about as thick as that of the Tiger, although the latter had stronger protection on the sides and back. Both tanks were powered by the same engine, which gave the Panther greater mobility because of its lesser weight. Despite its 43 tonnes (D model), it was the fastest German battle tank. Its silhouette showed that it had been designed as a counter to the T-34, but it clearly outclassed its Soviet model in most respects. The most striking example was its 75-mm long-barrelled gun, whose penetrating power was even slightly greater than that of the Tiger's somewhat

<sup>50</sup> Kleine and Kühn, *Tiger*, 111.

<sup>51</sup> Polikarpov, 'Krushenie Citadeli', 32.

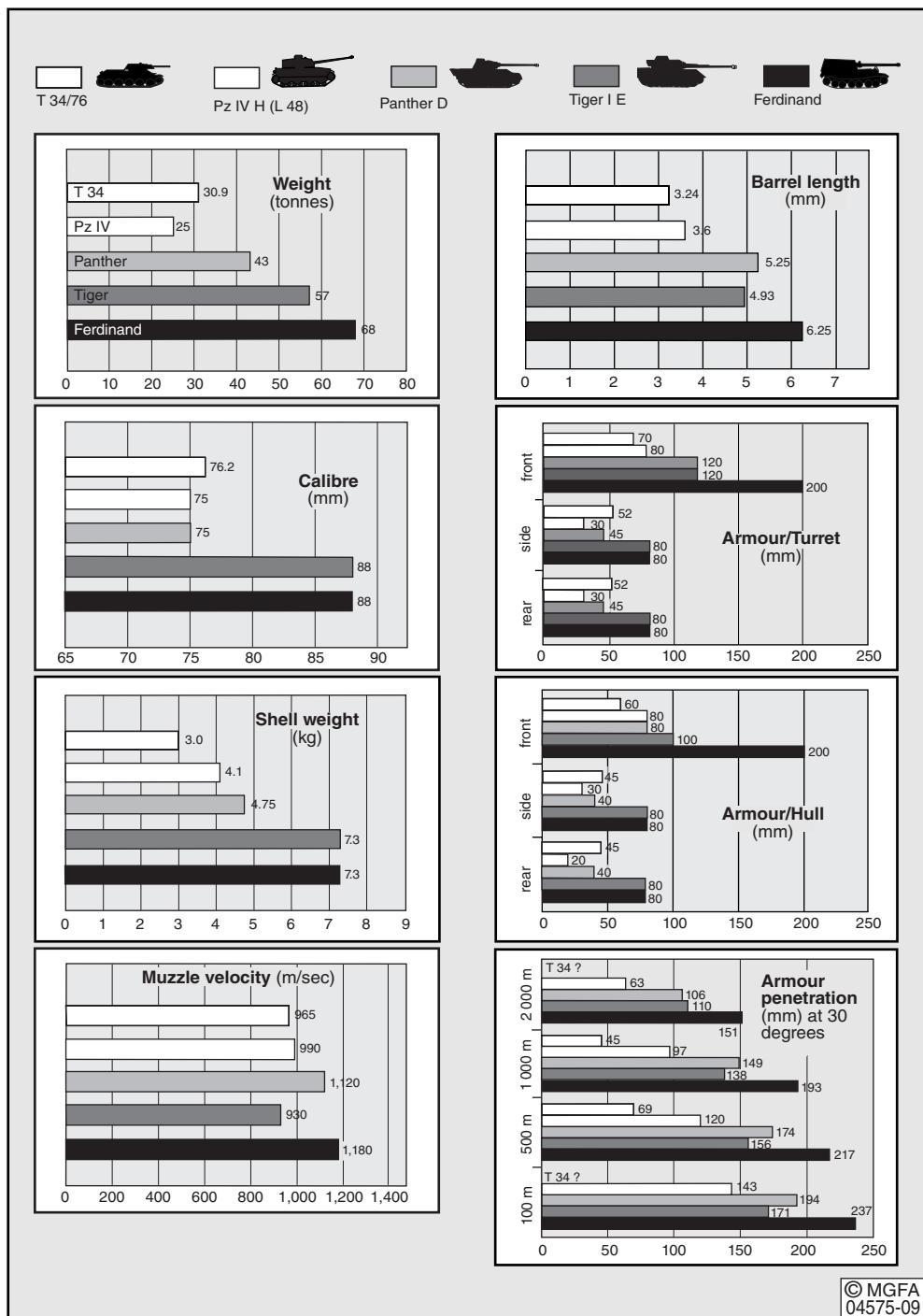
<sup>52</sup> Kleine and Kühn, *Tiger*, 93. This includes the Tigers of SS Armoured Infantry Division 'Totenkopf' deployed north of the Psel, which were not used that day against Rotmistrov's 5th Guards Armoured Army.

<sup>53</sup> Dunn, *Kursk*, 86.

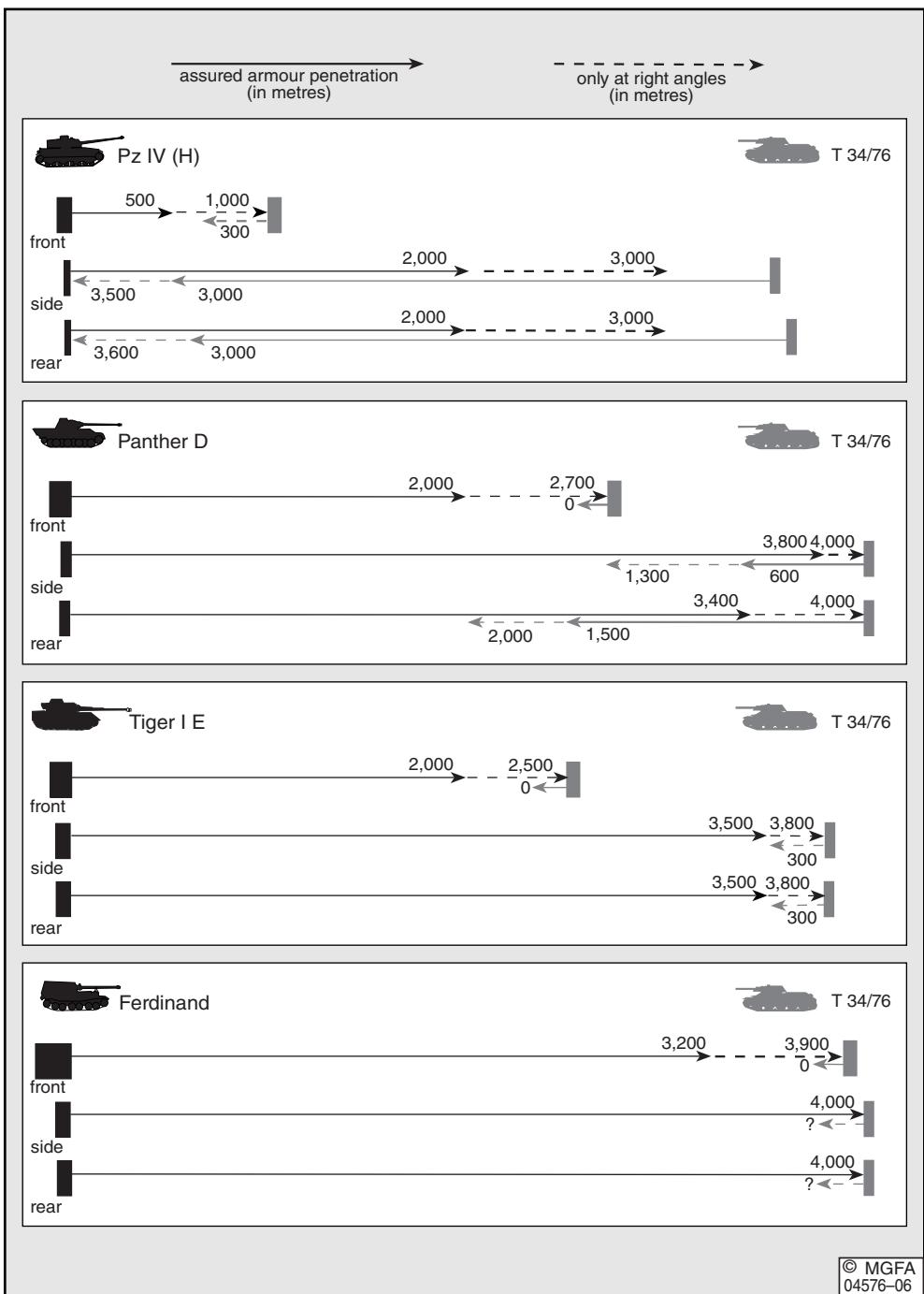
<sup>54</sup> The number of Panthers operational on 13 July varies in the sources from 43 to 51. On this see the statistics in Zetterling and Frankson, *Kursk 1943*, 178–9.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.* 178.

<sup>56</sup> See e.g. Glantz and House, *The Battle of Kursk*, 20; Zetterling and Frankson, *Kursk 1943*, 62; Miksche, *Vom Kriegsbild*, 168.



**Diagram II.III.4.** Tank comparison (status: July 1943): the T-34 and its German adversaries  
Source: Zetterling and Frankson, *Kursk 1943*, 210 and 212.



**Diagram II.III.5. Tank duels, summer 1943 (comparison of penetration ranges)**

Sources: Zetterling and Frankson, *Kursk 1943*, 213–15; Spielberger, *Tiger*, 211; Jentz, *Die Deutsche Panzertruppe*, ii. 280.

shorter 88-mm gun. With its high muzzle velocity it could penetrate a T-34 frontally at a distance of over 2,000 metres, while the latter could do nothing against the Panther's frontal armour even at a closer distance.<sup>57</sup> The Panther, moreover, was able to penetrate the standard Soviet tank's side armour at a distance of up to 4,000 metres.<sup>58</sup> Although it never attained the legendary status of the Tiger, whose massive shape inspired such fear, it was in fact the more effective of the two tanks.

The Ferdinand tank destroyer has repeatedly been taken as a symbol of the alleged collapse of German armour at Kursk. The 68-tonne steel monster was supposedly a faulty design resulting from German 'giant tank mania'. Here too, however, a distinction between myth and reality is required. The Ferdinand tank destroyer, named after the constructor Ferdinand Porsche, was in fact an improvisation. In the competition for the development of a heavy battle tank, the Porsche Tiger, as it was called, was losing out to the model produced by the Henschel company. It was therefore decided to use the 90 available chassis as the basis for a heavy tank destroyer, to bridge the gap until a proper tank destroyer was introduced. It was equipped with the 88-mm Pak 43/2 L/71, the long-barrelled gun, a modified version of which was later also fitted to the tank destroyer and the famous King Tiger. No other tank gun in the Second World War shot better or more accurately. Its shells, which left the muzzle with an initial velocity of 1,180 m/sec., could penetrate the frontal armour of a T-34 at a distance of 3,500 metres. Moreover, the Ferdinand proved practically invulnerable to fire from Soviet battle tanks. Its frontal armour was 200 mm thick, compared with the 70 mm maximum of a T-34. Nevertheless, these extremely high values could not hide the fact that the Ferdinand was a temporary improvisation, prone to breakdowns. Logistics were the main problem, since not enough spare parts had been produced for these few vehicles.

The first deployment ended in fiasco. Instead of using the Ferdinand defensively as a tank destroyer, it was employed like a battering-ram at the spearhead of the wedge. The huge fighting vehicles immediately attracted enemy fire, which was practically without effect. However, no other vehicles had been able to keep up with them, and the infantry least of all. Suddenly the Ferdinands blundered, 'like helpless giants', into the maze of the defence system. Completely isolated, they were surrounded by enemy close combat troops, who crept up on them with explosives. Since, like the corresponding Soviet assault guns, they had no machine guns, they had to fire at individual infantrymen with their huge cannon. But this required a rotational movement of the whole vehicle, since the gun was built immovably into the turret. That grotesque scene is repeatedly invoked in the literature to show that the Ferdinand was a faulty design. The problem, however, was not the design but the fundamentally erroneous tactical deployment. Whenever this fighting vehicle was used as a tank destroyer, it was outstandingly successful. According to

<sup>57</sup> On this, see Guderian's positive report to Lt.-Col. Zeitzler on experience with the Panther during its first deployment at Kursk, repr. in Jentz, *Der Panther*, 132–4.

<sup>58</sup> Zetterling and Frankson, *Kursk 1943*, 215.

an occurrence report, ‘the Ferdinand has a gun of unprecedented performance. It can reduce any T-34 or KW-1 to rubble at a very great distance.’<sup>59</sup> In a single morning, a Ferdinand hit 22 passing Soviet tanks, one after the other, at a distance of 2,000 to 3,000 metres; the Soviet crews felt perfectly safe, believing they could not be attacked from such a distance.<sup>60</sup> From 5 to 27 July, 653rd Heavy Anti-Tank Battalion, one of the two battalions equipped with Ferdinands, destroyed 320 Soviet tanks for only 13 losses of its own.<sup>61</sup> It may therefore be concluded that, while the Ferdinand was an improvisation, it was by no means a faulty design.

The mass of German fighting vehicles consisted of Panzer IVs, and to a lesser extent of Panzer IIIs, which were no longer produced. The latest version of the Panzer IV (the H model) was equipped with a long-barrelled 75-mm KwK 40 L/48 gun which could penetrate a T-34 frontally at a distance of 1,000 metres. Shells from a T-34, however, were effective only at close range against the frontal armour of a Panzer IV (H), which was up to 80 mm thick. The standard German tank, in its modernized version, was thus superior to the standard Soviet tank of that time.<sup>62</sup> The Panzer IV (H) was rather similar to the Tiger in appearance, which led to some disastrous mistakes. Following the first encounters in the Kursk salient, it was wrongly assumed on the Soviet side that the frontal armour of a Tiger could be penetrated by the cannon of a T-34 if the latter managed to attack at very close range. In the tank battle of Prokhorovka, General Rotmistrov accordingly ordered his armour to advance at full speed so as to nullify the advantage conferred by the enemy’s superior range and seek close combat. That was a fatal mistake, however, since the Tiger was frontally invulnerable even at close quarters. Thus, at Prokhorovka the T-34s voluntarily drove right up to the Tigers’ guns, and some of the German combat reports are gruesomely reminiscent of hunting scenes. The Panzer IV (H) tanks, which had been mistaken for Tigers, also took advantage of the headlong rush. As a result, the Soviet tank attacks repeatedly ended in chaotic disorder.

During the battle of Kursk it thus became apparent that, in terms of quality, Soviet armour was stuck in a technological impasse. At the start of the Russian campaign, in the summer of 1941, the T-34 had still spread fear and terror among the German tank crews. But since then the Soviet fighting vehicles, including the heavy KV-85 (Kliment Voroshilov), had remained at the same technical level. New developments, such as the improved T-34/85, with its 85-mm gun, were still in preparation and could not be deployed until the following year. In the meantime, however, the Germans had thoroughly modernized their armour. In the summer of 1943 they surprised the Red Army by fielding a new generation of fighting vehicles with peak technical performance. It was precisely at Kursk, the ‘greatest tank battle in history’, that Soviet tanks were at their lowest technical level during the war compared with those of Germany.<sup>63</sup> That was also true of Soviet assault guns and

<sup>59</sup> Quoted in Spielberger, Doyle, and Jentz, *Schwere Jagdpanzer*, 106. Despite all the technical problems, crews were ‘by and large, very pleased with the Ferdinand’ (Münch, *Einsatzgeschichte*, 4).

<sup>60</sup> Rendulic, ‘Die Schlacht von Orel’, 135.

<sup>61</sup> Münch, *Einsatzgeschichte*, 45.

<sup>62</sup> See Zamulin, *Prokhorovka*, 662.

<sup>63</sup> Glantz and House, *The Battle of Kursk*, 36.

most anti-tank cannon. The only fundamental new development was the SU 152 assault gun, which was still available only in small numbers. The 152-mm gun, mounted in a rigid turret, proved to be a serious threat to the German tanks, at least at close range. In open field battle, however, this fighting vehicle had little chance against modern high-velocity tank guns. Another disadvantage was its slow firing speed. Loading took much too long because shells and cartridges were stored separately.<sup>64</sup> For that reason the SU 152, which was mostly deployed in a lurking position, had to hit the target at first shot, if at all. This was a general problem for the Soviet tanks, which did not have such high-precision telescopic sights as the German Zeiss scopes. In all tank duels 'first-shot hit probability' proved decisive, and that was precisely a strength of the German fighting vehicles. Most German tank losses in the first days of the battle of Kursk were due to mines, and thereafter to artillery. Artillery had always been the Russians' favourite weapon, and a recent Russian account rightly argues that, at Kursk, 'the real heroes of the battle were the artillerymen'.<sup>65</sup>

A new feature of the battle of Kursk was that for the first time tanks were attacked by aircraft on a large scale. The most dangerous threat from the sky was a special version of the Stuka, the Ju 87 G, which had two 'Flak 38' 37-mm machine cannon fitted under its wings. Capt. Hans-Ulrich Rudel, the commander of Group 1, Stuka Squadron 2, scored the highest number of kills with this 'flying anti-tank cannon', destroying twelve tanks on the first day of his deployment at Kursk. In the course of the war he destroyed a total of 519 Soviet tanks and became the highest-decorated officer in the German armed forces.<sup>66</sup>

The Luftwaffe attacked enemy tanks not only with Stuka dive-bombers but also with Henschel HS-129 ground-attack aircraft, which were armed with a 30-mm cannon. Their great test came on 8 July, when suddenly, from a forested area north of Belgorod, a reinforced Soviet armoured brigade with infantry support thrust into the gap between II SS Armoured Corps and III Armoured Corps. Before the German army units were even aware of the danger, four anti-tank squadron units, each with 16 HS-129s, took off. The ground-attack aircraft, led by Capt. Bruno Meyer, destroyed 84 Soviet tanks and damaged 21 others. The Soviet flanking attack was repelled from the air without the need for any intervention by ground troops.<sup>67</sup>

For its part, the Soviet air force made massive use of the Ilyushin IL-2 Sturmovik as a ground-attack aircraft. It was the most frequently produced aircraft of the Second World War. For anti-tank combat it was equipped with a 23-mm cannon (sometimes also 37-mm), hollow-charge bombs, and rockets. However, the huge

<sup>64</sup> Kleine and Kühn, *Tiger*, 111                    <sup>65</sup> Shutov and Ramanichev, 'Ognennaya duga', 262.

<sup>66</sup> In the Second World War Rudel flew 2,530 combat missions, during which, among other things, he sank a Soviet battleship and two cruisers. He was wounded five times but continued to fly missions in a specially adapted cockpit even after losing a leg; BA-MA, Study ZA 3/746, 150–5; Griehl, *Junkers Ju 87*, 262 ff.; Rudel, *Mein Kriegstagebuch*, 91–2 and 102 ff.; Bekker, *Angriffshöhe 4000*, 388; Carell, *Verbrannte Erde*, 57–8.

<sup>67</sup> BA-MA, Study ZA 3/746, 155–8; Zins, *Die Operation Zitadelle*, 90; Piekalkiewicz, *Unternehmen Zitadelle*, 158; Bekker, *Angriffshöhe 4000*, 387–9.

amount of ammunition which the aircraft consumed was out of all proportion to its effectiveness, since only a tiny number of German tanks were destroyed from the air.<sup>68</sup>

The impact of the technology factor can be summarized as follows. While from 1941 on the Soviet air force was able to reduce the qualitative advance of German aircraft only slightly, German armour not only succeeded in catching up with the Soviet advance but put itself at the forefront of technological progress. Operation CITADEL came as a technological shock for Soviet armour, showing that the superiority it had enjoyed up till then was now a thing of the past. Kursk indeed marked a turning point in tank technology, but the turnaround was in favour of German armour.

### (b) Tactical Efficiency

According to official figures the Red Army, although victorious, lost 96,500 tanks and assault guns as total write-offs from 1941 to 1945.<sup>69</sup> This figure shows that, for the Soviet leadership, tanks were mass-consumption goods in a battle of material. Manpower as a weapons system played a subordinate role. A completely different philosophy of tank warfare arose on the German side, however, because of the permanent shortage of material. The positional battles of the First World War having resulted in a victory of ‘matter over mind’, Guderian, first and foremost, developed ideas on how to use tanks to switch to a war of movement and outmanoeuvre a materially superior enemy by means of superior tactics. The ‘tank philosophy’ of the two armies consequently differed in several respects:

#### Tank turret

The construction of the tank turret was in itself symbolic of the two different ways of thinking. On Soviet fighting vehicles of 1943 it was primarily an armoured platform for operating the cannon, whereas the Germans saw it as the vehicle’s ‘head’, that is, its control centre. The main difference was the dominant role assigned to the tank commander on the German side. For that reason German battle tanks had a five-man crew, which relieved the commander of all technical tasks, whereas the T-34 had a crew of only four.<sup>70</sup> The importance of this is made even clearer by the fact that the German battle tanks were fitted with three-man turrets, while the T-34 models all had very cramped two-man turrets. In combat situations a Soviet tank commander was quickly overstretched, since he also had to perform the function of gunner.<sup>71</sup> He had, at the same time, to observe, give orders to his own crew, possibly also direct other tanks as convoy or company commander,

<sup>68</sup> Zetterling and Frankson, *Kursk 1943*, 81.

<sup>69</sup> *Grif sekretnosti sniat*, 358 and 366.

<sup>70</sup> The T-34/85, introduced in 1944, was the first Soviet tank with a five-man crew on the German pattern, although on the standard version the fifth man’s function was only to fire the on-board machine guns, whereas on German battle tanks he was primarily a radio operator.

<sup>71</sup> Zamulin (*Prokhorovka*, 380) calls this design feature the T-34’s ‘birth defect’.

and, as if that were not enough, also fire the cannon. At the decisive moment in a duel he was often unable to perform any of his tasks to the full. In the German tank turrets, on the other hand, only the gunner was occupied with the shooting process, while the commander had his head free for his tactical tasks, such as indicating targets to the gunner.<sup>72</sup> That also explains why so many German combat reports criticize the poor shooting performance of the Soviet fighting vehicles. As already pointed out in discussion of the technology factor, the German tanks were able to aim better because of their superior telescopic sights and modern high-velocity cannon. The division of tasks among the tank crew also had a positive effect on ‘first-shot hit probability’, which was decisive in duel situations.

### *Radio*

It is significant that the creator of the German armoured forces, Col.-Gen. Guderian, came from the First World War signals troops. His guiding idea was that a multitude of individual tanks could be formed into a tactical or even operational instrument only if all the vehicles were equipped with radios.<sup>73</sup> On the Soviet side, at that time, only the company commander’s tank had a radio. This meant that the Red Army’s tank operations were carried out rigidly according to plan, because the units were unable to react flexibly, and above all quickly enough, to sudden changes in the situation. The consequences could be disastrous, as can be seen, for example, from the ‘kamikaze attack’ by the Soviet XXIX Armoured Corps at Prokhorovka, which ended in front of its own tank trench. The advantage given to German armour by the possession of on-board radio was largely underestimated. Time and again, massed Soviet tanks were outmanoeuvred and onrushing units lured into prepared fields of fire. The encounters usually began with the German company commander using radio to concentrate his company’s fire on the tank of the Soviet company commander. If the latter was eliminated, the crews of the other tanks often reacted helplessly.<sup>74</sup>

### **Mission-type tactics**

The Soviet formations were commanded rigidly according to detailed-order tactics, whereas the German units operated flexibly with mission-type tactics.<sup>75</sup> The latter method, in which military commanders had considerable freedom of manoeuvre and decision, proved itself in the chaos of Prokhorovka. On 12 July the top leadership on both sides temporarily lost control, and the tank battle broke down into a multitude of individual combats. This very much suited the German tank officers and NCOs, who were trained in autonomous operation.

<sup>72</sup> BA-MA, Study ZA 1/1968, 33 (App. 4).

<sup>74</sup> BA-MA, Study ZA 1/1569, 8.

<sup>73</sup> Frieser, *Blitzkrieg-Legende*, 426.

<sup>75</sup> On this, see Manstein, *Verlorene Siege*, 413–14.

### *Combined arms combat*

As already mentioned, task assignment was organized very differently on the German and Soviet sides. A German division seemed numerically superior, at least on paper. But the Red Army had two components: on the one hand hierarchically ordered formations, on the other, unattached formations such as self-propelled-gun regiments, armoured brigades, and artillery divisions. These components were used in mixed deployment, which enabled the Soviet operations staffs to assemble huge masses, especially of artillery. This system proved effective in breakthrough operations prepared well in advance. But as soon as a battle deviated from the scenario and went into free combat, the Red Army was subject to serious friction. The errors in the deployment of 5th Guards Tank on 12 July were so striking that even official Soviet historiography criticized 'the insufficient coordination of action by the infantry and tanks with that of the artillery and air force units'.<sup>76</sup> In contrast, a German division had all the classes of weapons needed for combined arms combat already integrated in organic units. In comparison with the problems of the Red Army, the coordination was almost perfect. This was due not least to the fact that the officers of the various units knew each other personally and were used to working together.

### **Training and group cohesion**

During the Stalin era the Soviet leadership clearly attributed only secondary importance to the value of the human individual and relied instead on the power of mass. Accordingly, it sent most of its soldiers into battle after only a short period of preparation. Casualties were of little concern as long as the objective was achieved. Soviet personnel deployment practice met with astonishment on the German side, since the level of training of many Soviet troops was frighteningly low. Up to the end of 1942 Soviet tank drivers were often given no more than five to ten hours of driving practice, although the necessary minimum was estimated at 25 hours.<sup>77</sup> One of the Soviet Union's greatest achievements during the war was the astonishingly high mass-production of tanks. The negative side, however, was that tanks were produced faster than tank troops and officers could be trained. This repeatedly resulted in ineffective operations with irresponsibly high losses.

The Wehrmacht placed much greater value on the quality of training, in order to compensate for its quantitative inferiority.<sup>78</sup> Considerable attention was paid to the primary group effect. Training was carried out in a team, with the aim of welding it into a close-knit community.<sup>79</sup> In contrast to the Red Army, casualties were not immediately replaced by new soldiers. Units were often left in the front line until they were completely decimated. Only when their combat value fell below a

<sup>76</sup> Posnjak, *Die Schlacht bei Kursk*, 276.

<sup>77</sup> Melnikov, *Marshal Rybalko*, 50–1, quoted in Sokolov, 'The Battle for Kursk', 85.

<sup>78</sup> BA-MA, Study ZA 1/1968, 33–4 (App. 4).

<sup>79</sup> On this, see Fritz, 'We are trying', 683 ff.

minimum level were they withdrawn jointly and reformed with new arrivals. After the necessary cohesion had been achieved through group training, the unit was redeployed. Although this principle could no longer be applied in the late stage of the war, it shows the different attitude of the two armies to the ‘quality through training’ factor, which was decisive, above all, in the case of elite formations such as tank units.

To sum up, the battle of Kursk did not mark a decisive change in the tactical levels of the two armies either, nor did it bring them to the same level. The Red Army had learnt much from the Wehrmacht since the beginning of the war, but in 1941 it had still deployed its huge masses of armour just as erroneously as had the western powers a year before, when their tanks had been outmanoeuvred by the cohesive German armoured formations. The western campaign might as well have taken place on another planet, since the Red Army leadership proved to be so convinced of the superiority of its own armour that it believed it could ignore that outcome. The shock was all the greater in 1941, when, according to official figures, it lost 20,500 tanks in the space of a few months.<sup>80</sup> Since then Soviet tank tactics had undergone some improvements, as shown above all in the battle of Stalingrad. But the resulting euphoria was immediately followed by disillusionment. When the masses of Soviet armour stormed headlong further west, they were caught off guard by Manstein’s tank units. Whole armies fell into the trap. In the end, Soviet losses were considerably higher than those of the Germans at Stalingrad. This resulted in a thorough reform of Soviet armour, involving the formation of five tank armies on the German pattern, supplemented by a large number of unattached armoured and motorized corps, armoured brigades, and armoured regiments.

Strangely enough, the Red Army leadership could not bring itself to create armoured divisions. Instead it skipped over the divisional level of command. Yet it was precisely the armoured division, as the lowest level of command in combined arms combat, that was the real recipe for the tactical success of German armour. The fact was that command of an armoured division required a maximum of flexibility and autonomy. For that reason, it would seem, the Stavka was afraid to risk the experiment. The Soviet armoured corps were constituted far less homogeneously than a German armoured division. Units from the various arms of the service fought alongside each other rather than together. Above all, they lacked a decisive component: armoured infantry. Since the western powers were supplying hundreds of thousands of trucks, the Soviets used them also to transport infantry, but they built no infantry fighting vehicles, as the Germans did so successfully. As a result, infantry was often lacking in an attack during the decisive stage of a breakthrough, because it was held back by enemy artillery fire. The Soviet tanks frequently attacked without infantry support, in the anachronistic manner of a cavalry charge, which led to untold losses at Prokhorovka. In contrast, German armoured infantry was able to accompany such thrusts quickly enough to provide protection for the battle tanks.

<sup>80</sup> *Grif sekretnosti sniat*, 357.

Kursk did not mark a decisive break in the relative tactical efficiency of the two armies. German officers remained superior until the end of the war at the middle and lower levels of command that were so important in armoured combat. That ‘skill superiority’<sup>81</sup> enabled them to compensate for the enemy’s numerical superiority time and again. Even in recent Russian literature the battle of Kursk is not necessarily described as a triumph of the Soviet art of war. The revised edition of *History of the Great Patriotic War*, for example, soberly concludes that, ‘despite the experience of two years of war, the Soviet commanders, staffs, and troops had not yet mastered the necessary military tool’.<sup>82</sup>

It was not until a year later, in the summer offensive of 1944, that the Soviet reforms brought about an improvement in combat tactics. But that qualitative progress came too late to influence the outcome of the war, which was long since decided. During the battle of Kursk the Red Army was still at a relatively modest tactical level, as reflected not least by the horrendous loss statistics.

#### 4. STRATEGIC BALANCE-SHEET: CITADEL—ONLY A VIRTUAL TURNING POINT

In the judgement of one British historian, ‘Soviet success at Kursk, with so much at stake, was the most important single victory of the war. It ranks with the great set-piece battles of the past—Sedan in 1870, and Borodino, Leipzig and Waterloo from the Age of Napoleon. It was the point at which the initiative passed to the Soviet side’.<sup>83</sup> So it was not only Soviet historiography which attributed overriding importance to this battle. In the west too, it became almost standard practice to refer to Kursk as the ‘decisive battle’ or ‘turning point of the war’.<sup>84</sup> The account of the battle was highly dramatized, as if in the summer of 1943 the further course of the war was still balanced on a knife edge.<sup>85</sup> Supposedly, Hitler, faced with the threat of a war on two fronts, acted like a gambler going for broke and threw the last reserves into the balance in an attempt to turn the tide of the war at Kursk. But was Operation CITADEL really the fateful battle that decided the outcome of the war?

Recent historical research attributes decidedly modest importance to this battle. Operation CITADEL is seen as a ‘makeshift operation lacking any strategic objective’.<sup>86</sup> The German summer offensive of 1941 (Operation BARBAROSSA) was a campaign, just like the summer offensive of 1942 (Operation BLUE), which is described as Hitler’s ‘second campaign’.<sup>87</sup> Operation CITADEL in the summer of 1943, on

<sup>81</sup> Zetterling and Frankson, *Kursk 1943*, 136.

<sup>82</sup> Shutov and Ramanichev, ‘Ognennaya duga’, 284.

<sup>83</sup> Overy, *Why the Allies Won*, 96.

<sup>84</sup> See, e.g., the title of Solovev’s monograph *Wendepunkt des Zweiten Weltkrieges. Die Schlacht bei Kursk* [Turning point of the Second World War. The battle of Kursk]. Khrushchev too wrote in his memoirs that the battle of Kursk was the ‘turning point’ of the Great Patriotic War; see *Khrushchev Remembers*, 223.

<sup>85</sup> Zimmern, ‘Unternehmen Zitadelle’, 39. On this, see Alfred Zins’ analysis of the battle of Kursk and its portrayal in literature in Zins, *Die Operation Zitadelle*, 145.

<sup>86</sup> Schreiber, *Der Zweite Weltkrieg*, 102.

<sup>87</sup> See *Germany and the Second World War*, vi. 843 ff.

the other hand, was only a limited offensive operation that was part of a strategic defence. As already pointed out, in 1943 Hitler was not seeking a ‘knock-out blow’,<sup>88</sup> but wanted only to make ‘small forays’.<sup>89</sup> Moreover, the balance of military strength had shifted in the meantime to such an extent that the Wehrmacht no longer had any chance of winning the war with the Soviet Union in one decisive operation—at a single blow, as it were. With Operation CITADEL, Hitler and the OKH generals were in fact pursuing only two limited operational objectives:

- The first was to straighten the front. By cutting off the protruding Kursk salient, a more favourable defensive line would be achieved, enabling troops to be withdrawn from the eastern front for the anticipated two-front war with the western powers.
- The second was to weaken the Soviet forces concentrated in the Kursk area before they could launch an avalanche-like summer offensive in a concerted action with the western powers.

In the present state of research, it seems aberrant to consider the battle of Kursk as the decisive battle of the Second World War, since at that point in time the outcome of the war was long decided. Germany was as little able to endure a long conflict with the western maritime powers, with their inexhaustible raw-material reserves, as it had been in the First World War, especially when the US superpower stood behind the worldwide British Empire. If there was a decisive battle at all, it was the winter battle before Moscow at the end of 1941, which saw the failure of Germany’s ‘blitzkrieg’ strategy, that is, the attempt to defeat the huge Soviet Union by military-operational means.<sup>90</sup> However, Germany could not possibly win a strategic war of erosion, given the enormous resources of the Soviet Union and its powerful allies in the west. This is clear from a simple example: during the war the German armament industry produced a total of only 25,000 battle tanks, compared with an Allied output of well over 200,000.<sup>91</sup> Faced with such numerical superiority, better tanks and superior command skills were of no avail. The Second World War, like the first, was decided not on the battlefields but in the factories. Even if Operation CITADEL had gone according to plan and the two flanks of the pincer attack had joined up at Kursk, it would have been only a temporary operational success, which would soon have proved meaningless in view of the war on two fronts that was then beginning.

The failure of the German attack on Kursk was only a virtual turning point in the war between Germany and the Soviet Union. It was a delayed manifestation on the

<sup>88</sup> Weinberg, *A World at Arms*, 602.

<sup>89</sup> Situation conference at Army Group South HQ in Zaporozhye on 18 Feb. 1943, quoted in Schwarz, *Die Stabilisierung im Süden der Ostfront*, 255.

<sup>90</sup> See Reinhardt, *Die Wende vor Moskau*.

<sup>91</sup> Foss, *An Illustrated Guide*, 7; see also Chamberlain and Doyle, *Encyclopedia of German Tanks*, 261. According to these sources, Germany produced 24,242 battle tanks from January 1939 to the end of the war. While the comparative statistics refer only to battle tanks, not assault guns and tank destroyers, the Allies were clearly superior in the latter sector too.

battlefield of what had long been the reality, that is, the fact that Germany had lost the production battle. More than a fight between troops, the battle of Kursk was a clash between the competing outputs of armament factories, in which British and American deliveries played an ever-increasing part. Nor was Kursk the Wehrmacht's last 'strategic' offensive, as so often claimed, because no offensive with a decisive strategic objective was planned. As the chief of the Naval War Staff stated without illusions in May 1943, experience in 1941 and 1942 had shown that belief in the defeat of Russia was 'utopian'.<sup>92</sup> Significantly, Hitler saw Operation CITADEL as no more than a 'limited offensive'<sup>93</sup> of an operational nature. The claim that it was the last major German offensive at operational level is not true either. In August 1944, for example, the armoured Operation DOPPELKOPF re-established the connection with Army Group North, which had been cut off on the Baltic coast. The last German offensive operation was conducted as late as February/March 1945 by Sixth Armoured Army in Hungary. As already discussed in detail, Kursk was not a turning point in favour of the Red Army in the technological or tactical area either. Instead, it became clear that German armour had meanwhile established itself qualitatively at the peak of technological development. Furthermore, at Kursk the Red Army did not achieve a victory of annihilation; it suffered many times more losses than the German attacking forces. Those losses were so serious that they took the force out of the planned summer offensive. Thus, from the viewpoint of German defensive strategy this was no 'catastrophe' but a partial operational success with at least temporary effect.

What, then, was the real importance of this battle? The answer lies mainly in the realm of psychology. The failure of the German offensive had a symbolic impact that is hard to overestimate. For the first time the Red Army had succeeded in repelling a German summer offensive, and had done so despite the fact that the German forces had deployed tanks to which miracles were attributed. The Wehrmacht's aura of invincibility had been finally dispelled. This time, in contrast to the battles of Moscow and Stalingrad, the Germans could not put the blame on 'General Winter'. Although, objectively, German defeat had long been sealed, the infantryman in the front line was now subjectively aware that the war could no longer be won. Kursk can therefore be seen as a virtual turning point with regard to the awareness of defeat. The failure of Operation CITADEL was the writing on the wall for the impending collapse of the eastern front. In another respect, however, July 1943 was a real turning point. The western powers' landing in Sicily conjured up the old German nightmare of a war on two fronts.

<sup>92</sup> Repr. in Salewski, *Die deutsche Seekriegsleitung*, iii. 347, n. 5.

<sup>93</sup> Goebbels, *Tagebücher*, pt. 2, viii. 225 (7 May 1943).

## IV. The Soviet Counter-Offensives

According to the German understanding, Operation CITADEL, broken off on 16 July 1943, is synonymous with ‘the battle of Kursk’. In Soviet historiography, however, that battle has wider chronological and geographical dimensions. Three phases are distinguished:

- The ‘Kursk Strategic Defensive Operation’ coincides approximately with the German Operation CITADEL, which began on 5 July.<sup>1</sup> It ended for Central Front on 11 July and for Voronezh Front and Steppe Front on 23 July.
- The Orel counter-offensive (Operation KUTUZOV) was launched on the section of the front to the north of Kursk on 12 July, that is, while Operation CITADEL was still under way. It was directed against the southern wing of Army Group Centre (Ninth Army and Second Armoured Army) and lasted until 18 August. The army groups involved were Central Front, Bryansk Front, and large parts of West Front.
- At the height of Operation KUTUZOV the Red Army launched a further offensive, Operation RUMYANTSEV, to the south of Kursk at Kharkov and Belgorod. It lasted from 3 to 23 August. Voronezh Front and Steppe Front were deployed against the northern wing of Army Group South (Fourth Armoured Army and Army Detachment Kempf).

These three operations were interlocked and partly conducted in parallel, so that the Wehrmacht had constantly to move its few armoured divisions back and forth like a fire brigade. The Red Army’s troop masses exceeded any concentration of forces ever assembled on a battlefield in the history of war. In addition to the units and aircraft squadrons of the three Soviet army fronts fighting in the Kursk salient during the defensive phase, a further 1,008,100 men, 25,500 cannon and grenade launchers, 3,200 tanks and assault guns, and 3,950 aircraft were deployed.<sup>2</sup>

According to the Russian accounts, three army fronts totalling 74 divisions took part in the Stalingrad counter-offensive, whereas at the start of the Kursk counter-offensives five army fronts totalling 132 divisions were deployed. At Stalingrad 720,000 combat troops, 14,000 cannon and grenade launchers, and 1,510 tanks were available for the counter-attack, while the numbers at Kursk were 2,226,000

<sup>1</sup> Operation CITADEL ended for Ninth Army on 13 July, whereas the attacking units of Army Group South were finally halted by Hitler on the evening of 16 July.

<sup>2</sup> *Velikaya Otechestvennaya Vojna 1941–1945*, ii, document attachments, 449.

men (of whom 1,583,000 combat troops), 35,200 cannon and grenade launchers, and over 4,800 tanks and self-propelled guns. In the course of the two Kursk counter-offensives, several additional armies were brought up as second-line forces and reserves. A total of 1,350 aircraft were available for the counter-attack at Stalingrad, while at Kursk almost 5,000 (including long-range aircraft) stood ready.<sup>3</sup>

By then the Red Army had achieved such quantitative superiority that it was able to launch offensives on other sectors of the front at the same time. Soon almost the whole eastern front was in flames, and the Germans were forced to withdraw strong armoured forces from the Kursk area:

- On 17 July, as already mentioned, South Front and South-West Front launched an offensive against the right wing of Army Group South on the Mius and the Donets.
- On 22 July Army Group North was attacked by Leningrad Front and Volkov Front.
- On 7 August Kalinin Front and West Front began an offensive against Army Group Centre, mainly directed against Fourth Army.
- At this time, moreover, the large-scale partisan ‘railway war’ operation was under way in the rear of the German front and tied down further large numbers of German forces.

## 1. THE OREL COUNTER-OFFENSIVE (OPERATION KUTUZOV), 12 JULY TO 18 AUGUST 1943

During Operation CITADEL the Soviet formations were far superior in quantitative terms. Yet, paradoxically, the balance of forces was nowhere else anything like as favourable for the German side as it was at Kursk. It was there that the Wehrmacht had concentrated all its available strong units. The other front sectors had been largely emptied of tanks, which had negative consequences for Army Group Centre. Immediately to the north of the Kursk salient lay the Orel bulge, where Second Armoured Army was deployed as the left-hand neighbour of Model’s Ninth Army. The section concerned was contemptuously referred to as ‘Recruiting District Headquarters 2’ (in line with the army’s numerical designation), since the area had been almost as quiet as in peacetime for an unusually long period.<sup>4</sup> The designation ‘Second Armoured Army’ had also become farcical, as (apart from units subsequently placed under its command) the army in question no longer possessed a single tank. It was attacked by one-and-a-half Soviet army fronts consisting of five (later six<sup>5</sup>) general armies, two armoured armies, five armoured corps, and numerous unattached units.

<sup>3</sup> Koltunov, ‘Kurskaya bitva v tsifrakh’, 77–8 and 80–3.

<sup>4</sup> Görlitz, *Model. Der Feldmarschall*, 151.

<sup>5</sup> The Soviet 11th Army was not brought into the battle until later and is not included in this count.

From the very beginning of the battle of Kursk on 5 July, Second Armoured Army was in a position of clear inferiority. Taking its section of the front in isolation, the balance of forces, including the Soviet reserves close to the front, was as follows:<sup>6</sup> the daily strength of Second Armoured Army's front-line units was approximately 107,000 men, while Bryansk Front and the left wing of West Front had 561,111 combat troops available. On the enemy's side, 3,262 tanks and assault guns were concentrated (including 3rd Guards Armoured Army and 4th Armoured Army), whereas Second Armoured Army, even including the 5th and 8th Armoured Divisions placed under its command, had only 234 tanks and self-propelled guns. The estimated total of all large-calibre barrelled weapons and rocket launchers was 2,050, compared with 16,001 on the Soviet side. While Bryansk Front and West Front could each deploy its own air fleet with a total of 2,317 aircraft, not a single aircraft was assigned specifically to Second Armoured Army. All the units of Air Fleet 6, which was under the command of Army Group Centre, were initially tied down by Operation CITADEL.

The first phase of Operation KUTUZOV began on 12 July with an offensive by Bryansk Front and the left wing of West Front.<sup>7</sup> The extreme fire superiority of the Soviet attacking forces is clear from the following example. In the main directions of thrust, the artillery density was more than 200 guns and grenade launchers per kilometre of front. In the breakthrough section of VIII Guards Rifle Corps, it was as high as 260 guns and grenade launchers per kilometre.<sup>8</sup> Against that, the artillery of the German LIII Army Corps could deploy only 1.7 barrelled weapons per kilometre of front.<sup>9</sup> While the 11th Guards Army assault group massed 59,777 men and 615 tanks and assault guns on a section 16 kilometres wide, that force was opposed by only two German infantry regiments, behind which was a tactical reserve (brought up later) consisting of one combat group of 5th Armoured Division with 40 tanks.<sup>10</sup>

Although a few additional German divisions were transferred to the sector of Second Armoured Army in the further course of Operation KUTUZOV, there was a fundamental difference. The reinforcements on the Soviet side were real reserves brought in from the depths of Russia, while on the German side they were mostly units already involved in the battle at other locations on the front. Each withdrawal of such a unit meant tearing a hole at one place on the front in order to fill a gap elsewhere. Most of the German units brought in as reinforcements came from the neighbouring Ninth Army, which, as a result, was no longer in a position to continue its attack on Kursk.

<sup>6</sup> See the detailed comparison of forces in the Kursk–Orel area in Chapter I.2 above.

<sup>7</sup> Taking into account only the Soviet forces deployed against Second Armoured Army in the initial phase on 12 July (excluding, for example, the two tank armies and 11th army), we still arrive at a figure of 645,074 men (of whom 487,111 combat troops), 1,401 tanks and assault guns, as well as 15,019 barrelled weapons and launchers; see Koltunov, 'Kurskaya bitva v tsifrakh', 80.

<sup>8</sup> *Geschichte des Großen Vaterländischen Krieges*, iii. 331.

<sup>9</sup> App. 2 to Gen.d.Ärt. No. 1600/43 g.K. 'Artillerie in der Abwehr' (fo. 289), BA-MA RH 10/14.

<sup>10</sup> Glantz and House, *The Battle of Kursk*, 422.

**Table II.iv.1.** Breakdown of Air Fleet 6 at 10 July 1943 (before the Soviet counter-offensive at Orel)

Category	Unit	Aircraft type	Target strength	Actual strength	Operational
Strategic reconnaissance	Stab/F.A.Gr. 2	—	—	—	—
	4.(F)/14	Ju 88	12	14	11
	1.(F)/100	Ju 88	12	17	11
	4.(F)/121	Ju 88	12	23	18
	2.(F)/Nacht	Do 217	12	12	7
			48	66	47
Tactical reconnaissance	N.A.Gr. 3 (with Third Armoured Army)	—	—	—	—
	3.(H)/14	Fw 189	9	9	6
	4.(H)/31	Fw 189	9	8	6
	N.A.Gr. 5 (with Fourth Army)	—	—	—	—
	12.(H)/12	Hs 126	9	10	4
	2.(H)/23	Hs 126	9	9	7
	N.A.Gr. 15 (with Second Armoured Army)	—	—	—	—
	1.(H)/11	Fw 189	9	6	3
	11.(H)/12	Fw 189	9	9	5
	12.(H)/13	Fw 189	9	10	8
	Nachtkette	Fw 189	—	5	4
	Stab/N.A.Gr. 4 (with Ninth Army)	Bf 109 G	4	3	3
	1./N.A.Gr. 4	Bf 109 G	16	14	11
	2./N.A.Gr. 4	Bf 109 G	16	13	10
	3./N.A.Gr. 4	Bf 109 G	9	8	7
Night fighters	N.A.Gr. 10 (with Second Army)	—	—	—	—
	3.(H)/21	Hs 126	9	10	9
	2.(H)/31	Fw 189	9	10	7
			126	124	90
Heavy fighters	N.J.-Schwarm Lfl. 6	misc.	5	7	7
	12./N.J.G. 5	Do 217	15	11	7
			20	18	14
Fighters	Stab/Z.G. 1	Bf 110	4	4	3
	I./Z.G. 1	Bf 110	40	33	17
			44	37	20
Anti-tank aircraft	Stab/J.G. 51	Fw 190	4	3	—
	Stabstaffel/J.G. 51	Fw 190	12	12	10
	I/J.G. 51	Fw 190	40	28	15
	III./J.G. 51	Fw 190	40	35	19
	IV./J.G. 51	Fw 190	40	30	25
	15.(span.)/J.G. 51	Fw 190	16	22	16
	I./J.G. 54	Fw 190	40	32	19
			192	162	104
Pz.Jg.St./Z.G. 1	Bf 110	12	13	11	
	Ju 87 G	9	11	7	
		21	24	18	

Dive-bombers	Stab/St.G. 1	Ju 87	3	4	3
	Stabsstaffel/St.G. 1	Ju 87	6	6	5
	I./St.G. 1	Ju 87	39	33	26
	II./St.G. 1	Ju 87	39	38	31
	III./St.G. 1	Ju 87	39	38	28
	III./St.G. 3	Ju 87	39	37	27
			165	156	120
Interceptors (night ground- attack)	Stab/Störkampf	misc.	3	—	—
	1./Störkampf	Ar 66	24	34	24
	2./Störkampf	Go 145	24	15	11
	3./Störkampf	Fw 58	24	11	7
			75	60	42
Ground-attack Aircraft	III./K.G. 1	Ju 88	26	17	7
	9.(Eis.)/K.G. 1	Ju 88	11	12	10
	Stab/K.G. 4	He 111	4	2	2
	II./K.G. 4	He 111	37	34	24
	III./K.G. 4	He 111	37	38	29
	Stab/K.G. 51	Ju 88	4	2	1
	II./K.G. 51	Ju 88	37	41	27
	III./K.G. 51	Ju 88	37	22	15
	Stab/K.G. 53	He 111	4	2	2
	I./K.G. 53	He 111	37	33	23
	III./K.G. 53	He 111	37	16	15
			271	219	155
10 July 1943	Air Fleet 6	Total strength	962	866	610

The second phase of Operation KUTUZOV began on 15 July, when Rokossovsky's Central Front went over to the attack against Model's Ninth Army in the southern section of the Orel bulge. There were now two-and-a-half Soviet army fronts fighting against two German armies at Orel. The total forces deployed on the Soviet side were as follows: 1,286,049 men, of whom 927,494 in combat units, 26,379 barrelled weapons and launchers, and 2,409 operational tanks and assault guns.<sup>11</sup> Air support was provided by 3,023 aircraft (excluding long-range aircraft).<sup>12</sup> On the other side, the two German armies had around 307,000 front-line troops (daily strength).<sup>13</sup> Including army group reserves, they had 464 battle tanks<sup>14</sup> and 161 assault guns and

<sup>11</sup> Koltunov, 'Kurskaya bitva v tsifrakh', 81.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. 82–3.

<sup>13</sup> Ninth Army originally had a daily strength of approx. 222,000 men. Up to 13 July it had suffered total personnel losses of 23,345 men, leaving it with around 200,000. The daily strength of Second Armoured Army was around 107,000 men.

<sup>14</sup> 'Panzerlage, Stand 10.7.' (drawn up on 21 July 1943), fos. 126–8, BA-MA RH 10/61. Panzer IIs and command vehicles are not included.

self-propelled cannon at the ready.<sup>15</sup> The number of barrelled weapons and launchers (including anti-tank and anti-aircraft cannon) was around 5,500. After reinforcement by several units previously deployed in the sector of Army Group South, Air Fleet 6 could muster a total of 610 operational aircraft (see Table II.IV.1. ‘Breakdown of Air Fleet 6 at 10 July 1943’).<sup>16</sup> Those aircraft, however, were not only concentrated in the Orel bulge, in the sector of Ninth Army and Second Armoured Army. They had also to intervene in support of Second and Fourth Armies and Third Armoured Army, which meant that they had to cover the whole of Army Group Centre’s huge section of the front from Kursk to Moscow. What made the Soviet attacking forces seem so overpowering was their reserves. In addition to the armies already deployed during the first phase, the Stavka threw the following troops into the battle: 3rd Guards Armoured Army, 4th Armoured Army, five unattached armoured corps, one mechanized corps, and one cavalry corps. 11th Army HQ and a total of eleven additional rifle divisions were also deployed.<sup>17</sup>

The course of the operation was as follows: after preliminary attacks on the previous day, the offensive by Bryansk Front (under Col.-Gen. Markian Mikhailovich Popov) and large parts of West Front (under Col.-Gen. Vasily Danilovich Sokolovsky) against Second Armoured Army began on 12 July. This marked, at the same time, the start of the Red Army’s summer offensive, which the OKH had long been expecting. The advancing wall of artillery fire surpassed all that the German troops had experienced on the eastern front till then. The foremost positions were literally ploughed over. The German defence system was exceptionally deeply staggered, however, and the Soviet attacking forces had clearly underestimated it. After they had broken through the weakly occupied first line, most of their thrusts cost them considerable losses.<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless, by the end of the first day they had already made several deep breaches in the German lines. Since there were no reserves available on the German side, it seemed that the front would collapse in a matter of days.

On 13 July, however, Army Group Centre transferred command of Second Armoured Army to Col.-Gen. Model, the commander-in-chief of Ninth Army, thus putting him personally in command of both armies so as to centralize the direction of operations in the Orel bulge. Events soon proved how right it was to do so. On the second day of the Soviet offensive the critical situation of Second Armoured Army deteriorated ‘with the speed of an avalanche’.<sup>19</sup> There was not only the threat of a frontal operational breakthrough from the east in the direction of Orel, but the much more dangerous threat of a collapse in the northern part of the bulge at Ulyanovo. If that happened, the Soviet attacking units could thrust into the rear of Ninth Army and cut off its retreat to the west. Model, who had

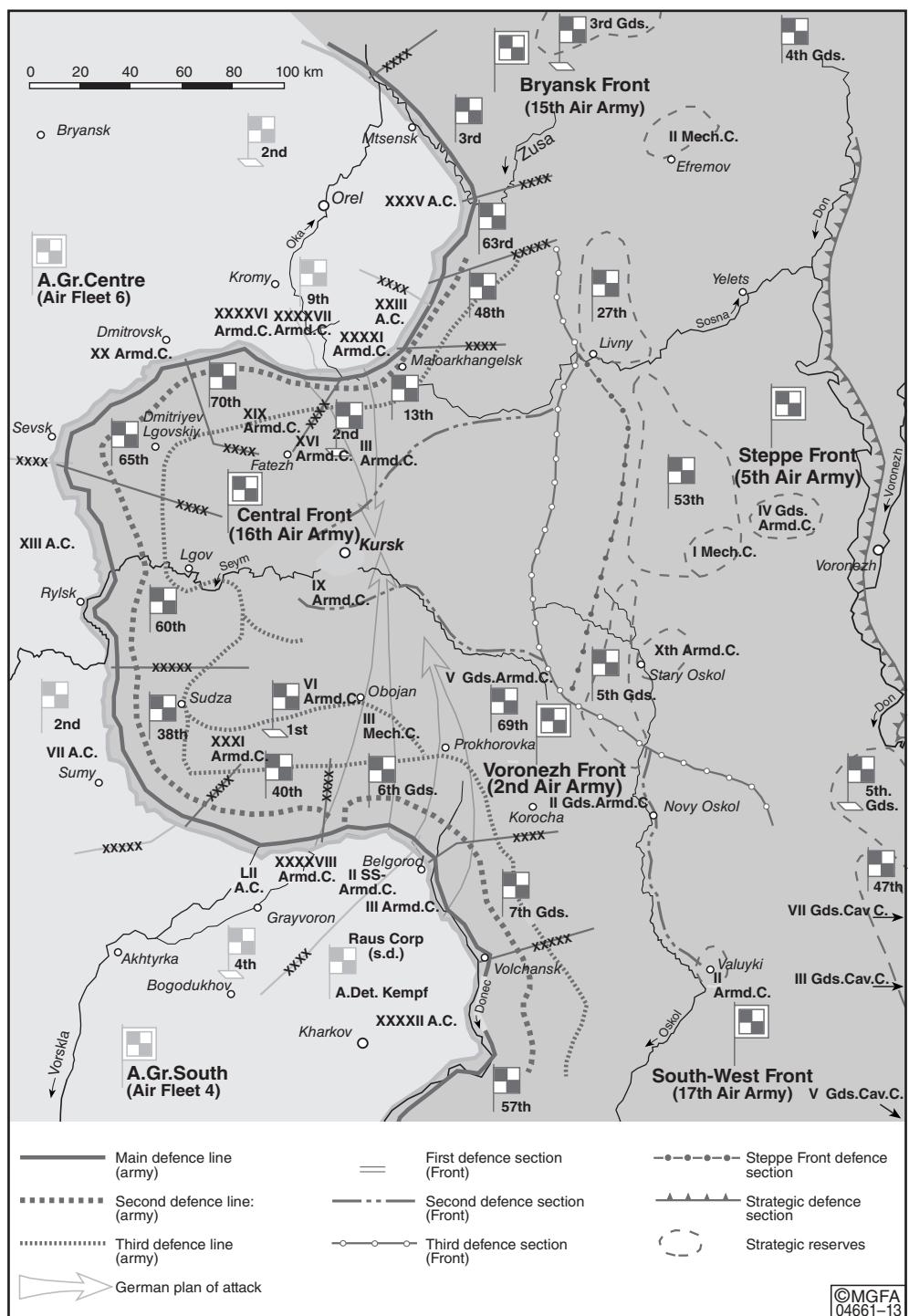
<sup>15</sup> ‘Sturmgeschützlage, Stand 10.7.’ (drawn up on 21 July 1943), BA-MA RH 10/62.

<sup>16</sup> Operational status report, 10 July 1943, BA-MA RL 2-III/725; edited by Ulf Balke in the light of further documents from his private archive. The figure of 610 operational aircraft does not include the 112 courier, liaison, and transport planes.

<sup>17</sup> *Grif sekretnosti sniat*, 188.

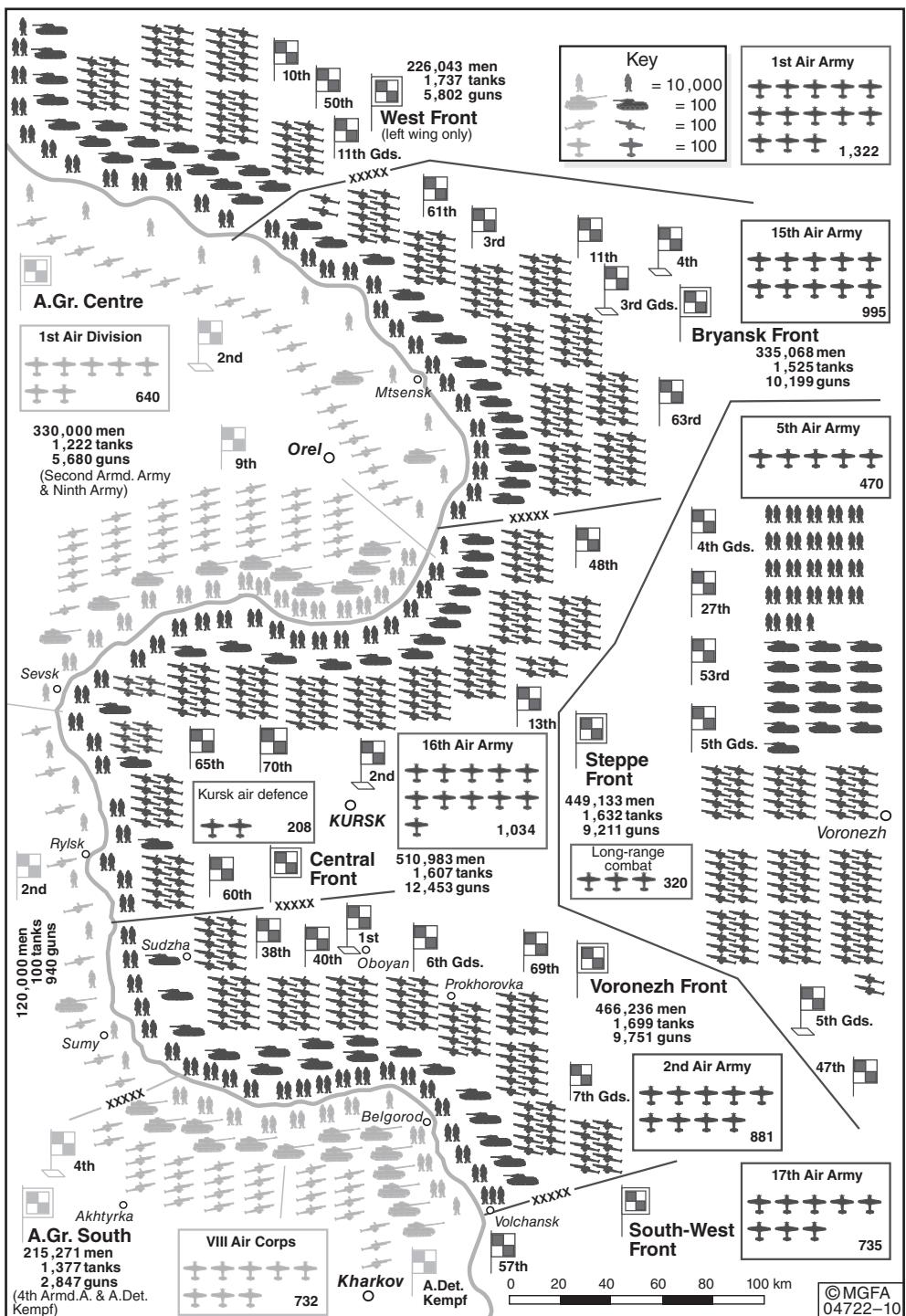
<sup>18</sup> Rendulic, ‘Die Schlacht von Orel’, 134; Rendulic, *Gekämpft*, 132 ff.

<sup>19</sup> Combat report on the battle in the Orel bulge, BA-MA RH 20-9/155, 3.

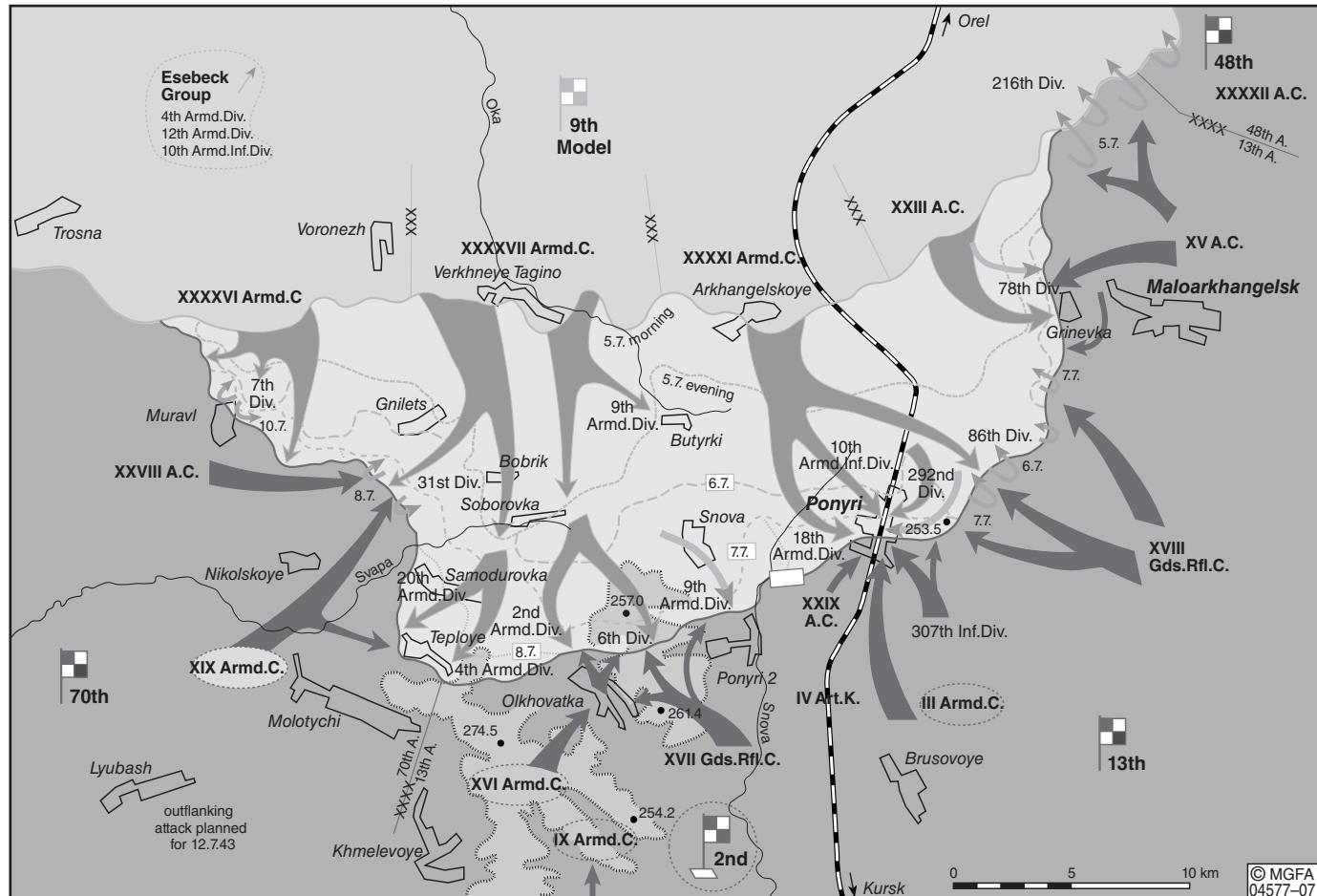


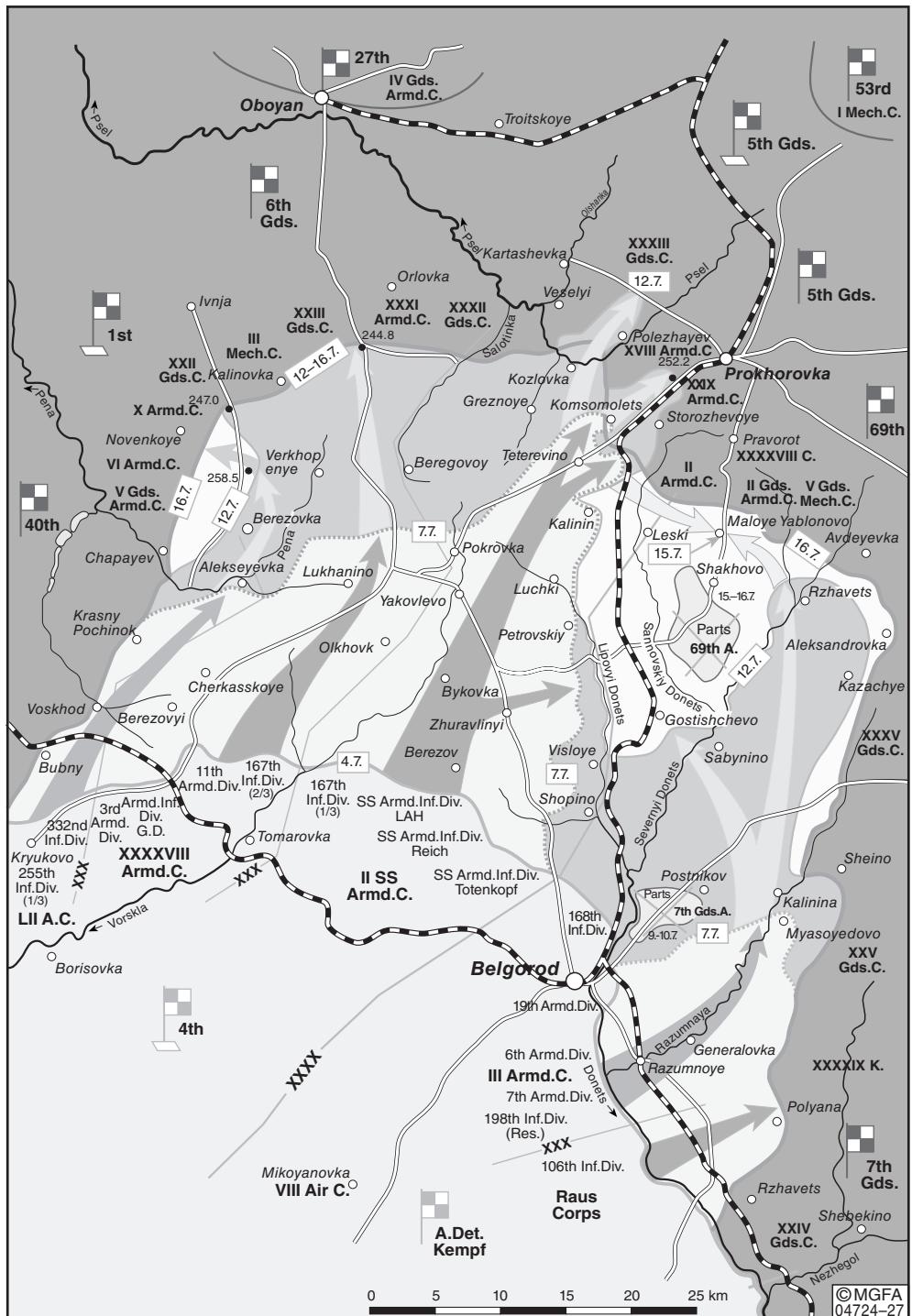
**Map II.iv.1.** The Kursk Salient on 4 July 1943

Source: OKH situation map, 3 July 1943, BA-MA, Kart RH2, Ost/717.



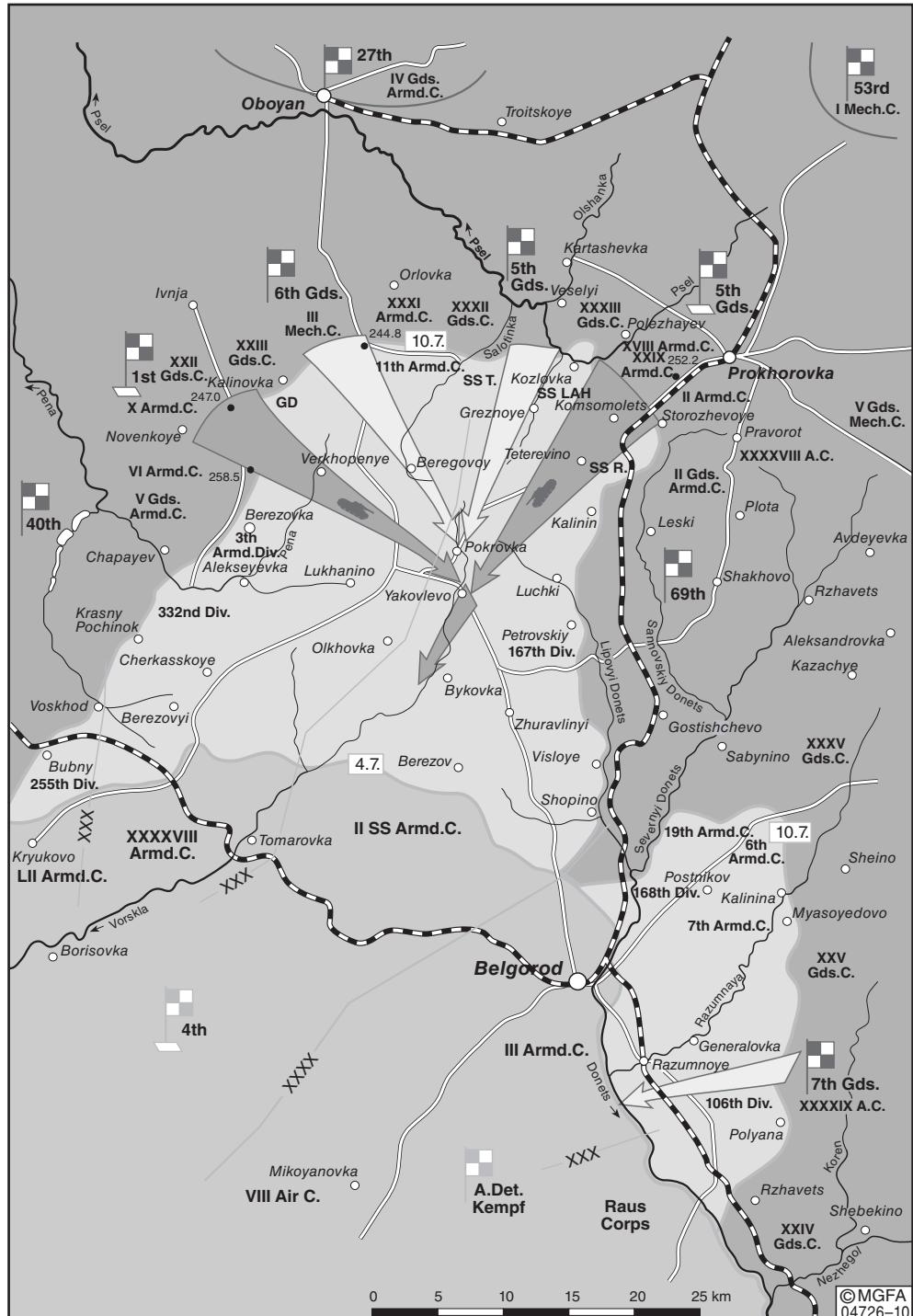
Map II.IV.2. Comparative strength in the Kursk Salient on 4 July 1943





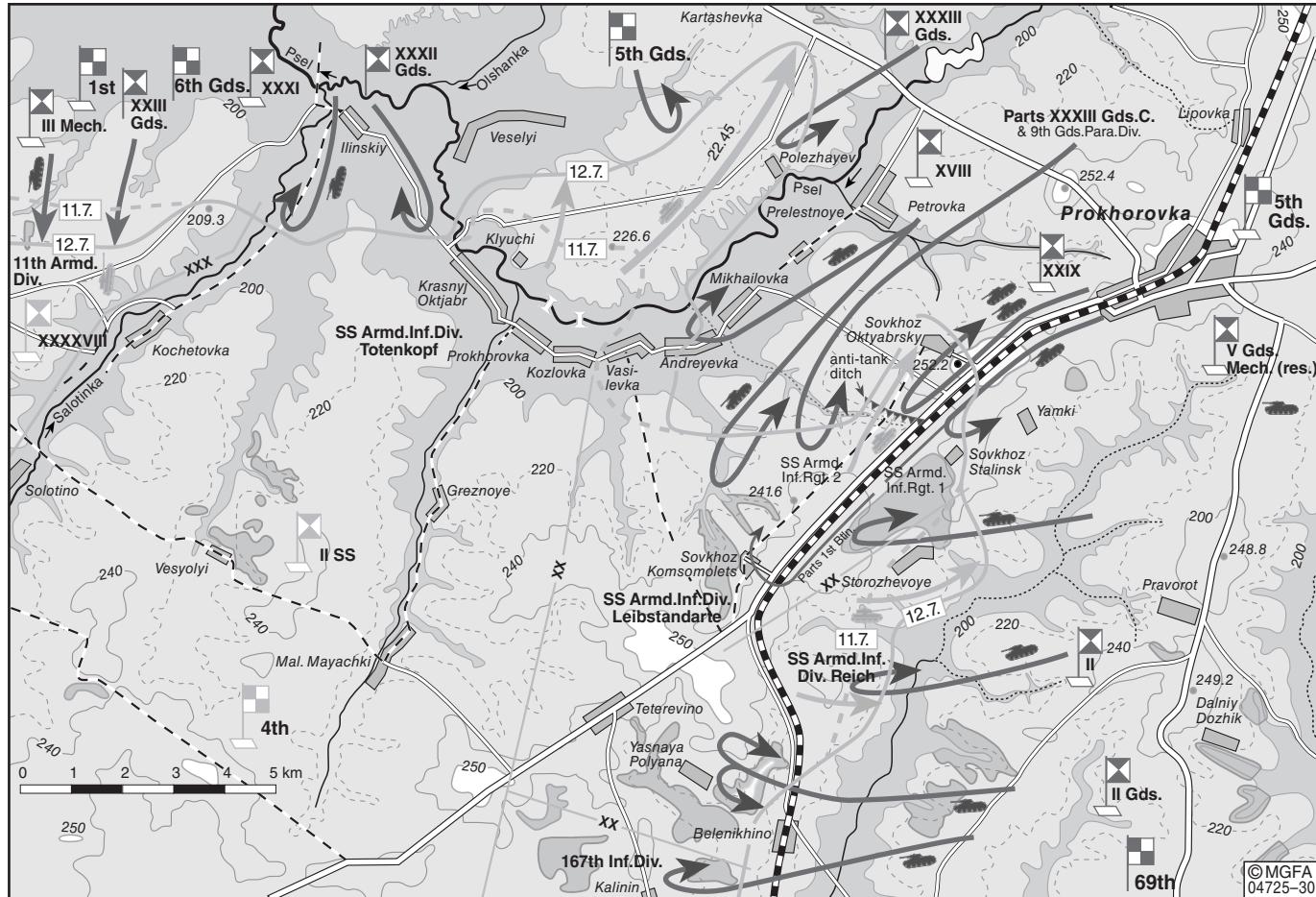
**Map II.IV.4.** The thrust by the Southern Group towards Kursk (4 to 16 July 1943)

Sources: Fourth Armoured Army, situation maps, RH 21-4/126 K; A.Det. Kempf, situation maps, RH 20-8/107 K; II SS-Armd. Corps, situation maps, RS 2-2/33 K; III Armd. Corps, situation maps, RH 24-3/92 K



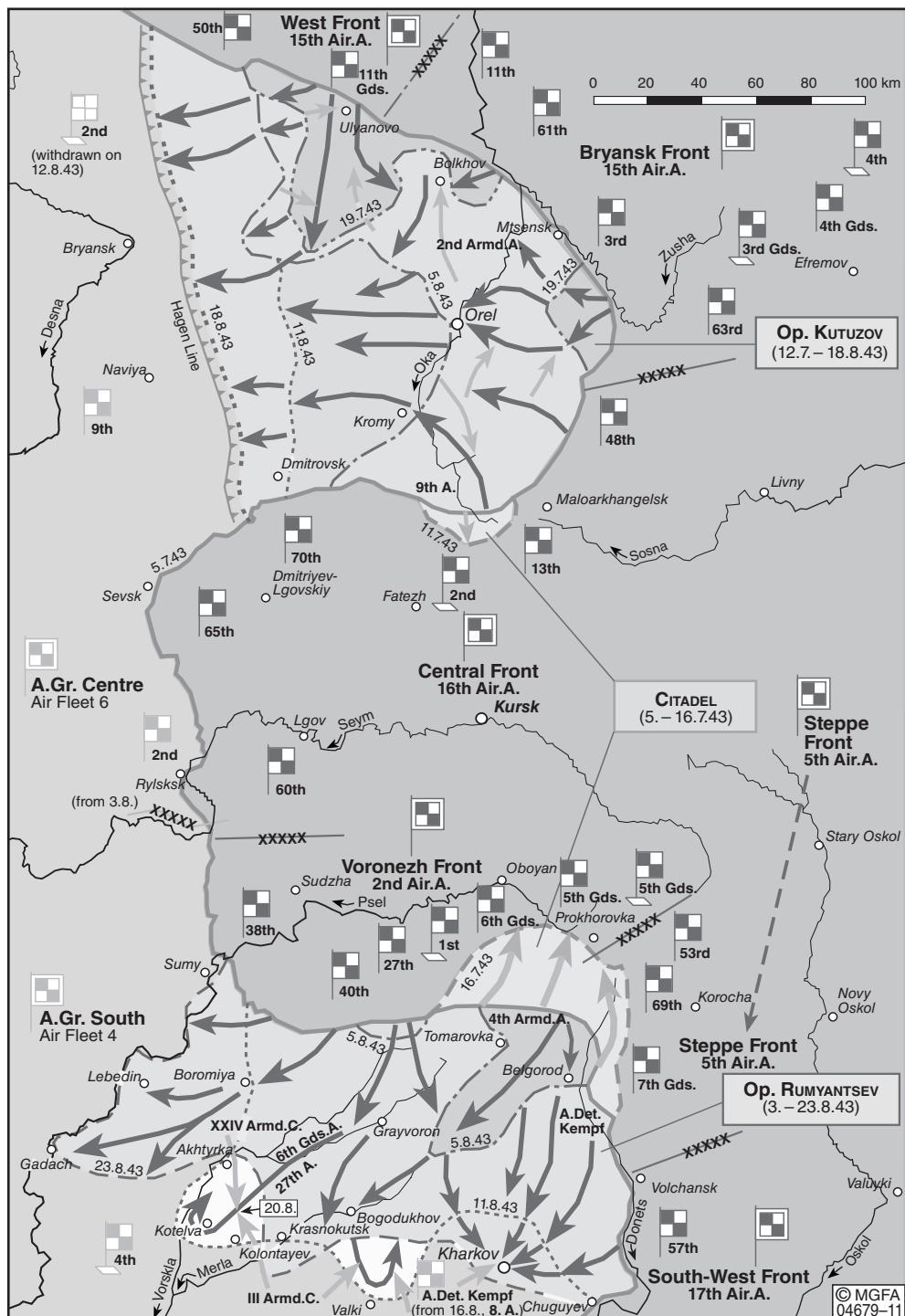
**Map II.iv.5.** The Soviet encirclement plan for 12 July 1943 at Prokhorovka

Sources: Fourth Armoured Army, situation maps, RH 21-4/126 K; A.Det. Kempf, situation maps, RH 20-8/107 K; II SS-Armd.Corps, situation maps, RS 2-2/33 K; III Armd. Corps, situation maps, RH 24-3/92 K; *The Battle for Kursk*, 100



Map II.iv.6. The tank battle at Prokhorovka on 12 July 1943

Sources: Fourth Armoured Army, daily reports, BA-MA, RH 21-4/118; II SS Armd. Corps, war diary, RS 2-2/117; II SS Armd. Corps, daily reports, RS 2-2/118, pt. 2; II SS Armd. Corps, war diary, situation maps, RS 2-2/33; Fortification map 1:50,000, RH 26-1005/47 K



Map II.IV.7. The battle in the Kursk Salient (5 July to 23 August 1943)

Sources: OKH situation maps, 5.7., 11.7., 19.7., 5.8., 11.8., 18.8., and 23.8.43, BA-MA, Kart RH-2, Ost/718, 724, 729, 732, 749, 756, 763, 769

earned the nickname ‘the Lion of Defence’ in the previous winter battles, now faced a great test. Acting decisively, he moved almost all Ninth Army’s armoured units into the threatened section of Second Armoured Army.<sup>20</sup> Once again, the situation was stabilized temporarily. As a result, however, Ninth Army had no option but to withdraw from the ground gained during Operation CITADEL. The Soviet Central Front at first pursued it hesitantly, but on 15 July it too moved onto the attack, with powerful air support. On 18 July the German units were back at their starting position of 5 July.

Meanwhile a bitter battle was raging on a 400-kilometre stretch of front, with the Red Army sending in huge masses of armour with no regard for losses.<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless, as the Soviet tank expert Rotmistrov critically remarked, despite all their superiority the three tank armies deployed in Operation KUTUZOV failed to achieve a single successful operational breakthrough.<sup>22</sup> Yet the attacks were repeated time and again by the same method at the same place. In the battle for Bolkhov, 4th Armoured Army, newly brought in on 26 July, lost 84 per cent of its T-34s and 46 per cent of its light tanks in the first few days.<sup>23</sup> Within two weeks, 3rd Guards Armoured Army, which was also brought in at a later stage, lost half of its 800 tanks.<sup>24</sup> Central Front’s Second Armoured Army was particularly hard hit. It had received full replacements after losing half of its tanks during the defensive phase,<sup>25</sup> but by 30 July it had again lost 60 per cent of them.<sup>26</sup>

Despite noteworthy individual tactical successes, the German defenders could only slow the Soviet steamroller, not stop it. For that reason it was dangerous to defend a given position too doggedly rather than withdraw in depth to a prepared defensive line. Hitler showed a strong dislike for such evasive manoeuvres, but a new chapter of the war was now beginning, that of incessant retreats up to the borders of the Reich. The pendulum swung the other way. At the same time a dispute began in the top operations staffs that ultimately led to permanent conflict. Hitler’s irrational stubborn refusal to retreat repeatedly brought his generals to despair. The aim of the first major evasive operation was to withdraw from the Orel bulge and fall back on the Hagen Line. Aware of Hitler’s obstinacy, Model took matters into his own hands and began to evacuate the foremost positions. The Führer was presented with a fait accompli and had no option but to approve the withdrawal retroactively. Model, however, paid dearly for his audacity. As we shall see, the ambitious general was temporarily put on ice.

<sup>20</sup> Fourth Army, which was deployed further to the north and itself came under attack soon afterwards, sent a few additional reinforcements, mainly 253rd Infantry Division. Armoured Infantry Division ‘Grossdeutschland’, taken from Army Group South, also intervened briefly but had to be ordered back because of the new Soviet offensive at Kharkov. Apart from 5th and 8th Armoured Divisions, which are included in the present comparison of strength, Army Group Centre had scarcely any reserves available.

<sup>21</sup> For an excellent account of the fighting, see John, *Kursk*, 94 ff. The author combines his personal perspective as an officer of 12th Armoured Division with an overall description of the battle.

<sup>22</sup> Rotmistrov, ‘The Role of Armoured Forces’, 173.

<sup>23</sup> Shutov and Ramanichev, ‘Ognennaya duga’, 277.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Glantz and House, *The Battle of Kursk*, 232.

<sup>26</sup> Shutov and Ramanichev, ‘Ognennaya duga’, 277.

Here we must take issue with the cliché of Model as a ‘Nazi general’ who carried out Hitler’s orders unquestioningly. The Israeli military historian Marcel Stein, author of the most recent biography of Model, paints a differentiated picture:

No other senior military leader contradicted Hitler so often and so clearly as Model [...] Model repeatedly refused to carry out orders which seemed senseless to him, or presented Hitler with a *fait accompli*, explaining that he had indeed acted on his own authority but in line with the Führer’s intentions. One of many examples is his withdrawal to the Hagen Line after the failure of Citadel, which enabled him to save both his endangered armies.<sup>27</sup>

Col.-Gen. Model’s forced evacuation of the Orel bulge, which extended far to the east, took place from 1 to 16 August. It was a four-stage withdrawal over a distance of 100 kilometres, which ended only with taking up position on the Hagen Line, deep in the hinterland.<sup>28</sup> Hitler was pained above all by the loss of the town of Orel, which was evacuated on 5 August.

This evasive manoeuvre against an enemy pushing forward strongly was a complicated operation, because the infrastructure of the area was to be destroyed at the same time, which meant blowing up bridges, railway stations, and so on. The situation was aggravated by two circumstances in particular. The first was that on 7 August the Red Army also launched an offensive against Fourth Army, the neighbouring army to the north. Fourth Army was critically weak at this time, since it had been obliged to give up seven divisions in the last few weeks and now had to cover a 300-kilometre stretch of front with only 14 divisions.<sup>29</sup> It was attacked by the massed forces of Kalinin Front and West Front, comprising 1,253,000 men supported by 1,436 tanks and self-propelled cannon, 20,640 guns and grenade launchers, and 1,100 aircraft.<sup>30</sup> Although the Soviet offensive, after an initial success, stalled on the southern wing at Spas-Demensk,<sup>31</sup> it had an operational side effect. Fourth Army was unable to come to the help of Model’s units; on the contrary, Ninth Army had to send further units to its assistance. The second aggravating factor was an order from the OKH to release Second Armoured Army HQ and several of its units, as from 12 August, for redeployment in the Balkans. This meant that Ninth Army, in addition, had to take over command in what had been Second Armoured Army’s combat zone. The situation became increasingly critical in the face of the onslaught by enemy forces that were continuously reinforced during the operation.

<sup>27</sup> Stein, *Generalfeldmarschall Walter Model*, 2.

<sup>28</sup> On this, see daily reports of Army Group Centre, 31 July to 18 Aug. 1943, BA-MA RH 19-II/403; ‘Gefechtsbericht über die Schlacht im Orelbogen’, 6–12, BA-MA RH 20-9/155; KTB Ninth Army, 31 July to 18 Aug. 1943 (fos. 165–94), BA-MA RH 20-9/134; KTB Second Armoured Army, 31 July to 13 Aug. 1943 (fos. 115–42), BA-MA RH 21-2/v. 432; Pz.AOK 2: ‘Akte Hagen-Bewegung’, BA-MA RH 21-2/v. 444; Pz.AOK 2: ‘Sommerschlacht um den Orelbogen’, BA-MA RH 21-2/493.

<sup>29</sup> BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2052, 56.

<sup>30</sup> *Geschichte des zweiten Weltkrieges 1939–1945*, vii. 289; *Grif sekretnosti sniat*, 191. This was the first phase of the Smolensk strategic offensive (Operation SUYOROV).

<sup>31</sup> Glantz and House, *When Titans Clashed*, 170–1.

A further problem was the ‘second front’ against the partisans in the hinterland. Not only were they tying down almost all the German reinforcements, but further troops needed to be withdrawn from the front to fight them. In the Orel area, partisans blew up railway tracks in almost 7,500 places from 22 July to 1 August.<sup>32</sup> But that was only the beginning. In the early hours of 3 August the Soviet partisans launched Operation ‘Rail War’ throughout the hinterland of Army Group Centre and part of the hinterland of Army Group North, all the way from the front to the western border of the Soviet Union. According to Soviet sources, around 100,000 partisans took part in these centrally coordinated diversionary actions. An entry in the OKW war diary dated 4 August reads: ‘Rail traffic in the east was severely endangered by a sudden outbreak of track explosions (75 large strikes with around 1,800 explosions in the area of Army Group Centre on 3 August). Rail communications in the area of Army Group Centre had to be halted for 48 hours from 4 August.’<sup>33</sup> According to Russian accounts, there were more than 42,000 track explosions in a single night. In the course of this partisan operation the number reached 171,000 by 31 August and 214,705 by 15 September.<sup>34</sup> And the interruption of rail traffic was only one of a range of partisan activities.

Despite all the difficulties, the withdrawal to the Hagen Line was completed by 16 August as planned. All Soviet attempts to push further westward failed at that defence line and involved high losses, so that the Stavka finally broke off Operation KUTUZOV. The new German defence line was a straightening of the Orel bulge, which had protruded far to the east, and thus reduced the length of the front considerably. As a result, apart from Second Armoured Army HQ, a total of 19 divisions (five armoured, five armoured infantry, and eleven infantry divisions) and numerous independent units were freed for deployment on other front sectors. The Luftwaffe played an important part in the defensive withdrawal operation in the Orel bulge, during which 1st Air Division flew a total of 37,421 missions (from 5 July).<sup>35</sup>

The Soviet counter-offensive (Operation KUTUZOV) lasted from 12 July to 18 August. It is largely identical with what the Germans called ‘the battle in the Orel bulge’, in which Ninth Army and Second Armoured Army took part. The two German armies incurred a total of 86,064 casualties (14,215 dead, 60,549 wounded, and 11,300 missing).<sup>36</sup> On the Soviet side, according to official sources, the casualties numbered 429,890 (112,529 dead or missing, 317,361 wounded).<sup>37</sup> Those figures, however, must be taken with a high degree of scepticism. One Russian historian estimates Soviet personnel losses at around 860,000, almost twice as many.<sup>38</sup> That would give a proportion of 1 to 10 and would confirm German combat reports, which assumed similarly high losses by the Red Army. The Soviet

<sup>32</sup> *Geschichte des zweiten Weltkrieges 1939–1945*, vii. 201.

<sup>33</sup> *KTB OKW*, iii/2, 891 (4 Aug. 1943).

<sup>34</sup> *Geschichte des zweiten Weltkrieges 1939–1945*, vii. 366 and 368.

<sup>35</sup> ‘Gefechtsbericht über die Schlacht im Orelbogen’, 11, BA-MA RH 20-9/155.

<sup>36</sup> Based on the 10-day reports of 10 July to 20 Aug. 1943 (see the statistics of the OKW medical officer in BA-MA RW 6/v. 558). In the case of Ninth Army, the calculation was made as from 13 July (see BA-MA RW 9/564), since casualties before that date were attributed to Operation CITADEL.

<sup>37</sup> *Grif sekretnosti sniat*, 189.

<sup>38</sup> Sokolov, ‘The Battle for Kursk’, 82.

units also lost 2,586 tanks and assault guns (total write-offs).<sup>39</sup> German tank losses, according to the fragmentary surviving documents, were a fraction of that amount. Total write-offs by Army Group Centre from 5 July to the beginning of August, including Operation CITADEL, were only 343 battle tanks, tank destroyers, and assault guns.<sup>40</sup> The number of losses fell in August, when the breakthrough battles of the previous month gave way to planned withdrawal (1 to 16 August). According to Russian sources, the Soviet forces lost 892 artillery guns and grenade launchers,<sup>41</sup> but no comparable record of losses exists on the German side. The official Soviet figure of 1,014 for aircraft losses<sup>42</sup> is called into doubt in recent Russian literature and is estimated at approximately 2,000,<sup>43</sup> which ought to be nearer the truth. According to the relatively reliable German calculations, Air Fleet 6 shot down a total of 1,705 Soviet planes from 12 July to 18 August,<sup>44</sup> but that figure includes neither aircraft shot down by army units nor losses by the Soviet air force over its own territory due to accidents or technical defects. In the same period (12 July to 18 August) Air Fleet 6, deployed over the whole front sector of Army Group Centre, lost a total of 218 planes.<sup>45</sup>

Despite massive deployment at the cost of great losses, the Red Army failed to achieve a decisive breakthrough at any point. It managed only to force the enemy back, slowly and laboriously. Model let the Soviet troops advance time and again, and gave the order to pull back just at the right moment. When the Soviet forces let loose dense artillery fire in preparation for a breakthrough, using up large amounts of ammunition, the shells fell on trench systems that had already been evacuated, and the attackers, pushing forward, unexpectedly ran up against deeply staggered German defensive lines. The German tanks played a decisive part in these encounters, but were finally overcome by the ‘sheer weight of Soviet armour’<sup>46</sup> and forced to abandon the battlefield.

Given that the task of Soviet historiography was to glorify the Red Army, it is noteworthy that Operation KUTUZOV was described in such a critical tone. The massive deployment and horrendous losses were out of all proportion to the laborious success. The memoir literature also contains noticeably critical remarks by former military leaders. The criticism is mainly directed at the plan of operations, which, instead of a battle of encirclement and annihilation (in Schlieffen’s meaning of the term), envisaged an advance on a broad front. Marshal Rokossovsky, then

<sup>39</sup> *Grif sekretnosti sniat*, 278.

<sup>40</sup> Pz.Offz. b. Chef GenstdH, Bb. No 562/43 g.Kdos., 14 Aug. 1943, ‘Entwicklung der Panzerlage bei Heeresgruppe Mitte in der Zeit vom 5.7. bis 1.8.1943’, BA-MA RH 10/48.

<sup>41</sup> *Grif sekretnosti sniat*, 278. <sup>42</sup> Ibid. <sup>43</sup> Sokolov, ‘The Battle for Kursk’, 83.

<sup>44</sup> Daily reports by the Second Army flight liaison officer, 1 July to 30 Sept. 1943, BA-MA RH 20-2/1337; edited by Ulf Balke in the light of further documents from his private archive. The figure of 1,705 aircraft shot down is by no means too high, as is proved by other file documents; see, e.g., ‘Gefechtsbericht über die Schlacht im Orelbogen’, 11, BA-MA RH 20-9/155, according to which 1st Air Division made 1,733 kills, of which 1,671 were attributed to fighters, while losing only 64 of its own planes. In addition, 12th Anti-Aircraft Division shot down 383 planes.

<sup>45</sup> Gen.Qu.Mstr., ‘6. Abt: Flugzeugunfälle und Verluste bei den fliegenden Verbänden (3.7.–2.8. sowie 3.8.–2.9.1943)’, BA-MA RL 2 III/191-193, calculated by Ulf Balke in the light of further documents from his private archive.

<sup>46</sup> Glantz and House, *The Battle of Kursk*, 237 and 273.

commander-in-chief of Central Front, observed that ‘instead of surrounding and destroying the enemy we were, in effect, pushing and jostling him out of the Orel salient. It could have been quite a different story had we begun the operation a little later, concentrating our forces in two powerful pincer movements closing at Bryansk’.<sup>47</sup> After the war Marshal Zhukov also criticized the fact that the Soviet units had ‘clashed with the enemy’s main concentration of forces on a broad front’ in ‘a frontal attempt to break through the enemy’s deeply staggered defences’.<sup>48</sup> But Stalin did not want another Stalingrad, where the Red Army had suffered considerably more losses than the Wehrmacht in a battle of encirclement that had tied down large forces for a long time. Instead, he declared that ‘our task is to drive the Germans from our territory as quickly as possible. We shall encircle them when they are weaker’.<sup>49</sup>

Stalin was not entirely wrong. Another year went by before the Red Army, in the 1944 summer offensive, to some extent mastered the operational deployment of armoured armies in deep thrusts and concentric encirclement manoeuvres. At all events, Operation KUTUZOV showed that the Soviet operations staffs were then still far from having done so. A Stavka directive of 13 August 1943 to the commander-in-chief of Central Front reads:

According to the information possessed by the General Staff, on 10 August the 110-strong tank group of 3rd Guards Armoured Army lost 100 tanks in the fight for Hill 264.6, which means that it was in fact annihilated by the enemy. This extraordinary incident occurred under the conditions of a general enemy retreat [...] The loss of such a large number of tanks in the space of a few hours shows not only the total lack of coordination between 3rd Guards Armoured Army and 13th Army, but also the inaction of the commanders-in-chief of those armies, who left the tanks to their fate without any support.<sup>50</sup>

In the view of present-day Russian military historians, operational encirclement of the numerically inferior German forces should at least have been attempted.<sup>51</sup> Instead of which, Stalin and some of the generals preferred the risk-free Soviet steamroller tactics, whereby an enemy was to be forced back, rather than beaten. In the course of the war this stupid but ‘dead certain’ method cost millions of Red Army troops their lives.

## 2. THE BELGOROD–KHARKOV OFFENSIVE OF 3 TO 23 AUGUST (OPERATION RUMYANTSEV)

In fact, Operation KUTUZOV in the Orel bulge was the only real counter-offensive. Its aim was to relieve Central Front, which had been put into considerable difficulties during the German CITADEL offensive. But by the time the second

<sup>47</sup> Rokossovsky, *A Soldier’s Duty*, 204.

<sup>48</sup> Zhukov, *Erinnerungen* (8th edn.), 188.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid. 189.

<sup>50</sup> Quoted in Andronikov, ‘Gitlerovski fakel’ (pt. 2), 4.

<sup>51</sup> Shutov and Ramanichev, ‘Ognennaya duga’, 273 and 277.

'counter-offensive' (Operation RUMYANTSEV) began on 3 August, Operation CITADEL was long over. The Stavka had planned this operation by Voronezh Front and Steppe Front, directed at the Belgorod-Kharkov area, as a major component of the Soviet summer offensive. As such, its aim was no less than the defeat of Fourth Armoured Army and Army Detachment Kempf, which had already been weakened by the preceding battles of Operation CITADEL. This was to be followed by an assault on Manstein's First Armoured Army and Sixth Army, which were deployed on the southern wing of Army Group South and had already been under attack by South Front and South West Front since 17 July. The aim was to enclose them by a thrust to the Black Sea coast, and then annihilate them.<sup>52</sup>

Voronezh Front and Steppe Front had been considerably reinforced for Operation RUMYANTSEV against Fourth Armoured Army and Army Detachment Kempf. In the first phase the attacking forces already consisted of eight armies, two armoured armies, four unattached armoured corps, and a mechanized corps. At their disposal were more than 1,144,000 men,<sup>53</sup> 2,418 tanks and assault guns,<sup>54</sup> 12,866 cannon and grenade launchers, and 767 rocket launchers.<sup>55</sup> They were supported by two air armies with 1,311 planes<sup>56</sup> (not counting long-range aircraft and fighters belonging to Air Defence).<sup>57</sup> South-West Front's 17th Air Army also attacked during the first phase of the offensive. In the course of the operation, 4th Guards Army, 47th and 57th Armies, as well as an armoured corps and a mechanized corps, were also deployed,<sup>58</sup> bringing the number of tanks and assault guns to over 2,800.<sup>59</sup> On 3 August, moreover, exactly at the beginning of the RUMYANTSEV offensive, partisans in the hinterland launched the 'rail war' operation.<sup>60</sup>

Faced with this concentration of Soviet forces, the German defenders were in a hopelessly inferior position. Fourth Armoured Army and Army Detachment Kempf bore little resemblance to the armoured formations that had attacked in the Kursk salient in July. Immediately after the termination of Operation CITADEL the following units, among others, had been withdrawn: II SS Armoured Corps with SS Armoured Infantry Divisions 'Leibstandarte', 'Totenkopf', and 'Reich', 3rd and 7th Armoured Divisions, Armoured Infantry Division 'Grossdeutschland', III Armoured Corps General HQ, as well as XXIV Armoured Corps with 23rd Armoured Division and SS Armoured Infantry Division 'Viking', which had been kept in readiness as reserves.<sup>61</sup> As a result, Fourth Armoured Army and Army Detachment Kempf now had only 138 operational battle tanks<sup>62</sup> and 99 assault

<sup>52</sup> Glantz and House, *The Battle of Kursk*, 241.

<sup>53</sup> *Grif sekretnosti sniat*, 190. Koltunov, however, gives the figure of 980,588 men (of whom 656,201 in combat units); see Koltunov, 'Kurskaya bitva v tsifrakh', 81.

<sup>54</sup> Koltunov, 'Kurskaya bitva v tsifrakh', 81.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid. 82–3.

<sup>57</sup> In addition, 9th Fighter Corps and 36th and 101st Fighter Divisions were also deployed for regional air defence; *ibid.* 83.

<sup>58</sup> *Grif sekretnosti sniat*, 190.

<sup>59</sup> Nipe, *Decision in the Ukraine*, 376.

<sup>60</sup> Solovev, *Wendepunkt*, 150; *Geschichte des zweiten Weltkrieges 1939–1945*, vii. 366 ff.

<sup>61</sup> App. 3, 'Umgruppierungen der HGr. Süd und Abgabe von Verbänden', 4, BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2075.

<sup>62</sup> 'Panzerlage, Stand 31.7.' (drawn up on 12 Aug. 1943), BA-MA RH 10/61. The 3rd and 7th Armoured Divisions are not included in this figure, since they were still on their way.

guns and self-propelled cannon,<sup>63</sup> against 2,400 Soviet fighting vehicles (2,800 including reserves). However, this constant transfer of German armoured units had become typical of the eastern front. While the Red Army drew on its ample reserves and constantly sent reconstituted armoured corps onto the battlefield, the few German armoured divisions had to keep shifting from one conflagration to another, like a fire brigade, leaving dangerous gaps that could barely be covered.

The Soviet offensive launched on 3 August created a crisis that set the rotation roundabout in motion once again. A large part of the armoured units which had been withdrawn now had to be sent back to the Belgorod–Kharkov area. On 10 August Fourth Armoured Army and Army Detachment Kempf, including the newly arrived units, again had at their disposal more than 353 battle tanks,<sup>64</sup> as well as 214 assault guns and self-propelled cannon.<sup>65</sup> Including the new divisions assigned to it, the ration strength of Fourth Armoured Army amounted to 156,433,<sup>66</sup> which must have given a daily strength of around 115,000 men in the front-line units. The personnel strength of Army Detachment Kempf was not even half as much, and it had only a few dozen tanks at its disposal.<sup>67</sup> Air Fleet 4, with only 796 operational aircraft (see Table II.IV.2), was also clearly inferior.<sup>68</sup> Above all, it was not only deployed on defence against the Soviet RUMYANTSEV counter-offensive at Kharkov, but also had to intervene on the whole front sector of Army Groups South and A on the Donets and Mius, as far as the Kuban bridgehead on the Black Sea. That meant that it not only had the 2nd and 5th Air Armies of Voronezh and Steppe Fronts against it, but also the 17th, 8th, and 4th Air Armies of South-West Front, South Front, and North Caucasus Front.

The Soviet counter-offensive at Belgorod began with seemingly impossible force. To the German troops, who had just inflicted enormous losses on the Red Army at Prokhorovka, it seemed as if ‘their beaten opponent had risen from the grave with renewed strength’.<sup>69</sup> The Soviet 5th Guards Armoured Army and 1st Armoured Army had lost almost all their tanks, and the Germans had considered them totally destroyed. In fact, the remnants had been transferred to the hinterland and rebuilt as armoured armies. Suddenly they reappeared on the scene with brand-new tanks and rapidly trained crews. These two armoured armies, with 1,112 fighting vehicles between them,<sup>70</sup> were used to form a ‘mobile force’ to carry out a deep operational

<sup>63</sup> ‘Sturmgeschützlage, Stand 31.7.’ (drawn up on 12–14 Aug. 1943), BA-MA RH 10/62; ‘Pak (Sf.)-Lage, Stand 31.7.’ (drawn up on 14–15 Aug. 1943), BA-MA RH 10/63.

<sup>64</sup> ‘Panzerlage, Stand 10.8.’ (drawn up on 23–4 Aug. 1943), BA-MA RH 10/61.

<sup>65</sup> ‘Sturmgeschützlage, Stand 10.8.’ (drawn up on 23–4 Aug. 1943), BA-MA RH 10/62. Regarding the operational status of the self-propelled cannon, the files contain only the situation report for 31 July (drawn up on 15 Aug. 1943), BA-MA RH 10/63.

<sup>66</sup> Armeeintendant Pz.AOK 4, 670/43 g.Kdos., 20 Aug. 1943, ‘Verpflegungsstärken nach dem Stand vom 10.8.1943’ (fo. 6), BA-MA RH 21-4/422.

<sup>67</sup> David M. Glantz estimates Army Detachment Kempf at 80,000 men (evidently the ration strength) and 60 tanks; see Glantz, *From the Don to the Dnepr*, 225–6.

<sup>68</sup> Operational status reports of 30 July and 10 Aug. 1943, BA-MA RL 2-III/725; edited by Ulf Balke in the light of further documents from his private archive. Courier, liaison, transport, minesweeper, and air-sea rescue aircraft are excluded from the strength figure.

<sup>69</sup> Glantz and House, *The Battle of Kursk*, 247.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid. 425; Shutov and Ramanichev, ‘Ognennaya duga’, 280.

thrust after the tactical breakthrough. Thus the Red Army had now adopted a procedure which the Wehrmacht had been applying since the blitzkrieg against the western powers in 1940.

The concentration of forces exceeded even the mass assembled at the beginning of the counter-offensive at Orel (Operation KUTUZOV). Along Voronezh Front's 6-kilometre-wide breakthrough section, 230 guns and grenade launchers, as well as 178 tanks and self-propelled cannon, were deployed per kilometre of front. The artillery density was even greater in the 7-kilometre breakthrough section of Steppe Front, where for every kilometre of front there was a reinforced rifle division supported by 300 guns and grenade launchers.<sup>71</sup> The offensive started in the early hours of 3 August with a preparatory artillery barrage lasting 170 minutes. At the same time, 2nd and 5th Air Armies began intensive attacks, supported by long-range aircraft and South-West Front's 17th Air Army. By 8 August the Soviet planes had flown a total of 13,000 sorties.<sup>72</sup> The defending German infantry units in the front line were virtually swept aside, and the few tanks had no chance of withstanding the avalanche. On the very first day, a tactical breakthrough was achieved between Belgorod and Tomarovka, during which some Soviet tank spearheads pushed forward as far as 25 kilometres. On the evening of 5 August Belgorod, the mainstay of the German defence system, had to be abandoned. By massing several armies, Voronezh and Steppe Fronts had formed a shock troop which pushed forward exactly along the border between Fourth Armoured Army and Army Detachment Kempf. By the evening of 7 August a gap over 50 kilometres wide had opened up between the two German formations. A decisive part in this success was played by the two armoured armies of the 'mobile force' brought in at a later stage. As Rotmistrov, the commander-in-chief of 5th Guards Armoured Army, later summed it up, it was the first time in the history of the Red Army that an operational breakthrough had been achieved by deploying armoured armies. A similar attempt had failed shortly before, during the Orel offensive (Operation KUTUZOV), despite the deployment of three armoured armies.<sup>73</sup>

As already mentioned, the German leadership reacted by progressively ordering back most of the armoured units which had been withdrawn after the termination of Operation CITADEL. Army Detachment Kempf received as reinforcements 3rd Armoured Division and III Armoured Corps, with SS Armoured Infantry Divisions 'Viking', 'Reich', and 'Totenkopf', while Fourth Armoured Army received the newly formed XXIV Armoured Corps, consisting of 7th Armoured Division, 10th Armoured Infantry Division, and Armoured Infantry Division 'Grossdeutschland'. Meanwhile the Red Army had advanced as far as Bogodukhov and Kotelva. The subsequent course of events is described as follows in a Soviet account: 'Things then took a surprising turn [...] The command of the Voronezh Front underestimated

<sup>71</sup> Shutov and Ramanichev, 'Ognennaya duga', 280.

<sup>72</sup> *Geschichte des zweiten Weltkrieges 1939–1945*, vii. 209.

<sup>73</sup> Rotmistrov, 'Bronetankovye i mekhanizirovannye voiska', 20–1; Rotmistrov, 'The Role of Armoured Forces', 173–4.

the imminent danger or simply overlooked it altogether. Our advance continued without sufficient consolidation of our gains and covering of flanks. The enemy took advantage of this and launched powerful counter-attacks.<sup>74</sup> On 12 August, III Armoured Corps began its counter-attack, in which it was able to deploy only SS Armoured Infantry Divisions 'Reich' and 'Totenkopf'.<sup>75</sup> A series of meeting engagements ensued to the south of Bogodukhov in which individual units of the Soviet 6th Guards Army and 1st Armoured Army were enclosed and destroyed. On 13 August the strength of 1st Armoured Army was down from an original 569 tanks to 134, and that of 5th Guards Army from 543 to 100.<sup>76</sup>

However, the two German armies were still separated by a gap between Akhtyrka and Krasnokutsk. That gap was now to be closed by means of a pincer attack. For a thrust from the north, Fourth Armoured Army deployed XXIV Armoured Corps, which had 79 tanks and 54 assault guns and self-propelled cannon at its disposal.<sup>77</sup> Army Detachment Kempf (later renamed Eighth Army) was supposed to deploy III Armoured Corps at the same time in an attack from the south. However, the corps was under such pressure from the enemy that SS Armoured Infantry Division 'Totenkopf' had to move forward on its own. With 71 operational fighting vehicles, it was nevertheless the corps' strongest unit.<sup>78</sup> The action began on 18 August, and the northern pincer arm, XXIV Armoured Corps, rapidly gained ground. The Totenkopf Division, however, had first to achieve a crossing of the Merla river at Kolontayev. After breaking through the Soviet lines, its troops pushed northwards through the enemy's hinterland. On the evening of 20 August they suddenly saw a column of tanks coming towards them at Lopukhavaty (to the east of Kotelva). To their relief, the tanks turned out to be German. They belonged to a unit of Armoured Infantry Division 'Grossdeutschland' commanded by Col. (Res.) Count Hyazinth Strachwitz. The pincer had closed. Large parts of 6th Guards Army and 27th Army, including 4th and 5th Guards Armoured Corps, were now trapped in an encirclement around Kotelva. However, the lines of the encircling forces were much too thin, and the weak German formations were unable to take tactical advantage of their skilful operational manoeuvre. Several Soviet units managed to break through the German lines and reach safety. Nevertheless, the German operation was by no means without effect. The Red Army forces, which had been on the attack up till then, had suffered considerable losses and were in a state of shock. Despite their superiority at that location, they refrained from continuing the offensive. The

<sup>74</sup> Stemenko, *Im Generalstab*, 191.

<sup>75</sup> KTB Eighth Army, 12 to 16 Aug. 1943, BA-MA RH 20-8/84; KTB III Armoured Corps, 12 to 16 Aug. 1943, BA-MA RH 24-3/93.

<sup>76</sup> Glantz and House, *The Battle of Kursk*, 426.

<sup>77</sup> 'Panzerlage, Stand 20.8.1943', BA-MA RH 10/61; 'Sturmgeschützlage vom 20.8.1943', BA-MA RH 10/62. In the case of self-propelled cannon, only the deployment strength on 31 August is given (33 fighting vehicles); see BA-MA RH 10/63.

<sup>78</sup> These consisted of 51 battle tanks, 16 assault guns, and 4 self-propelled cannon. For the relevant documentary sources, see the previous footnote.

**Table II.IV.2.** Breakdown of Air Fleet 4 at 3 August 1943 (before the Soviet counter-offensive at Kharkov)

Category	Unit	Aircraft type	Target strength	Actual strength	Operational
Air Fleet 4: VIII Air Corps (Kharkov), IV Air Corps (Mius), I Air Corps (Crimea)					
Strategic reconnaissance	Stab/F.A.Gr. 4	–	–	–	–
	2.(F)/100	Ju 88	12	12	6
	4.(F)/122	Ju 88	12	16	11
	1.(F)/Nacht	Do 217	12	9	3
	2.(F)/22	Ju 88	12	11	7
	2.(F)/11	Ju 88	12	9	9
	I. (F)/125 (See)	Bv 138	19	18	7
Weather reconnaissance	Wekusta 76	Ju 88	12	6	5
Special squadron	Küsta Krim	Bf 110	9	12	6
			100	93	54
Tactical reconnaissance	1./N.A.Gr. 2 (with Fourth Armd. Army)	Bf 109	16	16	14
	Stab/N.A.Gr. 6 (with Army Det. Kempf)	–	–	–	–
	2.(H)/16	Fw 189	9	10	8
	5.(H)/32	Hs 126	9	15	8
	Stab/N.A.Gr. 14 (with First Armd. Army)	–	–	–	–
	5.(H)/41	Fw 189	9	11	6
	Stab/N.A.Gr. 1 (with Sixth Army)	Bf 110	–	5	4
	5.(H)/11	Fw 189	9	10	7
	1.(H)/41	Fw 189	9	9	7
	2.(H)/31	Fw 189	9	9	7
	Stab/N.A.Gr. 9 (with Seventeenth Army)	Bf 109	–	2	–
	1.(H)/21	Fw 189	9	9	8
	7.(H)/32	Fw 189	9	8	7
			88	104	76
Fighters	Stab/J.G. 52	Bf 109	4	3	3
	I.J.G. 52	Bf 109	40	31	23
	II./J.G. 52	Bf 109	40	31	23
	III./J.G. 52	Bf 109	40	29	22
	13.(Slovak.)/J.G. 52	Bf 109	12	10	6
	15.(Croat.)/J.G. 52	Bf 109	16	–	–
	I.J.G. 51	Fw 190	40	36	20
	IV./J.G. 51	Fw 190	40	35	25
			232	175	122
Night fighters	11./N.J.G. 100	Bf 110	15	8	6
	5./N.J.G. 200	Bf 110	12	18	8
			27	26	14

(continued)

Table II.iv.2. Continued

Category	Unit	Aircraft type	Target strength	Actual strength	Operational
Anti-tank aircraft	Pz.Jg.St./J.G. 51	Hs 129	16	11	10
	8./Pz.Jg.St./St.G. 1	Hs 129	16	5	3
	4.(Pz.)/S.G. 2	Hs 129	16	12	8
	8.(Pz.)/S.G. 2	Hs 129	16	16	4
			64	44	25
Ground-attack Aircraft	Stab/S.G. 1	Fw 190	6	4	4
	II./S.G. 1 (excl. 7. St.)	Fw 190	30	26	21
	7./S.G. 1	Hs 123	12	11	6
			48	41	31
Interceptors (night ground-attack)	Stab/Störkampf Lft. 4	various	3	—	—
	1./Störkampf	He 46	16	14	6
	2./Störkampf	Ar 66	16	15	12
	3./Störkampf	Go 145	16	14	14
	4./Störkampf	Ar 66	16	13	10
	5./Störkampf	He 46	16	14	13
	6./Störkampf	Go 145	16	12	12
			99	82	67
Dive-bombers	Stab/St.G. 2	Ju 87	3	2	1
	I./St.G. 2	Ju 87	39	36	19
	II./St.G. 2	Ju 87	39	39	31
	III./St.G. 2	Ju 87	39	33	18
	III./St.G. 3 (partly with Air Fleet 6)	Ju 87	39	30	21
	Stab/St.G. 77	Ju 87	3	3	3
	I./St.G. 77	Ju 87	39	41	31
	II./St.G. 77	Ju 87	39	39	28
	III./St.G. 77	Ju 87	39	38	30
			279	261	182
Bombers	Stab/K.G. 3	Ju 88	4	1	1
	I./K.G. 3	Ju 88	37	41	26
	II./K.G. 3	Ju 88	37	36	25
	Stab/K.G. 27	He 111	4	2	2
	II./K.G. 27	He 111	37	34	22
	III./K.G. 27	He 111	37	30	18
	14.(Eis.)/K.G. 27	He 111	12	10	8
	Stab/K.G. 51	Ju 88	4	2	—
	I./K.G. 51	Ju 88	37	37	21
	III./K.G. 51	Ju 88	37	21	19
	Stab/K.G. 55	He 111	4	4	3
	II./K.G. 55	He 111	37	33	27
	III./K.G. 55	He 111	37	36	33
	I./K.G. 100	He 111	37	25	20
			361	312	225

3 Aug. 1943	Air Fleet 4 Total strength	1298	1138	796
Allied Hungarian units (deployed in the zone of VIII Air Corps):				
Hungarians	(H)/Staffel	Fw 189	12	12
	1.(F)/Staffel	Ju 88	12	7
	1./Jagdstaffel	Bf 109	12	11
	2./Jagdstaffel	Bf 109	12	5
	Kampfstaffel	Ju 88	12	5
	Kurierstaffel	misc.	12	3
			72	43
				31
Allied Romanian units (deployed in the zone of I Air Corps):				
Romanians	1.(F)/Staffel	Ju 88	12	9
	VII./1 Jagdgruppe	Bf 109	28	34
	V./1 Kampfgruppe	Ju 88	15	14
	Stukagruppe	Ju 87	24	29
	Verbindungsstaffel	misc.	12	9
			91	95
				71

Sources: Operational status reports, 31 July 1943, BA-MA, RL 2-III/725, and documents from the Ulf Balke collection.

most important result of the German counter-attack, however, was that the dangerous gap between the two armies had been closed.<sup>79</sup>

Meanwhile, the whole eastern front was in flames. Ten Soviet army groups were attacking simultaneously. In addition to Voronezh Front and Steppe Front, deployed to the south of Kursk, the attacking forces included Leningrad Front, Volkhov Front, Kalinin Front, West Front, Bryansk Front, Central Front, South-West Front, and South Front. The central point of the Soviet summer offensive was nevertheless Operation RUMYANTSEV, conducted by Voronezh Front and Steppe Front. In the course of the offensive the centre of gravity shifted increasingly towards Kharkov, in the sector of Army Detachment Kempf (Eighth Army). Here the German XI and XXXXII Army Corps were deployed, but they were in an alarming condition. On 6 August the two infantry regiments of 168th Infantry Division, for example, had a combat strength of 95 and 160 men respectively. 6th Armoured Division too, with only six operational tanks, could hardly be considered a respectable reserve.<sup>80</sup> Several Soviet armies were moving simultaneously on the prestigious target of the industrial metropolis of Kharkov. They were 53rd, 57th, and 69th Armies, 7th Guards Army, and Rotmistrov's 5th Guards Armoured Army, which operated as the spearhead. General Konev, the commander-in-chief of Steppe Front, planned an encirclement operation and launched an attack on the city's outer defensive ring on 12 August.

<sup>79</sup> KTB OpAbt OKH, 20 Aug.1943, BA-MA RH 2/3061; A.Gr. Centre, 'Lage der Nachbararmeen: Lage vom 20.8.' (drawn up on 21 Aug.1943), fo. 378, BA-MA RH 19-II/179; KTB Fourth Armoured Army, 18 to 21 Aug.1943, BA-MA RH 21-4/130; KTB Eighth Army, 17 to 21 Aug.1943, BA-MA RH 20-8/84; KTB III Armoured Corps, 18 to 21 Aug.1943, BA-MA RH 24-3/93; BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2073, 43-5; Nipe, *Decision in the Ukraine*, 309-26; Glantz and House, *The Battle of Kursk*, 251.

<sup>80</sup> BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2075, 22, app. 15.

Consequently, General Kempf warned of the imminent danger of enclosure and ordered the evacuation of the city, which could not be defended in any case owing to lack of forces. Field Marshal von Manstein concurred with that view.<sup>81</sup> But Hitler ordered that Kharkov ‘must be held at all costs’,<sup>82</sup> fearing that its fall could have an unfavourable political effect on the attitudes of Turkey and Bulgaria.<sup>83</sup> This provoked the opposition of the OKH General Staff. On 13 August Lt.-Col. Kielmansegg recorded in his diary: ‘Today yet another typical Führer order that makes me see red: Kharkov must be held at all costs!’<sup>84</sup> There ensued another dispute between Hitler and the generals. The Führer repeatedly issued orders to hold out that conflicted with the operational reality. Manstein, however, was not prepared to ‘sacrifice six divisions for questionable political considerations’, and declared he ‘would rather lose a city than an army’.<sup>85</sup> On 14 August Kempf reported that the overstretched front could no longer be held. The weak 161th Infantry Division, for example, had to defend a section 52 kilometres wide with no reserves available at all. The order to hold Kharkov would therefore result in the encirclement of two army corps and a new Stalingrad.<sup>86</sup>

Thereupon Hitler relieved General Kempf of his command and replaced him by General Otto Wöhler. On 16 August he ‘promoted’ Army Detachment Kempf to Eighth Army, though without being able to strengthen it accordingly. Several components of a full army were still lacking. It is also interesting to see the different yardsticks which Hitler applied to his generals. A few months earlier, in February 1943, a Waffen SS general, SS Obergruppenführer Hausser, had dared to evacuate Kharkov on his own authority despite an explicit Führer order. Yet Hitler had ignored that blatant disobedience, for which he would scarcely have forgiven a general of the ‘conventional’ army.

However, the new commander-in-chief, General Wöhler, took exactly the same line as his predecessor. Declaring that Kharkov could definitely not be held, he demanded its evacuation. In response, Hitler gave permission on 18 August to abandon the city ‘in the event of extreme emergency’.<sup>87</sup> At the same time—which was typical of him—he ordered Wöhler to hold out for a few more days to conceal the fact that he had given way. On the morning of 22 August, Eighth Army HQ reported: ‘There is no doubt that Kharkov must be abandoned [...] The munitions situation is catastrophic. The artillery is already fighting on foot.’<sup>88</sup> Immediately afterwards Manstein gave permission to evacuate the city that night. On 23 August the Soviet units streamed into the Ukrainian industrial metropolis, much of which was totally in ruins. The city had changed hands several times in the space of 22 months. The Red Army had repeatedly suffered bitter defeats in this very city, but the fourth and final battle of Kharkov was now over. According to the

<sup>81</sup> KTB OpAbt OKH, 13 Aug. 1943, BA-MA RH 2/3061; BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2073, 40–2.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.                   <sup>83</sup> Manstein, *Verlorene Siege*, 519.

<sup>84</sup> The author was able to examine Gen. (ret.) Count Kielmansegg’s wartime diary during an interview with him on 20 Apr. 2001.

<sup>85</sup> See Carell, *Verbrannte Erde*, 277.

<sup>86</sup> BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2073, 42.

<sup>87</sup> KTB OpAbt OKH, 18 Aug. 1943, BA-MA RH 2/3061.

<sup>88</sup> BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2075, 35, app. 23.

official Russian account: ‘With the liberation of Kharkov [...] Operation RUMYANTSEV, and along with it the battle in the Kursk salient, came to an end.’<sup>89</sup>

The victorious Belgorod–Kharkov offensive demonstrated impressively that the Red Army had now gained the upper hand in the years-long struggle. Yet measured against the high expectations in the face of an enemy so blatantly inferior in strength, the result was very modest. The thirteen Soviet attacking armies did not succeed in smashing the two German armies, let alone in creating the conditions for the destruction of the southern wing of Manstein’s army group, which was the planned follow-up. The result is all the more sobering when one considers the excessive losses that were the price of victory. According to official figures, personnel losses during the 20 days of battle amounted to 255,566 men, of which 71,611 were classified as ‘irrecoverable’.<sup>90</sup> As almost always, however, the official figures seem far too low, given the wretched Soviet reporting system. Moreover, unusually high loss figures were readily concealed. Filling in the gaps in the figures, which he described as ‘totally incorrect’, a Russian historian arrived at estimated losses of around 500,000 men.<sup>91</sup> Even Stalin, not noted for his excessive sensitivity to ‘human sacrifice’, was enraged this time and accused Vatutin, the commander-in-chief of Voronezh Front, of incurring ‘large, totally unjustified losses’.<sup>92</sup> The personnel losses of Fourth Armoured Army and Eighth Army (Army Detachment Kempf)—at just under 30,000, of whom around 10,000 dead or missing—were astonishingly low in comparison with those on the Soviet side.<sup>93</sup>

The Red Army’s tank losses in this operation were also frighteningly high, though nowhere near as catastrophic as in the Orel counter-offensive. The official figure was 1,864 total write-offs.<sup>94</sup> The exact number of German tank losses is impossible to determine from the fragmentary surviving records, but the rule of thumb, born out by the statistics, that in the battle of Kursk eight Soviet tanks were lost for every German tank destroyed can also be applied with some certainty to the Belgorod–Kharkov operation.<sup>95</sup> Katukov’s 1st Armoured Army had already lost 80 per cent of its fighting vehicles in the defensive phase (Operation CITADEL), and had to be reconstituted. In the following offensive, Operation RUMYANTSEV, it

<sup>89</sup> Shutov and Ramanichev, ‘Ognennaya duga’, 283.

<sup>90</sup> *Grif sekretnosti sniat*, 190.

<sup>91</sup> Sokolov notes astonishing contradictions when comparing the official figures for Operation RUMYANTSEV with those for the operation immediately following at Chernigov–Poltava. If those figures were correct, the huge reinforcements which had arrived in the meantime must have compensated for a large part of the loss of personnel; see Sokolov, ‘The Battle for Kursk’, 81–2.

<sup>92</sup> Stemenko, *Im Generalstab*, 193.

<sup>93</sup> See the statistics of the OKH medical officer in BA-MA RW 6/v. 558. According to the 10-day reports for the two periods 1 to 10 August and 11 to 20 August, the total losses of the two German armies amounted to exactly 25,068 men, of whom 8,933 dead or missing. Over the almost identical duration of Operation RUMYANTSEV, i.e. 3–23 August, total Soviet losses must have been around 30,000, of whom 10,000 dead or missing.

<sup>94</sup> *Grif sekretnosti sniat*, 370.

<sup>95</sup> As Diagram II.IV.1 shows, 1,331 German and 9,294 Soviet tanks were destroyed on the eastern front in July/August 1943. At all events, the ratio of Soviet to German tanks lost in the Kursk salient was disproportionately high.

(together with the units attached to it) lost a further 1,042 vehicles, while continuously being supplied with new tanks in the course of the fighting.<sup>96</sup> The same thing happened to 5th Guards Armoured Army, which had also been newly reconstituted: despite massive tank reinforcements, its strength fell from 543 to only 50. In the course of those 20 days Rotmistrov also lost 60 to 65 per cent of his staff officers and 85 per cent of his company and battalion commanders.<sup>97</sup> Thus, once again, within one-and-a-half months, 5th Guards Armoured Army was almost torn to shreds. It suffered a second 'Prokhorovka' during the advance on Kharkov, when it stormed forward at Hill 252.2 without any reconnaissance and rushed straight into a trap. This time, however, General Rotmistrov was not to blame. Once again the fault lay with Stalin, who had already informed the military attachés of the western Allies that Kharkov had been liberated.<sup>98</sup> Instead of correcting that misrepresentation, he gave orders that Kharkov must be taken without delay, regardless of losses. Paradoxically, in so doing he became the Germans' best ally. A slower but better-considered attack could have caused the front to collapse. As it was, the defending forces were able to repel the uncoordinated attacks with huge losses on the Soviet side, and themselves withdraw in good order.

The official figure of 153 Soviet aircraft lost must be considered an absurd understatement.<sup>99</sup> According to the Luftwaffe's relatively reliable kill reports, the Red Army lost 942 aircraft in the Kharkov sector from 3 to 24 August 1943.<sup>100</sup> The Luftwaffe's losses were low in comparison, with a reported total of 147.<sup>101</sup>

If the military efficiency of a troop unit is judged by the ratio of its losses to those of the enemy, the German defending forces appear in a positive light. In reality they were on the verge of collapse, as is revealed by a status report drawn up by General Wöhler on 2 September:

While we are forced to adopt the most stringent munitions tactics, the enemy has unlimited artillery and grenade-launcher ammunition at his disposal. He [...] is thinning our ranks to such an extent that the main battle line is no longer maintained, and only security units, linked by patrols, can be formed. [...] This morning 39th [Infantry Division] had 6 officers and around 300 men left in battle [...] The commanders report that as a result of exhaustion there is such apathy among the troops that draconian measures are no use and only 'coaxing' has any effect.<sup>102</sup>

<sup>96</sup> Glantz and House, *The Battle of Kursk*, 252.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid. 252 and 425, n. 48.

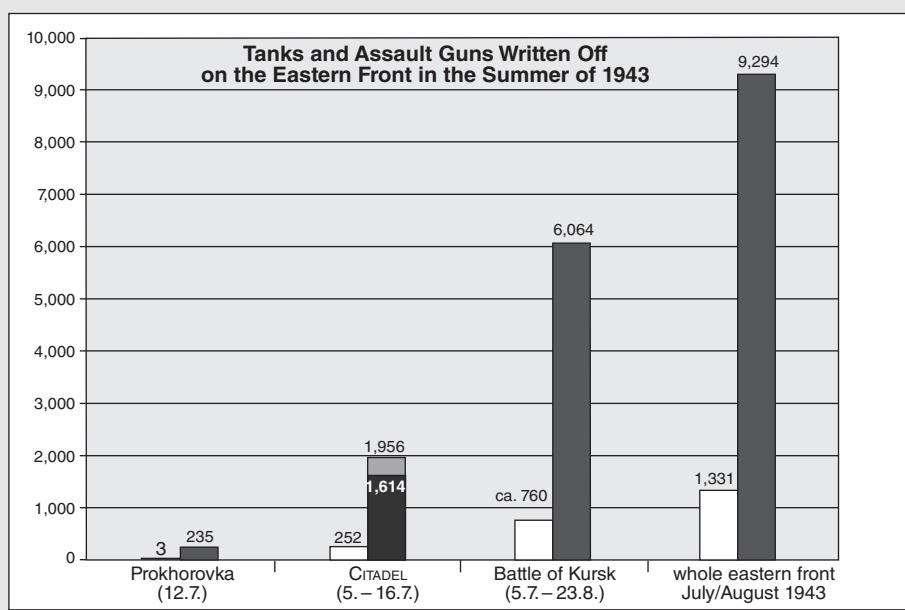
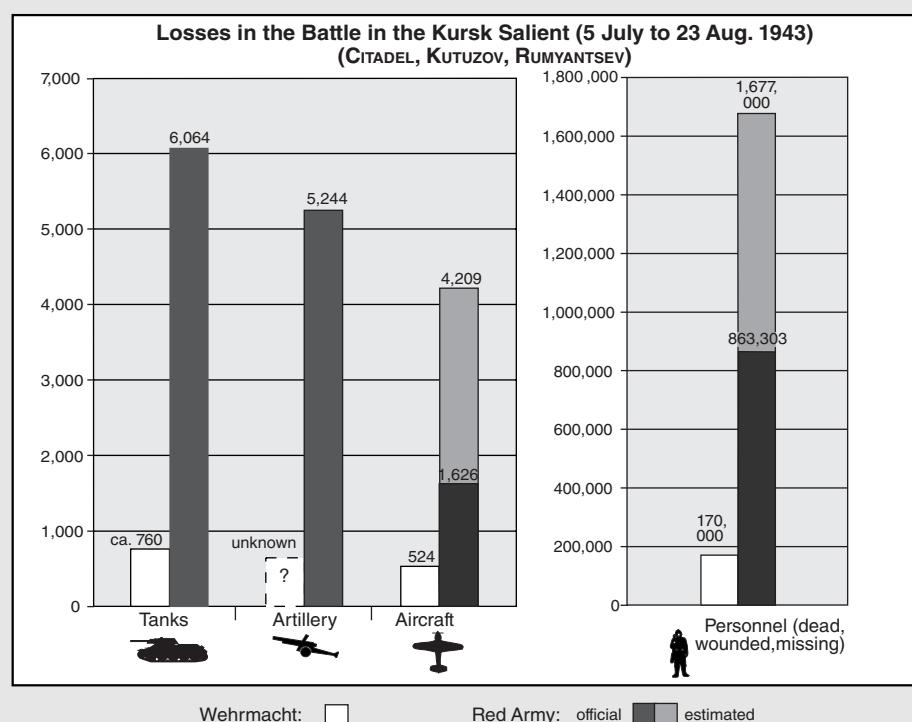
<sup>98</sup> Carell, *Verbrannte Erde*, 275–7.

<sup>99</sup> *Grif sekretnosti sniat*, 370.

<sup>100</sup> 'Tägliche Einsatzübersichten der Luftflotte 4 vom 3.7. bis 10.12.1943', BA-MA RL 7/667; edited by Ulf Balke in the light of further documents from his private archive. As can be seen from the mission reports, in this phase Air Fleet 4 was deployed almost exclusively in the Kharkov area, to the dangerous neglect of other sectors of the front. The real number of Soviet aircraft losses was perhaps even higher, since no records of planes shot down by German ground troops (mainly army anti-aircraft units) nor reports of Soviet losses on their own territory (e.g. accidents) are available.

<sup>101</sup> Gen.Qu.Mstr., 6. Abt.: 'Flugzeugunfälle und Verluste bei den fliegenden Verbänden', BA-MA RL 2-III/1191–1193 (edited by Ulf Balke).

<sup>102</sup> Report by AOK 8, 2 Sept. 1943, quoted in BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2075, 35, app. 23.



© MGFA  
04687-04

Diagram II.IV.1. Losses in the Summer of 1943

### 3. BALANCE OF LOSSES IN THE 'GREATEST BATTLE IN HISTORY'

In view of the multi-front war now beginning, the summer of 1943 was the last time the Wehrmacht was able to concentrate the mass of its forces on the eastern front. As the Red Army had massed a large part of its forces in the Kursk salient, the outcome was the greatest land battle of the Second World War, indeed the greatest in all the history of war. The German offensive, Operation CITADEL, together with the two Soviet counter-offensives, lasted for some 50 days. During that short period of time the Red Army, according to Russian sources, lost 863,303 men, of whom 254,470 dead or missing.<sup>103</sup> These figures, however, appear to be clearly understated. Boris V. Sokolov demonstrates a number of contradictions in the official account and estimates the losses at 1,677,000 men.<sup>104</sup> German losses in the course of these three operations (over the period 5 July to 23 August) amounted to approximately 170,000 men, of whom 46,500 dead or missing.<sup>105</sup>

Kursk was not the 'graveyard of German armour'. Rather, according to official statistics, the Soviet formations lost a total of 6,094 battle tanks and assault guns.<sup>106</sup> On the German side, owing to incomplete records, only the total losses of 252 fighting vehicles during Operation CITADEL can be clearly determined.<sup>107</sup> It is possible, however, to make a comparison of total Soviet and German tank losses on the whole eastern front for the months of July and August. In that period the Red Army lost 9,294 battle tanks and assault guns,<sup>108</sup> while the Wehrmacht lost only 1,331.<sup>109</sup> That gives a German loss ratio of 1 to 7. In the fighting in the Kursk salient, however, the proportion of Soviet losses was much higher. On the one

<sup>103</sup> *Grif sekretnosti sniat*, 188–90. Of these personnel losses, 177,847 were incurred in the defensive phase, 429,890 during the Orel counter-offensive, and 255,566 during the Belgorod–Kharkov counter-offensive.

<sup>104</sup> Sokolov, 'The Battle for Kursk', 83.

<sup>105</sup> As detailed above, the Germans incurred the following losses during the individual operations: CITADEL: 54,182, of whom 11,023 dead or missing; Orel offensive: 86,064, of whom 25,515 dead or missing; Belgorod–Kharkov Offensive: just under 30,000, of whom approx. 10,000 dead or missing. Even if the losses of all German armies (Second Armoured Army, Ninth Army, Second Army, Fourth Armoured Army, Army Detachment Kempf/Eighth Army) in the Kursk area for the whole period of July/August 1943 are added to those for the three above-mentioned operations, we still arrive at a total of only 203,000 men. On this, see the tables in Zetterling and Frankson, *Kursk 1943*, 117, as well as 116 and 129, n. 18.

<sup>106</sup> *Grif sekretnosti sniat*, 370. The breakdown for total write-offs of tanks and assault guns was 1,614 during the defensive phase (Operation CITADEL), 2,586 during the Orel counter-offensive, and 1,864 during the Belgorod–Kharkov counter-offensive. Sokolov, however, estimates the number of tanks and self-propelled guns destroyed during the three operations in the Kursk area at 7,700; see Sokolov, *Tsena pobedy*, 159.

<sup>107</sup> On this, see Chap II.4 above.

<sup>108</sup> The author is grateful for the assistance of the Institute of Military History in Moscow. According to information conveyed by Lt.-Col. Sergei Lipatov and Col. Shabayev, head of the Statistics Department, total Soviet losses in July and August were 9,061 battle tanks and 233 assault guns. The source given is CAMO, F. 38, Op. 11353, d. 1169, 339 and 351. These figures from the Soviet files are very close to the total losses of 9,400 Soviet fighting vehicles calculated by Zetterling and Frankson (*Kursk 1943*, 126).

<sup>109</sup> 'Panzerverluste Ost (5.7.–31.8.1943)', BA-MA RH 10/77 (K 18).

hand, that was where the Germans had concentrated almost all their modern fighting vehicles, such as Panthers and Tigers. On the other, the actions of the Soviet leadership, which committed some grotesque errors, resulted in unnecessarily high losses. The frequently quoted rule of thumb that in the battle of Kursk eight Soviet tanks were lost for every German tank destroyed is by no means an exaggeration. It thus seems realistic to put the German tank losses at an eighth of the Soviet total, that is, at about 760 tanks.<sup>110</sup> It should be emphasized that, in the case of the modern German tanks, only a small proportion of write-offs were due to direct hits on the battlefield. During the withdrawal fighting some of these heavy vehicles which had dropped out for technical reasons could no longer be recovered. In some cases it was no longer even possible to evacuate repair shops near the front line before the advancing enemy arrived.<sup>111</sup> As for artillery weapons, the Red Army lost a total of 5,244 guns and grenade launchers in the Kursk salient,<sup>112</sup> but no figures for German losses are available.

The most difficult puzzle is the number of aircraft losses. The official Soviet data, according to which only 1,626 planes<sup>113</sup> were lost during the three operations, seems completely unbelievable. Sokolov estimates the losses at a minimum of 3,300.<sup>114</sup> Since the official Soviet figures for their own aircraft losses must be deemed irrelevant to scholarly research, one has to turn to the German kill reports.<sup>115</sup> The fact is that in the Luftwaffe the conditions for recognition of a kill were decidedly strict,<sup>116</sup> and a comparison shows that the real number of kills was usually much higher than the official Soviet figure.<sup>117</sup> According to the kill reports recognized by the German services, Air Fleets 4 and 6 shot down at least

<sup>110</sup> This figure is also suggested by the partially surviving German files.

<sup>111</sup> Manstein, *Verlorene Siege*, 518.

<sup>112</sup> *Grif sekretnosti sniat*, 370. The Soviet artillery losses are broken down as follows: defensive phase (CITADEL) 3,929, Orel counter-offensive 892, Belgorod–Kharkov counter-offensive 423.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid. 370; the breakdown given there is as follows: defensive phase (CITADEL) 459, Orel counter-offensive 1,014, Belgorod–Charkov counter-offensive only 153!

<sup>114</sup> Sokolov, 'The Battle for Kursk', 83–4.

<sup>115</sup> How unrealistic the official Soviet loss figures are is shown *inter alia* by the following report from the Air Fleet 6 flight liaison officer to Second Army: 'Today [24.8.] the air units and anti-aircraft artillery of Air Fleet 6 reached a total of 2,500 kills since the beginning of heavy defensive combat in the Orel area on 5 July 1943'; see Flivo–AOK 2, 26 Aug 1943, BA-MA RH 20-2/1337. Moreover, this report refers to only one of the two air fleets deployed in the Kursk area.

<sup>116</sup> See the account in Obermaier, *Die Ritterkreuzträger*, 241: 'For every kill a statement by a witness in the air or on the ground was required if the wreckage of the plane in question or captured crew member did not constitute clear proof. The kill report was endorsed by the hierarchical superior or rejected at that level. It was then transmitted to the wing staff and finally to the relevant department of the commander-in-chief of the Luftwaffe.'

<sup>117</sup> According to Obermaier (*ibid.*), German fighters shot down 25,000 British, American, and French aircraft, which means that was the number of kills recognized on the German side. After the war, however, it transpired that, according to official figures, British and American losses amounted to 40,000 aircraft. The discrepancy is even more striking on the eastern front. While German fighter aircraft recorded only 45,000 recognized kills (see *ibid.*), the Soviet air force lost a total of 106,400 planes (*Grif sekretnosti sniat*, 360). Nor can this huge gap be filled by the considerably lower number of planes shot down by anti-aircraft artillery.

4,556 planes from 5 July to 24 August.<sup>118</sup> Of these, 4,209 were attributed to the three operations in the Kursk salient.<sup>119</sup> In any event, these figures do not include aircraft shot down by independent units or Soviet losses on their own territory (due to accidents or technical failure). Such losses 'behind the front' should not be underestimated, since in the Second World War they sometimes accounted for almost a third of total losses. On the German side, the two air fleets lost a total of 609 aircraft on the whole front from 5 July to 24 August.<sup>120</sup> If only the three above-mentioned operations are taken into account, the total comes to 524.<sup>121</sup>

The Red Army's horrendous losses during the battle of Kursk are only the tip of the iceberg. In the course of the war, according to its own figures, it lost 96,500 tanks and assault guns,<sup>122</sup> 106,400 aircraft,<sup>123</sup> and 317,500 cannon and grenade launchers.<sup>124</sup> The number of personnel losses is rather vague. It oscillates between the official figure of 11,285,057 'irrecoverable losses'<sup>125</sup> and estimates of up to 26,400,000 dead (military personnel).<sup>126</sup> As a Russian historian concluded at the end of the Soviet era, Stalin drove his armed forces 'from victory to victory, but at the cost of unimaginable losses that weigh heavily on the population to this day'.<sup>127</sup> The German officers were unable to understand why, when an unsuccessful attack had come to a halt, the Soviet commanders continued and repeated it with unbelievable obstinacy. This resulted in battles of attrition in which the German defenders inflicted 'not infrequently twenty times as many losses as they themselves incurred'.<sup>128</sup> In Basil Liddell Hart's judgement:

Such abortive assaulting is a common tendency in armies [...] but it was naturally accentuated in the Red Army by Soviet conditions, Russian traditions, and Russia's resources. Under such a system only the best established commanders could venture to exercise a sense of the limits of the possible, while the abundance of human material encouraged lavish expenditure. It was easier to be ruthless in sacrificing men than to risk the wrath of the man above.<sup>129</sup>

With regard to these mass attacks, another British author wrote: 'There was little finesse about these tactics. They relied on mass, and succeeded mainly because the

<sup>118</sup> Air Fleet 4 daily mission reviews, 3 July to 10 Dec. 1943, BA-MA RL 7/667. For Air Fleet 6, see daily reports by Second Army flight liaison officer, 1 July to 30 Sept. 1943, BA-MA RH 20-2/1337; edited by Ulf Balke in the light of further documents from his private archive.

<sup>119</sup> See the kill reports referred to in the previous chapters: CITADEL (1,961 aircraft), Orel (1,705 aircraft), and Kharkov (942 aircraft).

<sup>120</sup> See the previously mentioned loss tables in the files BA-MA RL 2-III/1191–1193 (Gen.Qu. Mstr., 6. Abt., 'Flugzeugunfälle und Verluste bei den fliegenden Verbänden').

<sup>121</sup> Ibid. As detailed in earlier chapters, the Luftwaffe lost 159 aircraft in Operation CITADEL, 218 during the Orel operation (KUTUZOV), and 147 during the Kharkov operation (RUMYANTSEV).

<sup>122</sup> *Grif sekretnosti sniat*, 358.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid. 360; 88,300 of these were combat aircraft.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid. 356.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid. 144.

<sup>126</sup> Sokolov, 'The Cost of War', 187. In comparison, Korol ('The Price of Victory', 423) puts the Red Army's losses at over 23 million men.

<sup>127</sup> Pronko, 'Die sowjetische Strategie', 325.

<sup>128</sup> Tippelskirch, *Geschichte des Zweiten Weltkrieges*, 335.

<sup>129</sup> Liddell Hart, *History of the Second World War*, 621–2.

Germans were forced to concede ground because of the pressure of sheer weight of numbers against them.<sup>130</sup>

Unlike the Wehrmacht, which set great store by good training and sought to integrate new soldiers in a 'tight-knit community', the Red Army treated its human resources at times like mass-consumption material. In the second half of the war the male population of the liberated areas was frequently dispatched to the front without any training worth mentioning. Tractor drivers straight from work on collective farms suddenly found themselves deployed as tank drivers or even tank commanders.<sup>131</sup> If, however, as German officers reported, such 'cobbled-together, untrained' units came up against a still-intact German formation, 'their losses were horrendous, beyond all imagining'.<sup>132</sup> Yet the system succeeded: 'More Russians kept coming, like waves from the sea.'<sup>133</sup>

In the extreme circumstances of 1941, when the Soviet system was fighting for survival, such ruthless behaviour towards its own population was perhaps understandable. But the regime continued that practice throughout the war. It was still manifest 'at five minutes to midnight' in the 'Berlin Operation', when the outcome of the war was no longer in doubt. Daily tank losses in that offensive were even greater than in the battle of Kursk.<sup>134</sup> The concept of a 'pyrrhic victory' was apparently unknown to the Soviet leadership. As the American tank general George Patton—himself known for his 'gung-ho' attitude—once declared: 'No bastard ever won a war by dying for his country. He won it by making the other poor dumb bastard die for his country.'<sup>135</sup>

In fact, American commanders were astonishingly economical in their use of the troops entrusted to them. During the Second World War, in all the theatres of operations, the US armed forces suffered 405,399 fatal casualties, of which only 291,577 were 'battle deaths'.<sup>136</sup> Such striving for efficiency, however, was decidedly foreign to the Red Army leadership system. Losses were irrelevant as long as the objective was achieved.

One of the most telling analyses of the phenomenon was made by the Russian military historian Nikolai M. Ramanichev:

Where lie the causes of such high Soviet losses? First and foremost, in the Stalinist regime. Even before the war, Stalinist repression had created an atmosphere in the armed forces that made independent action by commanders a mortal danger. The Red Army disciplinary regulations of 1942 state that: 'For a subordinate, an order from a commander and superior is law. It must be obeyed unconditionally, to the letter, and promptly.' In the event of disobedience [...] the commander was duty bound to take all coercive measures, including the use of weapons. In so doing, he bore no

<sup>130</sup> Messenger, *The Blitzkrieg Story*, 218.

<sup>131</sup> Nipe, *Decision in the Ukraine*, 329, see also 327.

<sup>132</sup> Cartier, *Der Zweite Weltkrieg*, ii. 696–7. <sup>133</sup> Ibid. 697.

<sup>134</sup> Solovev, 'Kutuzov', 11. <sup>135</sup> *The Greenhill Dictionary*, 130.

<sup>136</sup> The author is grateful to his American colleague, Dr John T. Greenwood, Chief Historian for the Office of the Surgeon General, US Army, Falls Church (Virginia), for supplying these figures.

responsibility [...] for the consequences of his actions. On the contrary, if he failed to implement that regulation he was court-martialled.<sup>137</sup>

The consequences of this attitude are described by Boris Sokolov as follows:

The Stalinist system created not only the habit of carrying out any order without objection, but also—and more frighteningly—that of issuing orders without thinking. The tragic paradox was that the pursuit of victory at all costs—with soldiers falling in the belief that they were bringing victory closer—only further delayed the end of the war. Had our losses been fewer, and the ratio to those of the Germans more favourable [...] our superiority in human resources would have enabled us to smash the German war machine and achieve victory quicker than actually happened.<sup>138</sup>

That was the main reason why the Soviet summer offensive of 1943 fell so far short of its objectives. The Red Army had planned to advance to the border of East Prussia in 1943,<sup>139</sup> but managed to do so only a year later. Although the Soviet leadership was in the stronger position, it had decided not to attack first but to let the German forces run up against the Kursk bulwark. The idea was to ‘bleed’ the enemy until he was decisively weakened, and then destroy him in a counter-offensive.<sup>140</sup> But things turned out differently. The defenders suffered considerably more losses than the attackers. When the counter-offensive started, the armoured units, eroded in pointless frontal attacks, were too weak to impart the necessary momentum. Moreover, the counter-attacks took place too soon, in the wrong place, that is, at the enemy’s strongest position, and were uncoordinated. Following the battle of Kursk, all five Soviet armoured armies had to be withdrawn from the front and transferred to the Stavka reserve for rehabilitation.<sup>141</sup> The declared aim of destroying the enemy had not been achieved. Instead, the German forces were able to withdraw in good order to the other side of the Dnieper.

It is significant that, despite the enormous forces deployed, the battle of Kursk at first played a relatively subordinate role in Soviet historiography. The reason must have been that a number of painful leadership errors had been made and the success seemed rather modest in relation to the enormous losses incurred. Not once, for example, did the Soviet forces succeed in enclosing large enemy formations. It was not the battle of Kursk, but the operation following, the crossing of the Dnieper, which was accounted as one of the major battles of the Great Patriotic War. While at Kursk only 180 officers, NCOs, and other ranks were awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union, 2,438 men received that distinction in connection with the crossing of the Dnieper.<sup>142</sup>

<sup>137</sup> Ramanichev, ‘Die Schlachten bei Kursk’, 62–3, where we also find another important statistic: more than 900,000 members of the Red Army were sentenced during the war, of whom 365,000 in the first year alone.

<sup>138</sup> Sokolov, ‘O Sootnoshenii poter’, 122.

<sup>139</sup> Stemenko, *Im Generalstab*, 171.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid. 161; Shutov and Ramanichev, ‘Ognennaya duga’, 254 ff. As already mentioned, Boris Sokolov is highly critical of the renunciation of a preventive strike; see Sokolov, ‘The Battle for Kursk’, 74 ff. and 86–7.

<sup>141</sup> Pronko, ‘Die sowjetische Strategie’, 322.

<sup>142</sup> Sokolov, ‘The Battle for Kursk’, 72.

The judgement changed with the seizure of power by Nikita Khrushchev, who had been a member of the Voronezh Front's military council at the time of the battle. In the 1960s the tendency to rank Kursk as the third decisive battle of the war, after Moscow and Stalingrad, came to dominate.<sup>143</sup> The Kursk operation was not only intensively documented but was paraded as a shining example of the invincibility of the Red Army and the superiority of the Soviet system. General Sergei Matveyevich Shtemenko, for example, wrote of the preparatory phase in the spring of 1943: 'The high moral virtues displayed by the members of our armed forces from the first days of the war were further strengthened. Our men matured. Their trust in the wisdom of the Party and the indestructibility of the Soviet order grew firmer by the day.'<sup>144</sup> The judgement of the historian Boris Solovev was particularly pathos-ridden. He celebrated the battle of Kursk as not only an outstanding example of the 'logical nature of Soviet victories'<sup>145</sup> but a 'triumph of the Soviet art of war'.<sup>146</sup> For him, the battle expressed the military and economic superiority of socialism. The tank battles at Kursk were portrayed, and increasingly idealized, in books, films, and paintings. Prokhorovka, above all, became legendary.

Only after the end of the Soviet era was it possible to call the iconic status of Kursk into question. A decisive role in the reappraisal was played by *Grif sekretnosti sniat*, a work which we have frequently had occasion to quote. Although, as has since become clear, many of the loss figures it contains are far too low, publication of that book caused a sensation at the time. What then became apparent, as many veterans had always suspected, was how horrendously high the 'price of victory' had been.<sup>147</sup> Seen in that light, the battle of Kursk was not so much a proof of the superiority of the Soviet system as a demonstration of its defects.<sup>148</sup> Sokolov went further, showing that even those shocking loss figures are still far too low and need substantial upward correction.<sup>149</sup> He draws the following conclusion: 'At the tactical level, and partially at the operational level too, the Wehrmacht won the battle of Kursk. But the Red Army's superiority in human and material resources was so overwhelming that the Germans were unable to achieve a full operational or strategic victory.'<sup>150</sup>

From the German perspective, it had already been clear before the battle of Kursk that the war could no longer be won. It was now obvious that the German forces were no longer even strong enough to achieve a major operational success. In the ironic words of an American historian, 'Blitzkrieg was at an end'.<sup>151</sup> A feeling of despair spread through the German operations staffs. On 12 August 1943, Lt.-Gen. Heusinger, chief of the OKH operations division, already knew that

<sup>143</sup> Töppel, *Die Offensive gegen Kursk*, 77.

<sup>144</sup> Stemenko, *Im Generalstab*, (1st edn., 1969), 156.

<sup>145</sup> Solovev, *Wendepunkt*, 13. <sup>146</sup> Ibid. 93 and 112.

<sup>147</sup> On 12 July 1993, the 50th anniversary of the tank battle of Prokhorovka, the author took part in a military history conference in Moscow on the battle of Kursk, at which it became clear that by no means all veterans of the battle agreed with the official Soviet version.

<sup>148</sup> See also Töppel, *Die Offensive gegen Kursk*, 80 and 85.

<sup>149</sup> See Sokolov, 'The Battle for Kursk'. <sup>150</sup> Ibid. 88.

<sup>151</sup> Glantz and House, *The Battle of Kursk*, 254.

'the war has entered a more critical stage'.<sup>152</sup> That feeling was expressed even more dramatically in the Naval War Staff's overall situation report of 20 August 1943: 'Since last year Germany, at the strategic level, has become the anvil rather than the hammer.'<sup>153</sup>

Yet the German strategists and operators were not the only ones staring helplessly at their situation maps. Ordinary troops at the front were also seized by despair. Antonius John, a soldier in an armoured unit who had lived through the Kursk inferno, found himself, in his own words, on a 'battlefield where every tree and bush was in shreds, and the ground was strewn with broken guns, burnt-out tanks, and wrecked aircraft'.<sup>154</sup> In a chapter of his autobiography entitled 'Hell', he concludes 'that events were on an apocalyptic scale. Scenes like the end of the world threatened to drive a person witnessing them to despair unless he had nerves of steel. Verdun, the Somme, and Stalingrad are comparable dates from history [...] The visibly apocalyptic dimensions seem to warrant the term "hell". Its use is justified when the presence of extreme fear and the absence of any escape combine in collective metaphysical despair'.<sup>155</sup>

<sup>152</sup> Meyer, *Heusinger*, 234.

<sup>153</sup> Salewski, *Die deutsche Seekriegsleitung*, iii. 371. On this, see Schreiber, *Der Zweite Weltkrieg*, 101.

<sup>154</sup> John, *Kursk*, 159. <sup>155</sup> Ibid. 17.

# PART III

## THE PERPLEXITIES OF WAR

*The Soviet Theatre in German Policy and Strategy  
from the Summer of 1943*

Bernd Wegner



# I. The Soviet Theatre of War in German Policy and Strategy from the Summer of 1943

After it was shown in July and August that the German front was no longer able to withstand the counter-attacks of an increasingly superior enemy, it became clear to the commander-in-chief and dictator in the course of the late summer that his hope of ‘imposing our will’ on the Allies through unyielding defence of the Reich’s strategic forefield would not be fulfilled. He who, through all the preceding weeks and months, out of concern for his prestige and the morale of the troops and the civilian population had shunned any admission that the situation was untenable and rejected the recommendation of his operational advisers to withdraw the exhausted troops to a shortened front line further to the rear, was now forced to realize that for Germany the war was irrevocably lost. In view of the extremely unfavourable balance of manpower and material resources between the warring parties, the United States’ massive intervention in the war, the failure of the U-boat campaign, and the collapse of Germany’s allies, German conduct of the war, as the commander-in-chief himself later admitted, had increasingly assumed ‘the character of an irresponsible game of chance’. Against that background he finally declared at the end of September that tactics and the army itself were ‘at an end’, that ‘final defeat was inevitable’, and that Germany must now seek an immediate armistice. ‘The fate of the German people’, he explained, ‘was for me too high a stake. The war had to be ended.’<sup>1</sup> The commander-in-chief of whom we are speaking was not Hitler but Erich Ludendorff. His demand for an armistice was dated 28 September 1918 and signalled the end of the First World War.

Twenty-five years later the memory of that end to the war was fresher than ever in the minds of friend and foe alike. In Vienna the date ‘1918’ was found painted on the walls of houses after Stalingrad. In Berlin it was invoked in leaflets.<sup>2</sup> From the beginning to the end of the war, Hitler himself repeatedly intoned that the traumatic days of November 1918 would never recur.<sup>3</sup> The fatal comparison between 1918 and 1943 seems to have impressed itself all the more strongly on his contemporaries as, sensitized by the daily terror of the bombing campaign and

<sup>1</sup> Foregoing quotes from Ludendorff, *Meine Kriegserinnerungen*, 551, and Thaer, *Generalstabsdienst*, 233 (30 Sept. 1918). See also Kaehler, *Zur Beurteilung Ludendorffs*; Kaehler, *Vier quellenkritische Untersuchungen zum Kriegsende 1918*; Kitchen, *The Silent Dictatorship*, 247 ff.; Delbrück, *Ludendorffs Selbstporträt*.

<sup>2</sup> *Wollt Ihr den totalen Krieg?*, 335 (11 Feb. 1943).

<sup>3</sup> On this, see the numerous quotations in Binion, *Hitler among the Germans*, 101 ff.

the no-longer-concealable German setbacks on all fronts, they became increasingly conscious of the Allies' superior resources. Summarizing the mood of parts of the population, the Security Service (SD) wrote: 'Then [in 1918] as now, America was at the back of people's minds. The United States had hardly got going, and Germany was already fagged out.'<sup>4</sup>

In the late summer of 1943 the governments in London and Washington also had reason to recall those events. Faced with the question whether the German government was likely to sue for peace in the present situation as in October 1918, the intelligence experts of the two countries made interesting but different assessments.

On the British side, above all, an optimistic view was taken. There was particular concern to avoid a repetition of the erroneous estimation of German intentions that had been made in August 1918, when the prime minister, David Lloyd George, told the Imperial War Cabinet to expect the war to last for a long time yet, and the German offer of an armistice came a few weeks later as a total surprise. That erroneous analysis, as the Joint Intelligence Sub-Committee concluded 25 years later,<sup>5</sup> had been the result of a situation assessment which focused too narrowly on the purely *military* balance of forces. If Germany's overall political and economic situation was taken into account, the picture was quite different, both in 1918 and in 1943. Notwithstanding the undoubted differences in Germany's internal and external situation in the two wars, the assumption must be that, all in all, Germany was in a worse position now, at the beginning of September 1943, than it had been in the same month a quarter of a century earlier. The conclusion was obvious:

[W]e may see the defection of the rest of Germany's European allies and, even before the end of this year, convince the German people and military leaders that a continuation of the war is more to be feared than the consequences of inevitable defeat. With the German people no longer willing to endure useless bloodshed and destruction, and the military leaders convinced of the futility of resistance, there might be, as in Italy, some sudden change of regime to prepare the way for a request for an armistice.<sup>6</sup>

The American Joint Intelligence Staff considered that events could conceivably develop in accordance with the foregoing scenario, but were unlikely to do so. In Washington much greater emphasis was placed than in London on the differences from the situation in 1918. In particular, the following arguments were adduced:<sup>7</sup>

- (1) The material and nutritional conditions of the German population were decidedly better than in 1918, and a comparable collapse of morale was hardly to be expected despite the stress caused by the bombing. Furthermore, the German government had quite different means at its disposal

<sup>4</sup> *Meldungen aus dem Reich*, xii, No. 359, 4800 (15 Feb. 1943).

<sup>5</sup> War Cabinet/Joint Intelligence Sub-Committee, 'Probabilities of a German Collapse', J.I.C. (43) 367 Final, 9 Sept. 1943, NA, ABC 381 Germany, 29 Jan. 1943, Sec. 1-A.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* 3 (para. 11).

<sup>7</sup> 'Probabilities of a German Collapse', J.I.C. 112/2, 21 Oct. 1943, NA, ABC 381 Germany, 29 Jan. 1943, Sec. 1-A.

today than in the First World War for preventing a political articulation of demoralization trends at home from spreading to the fighting troops, whose morale, unlike in the late summer of 1918, was largely intact.

- (2) In terms of war objectives and policy, the Allied camp was less cohesive than in 1918. This time, moreover, it was harder for the Anglo-Saxon powers to provide logistic support for the operations of their main ally on the continent of Europe—in 1918 France, now the Soviet Union. All of this was likely to strengthen Germany's expectation that, even in a seemingly hopeless situation, continued resistance would pay in the long term.
- (3) In the event of capitulation, Germany had much more reason to fear retaliation measures by the Allies than at the end of the First World War. For that reason, the Allied demand for unconditional surrender constituted a much higher psychological barrier than President Woodrow Wilson's 'fourteen points', particularly as it had been hammered into the German people that the peace conditions of 1918/19 were responsible for all their misfortunes, and that another capitulation would have similar consequences, only much worse.
- (4) It was hardly conceivable that the present National Socialist leadership would ever accept the demand for unconditional surrender. But even if that leadership were to lose political control as a result of growing war-weariness and a mounting desire for peace on the part of the population, it could scarcely be assumed that the transition to a leadership more flexible on the peace question would take place as rapidly and smoothly as in 1918.<sup>8</sup>

With hindsight it is, of course, easy to see the defectiveness of the British assessment of the situation and the comparatively greater realism of the American analysis.<sup>9</sup> More noteworthy is the fact that *both sides* left out of consideration factors whose full weight can be appreciated only at a historical distance. What at once seems significant in this connection is the great difference between Hitler's position and that of Ludendorff. The latter, whose personal responsibility was confined, at least formally, to the *military* conduct of the war, had in the German government a civilian leader to whom he could address his armistice demand—a leader who assumed responsibility for its political implementation and consequences, and even—as the success of the 'stab in the back' legend shows—took upon itself the responsibility for military defeat. In contrast, the lone and solely responsible Führer of 1943 had no other authority to which he could shift blame for defeat. In a situation where political and military leadership were vested in a single person, an opposition no longer existed, and full control of all areas of life had become the

<sup>8</sup> A JIC study of 21 Sept. 1943 entitled 'Possible Patterns of German Collapse' also deemed the likelihood of a revolutionary overturn in Germany relatively small, whereas the machinery of totalitarian control was found to be highly effective.

<sup>9</sup> A discussion of the reasons for such differing British and American assessments of the situation would take us too far from our subject. It would nevertheless be an interesting exercise, since it would probably reveal very different perceptions of the European totalitarian regimes on the part of Washington and London.

hallmark of the regime, its representative had, from the outset, scarcely any chance of surviving the foreseeable military and political collapse, as the representatives of the top military leadership had managed to do after 1918.

Hitler thus had very good reason to engage in the irresponsible game of chance with the fate of the Reich which Ludendorff had rejected in his day.<sup>10</sup> As he never tired of stressing, this war—especially its central component, the fight against the Soviet Union—was totally different from all previous wars. This time it was not a battle in which ‘the stakes could be recovered later’, but an ‘existential struggle’.<sup>11</sup> This, so it appears, was no propaganda cliché but Hitler’s deepest conviction. He had embarked on his genocidal war against ‘Jewish Bolshevism’ as precisely that—an existential struggle. The idea—indeed, the certainty—that such a war would now inevitably be waged against its instigator and his regime, left the dictator no room for any kind of armistice.<sup>12</sup> Imagining the ‘Jewish extermination squads already advancing behind the oncoming Soviet divisions’,<sup>13</sup> Hitler and the staunch propagator of his world-view saw no alternative to further radicalization of Germany’s conduct of the war.

That radicalization became the hallmark of all the political and strategic efforts of the ‘Thousand-Year Reich’ during the barely two years left to it. The consequences are everywhere perceptible. Thus, the Holocaust, as shown above all by the examples of France, the Ukraine, and Hungary, was stepped up even further,<sup>14</sup> while at the same time Germany’s own war losses, although long since unbearable, rose to dizzy heights. Under increasing pressure, German occupational rule now quite openly imposed a regime of exploitation and terror in western and northern Europe too, and intensified its hand-in-hand cooperation with the most extreme collaborationist elements.<sup>15</sup> People within the Reich now felt the consequences of the move to ‘total war’ in everyday life, though remarkably late and less drastically than beyond its borders.<sup>16</sup> At the same time, under the pressure of seemingly unending setbacks, the framework conditions for the military conduct of the war changed at a strategic level. Hitler’s tendency to strategic and operational dogmatism increased as his options for action diminished, while the readiness of wide circles of the military leadership to accept his orders weakened as the spectre of German defeat began to take concrete shape. This tension resulted, at first under the surface, in a permanent crisis of leadership that finally erupted in the events of 20 July 1944.

<sup>10</sup> Ludendorff, in his time, had also been called a ‘brilliant gambler’ by Scheidemann. Hans Delbrück, who justifiably doubted Ludendorff’s ‘brilliance’, defended him with the significant comment: ‘Every commander-in-chief must be to some extent a gambler and dare to tempt providence. Frederick the Great is said to have called the outcome of every battle a “gamble”, and Clausewitz attributed Blücher’s prowess as a military commander to his gambler’s nature’ (Delbrück, *Ludendorffs Selbstporträt*, 40).

<sup>11</sup> Meeting with Ion Antonescu on 10 Jan. 1943, quoted in *Staatsmänner und Diplomaten*, ii. 202.

<sup>12</sup> ‘A life-and-death struggle cannot be resolved by diplomatic trickery,’ Hitler declared to the Hungarian regent on 16 Apr. 1943 (*ibid.* 248). On the connection between German conduct of the war and the Holocaust, see Jersak in *Germany and the Second World War*, ix/I. 325–32.

<sup>13</sup> Goebbels, *Goebbels-Reden*, ii. 178 (18 Feb. 1943).

<sup>14</sup> See also Umbreit in *Germany and the Second World War*, v/II. 261–77.

<sup>15</sup> See *ibid.* 278–91. <sup>16</sup> See Blank in *Germany and the Second World War*, ix/I. 371–90.

## II. From the Setbacks in the Summer of 1943 to a Permanent Crisis of Leadership

July 1943 was a cruel month for the German leadership. The balance-sheet for those few weeks was disastrous. The carefully planned Operation CITADEL attacks had failed, the western Allies had landed in Europe, two of Germany's biggest and most splendid cities, Cologne and Hamburg, had been largely reduced to ashes, and fascism had been swept away in Italy, its country of origin. As the month drew to a close, Orel in the east and Sicily in the south, were about to fall, and Italy, Germany's most powerful European ally, was about to leave the war. Each of these disasters had worrying features of its own. In the case of CITADEL, there was the realization that for the first time in the war a German summer operation had stalled from the outset and the units involved had been forced onto the defensive. 'That was something we had not been used to before in summer,' Joseph Goebbels noted resignedly.<sup>1</sup> Also in the case of the British air raids on Hamburg in the last weeks of July, the propaganda minister could only admit that the destruction of the metropolis 'lacks all historical precedent. It is raising almost insuperable problems [...] I think most of Hamburg has to be written off.'<sup>2</sup> In the space of a few days Operation GOMORRAH had claimed 30,000 victims and destroyed a third of the Hanse city's housing stock. Hundreds of thousands left homeless had fled in panic or been evacuated.<sup>3</sup>

The fear, not to say expectation, that a comparable firestorm would soon or later be unleashed on the German capital was now ever present. Particularly worrying from the strategic viewpoint was the fact that, as in the case of the air raids on Cologne a few weeks earlier, the German anti-aircraft defences had managed to shoot down very few enemy planes (barely 2 per cent in all). Fortress Europe, even at its very heart, was thus revealed as a fortress without a roof. That impression was strengthened by further heavy air raids in the same month on Duisburg, Essen, Saarbrücken, Remscheid, and Düsseldorf. The Anglo-American air war against Germany took on a new dimension in those months. In 1943 close on 230,000 tonnes of bombs fell on the German Reich and the bordering territories, far more

<sup>1</sup> Goebbels, *Tagebücher*, pt. 2, ix. 126 (19 July 1943).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. 190 (29 July 1943).

<sup>3</sup> In another respect the air raids had failed, since only five months later Hamburg's armament production was back to 80% of its original level. It was only the air raids of 1944 which led to permanent collapse; see *Germany and the Second World War*, ix/I. 385–90 and vii. 43–55.

than twice as many as in the whole of the war until then. Yet compared with the figures for 1944 and 1945 it was only the beginning.<sup>4</sup>

Hitler himself seemed not directly affected by all this. Unlike Winston Churchill, who liked demonstrative visits to heavily bombed areas of London, the German dictator was noticeably concerned to keep his distance from the everyday suffering both of his troops and of the civilian population. More than any other politician, he owed his rise and success to direct contact with the masses, but now he sought to barricade himself against them. He avoided any contact with victims of the war, took refuge in the virtual world of his headquarters, and even resisted his propaganda minister's urgent pleas to address his people over the radio in their hour of greatest need.<sup>5</sup> It was not until the end of June, after a few comparatively restful months at Obersalzberg, that Hitler returned to the East Prussian 'Wolf's Lair' in which he had spent most of his time since the beginning of the war against the Soviet Union. He hardly left it again until February 1944. The fact that within the already heavily guarded Security Zone I, inhabited by only a few hundred staff and servants, a further special security zone was now established around the Führer bunker<sup>6</sup> seems an act of symbolic importance in this context.<sup>7</sup>

The dictator's self-imposed isolation not only reflected his deep concern about his popularity and security. It was also an essential precondition for relentless continuation of the war, regardless of the consequences. 'Here we see the major divisions and stages of the air war,' a perceptive observer of the atmosphere in Führer headquarters remarked, 'but we are rather shy of the details. There is no room here for the suffering of individuals.' Thus details of the air raids were no longer discussed at the 'Führer conferences', 'only really far-reaching production shortfalls, transport disruptions, etc.'. The result was 'a paralysis of feeling as a natural defence mechanism. The heart simply no longer fully responds.'<sup>8</sup> Invited to dinner in the company of Wilhelm Keitel, Alfred Jodl, and Hans-Heinrich Lammer, a secretary working in Security Zone II who had just come back from heavily bombed Berlin also realized that in those circles 'they have no idea what life is like in a bombed city'.<sup>9</sup> She found behaviour in the central military staffs wholly unnatural: 'People become so restricted and one-sided. Of course there are exceptions. But this "elite staff", always together, always outside real life, concerned only with situation maps and strategic problems!'<sup>10</sup>

That distance was precisely what Hitler needed in order to be able—regardless of the increasingly bad news on the political and military fronts—to continue projecting the optimism on whose effect he had always been able to count. That

<sup>4</sup> For details, see Friedrich, *Der Brand*, and *Germany and the Second World War*, vii. 7–453.

<sup>5</sup> Not until 10 Sept. 1943 did Hitler feel 'able to speak to the German people again without having to lie to myself or to the public' (radio address of 10 Sept. 1943, quoted in Domarus, *Hitler. Reden und Proklamationen*, ii. 2035). From 1944 Hitler no longer appeared in public as a speaker.

<sup>6</sup> See Seidler and Zeigert, *Die Führerhauptquartiere*, 205 and 345 ff.

<sup>7</sup> On Hitler's withdrawal from the public eye, see also *Germany and the Second World War*, ix/II. 238–42.

<sup>8</sup> Hartlaub, *Im Sperrkreis*, 166.

<sup>9</sup> Feuersänger, *Mein Kriegstagebuch*, 167 (20 Mar. 1944).

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. 162 (16 Mar. 1944).

optimism, which many people deeply internalized, was much more than just a propaganda trick. During the second half of the war it became nothing less than the state ideology of the declining regime. Germany's 'total war' was a war of total rhetoric. Its main purpose was to reinterpret defeats as victories, setbacks as opportunities, and sadness as pride. Immediately after the strategically disastrous collapse of Germany's U-boat campaign in the Atlantic, for example, Karl Dönitz announced a 'new U-boat war'. On 8 June he informed the divisional and departmental heads of his high command that '1943 is proving a hard nut to crack. 1944, 45, 46, and 47 will be better.'<sup>11</sup>

In the same way, as Hitler tried to tell his propaganda minister in all seriousness, 'our military setbacks in the east are to be equated with political victories', since they laid bare Stalin's aims and 'the inner tension in the enemy camp'.<sup>12</sup> Italy's withdrawal from the war now also appeared less as a strategic disaster than a necessary act of purification. It meant only that the half-hearted and lazy had been eliminated. However regrettable the personal fate of Benito Mussolini, 'a leopard can never change its spots', and fascism had always been 'a superficial phenomenon' which had never taken roots in the Italian people, which consisted 'only of idlers and cowards'.<sup>13</sup> The Allied air raids on Berlin, which had been increasing since the autumn of 1943, were now also seen as an act of providence. The Reich capital had to 'suffer wounds' for the sake of its future.<sup>14</sup> They were 'the great prelude to its historic destiny'. While the material damage would soon be repaired after the end of the war ('the Führer has already drawn up great plans for the reconstruction of Berlin'), the 'glory won by Berlin' in this time of destruction would never be lost.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, as Goebbels asserted not without reason, aerial terror strengthened the morale of the civilian population and welded the nation more closely together. The bombed-out civilians were, 'so to speak, the proletarians of the air war'. As such, they experienced National Socialism 'more as givers than as takers'.<sup>16</sup> Hitler welcomed the fact that the bombed-out population included generals and admirals, since it only made them 'tougher and more unyielding'. This bizarre perception of the suffering of millions caused by the bombing war is matched by the fact that the dictator apparently considered himself 'fortunate' to see his Reich chancellery and Munich residence hit by Allied bombs.<sup>17</sup>

Despite all his outward optimism, Hitler had few illusions about the real situation. The war could be won 'only if I can inflict more destruction on the enemy than he on us'. But that required more than simply the strength of will and nerves of steel which Hitler propagated as the recipe for victory.<sup>18</sup> Convinced that

<sup>11</sup> Quoted in Salewski, *Die deutsche Seekriegsleitung*, ii. 294.

<sup>12</sup> Goebbels, *Tagebücher*, pt. 2, xi. 157 (25 Jan. 1944). <sup>13</sup> Ibid., x. 518 (20 Dec. 1943).

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. 399 (1 Dec. 1943). At the same time, Roland von Hösslin, a young officer who witnessed the heavy British night-time air raids of 22 to 23 November, wrote to his parents that 'in the last few nights Berlin has become a wilderness' (letter dated 25 Nov. 1943, quoted in Kageneck, *Zwischen Eid und Gewissen*, 85).

<sup>15</sup> Goebbels, *Tagebücher*, pt. 2, x. 513 (20 Dec. 1943).

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. 516 (20 Dec. 1943).

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. 401 (1 Dec. 1943).

<sup>18</sup> *Lagebesprechungen im Führerhauptquartier*, 296 (situation at noon on 25 July 1943).

'the Englishman' would cease his terror bombing of Germany only if 'his own cities are destroyed, and only then',<sup>19</sup> he repeatedly demanded retaliation strikes against the British Isles. But he knew very well that the Luftwaffe's forces were insufficient. 'The fact is, we now count ourselves lucky if we manage to find London,' he observed mockingly during a situation conference. He himself, however, had no remedy for that 'shameful' state of affairs.<sup>20</sup> Hitler was not exaggerating. At around 3,000 tonnes of bombs in 1943, German 'counter-terror' against Britain amounted to just over 1 per cent of the tonnage dropped on 'Fortress Europe' by British and American pilots. This, however, did not prevent the Führer from enthusing about the coming destruction of London well into 1944. The V1s and V2s, to be followed by a V3 and a V4, were going to reduce the British metropolis to a heap of rubble.<sup>21</sup> As Albert Speer confided to his diary a few years after the war, he recalled:

Hitler's ordering showings in the Chancellery of the films of burning London, of the sea of flames over Warsaw, of exploding convoys, and the rapture with which he watched those films. I never saw him so worked up as toward the end of the war, when in a kind of delirium he pictured for himself and for us the destruction of New York in a hurricane of fire. He described the skyscrapers being turned into gigantic burning torches, collapsing upon one another, the glow of the exploding city illuminating the dark sky.<sup>22</sup>

What agitated the dictator in the summer of 1943 even more than his own impotence with regard to the devastation of German cities was the fall of his closest ally. The circumstances in which fascism simply 'expired' in Italy, its country of origin, 'undramatically' from one day to the next<sup>23</sup> were eminently suited to arouse concern about his own future. The reports from the SS Security Service on the mood of the population strengthened that concern. Nor had anyone forgotten that the end of the last great war had been initiated by the collapse of a German ally. Goebbels considered 'the fact that enemies of the regime believe an authoritarian state can be overthrown in such manner' to be in itself 'extremely dangerous'.<sup>24</sup> Heinrich Himmler also thought the arrest of the Duce and the fall of fascism could give rise to a 'very serious psychological situation' in Germany too, which could encourage defeatist elements to take similar action.<sup>25</sup> The unexpected appointment of the Reich Leader SS as the new minister of the interior shortly before, on 20 August 1943, showed more emphatically than any words how critical the Nazi leadership considered the internal situation of the Reich to be.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.      <sup>20</sup> Ibid. 295.      <sup>21</sup> See Speer, *Spandau: The Secret Diaries*, 43 (18 Mar. 1947).

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. 76 (18 Nov. 1947). On Hitler's related long-range bomber projects, see also Thies, *Architekt*, 136 ff.

<sup>23</sup> Thus Weizsäcker, *Die Weizsäcker-Papiere*, 344 (26 July 1943).

<sup>24</sup> Goebbels, *Tagebücher*, pt. 2, ix. 184 (28 July 1943).

<sup>25</sup> Thus in an address to Reichs- and Gauleiters on 6 Oct. 1943, Himmler, *Geheimreden*, 171; see also Goetzinger, 'Italien', 157 ff.

Although Hitler had long shown concern about the threatening destabilization of fascism in Italy, he was unquestionably surprised and deeply shaken, both personally and politically, by the news of the fall of his long-standing role model and closest personal ally. At noon on 25 July 1943 (the day the air raids on Hamburg began), when the first rumours about the events in Italy began to filter through, Hitler's opinion of Pietro Badoglio's new government was already firmly established: 'They declare, they fight, but it's treachery! Let's be clear about it: it's naked treachery'<sup>26</sup> Hitler still hoped to restore fascism in Italy with German support. The efforts to do so<sup>27</sup> are particularly noteworthy in this context as a further exemplary illustration of the unbridgeable contradiction which had developed between strategic and operational thinking or, to put it another way, of the regime's diminishing ability to solve political problems by military means.

A conference between Hitler and Field Marshal Hans Günther von Kluge, the commander-in-chief of Army Group Centre, on 26 July is highly instructive in this respect. On the face of it, the meeting was about the situation on the eastern front, especially in the Orel bulge, but in fact it was Mussolini's resignation the previous day which determined the course of the discussion. The dictator made it abundantly clear to his field marshal that, for him, Italy took absolute priority and that he was determined to 'intervene like lightning here too, just as I did in the case of Yugoslavia [in the spring of 1941 – B.W.]'. The Italian resistance was 'next to nothing', the fascists would 'come over to our side', and Mussolini himself would be 'freed immediately by paratroops'.<sup>28</sup> But, as Hitler sought to make clear to his visitor, he could act 'only if I can transfer some more units from east to west'.<sup>29</sup> The troops Hitler had in mind were the SS divisions deployed with Army Group South, which seemed to him predestined for intervention in Italy, not only because of their striking-power<sup>30</sup> but also because of their political orientation. To be able to withdraw them from the front as soon as possible, the dictator, otherwise so reluctant in matters of retreat, was now ready to give up the whole Orel bulge without further ado and, if necessary, effect 'other minor shortenings of the front'.<sup>31</sup>

For Kluge, whose troops were engaged in a desperate defensive struggle in the central sector,<sup>32</sup> the evacuation of Orel could be considered, but not the withdrawal of powerful combat units: 'My Führer! I must point out that nothing can be withdrawn at the moment. It is completely out of the question at the present time'<sup>33</sup> Hitler's continued insistence ('but it has to be possible, nevertheless') finally rebounded on him when the discussion turned to one of the fundamental shortcomings in the conduct of the war in the east for which Hitler was personally responsible, namely the lack of well-fortified rear positions. Kluge pointed out that

<sup>26</sup> *Lagebesprechungen im Führerhauptquartier*, 313 (evening situation, 25 July 1943); see also Kershaw, *Hitler 1936–1945: Nemesis*, 594 ff.

<sup>27</sup> See Part VI, Chapter IV of the present volume.

<sup>28</sup> *Lagebesprechungen im Führerhauptquartier*, 370. Preparations for the liberation of the imprisoned Duce in fact began without delay and, after some hitches, resulted in success on 12 Sept. 1943.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid. <sup>30</sup> 'The SS Corps is worth twenty Italian divisions.' See *ibid.* 383.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.* 371. <sup>32</sup> See Part IV, Chapter II of the present volume.

<sup>33</sup> *Lagebesprechungen im Führerhauptquartier*, 374.

a transfer of troops for deployment in Italy would be possible in the event of withdrawal to the Hagen Line, a shortened defensive line to the east of Bryansk. That line, however, was still under construction and, in the field marshal's opinion, would be ready for occupation in three to four weeks at the earliest—much too late for the dictator's 'lightning intervention' in Italy.

In this case, as in others, it proved impossible to resolve the tension between what Hitler saw as strategic necessity and what his generals considered operationally feasible. This contradiction had been characteristic of the regime's conduct of the war from the outset, but during the first two war years it had mostly been overcome because decisions of the dictator which were worrying from the professional military viewpoint could be mitigated at operational level—though often at the cost of high risk-taking—thanks to the Wehrmacht's superiority in materials, personnel, and operational skill. Since the winter crisis of 1941/2 it had been more seldom possible to surmount the contradiction in that manner. The cases of Moscow, Stalingrad, North Africa, and Kursk had demonstrated emphatically that political-strategic decisions taken without regard to actual operational possibilities necessarily resulted in military disasters. If those events had not yet led to an open systemic crisis of the Nazi state, it was primarily because Hitler's 'seizure of military power',<sup>34</sup> that is, his step-by-step appropriation of ever-more military leadership functions, had deprived his potential critics in the army and Wehrmacht of all leadership responsibility of their own. In that respect Hitler rightly regarded the break-up of a unified Wehrmacht command as a specific achievement and, particularly at the present time, a 'major facilitation' of his rule.<sup>35</sup>

Even the events of the summer of 1943, devastating as they were in every respect, did not lead to open conflict between the political and military leadership. They nevertheless contributed to the increasing estrangement between Hitler and his generals. The Führer now complained more and more frequently that the generals had no confidence in him.<sup>36</sup>

The loss of trust was mutual. Since Stalingrad, so it seems, more and more generals had already begun to have serious doubts about the prospects for German victory, despite all the assurances from the leadership.<sup>37</sup> Such doubts were common above all among the Army General Staff, whose chief, General Kurt Zeitzler, was finding it harder and harder to reconcile personal loyalty and professional insight since the failure of Operation CITADEL, and increasingly regretted 'not chucking it all in after Stalingrad'.<sup>38</sup> In fact, Zeitzler was 'probably the most loyal chief of the

<sup>34</sup> The expression comes from Stumpf, *Die Wehrmacht-Elite*, 303.

<sup>35</sup> File note by Himmler's secretary, Rudolf Brandt, concerning a comment made by Hitler to the Reich Leader SS on 7 Sept. 1943, NA, Washington, Microfilm Series T-175/Roll 88/Image 1418.

<sup>36</sup> Goebbels, *Tagebücher*, pt. 2, ix. 137 (21 July 1943).

<sup>37</sup> See Krechel, 'Die Bewertung der Kriegsniederlage', 44 ff.

<sup>38</sup> Thus Zeitzler's former adjutant, Lt.-Col. Günther Smend, in a report dated 1 Aug. 1944 on the attitude of younger officers in the General Staff to the top leadership, repr. in Kageneck, *Zwischen Eid und Gewissen*, 175–81, here 177. The report, written in prison after 20 July, is problematic from the viewpoint of source criticism but gives a good idea of the changing climate in the Army General Staff.

General Staff [...] the Führer could have wished for,<sup>39</sup> and not only in the opinion of his own adjutant. But at the same time he was the direct hierarchical superior of all the officers in his staff who—like Eduard Wagner, Erich Fellgiebel, Hellmuth Stieff, Rudolf Gercke, and Adolf Heusinger<sup>40</sup>—expressed their criticism of the dictator's command decisions ever more bluntly in their growing awareness that the war was hopeless. As heads of department in the central headquarters for conduct of the war in the east, they thus helped, deliberately or not, to create a climate in which 'the officer corps of the operations departments, influenced by the attitude of their superiors, no longer fully believed in the Führer and his military competence'.<sup>41</sup>

Notwithstanding individual variations in the reaction of members of the military elite to the increasingly apparent perplexities of the war, four typical patterns of behaviour can be identified, as a rough simplification. By far the most frequent reaction seems to have been resigned, often fatalistic, 'internal flight'. Conscious of being anyway unable to influence the overall course of the war, the individual retreated into the kernel of his own area of responsibilities and confined himself to doing, under increasingly difficult conditions, what he considered to be his duty. For Germany's strategic position, the behaviour of this group was significant in that, deliberately or inadvertently, it helped to prolong a war that had long become hopeless and a National Socialist rule that was bankrupt in every respect. The opposite reaction of the few officers who, through 'external flight' into military resistance, sought to destabilize the National Socialist system and shorten the war<sup>42</sup> will not be discussed in detail here, but it should be noted that a whole year would pass before the 'liberating act' of 20 July.

For the second half of 1943 the behaviour of another group of generals was of greater significance. We refer to those front-line commanders-in-chief who, like Erich von Manstein first and foremost,<sup>43</sup> were not prepared to give the war up for lost, but hoped to put German military operations on a new footing before it was too late by means of organizational reforms that would disentangle the political from the military conduct of the war. Convinced that Hitler would rather give up supreme military command than face total defeat, the commander-in-chief of Army Group South made repeated attempts to have his ideas on reorganization discussed at the highest level. He first took the opportunity to confront Hitler with his proposals directly on 3 September 1943, when he and Field Marshal von Kluge went to the 'Wolf's Lair' to discuss the distribution of forces on the eastern front. The outcome is described as follows in his memoirs:

I am sorry to say that the talk von Kluge and I had with Hitler proved quite profitless. Hitler declared that no forces could be spared either from other theatres or from Army

<sup>39</sup> Ibid. 177. Goebbels testifies repeatedly to a similar appreciation of Zeitzler by Hitler; Goebbels, *Tagebücher*, pt. 2, ix. 265 (10 Aug 1943) and 581 (23 Sept. 1943).

<sup>40</sup> On Heusinger's attitude in detail, see Meyer, *Adolf Heusinger*, 214 ff.

<sup>41</sup> See Kageneck, *Zwischen Eid und Gewissen*, 176.

<sup>42</sup> On military resistance in detail, see *Germany and the Second World War*, ix/1. 771–925 (Heinemann).

<sup>43</sup> On Manstein's strategic optimism, see also Stahlberg, *Die verdammte Pflicht*, 310, 315, and 339, and Wrochem, *Manstein*, 95 ff.

Group North. His reaction to the idea of creating a unified command by transferring responsibility for all theatres of war to the Chief of the General Staff was equally negative, his contention being that even the latter's influence could make no difference or improvement to the overall conduct of the war. Hitler, of course, was fully aware that the ultimate object of proposing a chief of staff who would be responsible for all theatres of operations was that he (Hitler), while continuing to have the final say, should relinquish the conduct of operations as such. He was just as much opposed to this as he was to renouncing the command in the east by appointing an actual commander-in-chief for that theatre.<sup>44</sup>

In the following months Manstein repeatedly brought up his proposals in personal discussions with Hitler, but never met with anything other than icy rejection.<sup>45</sup> While Manstein's pressing insistence was proof of personal courage, it also showed his considerable naivety in many respects. That applies not only to his hope—which appears wholly unfounded, at least in retrospect—that German defeat could still be averted and that the Allies could be fought to a draw,<sup>46</sup> but also to his conviction that he had found the key to success in the appointment of a chief of staff with overall responsibility. Manstein was well aware of Hitler's fatal tendency to compensate for the lack of an overall strategy by ever-more individual, often questionable, operational decisions: he had experienced it far too often to overlook it. What he did fail to understand, however, was the specific 'grammar' of a National Socialist Führer state, which rendered impossible the organization of warfare by society as a whole, that is, as a rational balance of civil and military, political, economic, and operational interests.

For this reason, not least of all, his attempts at intervention had the opposite effect to that intended. What Manstein saw as a system-inherent last-minute attempt to save the situation appeared to Hitler and his paladins as unsolicited interference by an overambitious, ideologically unreliable field marshal. The star of Germany's uncontestedly most gifted military commander began to fade rapidly. Hitler, as Goebbels noted gleefully, now likened Manstein to Hjalmar Schacht.<sup>47</sup> Unlike Field Marshals Kluge and Küchler, who were considered 'loyal and reliable' despite their age, as well as Ewald von Kleist, who also stood 'on firm intellectual

<sup>44</sup> Manstein, *Verlorene Siege*, 525. Other commanders made proposals similar to those of Manstein and Kluge. Thus Field Marshal von Kleist, the C-in-C of Army Group A, in an undated draft of a proposal to Hitler, evidently from late autumn 1943, to 'create a Chief Quartermaster-General of the Wehrmacht who, at one and the same time, is your permanent representative as Commander-in-Chief of the Army, works in accordance with your instructions and is in charge of operations in the east, has advisory powers with regard to all other theatres of war, is responsible to you for organization of the army and manpower deployment, and to whom the Commander of the Replacement Army is consequently also subordinated, etc. Under him there is a Chief of the Wehrmacht General Staff and the Chief of the Army General Staff.' BA-MA RH 19 V/2, fos. 31–5, here 34–5.

<sup>45</sup> See Manstein, *Verlorene Siege*, 572 ff., and Stahlberg, *Die verdammte Pflicht*, 354.

<sup>46</sup> See Manstein, *Verlorene Siege*, 474.

<sup>47</sup> Goebbels, *Tagebücher*, pt. 2, x. 177 (27 Oct. 1943). Schacht, the former Reich minister of finance and president of the Reich bank, was removed from office before the war as politically unreliable.

and spiritual ground', Manstein was 'an exceptionally skilful and versatile tactician, a clever professional, but lacking any world-view and any inner firmness or strength of character'.<sup>48</sup> It is hardly surprising that 'the weak and militarily questionable leadership of Field Marshal von Manstein' was 'getting on the Führer's nerves', so that in October—far too late, in Goebbels' opinion—he was already thinking of putting Walter Model in command of Army Group South instead of Manstein.<sup>49</sup>

Only a few months later Hitler's relations with Manstein suffered further owing to an incident that was harmless in itself, but is, for that very reason, particularly significant for the Führer's relationship with his generals. In an address to field marshals and commanders-in-chief on 27 January 1944, Hitler called for the unconditional loyalty of his listeners. 'If I should ever be deserted as supreme Leader,' he declared, 'I must have as the last defence around me the entire officer-corps, who must stand with drawn swords rallied round me.'<sup>50</sup> Manstein's interjection at that point—'And so it will be, *mein Führer*'—probably sprang from the field marshal's irritation at the implication of latent disloyalty on the part of himself and his colleagues.<sup>51</sup> The icy exchange left the listeners irritated and the speaker furious. On 30 March, two months after the incident and a year after his operational triumph in restabilizing the eastern front, Manstein was relieved of his command and not used further till the end of the war.<sup>52</sup> 'That finally settles the Manstein problem, the most critical problem in our conduct of the war,' Goebbels commented.<sup>53</sup>

The propaganda minister was wrong. The most critical problem in the conduct of the war was not Manstein but the continuing crisis of confidence between the political and military leadership. The latter served increasingly as a buffer between Hitler's criticism, inflamed by constant military setbacks on the one hand, and on the other, the discontent felt among the troops themselves as the physical and

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.      <sup>49</sup> Ibid. 165 (25 Oct. 1943).

<sup>50</sup> Quoted in Kershaw, *Hitler 1936–1945: Nemesis*, 618–19, which gives the most accurate account of the incident in terms of source criticism. See also the slightly different wording in Domarus, *Hitler. Reden und Proklamationen*, ii. 2080. Consistent with the image he employed here, in the last days before his suicide Hitler actually considered going out to meet the Russian enemy weapon in hand and falling on the steps of the Reich chancellery; see Fest, *Der Untergang*, 81.

<sup>51</sup> Quoted in Kershaw, *Hitler 1936–1945: Nemesis*, 619; see also in detail the not entirely reliable account in Manstein, *Verlorene Siege*, 579 ff., as well as Stahlberg, *Die verdammte Pflicht*, 354 ff. Goebbels spontaneously assumed that Manstein's interjection was due to 'his need to clear himself from some suspicion' (Goebbels, *Tagebücher*, pt. 2, xi. 189, 28 Jan. 1944). Opinions also differ as to the effect of Manstein's interruption on the other listeners. While Manstein in his memoirs (*Verlorene Siege*, 580) speaks of relief on the part of his comrades 'who found Hitler's words just as provocative as I did', the propaganda minister, informed by Schmundt, noted that Manstein's interjection was 'received rather negatively' by the other generals (Goebbels, *Tagebücher*, pt. 2, xi. 196, 29 Jan. 1944). That must have been true of Heusinger at least; the chief of the Army General Staff's operations department found Manstein's intervention incomprehensible. For him, as he wrote to his wife, it showed how the field marshal 'was clinging to his position and almost betrayed himself in the process. I was once again very disappointed' (letter dated 19 Jan. 1944, quoted in Meyer, *Adolf Heusinger*, 256).

<sup>52</sup> That this manifestation of insubordination and Manstein's subsequent dismissal were by no means coincidental is attested by a diary entry by Schmundt dated 27 Jan. 1944. See also Manstein, *Verlorene Siege*, 614 ff. On Manstein's continued impact in German memoir literature, see Wrochem, *Manstein*.

<sup>53</sup> Goebbels, *Tagebücher*, pt. 2, xi. 589 (31 Mar. 1944).

psychological pressure on the units at the front became permanent. It was therefore no isolated incident when front-line commanders and staff officers pressed for 'the soldier's work to be left to trained soldiers in all its aspects, i.e. the creation, maintenance, and employment of the soldier's tool. The soldiers in charge should be assigned their tasks,' wrote a staff chief from the area of Army Group A,<sup>54</sup> 'and the execution of those tasks should be left to them. Obviously, the tasks must correspond to existing possibilities and not derive from wishful thinking. In this way, I believe, we will be able to sort out the mess. But it's high time! If we don't re-establish sustainable, stable relations, confidence in the top leadership will disappear, and that will be the end.'

These fears were by no means imaginary, as is shown clearly by the dispute that broke out in the autumn of 1943 over the evacuation of Crimea. In the last weeks of October, General Erwin Jaenecke, the commander-in-chief of Seventeenth Army, openly threatened to ignore the orders from above and, in the absence of sufficient defence forces, to evacuate the peninsula on his own authority. The term 'Fortress Crimea', he declared, was 'a pure fiction'. Significantly, he justified his determination to disobey orders on the grounds that 'he had already experienced at Stalingrad how a commander-in-chief had tortured himself with self-accusations in front of his five commanding generals, and had no wish to go through that a second time'.<sup>55</sup> Only with difficulty was Kleist, the commander-in-chief of Army Group South Ukraine, able to talk the general out of his intended insubordination. Although the principle of obedience to orders won out,<sup>56</sup> the lack of confidence in the political leadership was unmistakable. The commander of Seventeenth Army was not the only one who found the Führer order to hold the Crimea incomprehensible. Kleist too, who as field marshal and commander-in-chief of an Army Group was one of the highest-ranking officers on the eastern front, was unable to defend the substance of the decision in the absence of more detailed background information. 'I am not aware of your intentions and do not know, *mein Führer*, how you envisage the continuation of operations on the eastern front,' he complained. 'I even have only a rough idea of the situation on the fronts of the other Army Groups.' All the civilian agencies and firms in the zone of operations, and apparently even the enemy, knew more than he.<sup>57</sup>

For Hitler and the National Socialist potentates who surrounded him, it was quite clear who was responsible for the crisis of confidence. If the troops were 'assailed by the spirit of doubt', it was simply because of 'the moral failure of our generals in the face of the crises in the east'. With some exceptions, they 'cannot

<sup>54</sup> This and the following quotation come from the undated draft of a letter, apparently from the late autumn of 1943. It was probably written by an unnamed Seventh Army general staff chief and addressed to his commander-in-chief, BA-MA RH 19 V/2, fo. 39.

<sup>55</sup> Thus in a telephone conversation with the commander-in-chief of Army Group A on the evening of 28 Oct. 1943, according to an undated memo plus Annexes 24 and 29, BA-MA RH 19 V/2, fos. 4, 14, and 16.

<sup>56</sup> 'The *only* issue here is obedience,' the chief of staff of Army Group A told the staff chief of Seventeenth Army in a telephone conversation on the evening of 28 Oct. 1943, BA-MA RH 19 V/2, fo. 18.

<sup>57</sup> Undated notes for a Führer address in late autumn 1943, BA-MA RH 19 V/2, fo. 31.

cope with the pressure'.<sup>58</sup> Once again it was Goebbels who called things by their name: 'The Führer, as he has frequently told me, considers the generals a disgusting bunch. They have no inner attachment to him; they keep their distance and are, for the most part, always in a hurry to make difficulties. Stalin has an easier time of it. He had the obstructive generals shot in good time, so they no longer get in his way'.<sup>59</sup>

It was no accident that conflict between the political and military leadership, hardly visible from the outside, grew extremely acrimonious long before the events of 20 July. Neither the outright rejection which the pragmatically intended 'reform' efforts of Manstein and others encountered, nor the massive suspicion which the army generals felt they were under, can be explained only by the increasingly desperate war situation and the sensitivity which it induced in all parties. In this situation the activities of the National Committee for a Free Germany (*Nationalkomitee Freies Deutschland*, or NKFD), formed in Moscow in July, and the League of German Officers (*Bund Deutscher Offiziere*, or BDO), founded two months later, contributed considerably to the unease of the German leadership. The NKFD manifesto, published to great propaganda effect on 13 July 1943, not only called for the overthrow of Hitler but sketched the outlines of a democratic post-war Germany. Basic rights of the individual and economic liberalism were to be restored, race laws abolished, and war criminals punished—under a flag coloured not black, red, and gold but, significantly, black, white, and red. The Wehrmacht's task was to prepare for Germany's rebirth by an orderly withdrawal to the borders of the Reich.<sup>60</sup> More worrying in its propaganda effect than the signatures of high-ranking KPD functionaries on the manifesto, which was thereby vitiated from the outset, was the fact that, in General Walther von Seydlitz-Kurzbach, an army commander highly decorated in two world wars, the BDO had the representative of a distinguished Prussian officer family at the very top.<sup>61</sup> As such, Seydlitz appeared as the very epitome of the class of national conservative army generals who, despite their long-standing political affinity with the Nazi regime, were only partially receptive to its ideology. 'It speaks very strongly against the German officer class', Goebbels commented, 'that such persons once had a place in its ranks'.<sup>62</sup>

One of the main reasons for the great fury directed at Seydlitz ('an out-and-out unpatriotic, treacherous swine'<sup>63</sup>) was that Hitler and his particularly challenged propaganda chief were quite helpless against the activities of the BDO. Convinced of the ideological unreliability of the top generals, as well as that of some of the troops and other sectors of the population, they tended to overestimate the impact of the calls for insurrection and revelations (especially about Stalingrad) disseminated over the radio, in Russian and British leaflets, and in personal letters to former comrades. According to an activity report of the chief of the Army's personnel department dated

<sup>58</sup> Goebbels, *Tagebücher*, pt. 2, xi. 227–8 (3 Feb. 1944).

<sup>59</sup> Ibid. 403 (4 Mar. 1944).

<sup>60</sup> A good overview of the state of research on this subject is provided by *Das Nationalkomitee Freies Deutschland*. On the conflicts to which NKFD and BDO agitation gave rise, see also Frieser, *Krieg hinter Stacheldraht*.

<sup>61</sup> See Reshin, *General zwischen den Fronten*.

<sup>62</sup> Goebbels, *Tagebücher*, pt. 2, xi. 240 (5 Feb. 1944).

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

12 September 1943, thanks to the ‘devilish skill’ of the Soviets and their ‘highly sophisticated methods’, ‘the activities of this League have gradually given rise to a danger that has to be taken seriously’.<sup>64</sup> Nevertheless, Hitler and Goebbels were reluctant to react offensively to the attacks since, as the Führer put it, ‘if we confront them publicly we will have to polemicize against the generals’.<sup>65</sup> This resulted in the paradoxical situation that, while the BDO made little impact on the officer corps of Germany’s eastern army which was its actual target,<sup>66</sup> it was not entirely unsuccessful with regard to the Nazi leadership, whose growing mistrust of its own military elite it permanently strengthened.

The rift could not be healed, as became clear in the course of the winter of 1943/4, but it could be patched over by cosmetic measures. Typical of these was the idea of a declaration of loyalty signed by all the army’s field marshals, which was thought up and implemented jointly by Hitler’s chief adjutant, Rudolf Schmundt, and Goebbels. The declaration was read out to the Führer by Gerd von Rundstedt, the longest-serving field marshal, at a reception arranged for all the top generals at Obersalzberg on 19 March.<sup>67</sup> The purpose of the document, which Manstein later described as ‘quite unnecessary from a soldier’s point of view’,<sup>68</sup> was to demonstrate that ‘the army distanced itself from General Seydlitz in the harshest possible manner and severed the ties between them’. Otherwise the danger would remain ‘that even well-meaning observers would see the Seydlitz case as a crisis of the whole army’.<sup>69</sup>

The greater the estrangement between sections of the military elite and the political leaders, the more decisive was the role of a fourth group of officers—those who, despite all the military setbacks, and indeed strengthened by them, were determined to follow their Führer unconditionally. Their motives varied greatly: ideological fanaticism, an understanding of the role of the military marked by the traumatic experience of 1918, and not infrequently careerism, opportunism, and corruption<sup>70</sup> were all determining factors. The typical representatives of this group were men like Eduard Dietl and Ferdinand Schörner, front-line generals of the middle or younger generation. Schörner joined the Nazi Party demonstratively at the beginning of 1943, was awarded the Golden Party Badge only a few weeks later, and in March 1944 was swiftly appointed ‘Chief of the Army’s National Socialist

<sup>64</sup> Schmundt, *Tätigkeitsbericht*, 96.

<sup>65</sup> Quoted in Goebbels, *Tagebücher*, pt. 2, xi. 403 (4 Mar. 1944). In the spring of 1944, however, when it became generally known that senior officers were also members of the NKFD/BDO, the tactics were changed to exemplary punishment in order to deter others from imitating them. In April 1944 Seydlitz was sentenced to death *in absentia* by the Reich court martial. This was followed by sentences against other leading members of the NKFD/BDO (incl. Hadermann, Korfes, and Lattmann), which were then made public.

<sup>66</sup> See in detail Heider, ‘Reaktionen’.

<sup>67</sup> On its impact, see Goebbels, *Tagebücher*, pt. 2, xi. 514–15 (20 Mar. 1944).

<sup>68</sup> Manstein, *Verlorene Siege*, 602–3. Goebbels, on the other hand, claimed that ‘it was Manstein, above all, who had pressed for the declaration to be signed and for it to be read out to the Führer in the presence of all the field marshals’. See Goebbels, *Tagebücher*, pt. 2, xi. 455 (11 Mar. 1944).

<sup>69</sup> Goebbels, *Tagebücher*, pt. 2, xi. 368–9 (29 Feb. 1944).

<sup>70</sup> On the long-underestimated importance of Hitler’s financial grants as an instrument for the political disciplining and corruption of his generals, see Ueberschär and Vogel, *Dienen und Verdienen*.

Guidance Staff at the OKH'.<sup>71</sup> Dietl, who had long been a loyal follower of Hitler, closed ranks with the Party even more strikingly than Schörner. Known for his affable nature and common touch, he spoke on public platforms in Bavaria and Austria in the autumn of 1943. On the steps of Munich's Hall of the Marshals, on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of Hitler's attempted putsch, he proclaimed: 'The soldier at the front knows that in this battle the fate of the German people is at stake, that the Jews of the whole world have united to destroy Germany and Europe [...] the war is a merciless providential purifier. I solemnly declare: I believe in the Führer!'<sup>72</sup>

The dictator's preference for seasoned commanders of the younger generation who were both political believers and military go-getters would probably have had relatively little impact on the strategic conduct of the war if the enthusiasm for Hitler's genius had not also been shared at the highest staff levels. General Schmundt, for example, in his capacity as chief of the Army's personnel department, saw his task as reorganizing the promotion of officers on grounds of 'performance' according to Hitler's meaning of the word. The effects of this strongly ideological 'manipulation of the elite'<sup>73</sup> were discussed in an earlier volume.<sup>74</sup> More important in the present context is the OKW's disastrous role in shaping German defeat. The word had long got around that the chief of the OKW, Field Marshal Keitel, was by reason of his personality totally unsuitable as an independent adviser to his supreme commander. Hitler's treatment of the field marshal is typified by Keitel's complaint during the Stalingrad crisis. Asked about the current military situation, he admitted he was totally in the dark. Hitler told him nothing: 'He only spits at me!'<sup>75</sup> His uncritical compliance, indeed dog-like devotion to Hitler, earned him the nickname 'the little lackey' and had long lost him his credit in both military and political circles. Goebbels was surely not alone in considering him 'a dimwit and, furthermore, utterly devoid of character and purpose'.<sup>76</sup> Hitler nevertheless considered him indispensable<sup>77</sup> because, although 'incapable of taking any decisions on his own',<sup>78</sup> he had proved himself a competent and relatively unscheming administrator. His determination to shield the Führer against all unwelcome solicitations, defeatist memoranda, and other disagreeable attempts to influence him was the best conceivable guarantee of

<sup>71</sup> For an assessment of Schörner, see the two short critical biographies by Schönher, 'Ferdinand Schörner', and Steinkamp, 'Generalfeldmarschall Ferdinand Schörner'; on his activity in the National Socialist guidance staff, see *Germany and the Second World War*, ix/I. 623–5.

<sup>72</sup> Quoted in Knab, 'Generaloberst Eduard Dietl', 32. For a succinct but balanced assessment of Dietl, see also Heinemann, 'Eduard Dietl'.

<sup>73</sup> Term coined by Stumpf, *Die Wehrmacht-Elite*, 341 ff. On Schmundt's personnel policy, see *ibid.* 320 ff.

<sup>74</sup> See *Germany and the Second World War*, v/II. 918–42.

<sup>75</sup> Quoted in Hassell, *Vom andern Deutschland*, 251.

<sup>76</sup> Goebbels, *Tagebücher*, pt. 2, xi. 368 (29 Feb. 1944). See the similar judgement by Speer in *Alles was ich weiß*, 196–7. Material for an assessment of Keitel is available in the biographical sketches by Mueller, 'Wilhelm Keitel', and Mitcham, 'Generalfeldmarschall Wilhelm Keitel'.

<sup>77</sup> On Hitler's appreciation of Keitel, see Goebbels, *Tagebücher*, pt. 2, ix. 578 (23 Sept. 1943).

<sup>78</sup> Thus Speer in *Alles was ich weiß*, 195.

the absolute ‘calm in the eye of the storm’ which Hitler needed for his style of military leadership.

In addition, the chief of the OKW allowed himself to be instrumentalized unresistingly for the political purposes of the Nazi leadership. How willingly Keitel let himself be involved in the programme of reinforced ideological education of the officer corps<sup>79</sup> by which Hitler sought to overcome the growing criticism in the armed forces<sup>80</sup> was shown in spectacular fashion at a commanding officers’ conference in Bad Schachen in October 1943. In a programmatic introduction,<sup>81</sup> the Reich’s top-ranking soldier emphasized that in the present ‘battle of ideologies’, in which there was only ‘victory or downfall’, every soldier had to be ‘a political-ideological warrior’. Insisting on ‘fanatical dedication to the National Socialist idea’, he condemned ‘with the utmost severity, malicious criticism of the top leadership, its leading figures [...] especially when the criticism does not even stop at the person of the Führer himself. Such criticism and arrogance is nothing else than subversion of our fighting strength and national resilience.’ As ‘treachery’, it should be punished only by ‘court martial and the harshest sentences’. What must be expected of soldiers, and especially officers, was not criticism but optimism, confidence, and a ‘positive view of the situation and events’, as well as ‘political activism’, ‘unquestioning trust in the top leadership’, and the fight ‘against unfavourable interpretations’. ‘An officer’, Keitel concluded, ‘for whom belief in the Führer is not the supreme innermost duty has lost the right to be an officer and wear epaulets.’

What Keitel called for in such harsh terms at that conference, and repeatedly on subsequent occasions, went far beyond an optimism specific to the military profession, which was perhaps essential for convincing leadership. Much more than that, he demanded the renunciation of all criticism. And that was precisely what Hitler himself demanded quite explicitly shortly afterwards. On 27 January 1944, in an address to more than a hundred generals to which we have already referred, the Führer forbade all criticism. Criticism could exist only when directed by a superior at a subordinate, and never in the opposite direction.<sup>82</sup> A communication addressed to his commander-in-chief almost at the same time by a general staff chief in the area of Army Group A reads like a reply to Hitler and Keitel’s ultimately useless appeals, which ignored the needs of the troops. ‘Criticism already exists,’ he wrote. ‘And in my view it can be silenced only by deeds, not words, and cannot be ignored.’ Otherwise there was ‘a great danger that the troops will gradually lose confidence in their leadership and no longer obey orders’.<sup>83</sup>

<sup>79</sup> On this subject, see *Germany and the Second World War*, ix/I. 479–669 (Fürster).

<sup>80</sup> The most significant factor in this connection was Hitler’s order of 22 Dec. 1943, aimed at centralizing and radicalizing political and ideological work within the Wehrmacht; see *ibid.* 614–26.

<sup>81</sup> The following quotations are taken from the manuscript keyword notes for Keitel’s speech, 11 Oct. 1943, CAMO/Moscow, 500/12450/292.

<sup>82</sup> See Meyer, *Adolf Heusinger*, 864, n. 352.

<sup>83</sup> Undated document, probably from late autumn 1943, written by an unnamed general staff chief (Seventeenth Army), BA-MA RH 19V/2, fos. 38 and 37.

The prohibition on calling mistakes by their name, handed down from the very top, was nothing less than a demand to put professional considerations and needs after personal loyalty to the Führer. What was going on at this late stage in the war was thus no longer simply political incapacitation but politically motivated de-professionalization of the top military leadership. This renunciation of professionalism was internalized by the top leadership of the Wehrmacht to an unprecedented extent. A characteristic example is a note which Karl Dönitz, the commander-in-chief of the navy, added to his record of a conference held at Führer headquarters on 9 to 11 August 1943:

The enormous force which the Führer radiates, his unerring confidence, his foresighted assessment of the situation in Italy, made it very clear during these few days that we are all miserable specimens compared to him, and that our knowledge, our view of things from our limited perspective, are a patchwork. Anyone who thinks he can do better than the Führer is stupid!<sup>84</sup>

Alfred Jodl is perhaps a more tragic case than Keitel or Dönitz. Although hardly less in thrall to Hitler, General Jodl<sup>85</sup> was nevertheless a man of an entirely different cut. As chief of the Wehrmacht Operations Staff he was still Hitler's primary strategic adviser, but at the latest after the heavy setbacks of 1942,<sup>86</sup> which were accompanied by gruelling personal conflicts, he no longer played any noteworthy role as an independent strategic thinker. Esteemed, nevertheless, for his professional judgement, he clearly had few illusions about the outcome of the war for Germany. In the summer of 1943 he also maintained an essentially sober view. He was highly sceptical about Operation CITADEL, which Zeitzler favoured and Hitler half-heartedly supported. Soon after the Allied landing in Sicily, he realized that the island, and shortly afterwards the whole of southern Italy, could no longer be held. Long before Hitler, he saw that Mussolini's downfall was the end of fascism.<sup>87</sup> In fact, there are numerous indications, not least of all the notes Jodl himself kept in the Nuremberg prison, that Percy Ernst Schramm was correct in his early supposition that 'Alfred Jodl, at the bottom of his heart, no longer believed in final victory after the winter campaign of 1941/42, and certainly not after Stalingrad the following winter'.<sup>88</sup>

In a Wehrmacht leadership which operated on professional lines, such recognition would have led inevitably to the realization that the war was hopeless and thus to efforts to end it as soon as possible. However, there is not a single official document

<sup>84</sup> *Lagevorträge*, 538 (15 Sept. 1943). Also characteristic is Dönitz's concluding address at the meeting of naval commanders in Weimar on 17 Dec. 1943, BA-MA RM 7/98.

<sup>85</sup> Promoted to colonel-general on 30 January 1944 and decorated with the Golden Party Badge. The most thorough biographical treatment remains that by Scheurig, *Alfred Jodl*; Davidson's earlier account in *The Trial of the Germans* is also by no means obsolete. The more recent biographical sketches by Wilt, 'Alfred Jodl', and Macksey, 'Generaloberst Alfred Jodl', add little that is new, apart from varying assessments of Jodl's personality.

<sup>86</sup> See *Germany and the Second World War*, vi. 1048–59.

<sup>87</sup> See Scheurig, *Alfred Jodl*, 256 ff.

<sup>88</sup> Schramm, *Hitler als militärischer Führer*, 145. The relevant passages from Jodl's post-war notes are reproduced in *ibid.* 147–55.

of the Wehrmacht leadership which shows that such a conclusion had been drawn. What we see instead is a rapidly growing readiness, in comparison with the earlier war years, to repress reality. Perhaps the most shattering example from 1943 is the detailed lecture which the chief of the Wehrmacht Operations Staff gave to Reichs- and Gauleiters on 7 November of that year.<sup>89</sup> It was no accident that he began by alluding to November 1918, when Germany was 'broken not at the front, but at home'. The decidedly sombre picture of the overall military situation which Jodl went on to paint might well have led critical listeners to the conclusion that this time it was the other way round: it was the front, rather than the homeland, which gave cause for alarm.<sup>90</sup> At all events, Jodl was unable to offer his listeners a single strategically justifiable prospect of overcoming the crisis he had described. Instead, he invoked the superior 'ethical and moral foundations of our struggle', and ended with the following lofty declaration of faith, not inadvertently reminiscent of Carl von Clausewitz:<sup>91</sup>

At this hour I want not to speak from the mouth but to acknowledge from the deepest recesses of the heart that our trust and our faith in the Führer is limitless, that for us there is no higher law and no more sacred duty than to fight to the last breath for the freedom of our people, that we want to rid ourselves of everything soft and disloyal, that all the threats of our enemies will only make us even tougher and more determined, that we will not surrender to the cowardly hope that others could save us from Bolshevism, which will sweep everything away if Germany falls, that we would defend even the ruins of our homeland to the last bullet, because it is a thousand times better to live in ruins than to live in slavery, *that we shall win because we must win, for otherwise world history will have lost all meaning.*

Even allowing for the psychological and oratorical considerations which must have lain behind the way in which the chief of the Wehrmacht Operations Staff formulated the end of his speech,<sup>92</sup> his concluding declaration, quoted above, which deviated so sharply from the preceding situation analysis, shows the extent of military de-professionalization in the German dictator's environment. In 1943

<sup>89</sup> 'Vortragsunterlagen für Generaloberst Jodl, Die strategische Lage am Anfang des fünften Kriegsjahres', 7 Nov. 1943, BA-MA RW 4/v. 38, quoted here from *KTB OKW*, iv. 1534–62.

<sup>90</sup> Goebbels too found the picture of the war situation which Jodl painted 'very realistic'; it had had 'a sensational effect' on the assembled Gauleiters (Goebbels, *Tagebücher*, pt. 2, x. 254, 8 Nov. 1943).

<sup>91</sup> *KTB OKW*, iv/2, 1562 (author's emphasis).

<sup>92</sup> See also the editor's notes to *KTB OKW*, iv. 1712–13. On 25 Feb. 1946, in the Nuremberg prison, Jodl himself wrote the following—in essence subjectively credible—explanation of his speech of 7 Nov. 1943 in his own defence: 'In 1914–18 I experienced how front and homeland, soldiers and workers, leadership of the state and leadership of the people by the political parties, moved further and further apart in their thinking, until the state in the homeland finally broke down and dragged the Wehrmacht into defeat and revolution. That experience had such a strong impact on me that in this second world war I made it a principle to do everything in my power to combat every split, every manifestation of disintegration, in short, all internal conflicts insofar as they affected the Wehrmacht. Any such internal conflict would necessarily create a fertile breeding ground for enemy propaganda and reduce our external effectiveness. [...] So it is understandable that in this war I never expressed criticism except to a few trusted close associates [...] and took every opportunity to work for understanding and unity. They were the precondition for victory, and working for victory was for me a sacred duty.' (quoted in *ibid.* 1713).

no officer any longer sought to bear the overall military responsibility to which the chiefs of the Great General Staff had constantly laid claim and assumed, whatever the results, since the time of Helmuth von Moltke. The permanent state of crisis since the summer of 1943 was thus, in terms of system structure, indeed a crisis of leadership, but not yet a 'Führer' crisis. Rather, the power of the dictator and the party he represented appeared to grow as the leaders of the Wehrmacht and its constituent parts lost all independence. Beneath the surface of the limitless Führer cult, however, the erosion of power induced by the regime itself had long since set in, and would soon afterwards, in the summer of 1944, shake the foundations of Nazi rule. Admittedly, before Claus von Stauffenberg's bomb shattered Führer headquarters on 20 July, hardly anyone had their eyes on the fragility of the regime. General attention was focused on the question of how, and if at all, Germany could still ward off the dangers threatening it on all sides.

### III. The Abandonment of Foreign Policy and the Isolation of Germany

If war, as Clausewitz argued with good reason, is a continuation of politics by other means, then it was to be expected that with the realization that those means were inadequate, the traditional instruments of foreign policy, especially diplomacy, would regain importance. The fact that this did not happen in the case of Germany was one of the most striking characteristics of German warfare in the last years of the Second World War. Hitler had always regarded foreign policy as his classic domain, and during the few years of his pre-war rule he had celebrated a series of exceptional successes in that field. So his extensive renunciation of foreign-policy opportunities in the following years seems, at first sight, all the more surprising. The declaration of war against the United States in December 1941 had been the last eminently political decision of overall strategic importance.<sup>1</sup> As we have seen,<sup>2</sup> the German government was interested neither in serious exploration of existing possibilities for peace nor in a constructive alliance policy. The chances of politically secured coalition warfare were not even explored systematically, let alone taken up. In contrast to the Allies, multilateral meetings of foreign ministers or heads of state were anxiously avoided on the side of the Axis powers. There was no joint agreement on the strategic conduct of the war beyond bilateral operational consultations, nor any definition of common war aims or a jointly agreed European post-war order. Throughout the war there were not even the beginnings of a counterpart to the Atlantic Charter, which the Allies had announced as early as August 1941. In no other sector, as it appears in hindsight, had the German leadership learned so little from the disastrous experience of the First World War as in the area of foreign and alliance policy.<sup>3</sup>

Nothing symbolizes the abandonment of German diplomacy better than the dramatic decline in the role of the foreign ministry, aptly described as a transformation ‘from engine to transmission’.<sup>4</sup> Since the beginning of the war against the Soviet Union, as a well-informed observer concluded in retrospect, it had been ‘no

<sup>1</sup> Later decisions of limited importance mainly concerned the German occupation of allied countries; on this, see in detail *Germany and the Second World War*, v/II, 75–107. It is no accident that in all surveys of Nazi foreign policy the last years of the war receive only cursory treatment; see, e.g., Hildebrand, *Deutsche Außenpolitik 1933–1945*, and Recker, *Die Außenpolitik des Dritten Reiches*.

<sup>2</sup> See Part I, Chapter II of the present volume.

<sup>3</sup> The same conclusion is reached by DiNardo and Hughes, ‘Germany and Coalition Warfare’, 166.

<sup>4</sup> See Michalka, ‘Vom Motor zum Getriebe’.

more than a secretariat of Hitler's for dealing with routine matters. A dummy, so to speak.<sup>5</sup> In this case too, as so often in Hitler's state, personality played a significant part in the elimination of a traditional authority. Thanks to his 'downright masochistic' submissiveness,<sup>6</sup> foreign minister Joachim von Ribbentrop did not entirely lose the confidence of his Führer even in 1943/4,<sup>7</sup> but he no longer had any formative influence on German foreign policy. From the outset an outsider in the dictator's retinue, Ribbentrop had repeatedly got into struggles for position with somewhat more powerful satraps, especially Goebbels, Bormann, and Rosenberg, and finally Himmler too. Intrigues in his own ministry,<sup>8</sup> as well as the foreign minister's support for a separate peace with Russia,<sup>9</sup> also helped to undermine his standing in Hitler's circle. 'The so-called second Bismarck in the foreign ministry', Goebbels mockingly observed, 'seems not quite up to the demands of the present time'.<sup>10</sup>

The fairly incompetent foreign minister was of course only a symptom, not the cause, of what the German propaganda chief rightly (though not without ulterior motives) criticized as 'the total lack of an active foreign policy'.<sup>11</sup> The main reason for that lack was the inherent Nazi approach to politics. There is now general agreement in the research literature that Hitler was 'wholly incapable of partnership and dialogue, of admitting equally entitled interests, of limiting his own demands, or of establishing any meaningful arrangement', and that he understood foreign policy solely 'as an instrument of domination rather than partnership'.<sup>12</sup> Hitler had 'no intention of giving up appreciable parts of the empire that had been won by force of arms'.<sup>13</sup> Nor did he have the slightest doubt that Germany's relations with its neighbours in the future greater European area<sup>14</sup> would be based on German

<sup>5</sup> Thus Theodor Eschenburg, quoted in *ibid.* 259, n. 25.

<sup>6</sup> Kley, *Hitler, Ribbentrop und die Entfesselung*, 342. Göring mockingly referred to Ribbentrop, the eternal yes-man, as 'Germany's No. 1 parrot' (quoted in Overy, *Interrogations*, 162).

<sup>7</sup> Much to the chagrin of the envious and ambitious propaganda minister, as is clear from Goebbels' diary entry for 6 June 1944: 'The Führer is still only partly in agreement with Ribbentrop; however, he considers him a cool-headed tactician and an intelligent expeditor who knows exactly what he wants, only sometimes too rigid and inflexible in his methods. The favourable opinion which the Führer has formed of Ribbentrop is in my view rather rare. At least, it is not shared by anyone who has any say in the state or Party.' Goebbels must have been particularly pained by Hitler's confession that 'he had often toyed with the idea of relieving Ribbentrop of his post but could find no one anywhere to replace him. I am appalled that the Führer should even mention Rosenberg as a possible successor. Replacing Ribbentrop by Rosenberg would be jumping out of the frying pan into the fire' (Goebbels, *Tagebücher*, pt. 2, xii. 411).

<sup>8</sup> 'Crazy things are going on there,' Goebbels commented gleefully in February 1943 on Ribbentrop's conflict with his state secretary, Luther (*ibid.* vii. 325, entry for 12 Feb. 1943). See in detail Michalka, 'Vom Motor zum Getriebe', 255–6, and Bloch, *Ribbentrop*, ch. 21.

<sup>9</sup> On this, see Part I, Chapter II of the present volume.

<sup>10</sup> Goebbels, *Tagebücher*, pt. 2, vii. 325 (1 Feb. 1943).

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* 455 (2 Mar. 1943), quoting Göring. Goebbels doubtless considered himself the right man to formulate German foreign policy.

<sup>12</sup> Krüger, 'Rückkehr zum internationalen Faustrecht', 187 and 183. Similarly Gruchmann, *Nationalsozialistische Großraumordnung*, 119.

<sup>13</sup> *Germany and the Second World War*, v/II.10.

<sup>14</sup> On the international law and policy foundations for this concept, see in detail Schmoekel, *Die Großraumtheorie*.

hegemony rather than cooperation. Even before the war began, the German government, in anticipation of final victory, had avoided any treaty or contractual obligations that would bind it beyond the duration of the war, and exercised its rule, wherever possible, at its own sole discretion. Purely as a method of rule, this policy had been unproblematic as long as German power on the continent of Europe remained unchallenged. Now that the military balance had begun to shift against Germany, however, it seriously impeded the search for political-strategic ways out of the crisis. In 1943 and 1944 anyone in Germany who was in any way involved with issues of foreign or occupation policy (the boundary between the two was becoming increasingly blurred) was faced with the same dilemma: Germany's need of the countries under its rule or control as a strategic forefield, source of raw materials, or labour reservoir was growing stronger and stronger as its own force and resources waned, but for that very reason it was less and less able to impose its authority. What was needed most of all, therefore, was political measures which, in the words of a senior foreign ministry official, would 'make it possible to: (a) weaken the enemy's fighting spirit; (b) undermine the resistance movements from within; (c) strengthen the trust of the supporters of a European order in the justice and sustainability of the solution pursued by Germany and thus increase their commitment and their appeal to their own people; (d) neutralize wavering elements; and (e) above all, spare German blood'.<sup>15</sup>

In that context, more and more of the many ministries, departments, and official agencies seeking to assert themselves in the field of foreign policy argued for a reorientation of German policy or, at least, its propaganda image. The basic direction of change was already determined: since the attack on the Soviet Union, Germany's imperialistic war for 'living-space' had been reinterpreted as a European defensive struggle against Bolshevism. For many observers inside and outside Germany this interpretation, originally no more than a crude cloak for Germany's own war of aggression, became increasingly plausible as the Wehrmacht's eastern army was really forced onto the defensive and left the way open for a western advance by the Red Army. The propagandists, first and foremost Hitler,<sup>16</sup> hoped that the resulting fears of the 'Bolshevization' of Europe, if skilfully exploited, would strengthen the German war effort. The concrete manifestation of the 'Red Peril' would help to bring insecure allies, from Finland to Romania, into line. With their backs to the wall, collaborationist circles throughout German-controlled Europe would be forced to step up their efforts. And with the Stalinist danger literally drawing closer, even the neutral powers, and the wait-and-see majority in the occupied countries, might finally see Germany as a protector, or at least the lesser of two evils. Nor was it out of the question that, on the side of the western Allies, fears of the Bolshevikization of Europe might one day lead to a rift between London and Washington on the one hand and Moscow on the other. Significantly, this hope became the major justification for continuing the long-since futile

<sup>15</sup> Memorandum of 19 Aug. 1943 by Rudolf Rahn, *ADAP*, Series E, vi, doc. 235, 414.

<sup>16</sup> See, e.g., Goebbels, *Tagebücher*, pt. 2, xii. 406 (6 June 1944): 'The Führer tells me that for us every military defeat is a political opportunity.'

struggle,<sup>17</sup> despite the fact that, through its agent ‘Cicero’,<sup>18</sup> the German leadership was well informed of the course and outcome of the Allied war conferences in Moscow and Teheran in the autumn of 1943, which largely disappointed such expectations. In point of fact, in the inner circle of the German leadership there were few illusions about relations between the Allies. A meeting of naval commanders held on 11 November, less than two weeks after the conference of Allied foreign ministers in Moscow, reached the following sobering conclusion: ‘Even if possibilities for the outbreak of conflict in the enemy camp do exist, they will have no effect on military developments for the time being. Russia, because of its great losses, and the British and Americans because of their plans in East Asia, have a common interest in finishing the war in Europe quickly.’<sup>19</sup>

In line with the considerations outlined above, German propaganda in 1943 and 1944 was concerned above all to boost resurgent fears of Bolshevization wherever possible. Spectacular military successes of the Red Army were no longer simply denied or played down, but were announced in measured tones. Even the possibility of German defeat was now presented as a real threat that would necessarily result in the Bolshevization of the continent and the end of all European culture and civilization. A similar interpretation was applied to the bombing campaign unleashed by the western Allies, which—as well as costing countless civilians their lives within and beyond the borders of the Reich—was destroying cultural goods on a hitherto unimaginable scale.<sup>20</sup> In such circumstances the German propaganda thesis that the western powers were only the minions of Stalin’s planned Sovietization of Europe struck home in many circles. All the more so, if the long-term planning behind the Soviet intentions could be made clear. It was no coincidence that in 1943 specific efforts were undertaken under the auspices of the propaganda ministry to gather all existing information in the foreign ministry and the military operations staffs which appeared to support the thesis that the German attack on the Soviet Union in 1941 had been a preventive strike.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>17</sup> For the period under discussion here, see, e.g., Hitler’s statements to Dönitz, quoted in *Lagevorträge*, 537 (9–11 Aug. 1943). See also the discussion in Part VII, Chapter II of the present volume.

<sup>18</sup> ‘Cicero’ was the cover name of Elyesa Bazna, the Albanian valet of the British ambassador in Ankara, who passed important information to the representative of the German security service in Turkey. See Ludwig Moyzich’s memoirs, *Der Fall Cicero*, and, above all, Wires, *The Cicero Spy Affair*.

<sup>19</sup> Minutes of the meeting of commanders of 11 Nov. 1943, 2, BA-MA RM 7/98, fos. 158–64, here fo. 159. See also the assessment of the Moscow conference in KTB (Teil C/VIII) der 1. Skl, 8 Nov. 1943, 475–80, BA-MA RM 7/214, and, on the part of the army, a memorandum of Abt. FHO (IIa), ‘Die Ergebnisse der Moskauer Konferenz’, 17 Nov. 1943, BA-MA RH 2/2113. The naval command’s scepticism was fully justified, as is clear from a key memorandum of 10 Aug. 1943 from the American general staff urging the US government, on the assumption that the Soviet Union would be the dominant power in post-war Europe, to do everything in its power to ensure friendly relations with Moscow: ‘every effort must be made to obtain her friendship’ (quoted in Sherwood, *Roosevelt and Hopkins*, 748; see also Hillgruber, *Der Zweite Weltkrieg*, 6th edn., 130).

<sup>20</sup> For a comprehensive, if somewhat polemical, account, see Friedrich, *Der Brand*.

<sup>21</sup> See, e.g., FHO (II), ‘Belege für russische Angriffsabsichten gegen Deutschland, 9.9.1943’, and Gehlen’s file note of 10 Sept. 1943, BA-MA RH 2/2092. The fact that the thesis of a German preventive war in 1941 is historically untenable and served exclusively propaganda purposes has been repeatedly demonstrated by historical research, notwithstanding the occasional outbreak of public

The pan-European defensive war was also the leitmotif of Hitler's radio address on 30 January 1944. According to the dictator, the basic question in the present conflict was 'no longer the maintenance or restoration of the old balance of forces, but who will emerge from this war as the dominant power—the European family of nations represented by its strongest state or the Bolshevik colossus?'<sup>22</sup> There could be 'only one victor in this struggle—either Germany or Soviet Russia! German victory will mean the preservation of Europe; Russian victory will mean Europe's annihilation.' If Germany did not win, 'no other state in Europe will be capable of mounting an effective resistance against this new invasion by the Huns,' and 'the fate of the states of northern, central, and southern America [*sic!*] will be sealed in a matter of months'. Pronouncements of this sort were nothing new in themselves, but the timing was surprising. At the very moment when the dictator was preparing, in accordance with his Directive No. 51, to concentrate all his military efforts on the fight against the western powers, he proclaimed more emphatically than ever that his real concern was the war against the Soviet Union. 'The time has long passed when anyone could imagine this was merely another of those wars which Britain has incited time and again,' Hitler declared. 'In London the drivers have become the driven.' The spirits which the government 'sought to conjure up in accordance with the old British tradition have got beyond the control of their masters', and whatever the outcome of the struggle, the old world power had 'finally lost its position on the continent'.<sup>23</sup> The message behind the dictator's words was clear: the war against the west was of no value in itself but was part of the existential struggle against Bolshevism. This interpretation, which was subjectively wholly sincere, served first of all to shift the blame for the forthcoming battle for western Europe onto the western powers in anticipation of the invasion, and secondly to make it clear to the German population that Germany's fight against the western powers was also a life-and-death struggle.

Whatever the importance of the efforts to foster a negative legitimization of the war based on the increasingly tangible Bolshevik threat, there was a widespread view in German leadership circles that in the second half of the war they were no longer sufficient. What was needed in order to achieve the urgently necessary mobilization of the population was an overriding positive vision of how the future of Germany and Europe would take shape after the war was won. Uncertainty about this had grown considerably since the Stalingrad events. In his address on the tenth anniversary of the takeover of power, read out by Goebbels at the Berlin Sports Palace, the Führer himself had let it be known that 'in this war there will be neither victors nor vanquished, but only survivors and annihilated'.<sup>24</sup> According to an SD report of March 1943:

debate on the subject. See above all the anthologies *Der deutsche Angriff auf die Sowjetunion 1941* and *Präventivkrieg?*, and Wegner, 'Präventivkrieg 1941?'

<sup>22</sup> This and the following quotations are taken from Domarus, *Hitler. Reden und Proklamationen*, ii. 2082–3.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. 1978–9.

No one can form an accurate picture of how the Reich will look after the war with regard to internal politics, external politics, and economic conditions. The war has wrought such radical changes in all areas of life that it will be impossible to restore the former situation. The only thought propagated by the leadership at the present time is life-or-death struggle, but our *Volksgenossen* would also like to know what their life will be like if they emerge from this war as ‘survivors’, as the Führer puts it.<sup>25</sup>

For obvious reasons, this question also agitated—even more than the German population—those millions of foreigners who were collaborating more or less voluntarily with the German occupying power as civilians or soldiers and who expected in return future prospects that were more than just vague hints.

The crucial question of the future of Europe, which the Nazi regime had always wisely avoided, was now being raised with increasing insistence. Before the war the term ‘Europe’ had barely been part of Nazi vocabulary,<sup>26</sup> and since 1939 it had been completely overshadowed by the vision of the ‘Greater German Reich’. A few propaganda initiatives had taken place since 1941, such as the organization of ‘European poets’ conferences’ in Weimar in connection with the creation of a ‘European writers’ association’,<sup>27</sup> invitations to foreign artists, sessions of the International Journalists’ Conference, or the foundation of a European youth association.<sup>28</sup> However, despite the assiduous courting of individual western, northern, and central Europeans willing to collaborate,<sup>29</sup> all these and similar events and organizations were never more than ‘Potemkin villages’ behind whose propaganda façade the deep mistrust of the German leadership was clearly visible. In German foreign-policy guidelines formulated at the beginning of September 1942, Ribbentrop still insisted that the idea of Europe could ‘at the present time be treated by us only in very general terms, e.g. using the slogan of European solidarity against Bolshevism and Jewry. Any specific reference to European reconstruction or a new European order’ was accordingly to be ‘avoided for the time being, since it would not make our life-or-death struggle any easier, but only more difficult’.<sup>30</sup> Goebbels similarly polemicized ‘very sharply against talk of the “New Europe”. He thinks it wrong for us to make such a fuss about it. Nobody in the world will believe we are going to fight for a New Europe without any material interests.’<sup>31</sup> A few weeks later Hitler declared the field of foreign policy ‘unsuitable for experiments’, and forbade his party to ‘plan, prepare, or carry out any international initiatives such as congresses, conferences, meetings, the foundation of associations, etc.’<sup>32</sup>

<sup>25</sup> *Meldungen aus dem Reich*, xiii. 4903 (8 Mar. 1943).

<sup>26</sup> As already noted by Klemperer, *LTI*, 198–9.

<sup>27</sup> See Barbian, *Literaturpolitik*, 436–50, and most recently the seminal work by Hausmann, *Dichte, Dichter*.

<sup>28</sup> See Neulen, *Europa und das 3. Reich*, 35–6.

<sup>29</sup> See, as a prime example, Dufay, *Le Voyage d’automne*.

<sup>30</sup> Memorandum of the Reich foreign minister dated 6 Sept. 1942, in Neulen, *Europa und das 3. Reich*, doc. 6, 100.

<sup>31</sup> Briefing note by Luther dated 17 Sept. 1942, repr. in *ibid.*, doc. 8, 104.

<sup>32</sup> Order of 4 Nov. 1942 in *Führer-Erlasse*, doc. 207, 292–3.

Hitler's prohibition made no difference to the fact that in the course of 1943, that is, during the period of Germany's large-scale military withdrawals and in parallel with the decline of the foreign ministry, even more consideration was given to diplomatic and propaganda initiatives that could incite the peoples living within 'Fortress Europe' to give Germany voluntarily the support that was increasingly difficult to obtain by compulsion. In order to mobilize 'all the forces of the European continent' for 'the fight against Jewish Bolshevism', Goebbels found it necessary, in mid-February 1943, to ban any disparaging reference to the peoples of Europe under German control, especially in the east. According to the propaganda minister's belated realization, 'one cannot describe the eastern peoples as animals, barbarians, etc. and then expect them to be interested in German victory'. Equally inappropriate was 'a portrayal of the future New European Order that could give members of foreign peoples the impression that the German leadership intends to keep them in a permanent subordinate relationship'.<sup>33</sup> The minister's decree was warmly welcomed by the military leadership. The Army General Staff saw it as a 'suitable basis' for 'winning over the mass of the Russian population to our side as convinced fellow combatants'.<sup>34</sup> It addressed one of the main concerns of combat formation staff officers in the east, where army group commanders were repeatedly complaining about the declining work performance of the local population and their efforts to avoid the auxiliary duties imposed on them. Political uncertainty and fears for the future were seen as major causes: 'In the eastern countries the question "what will become of me?" has been replaced by the question "what will become of my country?" All the hunting for manpower, all the propaganda, all the efforts of heads of agricultural administrations, all the army's attempts to recruit fighters or auxiliaries, will remain a patchwork as long as no *political* objective is assigned to those countries'.<sup>35</sup>

The spring of 1943 also saw a change of tone with respect to the peoples of western and northern Europe. Goebbels had no inhibitions about assuring representatives of the Danish press, for example, that present German repression was only a temporary wartime necessity: 'The New European Order will essentially be based on voluntary action, not dictatorship. Germany intends to uphold the individual character of the European nations'.<sup>36</sup> Although such statements by Goebbels probably went beyond what his Führer would have wished,<sup>37</sup> ideas

<sup>33</sup> Decree of 15 Feb. 1943, quoted in *Wollt Ihr den totalen Krieg?*, 442.

<sup>34</sup> OKH/Generalstab des Heeres/Generalquartiermeister, 'Bericht aus dem Operationsgebiet des Ostens', 27 Apr. 1943, BA-MA RW 4/v. 309a.

<sup>35</sup> Oberkommando Heeresgruppe Nord/Ia, 'Stichworte für den Führervortrag des Oberbefehlshabers der Heeresgruppe Nord', 7 May 1943, BA-MA RH 19 III/2 (emphasis in the original).

<sup>36</sup> Interview of 13 Mar. 1943 with representatives of the Danish newspaper *Berlingske Tidende*, quoted in Neulen, *Europa und das 3. Reich*, 105, doc. 9.

<sup>37</sup> This time too, as almost always, Goebbels had safeguarded his position with Hitler. In a conversation on 9 March he had tried in vain to get the dictator to make a proclamation in favour of the eastern peoples. An entry in the propaganda minister's diary following that meeting reads: 'The Führer is already more open to the idea of a rough programme for Europe. Even if he doesn't want to go into details—which I never planned to do either—he is giving me permission to mention the subject in my Sports Palace speech and indicate the general outlines. Given that permission, I can already get started' (Goebbels, *Tagebücher*, pt. 2, vii. 509). A few days after the propaganda minister's

aired by other, less influential protagonists went even further. Thus, at the same time, Ribbentrop proposed the formal proclamation of a 'European confederation' which, in addition to Germany and Italy, would immediately include France, Denmark, Norway, Finland, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Serbia, Greece, and possibly Spain, and could be extended, in the event, to occupied areas which the Führer subsequently wished to declare independent states. The members of the federation would, in the words of the draft founding statement, be 'sovereign states and guarantee one another's freedom and political independence. The organization of their internal relations is a matter for the sovereign decision of each of them.' They would 'conclude an alliance for the defence of Europe' and, with the progressive abolition of customs barriers, the European economy would be 'organized on the basis of a uniform plan arrived at by mutual agreement'.<sup>38</sup> The 'guidelines' put forward in September 1943, after several months' preparatory work, by a 'European committee' set up in the foreign ministry, sounded no less promising.<sup>39</sup> Germany's fight against Britain was described as 'the war of European unification', which was to culminate in 'the unification of Europe on a federative basis'. While the Axis powers would have 'special internal and external responsibilities' in the resulting 'community of sovereign states', 'because of their location in the centre of Europe and their political weight', that would mean only leadership, not control, and the 'imperialistic methods of the past' would be rejected.<sup>40</sup>

What the top officials in the foreign ministry—men like Rudolf Rahn, Cecil von Renthe-Fink, and Carl August Clodius—were trying to achieve was in fact nothing less than the squaring of the circle. Without the slightest weakening of the demand for 'fully implemented primacy of the Greater German Reich',<sup>41</sup> they were attempting to conceal the true nature of that primacy so as to render it acceptable to the nations which were to be integrated. Since substantive political or military promises were considered inadvisable in that context, the main concessions contemplated were in the area of economic and financial policy. The proposals included

interview with the Danish press, Blücher, the German envoy in Helsinki, asked whether he should sustain the principles formulated in that interview at diplomatic level. Significantly, Ribbentrop forbade him to do so: he was to avoid the subject of the New European Order as far as possible in his conversations and, in response to any inquiries, to qualify Goebbels remarks as an unofficial expression of opinion (see *ADAP*, Series E, v, doc. 211, 409–10).

<sup>38</sup> Quoted in *ADAP*, Series E, v, doc. 229, 437–41. See also Drechsler, Dress, and Hass, 'Europapläne', 921, doc. 2, and 927 ff.

<sup>39</sup> For details concerning this committee and its deliberations, see Neulen, *Europa und das 3. Reich*, 41–2.

<sup>40</sup> Guidelines of the foreign ministry's European committee, 9 Sept. 1943, quoted in *ibid.*, 125, doc. 14. Similar ideas were expressed around the same time in a memorandum by Ernst Jünger (published only after the war), who also interpreted the conflict as a war of European unification, at the end of which former enemies could, though only with their consent, be integrated in a larger Reich; see Jünger, *Der Friede*.

<sup>41</sup> On 5 April 1943, in his guidelines for the work of the Europe committee, Ribbentrop had already indicated that the future could 'have substance only if based on the fully implemented primacy of the Greater German Reich. The securing of that primacy must therefore be seen as the core of the future New Order'; PA, Inland II/geheim R 100673.

the establishment of a permanent 'European economic congress', as well as plans for a European internal market and the long-term goal of European monetary union.<sup>42</sup> Partly similar, though mostly completely different, ideas about the economic future of Europe were mooted in sectors of heavy industry and the Reich Bank, in the ministry of economic affairs, and in Speer's circle. If all these proposals, which will not be discussed in detail here,<sup>43</sup> were largely uncoordinated and had no significant lasting effect, it was above all because they were not the outcome of an overall political plan, but were rather intended 'as a substitute for such a plan',<sup>44</sup> that would provide something positive with which to counter enemy propaganda.

The tone of some statements emanating from SS circles at the same time is also surprising at first sight. 'We cannot build Europe', said Franz Riedweg, the chief of staff of the 'Germanic' department of the SS Main Office, 'as a police state protected at the point of the bayonet, but must shape the life of Europe from the Greater German viewpoint'.<sup>45</sup> Frank statements of that kind were not untypical of a 'pan-Germanic' line of thought that had developed mainly around the SS Main Office. Without calling German hegemony into question in any way, such concepts differed both from the crudely nationalistic occupation mentality of other Party circles and from the traditional thinking of many diplomats in the foreign ministry, who were imbued with the idea of the nation state. The ideologues in the SS Reich leadership saw their aim neither as the destruction of the non-German 'Germanic' states and the political disempowerment of their elites, nor as the restoration of the pre-war system of states, but as the integration of the peoples concerned in the Reich on the basis of racial equality. In that connection, the unification of the German Reich in 1871 was readily invoked as a model. Just as Prussia had forged the Second Reich under the leadership of Otto von Bismarck, so Germany, under Hitler's leadership, would now weld the European states into the 'Greater German Reich'.<sup>46</sup> 'The future European order will therefore be built,' according to an SS manual of that period, 'not on the basis of compulsion and repression, but on the unconditional equality of Germanic blood. The incorporation into the SS of Norwegians, Danes, Dutchmen, and Flemings, as well as many other volunteers from Switzerland, Liechtenstein, and Sweden, cannot and should not be understood in any other way'.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>42</sup> See Eichholtz, *Geschichte der deutschen Kriegswirtschaft*, iii. 510–11. Clodius' pamphlet of 20 Aug. 1943 on the new European economic order was characteristic in this respect; see ADAP, Series E, vi, doc. 237, 419–21.

<sup>43</sup> For details, see Eichholtz, *Geschichte der deutschen Kriegswirtschaft*, iii. 511–36, and Herbst, *Der totale Krieg*, 247–52.

<sup>44</sup> Herbst, *Der totale Krieg*, 251.

<sup>45</sup> 'Germanisch-völkische Reichspolitik', manuscript of a lecture by Franz Riedweg, n.d. (probably summer 1943), BA-MA RS 5/310.

<sup>46</sup> See, along these lines, Himmler's speech as early as 9 June 1942 (Himmler, *Geheimreden*, 157 ff.), and his later speeches of 28 Jan. 1944 (NA, Microfilm Series T-175/94/4821-2) and 24 May 1944 (*ibid.* 4609 ff.) According to Smith and Peterson (Himmler, *Geheimreden*, 299, n. 29), Himmler addressed the issue of winning over 'Germanic peoples' in at least eight of his speeches.

<sup>47</sup> SS manual, probably from 1943, 68, NA, Microfilm Series T-175/Film 232. See also, along the same lines, a draft scenario for the film *Germanische Waffenbrüderschaft* [Germanic comradeship in arms], Junkerschule Tölz, 7 Dec. 1942, BA, Schumacher collection/238 II.

In 1943 and 1944 the growing fear of possible German defeat led to a veritable flood of confidential or published 'reform' projects and proposals for the future that went far beyond the above-mentioned examples.<sup>48</sup> Civilians and military men, ideologues, academics, economists, private individuals, official agencies, ministries, Party branches, and foreign allies all felt called upon to come up with proposals. Such proposals were generally motivated (as in the case of Goebbels, Bormann, or Ribbentrop) purely by considerations of political tactics, but in individual cases—especially when the originators were far enough removed from the centre of power—by the genuine conviction that a fundamental change in German policy was urgently needed. Behind all the proposals, however, stood the shared conviction that, insofar as military weapons proved insufficient for German victory, politics and propaganda must themselves be deployed more forcefully as a weapon in the clash of nations. As a first step in this direction, internal coordination of the partially conflicting, not to say contradictory, ideas about the new European order would have been an urgent requirement. Instead, as previously in the matter of a possible separate peace,<sup>49</sup> the National Socialist regime, with its incurably splintered power structure, proved to have lost the structural preconditions for the formulation of a coherent foreign policy. The decline of the foreign ministry, mentioned earlier, was not the cause but a symptom of that process of disintegration.

What may appear in retrospect as a serious structural shortcoming of the Nazi state was at the time thoroughly suited to consolidating the dictator's personal position. The fact was that Hitler, regardless of the worsening war situation, remained deeply sceptical of most of the proposals for a new order that were put to him with greater or lesser discretion. In this, his personal distaste for the hated national conservative mode of thought of many diplomats must have played a part, and likewise his concern that any reorientation of German policy could be interpreted as a sign of weakness on his part. More questionable, however, is the widespread assumption that Hitler was concerned to avoid hampering his post-war policy by premature promises to his Axis partners.<sup>50</sup> Anyone who had exploited the interplay between promise and default so often and so successfully as Germany's Führer had no need to fear the binding effect of promises. In all likelihood, the most decisive reason for Hitler's rigid attitude was the fact that the dictator was more aware than many of his advisers of the extent to which he had long since become the prisoner of his own policy. He had always taken the view that a union of the peoples of Europe could be achieved only by way of violent subjugation: 'community can be created and maintained only by force', and 'true world

<sup>48</sup> On this, see the wide-ranging discussion in Salewski, 'Ideas', here above all 116–72, and the numerous documents in Neulen, *Europa und das 3. Reich*, 105–77.

<sup>49</sup> See Part I, Chapter II of the present volume.

<sup>50</sup> This argument was already opposed with remarkable frankness by the deputy head of the foreign ministry's information department, Rudolf Rahn, in a minute dated 19 August 1943: 'Fine gestures are cheap and can be extremely effective. So why aren't we using them? Why aren't we drawing up future programmes which reassure, seduce, or least neutralize? They say it's because we would be committing ourselves to promises that we wouldn't be able to keep. Since when have we been so self-conscious and prissy?'; ADAP, Series E, vi, doc. 235, 415.

domination can only be founded on one's own blood'.<sup>51</sup> The practices of years of German occupation, coupled with an alliance policy unilaterally geared to German interests and at times downright extortionate, had turned these convictions into a self-fulfilling prophecy. Hitler's view that Germany was basically surrounded only by enemies<sup>52</sup> must therefore have been entirely realistic in the second half of the war. At all events, Hitler viewed the growing resistance in the occupied countries with just as little illusion as the discreet efforts by the neutral countries and Axis partners to distance themselves from Germany. When the statesmen of the Axis partners arrived one after another at Klessheim Castle in the spring of 1943, their host was well aware that 'all the guests came mistrustfully and departed mistrustfully'.<sup>53</sup> Significantly, the conclusion which Hitler drew from that experience and announced to his Reichs- and Gauleiters a few weeks later was that 'the hotchpotch of small states existing in Europe to this day must be liquidated as soon as possible'.<sup>54</sup> Unlike those who were now recommending him to change his policy, the dictator did not believe—and probably rightly so—that Germany's position could be improved other than by military successes. The condition for those urgently needed successes, however, was not that Germany go easy on the areas of Europe still under its control, but that it exploit them even more severely. And none of the peoples concerned was prepared to accept such further exploitation willingly, however seductive the proposals for the future put forward by German propaganda might appear.

The most striking result of this conviction was the increasing replacement of diplomacy by force. Not only in the east, but almost everywhere, Germany's occupation policy in the second half of the war was built almost exclusively on the power of its arms. The moderately collaborationist regimes in western and northern Europe increasingly gave way to rule by radical collaborators who had tied their fate, come what may, to that of the Nazi state.<sup>55</sup> German alliance policy was marked by comparable tendencies to radicalization, and by 1944 the borderline with occupation policy had become increasingly blurred. Thus, following the successful occupation of Italy, military planning began in November 1943 for the occupation of Hungary (Operation MARGARETHE I), and preparations for the occupation of Romania (MARGARETHE II) started in January 1944. While the latter preparations were halted a few weeks later, German troops marched into Hungary on 19 March 1944. Occupation of the country without a fight, agreement to which had been extracted from the aged regent, Admiral Miklós Horthy, during a visit to

<sup>51</sup> Picker, *Hitlers Tischgespräche* (1963), 270 (11 Apr. 1942) and 168 (27 Jan. 1942). See, in similar vein, Hitler, *Hitlers zweites Buch*, 129–30.

<sup>52</sup> See Weizsäcker, *Die Weizsäcker-Papiere*, 337 (2 May 1943): 'The reason given by the Führer internally, why we were not to get involved in discussions about a "new European order", was that our neighbours were all our enemies. We had to squeeze them dry, but could not nor should not promise them anything.'

<sup>53</sup> Thus Below, *Als Hitlers Adjutant*, 335.

<sup>54</sup> Quoted in Goebbels, *Tagebücher*, pt. 2, viii. 236 (8 May 1943).

<sup>55</sup> See in detail the chapters by Umbreit in *Germany and the Second World War*, v/II.

Klessheim the day before,<sup>56</sup> was in many respects a triumph for Hitler's policy. Although Hungary formally retained its sovereignty, the superficially legal overturn made the country directly dependent on German policy, whose implementation in Hungary was assigned to an SS ranking Reich plenipotentiary with the title of 'envoy'.<sup>57</sup> All further efforts by Hungary to withdraw from the Axis Pact were thus blocked in advance. The occupation of Hungary also served as a warning to the governments of other powers allied with Germany, especially Finland and Romania, of the risks of pursuing an all-too independent policy. No less important for Hitler was the prospect of now being able to achieve, in Hungary too, one of his central war aims: the elimination of European Jewry. Probably no other action of those months is a more striking demonstration of the dictator's unbroken determination to continue the war uncompromisingly than the deportation of some 430,000 Hungarian Jews to Auschwitz in the period from March to Horthy's intervention in July 1944.<sup>58</sup>

The growing violence of German foreign policy in the last years of the war was one thing; its extent was quite another. However 'strongly determined' Hitler was to 'put the screws on' his allies,<sup>59</sup> it was becoming increasingly obvious that Germany could apply pressure with any prospect of success only where it was also in a position to impose economic or military sanctions. The possibilities of doing so were shrinking from month to month. German diplomacy was hard put to exert pressure even on an allied but distant small state like Finland.<sup>60</sup> Faced with divergence on the part of Japan, which had been perceptible since the autumn of 1943,<sup>61</sup> it was practically helpless.<sup>62</sup> Vis-à-vis the neutral powers, too, German policy was losing influence as its military foundation proved brittle. It could do as little against the strongly increasing British pressure on Turkey as it could to oppose the new emphasis in Sweden's neutrality policy, apparent since the late summer of the same year, when Stockholm began to retreat from its hitherto pro-German course.<sup>63</sup>

With historical hindsight, there is little to support the assumption that in the second half of the war Germany still had any serious alternative to its foreign, alliance, and occupation policy—with the possible exception of the option of a separate peace, which was never seriously mooted. At all events, whatever proposals

<sup>56</sup> For an account of the visit that is probably reliable as to source criticism, see Kershaw, *Hitler 1936–1945: Nemesis*, 626 ff. On the context of the cunning game Hitler was playing, see in detail Fenyo, *Hitler, Horthy and Hungary*, ch. 9, and Ránki, *Unternehmen Margarethe*.

<sup>57</sup> See Führer decree of 19 March 1944, PA, Büro Staatssekretär R 2974, fos. 109871–2. See also *Germany and the Second World War*, v/II, 94–7.

<sup>58</sup> That was more than half of all the Jewish communities in Hungary; see Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, 547. For recent history of the Holocaust in Hungary, see, in addition to the collective works *Genocide and Rescue* and *The Nazis' Last Victims*, above all the comprehensive monograph by Aly and Gerlach, *Das letzte Kapitel*.

<sup>59</sup> Goebbels, *Tagebücher*, pt. 2, xii. 138 (18 Apr. 1944).

<sup>60</sup> On this, see the discussion in Part VII, Chapter I of the present volume.

<sup>61</sup> On Japanese policy in that period, see *Germany and the Second World War*, vii. 703–835, here mainly 737–47.

<sup>62</sup> See Martin, 'Die Einschätzung der Lage Deutschlands', 136 ff.

<sup>63</sup> For details, see Radowitz, *Schweden*, ch. 7.

were put on the table were well out of touch with reality. That applied both to the 'European' policy proposals of the national conservative German diplomats and to the ideas of a 'greater economic area' put forward by the social market economists. Both these groups, pushed to the fringes of the regime's power structure, overestimated the rationality of National Socialist rule and underestimated the primacy of ideological dogma.<sup>64</sup> Even the Germanization plans formulated within the SS in line with Nazi dogma, although implemented only symbolically,<sup>65</sup> mostly proved counter-productive, as exemplified by developments in the Waffen SS. The tendency of the SS Reich leadership to combine the Waffen SS's national volunteer legions, which originally operated autonomously, in large multinational formations under German leadership with predominantly German cadres, aggravated the already conflictual situation in which foreign volunteers found themselves. Above all, membership of their separate national formations had allowed them the illusion that they were pioneers of a better future for their own peoples, rather than traitors. Inevitably, the incorporation of foreign legions fighting in the framework of the SS into what were ultimately German units seriously undermined the possibility of national identification and the fighting motivation of the volunteers. In those circumstances it is not surprising that by mid-1943 more than a fifth of all mercenaries recruited in Flanders, Holland, Denmark, and Norway had left the service of the Waffen SS.<sup>66</sup> At the beginning of 1943 the Finnish liaison officer with SS Division 'Viking' already informed the SS Main Office that almost the whole battalion of Finnish volunteers wanted to be released, and the unit was dissolved in the summer of that year without replacement. The manifold difficulties within the volunteer units, and the political fragmentation of the 'Germanic' movement as such, ultimately rebounded on the success of SS recruitment efforts in the occupied countries. In February 1943 the head of the SS Main Office, Gottlob Berger, wrote to Himmler that 'the current dispersal of Germanic combat volunteers is [...] having a very bad effect on the recruitment of replacements'. Barely half a year later he considered the situation so disastrous as to write: 'In the Germanic countries we are at our wits' end.'<sup>67</sup> In 1944/5 this crisis was overcome in appearance only. Although the numbers of non-German SS volunteers again rose appreciably in the last 15 months of the war, this was ultimately not due to the SS's 'Germanic' efforts but the result of the increasingly desperate situation in which all national collaborationist movements now found themselves in view of the prospect of German defeat.

<sup>64</sup> Thus it was only after German defeat that some of the ideas referred to here found their way back into the debate on European policy in an entirely different framework. See also Salewski, 'Ideas', 53–4.

<sup>65</sup> In this connection, see above all the formation of 3rd ('Germanic') SS Armoured Corps; details in Wegner, 'Auf dem Wege zur pangermanischen Armee'.

<sup>66</sup> On this and the following, see Wegner, *Hitlers Politische Soldaten*, 292–3.

<sup>67</sup> Both quotations from *ibid.* 293.

# IV. Withdrawal from the East? ‘Fortress Europe’ and the Dilemma of Interconnected War

## 1. FÜHRER DIRECTIVE NO. 51

The overriding aim of all German war efforts in 1943 and 1944 was to consolidate and secure Germany’s strategic defensive position, already known to contemporaries as ‘Fortress Europe’.<sup>1</sup> In the autumn of 1942 the Naval War Staff was already talking about the need for rapid consolidation of a ‘European hedgehog position’ and warning of the danger of strategic encirclement of the German sphere of power—a danger which it perceived as a continuation of the enemy powers’ attempts at encirclement, which had been thwarted by the Wehrmacht’s military successes of 1939 and 1940.<sup>2</sup> Germany’s offensive war was thus reformulated as a defensive struggle on a continental scale, laying the theoretical basis for a defensive form of warfare conceived only as a means of gaining time. This reformulation nevertheless became a strategic principle only after the shocks of the Allied landing in North Africa and the Stalingrad disaster, and irrevocably after the failure of Operation CITADEL. But it was a strategic principle backed by no overall concept: ‘In the summer and autumn of 1943, the high command’s only aim and only plan’, Jodl admitted with disarming frankness a few weeks after the end of the war, ‘was to hold out on some line or other.’ And with regard to the plan of operations for 1944, all he could say was: ‘There wasn’t any.’<sup>3</sup>

A few figures will give an idea of the scale of the problems raised by the defence of ‘Fortress Europe’ in autumn 1943. They are based on calculations made by the relevant Wehrmacht and army agencies in October 1943 in preparation for Jodl’s address to Gauleiters. Table III.IV.1 shows the length of the front and coast sections at that time, together with the number of troops available for their defence.

What is striking is the enormous size of the defence area still controlled by Germany, despite the fact that it had already been considerably reduced by the loss of North Africa, the Allied advance in Italy, and the more recent setbacks on the eastern front. Although the total length of around 15,000 kilometres consisted

<sup>1</sup> See the discussion in Part I, Chapter I.3 of the present volume.

<sup>2</sup> See the Naval War Staff’s situation analysis of 20 Sept. 1942, ‘Welche militärischen Forderungen ergeben sich aus der gegenwärtigen Lage?’, BA-MA RM 7/259, 43; also the situation analysis of 20 Oct. 1942, repr. in Salewski, *Die deutsche Seekriegsleitung*, iii. 275–312, doc. 13.

<sup>3</sup> ‘Die Vernehmung von Generaloberst Jodl’, 540.

Table III.IV.1. 'Fortress Europe': size and distribution of forces in October 1943<sup>(a)</sup>

Front and coastal sectors	Length in km	Available forces	Men per kilometre <sup>(b)</sup>
Eastern front	2,100	3,900,000	1,860
Finland <sup>(c)</sup>	1,400	180,000 (630,000)	130 (450)
Norway	2,500	315,000	130
Denmark	700	110,000	160
Western Europe	2,600	1,370,000	530
Italy	1,750 <sup>(d)</sup>	330,000	190
South-East Europe <sup>(e)</sup>	4,200	610,000	145
<b>Total</b>	<b>15,250</b>	<b>6,815,000</b>	<b>450</b>

(a) Calculation basis: 'Materialien zum Vortrag des Chefs des Wehrmachtführungsstabes', *KTB OKW*, iv.1534 ff. (7 Nov. 1943); (b) the figures in this column are notional and intended only to give an idea of the density of forces; (c) the figures in brackets include the Finnish combat forces of roughly 450,000 men; (d) of which 150 km of fighting front; (e) including Crete and Rhodes.

predominantly of (as yet) uncontested coastline, the second front, expected to be opened by the spring of 1944 at the latest,<sup>4</sup> had long been casting its shadow.<sup>5</sup> Particularly under threat was the western, that is, French–Belgian–Dutch, area, whose over 2,500 kilometres of coastline, in the opinion of the Wehrmacht Operations Staff, permitted enemy landings almost everywhere and at almost any time of year. In addition, the terrain of western Europe, its extensive traffic network, and its well-developed infrastructure made it particularly suitable for a landing by operational armoured formations. It was also clear that for such an undertaking the enemy disposed of possible jumping-off points 'in an almost full circle from eastern England to the United States and North Africa, as far as Corsica and Sardinia, with some of the shortest access routes to the mainland': 'The enemy has superior forces locally available in all areas. The enemy units are still fresh and have accumulated experience in the campaign in Africa, Sicily, and Italy. Landing tactics and technique are exceptionally well developed, so that a large-scale landing must be reckoned with everywhere and at any time.'<sup>6</sup> If such a landing succeeded, not only would the U-boat bases on the Atlantic be cut off, but the whole industrial region of Belgium, northern France, and western Germany could also be taken out in very short order, with 'fatal' consequences for the defence of Germany.<sup>7</sup>

The experts in the Wehrmacht Operations Staff were sceptical about Germany's chances of defence against the threatening danger. It was absolutely necessary to repel and destroy the enemy at an early stage in his attack, if possible even before he reached the coast, but it was doubtful whether German had the ability to do so, and

<sup>4</sup> See handwritten letter of 31 Oct. 1943 from Capt. Assmann to 1. Skl, BA-MA RM 7/260, fos. 329–30.

<sup>5</sup> See also the discussion in Part I, Chapter I.3 of the present volume.

<sup>6</sup> WFSt/Op. (H)/West, 'Westlicher Kriegsschauplatz einschließlich Niederlande und Belgien', 2 Nov. 1943, BA-MA RW 4/v. 38, fos. 71–3.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, as also the following quotations.

not only because of the Allies' huge air superiority. The Atlantic Wall, which had long been systematically consolidated,<sup>8</sup> was no guarantee either, although 'in the number of bunkers and built-in weapons it surpasses any previous fortified line, including the West Wall and the Maginot Line'. Quite apart from the impossibility of securing the whole 2,600 kilometres of the coastal front with a deeply staggered belt of fortifications, the increasing dispersion of ever greater numbers of German forces over its whole length meant that, in the event of an attack, 'only a small part could be brought to bear on the disembarking enemy at any point'. The Wehrmacht Operations Staff consequently called for 'strong, mobile, well-equipped reserves in the west for the formation of points of concentration', while pointing out in the same breath that even if such reserves were deployed the 'available forces would be insufficient' in the event of a large-scale enemy offensive. In such an event, which would 'finally decide the outcome of the war', it would be necessary to 'deploy every German bearer of arms [...] leaving the homeland extensively depleted'.

German defence plans were complicated by the fact that—while the Allied invasion was expected in the western European theatre of operations, with the Channel coast and the Netherlands considered particularly under threat<sup>9</sup>—a landing in Scandinavia could not be ruled out. In this respect, Jodl and Hitler thought Denmark was at risk above all, since its occupation by the Allies would not only mean the loss of German control of the Baltic and the blockage of Swedish ore and Finnish nickel supplies, and might possibly draw Sweden into the war, but would also directly threaten the whole of northern Germany.<sup>10</sup> Although the Wehrmacht Operations Staff thought such a development rather unlikely for the time being, it had to be admitted that, with the increasing deterioration of the German situation in the east, there would be a growing likelihood of an Allied attack on Scandinavia, especially in the area of Denmark and southern Norway (i.e. probably on Oslo, with side attacks on Jutland and the German bases to the south of Bergen).<sup>11</sup> Moreover, the fact remained that, given their enormous transport capabilities, the Allies would be perfectly able to carry out several landing operations in parallel at different locations in 'Fortress Europe'.

Jodl's stubborn insistence on the threat to Germany in the west derived not least from his fear that the western theatres of operations could remain a secondary concern in Germany's conduct of the war, as they had been since 1941. However, Hitler's own interest in events on the eastern front, which in late June 1943 he had

<sup>8</sup> On this, see *Germany and the Second World War*, vii. 511–16.

<sup>9</sup> The Cherbourg peninsula and Brittany, however, were considered target areas 'for landings with limited aims and ancillary operations'; WFSt/Op. (M): 'Betrachtung der feindlichen Angriffsmöglichkeiten von Westen her gegen den Westraum', 4 Nov. 1943, BA-MA RM 7/260, fos. 352–7.

<sup>10</sup> In a handwritten letter of 25 Oct. 1943 to 1. Skl, Capt. Assmann reported Jodl's fears in this respect, with which Hitler had 'strongly' agreed; BA-MA RM 7/260. See KTB Skl, pt. A, l. 553–4 (27 Oct. 1943).

<sup>11</sup> WFSt/Op., 'Betrachtung der feindlichen Angriffsmöglichkeiten gegen den Nordraum', 3 Nov. 1943, BA-MA RM 7/260, fos. 338–46.

still seen as, 'of course, the decisive front for us',<sup>12</sup> had waned noticeably since the failure of Operation CITADEL. Just as after the failure of Operation BLUE and the defeat at Stalingrad he had resigned himself to the fact that the time for *strategic* offensives was past, he now realized that *operationally* significant victories in the east were no longer possible. As a result, his attention turned more strongly to the emerging developments in southern, south-eastern, and western Europe. 'The danger in the east remains,' he proclaimed in Directive No. 51 of 3 November 1943:<sup>13</sup>

but a greater danger now appears in the west: an Anglo-American landing! In the east, the vast extent of the territory makes it possible for us to lose ground, even on a large scale, without a fatal blow being dealt to the nervous system of Germany. It is very different in the west! Should the enemy succeed in breaching our defences on a wide front here, the immediate consequences would be unpredictable. Everything indicates that the enemy will launch an offensive against the western front of Europe at the latest in the spring, perhaps even earlier.

Directive No. 51 was provoked directly by the outcome of the meeting of Allied foreign ministers which had ended in Moscow a few days earlier.<sup>14</sup> Information from the intelligence services<sup>15</sup> led Hitler to believe that, 'in exchange for Russian alignment with their political position, the Anglo-Americans must have decided to make military promises, i.e. the rapid opening of a second front in western Europe'.<sup>16</sup> The dictator's view that Denmark and the 'coastal strips directly opposite England', including regions directly bordering on core areas of the Reich, were 'especially threatened' by this development<sup>17</sup> increased the pressure on him to act quickly. The Wehrmacht Operations Staff did everything it could to step up that pressure and urge Hitler to take a far-reaching decision in favour of the west. At the situation conference of 30 October Jodl insisted strongly that the western Allies long-awaited large-scale offensive against continental Europe would begin in the spring of 1944 at the latest. Irrespective of possible parallel operations against Denmark, southern Norway, or the Balkans, the enemy would in all probability be 'simply forced' to make his main landing on the Channel coast whether he wanted to or not, since only the shortest sea route would enable him to deploy the strongest possible force.<sup>18</sup> If that landing was successful, it could easily be expanded into a large-scale operation against 'the indispensable Ruhr district'

<sup>12</sup> Goebbels, *Tagebücher*, pt. 2, viii. 532 (25 June 1943).

<sup>13</sup> Hitlers Weisungen, 233.

<sup>14</sup> This is clear from the minutes of the meeting of naval commanders on 11 Nov. 1943, BA-MA RM 7/98.

<sup>15</sup> In this connection, special mention should be made of 'Cicero', a spy operating for the Germans in Turkey; on his role, see Wires, *The Cicero Spy Affair*.

<sup>16</sup> Minutes of meeting of commanders on 11 Nov. 1943, 1, BA-MA RM 7/98.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. The particular threat to Denmark too was raised by Jodl, with strong agreement from Hitler, at the situation conference of 25 Oct. 1943; see handwritten letter of 25 Oct. 1943 from Capt. Assmann to 1. Skl/Ia, BA-MA RM 7/260.

<sup>18</sup> All quotations, except where otherwise indicated, are from Capt. Assmann's handwritten letter of 31 Oct. 1943 to 1. Skl/Ia, BA-MA RM 7/260. On this, see KTB Skl, pt. A, li. 61–4 (3 Nov. 1943). On the thematic context, see also *Germany and the Second World War*, vii. 498–508.

and become a ‘deadly threat to Germany’. The German fortifications along the Atlantic coast and the English Channel were not sufficient to avert the danger. In any case, Jodl insisted, from the German side the Allied landing could ‘never be prevented on a purely defensive basis, but can only be repulsed by strong, fresh, and fully equipped *offensive* forces, that is to say the enemy must be forced back and driven from the continent by us through offensive action’.<sup>19</sup>

Hitler saw the enemy’s impending large-scale landing in the west as ‘the decisive hour of the war that *must* under all circumstances be turned to our advantage by ruthless employment of the very last forces which Germany can muster’. He agreed ‘fundamentally’ with Jodl’s analysis of the situation and instructed the chief of the Wehrmacht Operations Staff to take the necessary measures in agreement with the army leadership. The main task was obvious: countless new divisions had to be built from scratch<sup>20</sup> and more units had to be withdrawn from the east as needed. Furthermore, as Jodl demanded, the transfer of forces from the west to the eastern front had to ‘cease immediately’.<sup>21</sup> Hitler and his advisers undoubtedly saw the transfer of the strategic focus to western Europe that was now beginning as the sole remaining possibility of continuing the war for any length of time. It was by no means ‘continuity of strategic vision’<sup>22</sup> that led Hitler at the end of 1943 to return to the starting point of his European great-power war of 1939/40, but rather strategic hopelessness. The initiative, which still lay with the dictator at the beginning of the war, had long since passed to the Allies. And as to the question of *how* to react appropriately to the actions of the enemy, the German leadership had been deprived of all choice in the matter.

As in many similar cases, and whatever its specific cause, Hitler’s Directive No. 51 did not initiate a new process but simply sanctioned a reorientation of German conduct of the war that had long been under way. In May, as a result of the surrender of Tunis, a shift in strategic priorities had already been mooted in the event of crisis in western or southern Europe.<sup>23</sup> On 25 July the OKW, resolutely exploiting the debacle of the battle of Kursk, which had been broken off shortly before, announced the number of major formations it needed by the autumn for the theatres of operations for which *it* was responsible. Instead of the 84 units hitherto available, it now demanded that 116 major formations be put at its

<sup>19</sup> Jodl’s thinking was taken into account in the wording of Directive No. 51, which called for ‘the rapid concentration of adequate forces and material, as well as intensive training, to transform the large units available to us [in the west, B.W.] into first-rate, fully mobile reserves suitable for offensive operations. The counter-attack by these units will prevent the enlargement of the beachhead, and throw the enemy back into the sea’ (*Hitlers Weisungen*, 234).

<sup>20</sup> See Führer Order of 27 Nov. 1943 (BA-MA RW 4/v. 474), in which Hitler ordered the services to release ‘at least a million men’ from their own ranks to serve at the front. For details, see *Germany and the Second World War*, v/II, 1031–59.

<sup>21</sup> Assmann’s handwritten letter of 31 Oct. 1943, 2, BA-MA RM 7/260.

<sup>22</sup> Thus Hillgruber, *Der Zweite Weltkrieg*, 134. Hillgruber develops his ‘continuity’ thesis through a comparison of the overall situations in 1940 and 1943/4. A necessary precondition for that thesis would, of course, be the existence of comparable room for manoeuvre in both situations. But that is precisely what was lacking in the case at issue. Hitler took his decision because he had no alternative worth considering.

<sup>23</sup> See Part I, Chapter I.3 of the present volume.

disposal. Since the extra requirement could not be met by the formation of new units alone, no fewer than nine or ten divisions (including six or seven motorized units) were to be taken from the eastern front.<sup>24</sup> In the ensuing intensified struggle between the Wehrmacht and the army leadership over the divisions still available, the OKW had repeatedly to defend itself against the ‘wrongheaded notion’ that forces were needlessly being withheld from the heavily embattled eastern army.<sup>25</sup> Thanks to the change in Hitler’s priorities, however, the OKW finally gained greater leverage. Although the Soviet Union still remained the most important theatre of war for Germany in purely quantitative terms, the head-count of German troops deployed there now stood at its lowest level since the beginning of the war against the Soviet Union. Whereas in June 1941 the Wehrmacht and the Red Army were still more or less evenly matched in numbers, with about 3.3 million men on each side, the figure for the Red Army had since doubled, and that for the Wehrmacht had fallen to barely 78 per cent of its original level.<sup>26</sup> In the theatre of operations where, according to the casualty figures, around 90 per cent of all battles were taking place,<sup>27</sup> only 57 per cent of all German combat forces (3.9 million men out of a total of 6.9 million) were now deployed. And in October 1943 not even two-thirds of the field army’s approximately 4 million men were deployed on and behind what was by far the longest land front.<sup>28</sup> Since the high point of Operation CITADEL, the actual strength of the eastern army had fallen by over half a million to barely 2.6 million men.<sup>29</sup> In view of the exorbitantly high casualty figures, now averaging 150,000 men per month, that might still seem a large number. In comparison with the estimated 5.5 million men (in reality probably 6.4 million) deployed by the Red Army on that same front, it was alarmingly small.<sup>30</sup> In those weeks and months, moreover, worrying comparisons were made between the current situation of the eastern army and that of the German western army in the final phase of the First World War. They showed that in July 1918 a division had to cover on average 3.5 kilometres of front, whereas 25 years later the average on the eastern front was nearly 16 kilometres. In other

<sup>24</sup> KTB OKW, iii. 827 (25 July 1943); see also Hubatsch’s comment, *ibid.* 1629.

<sup>25</sup> Chef WFSt, accompanying letter of 14 Sept 1943 to his memorandum of 8 Sept. 1943 ‘Entspricht die Verteilung der Gesamtkräfte auf den einzelnen Kriegsschauplätzen der strategischen Lage?’, BA-MA RM 7/260. The purpose of the memorandum was to show that the transfer of German forces to northern, western, and southern Europe was indispensable.

<sup>26</sup> See Diagram VII.I.1. ‘Comparison of actual strength of the German Eastern Army and the Soviet army on the European front’.

<sup>27</sup> According to the figures reported by the OKH medical officer, field army casualties (dead, wounded, and missing) in the period from 22 June 1941 to 31 May 1944, i.e. from the beginning of the war against the Soviet Union to the eve of the Normandy invasion, totalled 4.48 million men, of which around 92% (4.12 million) were incurred on the eastern front. See ‘Personelle blutige Verluste des Feldheeres. Berichtigte Meldung für die Zeit vom 1.6.1944 bis 10.1.1945’, BA-MA RW 6/v. 560.

<sup>28</sup> See Table III.II.3 in *Germany and the Second World War*, v/II. 1030.

<sup>29</sup> See Diagram III.II.10, *ibid.* 1020.

<sup>30</sup> See Table III.II.1, *ibid.* 1018. According to more recent Russian data (*Grif sekretnosti sniat*, 152), in 1943 the Red Army deployed a monthly average of 6.39 million troops (excl. partisans).

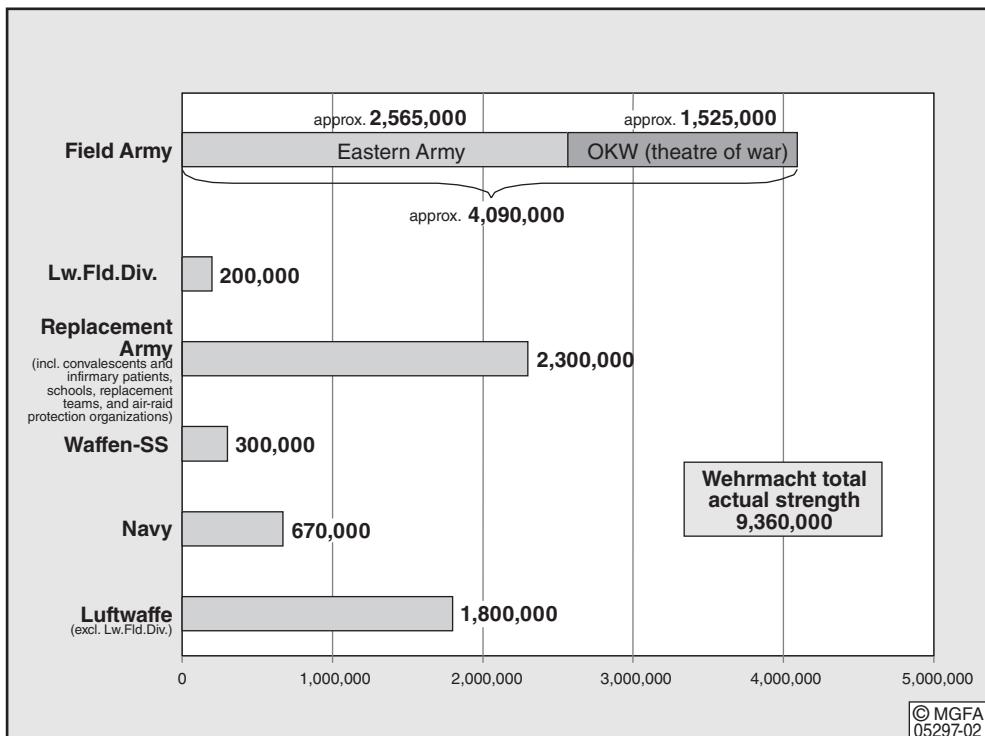


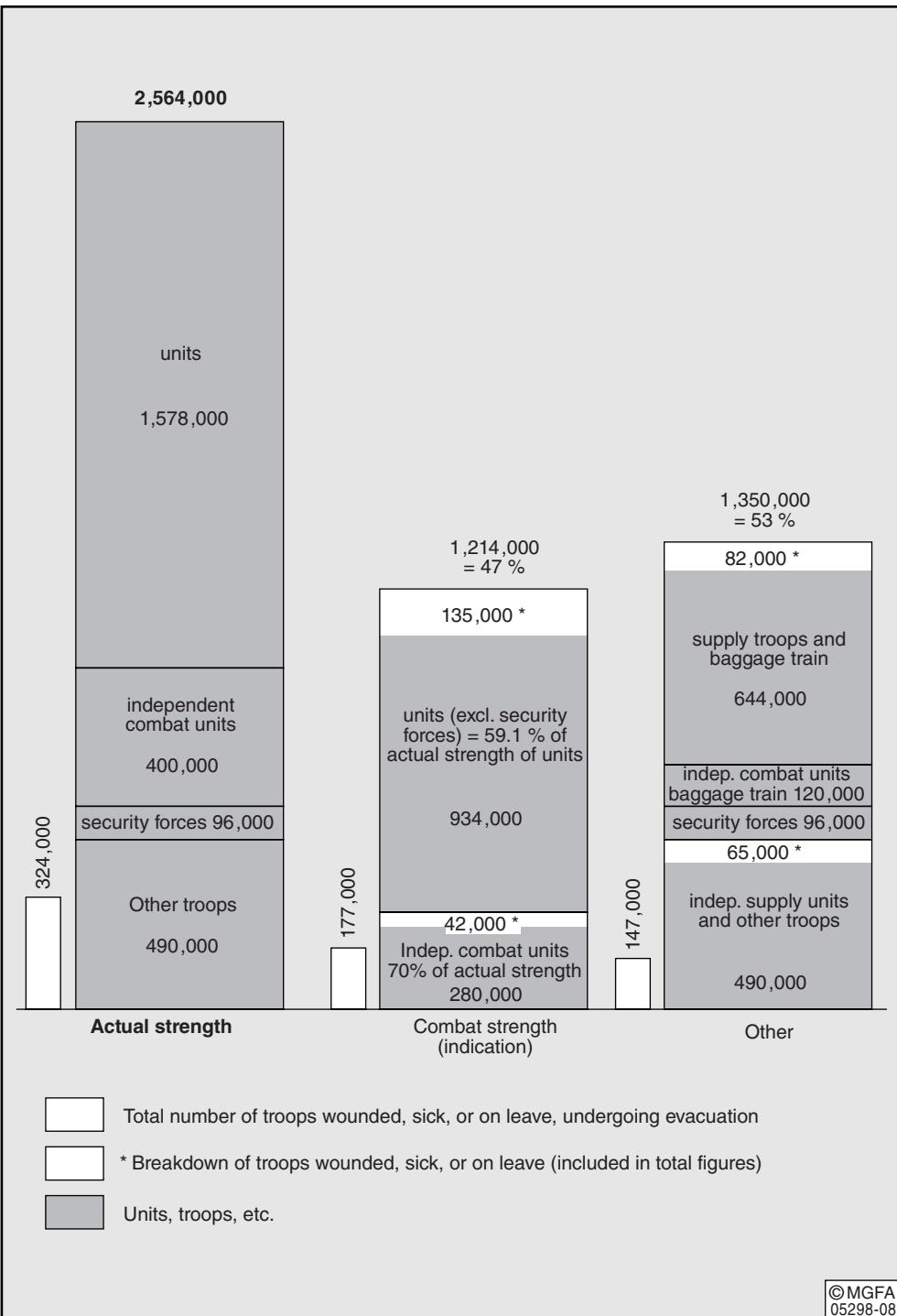
Diagram III.iv.1. Breakdown of Wehrmacht actual strength at 1 October 1943 (excl. birth year 1926)

words, where one division had stood in 1918, there stood in the autumn and winter of 1943/4 only one battalion.<sup>31</sup>

Unlike in the first twelve months of the war in the east, the German leadership was by no means surprised by the development outlined above. If the memoirs of his adjutant are to be believed, Hitler himself perceived ‘the future threatening developments on the eastern front sooner and more clearly than his advisers’.<sup>32</sup> In October 1943, that is, even before Directive No. 51 was issued, Foreign Armies East had already set out in detail the increase in the strength of the Red Army which would have to be reckoned with in the coming months. Although the enemy’s casualties in terms of dead, wounded, and prisoners had risen during the summer (June to August) by a total of 900,000 from the figures in the previous months, the

<sup>31</sup> See FHO, undated table, BA-MA RH 2/2598; ‘Kräftegegenüberstellung für die Ostfront mit Stand vom 13.1.1944’, BA-MA RH 2/1897 K.

<sup>32</sup> Below, *Als Hitlers Adjutant*, 352.



**Diagram III.iv.2. Breakdown of the Eastern Army at 1 October 1943 (excl. SS and Luftwaffe field units)**  
**Source:** Fremde Heere Ost (IIc), BA-MA RH 2/2602.

actual strength of the Russian army on the European front had increased over the same period by 300,000 men, from 5.8 to 6.1 million.<sup>33</sup>

Thus, in contrast to Germany's eastern army, the Red Army's strength in the European theatre of war was again at its highest level. Furthermore, the call-up of new birth years (1926, 1888–92) which had meanwhile proved necessary had brought its human reserves to some 2.5 million men. Foreign Armies East estimated that, over and above the ongoing replacement and rehabilitation of hard-hit units, this would permit the formation of 27 new rifle divisions, while a similar number could be formed from the remnants of dissolved units. It could therefore be assumed that by the end of the current year the Soviet Union would be in a position to form another 54 rifle divisions and some 25 rifle or armoured brigades. Around half of these divisions would be ready before the end of the autumn, and deployment of the remainder could be expected in the winter months.<sup>34</sup>

In fact, in the five months from July to November 1943 the new units reported by Foreign Armies East on the Soviet Union's European front numbered no fewer than 52 rifle divisions, one cavalry division, 39 brigades (including 19 armoured brigades), and 86 armoured regiments.<sup>35</sup> While these figures were considerably lower than those for the previous year, they were alarming enough, especially as the Red Army could be assumed to have withdrawn an appreciable number of units from the front for rehabilitation with a view to the winter hostilities. The total amount of these reserves, some of which were near the front while others needed to be brought up from the hinterland, was estimated by Foreign Armies East towards the end of 1943 at 163 rifle units and 220 armoured units, plus a further 40 to 50 rifle divisions assumed to exist in new formations.<sup>36</sup>

The evaluation of the Red Army's equipment was no less sobering than the assessment of its capacity for regeneration of its human resources. With regard to armour, the enemy had indeed suffered enormous losses in the east: for 1943 alone the Germans estimated total Soviet losses at over 18,000 armoured vehicles, and over 56,000 for the whole duration of the war in the east up to the end of 1943.<sup>37</sup> Nevertheless, in mid-October 1943, that is, only a few months after the summer battles in which so many losses were incurred, it was estimated that the Soviet Union, mainly thanks to its own high output and because of supplies from the Allies, still (or once again) possessed a total of 9,320 tanks, around half of which

<sup>33</sup> These and the following figures are taken from FHO (IIa), 'Entwicklung des personellen Kriegspotentials und die Menschenreserven der Sowjet-Union/Stand 1.9.43, 12.10.1943', BA-MA RH 2/2092. On that basis, the Soviet Union's total losses in prisoners, dead, and wounded from the beginning of the war on 22 June 1941 to 1 Sept. 1943 have been estimated at 13.3 million.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> See FHO (IIc), 'Bedarf an Menschen zur Aufstellung der in der Zeit vom 1.7. bis 30.11.43 an der Europafront neu aufgetretenen sowjetrussischen Verbände', 28 Dec. 1943, BA-MA RH 2/2602.

<sup>36</sup> FHO (IIa), 'Vortragsnotiz über den möglichen Kräfteeinsatz bei den russischen Winteroperationen', 29 Dec. 1943, BA-MA RH 2/2092.

<sup>37</sup> This estimate agrees almost exactly with recent Russian data, which is based on a total of 59,100 losses up to the end of 1943; see FHO (IIc), 'Sowjetrussische Panzer- und Sturmgeschütz-Verluste, 1941–1943', n.d. [Jan. 1944], BA-MA RH 2/2589, fo. 51, and *Grif sekretnosti sniat*, 357.

had been detected on or near the German front.<sup>38</sup> As for the front-line aircraft at the enemy's disposal, Foreign Armies East was able to detect 'no decisive inroads into the total stock' following the summer hostilities. The losses incurred during the summer had already been made good by the end of September, and at the end of October the total number was 'already higher than at the beginning of the summer battles'. Worse still: by the spring of 1944 the stock of front-line aircraft, thanks to largely undisturbed production, would reach 28,000, that is, 'the same level as at the beginning of the war'. However, as a result of modernization, which had been completed on schedule, its combat value would be far greater than in 1941.<sup>39</sup>

In the run-up to the final decision on Directive No. 51, Galen's department came to the hardly surprising conclusion that the trend shown by the findings outlined above was 'much more worrying' for Germany than for the Soviet Union, and that 'in the future the Soviet Russian enemy [would] continue to be superior to Germany in human and material resources and propaganda': 'To expect a slackening on the part of the enemy would be to take refuge in a false judgement. Soviet Russia is *with certainty* capable of a strong winter offensive at least equal to that of the summer in terms of the quantity of men and material deployed.'<sup>40</sup> This was simply a roundabout way of saying that further German setbacks were to be expected in the east unless the human and material basis for Germany's conduct of the war was improved considerably in the short term. That, however, was precisely what the Reich leadership was incapable of doing. Despite the loud proclamation of 'total war', the attempt to achieve manpower management geared to the needs of the front had more or less misfired.<sup>41</sup> While the efforts to increase armaments production were more successful,<sup>42</sup> they made no difference to Germany's hopeless inferiority in the arms race with the Allies.<sup>43</sup> When Hitler, against this background, decided to shift the focus of his future military efforts from the eastern to the supposedly more endangered western front, he had some good reasons for doing so. But neither he nor the OKH and Wehrmacht Operations Staffs could have failed to realize that this decision would necessarily have disastrous consequences for the situation of the eastern army. Hitler's directive of 3 November was, moreover, an admission that the war in the east had entered a new phase. What those responsible had up till then endeavoured to portray as an operational feint or a circumstantial

<sup>38</sup> FHO (IIc), 'Panzer-Bestand am 14.10.43, 15.10.1943', BA-MA RH 2/2589.

<sup>39</sup> The 'number of outdated aircraft' had fallen from 84% at the beginning of the war to 20% in the autumn of 1943. See FHO (I), 'Vortragsnotiz Russische Luftwaffe nach Angabe des Luftlageberichts Ost/Stand: 1.11.1943', 12 Nov. 1943, BA-MA RH 2/2115. According to *Grif sekretnosti sniat*, 360, the total number of Soviet front-line aircraft at the beginning of 1944 was around 32,500.

<sup>40</sup> FHO (Ia), 'Bisherige Entwicklung des deutsch-sowjetrussischen Kräfteverhältnisses seit Kriegsbeginn und seine mögliche Weiterentwicklung bis Ende 1943', 17 Oct. 1943, here 4 and 18–19, BA-MA RH 2/2566.

<sup>41</sup> See in detail *Germany and the Second World War*, v/II. 837–1064, and Kroener's summary in 'Nun Volk steh auf...!'

<sup>42</sup> On this, see the comprehensive studies in Eichholtz, *Geschichte der deutschen Kriegswirtschaft*, iii, and *Germany and the Second World War*, v/II. 295–831.

<sup>43</sup> See Harrison, 'Resource Mobilization' and, though with different conclusions, Overy, *Why the Allies Won*, here esp. 331–2 (Appendix).

straightening of the front line would now, notwithstanding all the rhetoric about holding fast, assume the character of a long strategic retreat. There were considerable differences of view within the German leadership concerning the duration and extent of that retreat, as is shown by the East Wall debate discussed in section 3 of the present chapter. It was nevertheless clear from the outset that, given the ubiquitous adoption of a scorched-earth policy, the retreats taking place in 1943 and 1944 would lend a new quality to the growing escalation of violence in the eastern theatre of war. Even more than during the months of the German offensive, the civilian population became the main victim of a labour of destruction which, while it might perhaps delay the advance of the Red Army in places, conjured up apocalyptic visions of the future facing the German people in the event of defeat.

## 2. SCORCHED EARTH

The scorched-earth tactic employed extensively from 1943—from the beginning of the Wehrmacht's large-scale retreats from Russia—was a form of behaviour characteristic of German warfare in the east. Military necessity, professionally organized devastation, individual delight in destruction, and politically and ideologically motivated annihilation all blended in an almost indissoluble symbiosis. The scorched-earth principle was, of course, by no means an invention of Nazi warfare. The inclination of retreating armies to leave systematically devastated terrain in their wake has long been evident in history and has repeatedly left its traces in Europe in the modern age, as, for example, during the Thirty Years War and the wars of Louis XIV. Carl von Clausewitz described the phenomenon as follows:

All that the country yields will be taken for the benefit of the retreating army first, and will be mostly consumed. Nothing remains but wasted villages and towns, fields from which the crops have been gathered, or which are trampled down, empty wells, and muddy brooks. The pursuing army, therefore, from the very first day, has frequently to contend with the most pressing wants. On taking the enemy's supplies he cannot reckon; it is only through accident, or some unpardonable blunder on the part of the enemy, that here and there some little falls into his hands.<sup>44</sup>

As a means of delaying an enemy advance, this tactic proved effective mainly where armies operated far from their starting positions and were especially reliant on the resources of the countryside. So it is not surprising that it was precisely Russian tsars who employed scorched-earth tactics in defence against foreign invaders, like Peter the Great against Charles XII or Alexander I against Napoleon. It was this policy which Stalin saw himself as continuing when, on 3 July 1941, two weeks after the start of the German offensive, he ordered the evacuation or destruction of all goods that could be of use to the enemy in the areas threatened by him.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>44</sup> Clausewitz, *Vom Kriege*, 684.

<sup>45</sup> Radio address of 3 July 1941; see also *Germany and the Second World War*, iv. 854–5 and 906.

The Soviet scorched-earth measures in the summer of 1941 contributed decisively to the Soviet Union's survival in the Second World War, less by the destruction they wrought than by the evacuation of economic infrastructure.<sup>46</sup> They served as a welcome precedent for the German dictator when, in the same year, the winter crisis of the eastern army made the first retreats necessary. Immediately after the launch of the Soviet winter offensive at the beginning of December, Hitler ordered the general staffs of the army groups concerned 'to destroy unreservedly all possible living accommodation in the abandoned areas'. The troops were to be informed that 'all concern for the situation of the local population [...] must be set aside in the interests of the military operations'.<sup>47</sup> A Führer order issued shortly after the defeat at Stalingrad summarized once again the principles governing the clearance, evacuation, and destruction operations, and stated, as if in justification: 'The Russian has shown us what to do.' The troops were not only warned against letting weapons and equipment fall undestroyed into enemy hands, but were expressly ordered to burn or destroy, during the clearance operations, any valuable installations, living accommodation, and so on that could quickly be made usable. Furthermore, the troops were to take away with them 'all men between 15 and 65 years of age', to serve as 'heavy labourers'. In the case of large-scale clearance operations, 'the mass of the civilian population was to be taken away and the villages destroyed'.<sup>48</sup>

Hitler's demands were described in advance as being 'in the vital interests of the heavily embattled troops'.<sup>49</sup> What they meant in practice was already seen during the evacuation of the Rzhev–Vyazma salient in March 1943. The systematic planning of the evacuation was matched by systematic destruction, after Army Group Centre HQ had called for the evacuated area to be turned into a 'wasteland' and had ordered the troops, among other things, to 'destroy all dwellings, wells, and bridges during their withdrawal, and to sow mines throughout the area'.<sup>50</sup> What followed was widespread destruction of the infrastructure in the areas of both Ninth and Fourth Armies. In a report dated 11 March, the commander-in-chief of Fourth Army gave an idea of its extent when, referring to Vyazma, he stated that 'all installations important for the war effort have been completely destroyed', and that 'owing to the location of those installations in the town [...] the destruction of the

<sup>46</sup> See *ibid.* 856–7; also Barber and Harrison, *The Soviet Home Front*, 127–32.

<sup>47</sup> War diary of Army Group North (Ia), 8 Dec. 1941, BA-MA RH 19 III/769, fo. 42. Further incisive instructions and reports in *Europa unterm Hakenkreuz*, v. 237–8 (doc. 67), 240–1 (doc. 70), and 328–9 (doc. 124); see also Wrochem, *Manstein*, 93 (n. 265). The fact that the corresponding instructions did penetrate downwards is shown by the example of 253rd Infantry Division, which on 13 December 1941 was ordered by XXIII Corps HQ to 'prepare a total "wasteland" in front of its positions, to a depth of at least 20 and if possible 30 kilometres'. The division passed this order on to its units on 16 December. For this division alone, the destruction of an area of 1,000 to 1,500 km<sup>2</sup> was planned. According to the order, the indigenous population was to be forced, regardless of the winter, into the no-man's-land between the main battle lines, in order to serve as a 'human barrier' against the advancing Red Army; Rass, *Menschenmaterial*, 379–80.

<sup>48</sup> Führer Order No. 4 of 14 Feb. 1943, quoted in *Europa unterm Hakenkreuz*, v. 390, doc. 157.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> Army Group Centre HQ directive of 11 Feb. 1943, repr. in *Ibid.* 385, doc. 154. See also Rass, *Menschenmaterial*, 381–2.

town itself could not be avoided'. All that had been spared were 'buildings of cultural value' and two 'infirmaries containing Russian soldiers and civilians'.<sup>51</sup>

The picture was similar after the abandonment of the Orel bulge in July 1943. The Orel garrison commander's report on the destruction of the town contains a five-page list of destroyed buildings and installations. As proof of the effectiveness of the measures taken, Army Group Centre subsequently circulated a report by a British journalist who visited the town after it was retaken by the Red Army: 'The Orel province is no more than a smoking, exploding heap of rubble [...] After the retreat, Orel simply no longer exists.'<sup>52</sup> The picture is confirmed by German troops' letters from the front. 'Orel', a 30-year-old ordinary soldier wrote to his fiancée in August, 'has been completely razed to the ground [...] and left to the Russians'; the inhabitants had 'fled to the hinterland'.<sup>53</sup> Six weeks later the same writer, referring to another town, 'on whose outskirts we are positioned', reported that 'in 5 days it will no longer exist. The Russians will find only the rubble of blown-up houses and bridges [...] People and livestock from a huge area abandoned to the enemy are all streaming west. The Russians will find an empty wasteland. Every village and every hut are going up in flames.'<sup>54</sup>

Time and again, division commanders found it necessary to issue specific directives on the implementation of the destruction measures. At the beginning of August, the commander of 296th Infantry Division ordered as follows:

Everything stands and falls on destruction of the harvest, followed by that of all other goods, especially living accommodation. The main method of destruction must be burning. Explosives should be used only on things which cannot be burnt. [...] All resources must be mobilized [...] Every soldier behind the main battle line must be assigned the daily task of uprooting 100 potato plants in the early hours of the morning [...] By the evening of 9 Aug. 1943 I do not want to see a single grain or potato field left standing [...] By 17 Aug. at the latest: [...] destruction of unripened grain and buckwheat fields by mowing or grinding. Burning to the ground the listed villages and settlements, where not already done.<sup>55</sup>

In September 1943 a young infantryman wrote a letter to his wife containing his impressions of the retreat on the Dnieper: 'On the opposite bank of the river everything has been ablaze for days, for I have to tell you that all the towns and villages in the areas we are now evacuating are being set on fire; even the smallest house must be burnt down. All large buildings are blown up. The Russians must find nothing but a field of rubble, with no possible lodgings for troops. So it's a horribly beautiful picture.'<sup>56</sup>

<sup>51</sup> Report by Oberbefehlshaber AOK 4, 11 Mar. 1943, quoted in *Europa unterm Hakenkreuz*, v. 399, doc. 164. The following account is based in its choice of examples, except where otherwise indicated, on Klingenberg's unpublished Master's dissertation 'Strategie und Politik'.

<sup>52</sup> Quoted in Klingenberg, 'Strategie und Politik', 32.

<sup>53</sup> Letter from Kolbenhoff dated 10 Aug. 1943, quoted in Latzel, *Deutsche Soldaten*, 155.

<sup>54</sup> Letter from Kolbenhoff dated 24 Sept. 1943, quoted *ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> Directive of 5 Aug. 1943, quoted in Klingenberg, 'Strategie und Politik', 33.

<sup>56</sup> Letter from Pretzel dated 21 Sept. 1943, quoted in Latzel, *Deutsche Soldaten*, 155.

The ‘intensification of annihilation thinking’<sup>57</sup> among the troops which such directives sought to achieve proved a two-edged sword. As could hardly be otherwise expected, it encouraged savagery, even to the point of putting tactical and operational aims at risk. Higher command authorities increasingly found it necessary to intervene against ‘burning which has become a custom’,<sup>58</sup> and to warn against vandalism. ‘Regrettable scenes. Soldiers are losing control of themselves, etc., etc.,’ wrote a young rank-and-file soldier, commenting on the destruction operations of his own troops.<sup>59</sup> ‘We too’, another soldier later recalled, ‘moved teams through the villages firing phosphorus rounds into the dry straw roofs, which immediately burst into flames. In this way we managed to burn down whole villages in a short time. The Russians used to call us “the incendiary division”’.<sup>60</sup>

Apart from troop discipline, the destruction operations were also a source of major concern to the leadership because of their effect on military tactics. Most seriously, they made it harder, or even impossible, to conceal German intentions, since burning houses all too easily alerted the enemy to the timing and direction of planned withdrawals. According to a report from 56th Infantry Division to XII Army Corps HQ:

During the recent withdrawal movements, as confirmed in statements by prisoners, the enemy was always alerted to the further course of the withdrawal by the partially needless burning of buildings. In certain cases, marches through villages were impeded by fires which had been started arbitrarily. Above all, the resulting night-time illumination made it particularly easy for enemy aircraft to attack the withdrawing forces.<sup>61</sup>

There is no evidence to suggest that either the Wehrmacht units which were obliged to withdraw, or their corps HQs, rejected ‘scorched earth’ on principle or sabotaged its application. Nevertheless, testimony of various kinds shows that the two issues referred to in the above-mentioned report—the tactical effectiveness of the destruction measures in general, and concern about the growing savagery of the troops in particular—caused the divisions in question serious problems. If they were to serve their main military objective of delaying the enemy advance, systematic destruction operations required a great deal of time and personnel that in some cases were simply not available. This often resulted in constant switching between withdrawal movements at night, hasty construction of defensive positions in the morning, and more or less systematic destruction activities during the day.<sup>62</sup>

<sup>57</sup> Wording adopted in the directive of 5 Aug. 1943 to 296th Infantry Division; see Klingenbergs, ‘Strategie und Politik’.

<sup>58</sup> This was the phrase used in a directive from the relevant corps HQ to 56th Infantry Division, quoted in Klingenbergs, ‘Strategie und Politik’, 36.

<sup>59</sup> Letter from Pretzel dated 21 Oct. 1943, quoted in Latzel, *Deutsche Soldaten*, 155.

<sup>60</sup> Schneider, *Aus der Hölle*, 32–3. (The reference here is to 15th Infantry Division.)

<sup>61</sup> Quoted in Klingenbergs, ‘Strategie und Politik’, 35–6.

<sup>62</sup> See *ibid.* 63. In the case of 253rd Inf. Div., in many respects a typical large infantry formation, this led during the 1942/3 withdrawals, according to estimates by Rass (*‘Verbrecherische Kriegsführung’*, 86), to the devastation of a total area of approx. 5,000 km<sup>2</sup>.

In those circumstances, impairment of the German forces' own operations was unavoidable. Communication connections, transport links, and living quarters used by the Wehrmacht itself fell victim to the destruction. According to a directive issued in the area of Second Armoured Army at the beginning of August 1943, the divisions had to cope with the fact 'that they are often quartered in particularly difficult terrain. Many of the places shown on the map no longer exist.'<sup>63</sup>

Divisional staffs and corps HQs reacted to all these difficulties by endeavouring to carry out the destruction orders they received in a manner adapted to the local situation. In general, this must have involved not so much the curbing of destruction measures as their control, regulation, and channelling. Fully consistent with that approach were the repeated reminders that the destruction of whole villages was 'a tactic which required an order from the leadership'. All burning down was to be restricted to buildings and installations 'of economic or military importance to the enemy'.<sup>64</sup> Sometimes, out of concern to preserve winter quarters for the division's own troops, all vandalizing and destruction of villages was wholly forbidden. In other cases, orders were issued not to burn down buildings, as was usually done, but to dismantle them instead, so as to obtain materials for the construction of defensive positions. In order to control destructive frenzy on the part of the troops going beyond what was justifiable on military grounds, some divisional commanders finally resorted to threatening those guilty of arbitrary vandalism with court martial for undermining combat efficiency.<sup>65</sup>

The troops' growing inclination to arbitrary requisitioning also gave cause for alarm. Under the conditions of a withdrawal governed by the scorched-earth principle, the already delicate distinction between the imperative of self-supply and the prohibition of plundering was increasingly absent. 'We had a cattle wagon with us, in which there were four cows, two calves, a few hens, rabbits, etc.', an older rank-and-file soldier reported in a letter to his wife. 'Now you'll ask me where we got it all from. Well, the population is retreating before the Russians, so you can buy things *cheap*'.<sup>66</sup> And a few weeks later: 'Yesterday around twenty trucks were out in the surrounding area getting potatoes for the section. It's a military operation [...] An interpreter goes with the men to a village and asks for so and so many potatoes. Now, there are real partisan villages which give nothing voluntarily. So there we have to organize things. Chickens, pigs, geese, change hands.'<sup>67</sup> The euphemistic phrasing cannot hide the fact that the borderline between buying and stealing had long since disappeared, and spontaneous 'organizing' was increasingly turning into 'organized robbery'.<sup>68</sup> In 20th Armoured Division too, 'reports of illegal requisitioning of livestock and seizure of vegetables and potatoes by troops from the division have recently increased to an intolerable extent'.<sup>69</sup> Things were clearly very similar in many other divisions. An NCO taken prisoner at Stalingrad

<sup>63</sup> Quoted in Klingenberg, 'Strategie und Politik', 38.

<sup>64</sup> Directives to 56th and 296th Inf. Div., quoted *ibid.* 36.

<sup>65</sup> For examples of such directives, see *ibid.* 35 ff.

<sup>66</sup> Letter from Bauer dated 17 Sept. 1943, quoted in Latzel, *Deutsche Soldaten*, 144.

<sup>67</sup> Letter from Bauer dated 12 Oct. 1943, quoted *ibid.* <sup>68</sup> *Ibid.* 144.

<sup>69</sup> Quoted in Klingenberg, 'Strategie und Politik', 37.

recalled 'the fond habits, from the times of deployment in enemy territory, of helping yourself wherever and whenever the opportunity arose'.<sup>70</sup>

Commanders increasingly felt obliged to threaten tough action against military plundering, including court martial if necessary. How often such threats were followed by action, which might have had a deterrent effect, has not been sufficiently investigated so far, but it is likely to have been seldom the case.<sup>71</sup> In the given situation there were too many factors inducing the commanders responsible to refrain, in the end, from initiating inherently urgent court-martial proceedings. For one thing, there were the external difficulties dictated by the conditions of the withdrawal itself: a dramatic shortage of personnel, the extreme time pressure under which the withdrawal movements often had to be carried out, and the particularly difficult evidential situation resulting therefrom, which often rendered the reconstruction and criminal assessment of the acts committed barely possible. For another, the overall situation in terms of orders from above made it difficult for commanders to invoke *jus in bello*. In the context of a scorched-earth policy that was highly questionable under international law, the provisions of the Decree on Military Jurisdiction,<sup>72</sup> which were in themselves an incitement to criminal acts, naturally had particularly devastating effects. At the beginning of August, Fourth Armoured Army HQ (Hoth) had already ordered the troops to 'take advantage of every opportunity to seize livestock' and to 'take it from the population by force of arms, if necessary'.<sup>73</sup> Similar orders were issued in the area of Army Group Centre. With winter approaching, concern to build up adequate stores for one's own troops came to the fore. Orders to carry out the compulsory purchase of livestock and to secure the population's grain harvests for the use of the troops were on the agenda.<sup>74</sup> For an army in the throes of withdrawal, this opened the floodgates for plunder.

Those who suffered most from the type of withdrawal outlined above were the civilian population, ground once again between the millstones of the opposing armies. An early, striking example is the fate of the city of Kharkov, which had to be evacuated by the German troops at short notice in February 1943 but was retaken the following month.<sup>75</sup> According to a German intelligence report of April that year, the city 'gives the impression of total destruction. Around a third of all buildings have been completely destroyed—some blown up by German troops during the withdrawal and others bombed by German aircraft. Two-thirds of the houses are more or less badly damaged and need repair before they can be lived in.'

<sup>70</sup> Meyer, *Kriegsgefangener in Stalingrad*, 112. On this and other examples, see also Hilger, *Deutsche Kriegsgefangene in der Sowjetunion*, 292–3.

<sup>71</sup> Klingenberg, 'Strategie und Politik', 38, has been able to confirm no more than three cases of court martial for military plundering in the area of 383rd Infantry Division during the second half of 1943.

<sup>72</sup> The decree (repr. in 'Unternehmen Barbarossa'. *Der deutsche Überfall auf die Sowjetunion 1941*, 306–7, doc. 6) abolished court-martial proceedings for offences and crimes committed by members of the Wehrmacht against 'enemy civilians'.

<sup>73</sup> Quoted in Friedrich, *Das Gesetz des Krieges*, 513.

<sup>74</sup> For examples, see Klingenberg, 'Strategie und Politik', 40.

<sup>75</sup> On the context, see *Germany and the Second World War*, vi. 1182–4 and 1191–2.

Houses with their window-panes intact are few and far between.<sup>76</sup> Nevertheless, around 200,000 of the former 300,000 inhabitants remained in the city. The German intelligence unit estimated that, of the other 100,000, some 35,000 had left the city in search of better living conditions in the countryside, while around 10,000 in each case had left together with the German or Soviet units. Apart from these, the Red Army had recruited some 20,000 men and women as soldiers or intelligence staff, and a further 4,000 had been shot in the course of the first Soviet purges. ‘The rest, around 21,000, must have died as a result of combat operations.’<sup>77</sup>

The plunder, exploitation, evacuation, and deportation of the civilian population was an integral part of the scorched-earth principle, according to which human as well as material resources were to be seized from the enemy and used for one’s own purposes. The procedure whose beginnings were discernible in Kharkov was put into practice on a large scale in the following months. In September 1943, Army Group North HQ ordered the evacuation of around 900,000 people ‘from the area between the present forwardmost line and the Panther Line’.<sup>78</sup> In the area of Army Group Centre, over half a million civilians had been systematically uprooted by October 1943.<sup>79</sup> For January 1944 alone, Army Group South reported the forced evacuation of 143,000 local inhabitants and Army Group A that of 105,000.<sup>80</sup> Unless they voluntarily joined the evacuation, the elderly, infirm, sick, and mothers with infants remained and were left to their own resources, or—as in the area under the command of Ninth Army—were expelled ‘in the direction of enemy or bandit territory’ as ‘useless mouths to feed’.<sup>81</sup> Men of arms-bearing and working age, and often women too, were either deported to Germany for labour service or grouped together in work camps or work battalions for menial and navvying tasks. Exactly who was affected, and how, largely depended on local circumstances and military developments. In mid-November, for example, 383rd Infantry Division ordered all able-bodied men aged 16 to 65, and all women aged 15 to 45 who did not have children under 15 years of age, to be assembled in labour squads. Those affected were treated essentially like prisoners of war and had to reckon on being shot for resisting or attempting to escape. According to the order issued by 296th Infantry Division, ‘the separation of families must be accepted’ in order to secure a sufficient number of labourers. Furthermore, any civilian found after an announced deadline in an area designated for total evacuation was under threat of being shot.<sup>82</sup>

Evidently, individual troop units or local HQs often ordered evacuation measures on their own initiative, without or against orders from the commanding

<sup>76</sup> Dienststelle Baun, ‘Stimmungsbericht über Charkov’, 17 Apr. 1943, 1, BA-MA RW 4/v. 309a.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Directive of 21 Sept. 1943 from the commander of Rearward Army Area North, repr. in *Europa unterm Hakenkreuz*, v. 480–1, docs. 210–11.

<sup>79</sup> See ‘Meldungen der Armeen zum 20.11.1943’, repr. ibid. 492, doc. 218.

<sup>80</sup> Figures, ibid. 86.

<sup>81</sup> Thus Ninth Army’s hygiene officer in an activity report of May 1944, quoted in Rass, ‘Verbrecherische Kriegsführung’, 85.

<sup>82</sup> Quotation and examples in Klingenberg, ‘Strategie und Politik’, 42.

staffs. This meant additional hardships for the population concerned, since in such cases neither march routes nor supply points and reception areas had been established and prepared. The military units were primarily interested in the civilian population as a labour force, since the deployment of civilians on the construction of roads and defensive positions helped to compensate for the ubiquitous shortage of their own manpower and of able-bodied prisoners of war.<sup>83</sup> Thus, at the end of April 1943, in addition to 1,381 Russian soldiers employed as paramilitary auxiliaries, 253rd Infantry Division also had at its disposal—as was by no means unusual—835 civilians, the greater majority of them female forced labourers, who were assigned to a ‘civilian labour battalion’ consisting of several companies.<sup>84</sup> In addition to such labourers, who were housed in barracks and counted as part of a division’s personnel strength, the units resorted, when necessary, to the local civilian population. The extent which such forced labour could attain is shown by an order of 6 October 1943 from 56th Infantry Division, which, for the purpose of constructing the Panther Line, imposed compulsory piecework of 12 hours per day on the whole available civilian population aged 12 to 55.<sup>85</sup>

For obvious reasons, the divisions were little inclined to deport forced labourers to Germany in accordance with the wishes of the higher command authorities,<sup>86</sup> since that necessarily meant a reduction of the local labour force. On that point at least, the interests of the troops must have coincided with those of the local population. According to numerous reports, the threat of deportation gave rise to ‘feverish unease among the civilian population’, great enough to ‘push all other events into the background’.<sup>87</sup> Above all, the obligation on young women to present themselves, and the resulting fear of humiliation and enslavement, led to rage and desperation: ‘There are more and more cases of self-mutilation and infection (scalding of hands and feet, infection with scabies and trachoma) intended to induce rejection by the medical boards.’<sup>88</sup> According to another report, labour deployment in Germany, which was likened to ‘deportation to Siberia’, was ‘strongly rejected even by local inhabitants who were employed by the troops or

<sup>83</sup> Mainly from 1943 onwards, hundreds of thousands of Soviet POWs working in construction battalions were either incorporated into eastern battalions or deployed as paramilitary auxiliaries in regular front-line divisions, where they freed German soldiers for combat duties. In the latter case alone, there must have been around 400,000 Soviet citizens active in German units in May 1943; see *Germany and the Second World War*, v/II. 1057. In either case, they were no longer available as a labour force and had to be replaced by civilians.

<sup>84</sup> See Rass, *Menschenmaterial*, 368.

<sup>85</sup> See Klingenberg, ‘Strategie und Politik’, 45. On the increasingly radical procedures for selection of the labour force, see the detailed discussion of the case of 253rd Infantry Division in Rass, *Menschenmaterial*, 369 ff.

<sup>86</sup> Nevertheless, as a result of intensified recruitment and compulsory measures, the number of ‘eastern workers’ deported to Germany from the former Soviet territories rose from a few tens of thousands at the beginning of 1942 to around 1.8 million at year end 1943 and over 2.1 million by the late summer of 1943; see *Germany and the Second World War*, v/II. 234–42.

<sup>87</sup> Propaganda Department K to OKW/WPr (ID), 15 May 1943, ‘Lage- und Stimmungsbericht April 1943’, 2, BA-MA RW 4/v.309b.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid. 3.

the German agencies and thus less exposed to the many rumours circulating among the population'.<sup>89</sup>

Irrespective of the gain in manpower, the mass evacuation and deportation of civilians under the scorched-earth policy placed a considerable burden on the troop units involved. The organizational problems were essentially similar to those that had arisen in previous years in taking prisoners of war back to Germany, but the framework conditions had worsened considerably in the meantime. Time and again, tens of thousands of civilians were put on the march westwards without assigning the military personnel needed to conduct them, guard them, and ensure their provisioning and billeting. For the troops fighting their retreat, care of the civilian population came more or less at the bottom of their list of priorities. In the words of a divisional order issued by 56th Infantry Division in October, the evacuation of civilians was 'an administrative measure' which 'had to take second place to all tactical requirements'.<sup>90</sup>

At the same time, and perhaps for that very reason, the fate of the civilian population was for some soldiers clearly a psychological as well as an organizational burden. Fighting an armed enemy was one thing; hounding helpless old people, women, and children was for some ordinary soldiers something else again. Command staffs repeatedly found it necessary to justify the cruelties they had ordered and to enforce execution by means of threats. A directive from Ninth Army HQ dated 30 March 1944 read: 'It must be made clear to the troops that the complete removal of labour resources has become essential to the conduct of this war. How much more cruel and brutal would be the fury directed by the Soviets against the German people if they got into our country because, out of humanitarian sentimentality, we had neglected to organize all labour resources to enforce final victory.'<sup>91</sup> Whoever, 'out of inappropriate human softness', failed to carry out the orders 'relentlessly and to the letter', would be regarded as 'a traitor to the German people'. 'Traitors will be dealt with by court martial—this is to be communicated to every soldier immediately before deployment.'

A minority of the indigenous population—by no means insignificant but hard to put a figure on—scarcely needed forcing to leave for the west. It mainly consisted of all those who, in the months or years of the German occupation, had cooperated with it willingly or under compulsion, or indeed profited from it. In addition to groups like the clergy or the kulaks, who had been persecuted by the Stalinist system from the outset, it included all those who had been in local self-administration or the auxiliary police during German rule, as well as the not entirely insignificant number of farmers who had benefited from the land reform finally initiated by the occupation authorities<sup>92</sup> in a last desperate attempt to give the occupation regime some popularity where it could no longer be maintained by force alone.<sup>93</sup>

<sup>89</sup> Monthly report of 221st Rifle Division, June 1943, quoted in Klingenberg, 'Strategie und Politik', 46.

<sup>90</sup> Quoted *ibid.* 47.

<sup>91</sup> This and the following quotations are taken from Rass, *Menschenmaterial*, 375.

<sup>92</sup> See Friedrich, *Das Gesetz des Krieges*, 513–14.

<sup>93</sup> See details in *Germany and the Second World War*, v/II. 220 ff.

Those who feared retaliation by the Red Army less than forced labour for or in Germany joined the partisans, whose zones of influence, military role, and impact had naturally increased as the position of the eastern army grew shakier. The 'counter-terror' measures taken in response, though applied only sporadically, were themselves increasingly radical. As a result, burning down villages, rounding up livestock, and deporting, if not shooting, the population had long been common practice among front-line troops too.<sup>94</sup> The practices pursued from the summer of 1943 under the scorched-earth policy were not so very different, except for the extent of the shootings.<sup>95</sup> So it was not surprising that the two forms of military action very quickly fused in a symbiosis in which the distinction between partisans and non-partisans was made ever less frequently, and was perhaps no longer even possible to make.

In point of fact, the close connection between anti-partisan warfare, 'scorched earth', and the confiscation of resources had been established well before the start of the large-scale withdrawals. In an order of 26 October 1942, Göring had stipulated that in 'bandit-infested' areas, all livestock and food stores were to be requisitioned, and all available male and female labour resources were to be 'seized by force'.<sup>96</sup> Against that background, the measures introduced a year later under the scorched-earth policy appear simply as a continuation of long-standing devastation practices. While the motives had changed, inasmuch as the punitive and deterrent approach characteristic of anti-partisan warfare was now supplemented by increasing concern to optimize the security of the military withdrawal, that must have made little difference to the troops charged with carrying out the work of destruction or to the population affected. Whether perpetrators or victims of the devastation, they were generally neither capable of, nor indeed interested in, looking for the underlying reasons for their actions or suffering.

This constellation of circumstances gave rise to an essentially insoluble dilemma for middle- and lower-level troop commanders. Mostly young men rapidly promoted to positions of responsibility under the pressure of war, they had to command troops whose overwhelming majority had experienced the exceptional nature of the war in the east to the full in years of bitter fighting, and had willingly or reluctantly internalized the 'annihilation thinking' which dominated it.<sup>97</sup> The practices required by the scorched-earth policy placed no fundamentally new demands on them. What was new for many soldiers was the unaccustomed circumstances of an ongoing retreat, which made it doubly difficult for commanders to keep the devastation within militarily 'reasonable' bounds. Although the

<sup>94</sup> See *Germany and the Second World War*, vi. 1005–21.

<sup>95</sup> As Gerlach rightly stresses ('Verbrechen deutscher Fronttruppen', 106), 'a broad-based investigation of crimes committed by front-line troops' is still a research desideratum. On the basis of his own studies of Belorussia, he sees a difference between the crimes of 1941 and those of 1943/4, not in quantity but in kind. During the offensive phase such acts had preferably been directed at the military enemy, whereas later on they were applied on principle to the whole civilian population (see ibid. 104 ff.).

<sup>96</sup> See *Europa unterm Hakenkreuz*, v. 340 f., doc. 133.

<sup>97</sup> In this connection, see also the imaginative observations of Latzel, 'Tourismus und Gewalt'.

directives from the top leadership, which were often impossible to apply owing to dynamic developments in the local situation, left the divisions some room for manoeuvre, the shift in the balance of forces that was evident on all sides created its own constraints. In particular, the naturally declining authority of an army of occupation on the retreat, coupled with the partisan activity that was gaining the upper hand in certain areas, made it increasingly difficult for commanders to ensure the security of their units other than by rigorous measures. The implementation of those measures, however, conditioned by the time and place constraints of the evacuation and withdrawal movements, increasingly escaped the commanders' control, leading to the forms of vandalism already mentioned and thereby driving ever larger sections of the population into the arms of the partisans. Such contradictions are the main explanation for the striking frequency of clearly conflicting orders on the part of individual divisions. Depending on the commander's intentions, the subjectively perceived threat, and considerations of discipline, orders were issued which, in the event of incidents, either left troops free to commit any kind of measures of collective violence, mostly the burning of houses and villages, or else strictly forbade precisely such measures except in specifically defined individual cases.<sup>98</sup> All in all, the mass of the troops, as well as the population affected, must have gained the impression—and perhaps were intended to do so—of an area of lawlessness in which what happened was determined only by considerations of expediency. The ground was thus prepared for excesses of every kind, whether commanded or not; all the more so as troops who were militarily hard hit and condemned to retreat were given cause and opportunity—by an order from their supreme command to destroy all means of life in their wake—to vent their pent-up aggression largely without risk.<sup>99</sup>

It is striking that in the orders and directives regarding scorched earth, as in those on anti-partisan warfare, there are generally no references to provisions of international law. Of course, the fact that the responsible command authorities and agencies did not consider it advisable to mention them does not in itself mean that considerations of international law played no part, or that the orders in question were contrary to international law from the outset. What, then, was the formal legal position of the scorched-earth tactic applied by the eastern army? The relevant international legislation on the matter, though not ratified by the Soviet Union, was the Hague Convention of 1907 respecting the Laws and Customs of War on Land. On the one hand, its provisions made it quite clear that 'requisitions in kind and services' could be demanded of the population of an occupied country (Art. 52), and that 'all kinds of munitions of war' could be seized (Art. 53). On the other, it stipulated that an army of occupation was to regard itself 'only as administrator and usufructuary of public buildings, real estate, forests, and agricultural estates', and

<sup>98</sup> See the numerous examples in Klingenberg, 'Strategie und Politik', 49–58.

<sup>99</sup> There is some plausibility about Bartov's thesis ('Von unten betrachtet', 326 ff.) that the troops of the eastern army were deliberately given a safety-valve in the form of the toleration of excesses against the civilian population so that even more rigorous discipline could be demanded of them within their units, but it remains speculative pending better empirical evidence.

was obliged to safeguard them (Art. 55), and in particular to abstain from ‘all seizure of, destruction or wilful damage’ to buildings dedicated to religion, art, science, and the like. Belligerents were by no means free in their choice of means of injuring the enemy (Art. 22), but were entitled to destroy or seize enemy property only where such destruction or seizure was imperatively demanded by the necessities of war (Art. 23). ‘The attack or bombardment, by whatever means, of towns, villages, dwellings, or buildings which are undefended’ was specifically prohibited. (Art. 25), and all necessary steps were to be taken to spare religious, historic, cultural, and medical buildings, provided they were not being used for military purposes (Art. 27).<sup>100</sup>

It is obvious that general provisions of that kind permitted considerable room for interpretation in individual cases, and indeed could be adhered to only to a limited extent under the conditions of a total war of annihilation whose ultimate form was quite inconceivable at the beginning of the century. On the other hand, the common purpose of all the relevant provisions was unequivocal: to limit the extent of destruction and devastation to what was unavoidable on military grounds. Devastation out of malice or to terrorize the population, or for reasons of war economy, is, as Friedrich Berber aptly observed,<sup>101</sup> ‘always inadmissible; rather there has to be an immediate threat to troops in action who cannot be protected against destruction or capture by any other means’. But although some front-line commanders may perhaps have been concerned to exercise such restraint, there was no question of it in the directives and proclamations of the top leadership. On the contrary, in an address to SS leaders in Kharkov in April 1943, Reich Leader SS Heinrich Himmler summarized, more openly than on many other occasions, what he and his Führer actually wanted: ‘How can we take the most men from the Russians—dead or alive? We shall do it by killing them or taking them prisoner and really putting them to work, by endeavouring to gain as much control as possible over any territory we occupy, and by leaving empty of people any territory we dispose of, any areas we make over to the enemy.’<sup>102</sup> However unpalatable such views may have been to many Wehrmacht front-line commanders (and sometimes even Waffen SS commanders), they determined the ‘strategic’ line adopted during the retreat of 1943/4, just as they had already done during the advance of 1941.

The accusation that the devastation effected in the course of the German retreat was illegal under international law,<sup>103</sup> which the Allies raised immediately and which was examined in detail above all in Nuremberg in the ‘subsequent trials’—in particular in the trial of the Wehrmacht high command—later led to repeated attempts at justification by the German generals involved, who were nevertheless very little inclined to reveal the real motives for their actions. Manstein, for

<sup>100</sup> All quotations are taken from the Hague Convention respecting the Laws and Customs of War on Land.

<sup>101</sup> Berber, *Lehrbuch des Völkerrechts*, ii. 176.

<sup>102</sup> Speech of 24 Apr. 1943, quoted in Himmler, *Geheimreden*, 186.

<sup>103</sup> From the historical viewpoint, see above all the broad-ranging, seminal, though sometimes polemically coloured treatment of the subject in Friedrich, *Das Gesetz des Krieges*, ii.

example, in his account of the retreat on the Dnieper, argued that while ‘scorched earth’ had caused the Russian population a great deal of misfortune and hardship, ‘it bore no comparison to the terror-bombing suffered by the civilian population in Germany or to what happened later in Germany’s eastern territories’.<sup>104</sup>

In accordance with the need to ‘balance accounts’ that was all-too-characteristic of West Germany in the post-war period, Manstein invokes two large sets of crimes, one of which—the behaviour of the Red Army following its advance into Germany—need not be discussed here<sup>105</sup> since, having occurred much later, it cannot help to explain German behaviour in 1943. At most, the fear of Soviet mass crimes in the event of German defeat may have increased troop commanders’ readiness to radicalize their own conduct of the war. Such fears were not infrequent among German participants in the war, irrespective of rank and function, and were by no means unfounded. With every day that the front moved further west, many Germans became increasingly worried that their own nation could one day itself fall victim to the forms of warfare which Germany had adopted in Russia.<sup>106</sup> Stirred up by propaganda for obvious reasons, these fears were associated with long-standing stereotypes of ‘Russian bears’, ‘Asiatic hordes’, or ‘Jewish-Bolshevik subhumans’, which must have strengthened the conviction that all means were justified in order to ward off a danger of that kind.

The Allies’ strategic bombing war invoked by Manstein, however, was definitely a source of tangible justification for that conviction. The destructive air raids on Hamburg, Berlin, and other German cities immediately preceded the large-scale German withdrawals in the east and accompanied them without interruption. The horrors of those air raids and their consequences were reported in millions of letters from home. Many soldiers had experienced them personally while in Germany on convalescent leave or on special home leave to visit their bombed-out families.<sup>107</sup> Whatever they saw, heard, or read needed no propaganda exaggeration to convince every soldier that the enemy was not prepared to exercise any restraint with respect to the German civilian population. Such convictions only played into the hands of Hitler and the Nazi leadership. The German dictator could now be more certain than ever that his decision to fight the war with all means (including ‘scorched earth’)—taken long before, and without regard to, the Allies intensified bombing campaign—would scarcely encounter any fundamental resistance among the front-line staffs of the eastern army.

There, and in the army’s central operations staffs, the overriding concern was whether the Red Army’s advance could still be halted and, if so, how. Everyone in the army leadership at least had long been convinced that a total German collapse could be prevented only by means of a radically new defence concept.

<sup>104</sup> Manstein, *Verlorene Siege*, 540.

<sup>105</sup> For details, see *Germany and the Second World War*, x.

<sup>106</sup> See also the discussion in the following chapter of the present volume.

<sup>107</sup> On the air raids on Hamburg, see the cases described in Schröder, *Die gestohlenen Jahre*, 742–63 (docs. 200–6). On the general background, see *Germany and the Second World War*, ix/I, 371–476.

### 3. THE EAST WALL DEBATE

The increasingly serious problem facing the German leadership—that of lacking sufficient forces, in both the west and the east of the continent, to oppose the threat of major Allied offensives—had already impelled the Army General Staff to press Hitler for the construction of prepared defensive positions well in the rear, with a view to saving troops. Fundamentally opposed to large-scale withdrawals, the supreme commander had ordered only the construction of prepared rear positions close to the front, that is, a few dozen kilometres behind the main battle line.<sup>108</sup> It was not until 12 August 1943, after the failure of Operation CITADEL, that Hitler finally—though essentially much too late—issued Führer Order No. 10, on ‘immediate construction of the East Wall’ along the Dnieper and the Desna (‘Panther Line’), thus returning more or less to the plans which the Army General Staff had put forward six months before.<sup>109</sup> The same performance took place only a few weeks later at the beginning of October, after the Dnieper too had been crossed by the Red Army, when the dictator again banned the establishment of a ‘permanently constructed’ rearward defence line.<sup>110</sup> In December 1943 Hitler found out that Manstein had ordered the construction of a defensive position on the Bug on his own authority, and that Zeitzler had acceded to it. He immediately forbade the enterprise, which he described it as further proof of his field marshal’s defeatist attitude.<sup>111</sup>

Shortly afterwards, in a one-to-one discussion, Guderian too failed to persuade his Führer of the need for systematic construction of defensive zones in the east.<sup>112</sup> While the inspector-general of armoured troops at least managed to keep the dictator’s trust despite his unsolicited proposals, the commander-in-chief of Army Group North, Field Marshal Georg von Küchler, was quickly relieved of his command after arguing all too insistently, during a visit to Führer headquarters on 22 January 1944, for withdrawal of his army group to the Panther Line.<sup>113</sup> On all these and other occasions, Hitler insisted that ‘any rearward defensive position draws the troops backwards’. Clearly, what he feared was a kind of ‘domino effect’, that is, an irreversible process of step-by-step withdrawal, ‘since

<sup>108</sup> Deployment of the Reich Labour Service to construct positions further in the rear was indicated as a possibility, but was made subject to further directives. See Führer Order No. 8, 5 Mar. 1943, BA-MA RH 2/412. On the course of the positions ordered, see OKH/GenStdH/Op.Abt. (II) to Army Groups Centre and North, 18 Mar. 1943, plus annexed maps, BA-MA RH 2/747a and RH 2/747a K-2.

<sup>109</sup> See *KTB OKW*, iii. 933 (12 Aug. 1943).

<sup>110</sup> Quoted in Speer, *Erinnerungen*, 554 (n. 3).

<sup>111</sup> See *ibid.* 282. Kleist had also called for the southern front to be re-established behind the Bug, from where it should extend to ‘the Zhitomir area’ and connect up with the Pripet marshes. At the same time, a ‘strong operational reserve’ should be kept in the ‘Rovno–Dubno–Lutsk fortified triangle’; undated note from C-in-C Army Group A for a presentation to the Führer in the autumn of 1943, 3, BA-MA RH 19 V/2, fo. 33.

<sup>112</sup> See Guderian, *Erinnerungen eines Soldaten*, 295, and *id.*, ‘The Interrelation between the Eastern and Western Fronts’, 27–9, BA-MA, Hist.Div., Study T-42. Only after the collapse of Army Group Centre in the summer of 1944 did Hitler again prove open to the idea of an East Wall; see Noble, ‘The Phantom Barrier’.

<sup>113</sup> See Ziemke, *Stalingrad to Berlin*, 255–6.

news of the construction of such a position would reach the front even before the new position was ready. The troops would abandon their old position too soon, placing all their hopes in the new one.<sup>114</sup> The fact that the dictator did not hesitate to use that argument in a psychologically effective and personally insulting manner even against his field marshals was shown during a meeting at Führer headquarters on 20 May 1944, when the commander-in-chief of Army Group Centre pressed for withdrawal of the front to the Dnieper or Berezina line. Hitler dismissed the proposal with the disparaging remark that he had previously been unaware that he, Ernst Busch, 'had now joined the ranks of those generals who are always looking backwards'.<sup>115</sup>

The idea of an East Wall repeatedly put forward by the generals nevertheless made very good sense from the military viewpoint, since it promised relief from particularly serious difficulties weighing upon German conduct of the war in the east. The main problem, as Manstein explained with reference to his own army group, was that the troops 'were forced, without sufficient reserves, to defend a front that far exceeded their own strength, so that the Russians were able to mass their forces at any point at which they wanted to attack, without ever having to fear leaving a weak position where the enemy might achieve an operational breakthrough'.<sup>116</sup> In addition to the resulting 'total operational dependency' of his own units, their fighting power had been so eroded by incessant deployment that the enemy, 'however bad the condition of his own troops, was able to break through at any point where he could muster sufficient forces, simply because of our insufficient occupation of the front'. Manstein's own troops had 'nothing nearly sufficient' with which to oppose such a concentration of forces; the 'constant over-demand' had so undermined their mental and physical power of resistance that 'they were no longer capable of strong artillery fire and the deployment of armour, so that successes for which the enemy had previously not dared to hope simply fell into his lap'.

In view of the problems facing the eastern army, which were invoked by other commanders in a similar form,<sup>117</sup> one might think no general staff training was necessary in order to see the attractiveness of the East Wall proposals. It is therefore not surprising that in the summer of 1943 the security service reported that even 'anonymous *Volksgenossen*' were asking why there was no equivalent to the West Wall in the east to shatter the attacking waves of the Red Army with the use of comparably fewer German defence forces.<sup>118</sup> Hitler's stubborn rejection of the project seems all the more in need of explanation. It surely cannot be attributed solely to his undoubted antipathy to all primarily defensively oriented thinking,

<sup>114</sup> Thus Speer, shortly after the end of the war; see *Alles was ich weiß*, 204.

<sup>115</sup> Gackenholz, 'Der Zusammenbruch der Heeresgruppe Mitte', 451–2.

<sup>116</sup> This and the following quotations are taken from a letter of 27 Oct. 1943 from the naval liaison officer with the OKH General Staff to the Naval War Staff's chief of staff, based on a discussion with Manstein, BA-MA RM 7/260.

<sup>117</sup> e.g. by Field Marshal von Kleist, commander-in-chief of Army Group A, in an undated note for a presentation to Hitler from the autumn of 1943, BA-MA RH 19 V/2.

<sup>118</sup> See Noble, 'The Phantom Barrier', 2.

which he sweepingly imputed to his army generals. After all, Hitler had already had fortifications built in the east against Poland—mainly in East Prussia and Brandenburg—and subsequently the West Wall and the Atlantic Wall in the west. His coquettish self-description as ‘the greatest builder of fortifications of all time’<sup>119</sup> may have been an exaggeration, but there was a grain of truth in it. The key to Hitler’s attitude was not a principled aversion to fortified forms of defence but his conviction about the specific nature of the war in the east. As recent research has repeatedly demonstrated,<sup>120</sup> Hitler’s real war was the war against the Soviet Union, which was thus the *raison d’être* of all other German war efforts. Hitler believed the historical significance of ‘his’ war would be decided in the east alone. If the battle in and against the west was again at the centre of his strategic thinking for the time being, it was only because the outcome in western Europe would decide, in the foreseeable future, whether Germany would actually be able to continue its mission in the east. Moreover, the defence of gains was the most suitable form of battle in the west—as also in the north and south—of ‘Fortress Europe’, whereas in the east Germany had to maintain its vision and not abandon its future potential. Not for nothing were Germany’s future prospects in the east invoked time and again in Hitler’s milieu, and by Hitler himself, in the second half of the war. Anyone prepared to admit it knew that the war in the east was a war of conquest. What else could be its justification, if not conquest? Restricting it to pure defence, made obvious by large-scale withdrawals and the construction of an East Wall far to the west, threatened to rob it of all meaning.

This shows once again that in the last years Hitler increasingly became the prisoner of the ideas and concepts under whose sign he had once begun his war. As in the planning and offensive phase of Operation BARBAROSSA, his ideological and strategic concepts again overlapped in such a way that the strategic concepts appear, to some extent, ideologically stringent. Thus Hitler’s antipathy to all plans for an East Wall, though scarcely comprehensible from a purely military-operational viewpoint, appears not entirely unfounded in terms of strategy when his ideological fixed point, that is, his adherence to the racial-imperialistic concept of ‘living space’, is taken as a given. Just how serious were the potential strategic consequences of even a moderate withdrawal of the eastern front was made clear by Führer Order No. 10 of 12 August 1943. At the same time, it is clear that the constantly recurring differences of view about the East Wall cannot be interpreted, as has been repeatedly claimed,<sup>121</sup> simply as a conflict between generals who thought in military-professional terms and an ideologically rigid dictator. Serious reservations about the course of the planned defensive line were also expressed by the naval and air commands, and by the Wehrmacht Operations Staff.<sup>122</sup> Dönitz, for example, supported by Jodl, drew attention to the problems which the planned East Wall

<sup>119</sup> Thus Guderian, *Erinnerungen eines Soldaten*, 295.

<sup>120</sup> The state of recent research is summarized in Müller and Ueberschär, *Hitlers Krieg im Osten*, 30–5.

<sup>121</sup> Thus Guderian in *Erinnerungen eines Soldaten*.

<sup>122</sup> These reservations are summarized in a briefing note by Jodl in *KTB OKW*, iii. 983, 21 Aug. 1943.

line on Lake Peipus would create 'for the naval warfare situation in the Baltic in general, for warfare in the Gulf of Finland, and by endangering the Estonian oil shale area'. Hitler could only agree completely with the objections raised by the commander-in-chief of the navy and console him with the explanation that 'construction of the East Wall on Lake Peipus would only be a precautionary measure, without any intention from the outset of withdrawing the northern front to that line'.<sup>123</sup> For his part, the commander-in-chief of the Luftwaffe pointed out that the shift of the front envisaged in Führer Order No. 10 meant the loss of 35 airfields that had been constructed,<sup>124</sup> and would have a major impact on the possibilities for action by the German and Russian air forces: 'The consequences of the front withdrawal for aerial warfare are that we shall no longer be able to reach not only Russian industry in the Urals but also targets such as Grozny, Saratov, and Gorky, whereas Berlin and Upper Silesia will be within range of the mass of Russian units'.<sup>125</sup> For the area of the Donets Basin and central Ukraine, as the Wehrmacht Operations Staff pointed out, withdrawal to the planned East Wall would cause serious problems, *inter alia*, for the food sector (above all, the loss of around 1.5 million tonnes of bread and feed grain) and for coal supply. The resulting coal shortage would 'directly affect supplies to the troops, railways, and industry, particularly iron and steel production, and thus also munitions production (the Ivan programme) and the manufacture of other German armaments', and even indirectly affect the supply of coal throughout the German sphere of power. The loss of other raw materials, the expected energy shortages, and the almost total absence of manganese ore extraction would be no less serious.<sup>126</sup> Account had also to be taken of the not inconsiderable changes and restrictions which the planned measures would involve for the German civil administration, especially in the Reich commissariat of the Ukraine, and—more importantly still—the unfavourable foreign-policy consequences. In the north, the planned 'abandonment of the Leningrad area and the inner Gulf of Finland' threatened to weaken the position of Finland and Sweden, while negative repercussions on Turkey, Romania, and Bulgaria were to be expected in the south. In the opinion of the Wehrmacht Operations Staff, Romania and Bulgaria in particular would have to reckon with a considerably increased threat to their Black Sea coasts. In addition, the German presence in Crimea would be much more precarious in future owing to the reduced possibilities of sea transport.<sup>127</sup>

<sup>123</sup> Minutes of situation conference at Führer HQ, quoted in *Lagevorträge*, 544 (28 Aug. 1943). In fact, the Army Group North units withdrew to the Panther Line (Narva–Lake Peipus–Pleskau–OPOCHKA-area to the west of Nevel) only on 18 Feb. 1944 and held it until 12 July 1944.

<sup>124</sup> See WFSt/Op (L), briefing note of 3 Sept. 1943, 'Ausbau der Fliegerbodenorganisation im Osten', BA-MA RW 4/v. 708.

<sup>125</sup> KTB OKW, iii. 983 (21 Aug. 1943). For a more detailed argument, see also WFSt/Op, 'Vortragsnotiz zur Linienführung des Ostwalls', 21 Aug. 1943, BA-MA RW 4/v. 708.

<sup>126</sup> WFSt/Op, 'Vortragsnotiz zur Linienführung des Ostwalls', 21 Aug. 1943, 4–5. BA-MA RW 4/v. 708.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid. 2, 6. In fact, plans leading to the evacuation of Crimea were already being contemplated in the operations division of the Army General Staff in mid-September; see Meyer, *Adolf Heusinger*, 235–6.

In the present context, the objections and problems outlined above are noteworthy in two respects. First, they show that Hitler was by no means alone in his scepticism about large-scale changes to the eastern front, but received at least occasional and partial support from supreme commanders of the armed forces other than the army, not to mention representatives of the war economy and the armaments industry. ‘I am an advocate of not giving up anything in the east when not absolutely necessary’—that statement was made, significantly, not by Hitler (who might have said it) but by Dönitz, who was arguing in favour of maintaining control of the Crimean peninsula, which was already cut off by land.<sup>128</sup> Second, the example discussed here shows once again the nature of the military (as well as the political) decision-making process in the Führer state. All the above-mentioned objections and reservations about the planned course of the East Wall defensive line were expressed only after the Führer order of 12 August had been issued. They were aimed not at its revision but only at securing an advantageous position for the objector’s own arm of the Wehrmacht or civilian agency with respect to the changed circumstances. As usual, there had been no broad-based coordination of interests among the military and civilian authorities concerned prior to the Führer order. Nor could there have been, since the decision-making process at Führer headquarters made no provision for such consultations. The most that could happen was that Hitler, before committing himself on an important issue, might seek the opinion of individual officers or officials entirely at his own discretion. Notwithstanding all Keitel’s obvious efforts to deny personal responsibility, he was by no means untruthful when he said: ‘The Führer always made the important decisions himself [ . . . ] but then there was no more discussion. Discussions took place only when he asked for them. When he decided, the generals concerned were called, and none of them knew what the results would be. Neither did I.’<sup>129</sup>

<sup>128</sup> Concluding address by Dönitz at the conference of naval commanders in Weimar on 17 Dec. 1943, 2, BA-MA RM 7/98. On the fate of Crimea, see Part IV, Chapter IV of the present volume.

<sup>129</sup> Interrogation of Field Marshal Wilhelm Keitel by USSBS, Interview No. 55, 25 June 1945, quoted in Overy, *Interrogations*, 340, doc. 10

## PART IV

# THE SWING OF THE PENDULUM

*The Withdrawal of the Eastern Front from  
Summer 1943 to Summer 1944*



## Prologue: The ‘Forgotten Year’

Despite the dramatic nature of the events and the monstrous losses incurred, there is scarcely a chapter of military history that has received as little attention as the period from the summer of 1943 to the summer of 1944 on the eastern front. What took place between the battle of Kursk and the collapse of Army Group Centre has largely remained in the dark, although the fighting was even fiercer than during the battles of the first war years. The operations between the Baltic and the Black Sea, in the course of which the Red Army forced the Wehrmacht back from the Kursk salient to the Carpathians, were on a huge geographical scale. Almost the whole Ukraine was reconquered. Although almost always victorious, Stalin’s troops nevertheless suffered enormous losses. Soviet casualties were mostly five to ten times as great as those of the Germans, and even more in some individual operations, even if we accept the (much too low) official Soviet figures. This was one of the most eventful periods of the war, mainly because the superiority of the Red Army had increased to such an extent that it was able for the first time to conduct large-scale offensives simultaneously along the whole front. The specific weather conditions were also a major factor. Up to then the icy winter had imposed a static war of position for weeks and months on end, but now the winter weather turned unusually warm. In the southern sector especially, the fighting went on almost without interruption.

Yet although this period of the war in the east saw a torrent of dramatic and tragic events, military historiography has so far shown a remarkable lack of interest in it.<sup>1</sup> On the German side it largely consisted, after all, in inglorious withdrawal battles, and on the Soviet side in inglorious victories achieved at far too great a cost. The Red Army was still employing remarkably ineffective fighting methods and resorting to the massive deployment of troops to overcome the enemy without regard to its own losses. The fact that the learning process was so painfully long was due to the weaknesses of the Stalinist system. As in civilian life, innovative thinking and independent action were highly risky activities. Not until the summer of 1944 was there major progress in transforming the Red Army into an operationally effective war machine, and the resulting victories received more attention in the history books. The following chapters describe what happened in the ‘forgotten year’ of July 1943 to June 1944.

<sup>1</sup> One exception is the third volume of the post-Communist edition of the ‘Great Patriotic War’: *Velikaya Otechestvennaya Voina 1941–1945 gg.*

# I. The Withdrawal of Army Group North from Leningrad to the Baltic

*Karl-Heinz Frieser*

The lightning campaign of 1941 had brought Army Group North to the outskirts of Leningrad in less than two months. On 8 September it reached Lake Ladoga at Shlisselburg, cutting off the second-biggest Soviet city's land links to the rear. Then began the long siege of Leningrad, known to the Germans as 'the 900-day battle'. As the Red Army tried time and again to break through the encirclement from the east, the fighting was concentrated in the Shlisselburg bottleneck, only 15 kilometres wide. Not until January 1943 did Leningrad Front and Volkhov Front manage to retake the strategically important locality, together with a narrow strip of land along the southern bank of Lake Ladoga. After 506 days, they had thus achieved at least a partial breach in the blockade.<sup>2</sup> But it was no more than a narrow corridor, only 8 to 10 kilometres wide, which lay within range of the German artillery and was considered to be seriously threatened. While the positional battles, reminiscent in many respects of the western front in the First World War, continued with undiminished ferocity, no spectacular operations took place, so events in the northern sector of the eastern front fell increasingly into the shade. All the same, the Red Army massed enormous forces in the area, forcing more and more fresh troops and vast amounts of war material into the besieged city of Leningrad and the Oranienbaum bridgehead to the west, whereas on the German side Army Group North was seen rather as an available mass of troops from which more and more units could be withdrawn. The military situation had changed into its opposite. It was no longer the besieger who threatened the besieged, but the converse. It has become a cliché in the literature that Army Group North was almost exclusively engaged in the siege of Leningrad. One glance at the map, however, is enough to make nonsense of that view. In actual fact, Army Group North had to cover a 900-kilometre stretch of front. While the length was reduced to 750 kilometres in the spring of 1943 by the evacuation of Demyansk, the army group, comprising only two armies, was hardly sufficient to withstand the increased Soviet forces.

<sup>2</sup> See *Germany and the Second World War*, vi. 1202.

## 1. DEFENCE AGAINST SOVIET OFFENSIVES IN THE SECOND HALF OF 1943

On 20 July 1943 Field Marshal Georg von Küchler had more than 44 front-line divisions and independent brigades at his disposal, but not a single armoured division.<sup>3</sup> Including the Wehrmacht retinue in the hinterland, the personnel strength was 710,000 men,<sup>4</sup> but only about 360,000 of them (the daily strength of the divisions and independent combat units) were front-line troops.<sup>5</sup> The infantry combat strength of Eighteenth Army, in which almost two-thirds of the army group's front-line units were concentrated, was only 96,164 men.<sup>6</sup> The total number of cannon was 2,407.<sup>7</sup> Above all, the number of weapons systems enabling those units to wage a modern operational war of movement was frighteningly small. At that time, despite the vast area it had to defend, Army Group North possessed only 40 operational tanks and assault guns.<sup>8</sup> The Luftwaffe was even worse off. Apart from a few reconnaissance planes, Air Fleet 1 had only six fighters available for daily deployment (see Table IV.I.1. 'Army Group North: order of battle').<sup>9</sup> Motor vehicles of all kinds were also in very short supply. Their place had once again been taken by horses. The Army Group North formations increasingly resembled those of the First World War. In comparison with reality on the rest of the eastern front, the German armoured units concentrated near Kursk in July 1943 gave the impression of a mirage. The two depleted armies making up Army Group North were faced by more than three Soviet army fronts, namely Leningrad Front, Volkov Front, North-West Front, and the right wing of Kalinin Front.

The third battle of Lake Lagoda (also known as the battle of the Sinyavino Heights) took place from 22 July to 22 August 1943. Soviet historians refer to it as the Mga Offensive, after the town of Mga, which lies to the south of the Sinyavino Heights. The plan was for the two pincers of the Soviet offensive to join up at Mga in the rear of the German defending forces. The offensive was directed against the northernmost and most exposed position of Army Group North, that is, the 'bottleneck' which sealed off Leningrad to the east and extended to the outskirts of Shlisselburg. The section under threat was defended only by XXVI Army Corps. On 22 July the Red Army launched its new offensive using massive artillery fire.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>3</sup> This figure does not include the three security divisions or 388th Field Training Division; see BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2045, 407 and 543–4.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> By comparison, on 1 June 1944 the ration strength of Army Group North was 670,000 men (in the army formations), while the daily strength of the divisions and independent combat units amounted to only 331,025. See OKH, Organisationsabteilung (I), No. I/1820/44 g.Kdos, 23 July 1944, 'Stärke der H.Gr. Nord' (fo. 29), BA-MA RH 2/1341; ibid. (fos. 31-2), Organisationsabteilung (I), 26 July (status at 1 June): 'Stärken der Verbände sowie fechtenden Heerestruppen'.

<sup>6</sup> Detailed troop breakdown of Army Group North, Appendix C 19 (p. 596), BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2045.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. 407.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Operational status reports of 20 July 1943, BA-MA RL 2-III/725, edited by Ulf Balke in the light of documents from his private archive.

<sup>10</sup> An excellent presentation is contained in the coloured atlas 'Der Feldzug gegen die Sowjetunion der Heeresgruppe Nord, Kriegsjahr 1943' (fos. 68 ff.), BA-MA RH 19-III/665. See

Table IV.I.1. Army Group North: order of battle (status: 21 July 1943)

Divisions	Corps	Armies	Army Group
331st			
12th			
218th	II	Sixteenth	
123rd			
93rd			
21st Lw.Fld.	VIII		
122nd		8th Lt.Inf.Div.	
32nd			
5th Lt.Inf.			
30.	X		North
126.			
329.			
1. Lw.Fld.			
217th	XXXVIII		
Latv. SS Vol.Brig.			
13th Lw.Fld.	I		
227th			
96th			
61st	XXVIII		
81st			18th Armd.Inf.
12th Lw.Fld.			
225th		Eighteenth	
132nd			
212nd	XXVI		
1st		121st, 28th Lt.Inf.	
11th			
69th			
290th			
23rd			
5th Mtn.			
21nd			
24th	LIV		
254th			
58th			
250th Span.			
170th	L		
215th			
9th Lw.Fld.		III Lw.Fld.	
10th Lw.Fld.			
207th Sec.		Cdr. A.Gr. North	388th F.T.D.
281st Sec.			
285th Sec.			

Source: BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2045, 543–4.

also KTB H.Gr. Nord (fos. 81 ff.), BA-MA RH 19-III/220; KTB 18. Armee (fos. 97 ff.), BA-MA RH 20-18/597; for a Soviet view, *Bitva za Leningrad*, 280 ff.

Table IV.I.2. Breakdown of Air Fleet 1 (assigned to Army Group North) at 20 July 1943

Category	Unit	Aircraft type	Target strength	Actual strength	Operational
Strategic reconnaissance	Stab/F.A.Gr. 1	–	–	–	–
	3.(F)/22	Ju 88	12	12	9
	5.(F)/122	Ju 88	12	12	10
	3.(F)/Nacht	Do 217	12	9	4
Weather reconnaissance	Wekusta 1	Ju 88	12	10	8
			48	43	31
Tactical reconnaissance	Stab/N.A.Gr. 8	Fw 189	–	1	–
	11.(H)/13	Hs 126	9	18	10
	4.(H)/33	Bf 110	9	10	8
	Stab/N.A.Gr. 11	Fw 189	–	1	1
	1.(H)/31	Fw 189	9	12	8
			27	42	27
Seaplanes	Stab(H)/127 (See)	He 50	3	3	3
	1.(H)/127 (See)	Ar 95	9	10	8
	2.(H)/127 (See)	He 50	9	19	15
	3.(H)/127 (See)	He 60	9	8	3
			30	40	29
Fighters	4./J.G. 54	Fw 190	12	10	6
			12	10	6
Night fighters	Nah-N.J.-Schwarm	Ju 88	5	8	6
			5	8	6
Ground-attack aircraft (night)	Stab/Störkampf Lfl. 1	misc.	3	–	–
	1./Störkampf	misc.	20	21	17
	2./Störkampf	misc.	20	20	18
	3./Störkampf	misc.	20	19	13
	4./Störkampf	misc.	20	21	16
			83	81	64
20 July 1943	Air Fleet 1 Total strength		205	224	163

*Note:* In addition, Air Fleet 1 had several courier, liaison, and transport squadrons available, with a total target strength of 51 aircraft, as well as a minesweeper squadron (Ju 52) and two air-sea rescue units with their own aircraft. Also located in the area of Air Fleet 1 were IV/KG 1 (training group) and Combat Flying School 101, from which a few crews could be obtained for missions from time to time.

*Source:* Operational status reports, 20 July 1944, BA-MA, RL 2-III/725, and documents from the Ulf Balke collection.

In the first phase, Leningrad Front's 67th Army attacked from the north-west and Volkhov Front's 8th Army from the east.

At the outset, 253,300 men were deployed in the attack.<sup>11</sup> They were supported by 13th and 14th Air Army and some aircraft from the Baltic Red Banner Fleet. Against them the Germans could deploy only six fighters belonging to Air Fleet 1.

<sup>11</sup> Gurkin, 'Liudskie poteri Sovetskikh Vooruzhennykh Sil', Table 1.

Not until the fifth day of the battle, and then only for a short time, were they reinforced by a fighter group.<sup>12</sup> The units of XXVI Army Corps were hopelessly outnumbered and had also to fend off attacks by partisans in their rear. Yet although the Red Army brought up further reserves, its efforts were unsuccessful.<sup>13</sup> In one German account, the stubbornly repeated Soviet assaults are summed up as follows: 'All in all, no new ideas or objectives, no large-scale surprise planning; instead, a continuation of the second battle of Ladoga, as the German leadership had been expecting since June.'<sup>14</sup> Another analysis is even more critical of the procedure adopted by the Soviet leadership: 'Instead of disrupting the operational concept of the enemy, who is always on the backhand, by continuously changing the point of concentration, it drilled away time and again at the same places, regardless of losses.'<sup>15</sup> The Red Army broke off its offensive on 22 August.<sup>16</sup> In the space of four-and-a-half weeks the two Soviet armies had lost 79,937 men, of whom 20,890 dead or missing.<sup>17</sup> The losses of Germany's XXVI Army Corps over the same period were 26,166 men, of whom 5,435 dead or missing.<sup>18</sup> In addition, troops from 54th and 55th Armies also took part in the final phase of the offensive against the Mga bottleneck. At the same time, X Army Corps, belonging to Germany's Sixteenth Army, was attacked by North-West Front's 34th Army to the south of Lake Ilmen.

Soviet military historiography tends to keep quiet about or minimize unsuccessful operations.<sup>19</sup> It describes the Mga offensive as an insignificant relief operation designed to prevent the Germans from withdrawing reserves for the battle in the Kursk salient, which was taking place at the same time. That judgement, however, is contradicted by two arguments. On the one hand there are the enormous losses, which had to remain secret during the Soviet period. On the other, the direction of thrust of the two armies attacking at the point of concentration testifies to an operation with a strategic objective. Finally, the two points of concentration of the offensive by Leningrad and Volkov Fronts marked the launch of a pincer operation in which the spearheads of 67th and 8th Armies were supposed to meet in the rear of the German units. The Soviet leadership was clearly out to eliminate the bottleneck blocking the besieged city of Leningrad, and for that purpose used considerably more forces than would have been required for a relief offensive.

The autumn of 1943 saw the beginning on the eastern front of the planned German withdrawal to the 'East Wall', also known as the 'Panther Line', which ran from the Black Sea across the Dnieper to the Baltic. Only Army Group

<sup>12</sup> BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2045, 408. At that time, a fighter group on the eastern front consisted of about 25 aircraft on average.

<sup>13</sup> Glantz, *The Siege of Leningrad*, 145–7; id., *The Battle for Leningrad*, 306–14.

<sup>14</sup> Pohlmann, *Wolchow*, 98. <sup>15</sup> BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2153, 73.

<sup>16</sup> See Stavka directive of 22 Aug. 1943 to the commanders-in-chief of Leningrad and Volkov Fronts instructing them to go over to the defensive, *Russkii Arkhiv: Velikaya Otechestvennaya*, Stavka VGK. 'Dokumenty i materialy 1943 god.', pt. 16 (5–3), 195, Doc. No. 307; Directive of 22 Aug. 1943 with similar instructions to Northwest Front, 196, Doc. No. 308.

<sup>17</sup> Gurkin, 'Liudskie poteri Sovetskikh Vooruzhennykh Sil', Table 1.

<sup>18</sup> BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2153, 93 ('Verluste vom 22.7. bis 23.8.1943').

<sup>19</sup> See Glantz, *The Battle for Leningrad*, 467.

North remained in its previous positions, and it found itself in a difficult situation when its neighbour to the south, Army Group Centre, abandoned Smolensk on 24 September and withdrew westwards, depriving it of the protection afforded by the latter's staggered forward position.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, Army Group North's border was shifted to the south by order of the OKH, which also meant taking over responsibility for XXXXIII Army Corps. As a result, it 'gained' an additional 80-kilometre-long stretch of front including the transport node of Nevel. In that section of the front, three weak German divisions faced two Soviet Armies ready to attack. But since the rest of the eastern front was even more threatened, Army Group North was obliged to give up 13 divisions between July and the end of November, mainly to the hard-pressed Army Group Centre,<sup>21</sup> so that its front became still further overstretched. The situation was made even worse by the fact that the partisan areas in the rear of the front were gradually developing into a new theatre of war.<sup>22</sup>

On 6 October Kalinin Front (renamed '1st Baltic Front' on 20 October) launched an offensive exactly at the interface between Army Groups North and Centre.<sup>23</sup> Sixteenth Army, positioned on the southern flank of Army Group North, now also found itself in great difficulty.<sup>24</sup> In the first phase of the Nevel–Gorodok Operation, the attacking forces consisted of 3rd and 4th Shock Armies, 11th Guards Army, and 43rd Army, totalling around 200,000 men.<sup>25</sup> The breakthrough occurred in the sector of a German infantry division which had to hold an 18-kilometre-long stretch of front with six battalions of 200 men each, that is, only 66 men per kilometre.<sup>26</sup> The Soviet offensive could be only insufficiently reconnoitred, since only ten operational reconnaissance aircraft were available to cover the whole enormous front sector of Army Group North.<sup>27</sup> In contrast, the Soviet offensive in the narrow breakthrough sector was supported by 3rd Air Army.<sup>28</sup> The superior attacking forces were able to take Nevel and open up a 20-kilometre-wide breach between Army Groups North and Centre. Hitler ordered strong counter-attacks, although no sufficient troops were available. Thus all attempts to close the front failed. Instead, more and more Soviet units poured through the gap. Meanwhile, the Red Army brought up further forces—6th Guards Army, for example—which were mainly incorporated in the newly formed 2nd Baltic Front.

The second phase of the Nevel–Gorodok Operation began on 2 November. The point of concentration shifted to the south and the attack was directed against

<sup>20</sup> BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2045, 421.

<sup>21</sup> Haupt, *Heeresgruppe Nord*, 166.

<sup>22</sup> Haupt, *Leningrad*, 206.

<sup>23</sup> The battles at Nevel are also described from the viewpoint of the neighbouring Army Group Centre in Part IV, Chapter II of the present volume.

<sup>24</sup> On the following, see colour atlas 'Der Feldzug gegen die Sowjetunion der Heeresgruppe Nord, Kriegsjahr 1943' (fos. 94–106), BA-MA RH 19-III/665. See also KTB H.Gr. Nord of 6 Oct. 1943 (fos. 43 ff.), BA-MA RH 19-III/239; KTB 16. Armee of 6 Oct. 1943 (fos. 11 ff.), BA-MA RH 20-16/269.

<sup>25</sup> Gurkin, 'Liudskie poteri Sovetskikh Vooruzhennykh Sil', Table 1, No. 39.

<sup>26</sup> Heusinger, *Befehl im Widerstreit*, 281. <sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Gurkin, 'Liudskie poteri Sovetskikh Vooruzhennykh Sil', Table 1.

Third Armoured Army, which formed the northern wing of Army Group Centre. Third Armoured Army had to give up Gorodok on 24 December, but was able to hold its important cornerstone, Vitebsk. With the southern wing of Army Group North also in great difficulty, withdrawal of the front appeared inevitable. On 5 January Sixteenth Army evacuated Novosokolniki and took up a new defensive position, at which point the Red Army's offensive also came to a standstill. Meanwhile, the German forces had formed a more or less stable front to the west of Nevel, surrounding the 90-kilometre-wide and up to 90-kilometre-deep breakthrough area over a length of some 200 kilometres.<sup>29</sup> The fact that the Red Army's rather stereotypical offensive could not be stopped earlier was due to disastrous intervention by Hitler, who repeatedly forbade withdrawal to a more favourable rear position when that was still possible. Their frontal assault cost the Soviet troops considerable losses. The official figures put the casualties during the fighting at Nevel at 180,597 men, of whom 46,125 dead or missing.<sup>30</sup>

## 2. WITHDRAWAL TO THE PANTHER LINE IN THE BALTIC (14 JANUARY TO 1 MARCH 1944)

At the beginning of January 1944 Army Group North was in an alarmingly weak condition, whereas the Soviet potential had increased to menacing proportions. Whenever the eastern front flared up and other sectors were threatened with collapse, more troops were withdrawn from Army Group North. It had been obliged to give up 40 per cent of its front-line units (18 divisions) in the previous six months alone.<sup>31</sup> At the same time, however, its front line had been repeatedly extended southwards. On 10 January 1944 it was also made responsible for the Polotsk sector (near Vitebsk), so that it now had to defend almost 1,000 kilometres of front. For that it had only 40 infantry divisions, and not a single armoured or armoured infantry division. Moreover, some of its units were of doubtful quality, such as the six Luftwaffe field divisions, mockingly referred to by army troops as 'Luftwaffe rejects'. Most of the army units were also in poor shape. In mid-January, for example, 14 of Sixteenth Army's infantry battalions had fewer than 100 men.<sup>32</sup>

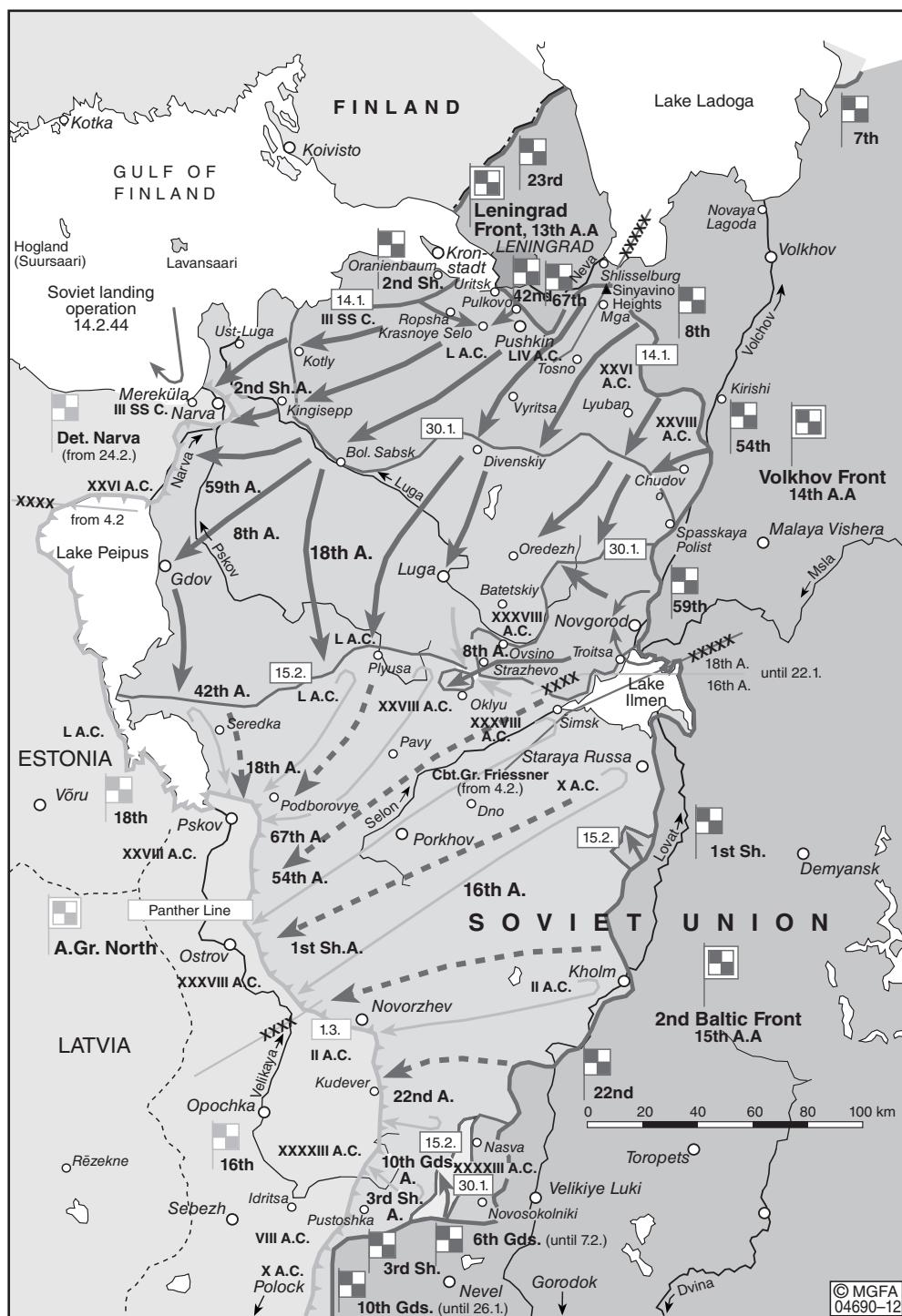
Field Marshal von Küchler had no illusions about the fact that his army group was no longer capable of holding the overstretched front in the event of a massive Soviet attack. In his view, the only correct decision was withdrawal to the far more defensible Panther Line, to which all the other German army groups had already retreated in the autumn of 1943. In the area of Army Group North, the Panther

<sup>29</sup> BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2045, 430.

<sup>30</sup> A total of 168,202 losses were incurred in the Nevel–Gorodok offensive (6 Oct. to 31 Dec. 1943) and a further 12,395 in the Novosokolniki follow-up operation (30 Dec. 1943 to 8 Jan. 1944). See Gurkin, 'Liudskie poteri Sovetskikh Vooruzhennykh Sil', Table 1. Corresponding figures are not available for the German side since the relevant files have not survived.

<sup>31</sup> Appendix to Obkdo, H.Gr. Nord, Ia, No. 6/44 g.Kdos. Chefs, 7 Jan. 1944, 'Aufstellung über die Kräfteverschiebung aus dem alten Bereich der H.Gr. Nord seit Juli 1943', 146, BA-MA RH 19-III/14.

<sup>32</sup> BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2046, Appendix, 808.



**MAP IV.I.1.** The withdrawal of Army Group North from Leningrad to the Panther Line (14 January to 1 March 1944)

Sources: OKH situation maps for given dates, BA-MA, Kart RH-2, Ost/919, 934, 939, 942

Line stretched from the Gulf of Finland along the Narva and Lake Peipus to Pskov, and then southwards as far as Polotsk. Its decisive advantage was that it would reduce the length of the front from almost 1,000 to 400 kilometres (land front). There would also be an additional 'water front' along the coast and the 180-kilometre-long bank of Lake Peipus, but that could be guarded with relatively few forces. Shortening the front in that way would have saved eight divisions, which were urgently needed in other sectors. Army Group North HQ had therefore long been making plans to withdraw.<sup>33</sup> At a meeting at Führer headquarters on 30 December 1943, Field Marshal von Küchler tried in vain to obtain permission for withdrawal,<sup>34</sup> following which the OKH chief of staff, Col.-Gen. Kurt Zeitzler, had a 'sharp debate' with the Führer on the evening of 1 January 1944. In view of the convincing arguments, Hitler at first seemed prepared to give in, but in the end he refused to allow the withdrawal. Zeitzler informed the Army Group that 'all his proposals had been firmly rejected and the issue had been pushed to the side'.<sup>35</sup> The order to defend all positions remained in force.

By mid-January, on the eve of the Leningrad–Novgorod Offensive, Soviet superiority had increased dramatically. Arrayed against the two German armies were three Soviet army groups, namely Leningrad Front,<sup>36</sup> Volkov Front, and 2nd Baltic Front, comprising eleven armies with a combined strength of 1,252,000 troops, 20,183 cannon and grenade launchers, 1,580 tanks and assault guns, and 1,386 aircraft.<sup>37</sup> According to Soviet figures, there were also 43,000 partisans fighting in the hinterland who were tying down many German units.<sup>38</sup> In contrast, the actual strength of Army Group North, including the Wehrmacht retinue in the hinterland, was 397,763 men,<sup>39</sup> which corresponded to a daily strength of approximately 250,000 men in front-line units.<sup>40</sup> The units were miserably armed. For a front of almost 1,000 kilometres they had only 16 tanks, including four captured T-34s, and 109 assault guns.<sup>41</sup> At that time Air Fleet 1 had a total of 45 fighters and 26 ground-attack aircraft available for daily deployment, but not a single bomber (see Table IV.1.3. 'Breakdown of Air Fleet 1 at 10 January 1944').<sup>42</sup> Almost all the tanks and aircraft on the eastern front were concentrated with Army Groups Centre and South, where the front was threatened with collapse as a result of extremely heavy battles.

<sup>33</sup> See 'Fall Blau' file, BA-MA RH 19-III/257.

<sup>34</sup> Grier, 'Hitler's Baltic Strategy', 11–12.

<sup>35</sup> BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2046, 613.

<sup>36</sup> Without 21st and 23rd Armies.

<sup>37</sup> *Deutschland im zweiten Weltkrieg*, v. 67.

<sup>38</sup> *Geschichte des zweiten Weltkrieges 1939–1945*, viii. 196.

<sup>39</sup> KTB OKW, iii/6 (1943), 1484. Not included are 20,613 men from Germany's allies and 3,371 belonging to foreign units.

<sup>40</sup> The daily strength of 250,000 men has been estimated by analogy. On 1 June 1944 the actual strength of Army Group North was around 550,000 men (in the army formations), while the daily strength of the divisions and independent combat units amounted to only 331,025. See OKH, Organisationsabteilung (I), No. I/1820/44 g.Kdos, 23 July 1944, 'Stärke der H.Gr. Nord' (fo. 29), BA-MA RH 2/1341; ibid. (fos. 31–2), Organisationsabteilung (I), 26 July (status at 1 June): 'Stärken der Verbände sowie fechtenden Heerestruppen'.

<sup>41</sup> H.Gr. Nord, Ia: daily report of 14 Jan. 1944 (fo. 180), BA-MA RH 19-III/296.

<sup>42</sup> Operational status reports of 10 Jan. 1944, BA-MA RL 2-III/728, edited by Ulf Balke in the light of documents from his private archive.

Table IV.i.3. Breakdown of Air Fleet 1 (assigned to Army Group North) at 10 January 1944

Category	Unit	Aircraft type	Target strength	Actual strength	Operational
Strategic reconnaissance	Stab/F.A.Gr. 1	—	—	—	—
	3.(F)/22	Ju 188	12	12	9
	5.(F)/122	Ju 88	12	13	10
	3.(F)/Night	Do 217	12	9	5
Weather reconnaissance	Wekusta 1	Ju 88	12	7	5
			48	41	29
Tactical reconnaissance	Stab/N.A.Gr. 8	Fw 189	—	—	—
	11.(H)/13	Hs 126	9	9	8
	4.(H)/33	Bf 110	9	8	5
	1.(H)/31	Fw 189	9	15	8
	1.(H)/127 (Land/Sea)	misc.	9	13	9
Fighters			36	45	30
	II./J.G. 5	Bf 109	40	25	20
	4./J.G. 54	Fw 190	12	11	7
	IV./J.G. 54 (excl. 12. St.)	Fw 190	28	22	18
Night fighters			80	58	45
	1./N.J.G. 200	Ju 88	12	6	3
Ground-attack aircraft			12	6	3
	I./S.G. 5	Ju 87	39	38	26
Night ground-attack aircraft			39	38	26
	Stab/N.S.Gr. 1	Go 145	2	—	—
	1./N.S.Gr. 1	Go 145	20	19	19
	2./N.S.Gr. 1	Go 145	20	11	9
	3./N.S.Gr. 1	He 46	20	12	7
(in course of formation)	Stab/N.S.Gr. 3	Ar 66	2	—	—
	1./N.S.Gr. 3	Ar 66	20	18	12
	2./N.S.Gr. 3	Ar 66	20	22	20
	3./N.S.Gr. 3	Ar 66	—	—	—
Stab/N.S.Gr. 11 (Estonians)	He 50	2	—	—	—
	He 50	20	10	6	6
	He 50	20	10	6	6
	He 50	—	—	—	—
Stab/N.S.Gr. 12 (Latvians)	misc.	—	—	—	—
	in course of formation				
	1./N.S.Gr. 12 (Latvians) in	misc.	—	—	—
	course of formation.				
2./N.S.Gr. 12 (Latvians) in	misc.	—	—	—	—
	course of formation.				
1./Ostfliegerstaffel (Russians)	misc.	20	7	1	1
		166	109	80	80
10 Jan. 1944	Air Fleet 1	Total strength	381	297	213

Note: In addition, Air Fleet 1 had several courier, liaison, and transport squadrons available, with a total target strength of 60 aircraft, as well as a minesweeper squadron (Ju 52) and an air-sea rescue squadron (Fw 58) with a combined target strength of 16 aircraft.

Source: Operational status report, 10 Jan. 1944, BA-MA, RL 2-III/728, and documents from the Ulf Balke collection.

The Soviet high command had long been preparing the ‘Leningrad–Novgorod Strategic Offensive’ (14 January to 1 March 1944).<sup>43</sup> A conference with the commanders-in-chief of the three army fronts involved had been held in Moscow, where it was decided that Leningrad Front and Volkov Front would smash Eighteenth Army on the northern wing, while 2nd Baltic Front tied down Sixteenth Army in the south. The aim was not only to break the blockade of Leningrad once and for all, but to push forward to the borders of the Baltic republics.<sup>44</sup> The major role was assigned to Leningrad Front, which had mustered 417,600 men for the offensive.<sup>45</sup> Its troops were concentrated both in the southern forefield of the metropolis and in the Oranienbaum bridgehead on the south bank of the Gulf of Finland, a bitterly defended strip of land to the west of the famous Peterhof Palace, which the exhausted German troops had no longer been able to capture in the autumn of 1941. The strategic importance of the bridgehead was that it faced and covered Kronstadt Island, where the Baltic Red Banner Fleet had its main base. The fleet’s ships were not only important as sea-based artillery but carried large numbers of troops into the bridgehead in the preparatory phase, especially 2nd Shock Army, as well as massive amounts of war material, including, for example, 211 tanks, 2,400 motor vehicles, and 677 cannon.<sup>46</sup> The Oranienbaum coastal strip had thus become the springboard for the offensive.

On 14 January 2nd Shock Army began its attack on the positions of the Luftwaffe field division deployed in the area. This operation formed the western arm of a pincer movement aimed at Ropsha, the eastern arm of which was to be launched from the Pulkovo Heights south of Leningrad. The following day, 42nd Army attacked from the east in order to join up with 2nd Shock Army and encircle the German units on the coast. The advance was supported by 366 tanks and assault guns.<sup>47</sup> On 17 January the Soviet forces broke through between Krasnoye Selo and Pushkin, leading to a crisis in the headquarters of Army Group North. There were hardly any reserves, and Hitler refused to allow a withdrawal. On 18 January Field Marshal von Küchler nevertheless gave the order to retreat in the sector between Oranienbaum and Leningrad, without waiting for Hitler’s permission.<sup>48</sup> It was just in time, since Leningrad Front and 2nd Shock Army closed the pincer at Ropsha the very next day.

Volkov Front launched its assault simultaneously with Leningrad Front on 14 January, but its attacks were so slow and routinely systematic that it made hardly any progress at first, despite its great superiority. At the southernmost end of the front, however, it carried out a successful surprise attack. Two battalions of 59th Army crossed frozen Lake Ilmen under cover of darkness, partly using motor sledges.

<sup>43</sup> Glantz, *The Battle for Leningrad*, 327–37.

<sup>44</sup> Daines, ‘Srazhenie pod Leningradom i Novgorodom’, 20. In the first phase, the attacking forces consisted of 57 divisions and 18 independent brigades with a total of 822,100 men, who were subsequently joined by a further 30 divisions and 6 brigades, as well as the operations staffs of 3rd Shock Army, 10 Guards Army, and 22nd Army; see *Grif sekretnosti sniat*, 199–200.

<sup>45</sup> *Grif sekretnosti sniat*, 199.

<sup>46</sup> Daines, ‘Srazhenie pod Leningradom i Novgorodom’, 22.

<sup>47</sup> *Bitva za Leningrad*, 314.

<sup>48</sup> KTB H.Gr. Nord, 18 Jan. 1944, BA-MA RH 19-III/269.

It was a bold move, carried out with great daring. The defenders were not expecting such a risky undertaking, since the ice of the lake was relatively thin, and they were also hampered by poor visibility due to the bad weather. On the morning of 14 January the attackers managed to establish a 5-kilometre-wide and 4-kilometre-deep bridgehead on the far bank near Troitsa, and two or three divisions moved in after them. The Soviet troops pushed on northwards in the rear of 1st Luftwaffe Field Division, bypassing Novgorod.

When Hitler heard this, he demanded an immediate investigation to determine whether to initiate court-martial proceedings.<sup>49</sup> In response, Army Group North HQ asserted that, after the removal of 18 divisions in the last few months, the front was completely overstretched and could not be sufficiently guarded. Not satisfied with that response, the dictator sent a special plane to the front to fetch the officer responsible for the Lake Ilmen sector and bring him back to Führer headquarters for interrogation. Field Marshal von Küchler wanted to prevent the situation from escalating and was at first supported by Col.-Gen. Zeitzler in the OKH. Soon afterwards, however, Zeitzler changed his mind and expressly welcomed the fact that the officer concerned 'would be able to explain to the Führer how the situation looked in practice'. To Hitler's astonishment, the shortage of personnel at the front was shown to have been so serious that the west bank of Lake Ilmen had been guarded by only one Estonian and one Lithuanian battalion—an average of eight men per kilometre.<sup>50</sup>

Meanwhile the 59th Army main force had also broken through the German positions to the north of Novgorod with massive artillery support. Veering to the south with its armoured units, it joined up with the shock group advancing from Lake Ilmen on 19 January, 10 kilometres west of Novgorod. Hitler then had no option but to allow the enclosed German units to break out. On 20 January Novgorod was retaken by Soviet units, thus creating a dangerous breach exactly at the interface between Eighteenth and Sixteenth Armies. Sixteenth Army, deployed to the south, was unable to intervene since it was attacked at the same time by 2nd Baltic Front. Meanwhile, the withdrawal of the front on both flanks of Eighteenth Army had left the northward salient on the Sinyavino Heights even more exposed. This was the 'bottleneck', referred to earlier, which blocked Leningrad to the east and was therefore heavily contested in the three battles of Lake Lagoda. On 19 January Hitler gave permission to withdraw to the 'Rollbahn' (Highway) Line, a little further to the south, at the base of the previously existing salient. Mga was evacuated on 21 January, and on 26 January the Red Army regained possession of the railway line to Moscow.

That marked the final liberation of Leningrad after almost 900 days of siege. It was celebrated on 27 January by a massive artillery salute. According to recent

<sup>49</sup> H.Gr. Nord, Ia, 20 Jan. 1944, 14.45 hrs: call from Major Schall, OKH/GenStdH/OpAbt. (fo. 127), BA-MA RH 19-III/275.

<sup>50</sup> KTB H.Gr. Nord, 21 (and 14) Jan. 1944, BA-MA RH 19-III/269. See also telegram from H.Gr. Nord, Ia, 21 Jan. 1944 to OKH/GenStdH/OpAbt (fos. 133–4), BA-MA RH 19-III/275.

Russian accounts, 800,000 civilians lost their lives during that period,<sup>51</sup> of whom 642,000 perished within the besieged city.<sup>52</sup> The military losses totalled 3,437,066 men, of whom 1,017,881 dead or missing. If, taking an operational view, the sectors on both sides of Leningrad are included, the losses of the two army fronts involved amount to 3,964,193 men, of whom 1,146,258 dead or missing.<sup>53</sup> As the American military historian David Glantz points out, estimates of total civilian and military human losses in the defence of that one city vary from 1.6 to 2 million. Since Red Army losses are usually assumed to have been much greater than the official figures, the latter estimate is more likely. At any rate, Glantz concludes that Soviet human losses in the battle of Leningrad were as high as the total number of United States deaths in the Second World War.<sup>54</sup>

For the German side, the breaking of the blockade of Leningrad meant the collapse of a front that had remained stable for years. Not only were the defence lines torn apart, the 'second front' in the hinterland was aflame on all sides. In January alone, some 40,000 partisans blew up 58,000 railway tracks and destroyed 300 bridges and 133 troop trains.<sup>55</sup> Field Marshal von Küchler had already demanded immediate withdrawal to the Panther Line on Lake Peipus on 20 January and had convinced the OKH chief of staff that it was necessary. But when he put this to Hitler at Führer headquarters on 22 January, the dictator categorically refused. Hitler even rejected a compromise proposal to withdraw the particularly hard-hit Eighteenth Army to an intermediate position on the Luga river. At that meeting, which took a 'dramatic turn',<sup>56</sup> Küchler was treated to more of Hitler's tirades: 'There are crises everywhere. The A.Gr. is spoilt. The A.Gr. hasn't had any crises for a year now [...] I'm against any withdrawal. Let's have the crisis where we stand. There's no guarantee that we won't be broken through on the Panther Line either [...] The fighting must be kept as far away from the borders of the Reich as possible.'<sup>57</sup> The Führer also invoked his usual political and economic arguments, such as consideration for Finland as an Axis partner and the importance of German control of the Baltic for the transport of iron ore from Sweden. The shale-oil deposits in Estonia at Narva were also important, as was control of the eastern Baltic as a training area, especially for U-boats. In this, Hitler was strongly under the influence of the commander-in-chief of the navy, Grand Admiral Karl Dönitz, who feared that the Soviet Red Banner Fleet, enclosed in the bottleneck of the bay of Leningrad, could break out into the Baltic if the coastal strip were given up.<sup>58</sup> With that in mind, Hitler closed himself to all the operational arguments of the army generals. Instead of giving permission for withdrawal, he announced the posting of 12th Armoured Division to Army Group North.

<sup>51</sup> Kovalchuk, 'Die Verteidigung Leningrads', 123. Because the catastrophic civilian losses had to be concealed on Stalin's orders, exact calculation of the number of victims is impossible. There is a whole range of widely varying estimates. Ganzenmüller (*Das Belagerte Leningrad*, 239) assumes a figure of over a million.

<sup>52</sup> Glantz, *The Battle for Leningrad*, 468.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid. 469.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Haupt, *Leningrad*, 235.

<sup>56</sup> BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2046, 630.

<sup>57</sup> KTB H.Gr. Nord, 22 Jan. 1944, BA-MA RH 19-III/269.

<sup>58</sup> Grier, 'Hitler's Baltic Strategy', 19–50; Salewski, *Die deutsche Seekriegsleitung*, ii. 454–5.

All strategic arguments were pointless, however, since the operational preconditions were lacking. The enemy forces were too superior for that section of the coast to be defended successfully. Eighteenth Army was threatened with envelopment from both flanks. One of the two gaps had developed in the north, on the Baltic coast, where Soviet units were pushing westwards from the Oranienbaum area, threatening the left wing of the still-unoccupied Luga Line at Narva, as well as the Panther Line behind it. Developments on the right wing of Eighteenth Army at Lake Ilmen were even more threatening. A gap had formed at the interface with Sixteenth Army, through which strong enemy forces were streaming west in the direction of Luga (on the river of the same name). But the front was about to collapse in Eighteenth Army's centre too, where Soviet units were also advancing towards Luga from the Leningrad area. The only remaining chance was to pull back to the proposed, but still-unfortified, Luga Line before the enemy crossed it. In the next few days the commander-in-chief of Army Group North repeatedly requested permission to withdraw but, despite the insistence of Col.-Gen. Zeitzler, Hitler remained intransigent. On 27 January, when Küchler was again able to speak to him personally, the Führer once more refused. Meanwhile, the German units were crumbling. In January Eighteenth Army had suffered a total of 52,000 losses.<sup>59</sup> But the decisive factor was the fall in its infantry combat strength from around 58,000 men on 10 January to 17,000 men on 28 January.<sup>60</sup>

Events now proceeded apace. On 28 January Lt.-Gen. Eberhard Kinzel, Army Group North's chief of staff, initiated Eighteenth Army's withdrawal to the Luga Line on his own authority, though in agreement with Col.-Gen. Zeitzler. Field Marshal von Küchler, however, who had returned in the meantime and was still wholly under the impression of his talk with the Führer, countermanded the order.<sup>61</sup> Yet he too finally decided to organize the withdrawal. On 29 January he reported to the OKH that 'Eighteenth Army is split in three. It is no longer capable of establishing a continuous front on the present line. That is now possible only with the mass of the army along the general line of the Luga position.' In the same telex, he said he 'intended' to let Eighteenth Army withdraw to the Luga in order to 'save it from destruction'.<sup>62</sup> Whereupon the field marshal was summoned to Führer headquarters. Hitler had no alternative but to accept Küchler's decision as operationally correct. But on the following day, 31 January, he relieved him of his command and replaced him by Col.-Gen. Walter Model, the commander-in-chief of Ninth Army.

Model was known as a 'Steher', a man who held his ground. His defensive prowess had earned him the nickname 'Lion of Defence'. Exceptionally tough and energetic, he was considered for some time to be Hitler's 'favourite general'. Immediately after his appointment he sent the following telex from Führer headquarters

<sup>59</sup> AOK 18, Ia, No. 703/44 g.Kdos., 2 Feb. 1944, (fos. 92–3), BA-MA RH 19-III/284.

<sup>60</sup> AOK 18, Ia, No. 020/44 g.Kdos. Chefs., 28 Jan. 1944 (fo. 183), BA-MA RH 19-III/14.

<sup>61</sup> See radio messages 376, 377, and 379, BA-MA RH 19-III/19.

<sup>62</sup> BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2046, 642. See also KTB H.Gr. Nord, 29 Jan. 1944, BA-MA RH 19-III/269.

to Army Group North: 'There will be not a step backward without my express permission.'<sup>63</sup> To prevent the spread of the 'Panther complex', as he called it, among troops obsessed with withdrawal, he forbade use of the term 'Panther Line' and replaced it by 'lock and bolt position'. But that could not halt the collapse of the front. The German forces now paid the price for Hitler's refusal of Field Marshal von Küchler's request to withdraw while there was still time. In any case, Küchler had proposed, as a compromise, only that Eighteenth Army withdraw to the intermediate position of the Luga Line. By now, however, the enemy had crossed that new line on both wings before the German troops were able to occupy it. Eighteenth Army was split into separate groups attempting to withdraw under constant threat of encirclement. Meanwhile the thaw had set in, favouring the Soviet attackers, with their numerous US-produced off-road vehicles, over the wholly unmotorized German troops. The terrain had become 'one big swamp' and afforded scant cover from shells and bombs.<sup>64</sup> The German units struggled forward along the few roads and corduroy tracks, constantly under threat from enemy ground-attack aircraft. Many German soldiers had not seen a German aircraft for weeks. The fact that the front did not collapse completely was due solely to the methodically slow advance of the Soviet attackers. Time and again, gaps opened up in the German front which a decisive military commander could have pushed through to attack the defenders in the rear. But the command tactics of the Soviet officers involved were marked by an astonishing reluctance to take swift autonomous decisions.

Crises developed on both wings of Eighteenth Army, however, where the German troops were no longer able to withstand the many times superior enemy. The point of concentration of the Soviet offensive was on the north wing, where Leningrad Front was advancing along the coast. Its main forces—2nd Shock Army, 59th Army, and 8th Army—focused on the Narva Isthmus. On 1 February they already succeeded in crossing the Luga at Kingisepp before German forces could fully occupy the position—a fatal consequence of Hitler's refusal to allow withdrawal in good time. By 3 February Soviet advance troops had already reached the still scarcely occupied Panther Line. That same evening they crossed the River Narva to the south of the town of that name, where they were finally able to establish a bridgehead with a width and depth of 15 kilometres. The Narva Isthmus was of strategic importance.<sup>65</sup> It was considered the 'gateway to the Baltic'. At first, the only unit available for the defence of this importance sector of the front was III SS Armoured Corps, which had fought its way back to the Narva from the Oranienbaum area. Despite its name, it possessed almost no tanks at that time and was a conglomeration of SS units (mainly Baltic volunteers), splintered army units, and Luftwaffe and naval troops. After further reinforcements were

<sup>63</sup> Ibid. (KTB H.Gr. Nord, 31 Jan. 1944).

<sup>64</sup> Haupt, *Heeresgruppe Nord*, 189.

<sup>65</sup> On this, see Seekriegsleitung B. No. 1. Skl. 950/44 g.Kdos. Chefs., 27 Mar. 1944: 'Denkschrift des Ob d M über die Bedeutung der Narwa-Stellung für die Gesamtkriegsführung' (fos. 90–6), BA-MA RH 19-III/15; first version printed in BA-MA RM 7/161 (fos. 295–304). See also Salewski, *Die deutsche Seekriegsleitung*, ii. 458–9.

brought up, the troops in the isthmus were removed from the responsibility of Eighteenth Army and grouped together in a new large formation designated Army Detachment Narva. In any case, Eighteenth Army HQ was no longer in a position to control action on its previous northern wing, from which it was separated by the long stretch of Lake Peipus.

In the night of 13 to 14 February, during heavy fighting in the battle for Narva, a Soviet landing operation took place in the rear of the German troops.<sup>66</sup> Parts of two naval infantry brigades landed on the coast near Mereküla. Although they initially achieved a surprise effect, the advancing commando troops came under frontal fire from the 100-mm cannon of a German coastal battery. That was followed immediately by a counter-attack by Waffen SS units and naval troops, supported by three Tigers from 502nd Heavy Armoured Battalion and Stuka dive-bombers. The landing operation collapsed within hours, leaving behind the corpses of many killed or drowned Red Army soldiers on the shore.<sup>67</sup> In the end, the situation in that sector was stabilized. The Germans managed to form a stable front along the Narva and constrict the Soviet bridgehead.

Meanwhile, between Lake Ilmen and Lake Peipus the 'battle on the Luga' was taking place. In fact, the 'battle' consisted of numerous separate, operationally unconnected actions, often without any recognizable front line. By his long hesitation, Hitler had plunged the troops of Eighteenth Army into such a difficult situation that even as energetic a commander as Model was able to restore order only with great difficulty. The other focal point near Narva was on the south wing at Lake Ilmen, where the front had largely disintegrated. Sixteenth Army, deployed to the south of the resulting gap, also found itself very hard-pressed. Moreover, the sections assigned to the individual divisions were alarmingly overstretched, since units had repeatedly been transferred to other fronts. 21st Luftwaffe Field Division, for example, had for some time to defend a stretch of 118 kilometres.<sup>68</sup> In the gap between Sixteenth and Eighteenth Armies, the Soviet 8th Army was attempting to advance on Pskov. If it succeeded, the German front would be completely split. In this situation, the transfer of 12th Armoured Division to Army Group North at the end of January proved to be a great advantage. Although the division was exhausted on arrival and had only 36 operational tanks left,<sup>69</sup> it was Model's only remaining trump card. On 1 February he launched the armoured division on a counter-attack from the south-east into the gap between Sixteenth and Eighteenth Armies. At the same time, a Sixteenth Army unit made a push in the opposite direction. By the following day the two wings were able to join up to the north of Strazhevo, cutting off the overhastily advancing Soviet troops. This operation halted the dangerous

<sup>66</sup> KTB H.Gr. Nord, 14 Feb. 1944, BA-MA RH 19-III/270; H.Gr. Nord Ia, daily reports, 14/15 Feb. 1944, BA-MA RH 19-III/299; AOK 18, Ia reports, 14 and 15 Feb. 1944, BA-MA RH 20-18/741; KTB Marineoberkommando Ostsee, 14 and 15 Feb. 1944, and app. 31 (fos. 138–9), BA-MA RM 31/3215.

<sup>67</sup> According to Haupt (*Leningrad*, 245–6), a total of 460 Soviet soldiers were killed or drowned during the landing operation. That figure is clearly exaggerated, as the regional leader responsible for Mereküla explained to the author during a military history trip to the Baltic States in November 2004.

<sup>68</sup> Grier, 'Hitler's Baltic Strategy', 16.

<sup>69</sup> BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2046, 630.

advance of the Red Army at that point and closed the gap between the two German armies.<sup>70</sup>

Although the German forces thus managed to stabilize the situation on Eighteenth Army's wings, the enemy continued to push forward in the centre. Luga fell on 12 February, whereupon Zeitzler pressed Hitler to authorize withdrawal to the Panther Line. The Führer finally allowed the German units to begin the retreat. The planned withdrawal which now began (from 17 February) concerned first and foremost Sixteenth Army, which was still far to the east. On 1 March withdrawal from Lake Ilmen to Lake Peipus was completed, with the army group on the Panther Line on the Estonian and Latvian borders.<sup>71</sup> From then on the fighting abated. The Red Army made one more attempt to take Narva and Pskov, which again led to heavy losses,<sup>72</sup> but then abandoned its fruitless efforts.<sup>73</sup>

### 3. SUMMARY: THE BEGINNING OF THE END IN THE NORTH

Despite their crushing human and material superiority, the Red Army troops paid for their victory with disproportionately high losses. According to Soviet sources, from 14 January to 1 March Leningrad Front and Volkov Front together lost 313,953 men, of whom 76,686 dead or missing,<sup>74</sup> as well as 1,832 cannon, 260 aircraft, and 462 tanks and assault guns.<sup>75</sup> However, those are official figures which cannot be verified. Here too we may assume that the real numbers were higher still.<sup>76</sup> The Soviet forces lost a further 200,000 men in the attempt to break through the Panther Line.<sup>77</sup> Human losses on the German side from 10 January to 1 March totalled 98,921 men, of whom 17,772 dead, 69,995 wounded, and 11,154 missing.<sup>78</sup>

<sup>70</sup> KTB H.Gr. Nord, 2 Feb. 1944 (fo. 40), BA-MA RH 19-III/270; H.Gr. Nord reports, 2 Feb. 1944, BA-MA RH 19-III/298; Eighteenth Army summary reports, 2 Feb. 1944 (fo. 184), BA-MA RH 20-18/739; AOK 18, Ia reports, 2 Feb. 1944, BA-MA RH 20-18/741; KTB 16. Armee, 2 Feb. 1944, BA-MA RH 20-16/352.

<sup>71</sup> KTB H.Gr. Nord, 1 Mar. 1944, BA-MA RH 19-III/272.

<sup>72</sup> The attack on Pskov from 9 March to 3 April 1944 was carried out by Leningrad Front's 42nd, 54th, and 67th Armies, plus 13th Air Army. At the outset, 173,210 Red Army troops were deployed. In that short space of time the Soviet forces incurred 42,133 human losses, of which 10,453 were 'irrecoverable'; see Gurkin, 'Liudskie poteri Sovetskikh Vooruzhennykh Sil', Table 1.

<sup>73</sup> On this, see Loch, 'The Defensive Battle of the Eighteenth Army', and Reichelt, 'The Battles of Armeeabteilung Narva'.

<sup>74</sup> *Grif sekretnosti sniat*, 199.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid. 371.

<sup>76</sup> According to German sources, 1,218 Soviet tanks were destroyed during that period, for example, 544 of which by Eighteenth Army in the first two weeks. See BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2046, 667; KTB 18. Armee, 31 Jan. 1944, BA-MA RH 20-18/734. Other documents give the number of Soviet tanks lost as 1,172; see OKH Nord, Ia No. 38/44 g.Kdos. Chefs, 1 Mar. 1944 (fo. 29), BA-MA RH 19-III/15.

<sup>77</sup> This figure refers to the months of March and April; see Glantz, *The Battle for Leningrad*, 413.

<sup>78</sup> See the ten-day statistics of the OKH medical officer in BA-MA RW 6/559.

Hitler had long shown little interest in Army Group North. Nevertheless, when the first crisis arose at the beginning of 1944 the military commanders found that, on all major operational issues, they were no longer masters of their own decisions. The dictator's interventions were alarming not only because of his military diletantism. What worried the generals most of all was that, far away at Führer headquarters, he had largely lost sight of the operational reality at the front and was instead setting utopian strategic objectives. In the fateful days of January and February 1944 Hitler risked the destruction of Eighteenth Army. It owed its survival to the unauthorized action of its commander-in-chief, Field Marshal von Küchler, which nevertheless cost him his command. The Führer's senseless orders to hold firm repeatedly faced the officers in charge at the front with conflicts of conscience. This gave rise to what the sources refer to as an 'orders dialectic',<sup>79</sup> meaning the art of formulating orders in such a way that subordinate commanders could interpret them as tacit permission for flexible combat and withdrawal, while avoiding direct contradiction of the instructions from the top leadership. As emphasized in a study of Army Group North, the following order, issued by Hitler on 8 September 1942, was still in force: 'As a matter of principle, no army group commander or army commander has the right to undertake a so-called tactical withdrawal movement on his own authority without my express permission.'<sup>80</sup>

Army Group North had to cope with an enemy many times superior, and mostly without aerial or armoured support. Its situation was rendered even more difficult by Hitler's wrong operational decisions, which made him the unwilling ally of the Soviet leadership. Despite all, the army group managed to prevent the seemingly inevitable catastrophe and restabilize the front. That success was due not only to the skill of the German officers, but even more to astonishing tactical incompetence on the Soviet side. A telling German assessment of the enemy reads as follows:

Advancing after a long war of position, their troops clearly lacked independence, decisiveness, and flexibility at the intermediate, lower, and lowest command levels. One had the impression that their many favourable passing opportunities were not recognized, that their superiority in infantry, armour, and aircraft, like the high winter mobility of the Russian troops, was not sufficiently exploited. Their abundant armoured forces were expended simply in supporting infantry combat operations. Armoured units capable of independent combat were lacking.<sup>81</sup>

The Soviet attacks were mechanical and transparent, like a steamroller advancing in slow motion. They simply forced the German units back instead of encircling them.<sup>82</sup> For that reason, present-day Russian accounts also stress that 'the Leningrad–Novgorod operation did not achieve its aim'.<sup>83</sup> The attacks were repeatedly directed frontally into the enemy fire, resulting in senseless losses. The commander-in-chief of the Leningrad Front, General Leonid Aleksandrovich

<sup>79</sup> BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2046, 638.

<sup>80</sup> BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2045, 486.

<sup>81</sup> BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2046, 697–8.

<sup>82</sup> Glantz and House, *When Titans Clash*, 193. For criticism of Soviet operations command, see also Glantz, *The Battle for Leningrad*, 467–8.

<sup>83</sup> Daines, 'Srazhenie pod Leningradom i Novgorodom', 22.

Govorov, was also heavily critical, since the assaults were taking place over much too wide a front with no clear point of concentration. He enjoined the army commanders to drop their linear tactics and ‘manoeuvre in the main directions of thrust’.<sup>84</sup>

It seems remarkable that some of the relevant ‘manoeuvres’ had meanwhile been regularly rehearsed by Soviet troops in the southern sector (Ukraine), whereas in the northern sector they were still mismanaged as late as the beginning of 1944, and sometimes in a thoroughly amateurish fashion. On closer consideration, however, that is in no way surprising. How could Soviet troops who had spent almost 900 days in the trenches outside Leningrad have acquired experience of combined-arms combat and operational war of movement? Even if criticism of their tactically inefficient military commanders seems objectively justified, other virtues of the Soviet troops should not be forgotten. The soldiers of the Red Army mostly fought with utter fearlessness and proved themselves masters of winter warfare and improvisation, for example in crossing swamps. They showed themselves capable of enduring and fighting under extreme climatic and hygienic conditions that troops of their western Allies would have considered unacceptable. That made them an extremely unpleasant enemy. Moreover, Soviet officers learned from their tactical mistakes and gradually gained assurance precisely at the higher level of command.

From the beginning of March 1944, fighting continued only in a few places. On 30 March Col.-Gen. Model relinquished command of Army Group North in order to take over Army Group South, which was engaged in heavy combat. In mid-April quiet returned to the whole of the northern sector. But it was a deceptive calm, since the Wehrmacht had long since lost the war strategically and, above all, in terms of war economy. It could keep the quantitatively superior Red Army in check only with difficulty, by superior command skill. But the enemy was getting stronger by the day, as more and more new weapons and vehicles reached the front. Many of them were manufactured by the Allies and were brought in through the nearby port of Murmansk. There could be no doubt that Army Group North, treated with little consideration when it came to equipment, had no chance of withstanding a new major offensive. Yet it was not until July that the Red Army launched a new attack in the northern sector, although it had been obvious since the beginning of 1944 that Army Group North’s collapse could no longer be prevented. Even if an early conclusion was once again forestalled, the battle between Leningrad and Lake Peipus was already the beginning of the end.

<sup>84</sup> See *ibid.* 26. The inexperienced military commanders of 2nd Baltic Front and Volkov Front also made serious mistakes, as can be seen from several critical statements by the Stavka in Moscow. See *Russkii Arkhiv: Velikaya Otechestvennaya. Stavka VGK. Dokumenty i materialy 1944–1945*, pt. 16(5–4), 32, Doc. No. 10; *ibid.* 34, Doc. No. 14; *ibid.* 38, Doc. No. 20.

## II. The Withdrawal of Army Group Centre to Belorussia up to the Spring of 1944

*Karl-Heinz Frieser*

### 1. DEVELOPMENTS UP TO MID-SEPTEMBER 1943

In the summer of 1943 it became quite clear that Army Group Centre was no longer capable of withstanding the growing pressure from the enemy. The balance of forces shifted increasingly in favour of the Red Army. In July 1943 Operation CITADEL was launched to eliminate the Kursk salient, which extended dangerously far to the west, and thus save forces by shortening the front. For that purpose Army Group Centre had concentrated the mass of its armoured units with Ninth Army, which was supposed to advance on Kursk as the northern arm of a pincer movement. This attack, however, got stuck in the depths of the Soviet defence system. Furthermore, the Red Army launched a counter-offensive at Orel even before the German attack on Kursk had come to an end. The outcome was indeed a shortening of the front, but not the one which the Germans had intended. The new Soviet offensive forced the German troops to evacuate the Orel bulge and withdraw to the Hagen Line, a withdrawal which was complete by 16 August. At the same time, 2nd Armoured Army HQ, together with a number of smaller units, was transferred to the Balkan theatre, which meant a further weakening of Army Group Centre.

German inferiority was clear from the fact that each of Army Group Centre's four armies was faced by a whole Soviet army front.<sup>1</sup> It was compounded by the opening of the 'second front'. On 3 August approximately 100,000 partisans (according to Soviet figures) began the operation known as the 'rail war', which covered the whole hinterland up to the western border of the Soviet Union and was mainly aimed at the disruption of rail transport. In mid-September some 120,000 partisans launched Operation CONCERT, which also caused great damage and tied down a number of German units urgently needed at the front.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The composition and names of the Soviet army fronts changed several times. Thus, on 20 October 1943 Central Front and Bryansk Front were merged and designated Belorussian Front. On 24 February 1944, after additional forces had been brought up, Belorussian Front was in turn divided into 1st and 2nd Belorussian Fronts.

<sup>2</sup> *Geschichte des zweiten Weltkrieges 1939–1945*, vii. 366–78; Solovev, *Wendepunkt*, 150.

Since the course of the fighting in the area of Army Group Centre differed greatly from army to army, each battle needs to be discussed separately. All in all, a division can be made into the following stages:

- On 26 August and 1 September the Red Army resumed its offensive on most sectors of the front.
- On 16 September the German forces began their withdrawal to the Panther Line rearward position.
- By 2 October the units of Army Group Centre had largely occupied the Panther Line.

Third Armoured Army, deployed in the North, was the furthest from the epicentre at Kursk and had been affected only by offshoots of the Red Army's summer offensive. For that reason it had been obliged to give up several units. It still had three army corps<sup>3</sup> with horse-drawn infantry divisions, but, despite its name, it no longer possessed any tanks. The average length of front per division was 25 kilometres, so that some units had only one man per 50 to 80 metres. There were practically no reserves.<sup>4</sup> It was therefore to Third Armoured Army's advantage that it was touched only on its right wing by an offensive whose main thrust was directed against the neighbouring sector to the south.<sup>5</sup>

Its southern neighbour, Fourth Army, had been obliged to give up seven divisions in the last few weeks and had to cover a 300-kilometre-long stretch of front with only 14 remaining divisions.<sup>6</sup> Precisely in that period of weakness it was attacked by West Front and large sections of Kalinin Front in the 'Smolensk Strategic Offensive Operation', also known as the 'Suvorov Offensive', which lasted from 7 August to 2 October. In the initial phase the Red Army deployed 1,253,000 men, supported by 1,436 tanks and assault guns, 20,640 cannon and grenade launchers, and 1,100 aircraft. Additional forces, including two armoured corps, were also brought up afterwards.<sup>7</sup> Against this crushing superiority Fourth Army could muster only 66 assault guns.<sup>8</sup> The battle-hardened German defenders had never experienced such massive attacks. The reckless manner in which the offensive was conducted can be seen from the number of victims. Soviet losses totalled 451,466 men,<sup>9</sup> compared with 49,477 on the part of Fourth Army.<sup>10</sup> The Red Army also lost 863 tanks and assault guns, and 303 aircraft.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, the mood on the German side was one of crisis, as can be seen from a situation analysis by the commanding general of XII Army Corps, Gen. Kurt von Tippelskirch:

<sup>3</sup> On 14 September Army Group North's XXXIII Army Corps, which had previously belonged to Third Armoured Army, was assigned to it, and its border was moved correspondingly further to the south.

<sup>4</sup> Heidkämper, *Witebsk*, 15–16.

<sup>5</sup> KTB H.Gr. Mitte, 13 Sept. 1943, 1511, BA-MA RH 19-II/154.

<sup>6</sup> BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2052, 56.

<sup>7</sup> *Grif sekretnosti sniat*, 191. See also *Geschichte des zweiten Weltkrieges 1939–1945*, vii. 289.

<sup>8</sup> AOK 4, Ia No. T 219/43 geh., 7 Aug. 1943, BA-MA RH 20-4/471.

<sup>9</sup> Of whom 107,645 dead or missing; see *Grif sekretnosti sniat*, 191.

<sup>10</sup> KTB 4. Armee, 3 Oct. 1943, 203, BA-MA RH 20-4/491.

<sup>11</sup> *Grif sekretnosti sniat*, 370.

If the enemy continues to attack in the same manner, the outcome may be catastrophic. The combat strength of our units has fallen dramatically. There are great shortages of material [...] Some of the companies are led by very young officers, some by sergeants [...] Nowhere are local reserves available. The Russians attack in dense swarms and replenish them from the rear. Their combat value is not high in itself, but the massive deployment is crushing [...] Our position is stretched to breaking-point. Resumption of the Russian attacks must result in a breakthrough.<sup>12</sup>

The offensive achieved only initial success on the southern wing, after which the Soviet forces got stuck and suffered heavy losses.<sup>13</sup> There were, nevertheless, major consequences for the drawn-out battles taking place at the same time further south in the Kursk salient, where the Soviet counter-offensive at Orel was just reaching its peak. As already explained, Model's Ninth Army had been left on its own without any hope of support from Fourth Army, which was also under attack. On 26 August the Soviet units resumed their offensive after the first assault had come to a halt, but failed in their attempt to advance on Smolensk in the first half of September.

The situation of Ninth Army, deployed to the south, also appeared critical. It had been in action since 5 July, almost without interruption. After the unsuccessful attack on Kursk as part of Operation CITADEL, it had to fend off the Soviet counter-offensive, Operation KUTUZOV. By 16 August Col.-Gen. Model evacuated the Orel bulge and pulled his troops back to the Hagen Line. For a few days there was a short pause in the fighting, but then Bryansk Front, with 530,000 men, launched the 'Bryansk Independent Offensive Operation' (1 September to 3 October 1943). It cost the Soviet side 56,657 men, of whom 13,033 dead or missing,<sup>14</sup> while the Germans lost 13,300 (3,779 dead or missing).<sup>15</sup> Ninth Army had to withdraw to the other side of the Desna but managed to fend off the main thrust of the Soviet attack on Bryansk.<sup>16</sup> The new defensive line proved untenable, however, since the front had been broken through on the right, in the sector of Second Army, in mid-September.

In the spring of 1943 Second Army was away from the main course of events. It took no active part in Operation CITADEL, nor was it attacked during the Red Army's two counter-offensives in the Kursk salient. This meant, however, that it was repeatedly required to give up troops, leaving its front dangerously undermanned. In the end, it was left with only two weak army corps whose mobility depended mainly on the use of horses. Reinforcements, especially tanks, arrived only when it was already too late. It is therefore not surprising that the decisive breakthrough occurred in this sector, with repercussions on almost the whole eastern front. The Red Army attacked on 26 August, directing its main thrust at the interface between the two army groups, mainly against Second Army on the

<sup>12</sup> KTB 4. Armee, 11 Aug. 1943, 115–16, BA-MA RH 20-4/470.

<sup>13</sup> Glantz and House, *When Titans Clashed*, 170–1.

<sup>14</sup> Gurkin, 'Liudskie poteri Sovetskikh Vooruzhennykh Sil', Table 1, No. 37.

<sup>15</sup> Statistics of the OKH medical officer, 1 to 30 Sept. 1943 (Ninth Army), BA-MA RW 6/v. 558.

<sup>16</sup> On this, see the AOK 9 summary report 'Von der Hagen- zur Pantherstellung', BA-MA RH 20-9/152.

southern wing of Army Group Centre and Fourth Army on the northern wing of Army Group South. This was the 'Chernigov–Poltava Strategic Offensive Operation' (26 August to 30 September 1943). It deployed troops from Central Front, Steppe Front, and Voronezh Front, which attacked in the first phase with 1,581,300 men, supported by 30,245 cannon and grenade launchers, almost 1,200 tanks and self-propelled guns, and 1,700 aircraft.<sup>17</sup> In the course of the operation three army HQs, 3rd Guards Armoured Army, a mechanized corps, and two cavalry corps, plus 14 divisions and five brigades, were also brought in. The three army fronts, which had suffered painful losses shortly before during the battles in the Kursk salient, now incurred huge losses once again. According to official figures, they totalled 427,952 men, of whom 102,957 dead or missing. The attacking forces also lost 1,140 tanks, 916 cannon, and 269 aircraft.<sup>18</sup>

In the framework of this operation, three army fronts were deployed in the sector of Second Army. The leading role was played by Central Front, commanded by Gen. Konstantin Konstantinovich Rokossovsky, which had defended the northern sector of the Kursk salient in July during Operation CITADEL and had then taken part in the recapture of the Orel bulge (Operation KUTUZOV). Rokossovsky had five general armies at his disposal, plus 2nd Armoured Army, 9th Armoured Corps, and 7th Guards Mechanized Corps.<sup>19</sup> Central Front launched the attack on 26 August with 579,000 men.<sup>20</sup> However, Second Army, led by Gen. Walter Weiss, had accurately identified the point of concentration and positioned its troops accordingly.<sup>21</sup> The Soviet units managed to take Sevsk, but could advance only with difficulty in the well-built-up German defence system. Then, on 1 September, came the decisive breakthrough on the southern wing near Glukhov. Now the Soviet armoured units could push forward into the river delta between the Desna and the Seym. XIII Army Corps, deployed on Second Army's southern wing, was split off and had to be assigned to Fourth Armoured Army on the northern wing of Army Group South.<sup>22</sup> This meant that the right wing of Second Army was left hanging in the air, and a dangerous gap had opened up between the two army groups. Finally, Second Army was withdrawn to the other side of the Desna, where its task was to secure a 170-kilometre-long front with only six divisions.<sup>23</sup> But as the commander-in-chief of Second Army, General Weiss, reported, the remaining combat strength of all of his infantry divisions together was only 6,981 men.<sup>24</sup> That gave only 40 men per kilometre of front.<sup>25</sup> And in that situation Second Army was also ordered to carry out a counter-attack to the south so as to close the gap. LVI Armoured Corps, which had meanwhile been assigned to it, had been so weakened

<sup>17</sup> *Grif sekretnosti sniat*, 193–4; see also *Geschichte des zweiten Weltkrieges 1939–1945*, vii. 226; *Deutschland im zweiten Weltkrieg*, iv. 36.

<sup>18</sup> *Grif sekretnosti sniat*, 193–4 and 370.

<sup>19</sup> Glantz and House, *When Titans Clashed*, 171.

<sup>20</sup> *Grif sekretnosti sniat*, 193. In the course of this operation, Central Front lost 141,401 men, of whom 33,523 dead or missing.

<sup>21</sup> Glantz and House, *When Titans Clashed*, 171.

<sup>22</sup> BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2052, 77–8.

<sup>23</sup> KTB H.Gr. Mitte, 8 Sept. 1943, 1476, BA-MA RH 19-II/154.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 10 Sept., 1489.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 11 Sept., 1496.

by the constant pressure that it had been necessary to merge the fighting vehicles of its two armoured divisions in an ‘armoured corps under unified command’.<sup>26</sup> On the evening of 13 September the corps possessed only four operational battle tanks.<sup>27</sup> Second Army accordingly applied for ‘the supply of 60 battle tanks by express delivery’,<sup>28</sup> pointing out that it had the necessary crews at its disposal. Its request could not be met, however; there were no longer any reserves of fighting vehicles.

Meanwhile, the attacking units of Central Front had breached Second Army’s new defence line on the Desna. On 12 September they were able to establish a bridgehead to the north of Korop that was 18 kilometres wide and 6 kilometres deep.<sup>29</sup> Most alarmingly of all, the northern wing of neighbouring Army Group South was also in danger of collapse at Konotop. The gap was widening. In an attempt to prevent a debacle, the commander-in-chief of Army Group Centre, Field Marshal Günther von Kluge, ordered the retreat of Second and Ninth Armies to a new defensive position on his own authority, despite the fact that Hitler had expressly forbidden any withdrawal without his permission.<sup>30</sup> But it was no use. The dam could no longer be prevented from bursting.

## 2. WITHDRAWAL TO THE PANTHER LINE (16 SEPTEMBER TO 2 OCTOBER 1943)

Zeitzler, the OKH chief of staff, had long nursed plans to withdraw Germany’s eastern army to a favourable line of defence protected by wide stretches of water. Moreover, the resultant shortening of the front would make it possible to gather some reserves and thus withstand the assault by the superior forces of the Red Army. The ‘East Wall’ he had in mind, later dubbed the ‘Panther Line’, would run from Melitopol on the Sea of Azov, along the Dnieper and the Sozh, to Lake Peipus, and then on to Narva on the Gulf of Finland. By mid-August Zeitzler had succeeded in extracting Hitler’s agreement to build the planned defence line. For the time being, however, only inadequate preparations could be made since Hitler was still insisting on a sustained defence forward of the Dnieper. On 3 September a meeting took place at Führer headquarters at which Kluge and Manstein, the commanders-in-chief of Army Groups Centre and South, called urgently for withdrawal to the Panther Line. They both emphasized that the withdrawal movement had to begin without delay if the troops were to be brought behind the water barrier more or less intact. Nevertheless, Hitler refused, and was only willing to allow a few shortenings of the front.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>26</sup> KTB 2. Armee, 12 Sept. 1943, 123, BA-MA RH 20-2/723.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 13 Sept., 129.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. 130.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 12 Sept., 118; BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2052, 84.

<sup>30</sup> KTB H.Gr. Mitte, 14 Sept. 1943, 1535, BA-MA RH 19-II/154; Haupt, *Heeresgruppe Mitte*, 181–2.

<sup>31</sup> Philippi and Heim, *Der Feldzug gegen Sowjetrußland*, 215–16.

The breakthrough at the interface between the two army groups had occurred two days earlier. Field Marshal von Kluge showed himself to be worried not only by the open right flank, but also by the increasingly critical situation of the neighbouring army group to the south, whose defence lines were under attack by even greater masses of enemy troops. For that reason, over the period from 4 August to 8 September Army Group Centre had to transfer eleven divisions to its southern neighbour (including two armoured divisions and two armoured infantry divisions), as well as one HQ for each army corps or armoured corps.<sup>32</sup> But these reinforcements were to no avail against the enemy's superiority. Despite the thinned-out front, a further five divisions (including one armoured division and one armoured infantry division) had to be transferred to Army Group South.<sup>33</sup> Now Lt.-Gen Adolf Heusinger, chief of the operations division of the OKH General Staff, seized the initiative. On 14 September he declared, in a talk with the chief of staff of Army Group Centre, that 'it was in his view necessary for Army Group Centre to take far-reaching decisions [...] Perhaps the major withdrawal to the Panther Line had to begin before the muddy season. A.Gr. South's Fourth Armoured Army had been shattered into three groups. Fld. Mar. von Manstein had ordered the army to withdraw immediately to the Dnieper Line. The same decision had to be taken for A.Gr. Centre, and taken today.'<sup>34</sup>

The following day witnessed the decisive situation conference at Führer headquarters. Field Marshal von Kluge declared that immediate withdrawal to the Panther Line was the only remaining way to restore stability. Field Marshal von Manstein's analysis of the situation was even more pessimistic. In any case, he had reported on the previous day that he would, if necessary, order the withdrawal on his own authority in order to save Fourth Armoured Army from destruction. Faced with his generals' arguments, Hitler had no alternative but to give permission for withdrawal. He nevertheless watered it down immediately by ordering a slow, 'section by section' retreat, and specifying that each separate withdrawal movement required 'his express permission'.<sup>35</sup> In this connection, a former Wehrmacht general wrote scathingly of Hitler's 'hold-on' strategy: 'Instead of command skill, we were offered the impossible expedients of obstinacy and rigidity'.<sup>36</sup> How disastrous the situation of the fighting troops really was is clear from an analysis by Army Group Centre HQ for the second half of September. In theory, the following formations were available for the defence of the 700-kilometre-long front: 42 infantry divisions, two armoured infantry divisions, six armoured divisions, and four Luftwaffe field divisions. But some of them were in shreds and had to be split into other, equally rudimentary divisions. Only 11 infantry divisions, one armoured division, and four Luftwaffe field divisions were fully operational.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>32</sup> BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2052, App. 47, 174.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid. 87.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid. 84–5; KTB H.Gr. Mitte, 14 Sept. 1943, 1533–4, BA-MA RH 19-II/154.

<sup>35</sup> KTB H.Gr. Mitte, 15 Sept. 1943, 1545, BA-MA RH 19-II/154.

<sup>36</sup> Tippelskirch, *Geschichte des Zweiten Weltkrieges*, 337.

<sup>37</sup> KTB H.Gr. Mitte, 30 Sept. 1943, 1682–3, BA-MA RH 19-II/154.

In his denial of reality, however, Hitler refused to accept such facts. On his situation maps he operated with units some of which existed only on paper.

In the area of Army Group Centre, the Panther Line ran along the Dnieper in the southern sector, along the Sozh in the centre, and in the northern sector eastwards past Vitebsk to Nevel. The plan was to begin the 'Panther movement' on 16 September and complete it by 2 October. In parallel with the military withdrawal, Army Group Centre had to evacuate 535,000 civilians and transport huge amounts of economic goods.<sup>38</sup> Abandonment of the hitherto defended area went hand in hand with systematic destruction of its infrastructure, in order to make the advancing enemy's military operations more difficult. Fearing that the destruction could get out of control, the higher command authorities issued restrictive orders, such as the following from General Weiss, commander-in-chief of Second Army: 'I forbid the senseless burning of villages. Arsonists are to be court-martialled, and shot if trying to escape. The destruction of villages is justified only in battle with the enemy at the front and in the fight against partisan bands, and then only in the 40 km area forward of the Panther Line designated as a wasteland zone.'<sup>39</sup>

The operational withdrawal manoeuvre was a rotational movement around the axis of Third Armoured Army, stationed on the northern wing, which largely remained in its previous positions. Only Sixth Army Corps, defending the southern sector, was to withdraw, although more slowly than the army group's other large formations.<sup>40</sup> This manoeuvre was considerably more complicated in the case of the neighbouring Fourth Army, where the enemy was pushing forward strongly.<sup>41</sup> Since most of the Wehrmacht units were poorly equipped with motor vehicles, in many places it came to a grotesque race between German horse-drawn wagons and Soviet tanks, followed by all-terrain lorries (mostly manufactured in the United States). Despite the arrival of a few reinforcements in the meantime, the total number of operational fighting vehicles possessed by Fourth Army was 29 tanks and 37 assault guns.<sup>42</sup> But the situation of the other armies was no better. On 25 September the German forces lost Smolensk und Roslavl, 'the sites of the auspicious successes of the summer of 1941', as General von Tippelskirch put it. On 17 September the retreating Ninth Army had already had to evacuate Bryansk, a little further to the south. In 1942 this area had been the scene of the Vyazma-Bryansk battle of encirclement, in which the Red Army lost 673,000 men

<sup>38</sup> Müller, *Die deutsche Wirtschaftspolitik in den besetzten sowjetischen Gebieten*, 378.

<sup>39</sup> KTB 2. Armee, 21 Sept. 1943, 187, BA-MA RH 20-2/723. On the scorched-earth tactic, see Part III, Chapter IV of the present volume.

<sup>40</sup> Sixth Army Corps withdrew to the Panther Line only on 11 October, whereas the northern wing of Third Armoured Army remained in its previous positions forward of that line. This was because of its attachment to the neighbouring Army Group North, which did not withdraw to the Panther Line until February 1944.

<sup>41</sup> On this, see BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2154, 'Der Rückzug des XXVII. A.K. an der Autobahn Smolensk-Orscha im September und Oktober 1943'.

<sup>42</sup> AOK 4, Ia, Stopa No. 35/43 geh., 'Wochenmeldung über Panzer- und Sturmgeschützlage vom 30.9.1943', BA-MA RH 20-4/494.

as prisoners alone.<sup>43</sup> That success too had long faded from memory. Now the sarcastic slogan was: 'Forward, Comrades. We must retreat!'

Despite all these difficulties the Panther movement was completed by 2 October, according to plan.<sup>44</sup> On the southernmost wing, however, where Second Army was deployed, the disaster which the higher military authorities had been warning about occurred at Chernobyl. There, in the 'wet triangle' north of the confluence of the Pripet and the Dnieper, the eastern front suffered a first crack that later led to the bursting of the dam. As we have seen, the breakthrough by Central Front at Glukhov broke the connection between Army Groups Centre and South. Soviet tanks pushed through the gap south of Chernigov to the Dnieper. On 22 September, at the exact interface of the two German army groups, troops of 13th Army became the first to cross the river. According to a Soviet account, the following days saw an 'exceptionally bitter' and 'relentless' battle for Chernobyl, which was protected by the water obstacles of the Pripet and Uzh rivers.<sup>45</sup> This important town fell on 1 October. To the south and north of it, units of 60th and 61st Armies poured through the gap and widened the bridgehead.

This failure is one of many examples of Hitler's unprofessional command of operations. Once again it became clear that, despite his wealth of operational ideas, he lacked the technical skills of a general staff officer. His operational orders for execution of the Panther movement were marked by an inherent contradiction: on the one hand, he ordered the retreat to be carried out 'as slowly as possible'; on the other, armoured divisions were to be withdrawn 'as quickly as possible' in order to close the gap between the two army groups.<sup>46</sup> Yet in that almost obstacle-free terrain it was impossible to fight a slow, delaying retreat without sufficient armoured units. Moreover, withdrawal of the armoured divisions opened gaps in the front through which the Soviet tanks could advance. Manstein and Kluge, and the OKH chief of staff himself, protested strongly but in vain against this fundamental tactical error. By the time the armoured divisions were available for the counter-attack it was too late. The enemy had won the race to the Dnieper. In fact, the German units could have reached their positions on the western bank of the Dnieper without problems if they had been allowed to withdraw quickly enough. But that was precisely what Hitler had forbidden. As a result, the enemy had already established bridgeheads on the far bank while the German units were obliged to halt east of the river. Although Fourth Armoured Army, from the northern wing of Army Group South, managed to retake Chernobyl on 4 October, the Soviet bridgehead remained 60 kilometres wide and 30 kilometres deep. Army Group Centre was now in position on the Panther Line, as ordered, but there was an 'open wound' on its southern wing. When, on 14 October, its front had to be extended to

<sup>43</sup> Glantz and House, *When Titans Clashed*, 337, n. 18. The reference is to the double battle of Vyazma and Bryansk.

<sup>44</sup> Third Army and the northern wing of Fourth Army had at first remained forward of the Panther Line.

<sup>45</sup> Kobrin and Abaturov, 'Sokrushenie vostochnogo vala', 297–8.

<sup>46</sup> KTB H.Gr. Mitte, 16 Sept. 1943, 1551–2, BA-MA RH 19-II/154; BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2052, 88–9 and 104–5.

the area south of Chernobyl, it had to assume sole responsibility for the whole sector. The problem of the open right flank continued to occupy Second Army, which was deployed there, in the weeks and months following.

### 3. THE WINTER BATTLES OF 1943–1944: AN ‘UNKNOWN WAR’

What took place on Army Group Centre’s front in the winter months of 1943–4 was one of the bloodiest episodes of the Second World War. It was a drama that surpassed some of the war’s far better-known battles. Nevertheless, very little is said about it in the specialist literature. In Soviet historiography those battles are cloaked in exceptional darkness, all the more surprising in view of the enormous losses. The leadership of the Red Army became increasingly enraged at the setbacks in that sector of the front and threw more and more troops into frontal assaults on the German defence positions. Since its huge efforts and the sacrifice of countless army units met with no great success, the battles were later ignored, as if they had never taken place. This suppression of historical facts was particularly striking in Stalin’s speech on the 27th anniversary of the October Revolution. In his assessment of the winter campaign of 1943–4, the Soviet leader mentioned only the operations at Leningrad and Novgorod, in the western Ukraine, and in Crimea. Not a word about the fighting in the central sector on Belorussian soil. The normally uncritical *Geschichte des Großen Vaterländischen Krieges der Sowjetunion* has this to say on the subject: ‘The Supreme Commander was loath to admit that the high command had made mistakes in the planning of operations in the central sector and had failed to supply the fronts with the necessary forces and material.’<sup>47</sup>

In the front sector held by Army Group Centre, the Stavka was actually pursuing a far-reaching goal, namely the liberation of Belorussia before the end of the winter of 1943–4. That was the reason for the ‘Belorussian Strategic Offensive’ which it launched in November and had to abandon in February 1944 without success.<sup>48</sup> Looking back, Soviet marshal Ivan Khristoforovich Bagramyan remarked: ‘Had this plan succeeded, it would have taken our troops to the Baltic and the borders of East Prussia and Poland.’<sup>49</sup> The basic operational concept was a pincer attack on Minsk, consisting of a weaker thrust from the north-east via Polotsk or Vitebsk and a stronger thrust from the south-east via Bobruisk. It was thus an—albeit unsuccessful—anticipation of the opening phase of Operation BAGRATION, which in the summer of 1944 led to the battle of encirclement at Minsk and the collapse of Army Group Centre. The northern arm of the pincer was formed by 1st Baltic Front, as the former Kalinin Front had been called since mid-October. Its most important task was to smash the German Third Armoured Army near Vitebsk.

<sup>47</sup> *Geschichte des Großen Vaterländischen Krieges*, iv. 116.

<sup>48</sup> Glantz, ‘The Failures of Historiography’, 795–7. The sketch on p. 796 is particularly telling since it brings out the clear associations with Operation BAGRATION (Minsk battle of encirclement).

<sup>49</sup> Bagramyan, *So schritten wir zum Sieg*, 222; see also 226.

For a while the Stavka was even planning a supporting airborne operation, but eventually abandoned the idea.<sup>50</sup> The southern pincer arm was to be formed by Belorussian Front, created on 14 October by the merger of Central Front and Bryansk Front. Its mission was to attack the positions held by the German Ninth Army and, in the words of the Stavka directive of 1 October 1943, 'smash the enemy grouping at Zhlobin–Bobruisk and take possession of Minsk, the Belorussian capital'.<sup>51</sup> In the centre, West Front was to launch a frontal attack from the east against Fourth Army, which was positioned in the middle of Army Group Centre.

Soviet historiography, however, says hardly anything about the outcome of these ambitious operations. On this, the American military historian David M. Glantz comments:

Soviet historians have written about the series of operations west of Nevel, the Gorodok operations of November and December 1943, the Gomel–Rechitsa operation of November, and the Rogachev–Zhlobin operation of February 1944. They have been utterly silent, however, concerning subsequent operations by 1st Baltic and Belorussian Fronts during the period and, until recently, have ignored entirely operations by Western Front.<sup>52</sup>

Soviet reference works on military history are also silent about the operations in question. What seems particularly serious is that even *Grif sekretnosti sniat*, a work published in the post-Soviet period, passes over these operations in silence, as if they never took place. Apparently the losses were so horrendous that they were hushed up during the Stalin era.

Given the desolate state of the sources, it is noteworthy that, in the revised edition of *Velikaya Otechestvennaya Voina*, Makhmut Akhmetovich Gareyev cast light on the subject, taking West Front as an example.<sup>53</sup> After the end of Soviet Communism, articles dealing with this gloomy chapter appeared for the first time in the Russian press. One such article, published in *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, was a report by V. Diatlov, who had been deployed as a train driver in December 1943 during an offensive in Belorussia. Diatlov described how mercilessly the masses of Red Army soldiers were sent to their death. His account of an assault by a penal battalion directly into the German fire makes a particularly strong impression. In that single action, only seven out of 307 men remained alive.<sup>54</sup> A German general gave the following description of the Red Army's offensive tactics from the opposite viewpoint: 'A Russian infantry attack is an awe-inspiring spectacle. The long grey waves come pounding on, uttering fierce cries, and the defending troops require nerves of steel.'<sup>55</sup> But because of the 'brutal use of masses of troops in attack',<sup>56</sup> the cost in human lives was horrendously high. According to a British military historian, 'they attacked the same front positions again and again without

<sup>50</sup> Glantz, 'The Failures of Historiography', 797.

<sup>51</sup> Glebov, 'Manevr voisk', 15.

<sup>52</sup> Glantz, 'The Failures of Historiography', 797.

<sup>53</sup> See Gareyev's contribution, 'Neudakhi na zapadnom napravlenii'.

<sup>54</sup> *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, 24 June 1993, 3, repr. in English translation in Sokolov, 'The Cost of War', 180–1.

<sup>55</sup> Mellenthin, *Panzerschlachten*, 181.

<sup>56</sup> Görlitz, *Der Zweite Weltkrieg*, 183.

regard for losses, until either the German defence gave way or their own forces were completely used up'.<sup>57</sup> In the winter of 1943–4 the latter was usually the case in the central sector of the front.

The following chapters describe the battles from the viewpoint of the individual German armies, each of which was faced with an attacking Soviet army front. First, however, we shall consider the situation of the army group as a whole in regard to the Red Army's imminent winter offensive. On 14 October Field Marshal von Kluge, the commander-in-chief of Army Group Centre, wrote to the Führer stressing that, 'as the senior officer of the eastern army', he felt obliged to turn to him 'in confidence'.<sup>58</sup> Nevertheless, the content of his communication seemed so bold that, as he confessed privately, he feared it would cost him his post.<sup>59</sup> He described the hopeless situation of his army group, whose units, in their present condition, were no longer capable of fending off a strong Soviet offensive:

The foremost trenches, however, are frighteningly empty, and it is no wonder that soldiers feel alone and abandoned at the prospect of a mass attack by Russian infantry [...] In recent days I have personally been at artillery posts where the batteries were unable to fire on the most profitable targets imaginable because there was no more ammunition [...] Army Group Centre alone is short of 200,000 men. Recent losses have been so great that the combat strength of the units under the strongest attack has declined to a frightening extent. Without men, weapons, and reserves, no commander, however skilful, can command. To those who may claim that things are the same for the Russians, I have to say that is not the case. Where the Russians attack, they have everything we lack.<sup>60</sup>

That prophecy of doom long remained the last attempt to alert Hitler to the extremely critical situation of the army group. Two-and-a-half weeks later, on 28 October, Field Marshal von Kluge was involved in a serious traffic accident on the Orsha–Minsk road. Hitler's subsequent appointment of Field Marshal Ernst Busch as the new commander-in-chief of Army Group Centre met with little enthusiasm among the officer corps. While Kluge's autocratic manner had earned him some enemies, he was one of the few generals who dared contradict Hitler, and his involvement in the 20 July plot later cost him his life. Busch, on the other hand, was known as one of the Führer's unconditional yes-men. A study by Rudolf Hofmann, a retired infantry general, contains the following assessment of Busch's appointment: 'The change of commander-in-chief [...] weakened the leadership of the army group appreciably. Whereas Kluge had repeatedly striven to oppose Hitler's interventions and impositions in matters of command, his successor Busch was a submissive executive instrument of Hitler's command methods.'<sup>61</sup>

The accuracy of Field Marshal von Kluge's situation analysis in his letter to Hitler is confirmed by a calculation of the army group's strength carried out at the same time. The number of its four armies' operational fighting vehicles had fallen

<sup>57</sup> Macksey, *Deutsche Panzertruppen*, 217–18.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid. 34, 38.

<sup>58</sup> Heidkämper, *Witebsk*, 35.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid. 35.

<sup>61</sup> BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2053, 14.

to 216, and the artillery possessed only 2,577 cannon.<sup>62</sup> In the first half of the war the Luftwaffe had repeatedly been able to compensate for the army's weakness, but Air Fleet 6, assigned to Army Group Centre, was now left with only 434 operational aircraft.<sup>63</sup> Personnel strength is shown as 914,500 men,<sup>64</sup> but that figure includes the civilian and military Wehrmacht retinue in the hinterland, among which were numerous German and local auxiliaries employed on the construction of field fortifications, especially for the Panther Line.<sup>65</sup> In contrast, the daily strength of the combat units must have been only around half that number. Besides this, more and more troops had to be withdrawn from the front to protect the hinterland from partisans, whose numbers rose to 150,000 men in the winter of 1943–4, according to Soviet sources.<sup>66</sup> There are no suitable figures for the opposing Red Army units for October. They are available again only for the beginning of 1944, by which time Soviet strength had fallen appreciably owing to the Red Army's high losses. At that point the three army fronts attacking from the east had at their disposal 1,580,000 men, 24,041 artillery cannon and large-calibre grenade launchers, 1,159 tanks and assault guns, and 2,443 aircraft.<sup>67</sup> Deployed on a stretch of front 650 kilometres long were 135 rifle divisions, nine cavalry divisions, four armoured corps, six rifle and 17 independent armoured brigades, and six fortified areas (defensive troops).<sup>68</sup> Against them Army Group Centre could theoretically align 45 infantry and Luftwaffe field divisions and five armoured divisions, many of which had been merged in rudimentary 'combat groups' (see Tables IV.II.1 and IV.II.2).<sup>69</sup> With such weakened units it had to try to assert itself against 'a permanent conjunction of adjacent Russian attacking thrusts'.<sup>70</sup>

In the autumn the positions occupied by Army Group Centre extended over a width of 700 kilometres. In the following winter the front was stretched dramatically to 1,100 kilometres because the southern wing had to be moved back. While the army group was able to hold its positions mainly in the centre, the neighbouring Army Group South was forced back far to the west, leaving the southern flank open over a length of 350 kilometres.<sup>71</sup> As a result, Second Army could no longer be deployed against the three Soviet army fronts attacking from the east but had to occupy a new defensive line along the Pripet marshes to secure the southern flank. Here its main adversary was the newly formed 2nd Belorussian Front. In the sector of Army Group Centre, four German armies now faced four Soviet army fronts.

<sup>62</sup> 'Kräftegegenüberstellung, Stand 14.10.1943', BA-MA RH 2/2543. The figures for fighting vehicles refer to 1 Oct. and those for cannon to 1 Sept. 1943.

<sup>63</sup> Operational status report, 10 Oct. 1943, BA-MA RL 2-III/726, calculated by Ulf Balke in the light of further documents from his private archive.

<sup>64</sup> 'Kräftegegenüberstellung, Stand: 14.10.1943', BA-MA RH 2/2543. The personnel figures refer to 1 Oct. 1943.

<sup>65</sup> At the end of 1943 Army Group Centre employed nearly 100,000 civilians on the construction of field fortifications; see Müller, *Die deutsche Wirtschaftspolitik in den besetzten sowjetischen Gebieten*, 309.

<sup>66</sup> *Geschichte des zweiten Weltkrieges 1939–1945*, viii. 196. <sup>67</sup> Ibid. 169. <sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2053, 132–3; these figures do not include the two field training divisions, the three security divisions, or the 2nd Slovak Division and Royal Hungarian VIII Army Corps also stationed in the hinterland.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid. 12. <sup>71</sup> Tippelskirch, *Geschichte des Zweiten Weltkrieges*, 386.

**Table IV.II.1.** Army Group Centre: order of battle (status: beginning of October 1943)

Divisions	Corps	Armies	Army Group
5th Armd.			
2nd Armd.			
Cbt.Gr. 12th Armd.	LVI Armd.		
Cbt.Gr. 4th. Armd.			
Cbt.Gr. 86			
Cbt.Gr. 251		Second	
Cbt.Gr. 137	XXXXVI Armd.		
Remainder 7th			
Cbt.Gr. 102			
Cbt.Gr. 31	XX		
Cbt.Gr. 6			
45th			
292nd	XXXV		
216th			
299th			
253rd			
296th	XXXIII		
383rd			
110th		Ninth	
211th	LV		
Remainder 36th			Combat Group
267th			20th Armd.
260th	XXXXI Armd.		
131st			
Cbt.Gr. 56	XII		707th
26th			129th
35th			
Cbt.Gr. 330			
342th	IX.		
252th			
78th Aslt.		Fourth	
95th			
Cbt.Gr. 113			
25th Armd.Gr.	XXXIX Armd.		
337th			
18th Armd.Gr.	XXVII		
197th			
Cbt.Gr. 246			
256th			
206th	VI		
14th			Third Armd.
87th			
4th Lw.Fld.			
3rd Lw.Fld.			
6th Lw.Fld.	II Lw.Fld.		
2nd Lw.Fld.			
1st Hun.	12th Hun.	R. Hun.	Cdr. A.Gr. Centre
5th Hun.	23rd Hun.	VIII A.C.	
9th Hun.	18th Hun.		
286th Sec.	203rd Sec.		390th F.T.D.
201st Sec.	2nd Slov.		391th F.T.D.

**Table IV.II.2.** Breakdown of Air Fleet 6 at 10 October 1943 (for deployment with Army Group Centre)

Category	Unit	Aircraft type	Target strength	Actual strength	Operational
Strategic reconnaissance	4.(F)/14	Ju 88	12	12	8
	1.(F)/100	Ju 88	12	12	6
	4.(F)/121	Ju 88	12	10	5
	2.(F)/Night	Do 217	12	13	7
			48	47	26
Tactical reconnaissance	N.A.Gr. 3	–	–	–	–
	2.(H)/23	Hs 126	9	7	4
	4.(H)/31	Fw 189	9	8	6
	N.A.Gr. 4	Bf 109	4	3	3
	2./N.A.Gr. 4	Bf 109	16	12	10
	12.(H)/12	Hs 126	9	8	7
	3.(H)/14	Fw 189	9	8	6
	N.A.Gr. 10	–	–	–	–
	3.(H)/21	Hs 126	9	9	8
	12.(H)/13	Fw 189	9	4	3
	Stab/N.A.Gr. 15	–	–	–	–
	1./N.A.Gr. 4	Bf 109 G	16	10	8
	1.(H)/11	Fw 189	9	5	4
	11.(H)/12	Fw 189	9	5	4
	Nachtkette/15	Fw 189	–	6	3
			108	85	66
Night fighters	Stab I./N.J.G. 100	Ju 88	3	5	3
	1./N.J.G. 100	Ju 88	15	13	8
	3./N.J.G. 100	Ju 88	15	14	8
			33	32	19
Fighters	Stab/J.G. 51	Fw 190	4	4	4
	Stabsstaffel/J.G. 51	Fw 190	12	11	5
	I./J.G. 51	Fw 190	40	31	15
	III./J.G. 51	Fw 190	40	35	16
	15.(Span.)/J.G. 51	Fw 190	16	18	11
	Stab/J.G. 54	Fw 190	4	4	4
	I./J.G. 54	Fw 190	40	29	18
	4./J.G. 54	Fw 190	12	23	9
	IV./J.G. 54	Fw 190	28	21	13
			196	176	95
Ground-attack aircraft	Stab/S.G. 1	Ju 87	3	3	1
	I./S.G. 1	Ju 87	39	35	25
	II./S.G. 1	Ju 87	39	35	21
	III./S.G. 1	Ju 87	39	29	25
	I./S.G. 77	Fw 190	42	29	14
	III./S.G. 77	Ju 87	39	35	15
			201	166	101

Anti-tank aircraft	14.(Pz.)/S.G. 9	Hs 129	16 16	11 11	6 6
Night ground-attack aircraft	Stab/N.S.Gr. 2	Ar 66	2	—	—
	1./N.S.Gr. 2	Ar 66	20	26	9
	2./N.S.Gr. 2	Go 145	20	17	9
	3./N.S.Gr. 2	Ar 66	20	18	10
			62	61	28
Bombers	9.(Eis.)/K.G. 1	Ju 88	11	11	5
	II./K.G. 3	Ju 88	37	34	11
	Stab/K.G. 4	He 111	4	4	3
	II./K.G. 4	He 111	37	29	17
	III./K.G. 4	He 111	37	27	17
	II./K.G. 27	He 111	37	21	15
	Stab/K.G. 53	He 111	4	4	3
	I./K.G. 53	He 111	37	28	13
	II./K.G. 53	He 111	37	24	9
			241	182	93
<b>10 October 1943</b>	<b>Air Fleet 6 Total strength</b>		<b>905</b>	<b>760</b>	<b>434</b>
In addition, Air Fleet 6 had at its disposal:					
4 courier squadrons			30	45	39
1 corps transport squadron			15	8	8
2 transport groups		-	94	59	50
	<b>Other Units</b>		<b>139</b>	<b>112</b>	<b>97</b>

Source: Operational status report, 10 Oct.1943, BA-MA, RL 2 III/726, and documents from the Ulf Balke collection.

### (a) Third Armoured Army in the Winter Battles of Vitebsk

Third Armoured Army, led by Col.-Gen. Hans Reinhardt, was defending the northern wing of Army Group Centre. After giving up an army corps on 19 September, it was left with only two corps: VI Army Corps and II Luftwaffe Field Corps. The latter was deployed on the left wing at the border with Army Group North. It constituted a weak point in the front, since it had at its disposal only four Luftwaffe field divisions with insufficient front-line experience. The combat value of those units was so low that they were classified as of only limited suitability even for defensive tasks. It was precisely against this sector that the Soviet forces directed the main thrust of their Nevel–Gorodok Offensive, which lasted from 6 October to 31 December 1943. Large parts of Kalinin Front (from 20 October ‘1st Baltic Front’) attacked at the interface between Army Groups Centre and North. They consisted of 4th Shock Army, 11th Guards Army, 39th and 43rd Armies, and the aircraft of 3rd Air Army. In addition, 3rd Shock Army and other units attacked at the same time. According to Soviet sources, the total force of 198,000 men engaged in the first phase of the offensive suffered 168,202 losses, of whom 43,551 dead or

missing.<sup>72</sup> This was one of those operations which had to be abandoned in the end because the combat units had almost run out of men.

The great numerical superiority of the attacking forces nevertheless resulted in some successes for the Nevel–Gorodok Offensive. On the first day, 6 October, the Soviet troops broke through at the interface between the two army groups and took the town of Nevel. A breach almost 20 kilometres wide was opened in the German front. Since Third Armoured Army had no tanks but only five operational assault guns,<sup>73</sup> Army Group Centre HQ sent an intervention group including 20th Armoured Division and 505th Heavy Armoured Division to the northern wing. Its task was to drive back the onrushing attacking forces, but it only managed to establish a provisional stop-line. For a time the OKH even considered moving Seventeenth Army from Crimea and deploying it at the interface between Army Groups Centre and North.<sup>74</sup> The crisis continued to escalate, especially after the Red Army opened a second offensive phase at the beginning of November and pushed new troops into the breakthrough area. The width of the breach became increasingly dangerous, stretching Third Armoured Army's front to 360 kilometres.<sup>75</sup>

Hitler's interventions in operational command now had disastrous consequences. Instead of establishing a new line of defence in the rear, the dictator had ordered the reinforcement of the front on both sides of the breach with the few remaining reserves in preparation for a counter-offensive. From there he wanted to launch a concentric attack by both army groups so as to close the breach in the front and encircle the enemy units which had broken through. However, the commanders-in-chief of the army groups in question had hardly enough troops left to fill the numerous gaps, not to mention conducting a counter-attack of major operational proportions. The only serious attempt at an attack by Army Group Centre was made on 8 November by 20th Armoured Division and 252nd Infantry Division. The German units immediately broke through the enemy positions in the Lobok pass and advanced 6 kilometres northwards. This initial success substantially boosted the morale of the attacking German troops: 'high spirits everywhere, at last we're moving forward again!'<sup>76</sup> Then came the startling news that the attack by the northern pincer arm, scheduled for the following day, had been called off by Army Group North HQ.<sup>77</sup> Hitler's plan to close the gap in the front by attacking had proved an illusion. Meanwhile, more and more new Soviet units had pushed through the breach. Stretching out behind the breach on both sides, they formed a broad new front, some sections of which could be defended by the Germans only by deploying construction battalions as a last reserve. Army Group Centre HQ tried desperately to persuade Hitler to pull back the northern wing, which was threatened with encirclement, but in vain.

<sup>72</sup> Gurkin, 'Liudskie poteri Sovetskikh Vooruzhennykh Sil', Table 1, No. 39.

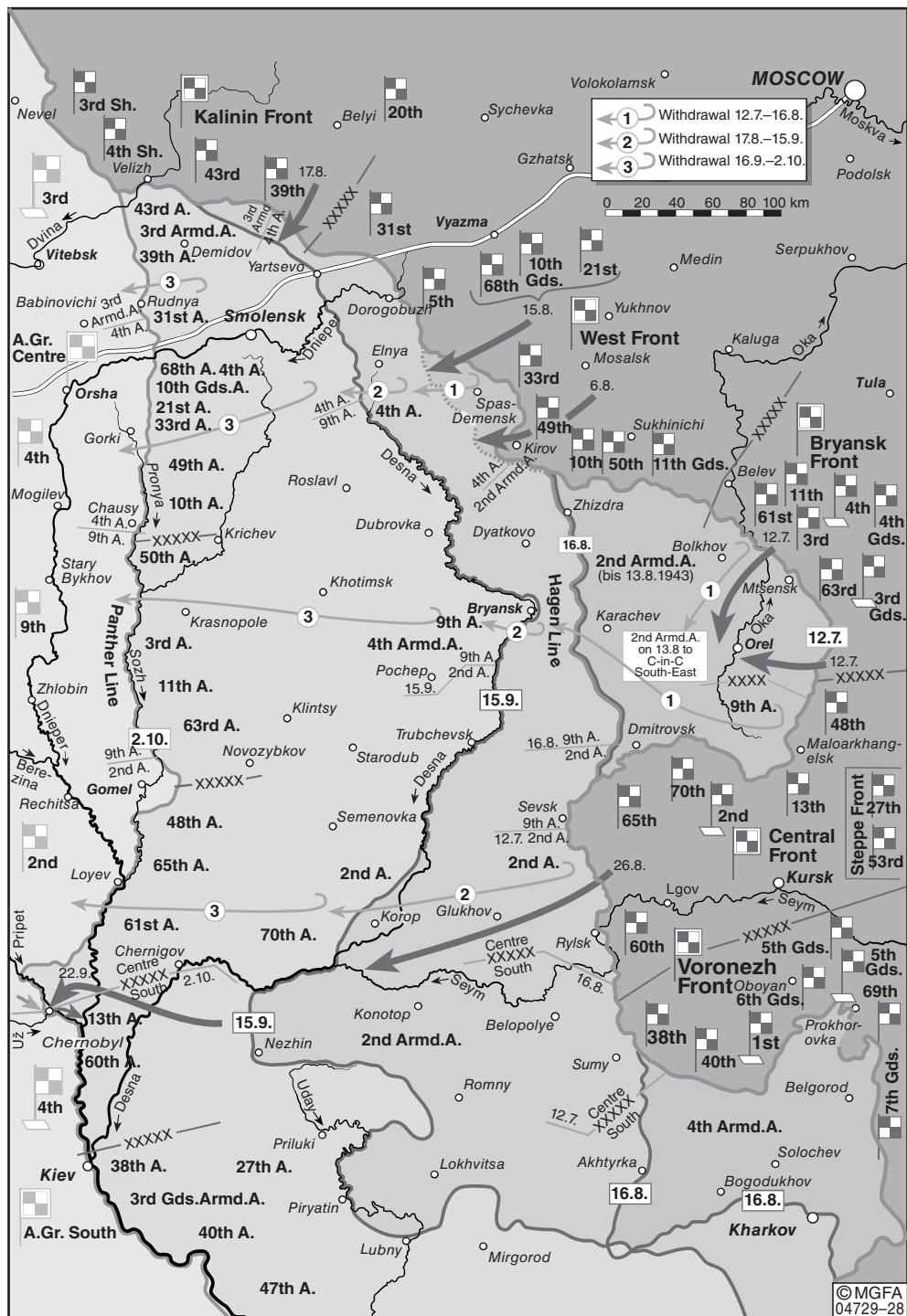
<sup>73</sup> Panzerarmeeoberkommando 3, Ia, No. M 1101/43 geh., 8 Oct. 1943, Ia daily report to Obkdo. H.Gr. Mitte, BA-MA RH 21-3/212.

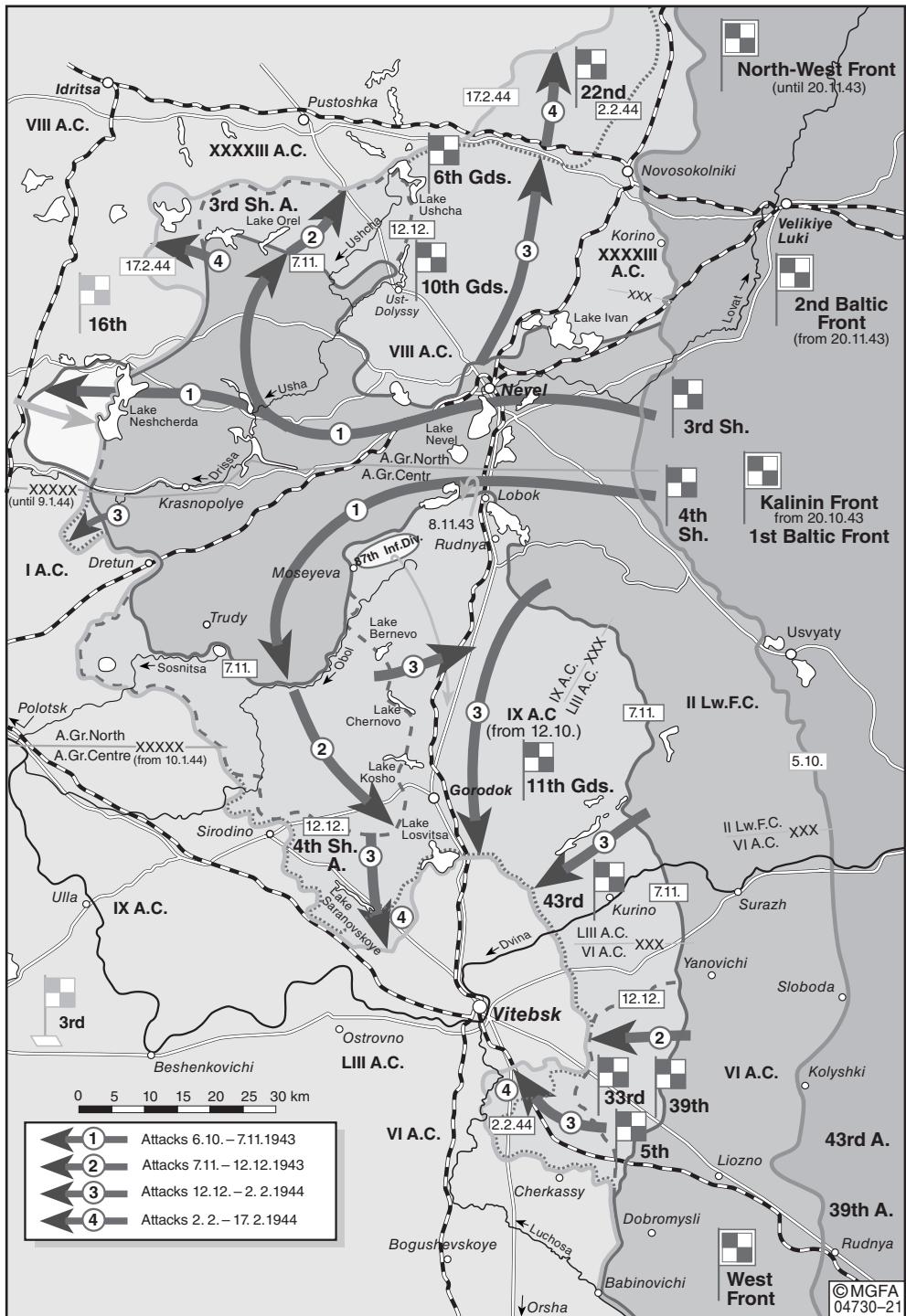
<sup>74</sup> BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2045, 430.

<sup>75</sup> Heidkämper, *Witebsk*, 62.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid. 44.

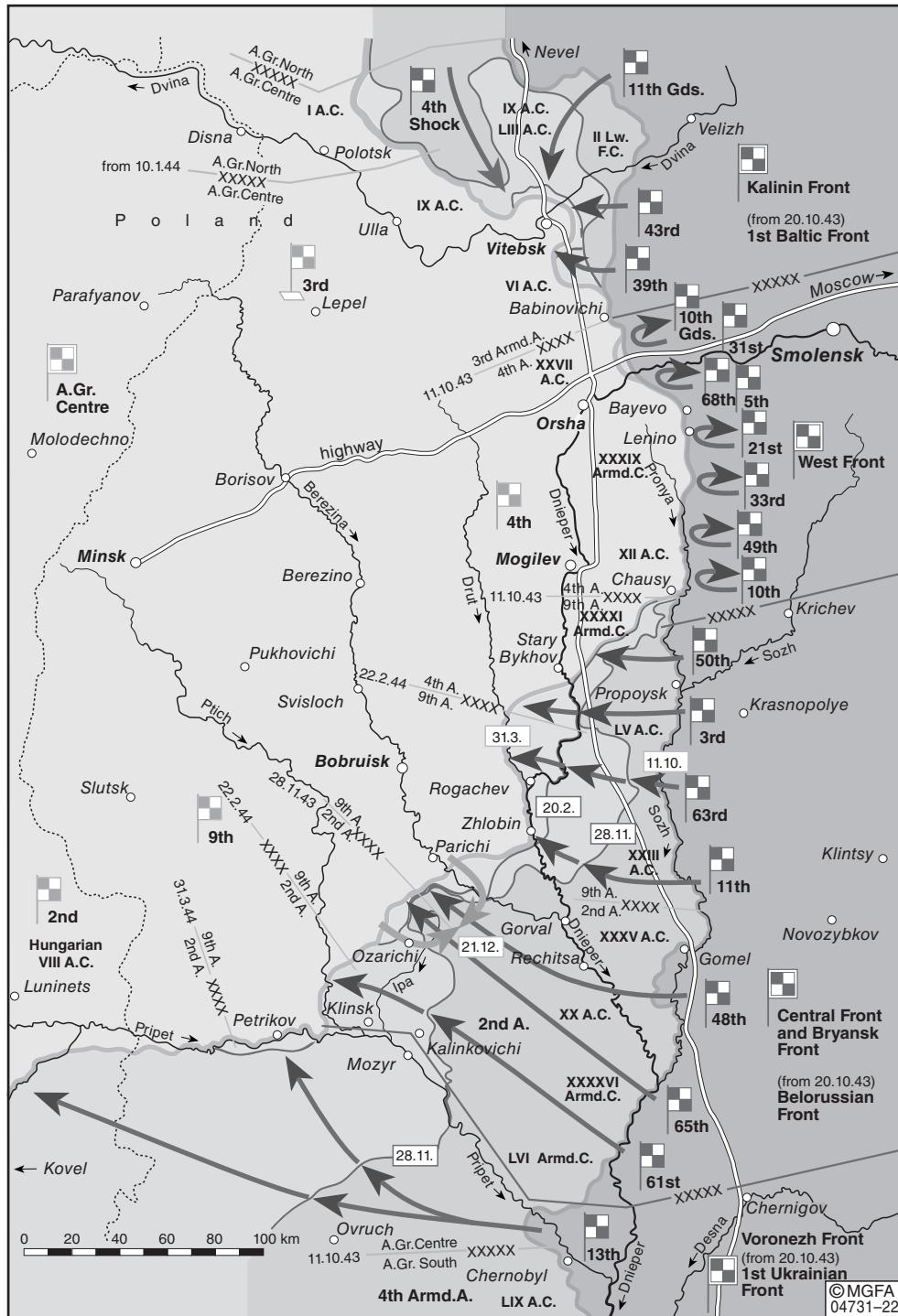
<sup>77</sup> KTB H.Gr. Mitte, 8 Nov. 1943, BA-MA RH 19-II/156; KTB 3. Panzerarmee, 8 Nov. 1943, BA-MA RH 21-3/244.





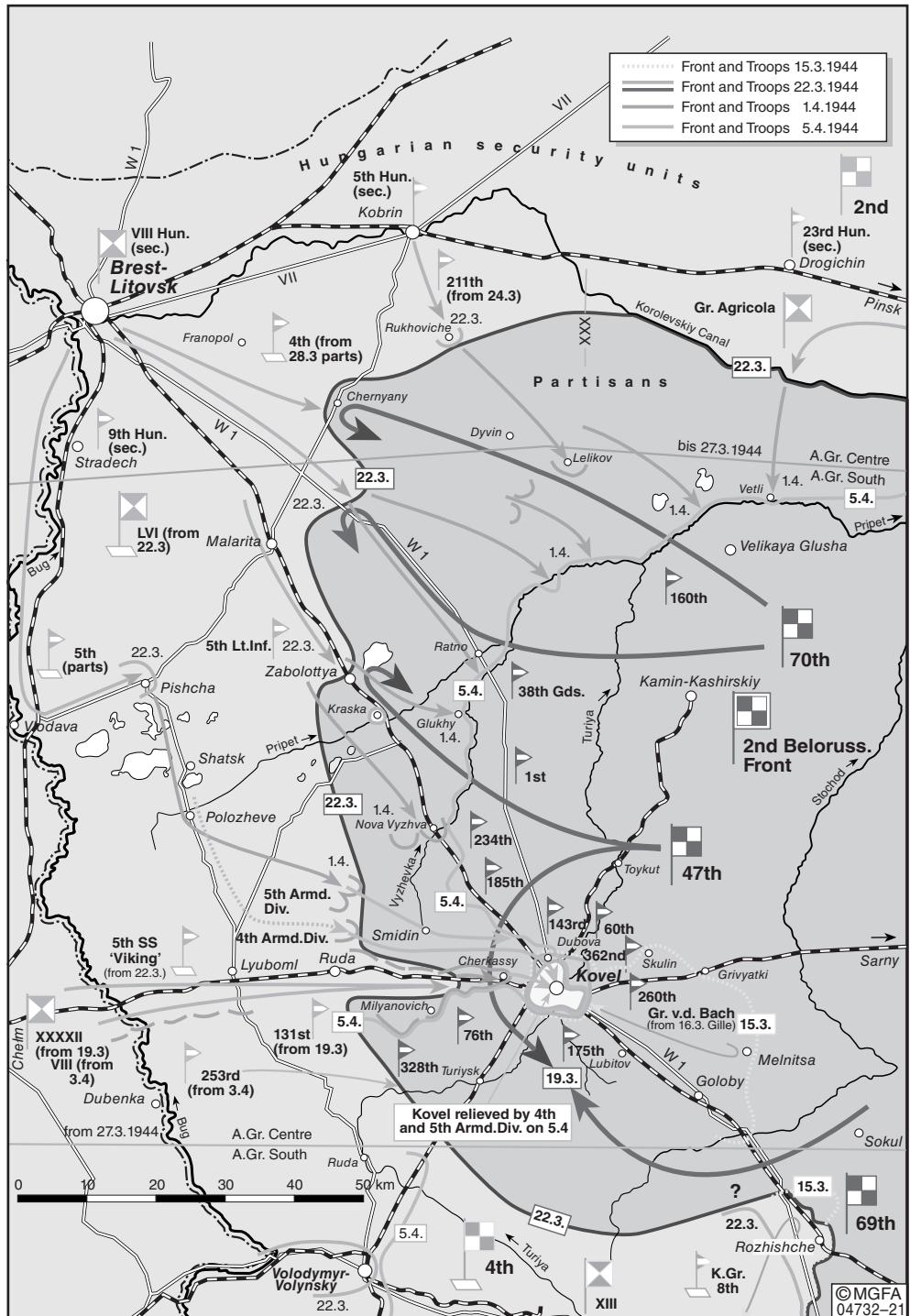
Map IV.II.2. The battles around Nevel and Vitebsk in the autumn and winter of 1943/4 (6 October 1943 to 17 February 1944)

Sources: OKH situation maps (for dates, see fronts), BA-MA, Kart RH-2 Ost 817, 850, 885, 937; A.Gr.North operations atlas 1943 RH 19 III/665; Sixteenth Army situation maps RH 20-16/323, 329, 335, 398.



#### **Map IV.II.3. The defensive battles of Army Group Centre (12 October 1943 to 31 March 1944)**

Sources: OKH situation maps for 11.10.1943, 28.11.1943, 22.2.1944, 31.3.1944; BA-MA, Kart RH-2 Ost/823, 871, 940, 980.



Map IV.II.4. The encirclement of Kovel and the relief offensive (15 March to 5 April 1944)

Sources: Situation maps for 15.3-5.4.1944, OKH, Kart RH 2 Ost/2619-2642; 2nd A., RH 20-2/915 K; 4th Armd. A., RH 21-4/226 K; KTB 2nd A., RH 20-2/833, 866; 4th Armd.A., RH 21-4/182; LVI Armd.C., RH 24-56/112.

On 8 November, in addition to the failure of the counter-attack on the northern wing, a new crisis arose on Third Armoured Army's southern wing: VI Army Corps was attacked frontally from the east in a Soviet thrust aimed at Vitebsk. The Soviet III Guards Cavalry Corps made a breach in the German front that was sealed off only with extreme difficulty. In the course of this action it became clear that Third Armoured Army scarcely had enough strength for a counter-attack. Its strongest unit up till then, 20th Armoured Division, shrank in November to a combined combat strength of 500 men and 19 tanks.<sup>78</sup> That was symptomatic of the whole army, whose remaining combat strength on 17 November was only 21,500.<sup>79</sup> As can be seen from a glance at the situation map, the state of Reinhardt's armoured army was so critical that the encirclement and destruction of a large part of its units seemed inevitable. However, 1st Baltic Front had suffered such huge losses that its troops were ultimately also incapable of further action. On 19 November Stalin dismissed its unsuccessful commander-in-chief, Gen. Andrei Ivanovich Yeremenko, and replaced him by Bagramyan, a much more skilful general.<sup>80</sup>

Under Bagramyan's leadership 1st Baltic Front immediately launched a new offensive, known in the German sources as the first winter battle of Vitebsk (13 December 1943 to 17 January 1944). Bagramyan received reinforcements which brought about a turnaround, although his more efficient operational command also had an effect. From the outset he deployed I Armoured Corps with 11th Guards Army at the point of concentration, while V Armoured Corps and III Guards Cavalry were to split the German front through additional thrusts. In the first phase of the battle the fighting was concentrated on the Gorodok corridor, which stretched from Vitebsk via Gorodok northwards to the Lobok lake district. In October the Soviet forces had managed to break through the front to the north of Lobok and push forwards, fanning out on both sides, but, unable to penetrate the Lobok pass between two lakes, they had failed in their attempt to widen the breach southwards. Nevertheless, the long northward-stretching front salient had been increasingly narrowed by the Soviet attacks on its flanks, and the Gorodok corridor constituted an obvious temptation to cut it off by means of a pincer attack. Col.-Gen. Reinhardt had already called for withdrawal from the northern section of the salient several times, arguing that the exposed Lobok defensive position could all too easily be circumvented by the enemy. He received little support from Field Marshal Busch, however, who retorted: 'That is for the Führer to decide, not you!'<sup>81</sup> The commander-in-chief of Third Armoured Army had even threatened to resign his post: 'In my position, I cannot simply stand by and watch disaster approaching. That is impossible. Someone else will have to do it.'<sup>82</sup> In all controversies, however, Busch took refuge in Hitler's instructions: 'I have no alternative. I am under orders from the Führer, and so are you. And an

<sup>78</sup> BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2053, 104.

<sup>79</sup> KTB 3. Panzerarmee, 17 Nov. 1943, 6, fo. 98, BA-MA RH 21-3/244.

<sup>80</sup> On Bagramyan's briefing with Stalin in Moscow, see Bagramyan, *So schritten wir zum Sieg*, 223–5.

<sup>81</sup> KTB 3. Panzerarmee, 17 Nov. 1943, 3, fo. 95, BA-MA RH 21-3/244.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

order from the Führer must be obeyed.<sup>83</sup> In this phase it became clear that it was extremely detrimental for the army group to be led by Field Marshal Busch, who carried out Hitler's orders more uncritically than probably any other commander. Busch reduced himself and his staff to a mere instrument for the execution of the Führer's instructions. That was extremely dangerous, however, given Hitler's increasing denial of the reality at the front. The dictator still retained the vision of a 'great solution', that is, closure of the Nevel-Lobok gap by means of a concerted attack by both army groups. His manic obsession with not evacuating front salients and bridgeheads that were hard to defend, but instead holding on to them as a springboard for possible future offensives, now became increasingly strong. More and more frequently, strategic utopia collided with operational reality.

When the Red Army launched its new offensive on 13 December, the directions of thrust were precisely those predicted by Col.-Gen. Reinhardt. The upper section of the Gorodok corridor was attacked simultaneously from the east, north, and west. The resulting situation was especially dangerous for the exposed German forces at Lobok. The second day already saw the German front breached on the flanks of the corridor by 11 Guards Army from the east and 4th Shock Army from the west. The pincer attack threatened to encircle several divisions of IX Army Corps, which was deployed on the northern wing. As the defensive positions could no longer be held, the only solution was to retreat southwards as quickly as possible to escape from the trap. That was what the commanding general of the army corps demanded: 'We are faced with the following decision: either let ourselves be beaten to death where we stand, which would mean a great loss of men and material, or else pull back while there is still the hope of withdrawing tonight in an orderly fashion.'<sup>84</sup> When Reinhardt, in 'an excited argument with the field marshal', requested permission to withdraw, Busch once again invoked Hitler's 'great solution'.<sup>85</sup> However, the idea of defending the Lobok pass as the springboard for a counter-attack was by now completely illusory. Much too late, the commander-in-chief of the army group summoned up the courage to apply, via the OKH, for Hitler's permission to withdraw. And much too late, at 14.00 on 15 December, the dictator gave his permission.<sup>86</sup> There now began a race against the concentrically advancing Soviet attackers.

While other units managed to escape, 87th Infantry Division was boxed in. The following day, 16 December, it broke through the enclosing ring with the courage of despair.<sup>87</sup> Third Armoured Army's war diary reported euphorically: 'With division commander Col. [Mauritz] Baron von Strachwitz at their head, the infantrymen overran everything with hand weapons and cries of hurrah!'<sup>88</sup> In the last phase of the breakthrough, moreover, several Soviet artillery batteries were put

<sup>83</sup> Heidkämper, *Witebsk*, 53.

<sup>84</sup> KTB H.Gr. Mitte, 14 Dec. 1943, 2400, BA-MA RH 19-II/157.

<sup>85</sup> Heidkämper, *Witebsk*, 68.

<sup>86</sup> KTB H.Gr. Mitte, 15 Dec. 1943, 2412, BA-MA RH 19-II/157.

<sup>87</sup> 87. Inf.Div., Kdr., Ia, No. 1759/43 geh., 22 Dec. 1943, 'Gefechtsbericht über den Durchbruch der 87. Inf.-Division bei Choljawki am 16.12.43', (fos. 50–4), BA-MA RH 21-3/306.

<sup>88</sup> KTB 3. Panzerarmee, 17 Dec. 1943, 64, BA-MA RH 21-3/245.

out of action. But then came disillusionment. Although a total of 4,780 men and 1,000 horses out of the enclosed 7,200 men and 2,900 horses managed to escape,<sup>89</sup> all the heavy weapons, including the whole artillery, were left behind. In a later analysis Lt.-Gen. (ret.) Otto Heidkämper, Third Armoured Army's chief of staff at the time, declared bitterly: 'The army's strongest division is in ruins. Another "too late"? The division would certainly have escaped in battle-worthy condition if the order to retreat so urgently requested by the armoured army's commander-in-chief had been given 24 hours earlier.'<sup>90</sup> General (ret.) von Tippelkirch described the episode as 'an example of an unbroken chain of sacrifices and losses caused by Hitler's orders to hold out'.<sup>91</sup>

Without 87th Infantry Division's heavy weaponry it appeared impossible to hold at least the southern section of the salient. On 24 December Gorodok too was lost. The fighting now shifted to the centre of Third Armoured Army, where the Soviet attackers were attempting to advance on Vitebsk from the east. In the end, however, they abandoned their offensive after suffering massive losses. On 17 January 1944 the first winter battle of Vitebsk came to an end. The success of the defence repeatedly hung by a thread, so impressive was the superiority of an enemy which sent its troops into action with ruthless disregard for losses. Four Soviet armies with 33 rifle divisions and 17 armoured units had attacked to the east of Vitebsk, while to the north and north-west of the city two armies with 23 rifle divisions and 11 armoured units had been deployed to encircle the German forces.<sup>92</sup> Third Armoured Army's war diary records: 'The intensity of the fighting is shown above all by the figure of 1,205 tanks shot down in the course of the battle (1,114 totally destroyed).'<sup>93</sup>

Vitebsk, on the River Dvina, was considered the gateway to the Baltic, and the Red Army therefore mustered all its available forces to retake the city.<sup>94</sup> Early February saw the beginning of the second winter battle of Vitebsk (3 to 17 February 1944), known in Soviet historiography as the Vitebsk Offensive Operation (3 February to 13 March). The city was encircled from three sides and attacked concentrically by six armies. According to statements by Soviet prisoners of war, a 'second Stalingrad' was planned.<sup>95</sup> Third Armoured Army faced an assault by two Soviet army fronts, whose mass threatened to overwhelm it. 1st Baltic Front, supported by 3rd Air Army, deployed 4th Shock Army, 11th Guards Army, and 43rd Army, while West Front attacked from the south-east at the same time with 5th, 33rd, and 39th Armies, and interventions by the aircraft of 1st Air Army. In the initial phase of the offensive the attacking forces already numbered 436,180 men.<sup>96</sup> They attacked Vitebsk not frontally but on both flanks, to cut the city off. Meanwhile, the German front formed an arc 70 kilometres long round the Vitebsk 'fortress'. The salient resembled a head which the attackers were attempting to sever

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 18. Dec. 1943, 76.

<sup>90</sup> Heidkämper, *Vitebsk*, 71.

<sup>91</sup> Tippelskirch, *Geschichte des Zweiten Weltkrieges*, 348.

<sup>92</sup> 'Die Abwehrschlachten um Witebsk: Aufruf des Oberbefehlshaber 3. Panzerarmee vom 20.1.1944', fo. 1, BA-MA RH 21-3/282; KTB 3. Panzerarmee, 17 Jan. 1944, BA-MA RH 21-3/283.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Grylev, *Dnepr*, 208.

<sup>95</sup> Heidkämper, *Vitebsk*, 111.

<sup>96</sup> Gurkin, 'Liudskie poteri Sovetskikh Vooruzhennykh Sil', Table 1, No. 47.

from the trunk. As in the final phase of the first winter battle of Vitebsk, the Soviet attacks were concentrated on two dents in the front to the north-west and south-east of the city. The operational objective was to break through concentrically at the narrowest place on the base of the salient so that the two pincer arms joined up west of Vitebsk in the rear of the German defending forces. The war diaries accordingly refer to the 'double battle of Vitebsk', since the fighting was focused on those two points.<sup>97</sup> North-west of the city, on Lake Saronovskoye, the mass of 1st Baltic Front attacked at the narrowest place, while three West Front armies attacked from the south-east on the opposite side, on the Luchesa river.

If one looks only at the marks on the situation maps, the fighting seems rather undramatic, since the attackers were aiming at only minimal territorial gains. In truth, however, what took place on those two narrow sections of the front in the space of a few days was a bloodbath. The Soviet units stormed the German positions repeatedly in dense waves. As reported in Army Group Centre's war diary, 'the ratio of our own to the enemy's infantry combat strength was 1:8 overall, and as much as 1:16 at the points of concentration'.<sup>98</sup> The enemy tried to force a breakthrough using 'a concentration of artillery never seen before'.<sup>99</sup> The front was stretched to breaking-point. Time and again collapse seemed imminent. But the Soviet losses grew to such an extent that, fortunately for the already beaten defenders, the attacks were broken off each time at the height of the crisis. After almost two weeks the Soviet onslaught appeared to have exhausted itself. On the German side, hope was spreading that the murderous conflict was at an end. The two Soviet fronts gathered their forces for one more massive blow, but the Germans were ready for them. They had learned from an intercepted radio message that the enemy was about to throw everything into the balance in one last attempt to force a breakthrough. On 16 February the defenders had to beat off fierce attacks, but managed to hold the front. The next day the second winter battle of Vitebsk was finally at an end.<sup>100</sup> Although fighting broke out again here and there in the following weeks, it was only of minor tactical importance.

Third Armoured Army's losses in this battle were relatively high, given its low infantry combat strength of 19,150 men.<sup>101</sup> They totalled 2,128 dead, 1,071 missing, and 8,489 wounded.<sup>102</sup> But, as usual, the Red Army's losses were many times greater. In the 'Vitebsk Offensive Operation', according to official Soviet figures, the six attacking armies lost a total of 135,012 men, of whom 27,639 dead or missing.<sup>103</sup> It was noticeable in the second winter battle of Vitebsk that the Red Army deployed its numerically superior armour with unusual reserve. The German

<sup>97</sup> e.g. KTB H.Gr. Mitte, 4 Dec. 1944, 322, BA-MA RH 19-II/193.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 11 Feb. 1944, 367, confirmed by Heidkämper, *Vitebsk*, 121. According to those sources, the three German corps had an infantry combat strength of 19,150 men, while that of the six attacking Soviet armies was estimated at 152,500.

<sup>99</sup> KTB 3. Panzerarmee, 17 Feb. 1944, fo. 124, BA-MA RH 21-3/284.

<sup>100</sup> BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2053, 121-2.

<sup>101</sup> Heidkämper, *Vitebsk*, 121.

<sup>102</sup> See casualty tables of the OKH medical officer, 1 to 20 Feb. 1944, BA-MA RW 6/559.

<sup>103</sup> Gurkin, 'Liudskie poteri Sovetskikh Vooruzhennykh Sil', Table 1, No. 47. The Soviet figures refer to the period from 3 Feb. to 13 Mar., although the Vitebsk offensive actually ended on 17 Feb., after which there was only insignificant sporadic fighting.

staff officers attributed this to the fact that in the previous winter battle, as already mentioned, the enemy had lost over 1,000 fighting vehicles. Nevertheless, according to German figures, 332 enemy tanks were destroyed in the second winter battle and a further 31 immobilized.<sup>104</sup> Moreover, the Germans noted with astonishment that throughout the months of fighting the enemy never once combined its far superior armoured units operationally to achieve a breakthrough. Instead, as reported in an analysis of the Soviet offensive tactics, ‘The enemy did not deploy compact armoured formations with more than 50 tanks. In general, tanks were used in support of infantry in groups of 15 to 25.’<sup>105</sup> That must have been astonishing in view of the great progress in operational deployment which Soviet armour had made during the battle in the Kursk salient. Finally, there remains the question of how the German defenders were able to withstand such vastly superior forces. One of the secrets of their success was the flexibility of the operations staffs, who constantly shifted their few troops to and fro so as to oppose each Soviet attack with a defensive concentration at the decisive point. Lt.-Gen. (ret.) Heidkämper commented in retrospect:

Moltke’s aphorism that strategy is a system of expedients is uncommonly applicable to our conduct at that time. Each night troops were moved around in columns of trucks. Battalions which yesterday were still engaged in heavy fighting to the north or north-east of Vitebsk, were today already in action east of the city. Others which today had repelled all enemy attacks on a sector of the south-eastern front would tonight be transported to another part of the front where new attacks were expected tomorrow. Only constant recourse to expedients was of any use.<sup>106</sup>

On the German side, the successful defence against a far superior enemy was celebrated as a great victory. Col.-Gen. Reinhardt, as commander-in-chief of Third Armoured Army, was awarded the Knight’s Cross of the Iron Cross with Oak Leaves and Swords. But both he and his troops knew it had been a shaky victory, in which the outcome had repeatedly hung on a knife edge. The disastrous consequence was that Hitler drew the wrong conclusions from the successful defence at Vitebsk. It supposedly confirmed the rightness of his strategy of holding out. Although at the end of February he authorized withdrawal to a more favourable defensive position around Vitebsk which shortened the front by 25 kilometres, he made clear at the same time how important the city was to him as an object of prestige. Vitebsk, he stressed, was ‘the last major Russian city on the eastern front which is still held near the front line, and it must therefore continue to be held in the future’.<sup>107</sup> Finally, he declared Vitebsk a ‘stronghold’ and appointed Gen. Friedrich Gollwitzer as its commanding officer. Heidkämper describes the reaction: ‘We are outraged by this demand. Prestige is taking precedence over reason! It is demanded [...] that, in the event that Vitebsk is enclosed, three

<sup>104</sup> KTB 3. Panzerarmee, 17 Feb. 1944, fo. 125, BA-MA RH 21-3/284.

<sup>105</sup> Panzerarmeeoberkommando 3, Ia No. 3040/44 geh, 24 Mar. 1944, ‘Erfahrungen aus den Großkämpfen Winter 1943/44’, 3, (fo. 50), BA-MA RH 21-3/278.

<sup>106</sup> Heidkämper, *Vitebsk*, 82–3.

<sup>107</sup> BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2053, 123.

divisions of the armoured army are to be left enclosed in the city.<sup>108</sup> In retrospect it can be seen that the successful defence in the winter battles of Vitebsk contained the seed of defeat in the following summer, when the Red Army managed to surround Vitebsk and the defenders had no chance to escape the trap. That was the beginning of the end for Army Group Centre.

### (b) Fourth Army in the ‘Highway Battles’ near Orsha

Anyone seeking an example of senseless operational command, combining incompetent leadership with ruthless mass deployment of human resources, need look no further than the battles which raged in the area of Orsha in the winter of 1943–4. The Soviet West Front attacked with overwhelming superiority, mainly along the Moscow–Minsk highway. Time and again, the same units attacked the same places on the German front in exactly the same manner. By the beginning of April, West Front had lost more than half a million dead or wounded, and achieved almost nothing.<sup>109</sup> In the first 52 days West Front’s seven armies already lost 104,420 men in combat against Germany’s Fourth Army.<sup>110</sup> This was a saga that ought to have fascinated military historians. Official Soviet historiography, however, ignored these battles—not although, but precisely because an immeasurable tragedy had taken place.<sup>111</sup>

By the beginning of October 1943 Fourth Army had withdrawn from the area of Smolensk to the Panther Line, although its left wing at first remained in a forward staggered position to preserve the link with Third Armoured Army, which was deployed to the north near Vitebsk. The last sections of Fourth Army took up position on the Panther Line only on 10 October.<sup>112</sup> The new front sector was 120 kilometres wide and was covered by three army corps with a total of 11 divisions.<sup>113</sup> XII Army Corps was deployed on the southern wing near Chausy, at the interface with Ninth Army, but the main point of concentration of the defence was on the northern wing, in the area of Orsha, where XXVII Army Corps was positioned. Through this section ran the Moscow–Minsk highway, which was the main axis of the Red Army offensive now beginning. The German divisions were in poor shape. They were short of weapons and equipment, and their personnel strength was scarcely greater than that of regiments.<sup>114</sup> While the actual strength of Fourth Army (as at 1 November 1943) was 193,510, including 14,231 paramilitary auxiliaries,<sup>115</sup> not all of them belonged to combat units at the front. The infantry, above all, had suffered enormous losses, for which hardly any replacements had

<sup>108</sup> Heidkämper, *Vitebsk*, 124–5.

<sup>109</sup> Gareyev, ‘Neudakhi na zapadnom napravlenii’, 11. The mass of West Front was deployed against the German Fourth Army, while the units on the right wing were also temporarily engaged in attacks on Third Armoured Army near Vitebsk.

<sup>110</sup> Gurkin, ‘Liudskie poteri Sovetskikh Vooruzhennykh Sil’, Table 1, No. 41.

<sup>111</sup> In the post-Communist era, Gareyev was the first to broach the subject.

<sup>112</sup> KTB 4. Armee, 10 Oct. 1943, BA-MA RH 20-4/501.

<sup>113</sup> BA-MA, Study ZA 1/1220, 64. <sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> ‘Iststärke des Feldheeres—Stand 1.11.1943’, BA-MA RH 20-4/506.

arrived. Fourth Army did not have a single armoured division, and on 10 October it possessed only nine operational tanks and 71 assault guns.<sup>116</sup> Facing it, West Front aligned seven armies, supported by 1st Air Army. Its total strength was given as only 310,900 men,<sup>117</sup> which is surprising since, according to a later publication, West Front lost 530,537 dead and wounded in the ensuing attacks.<sup>118</sup> This illustrates once again the problems with Soviet strength statistics, which usually refer only to the number of men deployed in the first body of troops on the first day of a given operation, and take no account of the huge reserves.

In the space of half a year West Front launched eight offensives against Fourth Army. Five of them, the ‘highway battles’, took place on the northern wing near Orsha, and two others on the southern wing, while the middle section was subjected to only one major attack, the last of all.

#### *The Defensive Battle of Lenino–Bayevo (12 to 18 October 1943)*

During its withdrawal to the Panther Line, Fourth Army was pursued by units of West Front and attacked at Lenino, where the first defensive battle took place. The Soviet side deployed 19 rifle divisions, supported by an armoured corps, a cavalry corps, twelve artillery brigades, 20 artillery regiments from the high command’s reserve, three independent armoured brigades, and six tank and self-propelled-gun regiments.<sup>119</sup> This mass of forces was directed against the combat sectors of two divisions of XXXIX Armoured Corps, which was thereupon reinforced with all available reserves. The German defenders benefited from the fact that the enemy had advanced in great haste, and were able to repel the attack immediately despite the opposing forces’ enormous superiority. The Soviet forces had advanced 1,500 metres at most, but had suffered 23,336 casualties, including 5,858 dead.<sup>120</sup>

#### *The First Highway Battle (21 to 26 October 1943)*

Only a few days later West Front opened a new offensive in the sector which was from now on to be the unambiguous point of concentration of its attack, that is, both sides of the Moscow–Minsk highway. The target of its constantly repeated thrusts was Orsha, in the combat sector of XXVII Army Corps, one of the most important traffic nodes in European Russia. The town was at the crossroads of the two major north–south and east–west highways, running from Leningrad to Kiev and from Moscow to Minsk. In addition, Orsha controlled the southern access to

<sup>116</sup> AOK 4, Ia No. T 283/43 geh., daily report of 10 Oct. 1943, BA-MA RH 20-4/502.

<sup>117</sup> Gurkin, ‘Liudskie poteri Sovetskikh Vooruzhennykh Sil’, Table 1, No. 41.

<sup>118</sup> Gareyev, ‘Neudakhi na zapadnom napravlenii’, 11. The reference period is 12 Oct. 1943 to 29 Mar. 1944. Gareyev gives his source as Archive of the Central Committee of the CPSUS, d. 2.1, 87–116.

<sup>119</sup> ‘Doklad Komissii GKO’ (report subheaded ‘Unsatisfactory combat performance by West Front in the past half-year’), 442.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid. 441. For the German perspective, see BA-MA, Study ZA 1/1220, 72–3; Study ZA 1/2053, 80.

the ‘Smolensk gate’, the land bridge between the Dnieper and the Dvina through which marches on and from Moscow had always passed. The Red Army massed large concentrations of artillery, as many as 260 cannon per kilometre of front,<sup>121</sup> to smash the German defences. The amount of ammunition used was ‘almost inconceivable in the conditions of the eastern theatre of war and reminiscent of the large-scale defensive battles on the western front in the First World War’.<sup>122</sup> It also impressed itself on the commander-in-chief of Fourth Army, Col.-Gen. Gotthard Heinrici, who had been a front-line officer in the previous war. Fourth Army’s war diary records that ‘the C-in-C was at the front for hours today and had the impression of a continuous artillery barrage no less heavy than at Verdun. The aerial photographs showed battery next to battery’.<sup>123</sup> Heinrici now adopted the tactic that had proved itself in the First World War and enabled him, to the surprise of Marshal Zhukov, to stop the Soviet steamroller one last time just before Berlin. Realizing that the foremost positions could no longer be held in the face of the enemy’s destructive artillery bombardment, he adopted the ‘major battle procedure’. For that purpose he had established a ‘major battle line’, termed the ‘Panther West Line’, a few kilometres to the rear. The units under attack withdrew to the Panther West Line at the crucial moment, so that the enemy’s heavy artillery barrage fell on empty ground. When the Soviet infantry divisions advanced against what they believed to be already beaten German defenders, they ran up against the new defensive positions. Once again, the lack of mobility of mass concentrations was decisive, since the densely concentrated Soviet artillery units were unable to change position fast enough. The Red Army’s attacking formations had advanced beyond the range of their own artillery and found themselves instead within optimum range of the German guns. As a result, the defenders were able to repel the attack by the superior enemy forces and inflict huge losses.

#### *The Second Highway Battle (29 October 1943)*

This battle, which began immediately afterwards, was the shortest of all. It failed from the outset and lasted only one day. According to Fourth Army’s war diary, on that day a ‘major attack on both sides of the highway, preceded by an enormous artillery barrage, was repelled in its entirety’.<sup>124</sup> The main thrust, supported by ‘unbelievably heavy artillery’, was accompanied by diversionary attacks along almost all the remaining army front.<sup>125</sup> The Soviet accounts make no mention of this debacle. The previous offensive had failed because the artillery was unable to catch up, but by now the cannon had been repositioned. Clearly, however, the infantry units had suffered such great losses in the meantime that they were no longer capable of a powerful advance. The German officers also wondered why the major Soviet offensives followed so closely upon each other, allowing the attackers insufficient time to prepare for the next action.

<sup>121</sup> ‘Doklad Komissii GKO’, 442.

<sup>122</sup> BA-MA, Study ZA 1/1220, 74.

<sup>123</sup> KTB 4. Armee, 22 Oct. 1943, 126, BA-MA RH 20-4/501.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 29 Oct. 1943.

<sup>125</sup> BA-MA, Study ZA 1/1220, 76.

### *The Third Highway Battle (1 to 19 November 1943)*

After receiving substantial reinforcements, the units of West Front again attacked in a closely confined area with a total of 32 rifle divisions, supported by 410 tanks and powerful artillery.<sup>126</sup> Although Fourth Army, which had been obliged to transfer several units to other sectors of the front, was in an increasingly critical situation,<sup>127</sup> the Soviet offensive failed once again, owing to inefficient combined arms action. With the Soviet operations staffs unable to bring their human and material superiority to bear, the combat operations were uncoordinated. The outcome was a gross disproportion between effort and effect. In less than a week the Soviet forces lost 38,756 men, including 9,167 dead, and managed to advance 1 to 4 kilometres at most.<sup>128</sup> Once again, the real objective—a breakthrough—eluded them.

### *The Fourth Highway Battle (30 November to 2 December 1943)*

The next battle was a repeat of the previous one, except that the outcome was even more negative for the Soviet side. The attacks were carried out mechanically, always according to the same scenario, with predictable results. The point of concentration was also on the same section where several frontal attempts at a breakthrough had already failed. The German defenders were therefore able to concentrate their forces on that narrow section in the area of XXVII Army Corps. Reinforcement of the left wing, however, involved a high risk for all other sections of the army front. Had the Soviet point of concentration been shifted further south to the area of XXXIX Armoured Corps, it would have inevitably led to a serious crisis, since that formation had been obliged to give up so many troops that its positions could often be covered only by stand-by units: ‘There were no more than 20 men per kilometre. Even a light attack could have broken through the front. Thank God it never came.’<sup>129</sup> Although the Soviet thrusts were so stereotypical in their method, they were carried out ‘with the enormous toughness for which the enemy is known and without regard for losses’.<sup>130</sup> One particularity was the incredible brutality with which the troops of the penal battalions, each containing up to 1,200 men, were driven into the German fire. On 1 December a captured Soviet captain from a penal battalion reported that the previous day the first wave had suffered 90 per cent losses and the second wave 60 per cent.<sup>131</sup> ‘When we entered the battlefield, we felt like we were being led to execution,’ said another Soviet prisoner, commenting on those mass attacks.<sup>132</sup> One reason for the ruthless use of manpower may lie in a

<sup>126</sup> ‘Doklad Komissii GKO’, 442.

<sup>127</sup> AOK 4, Ia No. T 319/43 geh., daily report of 15 Nov. 1943, BA-MA RH 20-4/515.

<sup>128</sup> ‘Doklad Komissii GKO’, 441. <sup>129</sup> BA-MA, Study ZA 1/1220, 80.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid. 81. <sup>131</sup> KTB 4. Armee, 1 Dec. 1943, 197–8, BA-MA RH 20-4/514.

<sup>132</sup> ‘Der Kampf um den Dnepr, zwischen Orscha und Mogilew’, in ‘Der Stoßtrupp, Siebente Aprilausgabe 1944’, annexed to KTB der 4. Armee, 9 April 1944 (fo. 30), BA-MA RH 20-4/533.

directive from Stalin, who allegedly ordered that on 5 December, ‘Soviet Constitution Day’, he was to be informed that Orsha had been taken.<sup>133</sup>

An interim balance shows that in the first phase of the battles alone, from 12 October to 2 December 1943, West Front lost a total of 104,421 men, of whom 24,553 dead or missing.<sup>134</sup> For the German Fourth Army, the corresponding figures cover the period 21 October to 10 December: its losses amounted to 17,662 men, of whom 5,628 dead or missing.<sup>135</sup> After the fourth highway battle there was a long pause. Although the Red Army continued to attack, at Christmas for example, the assaults had only tactical significance. Fourth Army HQ, which had been obliged to give up even more units, awaited a future offensive with great foreboding. So far the Soviet large-scale attacks had failed, mainly because the enemy had never taken the time to prepare them carefully. In February, however, there were more and more signs that a new, long-planned offensive was imminent.

### *The Major Offensive against the Southern Wing (22 to 25 February 1944)*

Meanwhile a threatening situation had arisen on the right wing, where the neighbouring Ninth Army was suffering heavy attacks by Belorussian Front. For that reason its former northern wing was assigned to Fourth Army. In February Belorussian Front nevertheless managed to break through Ninth Army’s positions to the north of Rogachev and establish a bridgehead on the western bank of the Dnieper. The aim of the operation was to push forward in the direction of Bobruisk. From 22 February the offensive was backed up by a simultaneous large-scale attack by West Front against the former southern wing of Fourth Army. This action, however, ended in failure. A secret ‘Report of 11 April 1944 to Comrade Stalin by the Commission of the State Defence Committee’ contains the following assessment: “The partial operation of 22 to 25 February in the direction of Orsha achieved nothing at all. In the course of the operation, parts of 52nd Fortified Area<sup>136</sup> were themselves surrounded. The original situation was restored at the cost of great losses.”<sup>137</sup>

### *The Fifth Highway Battle (5 to 9 March 1944)*

Immediately afterwards came a new highway battle, which was problematic in forcing Fourth Army to shift the point of concentration rapidly from the right to the left wing. This time the attacks were carried out with greater force. Furthermore, the main thrust was accompanied by several feints, to induce the defenders to

<sup>133</sup> ‘Gefangenenernehmung des Schützen Viktor Trifonow am 1.12.1943 durch XXVII. AK, Ic’, 3, BA-MA RH 20-4/517.

<sup>134</sup> Gurkin, ‘Liudskie poteri Sovetskikh Vooruzhennykh Sil’, Table 1, No. 41.

<sup>135</sup> Statistics of the OKH medical officer, 21 Oct. to 10 Dec. 1943, BA-MA RW 6/558.

<sup>136</sup> In the Red Army, a ‘fortified area’ was a fairly immobile formation especially strong in artillery (mostly of divisional strength).

<sup>137</sup> ‘Doklad Komissii GKO’, 441–2.

disperse their forces. Despite this new finesse, the offensive failed once again. That concluded the fifth and last highway battle between Smolensk and Orsha.

### *The Defensive Battle on the Southern Flank (25 to 31 March 1944)*

At the end of the winter battles Fourth Army had to shift the point of concentration once again, this time back to the right wing. Following the withdrawal by Ninth Army, the front line on the far side of the Dnieper was bowed out like a balcony to the east, so that the southern flank was under threat. At the end of March, units of West Front and Belorussian Front attempted a breakthrough in that sector. The attacks took place between Chausy and the Dnieper, with the aim of dislodging Fourth Army and forcing it back in a north-westerly direction towards Mogilev. However, this last offensive also failed.

For the Soviet West Front, the ratio of losses was disastrous. From 12 October 1943 to the end of March 1944 it had conducted eleven operations against the German Fourth Army, and occasionally against Third Armoured Army. In not one of those operations did it achieve any noteworthy success, while its losses amounted to 530,537 dead or wounded.<sup>138</sup> In contrast, the Fourth Army's losses totalled only 10,566 dead or missing, and 24,490 wounded.<sup>139</sup>

### *The Balance-Sheet from the German Perspective*

In the space of half a year Fourth Army had fought eight successful defensive battles. It was the only German army on the eastern front to have largely maintained its positions. It had even been able to hold a largish bridgehead east of the Dnieper. In the following weeks there was a long pause in the fighting, which gave the operational staffs enough time to complete occurrence reports. Clearly, success was mainly due to three factors:

*Early reconnaissance:* Faced with forces that were many times superior, it was absolutely necessary to ascertain the enemy's intentions at an early stage. Not only the place, but also the likely time of the enemy attack had to be known, so as to be able to withdraw at the right moment to a prepared position in the rear and concentrate all the defensive strength there. In general, the combination of all reconnaissance methods worked very well, with radio reconnaissance playing a decisive role. In any case, the Soviet enemy made the task of the German reconnaissance and counter-intelligence departments very easy by its ponderous, stereotypical conduct of operations.

<sup>138</sup> Gareyev, 'Neudakhi na zapadnom napravlenii', 11. Gareyev gives his source as Archive of the Central Committee of the CPSU, d. 2.1, 87–116. This figure for losses is thus considerably higher than the 383,870 given in the 'Report of the Commission of the State Defence Committee' of 11 April 1944; see 'Doklad Komissii GKO', 442.

<sup>139</sup> See the meticulous ten-day reviews by the OKH medical officer over the period 21 Oct. 1943 to 31 Mar. 1944, BA-MA RW 6/558 and 559.

*Defensive points of concentration:* The point of concentration of the enemy attack had to be met by an opposing concentration of defence forces. To that end, the front lines were manned extremely thinly and forces were withdrawn from them as reserves to be used to reinforce the sector under attack. Above all, it was there that the mass of artillery and anti-tank systems were positioned. This defensive concentration nevertheless entailed a considerable risk, since large stretches of the rest of the front could be guarded only symbolically.

*Staggered defensive positions:* Col.-Gen. Heinrici, an expert in ‘mobile defence’, favoured the ‘major battle procedure’ already developed in the First World War. The defenders’ surprise withdrawal to a prepared rear position saved them from destruction by the massive Soviet artillery barrage and prevented a breakthrough. As one analysis rightly observes: ‘The existence of further defensive positions in their rear gave both commanders and troops a feeling of security. What Hitler feared, and the reason why he forbade even the construction of rearward defence positions—namely that the troops would always be looking over their shoulders—never happened. [...] The army therefore constructed rearward defence positions partly against explicit orders from the top leadership and without its knowledge.’<sup>140</sup>

The assessment of the Soviet rank and file is also interesting: ‘The Russians showed themselves to be exceptionally weather-resistant. Snow, rain, cold, and ice did not bother them. Their winter clothing could be considered excellent. [...] All in all, the Russians were adversaries deserving full respect for their toughness, courage, and endurance.’<sup>141</sup> The assessment of the Soviet staffs, however, was less flattering. The lower leadership was deemed ‘rather ponderous in many respects’. The judgement regarding the upper leadership was even more damning: ‘During the highway battles the enemy mostly attacked time and again at the same, almost traditional places, as if trying once again to force a breakthrough there. The cost was a secondary consideration, given the huge reserve of manpower at its disposal.’ And again: ‘In wave after wave, the seemingly inexhaustible mass of men rose from the trenches, pushed forwards, slid back, and then came on again.’<sup>142</sup>

### *The Balance-Sheet from the Soviet Perspective*

West Front’s failed offensives in the winter half-year of 1943/4 were hardly mentioned in official Soviet historiography. A long-unpublished key document, kept secret until now, namely the ‘Report of 11 April 1944 to Comrade Stalin by the Commission of the State Defence Committee’,<sup>143</sup> is therefore all the more interesting. The commission was headed by a member of the State Defence Committee, Georgii Maksimilianovich Malenkov (later president of the Council of Ministers), and consisted of several generals, such as Colonel-Generals Aleksandr Sergeevich Shcherbakov and Sergei Matveyevich Shtemenko. The report in

<sup>140</sup> BA-MA, Study ZA 1/1220, 87.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid. 90–1.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid. 89.

<sup>143</sup> ‘Doklad Komissii GKO’.

question contains the following judgement of the eleven offensives carried out from 12 October 1943 to the end of March 1944: ‘All these operations ended without success, and the army front failed to fulfil the tasks assigned to it by the Stavka. In none of the listed operations was the enemy defence broken through, not even in tactical depth; at best, the operation ended in an insignificant penetration of the enemy defences whereby our troops incurred great losses.’<sup>144</sup> Nor did the members of the commission accept the excuse that West Front had received too little material support. On the contrary, it had received more ammunition than any other army front.<sup>145</sup> Its failure was due ‘solely to unsatisfactory leadership by the front’s HQ. In all the operations, West Front was considerably superior to the enemy in personnel and material, which gave every reason to hope for victory’.<sup>146</sup>

As a result of the commission’s report to Stalin, West Front’s commander-in-chief, General Vasily Danilovich Sokolovsky,<sup>147</sup> and several other senior officers were relieved of their posts. Strangely enough, the chief of staff, Lt.-Gen. Aleksandr Petrovich Pokrovsky, came through entirely unscathed, although he is described in the report as an officer ‘unsuited’ to his function ‘who fights shy of responsibility and is unable to take decisions independently, even on trivial matters’.<sup>148</sup> His staff seemed to the members of the commission ‘actually a kind of statistics office, which merely collects information about the situation, and is even late in doing that’.<sup>149</sup> With regard to the use of armour, the report criticized its repeatedly premature deployment against defensive positions that were still intact. As a result of those useless attempts to force a frontal breakthrough with tanks alone, II Armoured Corps was finally left with only two fighting vehicles.<sup>150</sup> Most surprising of all is how poorly the collection of enemy intelligence was carried out. After all, the Soviet intelligence service, the Razvedka, has a legendary reputation with western historians. According to the commission’s report, ‘West Front’s intelligence gathering is wholly unsatisfactory. The information is frequently false’.<sup>151</sup> From 1 January to 14 February, for example, 174th, 192nd, and 247th Rifle Divisions sent shock troops on hundreds of missions with the aim of taking prisoners for interrogation. They resulted in the capture of not a single German soldier. Instead, losses were incurred on the Soviet side, for example when shock troops stumbled into minefields of which they had not been informed. The report also criticized the performance of secret agents infiltrated by West Front, especially as some of them already drew attention to themselves by their clothing: ‘There are particularly serious defects in regard to the collection of intelligence by agents. West Front entrusts this task to dubious individuals, and it is carried out in a primitive and stereotypical fashion’.<sup>152</sup>

According to the Russian military historian Makhmut Gareyev, however, the basic mistake was made by the Stavka itself. It underestimated the defensive strength

<sup>144</sup> Ibid. 441.      <sup>145</sup> Ibid. 442.      <sup>146</sup> Ibid.

<sup>147</sup> After the war Sokolovsky, promoted to the rank of marshal of the Soviet Union, was appointed commander-in-chief of Soviet troops in Germany and head of Soviet military administration in that country.

<sup>148</sup> ‘Doklad Komissii GKO’, 447.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid. 446–7.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid. 447.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid. 448.

of Army Group Centre and held the enemy to be so weakened in the central direction (meaning Fourth Army) as to be no longer capable of withstanding a Soviet offensive. Instead of directing the operations of Baltic Front, West Front, and Belorussian Front at a joint strategic objective, it had each of those fronts carry out independent offensives.<sup>153</sup> It assigned West Front eleven offensive operations in less than six months, ‘which meant an average of 15 days for each operation, whereas experience shows that at least 30 to 40 days are needed for the preparation of a single major offensive operation’. Gareyev concludes that ‘if, instead of the eleven operations, two or three well-organized offensives had been carried out, the outcome might have been more positive’.<sup>154</sup>

Nevertheless, Gareyev’s criticism is also directed at West Front’s HQ: ‘Strangely enough, they had not even planned one combined operation by the whole West Front; all the operations were conducted by individual armies in isolation.’<sup>155</sup> Under the service regulations in force, as already explained, Soviet officers could not be held responsible for the consequences of an action if they adhered strictly to an order from a superior. Only those who dared to deviate from orders were punished.<sup>156</sup> In this case, such responsibility-avoidance behaviour was displayed even at the very top, by West Front’s commander-in-chief, Gen. Sokolovsky, and his chief of staff, Lt.-Gen. Pokrovsky. Both of them belonged to the ‘old school’ of army officers, who confined themselves to executing prior orders. Eschewing all personal initiative, they launched attack after attack in the same direction, without any element of surprise. The enormous losses of command personnel are therefore by no means surprising. In the space of half a year West Front lost (dead or wounded) 12 divisional commanders or their deputies/heads of staff, 33 regimental commanders or their deputies, and 174 battalion commanders. And the rank and file also paid a heavy price.<sup>157</sup>

There was, of course, another reason for the excessive losses (not only by West Front). Red Army had never placed a high premium on the qualitative training of its troops, since it had almost inexhaustible quantities at its disposal. But from the summer of 1943 the level of training in many units declined to a frightening degree. To put it cynically, many soldiers were of use only as ‘cannon fodder’ and were exploited accordingly. The German intelligence services established that they were frequently young men from the reconquered territories who were sent straight into combat units with insufficient preparation.<sup>158</sup> This is confirmed by Gareyev from his own experience: ‘I recall that from January to March 1944 our brigade several times received reinforcements of 100 to 200 men from reserve regiments, who were sent directly onto the battlefield. Often the unit commanders did not know their men, and vice versa.’<sup>159</sup> The inestimable importance of basic training was seen the following summer, after the Soviet units had used the break in hostilities

<sup>153</sup> Gareyev, ‘Neudakhi na zapadnom napravlenii’, 14–15.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid. 15.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid. 17. <sup>156</sup> Ramanichev, ‘Die Schlachten bei Kursk’, 62–3.

<sup>157</sup> Gareyev, ‘Neudakhi na zapadnom napravlenii’, 17.

<sup>158</sup> BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2053, 83.

<sup>159</sup> Gareyev, ‘Neudakhi na zapadnom napravlenii’, 18.

since the spring—sometimes as long as several months—to prepare for the new operation (BAGRATION). The German defenders, who were again expecting frenzied, uncoordinated attacks by hordes of Red Army soldiers, were in for a surprise.

### (c) Ninth Army in the Defensive Battles to the East of Bobruisk

Of all four armies of Army Group Centre, it was Ninth Army which had fought the most battles in the summer of 1943. During Operation CITADEL it attacked from the north in the direction of Kursk. After that, it had to defend against the Soviet counter-offensive at Orel, and withdrew to the Hagen Line. By 2 October heavy defensive engagements in the Bryansk area were followed by the major withdrawal movement to the Panther Line. For a while Ninth Army was away from the main course of events, while heavy attacks were directed against the neighbouring Second Army. It was, nevertheless, affected when Second Army was forced back and its own right wing came under threat. As the gap between Army Group South and Second Army widened in the months following, the latter's southern flank extended increasingly to the west. As a result, Ninth Army had to take over more and more sectors from Second Army, so that its border on the right also shifted substantially westwards. There is thus a close connection between the defensive operations of the two major formations.

The war diary records nothing spectacular for a while, with the exception of 5 November, when Col.-Gen. Walter Model was wholly unexpectedly removed from his post as commander-in-chief of Ninth Army.<sup>160</sup> For almost three months, until 31 January 1944, he was not given another command. His dismissal met with astonishment, since Model was known as Hitler's 'favourite general'. The Führer, however, proved very resentful. He was apparently unable to forgive Model for initiating withdrawal to the Hagen Line on his own authority weeks before at Orel.<sup>161</sup> Although Model had fallen temporarily into disfavour, his open disobedience had saved numerous units of Ninth Army. He was succeeded as commander-in-chief of Ninth Army by Gen. Josef Harpe. Harpe was reputed to be a capable commander, but he certainly did not have the exceptional leadership qualities of his predecessor.

The weaknesses caused by the constant transfer of units to other armies weighed more heavily in the balance. Less than a week after withdrawal to the Panther Line, Ninth Army was obliged to give up the following forces: two infantry divisions, one armoured division, 25 per cent of its artillery battalions, 50 per cent of its rocket-launcher regiments, 40 per cent of its assault guns, and 50 per cent of its sapper and construction units.<sup>162</sup> Its three army corps were left without a single armoured division. On 8 October 1943 its remaining complement of operational fighting vehicles consisted of 16 tanks, 41 assault guns, and 33 anti-tank cannon on self-propelling carriages.<sup>163</sup> Yet the reduction of personnel and material still continued.

<sup>160</sup> KTB 9. Armee, 5 Nov. 1943, BA-MA RH 20-9/157.

<sup>161</sup> Stein, *Model*, 2 and 78–9.

<sup>162</sup> KTB 9. Armee, 10 Oct. 1943, BA-MA RH 20-9/157.

<sup>163</sup> 'Panzer-Abwehrwaffen, Stand 8.10.1943, 18.00 Uhr', BA-MA RH 20-9/172.

Hardly a day went by without Ninth Army having further troops withdrawn, so that 'its already overstretched front was further weakened time and again'.<sup>164</sup> In his first briefing with Field Marshal Busch, Gen. Harpe stressed that 'the Army had already taken more bloodletting than it could stand'.<sup>165</sup> At that point in time, Ninth Army's remaining combat strength was 19,360 men.<sup>166</sup>

In the second half of November the situation of its neighbour to the right became even more critical. On 10 November 1943 Belorussian Front launched the Gomel–Rechitsa Offensive Operation, which was at first directed primarily against Second Army's northern wing. On 13 November it achieved a breakthrough south of Rechitsa. The Soviet units then pushed further and further northwards on the west bank of the Dnieper to the Berezina estuary at Gorval. Since Ninth Army's front extended to a bridgehead east of the Dnieper, its commanders viewed developments on the right flank and in the rear with great concern. Second Army failed to close the gap, with the result that XXXV Army Corps, positioned on its northern wing, was split off. The corps withdrew to the east bank of the Dnieper and tried to form a new front line on the ruptured right flank, whereupon Army Group Centre HQ ordered it to be placed under the command of Ninth Army. XXXV Army Corps, in an exposed position in the Gomel salient stretching far to the south, came under a pincer attack by Soviet forces on two sides: from the east at Gomel and from the south-west against the newly established Dnieper front at Rechitsa. But given its overstretched front and depleted units, Ninth Army considered itself unable to provide its neighbour with any support. 'Whoever tries to cover everything, covers nothing' was the sarcastic comment from its HQ.<sup>167</sup> Instead, it called for the immediate evacuation of the Gomel salient—a request that was also put forward by Second Army and the Army Group Centre HQ. Once again, however, Hitler was intractable, which proved to be a serious mistake.

On 22 November an additional Soviet attack began against Ninth Army's northern wing at Propoysk. At the same time, on the southern wing, new Soviet forces pushed forward along the Berezina in a north-westerly direction in the gap between Ninth and Second Army.<sup>168</sup> On 24 November Hitler finally gave permission to evacuate the untenable Gomel salient.<sup>169</sup> Most of the units withdrew to a bridgehead on the Dnieper near Rogachev. However, the situation further north had also become so critical that a partial withdrawal to the Dnieper had to be ordered. That freed up forces for the counter-attack that had long been called for to close the gap between the two armies. This operation, code-named 'NIKOLAUS', was planned as a concentric pincer attack in which Ninth Army would advance southwards along the Berezina from Parichi and Second Army northwards from

<sup>164</sup> KTB 9. Armee, 5 Nov. 1943, BA-MA RH 20-9/157.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid.

<sup>166</sup> Armeeoberkommando 9, Ia, No. 6573/43 geh., 'Gefechtsstärken (Stand: 7.11.1943)', BA-MA RH 20-9/162.

<sup>167</sup> KTB 9. Armee, 19 Nov. 1943, BA-MA RH 20-9/157.

<sup>168</sup> Kobrin and Abaturov, 'Sokrushenie vostochnogo vala', 322.

<sup>169</sup> KTB 9. Armee, 24 Nov. 1943, BA-MA RH 20-9/157; Tippelskirch, *Geschichte des Zweiten Weltkrieges*, 346.

Ozarichi.<sup>170</sup> Ninth Army's attack group consisted of 134th and 293rd Infantry Divisions, an SS brigade, and 16th Armoured Division, which was being brought up from Italy. Second Army's attack group was considerably weaker. All it could muster were parts of 4th Armoured Division, a reinforced infantry regiment, and an armoured reconnaissance battalion.<sup>171</sup> Since 16th Armoured Division was late in arriving, Operation NIKOLAUS began only on 20th December. The two pincer arms nevertheless joined up on the following day, closing the gap between the two armies.<sup>172</sup> The second phase of Operation NIKOLAUS was planned as a continuation of the attack to the east, with the aim of regaining as much ground as possible. This action was only moderately successful, however, and it was broken off on 26 December when 16th Armoured Division had to be withdrawn once again and sent urgently to the assistance of Army Group South.

On 8 January 1944 Belorussian Front, led by Gen. Rokossovsky, launched a new offensive aimed at the interface between Second and Ninth Armies. In response, Army Group Centre HQ shifted the boundary between the two armies southwards again to ensure unified operational command, assigning the former northern wing of Second Army at Ozarichi to Ninth Army.<sup>173</sup> The move to the right was completed by attaching Ninth Army's former left wing at Stary Bykhov to Fourth Army, positioned to the north. Renewed attacks against Ninth Army's southern wing finally forced a tactical withdrawal to the north-west on both sides of the Berezina. Right into March, Soviet armies repeatedly tried to break through in the direction of Bobruisk, but without success.

The northern wing also came under enormous pressure on 21 February,<sup>174</sup> when Belorussian Front launched the Rogachev–Zhlobin Offensive Operation, deploying 3rd, 48th, and 50th armies, with support from 16th Air Army. The initial attacking force numbered 232,000 men.<sup>175</sup> Although it succeeded in establishing a bridge-head west of the Dnieper and advancing as far as the Drut river, this time too, as with previous offensives, no operational breakthrough was achieved. Here the decisive factor was the timely withdrawal by the German units to a prepared position in the rear. At the beginning of March the fighting abated, and in the period following further forces, in particular LVI Armoured Corps, were transferred to Second Army, whose right wing stretched increasingly further westwards. At the same time, Second Army gave its eastern wing to Ninth Army,<sup>176</sup> whose positions finally reached as far as the Pripet river west of Petrikov.

<sup>170</sup> Oberkommando der Heeresgruppe Mitte, Ia No. 14 800/43 g.Kdos., 'Aufzeichnung über die Besprechung der Chefs der Generalstäbe der Armeen der Heeresgruppe Mitte am 12.12.1943', BA-MA RH 20-9/172.

<sup>171</sup> BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2053, 40.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid. 41; KTB 9. Armee, 21 Dec. 1943, BA-MA RH 20-9/157.

<sup>173</sup> BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2053, 49, 52.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid. 55 ff.; KTB 9. Armee, 21 Feb. 1944, BA-MA RH 20-9/176.

<sup>175</sup> Gurkin, 'Liudskie poteri Sovetskikh Vooruzhennykh Sil', Table 1, No. 48. This offensive lasted only a few days, from 21 to 26 Feb., and resulted in a total of 31,277 losses, of which 7,164 dead or missing.

<sup>176</sup> BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2053, 64.

To sum up: in the autumn of 1943 Ninth Army engaged in a continuous drift to the south and west. The following spring, as a result, it found itself occupying the front sector previously occupied by Second Army (though slightly further to the west). Second Army, on the other hand, had been constantly obliged to extend its right wing westwards, as it had proved impossible to close the gap with Army Group South. The dynamics and dramatic events of the battle on the ever-lengthening right flank are described in the following chapter.

#### (d) Second Army and Protection of the Open Southern Flank

Of all the army groups on the eastern front, only Army Group Centre still held some of its positions in the winter half-year of 1943/4. In the centre it was even able to hold the Panther Line east of the Dnieper, to which it had withdrawn at the beginning of October. However, by the spring of 1944, when the neighbouring Army Group South had been forced back 400 kilometres to the west, the southern flank was exposed along that length, and Second Army had to be deployed to cover the opening. During withdrawal to the Panther Line, as discussed earlier, a breakdown occurred at the interface with Army Group South. Since Hitler refused permission for early withdrawal behind the Dnieper, Soviet units were able to cross the river at the Pripet estuary near Chernobyl and form a bridgehead. When the boundary of Army Group Centre was shifted to south of Chernobyl on 14 October, Second Army became responsible for this problematic sector too.

In August 1943 Second Army, with four army corps, was the Army Group's strongest major formation. Of its 15 infantry and armoured divisions, however, nine were classified as 'combat groups' or 'remnants' and existed primarily as flags on the situation maps. Second Army's total combat strength on 11 October was only 21,129 men.<sup>177</sup> In LVI Armoured Corps, deployed on the southern flank, four of the five armoured divisions had been merged. Nevertheless, at that point in time Second Army had only 21 tanks and 31 assault guns available.<sup>178</sup> On 20 October Central Front, positioned opposite Second Army, was merged with Bryansk Front and renamed Belorussian Front. It had at its disposal 761,300 men,<sup>179</sup> 7,560 cannon and grenade launchers, 247 tanks and assault guns, and 526 aircraft.<sup>180</sup> Further reinforcements, mainly tanks, arrived in the course of the fighting. However, danger also threatened from the direction of Chernobyl through the northern wing of Voronezh Front (likewise renamed 1st Ukrainian Front on 20 October). The following section deals first of all with events in Second Army's central and northern sectors.

From 10 to 30 November Belorussian Front, commanded by Gen. Rokossovsky, conducted the Gomel–Rechitsa Offensive Operation,<sup>181</sup> in which it lost 88,206

<sup>177</sup> AOK 2. Armee, 'Gefechtsstärken Stand 11.10.1943, 0.00 Uhr', BA-MA RH 20-2/768 (b).

<sup>178</sup> AOK 2, Ia No. T 277/43 geh., daily report of 4 Oct. 1943, BA-MA RH 20-2/752.

<sup>179</sup> Gurkin, 'Liudskie poteri Sovetskikh Vooruzhennykh Sil', Table 1, No. 43.

<sup>180</sup> *Geschichte des zweiten Weltkrieges 1939–1945*, vii. 329.

<sup>181</sup> Rokossovsky, *A Soldier's Duty*, 223 ff.

men, of whom 21,650 dead or missing.<sup>182</sup> Soviet superiority was enormous, especially to the south of Gomel, where the attacking units pushed relatively easily through the weakly manned German front.<sup>183</sup> On 13 November Second Army already had to report that ‘the dam is now broken’.<sup>184</sup> After the Soviet troops had taken Rechitsa, they pushed further along the Berezina in a north-westerly direction. That gave rise to a critical situation for Second Army’s left (northern) flank, which had been split off and was still deployed east of the Dnieper near Gomel, since Hitler categorically refused to allow a withdrawal behind the river. On 15 November General Weiss, the commander-in-chief of Second Army, had already recorded a sober assessment of the situation: ‘If the army remains bound by the existing instructions, it will very shortly be incapable of combat owing to lack of ammunition and supplies, and will face destruction. If a second Stalingrad is demanded of it, it will sacrifice itself. But in my view that is not an operational necessity.’<sup>185</sup> Zeitzler, the OKH chief of staff, shared that view, but that put him at odds with Hitler, who was absolutely determined to keep Gomel for reasons of prestige.<sup>186</sup> Meanwhile XXXV Army Corps, deployed on the northern wing, had been split off, and Army Group Centre HQ accordingly put it under the command of Ninth Army. That solved a difficult problem for Second Army, but the situation continued to escalate. In the end, the connection between the two armies was also broken, and the Soviet wedge pushed deeper and deeper along the Berezina. On 24 November, when Hitler, much too late, gave permission to evacuate the Gomel salient, Ninth Army was at last able to release forces for a concerted attack with Second Army in order to close the gap. As we have seen, this action (Operation NIKOLAUS) resulted on 21 December in the junction of the two pincer arms and re-establishment of the front.<sup>187</sup>

At the beginning of 1944 Belorussian Front launched a new attack, the Kalinkovichi–Mozyr Offensive Operation, which lasted from 8 to 30 January. It deployed 61st and 65th Armies, supported by 16th Air Army, with an initial attacking force of 232,600 men.<sup>188</sup> Against such strength the German defenders had little to muster. In October Second Army had still possessed a nominal 15 divisions, but only six were left.<sup>189</sup> Despite a desperate German defence, the Soviet units broke through the front and pushed forward in depth. Second Army HQ wanted to withdraw and take up a new position along the Ipa, a tributary of the Pripet. But Field Marshal Busch, the commander-in-chief of Army Group

<sup>182</sup> Gurkin, ‘Liudskie poteri Sovetskikh Vooruzhennykh Sil’, Table 1, No. 43.

<sup>183</sup> Kobrin and Abaturov, ‘Sokrushenie vostochnogo vala’, 322.

<sup>184</sup> BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2053, 29.

<sup>185</sup> KTB 2. Armee, 15 Nov. 1943, 53, BA-MA RH 20-2/780.

<sup>186</sup> Tippelskirch, *Geschichte des Zweiten Weltkrieges*, 346.

<sup>187</sup> Operation NIKOLAUS has already been discussed in the previous section concerning Ninth Army. For the Second Army perspective, see the KTB entries for 6 Dec. (order for Operation NIKOLAUS) and 20 to 26 Dec., BA-MA RH 80-2/780. The file entitled ‘Unternehmen Nikolaus’, BA-MA RH 20-2/718, is particularly informative. See also the daily reports of LVI Armoured Corps in BA-MA RH 20-2/796.

<sup>188</sup> Gurkin, ‘Liudskie poteri Sovetskikh Vooruzhennykh Sil’, Table 1, No. 46.

<sup>189</sup> Order of battle of Army Group Centre at 30 Dec. 1943: BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2053, 145.

Centre, was not prepared to risk a conflict with Hitler. On 11 January he instructed his troops to 'keep their chins up; here too the Russians will probably exhaust their forces, as so often in the past. We have to hold out, if necessary till five minutes past midnight.'<sup>190</sup> Instead of approving withdrawal to the Pripet–Ipa position, he relieved Second Army only, by moving the dividing line with Ninth Army further to the south. The following day, however, the situation had escalated so far that the order to withdraw, which Hitler had 'flatly refused' that same morning,<sup>191</sup> had to be given around noon. As a result, the important towns of Kalinkovichi and Mozyr were given up. Although the new position along the Ipa could be held at first, the problem of the open southern flank now made itself felt. Second Army stood to the north of the Pripet, while to the south of the river a large gap had opened up with Army Group South. With the Soviet forces pushing westwards unimpeded through the gap, Second Army had no alternative but to withdraw its defensive positions to the west again—from the Ipa to the Ptich, another tributary of the Pripet. There, in the area east of Petrikov, the front was restabilized and held until the Red Army's subsequent summer offensive in June 1944.

From 8 to 30 January, the two Soviet armies involved in this operation lost 56,157 men, of whom 12,359 dead or missing.<sup>192</sup> On the German side, Second Army's total losses over a comparable period were only 4,040 men, of whom 720 dead or missing.<sup>193</sup> But bare figures alone cannot convey the harshness of those winter battles. Here is what Second Army HQ had to say in a corps-level status report dated 15 January:

The troops are enduring uninterrupted deployment for days on end in extremely fierce large-scale battle conditions and without any shelter. In their present position, with no shelter whatsoever, and with clothing which was drenched from fighting in the marshes and is now frozen stiff, the troops are completely exhausted, physically overstretched, and have reached the limit of their endurance. In their present unfortified position, they are out in the open day and night without any means of warming themselves. Given the very low combat strengths, no replacements are possible. The partially elevated enemy bank makes it impossible to move around during the day, so that food and hot drinks can mostly be distributed only at night, and navvying work on the hard frozen ground can also be done only at night.<sup>194</sup>

The following section describes operations on the southern wing, which were even more dramatic. Second Army actually put up an effective defence, managing to stabilize the front in the face of superior attacking forces until the end of January. At that time the right cornerstone of its defence line was the town of Petrikov on the Pripet river. On the open southern flank, however, the situation became so critical that, in the course of the spring, Second Army's whole sector of the front had to be moved to the west. As a result, Second Army was deployed west of

<sup>190</sup> KTB 2. Armee, 11 Jan. 1944, 68–9, BA-MA RH 20-2/810.

<sup>191</sup> BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2053, 50.

<sup>192</sup> Gurkin, 'Liudskie poteri Sovetskikh Vooruzhennykh Sil', Table 1, No. 46.

<sup>193</sup> Statistics of the OKH medical officer, 11 to 31 Jan. 1944, BA-MA RW 6/559.

<sup>194</sup> KTB 2. Armee, 15 Jan. 1944, 103, BA-MA RH 20-2/810.

Petrikov, so that the town now formed the right cornerstone of the neighbouring Ninth Army. At the same time, Second Army's front line was rotated 90 degrees. Whereas it had originally run north–south along the Dnieper, in the spring it stretched east–west along the Pripet.

The reason for this contortion of the front was that the neighbour on the right, Army Group South, was under even heavier attack than Army Group Centre. Ranged against it were 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Ukrainian Fronts, in which the Red Army's strongest armoured units were concentrated. This was undoubtedly the Soviet point of concentration. Army Group South's forced withdrawal gave rise to a problematic forward staggering of the right wing of Army Group Centre, whose southern flank was increasingly thrown open by the westward-advancing Soviet units. This was already apparent at the beginning of November, when Fourth Armoured Army, deployed next to Second Army, had to abandon the Dnieper Line and withdraw in the direction of Korosten. Chernobyl, Second Army's southern cornerstone, was left hanging in the air and in danger of being circumvented. In response, Army Group Centre HQ wanted to pull the southern wing back, but the OKH chief of staff declared that 'in Hitler's view, Chernobyl can be held. The gap with Army Group South must be taken on board'.<sup>195</sup> But 1st Ukrainian Front, whose northern wing was attacking at the boundary between the two German army groups, was pushing further and further westwards. The date of 17 November was marked by crucial developments. On that day the Soviet 60th Army took Korosten and 13th Army entered Ovruch.<sup>196</sup> Chernobyl also had to be abandoned. The southern flank stretched further and further, soon reaching a length of 120 kilometres.<sup>197</sup>

At the same time, the gap between the two army groups grew to more than 100 kilometres in length. This no-man's-land, in which two Soviet cavalry corps were advancing, could be guarded only by a few security units and, over large stretches, only by reconnaissance patrols. There was a constant danger that Red Army units would penetrate the 'soft belly' of Army Group Centre from the south. Although the vast expanse of the Pripet marshes on Second Army's right flank constituted a barrier, their value as an obstacle was less in winter, when they were partly frozen over. 1st Ski Brigade proved a valuable reinforcement. Its task was to conduct 'offensive defence in the deep flank'.<sup>198</sup> There were also several units of Royal Hungarian VIII Army Corps in the area of the Pripet marshes, but they could not be assigned to protection of the deep flank because of a commitment given to the Hungarian government that, in view of their light weaponry, they would be deployed only against partisan bands and not against Soviet front-line troops.<sup>199</sup> At that time, large parts of the Pripet marshes were considered 'partisan-infested areas', controlled by partisan bands who had withdrawn into the difficultly accessible

<sup>195</sup> See BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2053, 29.

<sup>196</sup> Kобрин and Абатуров, 'Сокрушение восточногоВала', 317.

<sup>197</sup> Типпелькирх, *Geschichte des Zweiten Weltkrieges*, 345.

<sup>198</sup> BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2053, 59.

<sup>199</sup> Типпелькирх, *Geschichte des Zweiten Weltkrieges*, 388.

terrain. Luckily for the Wehrmacht, however, the various Soviet, Ukrainian, and Polish partisan groups fought not only against the German occupying forces but also among themselves.<sup>200</sup> German troops who were obliged to cross the rough terrain could never consider themselves safe. The constant threat of partisan attacks made the swamps and virgin forests of the Pripet marshes seem even eerier. In places, the transfer of Hungarian units and the German troop shortage left a vacuum which the enemy could penetrate almost unimpeded. On 12 January 1944 Sarny, an important transport node in the area to the south of the Pripet marshes where there were few roads, was also lost.

Fourth Armoured Army, deployed on Army Group South's northern wing, was even less able to react to the threat posed by the open flank. It was under frontal attack by 1st Ukrainian Front, whose right wing conducted the Rovno–Lutsk Offensive Operation, lasting from 27 January to 11 February,<sup>201</sup> which was implemented by 13th and 60th Armies with support from I and VI Guards Cavalry Corps. The operational approach was dangerous, since the thrust was directed not only at the northern wing of Fourth Armoured Army, but also at the gap between the two German army groups. On 2 February both Rovno and Lutsk had to be abandoned. This had consequences for Second Army, whose overstretched front now extended even further to the west.

At the end of February 1944, Second Army's chief of staff, Maj.-Gen. Henning von Tresckow,<sup>202</sup> proposed closing the gap between the two army groups by means of a pincer attack. His plan was supported by Lt.-Gen. Hans Krebs, the chief of staff of Army Group Centre, but Lt.-Gen. Heusinger, the head of the OKH operations department, poured cold water on the idea. For him it was 'pie in the sky', since, for the foreseeable future, the hard-pressed Fourth Armoured Army would be unable to provide units for a joint concentrated attack. In response, von Tresckow proposed withdrawal to a new line of defence in the rear running from Kovel to Pinsk (on the Pripet river), making use, along the River Stokhod, of a position known from the First World War.<sup>203</sup>

The town of Kovel, an important transport node in difficultly accessible marshland, played a major role in all the German and Soviet plans that now followed. Its strategic significance was its location at the south-western end of the 400-kilometre-long Pripet marshes. Anyone who wanted to circumvent that enormous obstacle had to gain possession of Kovel. The Soviet leadership therefore concentrated its operational thinking on that key location. Above all, it sought to exploit the fact that the sector in question lay in the gap between German Army Groups Centre and South. On 26 February 1944 it established a special formation,

<sup>200</sup> Manstein, *Verlorene Siege*, 602–3.

<sup>201</sup> Eliseyev and Mikhalev, 'Osvobozhdenie', 38; *Geschichte des zweiten Weltkrieges 1939–1945*, viii. 91 and 97–8; *Deutschland im zweiten Weltkrieg*, v. 59–61. For further details from the Soviet viewpoint, see Belkin, *13 armija*. For the German perspective, see above all Lange, *Korpsabteilung C*, 43–66.

<sup>202</sup> Tresckow was a member of the '20 July movement' and a key figure in resistance to Hitler.

<sup>203</sup> BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2053, 61–2 and 152–3.

designated 2nd Belorussian Front, for the purpose of advancing into the breach. The new army front was inserted between 1st Ukrainian Front and the former Belorussian Front (now renamed 1st Belorussian Front). Its newly appointed commander-in-chief, Col.-Gen. Pavel Alekseyevich Kurochkin, was given the task of taking Kovel and then swinging north-west and advancing to the Bug at Brest-Litovsk.<sup>204</sup> Had that offensive succeeded, the Soviet attacking forces would have stood 500 kilometres west of the Dnieper in the rear of Army Group Centre, some of whose units were still engaged in defence to the east of the river. The German eastern front would have been outmanoeuvred at a stroke, and the Red Army could have pushed forward towards Warsaw.

The offensive was launched by 2nd Belorussian Front on 15 March. While 61st Army attacked in the north on the Pripet river, 47th and 70th Armies pushed directly westwards and enclosed Kovel on 19 March. The German defenders, a disparate body of around 4,000 men, held out with difficulty and had to be supplied by air drops.<sup>205</sup> Now the higher German operations staffs were also alarmed. Kovel was considered a cornerstone of the German defences and had to be held at all costs. For several days the Kovel stronghold, commanded by SS Obergruppenführer Gille, who had been flown in on Hitler's orders, became the focal point of the eastern front. The OKH reacted by putting the whole of that important sector of the front in a single pair of hands. On 27 March the boundary of Army Group Centre was moved further to the south, so that the Kovel garrison, including XXXXII Army Corps deployed in the area, was transferred from Fourth Armoured Army to Second Army.<sup>206</sup> Meanwhile LVI Armoured Corps, a valuable reinforcement, was transferred from Ninth Army to the western wing of Second Army. It was followed by more of the army group's divisions, withdrawn from the front covered by the army to which they belonged. Nevertheless, the attempt to relieve the stronghold was unsuccessful at first, owing not only to the German numerical weakness but also to a thaw which made the marshy terrain impractical. On 30 March, however, a combat group from SS Armoured Division 'Viking', consisting of seven Panthers and about 100 infantrymen, pulled off a surprise coup. It forced its way along the railway embankment into the besieged town,<sup>207</sup> where the fighting vehicles were urgently needed to fend off the Soviet tanks. Meanwhile Gen. Friedrich Hossbach, the commanding general of LVI Armoured Corps, had assembled a powerful combat group of 50 tanks from 4th and 5th Armoured Divisions, reinforced by infantry units.<sup>208</sup> On 4 April, taking advantage of a new period of frost, the group advanced on Kovel in a narrow wedge,<sup>209</sup> and on 5 April

<sup>204</sup> Eliseyev and Mikhalev, 'Osvobozhdenie', 44; Grylev, *Dnepr*, 201 ff.; *Geschichte des zweiten Weltkrieges 1939–1945*, viii. 98–9, 103, and 115.

<sup>205</sup> From 20 March to 7 April Kovel, declared a stronghold, was supplied by air drops from 431 aircraft (mainly He 111 bombers). See Flivo final report, 7 Apr. 1944, BA-MA RH 20-2/868.

<sup>206</sup> KTB 2. Armee, 27 Mar. 1944, 238, BA-MA RH 20-2/833.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid., 30 Mar. 1944, fo. 263; AOK 2, Ia No. T 91/44 geh., daily report of 30 Mar. 1944, BA-MA RH 20-2/861; Haupt, *Schlachten der Heeresgruppe Mitte*, 256 ff.

<sup>208</sup> Second Army daily report, 3 Apr. 1944, BA-MA RH 20-2/868.

<sup>209</sup> Decisive support was provided by the Luftwaffe, with 485 and 265 aircraft respectively during the two days of the attack. See BA-MA RH 20-2/868 and 869.

it broke through the encirclement.<sup>210</sup> The Soviet high command then called off the offensive, and the same day ordered the disbandment of 2nd Belorussian Front and the assignment of its units to 1st Belorussian Front.<sup>211</sup> The unsuccessful army front commander, Col.-Gen. Kurochkin, was relieved of his command and took over 60th Army, which he led till the end of the war. At the same time, Lt.-Gen. Vitali Sergeyevich Polenov was dismissed as commander-in-chief of 47th Army and given command of a corps.<sup>212</sup> In the following days German units succeeded in widening the narrow corridor, eventually freeing the whole area west of Kovel, and continued the counter-attack in a southerly direction. During these operations Kovel had to be supplied from the air once more because the thaw had resumed and the terrain was again swampy.<sup>213</sup>

The thaw made the Pripet marshes completely impassable for a while, in addition to which the Dnieper had overflowed its banks over several kilometres. As a result, the fighting on Army Group Centre's front gradually died down and finally came to almost a complete standstill for several weeks, right into the summer. In the winter half-year 1943/4 Army Group Centre had managed to assert itself much more forcefully than its neighbours. Its positions still extended across the Dnieper and far to the east. But although the number of its divisions had fallen from 77 to 44 since the previous spring, its front had lengthened continuously, from 700 kilometres at the beginning of December 1943 to 1,100 kilometres in the spring of 1944.<sup>214</sup> Almost 500 kilometres were accounted for by the newly formed southern flank, covered by Second Army.<sup>215</sup> Air Fleet 6, which was deployed in support of Army Group Centre, also proved increasingly incapable of intervening at all focal points on the overstretched front. On 29 February, for example, it possessed only 322 operational front-line aircraft.<sup>216</sup> While Army Group Centre had at least managed to avert the greatest danger, that is, a Soviet breakthrough at Kovel, the successful relief offensive proved a dangerous precedent. It was counter-productive in the long term by reinforcing Hitler's intention to declare important towns 'strongholds' that had to be defended to the last by commanders appointed by him personally. In his view, the battle of Kovel

<sup>210</sup> Dossier 'Fester Platz Kowel', BA-MA RH 20-2/912; AOK 2, Ia No. T 97/44 geh., daily report of 5 Apr. 1944, BA-MA RH 20-2/869; KTB 2, Armee, 5 Apr. 1944, BA-MA RH 20-2/866; Dossier Pz.AOK 4, Ia, 'Kampfkommandant Kowel, Feb./März 1944', BA-MA RH 21-4/213; BA-MA, Study ZA 1/1532, 8; BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2053, 69; Hinze, *Mit dem Mut der Verzweiflung*, 27–31; Plato, *Die Geschichte der 5. Panzerdivision*, 326–35; Neumann, *Die 4. Panzerdivision*, 328–44.

<sup>211</sup> Grylev, *Dnepr*, 205; *Geschichte des zweiten Weltkrieges 1939–1945*, viii. 116–17.

<sup>212</sup> Eliseyev and Michalev, 'Osvobozhdenie', 44.

<sup>213</sup> The Russian State Military Archives in Moscow contain interesting captured German files concerning the battles for Kovel: RGVA F. 1275, Op. 2, d. 183: AOK 2, 'Karten: Schlacht bei Kowel'; RGVA F. 1275, Op. 2, d. 329: '2. Armee: Schlacht um Kowel'; RGVA F. 1275, Op. 2, d. 275: KTB 2, Armee, 1 to 30 Apr. 1944.

<sup>214</sup> BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2053, 44 and 58.

<sup>215</sup> Tippelskirch, *Geschichte des Zweiten Weltkrieges*, 386.

<sup>216</sup> BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2053, 58.

was an example showing that such ‘strongholds’ could be held despite enemy encirclement. By tying down significant enemy forces, the strategy would inevitably lead to the abandonment of enemy offensives. From then on, the ‘strongholds’ chimera determined Hitler’s rigid defensive thinking—with disastrous consequences, as the Soviet offensive against Army Group Centre the following summer was to show.

### III. Army Group South's Withdrawal Operations in the Ukraine

*Karl-Heinz Frieser*

#### 1. IN THE SHADOW OF KURSK: DEFENCE AGAINST THE TWO SOVIET RELIEF OFFENSIVES ON THE SOUTHERN WING (17 JULY TO 2 AUGUST 1943)

In some accounts of the Second World War, Army Group South is simply said to have formed the southern pincer of the German offensive during the battle of Kursk. This suggests that all of Field Marshal Erich von Manstein's units took part in Operation CITADEL *en bloc*. In fact, in the summer of 1943 Army Group South had to cover a huge section of the front, 950 kilometres long, stretching from the south-western edge of the Kursk salient to the Sea of Azov. Only Fourth Armoured Army and Army Detachment Kempf, which were stationed on the northern wing, took part in the fighting in the Kursk salient. Army Group South's other two armies had to defend more than two-thirds of the front, a good 660 kilometres. First Armoured Army was deployed in the centre, on the middle Donets, while Sixth Army formed the southern wing on the Mius. The southern half of the salient protruded far to the east, not least because of the need to protect the Donets industrial area, since Hitler considered possession of the Donets Basin indispensable for the German war economy.

On 16 July 1943, the day on which Operation CITADEL was finally broken off and the day before the Soviet offensive in the Donets–Mius sector, the situation of Army Group South gave cause for concern. The group's four armies (including Army Detachment Kempf) were faced by four Soviet army fronts, four to five times superior in strength.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, each of the Soviet fronts had an air army under its command, whereas since 14 July Army Group South had been supported by only 250 operational fighters and ground-attack aircraft.<sup>2</sup> Air Fleet 4 had to release more and more planes to stop the Soviet breakthrough at Orel. Manstein's units consisted of 41 divisions, 13 of which were armoured and armoured infantry divisions. In the summer of 1943 Maj.-Gen. Carl Wagener judged their condition

<sup>1</sup> BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2073, 6.

<sup>2</sup> BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2071, 174–5; Study ZA 1/2341, 80 and 86.

as follows: 'The armoured divisions were still motorized battalions with a few tanks; the infantry divisions were reinforced regiments which had many teams of horses missing and therefore lacked mobility.'<sup>3</sup> The uneven distribution of the units was another problem. In the deployment of massed armour for Operation CITADEL, a concentration of forces unparalleled in the eastern campaign, almost all the mechanized formations were assigned to the northern wing. As a result, First Armoured Army and Sixth Army were left without a single armoured division.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, the sections assigned to the divisions of those armies were critically overstretched. On 17 July the Stavka launched two simultaneous offensives, involving a total of 474,220 men<sup>5</sup> and 1,864 tanks and assault guns,<sup>6</sup> against the two armies.<sup>7</sup>

The Soviet attacks were nevertheless 'spectacularly unsuccessful'.<sup>8</sup> In the Middle Donets, South-West Front launched the Izyum-Barvenkovo Offensive Operation (17 to 27 July 1943) against First Armoured Army. The formations taking part were 1st, 3rd, and 8th Guards Armies, totalling 202,430 men, with 1,109 tanks and assault guns.<sup>9</sup> Air support was provided by 17th Air Army.<sup>10</sup> On 17 July the Soviet forces succeeded in establishing bridgeheads on the far side of the Donets to the north of Slavyansk and near Izyum.<sup>11</sup> However, the German defenders stopped the attack after a few kilometres,<sup>12</sup> and followed up with a counter-attack by 17th Armoured Division and SS Armoured Infantry Division 'Viking', which belonged to the army group reserve (XXIV Armoured Corps) and deployed 84 operational tanks and assault guns.<sup>13</sup> Although they were unable to drive the enemy forces back, they managed to seal them off, thus preventing any danger of an operational breakthrough. The Soviet command broke off the offensive on 27 July, after South-West Front had lost 38,690 men, of whom 10,310 dead or missing, in the space of ten days.<sup>14</sup>

The River Mius Offensive Operation (17 July to 2 August 1943) against Sixth Army seemed likely to prove more dangerous.<sup>15</sup> South Front deployed 2nd Guards Army, 5th Shock Army, and 28th and 51st Armies, totalling 271,790 men,<sup>16</sup> with 737 tanks and assault guns at their disposal,<sup>17</sup> and support from 8th Air Army. Sixth Army,

<sup>3</sup> Wagener, *Heeresgruppe Süd*, 248.

<sup>4</sup> 17th Armoured Division, which was anyway part of the army group's reserve, was kept ready in First Armoured Army's rear area. Sixth Army had 16th Armoured Infantry Division in reserve.

<sup>5</sup> Gurkin, 'Liudskie poteri Sovetskikh Vooruzhennykh Sil', Table 1, Nos. 34 and 35.

<sup>6</sup> Central Archives of the Ministry of Defence (CAMO), Doc. 20, 2: 'Spravka o poteriakh tankov po deistvuyushchim frontam v boyakh s 5.7.43 g. po 20.7.43 g.'

<sup>7</sup> For a comprehensive account from the Soviet viewpoint, see Ershov, *Osvobozhdenie Donbassa*, 101 ff.

<sup>8</sup> Glantz, *When Titans Clashed*, 352, n. 13.

<sup>9</sup> CAMO, Doc. 20, 2: 'Spravka o poteriakh tankov po deistvuyushchim frontam v boyakh s 5.7.43 g. po 20.7.43 g.'

<sup>10</sup> Gurkin, 'Liudskie poteri Sovetskikh Vooruzhennykh Sil', Table 1, No. 34.

<sup>11</sup> BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2073, 14 ff.; ZA 1/2075, 17–18.

<sup>12</sup> KTB 1. Panzerarmee, 17 to 27 July 1943, fos. 91–133, BA-MA RH 21-1/94.

<sup>13</sup> Pz.AOK 1, Ia, daily report of 18 July 1943, fo. 296, BA-MA RH 21-1/98.

<sup>14</sup> Gurkin, 'Liudskie poteri Sovetskikh Vooruzhennykh Sil', Table 1, No. 34.

<sup>15</sup> See Nipe, *Decision in the Ukraine*, 70 ff.

<sup>16</sup> Gurkin, 'Liudskie poteri Sovetskikh Vooruzhennykh Sil', Table 1, No. 35.

<sup>17</sup> CAMO, Doc. 20, 2: 'Spravka o poteriakh tankov po deistvuyushchim frontam v boyakh s 5.7.43 g. po 20.7.43 g.'

under Gen. Karl Hollidt, had to cover a combat zone 250 kilometres wide with only 11 divisions. A further unit, 23rd Armoured Division, was assigned to it from the army group reserve, but only after the crisis had become apparent. The Red Army units managed to establish a bridgehead 20 kilometres wide and 15 kilometres deep on the west bank of the Mius at Dmitrievka before they were stopped in a few days.

As we know, Hitler had announced the termination of Operation CITADEL on 13 July and, invoking the Allied landing in Sicily, he had withdrawn II SS Armoured Corps from the front in order to send it to Italy. He nevertheless hesitated to give the order for its departure in view of the new crises arising on the eastern front. In addition to the counter-offensive at Orel, which had already begun, the Red Army was preparing a huge counter-offensive in the Belgorod–Kharkov area to the south of Kursk. In view of that threat, immediate withdrawal of the strong, battle-worthy SS armoured corps seemed a risky proposition. Meanwhile, Voronezh Front and Steppe Front, hard hit in the fighting at Prokhorovka, needed a few more days to prepare for the offensive. That opened a window in which the SS armoured corps could be sent to the army group's southern wing as a 'fire brigade' to smash the Soviet advanced armies and then withdraw immediately to the Kharkov area. Manstein had originally been willing to accept loss of ground on the southern wing of his army group in order to fight the battle on the Mius at Kursk, as it were. However, after Hitler decided otherwise, he strove to make the best use of the forces now available for a counter-strike and to 'put the fire out' for both endangered armies. Although the situation of Sixth Army on the southern wing was the most critical, the armoured units to be sent there had first to pass through the combat zone of First Armoured Army, which was deployed in the centre. It therefore made sense for them also to attack the advanced Soviet units in that area—on the way through, so to speak. Moreover, not all of the four armoured or armoured infantry divisions envisaged for an operational counter-attack in the area of Sixth Army were ready yet. Manstein therefore drew up a two-phase plan. He would first deal a short but sharp blow to the advanced Soviet armies in the area of First Armoured Army, using the two SS armoured infantry divisions, 'Leibstandarte' and 'Reich', that were already available. Those two divisions, joined by the two others, ('Totenkopf' and 3rd Armoured Division), would then carry out a concentrated attack in the area of Sixth Army.<sup>18</sup>

On 24 July, just when these troops were moving into the marshalling areas, Hitler banned the attack in First Armoured Army's combat zone 'at the last moment'.<sup>19</sup> Instead, only an attack in the area of Sixth Army was to be carried out. Although it was known precisely that the order had been given by the Führer in person, First Armoured Army's war diary contains very frank criticism of the decision:

The great opportunity to take advantage of the enemy's moment of weakness in the major defensive battle by attacking ourselves was lost to the army because of the order

<sup>18</sup> Manstein, *Verlorene Siege*, 516; BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2073, 16.

<sup>19</sup> BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2073, 17. See also Study ZA 1/2075, 8; Study ZA 1/2342, 10; KTB Op. Abt. OKH, 23 July 1943, BA-MA RH 2/3060.

to stop and turn away the SS armoured corps. That order was all the more painful for the army as the forces of the SS armoured corps were not immediately thrown into attack in Sixth Army's combat zone but were first halted at the interface between the two armies. Those crucial days were wasted for our army, while nothing was gained for an attack in the area of Sixth Army.<sup>20</sup>

Field Marshal von Manstein was so furious at Hitler's interference in the orders to his army group that he offered to resign. This is what he wrote to Col.-Gen. Kurt Zeitzler: 'If the Führer thinks he can find any army group commander or headquarters staff with better nerves than we had during the past winter [ . . . ], I am fully prepared to hand over to them! As long as I remain at this post, however, I must have the chance to use my own head.'<sup>21</sup> The confusion among the troops was compounded two days later, on 26 July, when Hitler ordered SS Armoured Infantry Division 'Leibstandarte' to be transported to Italy. Had he transferred the division to Sicily directly from Prokhorovka, it would at least have made sense in strictly logical terms. As it was, the division had been sent to the southern wing of Army Group South to no purpose, where it had been unable to act to the advantage of either Sixth Army or—as a result of Hitler's surprising order to withdraw—First Armoured Army.

Meanwhile, the available armoured units had proved too weak for Sixth Army to undertake an operational attack on the Soviet bridgehead. Such an operation made sense only if the tanks could be deployed *en bloc*, not in dribs and drabs. So deployment was delayed, and the troop units which could actually have given First Armoured Army temporary support had to stand idle, waiting for the additional forces to arrive. The attack on the Soviet bridgehead on the Mius began only on 30 July. Five armoured divisions or armoured infantry divisions with a total of 258 tanks had been mustered for the operation, and the flanks were secured by parts of three infantry divisions.<sup>22</sup> The operational plan was as follows:

- XXIV Armoured Corps, together with 23rd Armoured Division and 16th Armoured Infantry Division, was to carry out a holding attack on the southern section of the bridgehead.
- The main concentration group, consisting of II SS Armoured Corps with SS Armoured Infantry Divisions 'Reich' and 'Totenkopf' plus 3rd Armoured Division, was to be deployed in the northern section and push forward towards Dmitrievka on the River Mius.

When the attack began on 30 July, with support from IV Air Corps, the weaker XXIV Armoured Corps made good progress, whereas II SS Armoured Corps got stuck at Hill 213.9, the Soviet key defensive area.<sup>23</sup> Faced with densely staggered anti-tank artillery secured by minefields, there seemed to be no way through for the German attackers, who were subjected to a hail of fire and repeated counter-blows

<sup>20</sup> KTB 1. Pz.Armee, 25 July 1943, BA-MA RH 21-1/94.

<sup>21</sup> Manstein, *Verlorene Siege*, 516 ff.

<sup>22</sup> 'Die Juli-Abwehrschlacht der 6. Armee am Mius', BA-MA RH 20-6/302, 32.

<sup>23</sup> On the attack by II SS Armoured Corps, see Nipe, *Decision in the Ukraine*, 181 ff.

by Russian tanks, with massive intervention by the Soviet air force. On the second day of the attack the southern group (XXIV Armoured Corps) managed to encircle and smash five Soviet divisions, whereas in the northern sector the advance came almost to a complete halt. Field Marshal von Manstein seriously considered calling off the attack in that area, but the following day, 1 August, after shifting the point of concentration, the northern group achieved the decisive breakthrough. SS Armoured Infantry Division 'Totenkopf' stormed the hotly contested Hill 213.9 and the Soviet resistance collapsed. The units of South Front, some of them in wild flight, made for the few river crossings. On 2 August, the fourth day of the attack, the German troops reached the Mius at Dmitrievka, thereby regaining their former defensive position.<sup>24</sup>

Despite enormous superiority, South Front's Mius offensive failed all along the line. According to Russian accounts, losses from 17 July to 2 August 1943 totalled 61,070 men, of whom 15,303 dead or missing.<sup>25</sup> As so often, however, those official figures must be considered far too low. According to German Sixth Army statistics, over the same period the number of Red Army soldiers taken prisoner (and thus missing) alone amounted to 17,762 men, of whom 955 had defected. The material booty included 732 destroyed or immobilized tanks, 522 anti-tank cannon, 197 artillery cannon, and 438 grenade launchers.<sup>26</sup> On the other side, German losses were 3,298 dead, 15,817 wounded, and 2,254 missing.<sup>27</sup>

In short, the German counter-attack on the Mius against superior Soviet attacking forces was a real operational and tactical success. However, a fundamental observation is called for at this point. Anyone looking at the history of the Second World War through the prism of the chronicles of the German armoured divisions might assume that the goddess of victory was knocking on the wrong door. The armoured divisions seemed to rush from one success to another, at least in tactical terms. From the strategic viewpoint, however, the picture is often quite different, as the Mius–Donets offensive shows. Although the superior Soviet armies failed miserably, they undoubtedly achieved an indirect success by the very fact that the battle took place. Army Group South HQ was unable to transfer forces to the Kursk salient. Instead, it had to move armoured units from the Kursk sector to the southern wing, thereby smoothing the way for the RUMYANTSEV offensive in the Belgorod–Kharkov area, which the Soviet forces launched on 3 August. Now most of the German armoured units had to be brought back to the northern wing immediately to deal with another emergency. There were, nevertheless, too few of these powerful battle-worthy mechanized units. While they were successfully dealing with problems at their point of deployment, the Red Army frequently broke through elsewhere with its masses of troops. This constant shifting of armoured divisions to cope with crises attained a new dimension in the summer

<sup>24</sup> 'Die Juli-Abwehrschlacht der 6. Armee am Mius', BA-MA RH 20-6/302, 33 ff.; BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2661, 46 ff.; BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2073, 20 ff.; Manstein, *Verlorene Siege*, 517.

<sup>25</sup> Gurkin, 'Liudskie poteri Sovetskikh Vooruzhennykh Sil', Table 1, No. 35.

<sup>26</sup> 'Die Juli-Abwehrschlacht der 6. Armee am Mius', BA-MA RH 20-6/302, 41.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

of 1943. Until then they had only been shifted linearly along the eastern front, but after the western Allies landed in Italy, they were shifted diagonally throughout Europe from one theatre of war to another. On the evening of 2 August, just when the battle on the Mius was coming to a successful conclusion, Hitler still wanted to transfer II SS Armoured Corps to Italy, and SS Armoured Infantry Division 'Leibstandarte' was already on its way there. However, the new Soviet offensive against the northern wing of Army Group South forced him to leave the two SS Armoured Infantry Divisions 'Reich' and 'Totenkopf' on the eastern front for the time being. Only the corps staff and a few units such as the reconnaissance battalion were sent off to Italy immediately. This constant toing and froing clearly shows the growing helplessness behind the decisions of the top leadership.

## 2. THE COLLAPSE OF THE FRONT TO THE EAST OF THE DNIEPER (16 AUGUST TO 15 SEPTEMBER 1943)

In the summer of 1943 the German offensive at Kursk, Operation CITADEL, had failed and the Germans had been forced back by two Soviet counter-offensives in the areas of Orel and Belgorod-Kharkov. The Red Army then began large-scale reconquest of the territories occupied by Germany. Launching a series of offensives along almost the whole front, it continually changed the point of concentration. Nevertheless, the main strategic direction was south-west, which meant that the Soviet high command was directing its efforts mainly against the four armies of Army Group South. For that purpose it concentrated an enormous mass of five army fronts, that is, Central Front, Voronezh Front, Steppe Front, South-West Front, and South Front. This concentration of forces comprised 27 general armies, three armoured armies, and five air armies, 22 armoured or mechanized corps, and two cavalry corps. A total of 2,633,000 troops, over 51,200 cannon and grenade launchers, more than 2,400 tanks and self-propelled guns, and 2,850 combat aircraft were to be deployed in the main direction of thrust. Of the Red Army's forces at the front, this grouping comprised almost 50 per cent of the soldiers, 40 per cent of the artillery, some 70 per cent of the armour, and over 50 per cent of the aircraft.<sup>28</sup> Additionally, according to Soviet figures,<sup>29</sup> around 500,000 partisans were deployed in the hinterland in the 'battle of the Dnieper' which now followed.

In view of this enormous superiority, it is hard to understand why the Soviet high command did not attempt to encircle large parts of Army Group South, but again attacked on a broad front by its usual 'steamroller' method. Marshal Georgii Konstantinovich Zhukov and General Aleksei Innokentevich Antonov, the deputy chief of staff, did in fact suggest forming a point of concentration in the Izyum-Kharkov area in order to push forward from there in a southward pivoting movement towards Dnepropetrovsk-Zaporozhye. It would then have been possible to cut off a large number of German units from withdrawal to the Dnieper

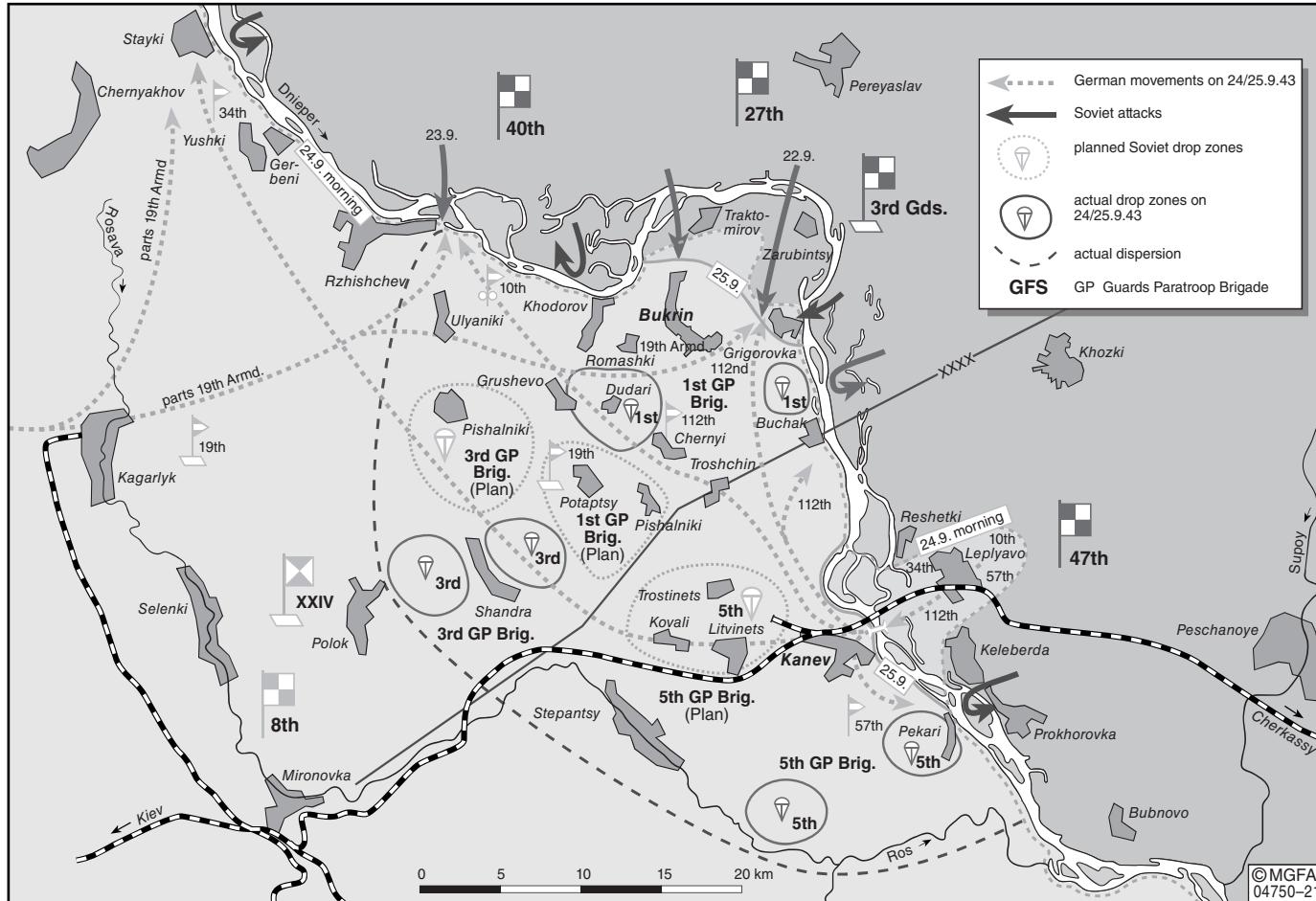
<sup>28</sup> Kobrin and Abaturov, 'Sokrushenie vostochnogo vala', 292.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid. 323.



Map IV.III.1. Army Group South's withdrawal operations to the Dnieper (17 July to 29 September 1943)

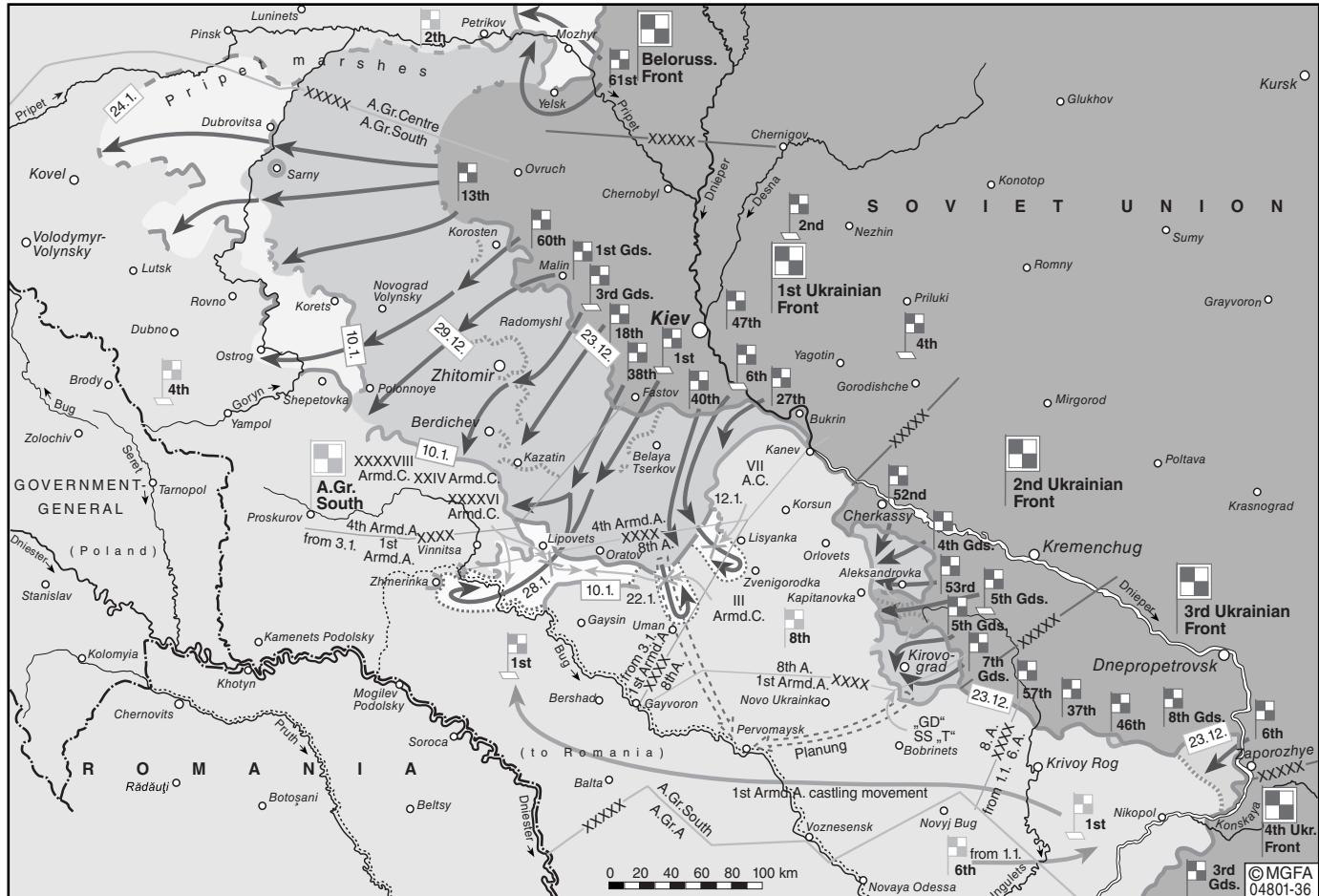
Sources: OKH situation maps for 16.7, 2.8, 15.8, 16.9, 29.9.1943, BA-MA, Kart RH 2 Ost/729, 746, 760, 797, 810.





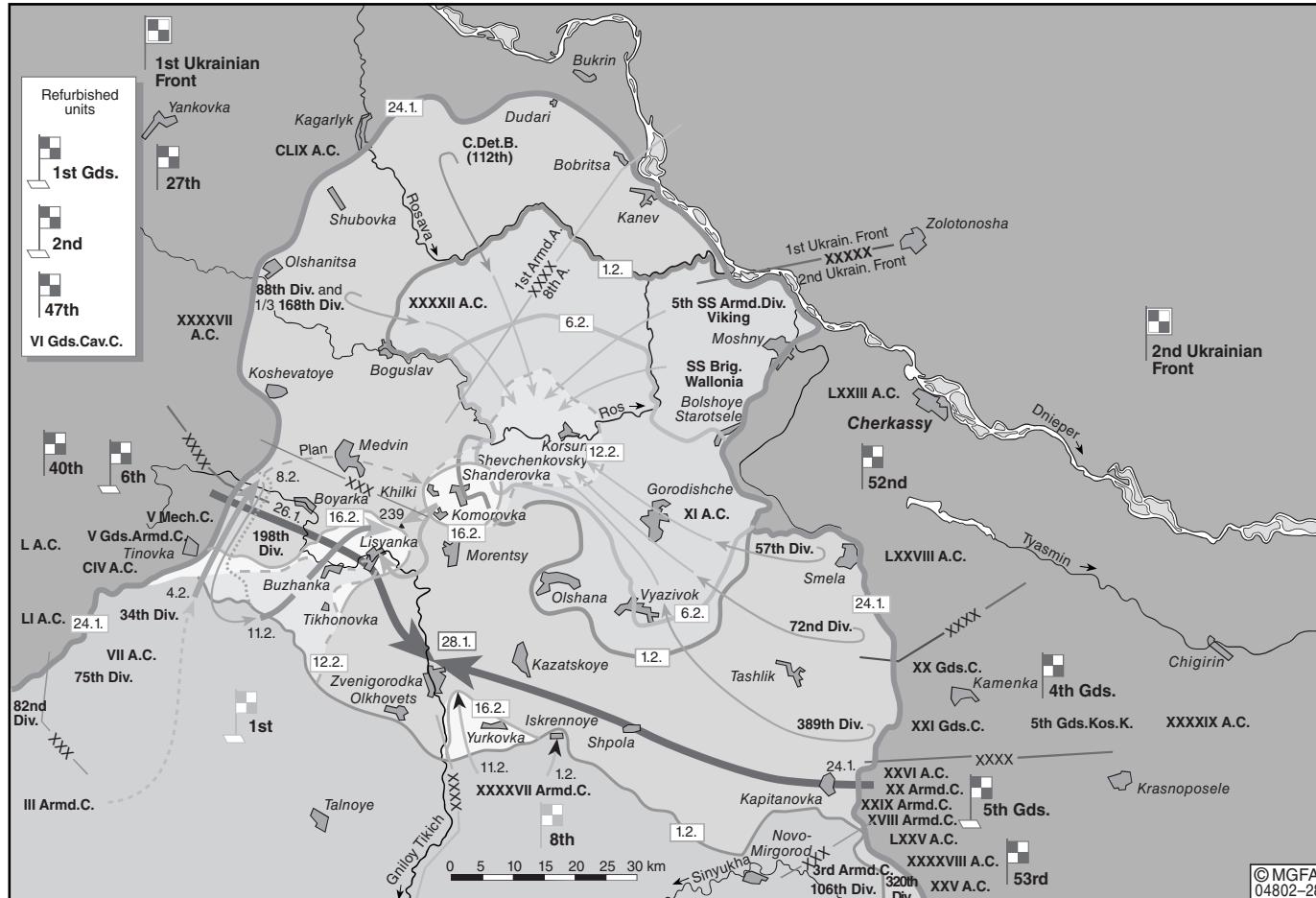
Map IV.III.3. Army Group South's battles for the Dnieper Line (24 September to 23 December 1943)

Sources: OKH situation maps for 25.9, 10.10, 2.11, 12.11, 23.12., BA-MA, Kart RH 2 Ost/807, 822, 845, 855, 897.



**Map IV.III.4.** The Soviet offensives in the area of Zhitomir and Kirovograd at the turn of 1943/4

Sources: OKH situation maps for 23.12, 29.12.1943, 9.1, 10.1, 24.1, 28.1.1944, BA-MA, Kart RH 2 Ost 897, 903, 914, 915, 930, 933; XXXXVI Armd.C., 'Planpausen' 1.1–29.2 1944, RH 24-46/114; III Armd.C., situation maps 2.1–11.2.1944, RH 24-3/123.



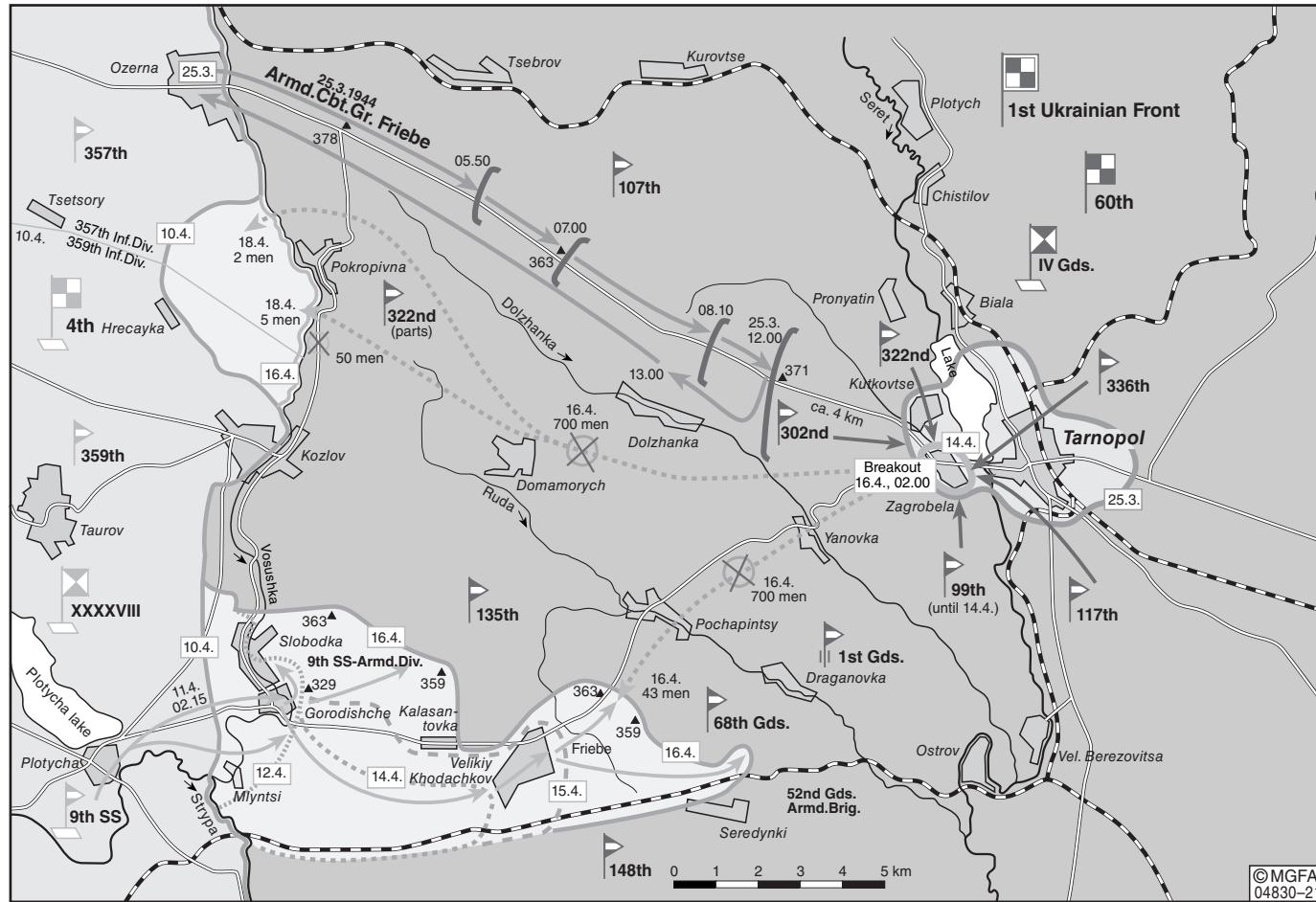
#### **Map IV.III.5. The Cherkassy–Korsun encirclement battle (24 January to 17 February 1944)**

Sources: OKH situation maps for 24.1., 28.1, 1.2, 6.2, 12.2., BA-MA, Kart RH 2 Ost 930, 933, 936, 938, 6900; Eighth Army situation maps, RH 20-8/150 A; XI A.C. 'Ausbruch', RH 24-11/98 K; Glantz and Orenstein, *The Battle for the Ukraine*.



Map IV.III.6. Battles during Army Group South/North Ukraine's withdrawal to the Carpathians (4 March to 12 April 1944)

Sources: OKH situation maps for 10.1., 3.3., 21.3., 27.3., 8.4., 13.4.1944, BA-MA, Kart RH 2 Ost/915, 953, 971, 976, 988, 993.



Map IV.III.7. The failed attempts to relieve the Tarnopol 'Fortified Place' (25 March to 16 April 1944)

Sources: OKH situation maps for 10.1., 3.3., 21.3., 27.3., 8.4., 13.4.1944, BA-MA, Kart RH 2 Ost/915, 953, 971, 976, 988, 993.

and encircle them. However, the attempt to enclose the German southern wing had failed disastrously on two previous occasions during the campaign. In the spring of 1943, immediately after Stalingrad, Manstein had entrapped and shattered the seemingly unstoppable Soviet troops streaming towards the Dnieper. Stalin therefore rejected the proposed manoeuvre and ordered his forces to push the German troops frontally out of the eastern Ukraine.<sup>30</sup> The war thus took a paradoxical course. In the first half, when the Wehrmacht was still capable of hitting back dangerously, the Soviet leadership overestimated its capabilities and took some adventurous risks aimed at bringing the war to a sudden end. In the second half, however, when the German units were sometimes barely capable of resistance, the Soviet high command proved strangely loath to take risks. The result was a wholly unnecessary prolongation of the war.

### (a) The Soviet Advance into the Donets Basin

First Armoured Army and Sixth Army, deployed on Army Group South's over-stretched southern wing, had successfully fended off the Soviet Mius–Donets offensive (11 July to 2 August 1943). But then the armoured units sent to reinforce them had to be transferred back to the northern wing, where a dangerous Soviet offensive operation was beginning in the Belgorod–Kharkov area. This resulted in exposure of the southern wing, against which South and South-West Front were preparing the Donbas Strategic Offensive Operation. At the start of the offensive the two army fronts had at their disposal over 1,053,000 men, 21,000 cannon and grenade launchers, 1,257 tanks and self-propelled guns, and 1,400 combat aircraft.<sup>31</sup> In the course of the operation they were reinforced by XI Armoured Corps, V Guards Cavalry Corps, and four more divisions.<sup>32</sup> The offensive lasted from 16 August (preliminary attacks from 13 August) until 22 September, and the official losses totalled 273,522 men, of whom 66,166 dead or missing.<sup>33</sup> A total of 886 tanks and self-propelled guns, 814 cannon and grenade launchers, and 327 aircraft were also lost.<sup>34</sup>

On 16 August the first attack, directed by South-West Front against First Armoured Army near Izyum on the Donets, was not very successful. Two days later, however, South Front launched an offensive on the Mius and achieved a breakthrough at Kuibyshev.<sup>35</sup> The German Sixth Army deployed in that sector consisted of only three weak army corps and, since the departure of the SS armoured corps, no longer possessed a single armoured or armoured infantry division. It thus had no chance of withstanding the attack by South Front, which was supported by 800 tanks.<sup>36</sup> Consequently 13th Armoured Division was brought up from Army Group A in the Crimea, but it turned out to consist of only one

<sup>30</sup> *Deutschland im zweiten Weltkrieg*, iv. 33.

<sup>31</sup> *Geschichte des zweiten Weltkrieges 1939–1945*, vii. 232.

<sup>32</sup> *Grif sekretnosti sniat*, 192.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid. 370.

<sup>35</sup> KTB 6. Armee, 18 Aug. 1943 (fos. 26 ff.), BA-MA RH 20-6/315. For a Soviet perspective, see Ershov, *Osvobozhdenie Donbassa*, 141 ff.

<sup>36</sup> Wagener, *Heeresgruppe Süd*, 249.

armoured infantry regiment reinforced by seven tanks.<sup>37</sup> It had as little effect as 9th Armoured Division, which also arrived too late. Soviet units which had broken through swung south towards the Sea of Azov and reached it at the end of August. As a result, the German XXIX Army Corps was enclosed on the coast, but it managed to break out after heavy fighting. Army Group South HQ then ordered withdrawal to the Tortoise Line near Stalino. This position was taken up by Sixth Army on 4 September, but the Soviet attacking forces quickly broke through the new defence line and took Stalino on 8 September.

At the same time, because of Sixth Army's withdrawal to the Tortoise Line, its neighbour to the north, First Armoured Army, had also been forced to withdraw. It was pursued by South-West Front, which broke through its southern wing near Konstantinovka on 6 September.<sup>38</sup> With that, a gap opened up between the two German armies, finally attaining a width of 60 kilometres.<sup>39</sup> The way was now clear for rapid Soviet advance forces to push forward towards the Dnieper. They passed Pavlograd and reached the Sinelnikovo rail node, just before Dnepropetrovsk, on 10 September. Meanwhile, Army Group South HQ had ordered its troops to withdraw to in-depth resistance lines while engaging in 'mobile defensive combat'. At the same time, the gap between the two armies was to be closed by means of a pincer attack. While 16th Armoured Infantry Division and 23rd Armoured Division advanced from the north, 9th Armoured Division attacked from the south. The two wedges met at Znamenka on 12 September, encircling the Soviet units which had broken through.<sup>40</sup> But although the gap between the two armies had been closed, the temporary stabilization could not disguise the fact that the front could no longer be held.

### **(b) The Crisis on the Northern Wing**

Following the failure of Operation CITADEL, Fourth Armoured Army and Eighth Army (formerly Army Detachment Kempf) had had to face the Soviet RUMYANTSEV counter-offensive. With the loss of Kharkov on 23 August, the third and last phase of the battle of the Kursk salient came to an end. This operation was the spring-board for a powerful new summer offensive, the Chernigov–Poltava Strategic Offensive Operation (26 August to 30 September 1943), in which three Soviet army fronts took part. Steppe Front attacked Eighth Army, while Voronezh Front was deployed to the north against Fourth Armoured Army. The advance of Central Front was also threatening, especially because the point of concentration was at the boundary between Army Groups South and Centre. It thus affected not only Second Army, stationed in the neighbouring sector, but the northern wing of Fourth Armoured Army as well. In the first phase the three Soviet army fronts

<sup>37</sup> 'Die Abwehrschlachten der 6. Armee vom 18.8. bis 3.11.1943', 11, BA-MA RH 20-6/326; KTB 6. Armee, 27 Aug. 1943, 53, BA-MA RH 20-6/315.

<sup>38</sup> KTB 1. Panzerarmee, 6. Sept. 1943, BA-MA RH 21-1/112.

<sup>39</sup> BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2073, 89.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid. 90; 'Die Abwehrschlachten der 6. Armee vom 18.8. bis 3.11.1943', 27, BA-MA RH 20-6/326; KTB 1. Panzerarmee, 12 Sept. 1943, BA-MA RH 21-1/112.

attacked with 1,581,300 men, supported by 30,245 cannon and grenade launchers, almost 1,200 tanks and self-propelled guns, and 1,700 aircraft.<sup>41</sup> In the course of the operation a further three armies, 3rd Guards Armoured Army, a mechanized corps, and two cavalry corps were brought in. Within five weeks, according to Soviet official figures, they suffered total losses of 427,952 men, of whom 102,957 dead or missing. The attackers also lost 1,140 tanks, 916 cannon, and 269 aircraft.<sup>42</sup>

On 26–7 August, despite the strain of the preceding battles, Fourth Armoured Army carried out a pincer attack. Units of XXIV Armoured Corps and LII Army Corps linked up at Vebrik, thus shortening the front.<sup>43</sup> The army's situation eased somewhat at the end of August, although its front was still only a 'thinly occupied security line'. The infantry was 'totally exhausted and physically and mentally at the end of its tether'.<sup>44</sup> At the end of August Eighth Army also reported that its troops were 'exhausted to the point of apathy'.<sup>45</sup> The greatest danger, however, lay on the northern wing of the neighbouring Second Army, where Central Front achieved a breakthrough at the beginning of September. The corps on Second Army's right wing (XIII Army Corps) was forced back towards the south and had to be reassigned to Fourth Armoured Army on 3 September. Strong Soviet units pushed through the gap towards the Dnieper, giving rise to a new, north-facing defensive front for Army Group South which stretched further and further to the west. After the Soviet 13th and 60th Armies, supported by armour, had advanced via Konoptop to the area around Nezhin, Fourth Army was threatened with encirclement from the north. At the same time, its front was breached from the east at Lebedin and Terny, splitting the army into three parts. However, it received only scant reinforcements such as 8th Armoured Division, which consisted of only one strengthened regiment without any tanks.<sup>46</sup> Eighth Army, deployed to the south, was exposed to less enemy pressure, but when Fourth Armoured Army had to withdraw, it too was allowed to go over to 'mobile combat' and pull back westwards.<sup>47</sup> By mid-September, Army Group South's front was threatened with collapse, above all on the northern wing.<sup>48</sup> Defence east of the Dnieper no longer appeared possible. It is therefore not surprising that a mood of crisis reigned in the higher operations staffs. Lt.-Col. Count Johann Adolf von Kielmansegg, head of the OKH General Staff's operations division, had already confided to his diary at the end of August: 'One sometimes believes downfall will come before this year is out.'<sup>49</sup>

<sup>41</sup> *Grif sekretnosti sniat*, 193–4; see also *Geschichte des zweiten Weltkrieges 1939–1945*, vii. 226; *Deutschland im zweiten Weltkrieg*, iv. 36.

<sup>42</sup> *Grif sekretnosti sniat*, 193–4, 370.

<sup>43</sup> KTB 4. Panzerarmee, 26 to 28 Sept. 1943, BA-MA RH 21-4/130; BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2073, 55–9.

<sup>44</sup> BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2073, 60.

<sup>45</sup> KTB 8. Armee, 27 Aug. 1943, fo. 228, RH 20-8/84. See also Eighth Army's status reports, repr. in BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2075, app. 23, 35.

<sup>46</sup> BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2073, 96.

<sup>47</sup> KTB 8. Armee, 13 Sept. 1943, fo. 93, RH 20-8/85.

<sup>48</sup> See descriptions of the situation in KTB 4. Panzerarmee, 14 and 15 Sept., BA-MA RH 21-4/130.

<sup>49</sup> During an interview on 20 April 2001 Count von Kielmansegg allowed the author to look at his diary of that period.

The disastrous developments, above all in the southern part of the eastern front, appeared to confirm his pessimism.

### 3. THE WITHDRAWAL TO THE DNIEPER UP TO THE END OF SEPTEMBER 1943

#### (a) The Dispute over Withdrawal

Maj.-Gen. Wagener was highly critical of Hitler's defence concept, which he summarized as 'defend and hold every square metre of ground'. Regarding the German withdrawal operations from the summer of 1943, he wrote:

The official combat designations refer only to defensive and positional battles fought with disciplined senselessness. The fighting was devoid of any idea on the German side. Holding some little village with an unpronounceable name was more important than properly planned withdrawal [...] Space, the strategic dimension of prime importance, disappeared from use! There could no longer be any talk of operations.<sup>50</sup>

In contrast, the generals, first and foremost Manstein, had repeatedly called for mobile defence and free combat so as to avoid being crushed in static defence by a far superior enemy. Their idea was to employ evasive manoeuvres to allow the enemy to advance repeatedly, and then inflict heavy losses on him by counter-attacking on the flanks. But the supreme commander clung to an anachronistic concept of static defence. In the First World War, as Heinz Guderian wrote, Hitler 'had experienced only positional warfare. The principles of mobile warfare had remained a mystery to him and he found them scary. He shied away from any large-scale movement. This timidity in the conduct of mobile operations [...] rendered the German command rigid and static at the very time when only extreme mobility and boldness, and the timely shortening of overstretched fronts, could have prevented collapse.'<sup>51</sup> Given the vast area concerned, it was only by shortening the fronts that the Wehrmacht could build up the reserves needed for flexible reaction. In that respect, even the propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels was more clear-sighted than Hitler, the 'commander-in-chief'. On 23 September 1943 he noted in his diary that the line on the Dnieper could 'save around 350 km of front. That would free up the divisions we need for the establishment of a new central operational reserve. In my opinion, the central operational reserve is the alpha and omega of our present warfare.'<sup>52</sup>

In May 1943 Col.-Gen. Zeitzler had already called for the construction of a 'fall back position' (designated 'East Wall' or 'Panther Line') between the Sea of Azov and the Gulf of Finland, so as to take advantage of the obstacle value of strong water barriers such as the Dnieper. But Hitler 'blew his top' when that proposal was put to him. Asked how he intended to meet the impending danger, he retorted: 'First of

<sup>50</sup> Wagener, *Heeresgruppe Süd*, 245–6.

<sup>51</sup> Guderian, 'Wechselwirkungen zwischen Ost- und Westfront', 28, BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2386.

<sup>52</sup> Goebbels, *Tagebücher*, pt. 2, ix. 566 (23 Sept. 1943).

all, we're not there yet! Second, hold, hold, hold!'<sup>53</sup> 'If the troops hear about that position,' he reproached Zeitzler, 'they will want to pull back to it. Their defensive determination will be undermined. They must see no other possibility than to stand to the fore and hold fast.'<sup>54</sup>

It is noteworthy that Hitler invoked economic grounds, that is, the supposedly crucial importance of the Donets Basin industrial region for Germany's conduct of the war. Zeitzler reports an outburst by the Führer at a conference in the summer of 1943 as follows: 'My generals always think only of military reasons and rearward manoeuvres. They never consider economic reasons, of which they have absolutely no understanding. If we give up the Donets region, we won't have its coal. We need that coal for our armaments. And then [now furious] the war will be over in eleven months.'<sup>55</sup> Thereupon Zeitzler phoned the armaments minister, Albert Speer, and asked him whether evacuation of the Donets region would have any consequences at all for the German war economy. Speer's answer was: 'Hardly any. We didn't take the coal from that area into account in our calculations at all. It was too uncertain. Transport to Germany is too difficult.'<sup>56</sup> Hitler responded by forbidding the army chief of staff to contact the armaments minister on his own initiative. 'All I need is him telling me what to do as military commander,' was the Führer's caustic comment.<sup>57</sup> Despite all, Hitler stuck to his own opinion and rejected withdrawal from the Donets region. His failure to authorize the construction of the 'East Wall' (Panther Line) which the generals were demanding until the middle of August also had disastrous consequences. And even then he initially allocated few resources to it.

The onset of the Red Army's summer offensive showed how right Zeitzler and the front commanders-in-chief had been in their pessimism. Yet although several sections of Army Group South's front were threatened with collapse in this phase, there is hardly any mention of combat operations in Manstein's memoirs.<sup>58</sup> It is as if his real enemy was Hitler. Conflicts between him and the Führer are almost all he talks about. At a meeting with Hitler in Vinnitsa on 27 August, Manstein pointed out that his troops had lost a total of 133,000 men and received only 33,000 replacements. Without substantial reinforcements, he insisted, the Donets area could not be held. Yet Hitler was neither able to provide additional forces nor willing to authorize withdrawal.<sup>59</sup> A meeting at Führer headquarters in East Prussia on 3 September was equally fruitless. At that time Col.-Gen. Zeitzler fully supported

<sup>53</sup> Zeitzler, 'Das Ringen um die großen Entscheidungen', BA-MA, Study ZA 1/1734, 91–2.

<sup>54</sup> Heusinger, *Befehl im Widerstreit*, 253.

<sup>55</sup> Zeitzler, 'Das Ringen um die großen Entscheidungen', BA-MA, Study ZA 1/1734, 91–2. This outburst of Hitler's is reported in similar words in Heusinger, *Befehl im Widerstreit*, 266.

<sup>56</sup> Zeitzler, 'Das Ringen um die großen Entscheidungen', BA-MA, Study ZA 1/1734, 91–2.

<sup>57</sup> Heusinger, *Befehl im Widerstreit*, 266. See also Zeitzler, 'Das Ringen um die großen Entscheidungen', BA-MA, Study ZA 1/1734, 100.

<sup>58</sup> Unfortunately, from 5 July 1943 on, all of Army Group South's war diaries and the important volumes of annexes to them are missing. That leaves Manstein's memoirs, *Verlorene Siege*, as a major source. They are supplemented by reports from Army Group South in the war diary of the OKH General Staff's operations division (BA-MA RH 2/3061 and 3062).

<sup>59</sup> Manstein, *Verlorene Siege*, 522–3.

Manstein's demands. He put the following argument to the supreme commander of the Wehrmacht: '*Mein Führer*, the question is no longer whether they can hold the Donets region or not. The only question now is whether to abandon the Donets region by itself or to lose an army group along with it.'<sup>60</sup> On 8 September Hitler flew to Manstein's headquarters in Zaporozhye. It was his last visit to the eastern front—on a day which was overshadowed by the capitulation of Germany's Italian ally. The commander-in-chief of Army Group South explained once again that defence east of the Dnieper was no longer possible, but Hitler persisted in refusing a general withdrawal and was willing to authorize only a partial pull back on the extreme southern wing.<sup>61</sup>

Manstein, however, repeated his demand for the rapid withdrawal of his Army Group behind the Dnieper in a letter to the Führer. The concluding sentence is particularly worthy of note: 'Had the reinforcements which the situation demanded been brought in with foresight in good time [...] the present crisis, which can ultimately decide the whole outcome in the east and thus the outcome of the war itself, would have been avoided.'<sup>62</sup> Seldom had a general dared to criticize Hitler's mistaken operational decisions in such clear terms and, what is more, in writing. But Manstein went even further. On 14 September he informed the OKH that, 'on 15 Sept. in the morning', he would 'order the withdrawal of Fourth Armoured Army to the Dnieper in order to prevent it being encircled in small groups and destroyed'.<sup>63</sup> This was risky high-handedness, since Manstein was facing the supreme command with a fait accompli in defiance of an explicit order. The next day, 15 September, Hitler summoned the commanders-in-chief of Army Groups South and Centre, Manstein und Günther von Kluge, to Führer headquarters. The dictator was unable to counter Manstein's arguments, especially when the latter declared that it was no longer a matter of holding the Dnieper Line or any economically important areas, but of the fate of the eastern front.<sup>64</sup> Hitler admitted defeat and authorized withdrawal to the Panther Line.

### (b) The 'Panther' Withdrawal to behind the Dnieper (16 to 29 September)

The next day, 16 September, a wide-ranging withdrawal operation began on the whole eastern front, with the exception of Army Group North. In addition to Army Groups Centre and South, the operation included Army Group A, which evacuated the Kuban bridgehead and pulled back to the Crimean peninsula.<sup>65</sup> On 17 September Sixth Army was placed under the command of Army Group A and had to pull back to the Wotan Line, which ran from Melitopol on the Sea of Azov to the bend in the Dnieper at Zaporozhye. Its northernmost corps, XVII Army

<sup>60</sup> Verbal communication from Gen. (ret.) Count von Kielmansegg.

<sup>61</sup> Manstein, *Verlorene Siege*, 526. <sup>62</sup> Ibid. 528.

<sup>63</sup> KTB Op.Abt. OKH, 14 Sept. 1943, BA-MA RH 2/3061, fo. 438.

<sup>64</sup> Manstein, *Verlorene Siege*, 530.

<sup>65</sup> On Army Group A, see Part IV, Chapter 4 of the present volume.

Corps, nevertheless remained with Army Group South and was incorporated into First Armoured Army, where its task was to cover the Zaporozhye bridgehead. According to Manstein, this withdrawal 'probably represents the most difficult operation performed by the army group throughout the 1943–44 campaign'.<sup>66</sup> The Dnieper is the second-longest river in European Russia and over 300 metres wide—in places as much as 3.5 kilometres wide. Army Group South's three remaining armies had to cross it in the 700-kilometre stretch between Chernobyl and Zaporozhye, where there were only five practicable crossing places. The problem was that only a few units were able to pull back along an axis perpendicular to the Dnieper.

The bulk of them had to converge on the crossing places in a funnel-shaped manoeuvre involving cumbersome lateral movements which carried a constant risk of outflanking by the advancing armoured units of the Red Army. Having once crossed the Dnieper, they had to spread out immediately and take up their recommended positions before Soviet advance troops could gain a foothold on the west bank.

A particular organizational difficulty was the evacuation of 200,000 wounded, plus hospitals and medical personnel, in 387 hospital trains.<sup>67</sup> A total of 520,500 civilians also had to be evacuated, although only 375,000 of them were registered as having reached the west bank.<sup>68</sup> Although technical experts and able-bodied men who would otherwise have been immediately recruited by the Red Army were deported by force, the great majority of the civilians on the westward march had joined the retreating German forces voluntarily.<sup>69</sup> Many Ukrainians feared the return of Stalin's commissars. Some 85,000 ethnic Germans also followed the military columns, mostly whole families with their few possessions and their livestock. A total of 2,942 railway trains were used to carry off salvaged goods.<sup>70</sup> It says much for the Wehrmacht's military efficiency, especially the organizational skill of its staffs, that this complicated operation went off almost without a hitch. Moreover, it should not be forgotten that every withdrawal operation went along with the systematic destruction of Soviet infrastructure in a strip 20 to 30 kilometres wide east of the Dnieper.

Although the complicated Dnieper withdrawal was professionally planned and executed militarily, it was once again Hitler who ruined the concept. During the withdrawal behind the Dnieper his rigid insistence on forward defence had two negative consequences in terms of the time factor.

The first was that, despite the urging by his generals, he gave permission to construct the rearward Panther Line, or East Wall, much too late. The wide Dnieper, with its higher west bank, would have been very favourable to defence,

<sup>66</sup> Manstein, *Verlorene Siege*, 537.

<sup>67</sup> BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2073, 129; Study ZA 1/2075, 71; Manstein, *Verlorene Siege*, 540.

<sup>68</sup> *Die deutsche Wirtschaftspolitik in den besetzten sowjetischen Gebieten*, 377.

<sup>69</sup> BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2073, 129; Study ZA 1/2075, 71; Manstein, *Verlorene Siege*, 540.

<sup>70</sup> BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2073, 129; Study ZA 1/2075, 71; Manstein, *Verlorene Siege*, 540; on the evacuation of economic goods, see *Die deutsche Wirtschaftspolitik in den besetzten sowjetischen Gebieten*, 374–7.

on condition that sufficient defensive installations had been prepared.<sup>71</sup> Instead of which—and contrary to experience so far—the dictator put too much trust in the natural obstacle value. As a result, the defensive wall proved illusory in many places, as can be seen from a letter sent from the front by a soldier in Army Group South: ‘We expected to find the “East Wall” behind the Dnieper. There wasn’t even a trench.’<sup>72</sup>

Even more disastrous were the consequences of Hitler’s refusal to order the withdrawal in good time, despite the fact that the front had already been breached east of the Dnieper and Soviet armoured spearheads were advancing in depth. Once again, permission to withdraw was given only at ‘five minutes past midnight’. The German troops had to pit their horse-drawn vehicles in a race against Soviet tanks and lorries; yet instead of authorizing them to withdraw at top speed, the Führer declared there was ‘nothing to be gained by swift movement’. Instead, he ordered the withdrawal to be carried out ‘section by section, avoiding any haste’.<sup>73</sup> The last troops (apart from the Zaporozhye bridgehead) crossed the river on the evening of 29 September. In the meantime, however, advance troops of the Red Army had already got across in several places. By the end of the month they had established 23 small bridgeheads on a 700-kilometre-wide section of the west bank.<sup>74</sup> As a result of Hitler’s refusal to give ground in good time, the race to the Dnieper was lost.

### (c) The Soviet Airborne Operation at Bukrin on 24–25 September

The race to the Dnieper was particularly disastrous for Eighth Army on the loop of the Dnieper at Bukrin. The only large crossings available to it were at Kremenchug and Cherkassy, on which the troops were converging from various directions. Since the battle order within the army group was threatened with disarray, the southern wing of the neighbouring Fourth Armoured Army, including XXIV Armoured Corps, was placed under the command of Eighth Army. The crossing place envisaged for XXIV Armoured Corps had been the Kanev bridge to the south of the Dnieper loop at Bukrin. In the meantime, however, a gap had opened between the previous northern wing of Eighth Army and XXIV Armoured Corps, through which Soviet tanks were advancing towards the Dnieper via Pereyaslav.<sup>75</sup> The tanks were an advance detachment of Third Guards Armoured Army, which belonged to Voronezh Front. On 22 September the first troops crossed the river in the Bukrin loop (80 kilometres south of Kiev).<sup>76</sup> Within four days the Soviet forces had taken Bukrin and established a bridgehead 12 kilometres wide and up to 6 kilometres deep in the Dnieper loop.

<sup>71</sup> Mellenthin, *Panzerschlachten*, 176, 178.

<sup>72</sup> Quoted from a letter from the commander-in-chief of Fourth Army (Ia No. 073/43 g.Kdos., 16 Nov. 1943), BA-MA RH 20-4/515.

<sup>73</sup> BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2052, 88.

<sup>74</sup> Kobrin and Abaturov, ‘Sokrushenie vostochnogo vala’, 302.

<sup>75</sup> BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2073, 102, 107, 112, 116.

<sup>76</sup> KTB 8. Armee, 22 Sept. 1943 (fo. 146), BA-MA RH 20-8/85; Kobrin and Abaturov, ‘Sokrushenie vostochnogo vala’, 299.

When the first Soviet troops crossed the river on 22 September there were no German units securing the west bank, only isolated observation posts. XXIV Armoured Corps, which was supposed to take over this sector, was still fighting east of the Dnieper and gradually beginning to withdraw to the Kanev bridge. The first of its troops would not be able to cross the river until the afternoon of 23 September. Thus the only emergency troops that could be mustered to contain the Soviet bridgeheads were 120 NCO cadres from a neighbouring service school. This improvised force was dispatched in lorries in the morning of 22 September. The river crossing took place a little earlier further north near Kiev, in the combat zone of Fourth Armoured Army. The reconnaissance battalion of 19th Armoured Division set out from there fairly quickly, but the mass of the division was not expected to arrive until sometime on 24 September.

No one on the German side had any idea that the largest Soviet airborne operation of the war would take place that same day to the west of the Dnieper loop,<sup>77</sup> with the ambitious aim of establishing an operational bridgehead from which Soviet armoured units could advance in depth before all the German troops had withdrawn behind the Dnieper. That would have had disastrous consequences for Army Group South, since the Dnieper Line would have been destroyed before it had even been occupied. Voronezh Front originally planned to deploy two squadrons to transport 1st and 5th Guards Airborne Brigades in the evening of 23 September and 3rd Guards Airborne brigade the following night, using a total of 245 transport planes and gliders.

However, the operation got out of control and ended in fiasco. For reasons of secrecy, the orders were not made known until the last minute, so proper preparation was impossible. When the operation was due to start, only part of the paratroops were assembled on the airfields. The Soviet air force performed no better, since only eight aircraft arrived on time. Thereupon General Nikolai Fedorovich Vatutin postponed the operation by a day until the evening of 24 September, and decided that, since not all the troops had arrived yet, only 3rd and 5th Guards Airborne Brigades would be deployed. This last-minute change of plan resulted in chaos. All the orders and repartition of troops had to be revised. The landing places were not announced, let alone marked. There was not even any time left for reconnaissance. Above all, the brigade commanders were able to issue their orders only an hour-and-a-half before boarding the aircraft, company commanders had only 15 minutes, and platoon leaders had to instruct their men during the flight. The pilots were also highly agitated. The paratroopers were often dropped far from the planned dropping zones and completely dispersed. Some landed in the bridgehead behind their own lines, and many even came down east of the Dnieper. Those who fared worst of all landed in the river.<sup>78</sup>

<sup>77</sup> For the Soviet perspective, see Glantz, *The Soviet Airborne Experience*, 91–111. For the German viewpoint, see above all BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2082: Gen. (ret.) Walther Nehring, ‘Der Einsatz russischer Fallschirmjägerverbände am 24./25.9.1943’, 35–86; BA-MA, Study ZA 3/750, app. 26, ‘Sowjetrussische Luftlande-Unternehmen Ende September 1943’.

<sup>78</sup> Glantz, *The Soviet Airborne Experience*, 100.

The airborne operation stirred up a hornets' nest,<sup>79</sup> since those Soviet paratroopers who were dropped over the recommended zones mostly landed in positions or deployment areas occupied by a defensively prepared enemy. The one-day postponement of the operation thus had fatal consequences. On 23 September XXIV Armoured Corps was still engaged in heavy fighting east of the Dnieper. But when the Soviet paratroopers landed on the 24th, the corps' divisions were already in position or were moving, as luck would have it, right into the Soviet dropping zones. The German troops immediately opened fire on the transport planes and the descending paratroopers. Others were attacked at their most vulnerable moment, immediately after landing. Moreover, the Soviet soldiers were so widely scattered that there was scarcely any tactical deployment *en bloc*.

The inefficiency of the airborne operation is clear from the following figures. Of the airborne corps' 10,000 or so soldiers, only 6,592 arrived at the airfields. And of that number, only 4,575 men were actually deployed, while the others had to be left behind owing to lack of air transport capacity.<sup>80</sup> Many of the paratroopers who landed were killed or taken prisoner right away.<sup>81</sup> Around 2,300 fled into the woods, where they splintered into 43 separate groups.<sup>82</sup>

An American expert describes the Soviet operation as 'a classic case of how not to conduct an airborne operation', and reproaches the higher command with 'planning failures of criminal proportions'.<sup>83</sup> 'In short,' he concludes laconically, 'the airborne assault was a disaster.'<sup>84</sup> In a study of the operation, a former Wehrmacht general also concludes that the whole action 'bore the stamp of dilettantism'.<sup>85</sup> At the same time, he stresses that 'the Soviet command's great moment had come'.<sup>86</sup> In point of fact, the Red Army had the chance to completely disrupt Army Group South's Dnieper defence during the German river crossing, which lasted until 29 September. The fact that the catastrophe did not happen is due less to a series of remarkable coincidences than to some fundamental Soviet errors:

- (1) *Wrong time*: The withdrawal of XXIV Armoured Corps to the west bank of the Dnieper did not begin until 15.00 on 23 September. On that day the Soviet paratroops could have occupied the recommended objectives until the late afternoon almost without resistance. By postponing the operation by a day, from 23 September to the evening of 24 September, the Soviet operations staffs missed a great opportunity.
- (2) *Wrong place*: The main objective should have been the Dnieper bridge at Kanev. Had that bridge been taken or destroyed, XXIV Armoured Corps would have been cut off on the east bank of the river. The Dnieper loop would then have fallen into Soviet hands almost without a battle.

<sup>79</sup> Erickson, *Stalin's War*, ii. 128.

<sup>80</sup> Glantz, *The Soviet Airborne Experience*, 100.

<sup>81</sup> KTB 8. Armee, 2 Sept. 1943, fo. 176, BA-MA RH 20-8/85.

<sup>82</sup> Glantz, *The Soviet Airborne Experience*, 100, 103, 108.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid. 109.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid. 100.

<sup>85</sup> Nehring, 'Der Einsatz russischer Fallschirmjägerverbände am 24./25.9.1943', in BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2082, 59.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid. 60.

- (3) *Pilot errors*: The pilots sometimes missed the dropping zones by dozens of kilometres. Instead of being dropped in the planned area of 10 by 14 kilometres, the paratroopers ended up scattered over an area of 30 by 90 kilometres.<sup>87</sup>
- (4) *A leap in the dark*: The German officers wondered why the airborne operation took place at night rather than during the daylight hours. According to the principles governing German airborne operations, the action should have been carried out at dawn so that the paratroops could assemble in daylight after landing. At Bukrin, however, the Soviet paratroops did exactly the opposite. After being dropped in the late evening, they wandered about in the darkness, scattered and disoriented, and incapable of any concerted action.
- (5) *Tactical passivity*: In the resulting chaos, the weakness of Soviet command tactics became apparent. After landing, several groups proved completely helpless and confined themselves to passive defence.

Finally, the operation in the Dnieper loop at Bukrin was not only the Red Army's biggest airborne operation, but also its last. From then on, Stalin refrained from such risky undertakings. Although spectacular by reason of the massive deployment of forces, the Bukrin operation was for long passed over by official Soviet historiography in total silence.<sup>88</sup>

#### 4. THE BATTLE OF THE DΝIEPER LINE (29 SEPTEMBER TO 23 DECEMBER 1943)

After taking up position on the Panther Line on 29 September, Army Group South had to defend 700 kilometres of front with three armies against several Soviet army fronts. These were Voronezh Front, Steppe Front, and South-West Front, renamed 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Ukrainian Front respectively on 20 October. In addition, the army group's northern wing was attacked by parts of Central Front (from 20 October 'Belorussian Front'), and its southern wing by several armies of South Front (4th Ukrainian Front). On paper, Manstein's HQ had 60 divisions at its disposal, including reserves.<sup>89</sup> However, about half of them were 'combat groups', that is, division remnants of roughly regimental strength, although some of the 'combat groups' were not even that strong.<sup>90</sup> In all, Army Group South (including the Wehrmacht retinue) had a total of 719,000 men, 271 operational tanks and assault guns, and 2,263 artillery cannon.<sup>91</sup> Each division had to cover a front

<sup>87</sup> Glantz, *The Soviet Airborne Experience*, 100.

<sup>88</sup> In the new post-Communist version of the 'Great Patriotic War' (Kobrin and Abaturov, 'Sokrushenie vostochnogo vala', 300), it is described briefly but in very critical terms.

<sup>89</sup> 'Kräftegegenüberstellung Stand 14.10.1943', BA-MA RH 2/2543.

<sup>90</sup> BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2074, 268. See also Manstein, *Verlorene Siege*, 542.

<sup>91</sup> 'Kräftegegenüberstellung Stand 14.10.1943', BA-MA RH 2/2543.

section of some 20 kilometres, with only about 1,000 soldiers per division still available ‘for front-line combat’.<sup>92</sup> Air Fleet 4 had a total of 562 operational aircraft at its disposal, but they had to be used at the same time in support of both Army Group South and Army Group A (see Table IV.III.1).<sup>93</sup> In the course of the withdrawal Field Marshal von Manstein moved his headquarters to Vinnitsa, where Führer headquarters had earlier been temporarily located. In a situation assessment for his army group, he noted that ‘the combat strength of our divisions—engaged as they are in heavy combat without a break (whereas the Russians can repeatedly withdraw, rehabilitate, and replenish their troops at the front)—is now so low in terms of men and weapons that the enemy, however bad his troops, can break through wherever he is able to muster enough forces, simply because of our insufficient coverage of the front’.<sup>94</sup> The only possibility of sustainable resistance to the assault by four Soviet army fronts would have been to dig in on the Dnieper Line. But the pursuing attackers had got through first in many places. Therefore, the urgent task now facing Manstein’s three armies was to eliminate the Soviet bridgeheads before the enemy could use them to continue his offensive.

#### **(a) Fourth Armoured Army in the Kiev Sector**

Fourth Armoured Army, led by Col.-Gen. Hermann Hoth, was defending Army Group South’s northern wing on both sides of Kiev with VII, XIII, and LIX Army Corps. On 22 September the Red Army had already managed to cross the Dnieper at Chernobyl, opening up a gap exactly at the interface with Army Group Centre.<sup>95</sup> Although Fourth Armoured Army succeeded in retaking Chernobyl, the bridgehead remained, with a width of 60 kilometres and a depth of 30 kilometres. In the further course of the campaign a dangerous gap arose between the two army groups. However, after the sector in question was assigned to Army Group Centre on 14 October, Army Group South HQ was able to concentrate on other critical points on the front.

#### *The Soviet Bridgehead at Lyutezh*

By the end of September advance units of Voronezh Front had crossed the Dnieper in several places, but the German defenders had managed to repel the still-weak Soviet forces almost everywhere. The Lyutezh bridgehead to the north of Kiev,

<sup>92</sup> Manstein, *Verlorene Siege*, 542.

<sup>93</sup> Operational status report, 10 Oct. 1943, BA-MA RL 2-III/726; calculated by Ulf Balke in the light of further documents from his private archive.

<sup>94</sup> Situation assessment by Manstein, 20 Oct. 1943, quoted in MVO to OKH (Gen.Stab), No. 172/43 g.Kdos. Chefs, ‘An den Chef des Stabes der Seekriegsleitung’, 27 Oct. 1943, BA-MA RM 7/260.

<sup>95</sup> See Part IV, Chapter II of the present volume: ‘The Withdrawal of Army Group Centre to Belorussia’.

**Table IV.III.1.** Breakdown of Air Fleet 4\* at 10 October 1943 (for deployment with Army Groups South and A)

Category	Unit	Aircraft type	Target strength	Actual strength	Operational
Strategic reconnaissance	2.(F)/11	Ju 88	12	9	6
	2.(F)/22	Ju 88	12	8	7
	3.(F)/121	Ju 188	12	12	6
	4.(F)/122	Ju 88	12	15	9
	1.(F)/Night	Do 217	12	10	7
Special squadron	Küsta Krim		Bf 110	12	5
				72	61
Maritime reconnaissance	Stab/S.A.Gr.125	Bv 138	1	—	—
	1./S.A.Gr. 125	Bv 138	9	7	4
	3./S.A.Gr. 125	Bv 138	9	8	7
				19	15
					11
Tactical reconnaissance	Stab/N.A.Gr. 1	Bf 110	—	2	—
	1./N.A.Gr. 2	Bf 109	16	10	6
	5.(H)/11	Fw 189	9	9	6
	1.(H)/21	Fw 189	9	6	2
	Stab/N.A.Gr. 6	—	—	—	—
	2.(H)/31	Fw 189	9	11	5
	Stab/N.A.Gr. 9	Bf 109	—	4	3
	7.(H)/32	Fw 189	9	8	8
	Stab/N.A.Gr. 14	—	—	—	—
	2.(H)/16	Fw 189	9	6	2
	5.(H)/41	Fw 189	9	11	7
	5.(H)/32	Fw 189	9	3	2
				79	70
					41
Fighters	Stab/J.G. 52	Bf 109	4	2	1
	I./J.G. 52	Bf 109	40	32	27
	II./J.G. 52	Bf 109	40	33	14
	III./J.G. 52	Bf 109	40	31	20
	Croat. 15. J.G. 52	Bf 109	16	—	—
	II./J.G. 54 (excl. 4. St.)	Fw 190	28	22	12
	12./J.G. 54	Fw 190	12	8	6
	IV./J.G. 51	Bf 109	40	22	15
				220	150
Night fighters	2./N.J.G. 100	Bf 110	15	11	8
	4., 5./N.J.G. 200	Bf 110	24	15	9
				39	26
					17
Anti-tank aircraft	II.(Pz.)/S.G. 2	Ju 87	39	26	18
	10.(Pz.)/S.G. 2	Ju 87	12	8	6
	Stab IV.(Pz.)/S.G. 9	Hs 129	6	4	4
	1.(Pz.)/S.G. 9	Hs 129	16	7	4
	2.(Pz.)/S.G. 9	Hs 129	16	9	7
	3.(Pz.)/S.G. 9	Hs 129	16	10	6
	13.(Pz.)/S.G. 9	Hs 129	16	11	10
	10.(Pz.)/S.G. 77	Ju 87	12	8	5
	I.(Pz.)/S.G. 77	Ju 87	39	33	27
				172	116
					87

(continued)

**Table IV.III.1. Continued**

Category	Unit	Aircraft type	Target strength	Actual strength	Operational
Ground-attack aircraft	Stab/S.G. 2	Ju 87	3	2	1
	I./S.G. 2	Ju 87	39	27	20
	II./S.G. 2 (excl. 6. St.)	Fw 190	30	32	14
	III./S.G. 2	Ju 87	39	27	20
	III./S.G. 3	Ju 87	39	29	24
	Stab/S.G. 77	Ju 87	3	2	2
	II./S.G. 77	Ju 87	39	36	27
			192	155	108
Night ground-attack aircraft	Stab/N.S.Gr. 4	misc.	2	—	—
	2./N.S.Gr. 4	Ar 66	20	11	8
	Stab/N.S.Gr. 5	Ar 66	2	—	—
	1./N.S.Gr. 5	Ar 66	20	5	4
	2./N.S.Gr. 5	Ar 66	20	10	8
	Stab/N.S.Gr. 6	Go 145	2	—	—
	1./N.S.Gr. 6	Go 145	20	18	13
	2./N.S.Gr. 6	Go 145	20	17	15
			106	61	48
Bombers	Stab/K.G. 3	Ju 88	4	—	—
	I./K.G. 3	Ju 88	37	27	17
	kroat. 15.K.G. 3	Ju 88	12	—	—
	I./K.G. 4	He 111	37	22	19
	Stab/K.G. 27	He 111	4	1	1
	III./K.G. 27	He 111	37	19	11
	14. (Eis.)/K.G. 27	He 111	12	9	7
	Stab/K.G. 55	He 111	4	9	7
	I./K.G. 55	He 111	37	28	14
	II./K.G. 55	He 111	37	26	15
	III./K.G. 55	He 111	26	30	15
	9. (Eis.)/K.G. 55	He 111	11	9	9
			258	180	115
10 Oct. 1943	Air Fleet 4		1157	834	562
	Total strength				
Allies:					
Kiev Training Command		—	—	14	6
Hungary			96	42	25
Romania			160	112	69
Slovakia			24	13	6
			280	181	106
Air Fleet 4 also had at its disposal:					
7 courier squadrons			48	61	52
6 liaison squadrons			72	68	54
4 corps transport squadrons			45	58	35
2 transport groups			106	92	65
1 weather recon. squadron			12	8	6
1 minesweeping squadron			12	18	14
1 air-sea rescue squadron			13	10	5
(with 1 auxiliary air-sea rescue squadron)	Other units		308	315	231

\* Air Fleet 4 with: VIII, IV, and I Air Corps

Sources: Operational status reports, 10 Oct. 1943, BA-MA, RL 2-III/726, and documents from the Ulf Balke collection.

however, grew into a threat of operational proportions.<sup>96</sup> It was from there that the right wing of Voronezh Front launched the Lyutezh Offensive Operation (1 October to 2 November 1943), deploying 13th, 38th, and 60th Armies, as well as 2nd Air Army. A total of 253,830 troops took part in the offensive, in which the attackers lost 85,064 men, of whom 24,422 dead or missing.<sup>97</sup> By 10 October Voronezh Front had, nevertheless, established a bridgehead 15 kilometres wide and 5 to 10 kilometres deep.<sup>98</sup> An important role in this fighting was played by V Guards Armoured Corps, led by Lt.-Gen. Andrei Grigorevich Kravchenko, the bulk of which had been carried across the Dnieper on ferries. The corps, nevertheless, lost many tanks, together with their crews, in crossing river branches and swamps.<sup>99</sup> Voronezh Front HQ had originally planned to use the Lyutezh bridgehead for only a diversionary or relief attack. The main attack was planned to start further south, from the Bukrin bridgehead near Kanev, and to be directed against the northern wing of the German Eighth Army. On 24 September, as already described, a major airborne operation took place in the Dnieper loop running through this area, but failed completely. The following offensive, in which 3rd Guards Armoured Army was deployed, was also unsuccessful.

There then occurred something that was most unusual for Soviet operations command. Whereas an attack which had already begun was normally continued stubbornly until either a breakthrough was achieved or the Soviet potential was exhausted, this time the operations plan was stood completely on its head. Gen. Vatutin, the commander-in-chief of Voronezh Front, decided to shift the point of concentration to the Lyutezh bridgehead and to carry out only a feint attack from the bridgehead at Bukrin.<sup>100</sup> The Stavka in Moscow also agreed to the plan. What followed next was one of the most impressive examples of an ability which the Red Army repeatedly demonstrated in the course of the war, that is, that of moving masses of troops unnoticed over great distances by means of 'maskirovka' (camouflage and deception). In the night of 25 to 26 October a large part of the Soviet units were moved from the Bukrin bridgehead to the east bank of the Dnieper. The plan was to march north parallel to the front for almost 200 kilometres, cross the Desna, and then cross back over the Dnieper into the Lyutezh bridgehead. The formations involved in this manoeuvre were 3rd Guards Armoured Army, VII Artillery Breakthrough Corps, XXIII Rifle Corps, and numerous other units. They reinforced the forces already massed in the bridgehead. The troop movements were mostly carried out under cover of darkness, and bad weather made the Luftwaffe's reconnaissance task even more difficult. A Russian speciality was the construction of underwater bridges just below the surface,<sup>101</sup> which were hard for German aircraft to detect and attack. At the same time, a series of measures were adopted to

<sup>96</sup> Kobrin and Abaturov, 'Sokrushenie vostochnogo vala', 300, 306.

<sup>97</sup> Gurkin, 'Liudskie poteri Sovetskikh Vooruzhennykh Sil', Table 1, No. 38.

<sup>98</sup> Kobrin and Abaturov, 'Sokrushenie vostochnogo vala', 300. On the fighting see, also KTB 4. Panzerarmee, 2, 7, and 17 Oct. 1943, BA-MA RH 21-4/131.

<sup>99</sup> Glantz and House, *When Titans Clashed*, 173.

<sup>100</sup> Kobrin and Abaturov, 'Sokrushenie vostochnogo vala', 303, 306.

<sup>101</sup> Mellenthin, *Panzerschlachten*, 179.

simulate the continued presence of the withdrawn formations in the Bukrin bridgehead. For example, radio stations were left in place of the staffs and continued the previous radio traffic. Dummies were put in place, fake bridges erected, and feint attacks conducted.<sup>102</sup> The German enemy intelligence services may indeed have been misled by those measures for a short time, but Soviet historians' claim that the attack from the Lyutezh bridgehead took the Germans by surprise seems greatly exaggerated.<sup>103</sup> On the contrary, Fourth Armoured Army's war diary entry for 3 November refers to 'the major offensive we have been expecting for days'.<sup>104</sup> For that reason the Germans had already sent in several armoured units as reinforcements. Nevertheless, as Field Marshal von Manstein admits in his memoirs, it was not clear 'whether it was an offensive with far-reaching objectives or whether the enemy initially intended to gain the necessary assembly area west of the Dnieper'.<sup>105</sup>

### *The Soviet Breakthrough at Kiev*

In the ensuing Kiev Strategic Offensive Operation (3 to 13 November), 1st Ukrainian Front (formerly Voronezh Front) deployed 671,000 men.<sup>106</sup> The attacking formations were supported by some 7,000 cannon and grenade launchers, 675 tanks and self-propelled guns, and 700 front-line aircraft.<sup>107</sup> A major problem from the outset was how to transport such a mass of weapons and vehicles across the Dnieper. A total of 26 bridges, as well as 66 large and 21 small ferries, were installed for the purpose.<sup>108</sup> An exceptionally large number of cannon and grenade launchers were assembled for the breakout from the bridgehead. In the area of L Rifle Corps, for example, there were 416 barrelled weapons per kilometre of front. Never in the course of the war had there been such a concentration of artillery.<sup>109</sup>

Two days in advance, on 1 November, 27th and 40th Armies launched the Soviet diversionary attack from the Bukrin bridgehead. On the same day the combat zone of Germany's Fourth Armoured Army was extended southwards to Kanev, so that it took over responsibility for the Bukrin sector and for XXIV Armoured Corps, which was deployed there. Despite the deployment of considerable forces, however, the Soviet troops managed to advance 1.5 kilometres at most and were beaten back from the outset.<sup>110</sup> Then, on 3 November, the main attack

<sup>102</sup> Zhukov, *Erinnerungen* (8th edn.), 199–200; Kobrin and Abaturov, 'Sokrushenie vostochnogo vala', 307–8; *Geschichte des zweiten Weltkrieges 1939–1945*, vii. 305–6.

<sup>103</sup> Significantly, that assessment is clearly revised in the post-Communist edition of 'The Great Patriotic War'. See Kobrin and Abaturov, 'Sokrushenie vostochnogo vala', 307.

<sup>104</sup> KTB 4. Panzerarmee, 3 Nov. 1943, BA-MA RH 21-4/131. See also BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2074, 292.

<sup>105</sup> Manstein, *Verlorene Siege*, 553. <sup>106</sup> *Grif sekretnosti sniat*, 196–7.

<sup>107</sup> *Geschichte des zweiten Weltkrieges 1939–1945*, vii. 306. Within ten days the official losses amounted to 30,569 men, of whom 6,491 dead or missing, 271 tanks, and 125 aircraft. See *Grif sekretnosti sniat*, 196–7, 371.

<sup>108</sup> Kobrin and Abaturov, 'Sokrushenie vostochnogo vala', 307.

<sup>109</sup> *Geschichte des zweiten Weltkrieges 1939–1945*, vii. 307.

<sup>110</sup> Kobrin and Abaturov, 'Sokrushenie vostochnogo vala', 309.

from the Lyutezh bridgehead began to the north of Kiev. The first wave consisted of 38th and 60th Armies but, despite massive artillery support, they were unable to make a decisive breakthrough. That was achieved the following day with the introduction of 3rd Guards Armoured Army and I Guards Cavalry Corps. The German VII Army Corps was forced to withdraw and evacuate Kiev, and on 6 November the Red Army marched into the Ukrainian capital. There now began the second phase of the Soviet offensive, in which 13th Army was to attack northwards towards Ovruch and 60th Army westwards towards Korosten. The Soviet 38th Army advanced in two diverging directions: south-westwards towards Zhitomir and southwards towards Belya Tserkov. It was followed from the bridgehead by 27th and 40th Armies, and by I Guards Cavalry Corps, while 3rd Guards Armoured Army led the main thrust towards Fastov. On 7 November the Soviet armoured units were already able to take the important Fastov railway node 50 kilometres south-west of Kiev.

That same day Field Marshal von Manstein flew to Führer headquarters to put through a decision of fundamental importance for the eastern front. On the surface it was simply a shift of the point of concentration from his army group's right wing on the lower Dnieper to its left wing near Kiev, where it was threatened with an operational breakthrough. However, the redisposition of the reserves coming in from the Reich was bound to have major consequences, since Manstein was determined to give up the eastward-protruding Dnieper bulge at Zaporozhye, where 1st Armoured Army was threatened with encirclement. He also demanded evacuation of the Crimea, where 17th Army had been cut off by a Soviet advance. It seems remarkable that this proposal should have come from Manstein, the man who had made his name as the conqueror of the Crimea and the legendary fortress of Sevastopol. In the present situation, however, he soberly concluded that this bastion could no longer be held. Above all, he refused to accept that Army Group A's Seventeenth Army should be stationed there to no purpose when it constituted the operational reserve so urgently needed to stabilize the eastern front. Hitler opposed the proposal with economic and political arguments. He invoked the manganese ore deposits near Nikopol on the Dnieper and also feared that loss of the Crimea would give the Soviet air force a base from which to attack the Romanian oilfields near Ploieşti. Evacuation of the Crimea would also result in an important loss of political prestige with the neighbouring Turks, Romanians, and Bulgarians.<sup>111</sup> Manstein countered with operational logic that was hard to refute: a Soviet breakthrough on the northern wing of Fourth Army 'would sooner or later seal the fate of Army Group South and Army Group A'.<sup>112</sup> It would give the Red Army leadership a chance to achieve the encirclement which they had already twice attempted without success. They would be able to swing south and advance to the Black Sea, enclosing the whole German southern wing. Manstein's assessment was confirmed by Col. Reinhard Gehlen, head of the General Staff's Foreign

<sup>111</sup> BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2073, 218–20, 228–31, 260–6; Study ZA 1/2074, 295, 327; Study ZA 1/2343, 20; Manstein, *Verlorene Siege*, 554.

<sup>112</sup> Manstein, *Verlorene Siege*, 554.

Armies East division, who concluded the same day, in a 'summary assessment of the enemy situation', that the Soviet point of concentration lay unambiguously in the area of Army Group South. The Red Army had assembled the mass of its operational armoured units in that sector in order to decide the issue.<sup>113</sup> In conclusion, he went so far as to evoke the 'danger of a collapse of the eastern front'.<sup>114</sup> Hitler admitted that Manstein's arguments were plausible, but declared that he would take the risk. His only concession was to permit 1st Armoured Division and 1st SS Armoured Division 'Leibstandarte', which had been brought back from Italy, to be deployed in the area of Fourth Armoured Army rather than on the lower Dnieper, as had been planned.<sup>115</sup>

In the following days the situation of Fourth Armoured Army 'took a rapid turn for the worse'. Almost all of its eleven infantry divisions were now down to regimental strength.<sup>116</sup> Indeed, 208th Infantry Division had only 165 men.<sup>117</sup> Most serious of all was the lack of fighting vehicles in the face of the armoured masses of 1st Ukrainian Front. On 10 November the already decimated 8th Armoured Division lost its last tank at Zhitomir.<sup>118</sup> Two days later, when that important transport node fell into the hands of the Red Army, a mood of crisis gripped Army Group South headquarters. The only reason why the situation at Zhitomir did not escalate was that, upon entering the city, the troops of I Guards Cavalry Corps plundered Fourth Army's alcohol stocks.<sup>119</sup> Meanwhile, the German units were everywhere on the retreat. They were under frontal attack and constantly threatened on the flanks. In ten days 1st Ukrainian Front advanced up to 150 kilometres westwards and then was stopped only with difficulty. Fourth Armoured Army found itself split into three groups: VII Army Corps had been forced back from Kiev 50 kilometres to the south, and the only way of stabilizing the front was to bring up units of the newly assigned XXIV Armoured Corps, which was still holding the Dnieper Line further to the right. XIII Army Corps had been thrown back to the south-west in the Zhitomir area. LIX Army Corps, stationed in the north-west, seemed particularly isolated. It tried in vain to defend Korosten, which fell to the Soviet 60th Army on 17 November. North of Korosten a huge gap opened up between it and Army Group Centre, since after the evacuation of Chernobyl Second Army withdrew to the middle reaches of the Pripyat river. This breach finally attained a width of around 100 kilometres.

When the Soviet armoured units rolled west out of the Lyutezh bridgehead, there were only a few fighting vehicles on the German side. On the crucial day of 6 November, 25th Armoured Division, which had arrived from France, seemed the

<sup>113</sup> Abt. Fremde Heere Ost (I), No. 87/43 g.Kdos., 9 Nov. 1943, 'Zusammenfassende Beurteilung der Feindlage vor der deutschen Ostfront (Stand 7.11.1943)', fo. 175, BA-MA RHD 18/249.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., fo. 180.

<sup>115</sup> KTB Op.Abt. OKH, 8 and 9 Nov. 1943; Manstein, *Verlorene Siege*, 555.

<sup>116</sup> Manstein, *Verlorene Siege*, 555.

<sup>117</sup> BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2074, 300.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid. 301.

<sup>119</sup> Glantz and House, *When Titans Clashed*, 174. The alcoholic excesses of some Red Army troops also facilitated the recapture of Zhitomir on 19 November; see Scheibert, *Die Gespenster-Division*, 126–8.

only formation that could possibly be used for a counter-attack. Yet this newly constituted unit had been sent to the eastern front 'in an unfinished state'.<sup>120</sup> Major components of weaponry and equipment were lacking. The troops had received emergency individual training, but no unit training in combined-arms combat. For that reason Col.-Gen. Guderian, as inspector-general of armoured troops, had protested against such premature deployment. In his view, at least four more weeks were needed to equip the division fully and train the men. But Hitler took no account of this. In deciding to commit 25th Armoured Division, the German command departed from one of its hitherto most important principles. In contrast to the Red Army, the Wehrmacht normally waited until a front-line unit had achieved internal cohesion before sending it into battle. Moreover, once the inexperienced division had been rushed to the front, it ran into a morass of hitches, misunderstandings, and unfortunate coincidences. It had originally been intended for deployment on the army group's right wing, where the tracked vehicles were just arriving by rail. But then it was decided to deploy it on the left wing. At the same time, the rail transport of the wheeled vehicles, which had started later, was switched to the right wing. The sections which arrived first in the area south-west of Fastov were an armoured division without armour. The Soviet battle tanks rolled towards them across open terrain. At that decisive moment the divisional commander was out of action, since he had been enclosed with parts of his staff and had to fight his way back on foot. When the division's tracked vehicles finally arrived two days later, the units already deployed had suffered so many casualties that it was no longer possible to recapture Fastov.<sup>121</sup> Hitler was furious and wanted to hold the divisional commander responsible. Nevertheless, the incomplete and inexperienced 25th Armoured Division had at least made an important defensive contribution. By halting the advance of 3rd Guards Armoured Army, it created the precondition for Manstein's planned counter-blow.<sup>122</sup> The failure of this offensive operation, however, was the writing on the wall. Up till then, the deployment of a newly brought-in German armoured division had always led to at least temporary offensive success. Hitler had already found a scapegoat for the failure of Fourth Armoured Army and dismissed its commander-in-chief. Col.-Gen. Hoth, one of the Wehrmacht's most capable tank commanders, was removed from his post and replaced on 15 November by Gen. Erhard Raus.

### *The German Counter-Attacks*

From the Soviet viewpoint, the Kiev Strategic Offensive Operation was over. It was now followed by the Kiev Defensive Operation (13 November to 22 December 1943), in which 1st Ukrainian Front committed 730,000 men and suffered, according to official figures, a total of 87,473 casualties, of whom 21,650 dead

<sup>120</sup> KTB 4. Panzerarmee, 9 Nov. 1943, fo. 148, BA-MA RH 21-4/131.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., fo. 155.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., entries for 7 to 11 Nov. 1943; Guderian, *Erinnerungen eines Soldaten*, 287–92; Mellenthin, *Panzerschlachten*, 186–90; Warlimont, *Im Hauptquartier*, 407–8; Manstein, *Verlorene Siege*, 556–7; Hinze, *Rückzugskämpfe*, 175–8.

or missing.<sup>123</sup> Meanwhile, on the German side, Fourth Armoured Army had been restructured. The three corps engaged in heavy defensive fighting (VII, XIII, and LIX Army Corps) had been merged as 'Army Detachment Mattenkrott'. The counter-attack in the direction of Kiev was to be led by XXXXVIII Armoured Corps, which had been transported in from neighbouring Eighth Army and comprised six armoured divisions.<sup>124</sup> This major formation, equipped with 280 battle tanks and assault guns, was commanded by General Hermann Balck.<sup>125</sup> The German counter-attack began on 15 November with two shock groups.<sup>126</sup> The main forces advanced to Brusilov (north-west of Fastov), where they were able to enclose several units of 3rd Guards Armoured Army.<sup>127</sup> A counter-thrust from the east by Soviet tanks ended in failure. At the same time, the left (western) shock group attacked Zhitomir with support from parts of XIII Army Corps, and on 19 November the town was retaken. Meanwhile, heavy fighting for Korosten had flared up on the northern wing. After an attack by LIX Army Corps, the town was recaptured by the Germans on 27 November.<sup>128</sup> For the last phase of the German counter-attack a westward push by XXXXVIII Armoured Corps in the direction of Kiev was planned, with the aim of cutting off the enemy forces positioned to the south of the city. Although that attack got stuck in the mud, the crisis was overcome by 30 November and a united front was established in the endangered sector south-west of Kiev. From 9 to 28 November, according to German figures, more than 20,000 enemy soldiers were killed and 4,800 taken prisoner. The Soviet forces also lost 603 tanks and 1,505 cannon.<sup>129</sup>

Once the ground had frozen over again, the German counter-attack was resumed on 6 December with Operation ADVENT.<sup>130</sup> Hitler, however, who saw the point of concentration as being in the lower reaches of the Dnieper, had ordered the withdrawal of several units, and XXXXVIII Armoured Corps was left with a total of 201 operational tanks and assault guns.<sup>131</sup> Meanwhile, in the expanded Kiev bridgehead, 1st Ukrainian Front had assembled nine armies, two of them armoured, as well as an armoured corps, a cavalry corps, and numerous other units. The Soviet air units were also continuously reinforced, while German aircraft were rarely seen in the skies. Given the enemy superiority, it seems surprising that the German troops achieved some further successes and were able to cause concern in the enemy's hinterland. Radomyshl was taken on 13 December,<sup>132</sup>

<sup>123</sup> Gurkin, 'Liudskie poteri Sovetskikh Vooruzhennykh Sil', Table 1, No. 44.

<sup>124</sup> Namely 1st, 7th, 19th, and 25th Armoured Divisions, plus SS Armoured Divisions 'Reich' and 'Leibstandarte'.

<sup>125</sup> For the figures, see the daily reports for 17 Nov. 1943 in BA-MA RH 21-4/161 (fos. 38–41). Command vehicles and anti-tank cannon (self-propelled guns) are not included.

<sup>126</sup> KTB 4. Panzerarmee, 15 Nov. 1943, BA-MA RH 21-4/131.

<sup>127</sup> Hinze, *Rückzugskämpfe*, 180–2.

<sup>128</sup> BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2074, 306; Hinze, *Rückzugskämpfe*, 166; KTB 4. Panzerarmee, 27 Nov. 1943, BA-MA RH 21-4/131.

<sup>129</sup> KTB 4. Panzerarmee, 30 Nov. 1943, BA-MA RH 21-4/131.

<sup>130</sup> KTB 4. Panzerarmee, 6 Dec. 1943, BA-MA RH 21-4/132.

<sup>131</sup> Strength report of 5 Dec. 1943, see Study BA-MA ZA 1/2074, 316.

<sup>132</sup> KTB 4. Panzerarmee, 13 Dec. 1943, BA-MA RH 21-4/132; BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2074, 316.

and by 22 December this had been followed by two attacks on Korosten and Malin in which the Soviet formations, especially 60th Army, suffered heavy losses. General Balck's recipe for success consisted in surprise armoured thrusts deep into the enemy's rear. As tank-warfare specialist Maj.-Gen. (ret.) Friedrich Wilhelm von Mellenthin later wrote: 'The Russians were certainly flabbergasted by these uncanny thrusts, which seemed to come from nowhere, and their wireless traffic provided abundant evidence of their bewilderment and anxiety.'<sup>133</sup> Although the German tank commanders were proving far superior to their Soviet adversaries in tactical manoeuvring, a turnaround had taken place on the eastern front. While the Germans still succeeded in carrying out daring tank raids and encirclement movements, at the decisive moment they lacked the two or three additional armoured units needed for operational exploitation of their tactical successes. The enclosure of strong Soviet forces in the Meleni pocket south-east of Korosten was a striking example. On 18 December three German armoured divisions (1st, 7th, and 'Leibstandarte') broke through the front between Meleni and Amlin and pushed forward in depth. This seemed set to result in a classic encirclement operation, a 'miniature Tannenberg', as Mellenthin calls it in an allusion to the famous encirclement battle of 1914.<sup>134</sup> The German officers were nevertheless surprised by the strength of the enemy's counter-attacks. On 22 December, when 1st and 7th Armoured Divisions were making ready to close the pocket, a map was found on the body of a Soviet major which alarmed the German operations staffs. It showed that in the 'pocket to the east of Meleni' there were no fewer than three Soviet armoured corps and four rifle corps. That was too large a prey, especially as it turned out that the German advance had penetrated the assembly area for a strong Soviet offensive. So the Germans had to leave it at that, contenting themselves with the psychological shock effect instead of putting the encircled enemy out of action. The promising pincer attack was broken off.

Although the counter-attacks begun on 15 November in the sector of Fourth Armoured Army had resulted in considerable territorial gains, the real aim of throwing the enemy back to the Dnieper was not achieved. In the Kiev area there was still an operational bridgehead that could be used as a springboard for a new Soviet offensive. The failure of the attack by a reinforced German armoured corps on the main forces of 1st Ukrainian Front was due not only to the Soviet multiple numerical superiority but also to Hitler's operational incoherence. On 7 November Manstein had proposed concentrating all the armoured forces available on the southern wing of the eastern front for a short but powerful counter-strike in the Kiev area. That was the only chance of eliminating the bridgehead, especially if combined with the element of surprise. But once again Hitler wanted to defend everything at the same time and even dreamed of an armoured thrust on the lower Dnieper to reconnect with Seventeenth Army (Army Group A), which

<sup>133</sup> Mellenthin, *Panzerschlachten*, 207. The latest official Russian publication on the 'Great Patriotic War' has this to say on the subject: 'The wrong calculations by the front's HQ were a heavy burden for the troops.' See Kobrin and Abaturov, 'Sokrushenie vostochnogo vala', 321.

<sup>134</sup> Mellenthin, *Panzerschlachten*, 210.

was cut off in Crimea. In his approach, strategic wishful thinking overrode operational necessity. At Führer headquarters on 9 November, that is, two days after Manstein's fruitless discussion there, Guderian too put forward a proposal along the lines suggested by Manstein. Acting in agreement with Col.-Gen. Zeitzler, he proposed to Hitler that he 'give up the idea of numerous small-scale counter-attacks and that he concentrate all our panzer divisions available south of Kiev for the planned operation through Berdichev towards Kiev'.<sup>135</sup> Full of irony, Guderian noted in his memoirs: 'I used my favourite old expression, *Klotzen, nicht Kleckern* [roughly: "Boot 'em, don't spatter 'em!"]'. Hitler paid attention to what I said but did not make his arrangements accordingly.'<sup>136</sup> With that, Hitler passed up the only remaining chance, which proved to be a serious operational mistake. The fact remains that a possible successful counter-attack would have had only local effect, since the Red Army's superiority was by then so great that German operational successes could only postpone the outcome.

### (b) Eighth Army in the Lee of the Wind

At first it had seemed that events were coming dramatically to a head in Eighth Army's sector. The most dangerous Soviet bridgehead had been established in the Dnieper loop at Bukrin, where Red Army advance troops had already managed to cross the river on 22 September. That was also where a Soviet airborne operation had been carried out, albeit unsuccessfully. In any case, the bridgehead could not be eliminated, which gave Voronezh Front, with its 908 tanks,<sup>137</sup> the opportunity for an operational breakthrough. The onslaught came in the form of the Bukrin Offensive Operation, conducted from 12 to 24 October.<sup>138</sup> The formations which took part were 27th, 40th, and 47th Armies, and 3rd Guards Armoured Army, with air support from 2nd Air Army. At the start of the operation 185,960 troops attacked at close quarters, and their number was continuously increased.<sup>139</sup> In addition, Voronezh Front's right wing launched a relief offensive from the Lyutezh bridgehead further to the north (near Kiev), so that the German command was unable to withdraw any units from the neighbouring Fourth Armoured Army. On 12 October alone, the first day of the offensive, the Soviet troops at Bukrin were supported by 1,054 air sorties.<sup>140</sup> The German front was threatened with collapse, especially when more and more Soviet tanks arrived via bridges which had meanwhile been erected over the Dnieper. The fact that Eighth Army had been obliged to give up several armoured units now had a negative effect.<sup>141</sup> Nevertheless, the superior enemy forces were unable to break through. On the

<sup>135</sup> Guderian, *Erinnerungen eines Soldaten*, 286.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

<sup>137</sup> Kobrin and Abaturov, 'Sokrushenie vostochnogo vala', 299.

<sup>138</sup> For the German perspective, see KTB 8. Armee (fos. 73 ff.), BA-MA RH 20-8/86.

<sup>139</sup> Gurkin, 'Liudskie poteri Sovetskikh Vooruzhennykh Sil', Table 1, No. 40.

<sup>140</sup> Kobrin and Abaturov, 'Sokrushenie vostochnogo vala', 303.

<sup>141</sup> BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2074, 274, 276.

contrary, their losses grew to huge proportions.<sup>142</sup> On 22 October General Vatutin had to admit that the offensive had failed.

As described earlier, the commander-in-chief of 1st Ukrainian Front then changed the plan of operations entirely, shifting the point of concentration from the Bukrin bridgehead to the bridgehead at Lyutezh.<sup>143</sup> For the German Eighth Army, 1st November marked a turning point, as the Bukrin sector was now assigned to Fourth Armoured Army, positioned to the north. On the same day a new Soviet offensive began from the Bukrin bridgehead. It was actually only a relief attack for the major offensive from the Lyutezh bridgehead, but the Soviet forces were so superior that serious danger threatened. Despite this, the attack was beaten off, and the Bukrin sector was quiet for a long time afterwards.

Eighth Army's withdrawal across the Dnieper had taken place in September 1943, in the centre at Cherkassy and on the right wing at Kremenchug, where Eighth Army units had been the last of Army Group South's troops to cross the river.<sup>144</sup> Some of them, however, were no more than remnants of divisions. One armoured division, for example, which had crossed the Dnieper at Kremenchug, was supposed to secure an 80-kilometre-wide section, but it had only four tanks left, and the superfluous tank crews were deployed as 'armoured infantry'.<sup>145</sup> On the opposite bank stood Steppe Front, with 463,500 men.<sup>146</sup> Meanwhile, the first Soviet advance troops were attempting to cross to the west bank. A bridgehead established to the south of Kremenchug at the beginning of October, on the northern wing of the neighbouring First Armoured Army, was looking dangerous. On 15 October Steppe Front launched an offensive at the interface of the two armies and pushed forward in depth towards Krivoy Rog. As described in the following section, the two German armies managed to close the gap at the beginning of November by means of a pincer attack. The same thing happened in December at Novgorodka, where Eighth Army and First Armoured Army again succeeded in stopping the Soviet advance and stabilizing the front through a combined attack.<sup>147</sup> In the meantime, however, a crisis had arisen in Eighth Army's centre. On 13 November the Soviet 52nd Army, attacking on the right wing of 2nd Ukrainian Front, had crossed the Dnieper at Cherkassy and established a bridgehead.<sup>148</sup> Soon afterwards 4th Guards Army, which was already on the west bank in the Kremenchug bridgehead, pushed north towards 52nd Army to unite the two bridgeheads.

<sup>142</sup> More than 200,000 Soviets troops are said to have been killed in September and October 1943 in the battles on the Dnieper at Bukrin. Such is the figure put forward by Korol ('The Price of Victory', 421) on the basis of Red Army documents.

<sup>143</sup> See above, section (a) 'Fourth Armoured Army in the Kiev Sector'.

<sup>144</sup> BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2073, 125. <sup>145</sup> Görlitz, *Der Zweite Weltkrieg*, 222.

<sup>146</sup> *Grif sekretnosti sniat*, 195–6. From 26 Sept. to 20 Dec. Steppe Front (= 2nd Ukrainian Front) lost 303,617 men, of whom 77,400 dead or missing.

<sup>147</sup> See below, section (c) 'First Armoured Army at Zaporozhye'.

<sup>148</sup> For a German perspective, see KTB 8. Armee, 13 Nov. 1943 (fos. 36 ff.), BA-MA RH 20-8/87.

The Cherkassy salient would again play an important role at the beginning of the next year, when it was the launch pad for the southern arm of the Soviet pincer attack in the Korsun–Cherkassy encirclement battle.

### (c) First Armoured Army at Zaporozhye

While Voronezh Front was fighting for the bridgehead at Kiev, three Soviet army fronts were engaged in an even more powerful offensive further to the south. This was the Lower Dnieper Offensive Operation (26 September to 20 December), in which 1,550,000 men, 1,160 tanks and self-propelled guns, 24,437 cannon and grenade launchers, and 2,000 combat aircraft were deployed.<sup>149</sup> How bitter the fighting was can be seen from the human losses, which totalled 754,392 men, of whom 173,201 dead or missing.<sup>150</sup> The material losses are even more striking: they totalled 2,639 tanks and assault guns, that is, more than twice as many as were available when the operation started at the beginning of October.<sup>151</sup> That figure not only shows the intensity of the fighting and the brutal mass deployment, but also testifies to the output achieved by the Soviet industrial giants. A huge number of additional fighting vehicles were delivered to the front in the course of the battle. What worried the Germans most was that the mass of those huge resources was concentrated against a single German army: First Armoured Army at Zaporozhye was attacked frontally from the east by the whole of South-West Front (from 20 October renamed 3rd Ukrainian Front), harried from the north by most of the units of Steppe Front (2nd Ukrainian Front), and attacked from the south in the Nikopol sector by several armies of South Front (4th Ukrainian Front).

### *The Zaporozhye Bridgehead*

In August 1943, because of the unfavourable course of the front, First Armoured Army found itself in the most dangerous position of all the major German formations. It had to defend the Dnieper salient at Zaporozhye, which protruded far to the east. Since the ‘untenable bulge’ tied down far too many forces, withdrawal to a shortened defensive line further to the west would have been preferable.<sup>152</sup> But Hitler overstretched First Armoured Army’s exposed front even further by having a bridgehead established on the east bank at Zaporozhye, at the apex of the Dnieper loop. The bridgehead, over 40 kilometres wide and up to 20 kilometres deep, was defended by units of XXXX Armoured Corps and XVII Army Corps, although First Armoured Army, with its five cobbled-together corps, was actually in no condition to defend such an endangered bridgehead. From 17 July to the end of September it suffered 48,000 casualties and received only 8,400 reinforcements.<sup>153</sup> Despite this, following

<sup>149</sup> *Geschichte des zweiten Weltkrieges 1939–1945*, vii. 316.

<sup>150</sup> *Grif sekretnosti sniat*, 195–6.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.* 371.

<sup>152</sup> Philippi and Heim, *Der Feldzug gegen Sowjetrussland*, 219, 224; Tippelskirch, *Geschichte des Zweiten Weltkrieges*, 340.

<sup>153</sup> KTB 1. Panzerarmee, 29 Sept. 1943 (fo. 130), BA-MA RH 21-1/112.

withdrawal to the Dnieper Line at the end of September it had to cover a 255-kilometre stretch of front. The combat strengths of its units had fallen dramatically, resulting in very asymmetric coverage. While there were 118 infantrymen per kilometre of front in the Zaporozhye bridgehead, the average density in the rest of the army's combat zone was only 56 per kilometre.<sup>154</sup>

From the operational point of view, the bridgehead did not seem too important. It served as 'flank protection' for the neighbouring Sixth Army (Army Group A), which had to defend the Wotan Line between the Dnieper and the Sea of Azov. But Hitler justified his decision mainly on war-economy grounds. Zaporozhye was the site of the Dnieper dam and the Lenin hydroelectric power station. Hitler argued that the electricity generated by the power station was indispensable for the West Ukrainian industrial area, although its importance had diminished considerably as a result of falling production. The dictator was also moved by considerations of prestige, since the gigantic dam was a showpiece of Soviet industrialization policy. Hitler's arguments met with great unease on the part of Field Marshal Manstein, however, since defending the dam deprived him of XXXX Armoured Corps, his one and only mobile reserve.<sup>155</sup>

It very soon became apparent how important the troops tied down east of the Dnieper would have been for the conduct of operations. In the case of First Armoured Army too, Hitler had given permission for withdrawal to the Panther Line much too late, and it was not until the evening of 29 September that the last German units were able to take up their new positions on the west bank. Once again, German underestimation of the Russian soldier backfired. The Red Army had striking weaknesses in free and combined-arms combat, but in overcoming terrain obstacles such as marshes or water courses the Soviet troops displayed an astonishing ability to improvise. On 25 September they had already managed to cross the Dnieper, in some places using fishing-boats and self-built rafts, and gain a foothold on the west bank.<sup>156</sup> Most of these bridgeheads were eliminated or contained, but on the northern wing of First Armoured Army, south-east of Kremenchug, 7th Guards Army and 37th Army established an operational bridgehead on both sides of the Vorskla estuary that could serve as a springboard for an offensive by Steppe Front.<sup>157</sup>

First Armoured Army HQ's main immediate concern, however, was an offensive against the Zaporozhye bridgehead launched by the left wing of South-West Front on 10 October, in which 3rd and 8th Guards Army, plus 12th Army, attacked at very close range with 150,500 men, supported by aircraft from 17th Air Army.<sup>158</sup> As Manstein stresses in his memoirs, this was the first appearance of massed artillery. The enemy laid down 'a barrage of shellfire bigger than anything we had seen to date'.<sup>159</sup> In contrast, First Armoured Army's war diary recorded its own

<sup>154</sup> Ibid., 27 Sept., fo. 121.

<sup>155</sup> Manstein, *Verlorene Siege*, 544–5.

<sup>156</sup> KTB 1. Panzerarmee, 25 Sept. 1943, fo. 113, BA-MA RH 21-1/112.

<sup>157</sup> Kobrin and Abaturov, 'Sokrushenie vostochnogo vala', 301–2.

<sup>158</sup> *Grif sekretnosti sniat*, 226. From 10 to 14 Oct. 1943 the Soviet side lost 17,708 men, of whom 3,443 dead or missing, in the Zaporozhye Offensive Operation.

<sup>159</sup> Manstein, *Verlorene Siege*, 547.

'chronic shortage of ammunition'.<sup>160</sup> The Soviet attackers broke through and entered Zaporozhye on 14 October. The following night the Germans evacuated the bridgehead after blowing up the bridges and the dam.<sup>161</sup> Field Marshal von Manstein later commented on this episode: 'In any case, we had been made to pay far too dearly for Hitler's insistence on holding the bridgehead.'<sup>162</sup> Once again the dictator had meddled in the business of the military experts, with the result that neither his utopian strategic aims nor the realistic tactical objectives of his generals were achieved. Since XVII Army Corps and XXXX Armoured Corps had senselessly been obliged to cover the untenable bridgehead east of the Dnieper, there were no sufficient forces available to eliminate the Soviet bridgeheads on the west bank of the river.

### *The Breakthrough in the Area of the Neighbouring Sixth Army*

Meanwhile, there were dangerous developments on First Armoured Army's right flank.<sup>163</sup> Sixth Army, which had been assigned to Army Group A since 17 September, was deployed there on the Wotan Line between the Dnieper bend south of Zaporozhye and the Sea of Azov. In that sector the Soviet South Front (4th Ukrainian Front) launched the Melitopol Offensive Operation (26 September to 5 November). Of the 555,300 men deployed in the first phase of the attack, a total of 198,749 were lost, of whom 42,760 dead or missing.<sup>164</sup> Sixth Army faced an assault by five Soviet armies, supported by 8th Air Army, and in the course of the battle the Soviet forces were joined by 3rd Guards Army and several independent units. Moreover, the Nogai Steppe, lacking trees and bushes, afforded no cover and hardly any natural obstacles. The German troops felt as if they were served up to the enemy fire on a platter. Even the much-mentioned Wotan Line was no more than a hastily dug anti-tank ditch and a few trenches. On that flat terrain South Front deployed 800 tanks, against which Sixth Army could pit only 65 battle tanks and 98 assault guns.<sup>165</sup>

The advance on Melitopol began on 9 October. It was characterized by the Red Army's typical obstinacy, with many attacks repeated as many as thirty times in the same place.<sup>166</sup> Since the Soviet side paid no regard to losses and clearly possessed sufficient reserves, the 'law of numbers' finally decided the outcome. After Melitopol fell on 23 October, the Soviet units were able to push forward in depth. At the beginning of November they reached the approaches to the Crimea at Perekop and cut off Germany's Seventeenth Army on the peninsula, splitting Army Group A in two.

<sup>160</sup> KTB 1. Panzerarmee, 11 Oct. 1943, fos. 47–8, BA-MA RH 21-1/113.

<sup>161</sup> BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2074, 277.

<sup>162</sup> Manstein, *Verlorene Siege*, 547.

<sup>163</sup> The operations of Army Group A are dealt with in a special chapter; see Chapter IV, 'The Withdrawal of Army Group A through the Crimea to Romania'. Since Sixth Army was temporarily assigned to Army Group South and its combat operations were closely interconnected with those of the neighbouring First Armoured Army, that subject is also discussed here.

<sup>164</sup> *Grif sekretnosti sniat*, 226.

<sup>165</sup> 'Abwehrschlachten der 6. Armee', 31, BA-MA RH 20-6/326.

<sup>166</sup> BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2073, 213.

Meanwhile another Soviet shock group had pushed forward south of the Dnieper as far as its estuary. The attempt to subject Sixth Army to a 'second Stalingrad' was nevertheless unsuccessful. Its units escaped the threatened enclosure on the north bank of Dnieper. The left wing, consisting of IV and XXIX Army Corps, remained largely intact and was able to form a stable bridgehead on the south bank at Nikopol. On 3 November both army corps were placed under the command of First Armoured Army and assigned to the defence of its newly formed right flank. Hitler was strongly fixated on the bridgehead and rejected all demands from his generals for its evacuation. He saw it as an advanced bastion protecting the Nikopol manganese district and hoped to use it as the springboard for a renewed push on Crimea to re-establish the connection with Seventeenth Army.<sup>167</sup> To the contrary, the commanders-in-chief of Army Groups A and South, Ewald von Kleist and Manstein, both demanded the withdrawal of all German troops from the Crimea. As already discussed, Field Marshal von Manstein had also demanded evacuation of the exposed Dnieper salient at Zaporozhye to release reserves for a counter-strike in the army group's northern sector.<sup>168</sup> In his view, pushes from the Soviet bridgeheads that had arisen there constituted the greater danger.

#### *The Soviet Advance on Krivoy Rog and the German Counter-Attack*

The situation was getting very critical on First Armoured Army's left wing to the south of Kremenchug. By the beginning of October the Soviet 7th Guards Army and 37th Army had crossed the Dnieper on both sides of the Vorskla estuary at Mishurin Rog, creating an operational bridgehead which Steppe Front (from 20 October '2nd Ukrainian Front') could use for a new offensive. First Armoured Army HQ reacted by attaching LVII Armoured Corps and LII Army Corps to the 'Kirchner Group' on its endangered left wing. This group nevertheless consisted only of remnants of individual infantry divisions and 23rd Armoured Division, which was why 6th and 9th Armoured Divisions, as well as Armoured Infantry Division 'Grossdeutschland', had been assigned to it until mid-October.<sup>169</sup> In the meantime, however, 57th Army and 5th Guards Army had been added to the forces in the expanded Soviet bridgehead. In addition, 5th Guards Armoured Army and other reserves, including an armoured corps and a mechanized corps, were stationed in readiness on the east bank of the Dnieper. Altogether, some 900 armoured fighting vehicles were available.<sup>170</sup>

On 15 October, Steppe Front, with support from 5th Air Army, opened an offensive to break out of the bridgehead. The attack, aimed at the interface of First Armoured Army and Eighth Army, drove a wedge between the two German armies. In the second wave, the Soviet armoured units pushed forward as far as 12 kilometres and reached Krivoy Rog on 24 October. That day LVII Armoured

<sup>167</sup> BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2074, 289–91.

<sup>168</sup> See above, section (a) 'Fourth Armoured Army in the Kiev Sector'.

<sup>169</sup> BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2075, Tables IX, X, and XXV (439–40, 458).

<sup>170</sup> Manstein, *Verlorene Siege*, 549.

Corps reported that there was no longer any chance of halting the advance of the superior enemy forces:

The troops are now so exhausted that they cannot cope with a powerful Russian attack. Should they be subjected to one, a breakthrough must definitely be expected. The only possibility of preventing it is to withdraw 3 to 5 km a day when strong preparations have been detected. That distance, by and large, makes little difference to the army's operations, but it forces the enemy each time to bring his artillery up again, change his force deployment, and conduct time-consuming reconnaissance.<sup>171</sup>

In response, the commander-in-chief of First Armoured Army reported to Army Group HQ that same day: 'The mass of the troops, who have been confronting the enemy in heavy fighting since July without a break, have reached the end of their physical and mental endurance [...] They will again be capable of defence only if they are released from the battlefield for at least a short period of rehabilitation. As things stand, they are worn to shreds.'<sup>172</sup> On 25 October, to make the inevitable catastrophe complete, 3rd Ukrainian Front (formerly South-West Front) also opened an offensive. It attacked from its bridgeheads on either side of Dnepropetrovsk and joined them up with those of 2nd Ukrainian Front to form a 'strategic' bridgehead.

The situation had become so threatening that Hitler waived his usual static defence concept (establishment of a holding line and defence to the last extremity). The gap in the front between First Armoured Army and Eighth Army had widened so much that it could no longer be closed with the forces available. The generals were thus faced with the task of closing the breach at Krivoy Rog by means of 'free combat' attacks. That was to be accomplished through a pincer attack by two German armoured corps in the flanks and rear of the Soviet armoured units which had broken through. The right pincer arm consisted of LVII Armoured Corps, already stationed on First Armoured Army's northern wing, but Eighth Army, standing opposite, was in no condition to provide armoured units for the left-hand pincer arm. Consequently, XXXX Armoured Corps HQ was moved in a sweeping 'castling manoeuvre' from the right wing of Army Group South at Zaporozhye straight through the hinterland of First Armoured Army to the right wing of Eighth Army. SS Armoured Infantry Division 'Totenkopf', 24th Armoured Division (brought up from Italy), and 14th Armoured Division (rushed in from the west) were also moved to that position. On 28 October XXXX Armoured Corps began its attack in a south-easterly direction towards Krivoy Rog. Taking advantage of the element of surprise, the three mechanized divisions thrust into the rear of 5th Guards Army. Two days later LVII Armoured Corps, with 11th and 23th Armoured Divisions, attacked in the opposite direction from the reconquered city of Krivoy Rog. The two pincer arms met on the Ingulets river, cutting off the Soviet armoured units which had forged ahead.<sup>173</sup> By 2 November the gap between the two German armies had been closed. In addition to numerous prisoners, the

<sup>171</sup> KTB 1. Panzerarmee, 24 Oct. 1943, fo. 118., BA-MA RH 21-1/113.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid., fo. 120.

<sup>173</sup> BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2074, 282-3, 287 ff.; Study ZA 1/2075, 170-6.

combined attack yielded booty of 350 tanks, 95 cannon, and 263 anti-tank and anti-aircraft guns.<sup>174</sup>

On 4 November the leadership of First Armoured Army changed. Col.-Gen. Eberhard von Mackensen handed over command to Gen. Hans Hube. In the weeks before Christmas the fighting in the army's sector ebbed and flowed. The Soviet side seemed wholly unimpressed by the defeat at Krivoy Rog and the losses it had suffered there. It rapidly resumed its attacks at the interface of First Armoured Army and Eighth Army and on 5 December achieved a breakthrough at Novaya Praga. The units of 2nd Ukrainian Front pushed further west and took Novgorodka on 10 December. There followed a repeat of the German pincer attack which had succeeded at Krivoy Rog in November. On this occasion the right pincer arm consisted of First Armoured Army's 13th and 17th Armoured Divisions, while the left was formed by Eighth Army's 11th and 14th Armoured Divisions. The enemy was beaten again, and Novgorodka was retaken on 21 December. The gap between the two armies was closed by 2nd Paratroop Division, which had been rapidly brought in.<sup>175</sup> This time the Soviet attackers lost 274 tanks and assault guns, and 306 cannon.<sup>176</sup> Meanwhile, several armies of 4th Ukrainian Front attacked the German bridgehead at Nikopol from the south, but failed to achieve a breakthrough. The situation in the Dnieper salient was getting more and more critical, however, as 3rd Ukrainian Front not only enlarged its bridgehead north of Zaporozhye but also managed to form another bridgehead on the west bank. Despite this, Hitler refused to listen to all his generals' requests that the Dnieper salient be evacuated in order to free units for the constitution of a reserve. Instead, he persisted with the illusory plan to use Nikopol as the starting point for reconquest of the approach to the Crimea. As a result, First Armoured Army's overstretched front extended far to the east in the shape of a wedge, with Zaporozhye as its exposed tip. To hold such an unfavourable front line against a far superior attacking force must have seemed a hopeless proposition.

## 5. THE START OF THE SOVIET DNIEPER–CARPATHIAN OFFENSIVE AT THE TURN OF 1943/4

By 23 December the Red Army had lost 1,687,164 men in the Battle of the Dnieper, of whom 417,323 dead or missing.<sup>177</sup> Yet its human and material reserves seemed inexhaustible. The state of Army Group South's units, however, can be judged from a report by Col. Oldwig von Natzmer, a general staff officer from Armoured Infantry

<sup>174</sup> KTB Op.Abt. OKH, 2 Jan. 1943, BA-MA RH 2/3062; Manstein, *Verlorene Siege*, 550.

<sup>175</sup> BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2074, 317–20; 'Gefechtsbericht des LII. AK über die Abwehrschlacht im Raume Nowaja Praga–Werbljushka–Nowgorodka vom 5.12. bis 21.12.1943', fos. 145–50), BA-MA RH 21-1/120.

<sup>176</sup> 'Gefechtsbericht des LII. AK', 11, fo. 150.

<sup>177</sup> Kobrin and Abaturov, 'Sokrushenie vostochnogo vala', 323.

Division 'Grossdeutschland', which was one of the Wehrmacht's elite units. In December 1943 Natzmer described the condition of those troops as follows:

In all sections, up to and including the regimental staffs, an unsurpassable degree of exhaustion has been reached [...] The result of these incessant battles is that most of the officers and almost all the NCOs are out of action [...] Almost all the men are in such a state of apathy that it is all the same to them whether they are shot by their own officers or by the Russians [...] I have no idea how we are supposed to hold our present or any other positions against the further attacks to be expected [...] Actual trench strengths are so low that, in most cases, a man in his hole cannot see his neighbour [...] This morning our strongest battalion, 1st Infantry Rgt., deployed in the trench: 4 NCOs and 17 men from miscellaneous branches (emergency supply units, and the like), 2 NCOs and 18 men from the recon. btl., and the division's sapper btl., with a strength of 2 NCOs and 22 men. The whole bunch is called 1st Infantry Rgt. G.D. [= Grossdeutschland] and has to hold a position 2.3 km long with its 8 NCOs and 57 men. Enough said.<sup>178</sup>

As a result of the lack of replacement personnel, Army Group South had only 328,397 men available at the end of December 1943, plus 109,816 men serving in Allied and foreign units.<sup>179</sup> Although Manstein's army group numbered as many as 14 armoured divisions, it had only 199 operational battle tanks ready for action.<sup>180</sup> On 20 January Air Fleet 4 had a total strength of 625 aircraft (see Table IV.iii.2), but those planes had to support both Army Group South and Army Group A.<sup>181</sup> According to an assessment by a German general, the enemy appeared 'to have grown bolder, since his massed attacks against thin German lines lacking ammunition were almost without risk. Even if the Russian infantry increased its numbers with people rounded up in the reconquered territories and put straight into uniform, the decisive factor was that their mass finally overwhelmed the German defenders.'<sup>182</sup>

The new course of the front was also very unfavourable to Army Group South. Almost everywhere the German defenders had been forced back westwards from the Dnieper. Only in the centre, at Kanev, was there a salient reaching as far as the river, where the German forces had managed to hold a 40-kilometre stretch of riverbank. On the southern wing, however, the lower reaches of the Dnieper were still in German hands. There, in the Dnieper salient at Zaporozhye protruding far to the east, units of First Armoured Army were deployed in an exposed position. The situation on the northern wing at Korosten had become even more critical. Along the Pripet river there was a yawning 100-kilometre gap from Army Group Centre that could not be closed. It gave rise to what was, from the operational viewpoint, a remarkable asymmetry in the distribution of forces. Field Marshal von Manstein did not see why he should have to contend with an enormous hole, while

<sup>178</sup> Communication of 1 Dec. 1943 from Gen. Staff Col. Natzmer to Laegeler, BA-MA RH 21-1/120, fos. 20-6; BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2075, 193-4.

<sup>179</sup> KTB OKW, iii/6, 484.

<sup>180</sup> Müller-Hillebrand, *Das Heer*, iii. 135. This figure applies to 20 Nov. 1943.

<sup>181</sup> Operational status reports for 20 Jan. 1944, BA-MA RL 2-III/728, calculated by Ulf Balke in the light of additional documents from his private archive.

<sup>182</sup> BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2074, 326. The analysis is based on a statement by Gen. (ret.) Theodor Busse, former chief of staff of Army Group South (see *ibid.*)

units he needed urgently were deployed on the southern wing in defence of a salient that was in any case untenable. But Hitler repeatedly refused evacuation of the Dnieper salient or the Crimea. For the sake of unrealistic strategic objectives, he placed the point of concentration in the south, whereas Manstein was demanding that the point of concentration of his Army Group be shifted to the endangered northern wing. The commander-in-chief of Army Group South was convinced ‘another heavy storm was brewing’, and the operation that began on 24 December proved him right.

That day Army Group South was subjected to one of the most powerful offensives of the war. Four Soviet army groups—1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 4th Ukrainian Fronts—were ranged against it. Not counting the troops deployed against the Crimea, the four army fronts started the offensive with 2,230,000 men, 28,654 cannon and grenade launchers,<sup>183</sup> 2,015 tanks and assault guns, and 2,600 combat aircraft.<sup>184</sup> In the course of the operation the following units were brought in and added to the forces deployed: 2nd Belorussian Front HQ; the operations staffs of 47th, 61st, and 70th Armies, and of 2nd, 4th, and 6th Armoured Armies; six armoured corps, two mechanized corps, and 33 divisions, as well as 6th Air Army.<sup>185</sup> The enormous scale of the reinforcements is shown by the fact that while 2,015 fighting vehicles were available at the start of the offensive, the number lost in the course of the operation was 4,666.<sup>186</sup> In this phase of the war the Red Army’s point of concentration lay unambiguously in the sector of Army Group South, against which all six armoured armies were temporarily deployed. Also important was the deployment of some 50,000 partisans, who caused great damage in the hinterland and tied down large numbers of German troops.<sup>187</sup> The ensuing offensive to liberate the Western Ukraine was designated ‘Dnieper–Carpathian Strategic Offensive Operation’.<sup>188</sup> It began on 24 December 1943 and lasted, depending on how the end point is defined, until 17 April or 6 May.<sup>189</sup>

### (a) Fourth Armoured Army’s Withdrawal and First Armoured Army’s Counter-Attack

The first action, known as the Zhitomir–Berdichev Offensive Operation (24 December 1943 to 14 January 1944), was carried out by 1st Ukrainian Front under General Vatutin. Seven general armies and two armoured armies attacked the northern wing of Army Group South, which was defended by Fourth Armoured Army. A total of 831,000 troops were committed from the outset, and within three weeks personnel

<sup>183</sup> Excluding anti-aircraft guns, 50-mm grenade launchers, and Guards grenade launcher units.

<sup>184</sup> *Geschichte des zweiten Weltkrieges 1939–1945*, viii. 84.

<sup>185</sup> *Grif sekretnosti sniat*, 197.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid. 371.

<sup>187</sup> Eliseyev and Mikhalev, ‘Osvobozhdenie’, 51.

<sup>188</sup> Also designated ‘Dnieper Right-Bank Operation’.

<sup>189</sup> According to the latest edition of the standard work *Velikaya Otechestvennaya Voina*, ‘The date given in Soviet historiography for the end of the strategic operation (17 April) is wrong, since on that day, on orders from the Stavka, only 1st Ukrainian Front went over to the defensive. That dating avoids investigation of the unsuccessful combat operations of two army fronts which were supposed to achieve their previously assigned tasks within 19 days (after which they too went over to the defensive).’ See Eliseyev and Mikhalev, ‘Osvobozhdenie’, 33.

losses amounted to 100,018 men, of whom 23,163 dead or missing.<sup>190</sup> The attacking forces had at their disposal 1,125 tanks and self-propelled guns, 11,387 artillery cannon and grenade launchers, and 529 combat aircraft.<sup>191</sup> Soviet superiority was so great that the German defenders were scarcely able to pit anything against it.<sup>192</sup> In a short time the attacking wedges of 1st Ukrainian Front were pushing towards Korosten, Zhitomir, and Berdichev, splitting the Germany Fourth Armoured Army front into several parts that fought a difficult retreat westwards. By the end of December the Soviet advance troops had gained almost 100 kilometres in some places.

In this critical situation Field Marshal von Manstein conceived a plan which was tantamount to a repeat of his famous 'castling manoeuvre' in the spring of 1943. On that occasion, faced with the entirely inevitable collapse of the front, he had switched Fourth Armoured Army from the left to the right wing of his army group and inflicted a heavy defeat on the advancing Soviet armies by means of a flanking attack. Manstein had obtained the forces for that counter-offensive by shortening the front on the right wing, despite Hitler's opposition.<sup>193</sup> However, the dictator had since become even more stubborn in his insistence on static defence and was now spellbound by the Nikopol bridgehead and its supposedly indispensable ore deposits. Commenting on this fixation of Hitler's, Lt.-Gen. Max Bork, then chief of staff of Sixth Army, later remarked: 'Neither the commanders nor the troops took Hitler's constantly repeated "Nikopol" argument seriously, since the extraction of manganese ore had already stopped in the winter of 1943/4 and the stocks at the mine could not be moved owing to the transport situation in the Romanian region, which had been difficult since the beginning of hostilities in the sector and was by then beyond repair.'<sup>194</sup> In Hitler's imagination, moreover, Nikopol was the springboard for re-establishing the connection with the Crimea.<sup>195</sup> He rejected Manstein's demand to abandon terrain so as to free up troops for 'operations'. Hitler reacted allergically to the term 'operation', calling it a 'pompous expression'.<sup>196</sup> 'Operating and ripping out are the same thing,' he declared.<sup>197</sup> In any case, Manstein was no longer aiming at a repeat of his brilliant victory at Kharkov in the spring of 1943. Rather, he wanted to move the point of concentration from the right to the left wing of his army group in order to remedy the situation by means of offensive defence, that is, counter-blows in the open flanks of the Soviet attacking forces. Col.-Gen. Zeitzler also had no illusions about the Russian offensive: 'If we can manage to halt this onslaught by the enemy, we can count it a victory. But defeating him is out of the question.'<sup>198</sup>

<sup>190</sup> *Grif sekretnosti sniat*, 227.

<sup>191</sup> Grylev, *Dnepr*, 40–1.

<sup>192</sup> KTB 4. Panzerarmee, 24 Dec. 1943, fos. 117 ff., BA-MA RH 21-4/132.

<sup>193</sup> Manstein, *Verlorene Siege*, 567; on this, see Klein and Frieser, 'Mansteins Gegenschlag', 14.

<sup>194</sup> Quoted in BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2076, 343, app. 152.

<sup>195</sup> Philippi and Heim, *Der Feldzug gegen Sowjetrußland*, 230–1.

<sup>196</sup> Hitlers *Lagebesprechungen*, 489 (28 Dec. 1943).

<sup>197</sup> Philippi and Heim, *Der Feldzug gegen Sowjetrußland*, 231.

<sup>198</sup> Hitlers *Lagebesprechungen*, 478 (27 Dec. 1943).

**Table IV.III.2.** Breakdown of Air Fleet 4 at 20 January 1944 (for deployment with Army Groups South and A)

Category	Unit	Aircraft type	Target strength	Actual strength	Operational
Tactical reconnaissance	Stab/N.A.Gr. 1	Bf 110/Fw 189	—	4	4
	1./N.A.Gr. 2	Bf 109 G	16	9	6
	2.(H)/16	Fw 189	9	4	2
	5.(H)/41	Fw 189	9	8	7
	Stab/N.A.Gr. 2	Bf 109 G	4	2	1
	2./N.A.Gr. 2	Bf 109 G	16	5	3
	Stab/N.A.Gr. 6	—	—	—	—
	2.(H)/31	Fw 189	9	7	5
	2.(H)/31	Hs 126	—	2	1
	7.(H)/32	Fw 189	9	6	3
	Stab/N.A.Gr. 9	Bf 109	—	9	6
	5.(H)/11	Fw 189	9	4	1
	1.(H)/21	Fw 189	9	9	3
			<b>90</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>42</b>
Strategic reconnaissance	2.(F)/11	Ju 88	12	3	2
	2.(F)/22	Ju 88	12	9	5
	3.(F)/121	Ju 88	12	12	7
	4.(F)/122	Ju 88	12	6	4
	Küsta Krim	Bf 110/He 111	12	8	4
	1.(F)/Nacht	Do 217	12	5	4
	1.(F)/Nacht	He 111	—	4	4
			<b>72</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>30</b>
Fighters	IV./J.G. 51	Bf 109 G	40	26	21
	Stab/J.G. 52	Bf 109 G	4	1	1
	I./J.G. 52	Bf 109 G	40	30	16
	II./J.G. 52	Bf 109 G	40	37	20
	III./J.G. 52	Bf 109 G	40	29	27
	Croat. 15./J.G. 52	Bf 109 G	16	8	2
	II./J.G. 54	Fw 190	28	16	14
	12./J.G. 54	Fw 190	12	8	5
			<b>220</b>	<b>155</b>	<b>106</b>
	Night fighters	5./N.J.G. 200	Bf 110 F/G	12	12
				<b>12</b>	<b>6</b>
Ground-attack aircraft	Stab/S.G. 2	Ju 87 D	3	2	2
	I./S.G. 2	Ju 87 D	39	31	28
	II./S.G. 2	Fw 190	30	18	14
	4./S.G. 2	Hs 123	12	8	7
	III./S.G. 2	Ju 87 D	39	16	11
	IV./S.G. 3	Ju 87 D	39	43	37
	Stab IV./S.G. 9	Hs 129	6	5	5
	10.(Pz.)/S.G. 9	Hs 129	16	6	3
	12.(Pz.)/S.G. 9	Hs 129	16	9	8
	13.(Pz.)/S.G. 9	Hs 129	16	8	8
	14.(Pz.)/S.G. 9	Hs 129	16	7	7
	Stab/S.G. 10	Fw 190	6	2	1
	I./S.G. 10	Fw 190	42	22	14
	II./S.G. 10	Fw 190	42	22	15

(continued)

Table IV.III.2. Continued

Category	Unit	Aircraft type	Target strength	Actual strength	Operational
	Stab/S.G. 77	Ju 87 D	3	5	5
	I./S.G. 77	Ju 87 D	42	39	34
	II./S.G. 77	Fw 190	42	21	15
	III./S.G. 77	Ju 87 D	42	39	35
	10. (Pz)/S.G. 2	Ju 87 G	12	5	4
			463	308	253
Night ground-attack aircraft	Stab/N.S.Gr. 4	W 34/Fw 58	2	2	2
	1./N.S.Gr. 4	Go 145	20	16	10
	2./N.S.Gr. 4	Ar 66	20	9	5
	Stab/N.S.Gr. 5	Fw 58	2	2	2
	1./N.S.Gr. 5	Ar 66	20	15	13
	2./N.S.Gr. 5	Ar 66	20	18	14
	Stab/N.S.Gr. 6	Fw 58	2	1	1
	1./N.S.Gr. 6	Go 145	20	16	14
	2./N.S.Gr. 6	Go 145	20	14	11
			126	93	72
Bombers	I./K.G. 4	He 111 H	37	31	26
	Stab/K.G. 27	He 111 H	4	1	—
	I./K.G. 27	He 111 H	37	36	25
	II./K.G. 27	He 111 H	37	24	11
	III./K.G. 27	He 111 H	37	18	15
	14. (Eis.)/K.G. 27	He 111 H	12	14	9
	II./K.G. 51	Ju 88 A 4	37	10	7
	II./K.G. 53	He 111 H	37	19	16
	9. (Eis.)/K.G. 55	He 111 H	11	12	7
			249	165	116
20 Jan. 1944	Air Fleet 4		1232	849	625
	Total strength				
Air Fleet 4 also had at its disposal:					
1 weather recon. squadron		He 111/Bf 110	12	20	11
4 transport groups		Ju 52	218	147	129
2 corps transport squadrons		Ju 52	30	25	21
11 liaison squadrons		Fi 156/W 34	102	106	86
3 air-sea rescue squadrons		Bv 138/Ar 196	31	24	17
	Other units		393	322	264
<b>Allies:</b>					
Romania		misc.	108	109	79
Hungary		misc.	48	23	13
	Allies		156	132	92

Source: Operational status reports, 20 Jan. 1944, BA-MA, RL 2-III/728, and documents from the Ulf Balke collection.

As Hitler would only accept some marginal adjustments to the front at Zaporozhye, Manstein decided to execute a castling manoeuvre on his own authority. He ordered First Armoured Army to pull back from the front and move to the north between Fourth Armoured Army and Eighth Army. In so doing, he took advantage of the fact that, as from 1 January 1944, Sixth Army was going to be transferred from Army Group A to Army Group South and take over First Armoured Army's combat zone in addition to its own. First Armoured Army left a few infantry divisions in the old positions, while its HQ and two armoured divisions, an armoured infantry division, and an infantry division, were moved to what had been the right wing of Fourth Armoured Army, and the units already positioned there were placed under its command. Hitler was informed of this after the event, but nevertheless approved Manstein's action because it did not involve any relinquishment of the Dnieper salient.

That, however, was precisely what the field marshal wanted to achieve in order to gain more divisions for the northern wing, where the two Soviet shock groups had made dangerous breaches in the front through which armoured units were advancing in depth. Moreover, an offensive by 2nd Ukrainian Front against Kirovograd was imminent. On 4 January Manstein flew to Führer headquarters with the firm intention of getting Hitler to give up Nikopol and thus the Crimea too. Withdrawal from the Dnieper bend alone would shorten the front for Sixth and Eighth Armies by 900 kilometres to about half its length. Bringing Seventeenth Army from the Crimea to the mainland would mean that Manstein could at last form a new point of concentration on his army group's northern wing, where a new army could be assembled in the Rovno area to meet the threat of wide-ranging envelopment by the enemy. He adjured Hitler that if the position was not stabilized once and for all, the entire southern wing of the eastern front would be 'in mortal danger', and Army Groups A and South would ultimately meet their end in Romania or on the Black Sea. But the attempt to get Hitler to change his mind was, in Manstein's view, 'quite futile'.<sup>199</sup>

The dilemma was that two huge gaps had been opened up on Army Group South's northern wing, with the inevitable result that Fourth Armoured Army would be cut off. On one side, a 100-kilometre breach had arisen between Army Groups Centre and South along the Pripet marshes, through which Soviet units were advancing past the northern wing of Fourth Armoured Army towards Sarny. On the other, there was a breach 75 kilometres wide on Fourth Armoured Army's southern wing. Since Hitler refused evacuation of the Dnieper bend, Manstein could at best plug one of the gaps with the forces available. He therefore decided to accept the risk of an open northern flank for the time being, even if that meant a far-flung outflanking movement round Fourth Armoured Army's northern wing. The field marshal calculated that a continuation of the enemy's advance on the army group's northern flank would not constitute a 'direct threat to our existence' until later on.<sup>200</sup> The immediate danger, as he saw it, was the gap on Fourth

<sup>199</sup> Manstein, *Verlorene Siege*, 569–72.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid. 576.

Armoured Army's southern wing, since from there the enemy could enclose the German units positioned further east in the salient on the Dnieper to the west of Cherkassy. The Red Army would then be able to carry out an encirclement operation in the direction of the Black Sea coast, which, if successful, would mean the end of Army Groups South and A. For that reason, as already discussed, Manstein ordered First Armoured Army, with its strongest units, to move into position between Fourth Armoured Army and Eighth Army to the south. Nevertheless, it seemed hardly possible, at first, to stem the advance of the Soviet forces streaming through the gap, which were mainly units of 1st Armoured Army, with some 600 tanks,<sup>201</sup> and 38th and 40th Armies.<sup>202</sup> On 9 January a Soviet wedge pushed forward to within 20 kilometres of Uman, which was First Armoured Army's new supply base, and a second wedge could not be stopped until just before Zvenigorodka. The most dangerous advance, however, threatened Vinnitsa, where Army Group South HQ had been located until a few days previously. Soviet tanks crossed the Bug to the south of the city on 10 January and pushed forward to Zhmerinka.

Army Group South proceeded on the assumption that the 'Uman gap' could not be closed by forming a static front in accordance with Hitler's views. Soviet superiority seemed too great. Above all, the onward-rolling masses of the enemy forces could no longer be stopped by frontal opposition. The only chance was to 'stake everything on one card' and 'resort to offensive defence'.<sup>203</sup> The counter-strike was to be directed mainly at the flanks and rear of the enemy's advanced wedges. Manstein assembled three shock groups, which were to attack concentrically from three directions: from the east VII Army Corps, from the south III Armoured Corps, and from the west XXXXVI Armoured Corps, which had been brought in from France.<sup>204</sup> Operational command was assigned to First Armoured Army.<sup>205</sup> In the first phase of the counter-attack large parts of the Soviet 40th Army were smashed in the east of the gap. On 15 January the Soviet units which had advanced on Zvenigorodka and Uman were cut off from their connections in the rear.<sup>206</sup> However, there was not enough infantry available to exploit the victory to the full, and the encircled units had numerical superiority. An entry in the war diary reads: 'In the combat area of 17th Armd.Div., it is not quite clear at present "who is encircling whom".'<sup>207</sup> Only after more troops were brought in could possession finally be taken of the area, and some of the encircled units had meanwhile fled in disarray. In the second phase of the counter-attack, several units of the Soviet 38th Army and First Armoured Army were destroyed in the west of the gap. The pincer attack by III and XXXXVI Armoured Corps began on 24 January, and the spearheads of the two corps joined up at Oratove four days later.<sup>208</sup> An important

<sup>201</sup> Katukov, *An der Spitze*, 248 ff.

<sup>202</sup> Moskalenko, *In der Südwestrichtung*, ii. 228 ff.

<sup>203</sup> KTB 4. Panzerarmee, 11 Jan. 1944, fo. 67, BA-MA RH 21-4/181.

<sup>204</sup> Manstein, *Verlorene Siege*, 577.

<sup>205</sup> BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2074, 377-8.

<sup>206</sup> KTB 4. Panzerarmee, 15 Jan. 1944, fos. 47-8, BA-MA RH 21-4/181.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid., 16 Jan. 1944, fo. 51.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid., 28 Jan. 1944, fo. 92-3. See also KTB III. Panzerkorps, 28 Jan. 1944, BA-MA RH 21-1/122.

role in this attack was played by Heavy Armoured Regiment Bäke, consisting of one Tiger and one Panther battalion, which had only been formed in mid-January and had already knocked out 268 Soviet tanks and assault guns within a week.<sup>209</sup> Large parts of seven out of eight Soviet divisions were encircled, but this time too several units managed to escape, leaving their material behind.<sup>210</sup> According to German sources, around 700 enemy tanks and 680 cannon were captured or destroyed during the second phase of the attack alone.<sup>211</sup> Given the threatening operational situation overall, it would nevertheless be wrong to describe this as a German victory. It was simply an offensively conducted defensive success which prevented or at least delayed a major disaster.

### (b) Eighth Army at Kirovograd

As Manstein feared, it was the centre of his army group that was most strongly threatened. There the front stretched far to the east and ran further along the Dnieper to the north of Cherkassy. It had been possible to hold onto a 40-kilometre-wide stretch of riverbank near Kanev, where the German front line formed, in Manstein's words, 'a sort of sack, of which the top was hitched to the Dnieper in the north' and the two sides constituted exposed flanks facing east and west respectively. If the enemy mounted a successful pincer attack, it would be only too easy for him 'to isolate this "sack" in the south'.<sup>212</sup> The commander-in-chief of Army Group South therefore insisted that it was necessary to give up the exposed salient, especially as forces were tied down there to no purpose. Hitler, however, categorically rejected voluntary evacuation. He persisted in hoping that this bulge in the front could one day be used as the starting point for reconquering the eastern part of the Dnieper bend. So the 'sack' remained, later to become the Cherkassy–Korsun encirclement.

At the beginning of January the Red Army already attempted to enclose the German units in the bulge through a pincer manoeuvre by 1st and 2nd Ukrainian Fronts.<sup>213</sup> The thrust by Vatutin's 1st Ukrainian Front, which failed to achieve an operational breakthrough because of the German counter-attack, has already been described above. Ivan Stepanovich Konev's 2nd Ukrainian Front was even less successful at Kirovograd. It had huge armoured forces at its disposal and had been further reinforced by two mechanized corps. In addition, 2nd Ukrainian Front received approximately 400 more tanks and self-propelled guns at the end of December.<sup>214</sup> The attack began on 5 January, with the point of concentration

<sup>209</sup> Schadewitz, 'Einsätze des schweren Panzerregiments Bäke', BA-MA MSg 2/4396, 7; Rubbel, *Tiger-Abteilung 503*, 196; Jahnke, *Der Kessel von Tscherkassy*, 76.

<sup>210</sup> KTB 1. Panzerarmee, 30 Jan. 1944, fo. 99, BA-MA RH 21-1/122; see also BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2074, 379; Lehmann, *Die Leibstandarte*, iv/I. 17–26.

<sup>211</sup> Pz.AOK I to III. Pz.Korps, 30 Jan. 1944 (fo. 225), BA-MA RH 24-3/110; Manstein, *Verlorene Siege*, 577; Hinze, *Rückzugskämpfe*, 214.

<sup>212</sup> Manstein, *Verlorene Siege*, 576. <sup>213</sup> Eliseyev and Mikhalev, 'Osvobozhdenie', 34.

<sup>214</sup> Grylev, *Dnepr*, 48.

directed at Eighth Army's right wing.<sup>215</sup> By 8 January Kirovograd had already been taken, but the main aim of encircling the defenders was not achieved. Instead, the German forces were able to pull back and establish a new defence line.<sup>216</sup> In this critical situation a German counter-attack spearheaded by Armoured Infantry Division 'Grossdeutschland' was decisive. According to a more recent Russian account, the Kirovograd operation was 'too hastily prepared'. Once again it was 5th Guards Armoured Army, thrown into action on the first day, which paid the price. Although a tactical breakthrough was achieved right away against the weak German defence, Pavel Alekseyevich Rotmistrov's units lost almost half their combat strength.<sup>217</sup> On the German side, the battle of Kirovograd was accounted a 'great success', given the enemy's overwhelming superiority.<sup>218</sup> The use of that expression shows how modest the operational objectives had since become. All the same, the enemy had lost 623 tanks and assault guns according to German sources, and had failed to achieve an operational breakthrough.<sup>219</sup> On 16 January, after several further unsuccessful attacks on the 'flexibly fighting'<sup>220</sup> Eighth Army, 2nd Ukrainian Front went over to the defensive.

## 6. THE BREAKOUT FROM THE CHERKASSY–KORSUN POCKET (24 JANUARY TO 17 FEBRUARY 1944)

### (a) The Encirclement (24 to 31 January)

'Defending in Russia means losing.'<sup>221</sup> This aphorism, coined by Lt.-Gen. Nikolaus von Vormann, who commanded XXXXVII Armoured Corps in the battle of Cherkassy–Korsun,<sup>222</sup> aptly sums up Hitler's failed strategy of 'holding on'. Yet, paradoxically, some decisions to defend certain sectors of the front to the last extremity sprang less from rigid defensive thinking than from reckless offensive strategy. At the beginning of 1944 Hitler was fixated on the Kanev salient northwest of Cherkassy, which was the only sector in which the German front still extended to the Dnieper. He planned to use it in the spring as the launch pad for an offensive in the direction of Kiev which would throw the Red Army back over the

<sup>215</sup> KTB 8. Armee, 5 Jan. 1944, BA-MA RH 20-8/124; Vormann, *Tscherkassy*, 29 ff.; Konev, *Aufzeichnungen eines Frontoberbefehlshabers*, 86 ff.; BA-MA, Study ZA 1/1220, 156 ff.

<sup>216</sup> BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2074, 371–3, 380–1.

<sup>217</sup> Eliseyev and Mikhalev, 'Osvobozhdenie', 34.

<sup>218</sup> 'Die Abwehrschlacht im Raum von Kirowograd vom 5.1. bis 17.1.1944', 12, BA-MA RH 20-8/153.

<sup>219</sup> A total of 93 of the Soviet fighting vehicles destroyed were knocked out by the Luftwaffe; *ibid.* fo. 14 (= appendix).

<sup>220</sup> BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2074, 388.

<sup>221</sup> Vormann, *Tscherkassy*, 62.

<sup>222</sup> The German designation 'Kesselschlacht von Tscherkassy' ('Cherkassy Encirclement Battle') is geographically incorrect, since the town of Cherkassy was outside the encirclement and was not involved in the fighting. Soviet literature speaks of the battle of Korsun or Korsun Shevchenkovsky, a town which lay at the centre of the encirclement. The event is also referred to as the 'Cherkassy–Korsun Encirclement Battle', and this last term has been adopted in the following discussion as a compromise between the two designations.

Dnieper. Army Group South HQ tried in vain to dissuade him from his ‘entirely unrealistic’ intention.<sup>223</sup> The trapeze-shaped salient was 140 kilometres wide at the base, tapering at Kanev to a width of 70 kilometres, and about 90 kilometres long. The western half was held by XXXXII Army Corps (First Armoured Army) and the eastern half by XI Army Corps (Eighth Army).

At the beginning of January the Red Army had already attempted to cut off the salient by means of a broad pincer movement. The plan had been for the two wedges to push forward in depth to the Bug. As already discussed, First Armoured Army managed to stop the thrust by 1st Ukrainian Front at Uman and in turn enclose the Soviet pincer forces. The attack by 2nd Ukrainian Front, aimed at Pervomaysk on the Bug, was even less successful, resulting only in the capture of Kirovograd. But although Eighth Army had managed to hold its positions, it was now facing a major threat on its flanks. ‘The last moment’ had come when the exposed troops could be ‘saved from inevitable disaster by swift withdrawal to the south-west’.<sup>224</sup> Despite all the warnings, however, Hitler stuck by his intention to defend the salient.

After the ambitious attempt at wide-ranging encirclement had led to nothing, Red Army high command decided on a simpler approach. The new plan was to cut the Kanev salient off directly at the base. To that end, strong armoured forces were to push forward by the shortest route from the west and east and join up at Zvenigorodka. The western pincer arm was formed by 1st Ukrainian Front, where General Vatutin concentrated 27th and 40th Armies, plus 6th Armoured Army as the spearhead, supported by 2nd Air Army. The attack from the east was to be conducted by 2nd Ukrainian Front under General Konev, which had 5th Guards Armoured Army, 52nd and 53rd Armies, 4th Guards Army, and the air units of 5th Air Army at the ready. In the initial phase of the offensive the two army fronts already deployed a total of 336,700 men,<sup>225</sup> 524 tanks and assault guns,<sup>226</sup> 5,300 cannon and grenade launchers,<sup>227</sup> and 1,054 combat aircraft.<sup>228</sup> During the three-and-a-half weeks of the operation, numerous reinforcements were brought in. For its part, 1st Ukrainian Front received in addition 2nd Armoured Army, large parts of 1st Guards Armoured Army, 47th Army, V Mechanized Corps, and VI Guards Cavalry Corps. Between 22 January and 3 February alone, 400 new T-34s were delivered.<sup>229</sup> On the eastern side, 2nd Ukrainian Front was reinforced by V Guards Cavalry Corps and other large formations. The aerial forces also received reinforcements, including an additional ground-attack corps, a fighter corps, two independent ground-attack divisions, and an independent fighter division.<sup>230</sup> Apart from this, the Red Army launched a large-scale operational feint which, as

<sup>223</sup> BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2074, 399.

<sup>224</sup> Tippelskirch, *Geschichte des Zweiten Weltkrieges*, 371.

<sup>225</sup> *Grif sekretnosti sniat*, 227.

<sup>226</sup> Eliseyev and Mikhalev, ‘Osvobozhdenie’, 35. Grylev, *Dnepr*, 61, gives the figure of 513 tanks and assault guns.

<sup>227</sup> Grylev, *Dnepr*.

<sup>228</sup> Glantz and Orenstein, *The Battle for the Ukraine*, 70.

<sup>229</sup> Grylev, *Dnepr*, 59.

<sup>230</sup> Dupuy and Martell, *Great Battles on the Eastern Front*, 134.

recent Russian historiography admits, did not achieve its aim.<sup>231</sup> Army Group South HQ saw clearly in advance that a Soviet pincer operation against the Kanev salient was coming but, given the overwhelming Soviet superiority, it had no means of preventing that manoeuvre.

On 24 January, 2nd Ukrainian Front attacked from the east and achieved a breakthrough at Kapitanovka. According to Lt.-Gen. von Vormann, the thrust was carried out directly into the German fire 'without regard to losses', but it succeeded: 'An astonishing scene, shattering in its drama! No other epithet will do. The dam burst, and the great unending flood poured across the flat terrain, past tanks which, surrounded by a few infantrymen, rose like rocks out of the surf.'<sup>232</sup> On 26 January 1st Ukrainian Front launched a symmetrical offensive from the west and broke through the German defences at Boyarka. The Soviet 6th Armoured Army pushed forward to Zvenigorodka, where its vanguard met up with the spearhead of 5th Guards Armoured Army on 28 January. The pincer had closed round the German XI and XXXXII Army Corps, but it was not until 31 January that 1st and 2nd Ukrainian Fronts were able to bring up infantry units and complete the stranglehold. The two German corps were now trapped in an encirclement 70 kilometres in diameter and 250 kilometres in circumference. Moreover, a gap of around 100 kilometres had opened up in the German front. The way was now open for the Soviet attackers to advance across the Bug to Romania, since there were no units in the German hinterland that could have prevented them from doing so. The big question now facing Army Group South HQ was whether the Soviet command would exploit its success for an advance in depth in an attempt to shatter the eastern front. That was precisely what the German armoured units had done successfully in 1941 in the opposite direction. Contrary to expectations, however, the Red Army stayed put, giving Army Group South the possibility of forming an emergency front over the next few days. Marshal Zhukov, who was coordinating the operations of 1st and 2nd Ukrainian Fronts on behalf of the Stavka, put in place an inner enclosing ring of three armies and one cavalry corps around the two trapped German corps. The remaining two armies, as well as 6th Armoured Army and 5th Guards Armoured Army, did not continue to attack at all but were deployed passively to form a new line of defence in the gap of more than 100 kilometres in the German front. In agreement with the Stavka, Zhukov proceeded very cautiously. He would first liquidate the encirclement, and only then risk continuing the advance.

Since then many people have puzzled over the reason why the Red Army high command passed up that great opportunity and stopped halfway, as it were. It was probably influenced to some extent by painful past experience. Whenever the Red Army allowed the German generals to switch to 'free combat' and pushed forward in depth, there was usually an unpleasant surprise, especially when Manstein was the adversary. In this case, however, wrong assessment of the enemy situation also played a part. The success stories emanating from General Konev's HQ about the

<sup>231</sup> Eliseyev and Mikhalev, 'Osvobozhdenie', 35.

<sup>232</sup> Vormann, *Tscherkassy*, 60.

'booty' in the encirclement led to great overestimation of the forces involved. At the time, the number of German troops encircled was estimated at 130,000.<sup>233</sup> In reality, the number was somewhere between 53,000<sup>234</sup> and 58,000 men,<sup>235</sup> although the latter figure apparently includes around 5,000 Soviet paramilitary auxiliaries.<sup>236</sup> Konev claimed later in his memoirs that 10 divisions and a brigade had fallen into the trap, with a total of 1,600 cannon and grenade launchers, and 230 tanks and assault guns.<sup>237</sup> In fact, the encirclement contained only six divisions, in part highly decimated (57th, 72nd, 88th, 112th, and 389th Infantry Divisions, 5th SS Armoured Division 'Viking', and Corps Detachment B),<sup>238</sup> plus SS Brigade 'Wallonia'.<sup>239</sup> Equally unrealistic are the Soviet figures of 1,600 German artillery cannon, of which there were in fact only 242 (including self-propelled guns).<sup>240</sup> Similarly, the number of fighting vehicles at the beginning of the encirclement was not 230 but only 26 operational tanks and 14 assault guns.<sup>241</sup> It must be borne in mind that by no means all the units of XI and XXXXII Army Corps fell into the trap. In fact, several rear formations remained outside the encirclement.<sup>242</sup> Furthermore, it took from 24 to 31 January for the Soviet troops to form a complete encircling ring. During that time several German units managed to break out.

### (b) The Relief Attacks (1 to 16 February)

Army Group South HQ's reaction to formation of the encirclement was relatively relaxed. After all, such situations had repeatedly been rectified by tried and tested methods, and a dangerous encirclement operation by 1st and 2nd Ukrainian Fronts had just been thwarted at Uman and Kirovograd. Thus, when the spearheads of 5th Guards Armoured Army and 6th Armoured Army joined up at Zvenigorodka on 28 January to form the Cherkassy-Korsun encirclement, that same day the German pincer arms of III and XXXVI Armoured Corps closed round the advanced units of the Soviet 1st Armoured Army further to the south at Lipovets. Only a few days later, III Armoured Corps stood ready for a counter-attack in the

<sup>233</sup> For previous criticism of these wholly exaggerated figures, see Nash, 'No Stalingrad', 73.

<sup>234</sup> Heeresarzt, Az.: 1335 (II b), No. I/5214/geheim, 1 Mar. 1944, fo. 13, BA-MA RW 6/559.

<sup>235</sup> An entry for 11 Feb. 1944 in the war diary of the quartermaster-general of 1st Armoured Army puts the strength at 54,000 men. Furthermore, 4,154 had been flown out up till then; see BA-MA RH 21-1/366, fo. 20.

<sup>236</sup> Jahnke, *Der Kessel von Tscherkassy*, 30, 118.

<sup>237</sup> Konev, *Aufzeichnungen eines Frontoberbefehlshabers*, 105.

<sup>238</sup> Corps Detachment B, in particular, was greatly overestimated by Soviet enemy intelligence. The German army had gone over to combining the remnants of beaten divisions into 'corps detachments', each of which had the strength of a single infantry division.

<sup>239</sup> Jahnke, *Der Kessel von Tscherkassy*, 23.

<sup>240</sup> 'Gruppe Mattenkrott, Ia: Geschütz-Bestand der Gruppe Stemmermann. Meldung vom 17.2. für Stichtag 1.2.1944', fo.74, BA-MA RH 21-1/140 a.

<sup>241</sup> Jahnke, *Der Kessel von Tscherkassy*, 29.

<sup>242</sup> According to Manstein (*Verlorene Siege*, 586), the ration strength of the two corps before the encirclement was 54,000 men. However, some of the rear units had not been enclosed. Obviously, Manstein's calculation of ration strength includes only German military personnel, and not foreign auxiliaries.

direction of Korsun. The usual tactic was for the enclosed units to break out of the pocket and join up with the oncoming relief forces. Once again, however, Hitler lost sight of what was operationally feasible. Manstein and the commanders-in-chief of Eighth Army and First Armoured Army had called for evacuation of the Kanev salient several times in the preceding weeks, but Hitler refused it even now when the two army corps in the salient were enclosed. He was intent on retaining the Cherkassy–Korsun pocket as a ‘fortress on the Dnieper’.<sup>243</sup> Nor was the relief attack to be carried out by the quickest and shortest route. Instead, Hitler ordered a wide-ranging operation aimed at encircling a large part of the Soviet encircling forces in their turn by means of an attack to the north. His idea was to exploit the momentum of this presumed success with a further attack in the direction of Kiev to trap the Soviet units west of the Dnieper.<sup>244</sup> Instead of facing up to the grim reality of the spring of 1944, the dictator lost himself in the conceptual world of 1941, where such encirclement operations were still possible on the German side. The real situation is summed up by Maj.-Gen. Wagener as follows: ‘A new Stalingrad on a smaller scale had arisen, with the Volga replaced by the Dnieper and the same orders from Hitler to the encircled troops: “hold out, supplies from the air, relief offensive, no breakout”’.<sup>245</sup>

Field Marshal von Manstein protested against the utopian plan to extend the operation as far as Kiev,<sup>246</sup> but the concept of a concentrated relief assault on the pocket was in line with his own ideas. He wanted to deploy two wedges in an encirclement operation: Eighth Army’s XXXXVII Armoured Corps would advance directly on the pocket from the south-east, while First Armoured Army’s III Armoured Corps would drive north through Medvin before turning west to the pocket, thus cutting off the enemy’s connections to the rear. That would also enclose the segment of the Soviet encircling ring positioned on the south-western edge of the pocket.<sup>247</sup> On paper, the armoured forces envisaged for the relief assault looked very impressive. A concentration of no fewer than nine armoured divisions was to be assembled for the purpose:<sup>248</sup>

- XXXXVII Armoured Corps, with 3rd, 11th, 13th, 14th, and 24th Armoured Divisions;
- III Armoured Corps, with 1st, 16th, and 17th Armoured Divisions, 1st SS Armoured Division (*‘Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler’*), 198th Infantry Division, and Heavy Armoured Regiment Bäke.

In reality, however, not one of the armoured units was able to attack immediately, since all the divisions envisaged for the counter-offensive were tied up at other crisis spots on the eastern front and had first to be brought in. Moreover, the first thing

<sup>243</sup> Stoves, *1. Panzer-Division*, 493.

<sup>244</sup> Buchner, *Ostfront 1944*, 16–18; Philippi and Heim, *Der Feldzug gegen Sowjetrussland*, 233.

<sup>245</sup> Wagener, *Heeresgruppe Süd*, 269.

<sup>246</sup> BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2074, 399.

<sup>247</sup> Manstein, *Verlorene Siege*, 583–4.

<sup>248</sup> Comprehensive material on the course of the German relief attacks was collected by Rolf Proschek; see BA-MA MSg 2/5648-5655.

which needed to be done was to occupy the 100-kilometre gap in the front with new units so as to form some sort of obstacle line. III Armoured Corps was in the midst of the battle at Lipovets, where it was in the process of encircling strong Soviet forces in a pincer movement. Its first units were not ready for a counter-attack until 4 February, so XXXXVII Armoured Corps under Lt.-Gen. von Vormann had to begin the relief offensive on its own. However, its exhausted armoured divisions had been reduced to combat-group strength and ought first to have received sufficient logistic supplies. When the relief assault began on 1 February, only 11th and 13th Armoured Divisions were available, with a total of 36 operational tanks and assault guns.<sup>249</sup> That day they managed to establish a bridgehead at Iskrennoye, but a sudden overnight thaw brought all movements to a stop. Only tanks and heavy tractors were able to 'grind their way extremely slowly through the viscous mud'.<sup>250</sup> Both 3rd Armoured Division (14 tanks and assault guns) and 14th Armoured Division (eight tanks and assault guns)<sup>251</sup> arrived only in the following days and were unable to play a direct part in the planned relief offensive. Instead, they were deployed defensively to plug gaps in the front. How weak those four armoured divisions were in any case is shown by their combined infantry strength: no more than 97 officers and 3,698 NCOs and other ranks.<sup>252</sup>

In that situation, hopes rested mainly with 24th Armoured Division, which was deployed 300 kilometres away with Army Group A's Sixth Army.<sup>253</sup> After it had made its way from the Nikopol bridgehead to the new deployment zone in extremely difficult road conditions, Hitler ordered it to turn round immediately and go back the way it had come, because a Soviet offensive had just begun in its previous sector of the front.<sup>254</sup> In the meantime, however, the thaw had made the roads muddy, so the division arrived too late. The bizarre outcome was that 24th Armoured Division was unable to intervene in either its northern or its southern deployment zone. This episode laid bare the dilemma facing the German command. The Red Army had attained such superiority that it was able to launch several offensives simultaneously. As a result, Army Group South was not only engaged in heavy fighting at the centre, in the Cherkassy-Korsun area. At the same time its northern wing was threatened by the Soviet Rovno-Lutsk Operation (27 January to 11 February) and its southern wing had to face the Nikopol-Krivoy Rog Operation (30 January to 29 February). Without the relatively strong 24th Armoured Division, however, the relief assault by XXXXVII Armoured Corps lacked the necessary impetus. By 12 February, 11th Armoured Division had advanced only as far as the hills south of Zvenigorodka. There, 27 kilometres from the pocket, the attack had to be abandoned. In the further course of operations XXXXVII Armoured Corps could do no more than tie down superior enemy forces.

<sup>249</sup> Gen.Kdo. XXXXVII. Pz.Korps, Ia, daily report, 1 Feb. 1944, BA-MA RH 24-47/98.

<sup>250</sup> Jahnke, *Der Kessel von Tscherkassy*, 61.

<sup>251</sup> Gen.Kdo. XXXXVII. Pz.Korps, Ia, daily report, 1 Feb. 1944, BA-MA RH 24-47/98.

<sup>252</sup> Telex from AOK 8, Ia to Army Group South, 4 Feb. 1944, 12.20 (fo. 243), BA-MA RH 20-8/133.

<sup>253</sup> Sixth Army had been assigned to Army Group South in January 1944, but on 2 February it was placed back under the command of Army Group A.

<sup>254</sup> Manstein, *Verlorene Siege*, 583.

The main thrust of the relief offensive was to be carried out by the considerably stronger III Armoured Corps, which in theory possessed 201 operational tanks and assault guns,<sup>255</sup> although not all were available for the attack since some had to be deployed defensively to cover gaps or secure the flanks.<sup>256</sup> In addition, the units arrived only gradually. III Armoured Corps nevertheless had a trump card in Heavy Armoured Regiment Bäke. Led by Lt.-Col. Franz Bäke, the regiment consisted of 503rd Heavy Armoured Battalion and II Btl./23rd Armoured Regiment. When it was established in January 1944, it possessed 34 Tigers und 46 Panthers. To these was added an infantry, artillery (armoured howitzers), and sapper component enabling the unit to be deployed independently. This regiment combined strike- and fire-power never seen before in a small unit of that kind. In the encirclement battle to the west of Uman which had just ended it had knocked out 268 Soviet tanks and assault guns in less than a week, with only four losses of its own.<sup>257</sup> Despite the Cherkassy–Korsun encirclement, the German command showed no nervousness and planned the relief offensive in a calm and relaxed fashion. The extent of its self-confidence is shown by the fact that the relief offensive was planned as a 'wide-ranging' operation aimed at enclosing the enemy forces positioned between III Armoured Corps and the pocket, for which purpose it was counting on the apparently irresistible force of Heavy Armoured Regiment Bäke.

Yet the operation did not go at all according to plan. What Clausewitz called 'friction' came into play. While the winter of 1941/2 had been Russia's coldest for 140 years, the winter of 1943/4 was 'the shortest and mildest in living memory'.<sup>258</sup> In the night of 1 to 2 February an astonishing burst of warm air turned the terrain into a sea of mud. The dreaded Russian 'rasputitsa'—the thaw which usually began gradually, and not until the spring—put a sudden stop to troop movements. Many wheeled vehicles could no longer move forward at all. The soldiers of 37th Armoured Sapper Battalion, who were specialists in overcoming terrain obstacles, took twelve hours for a 'mud march' of 8 kilometres.<sup>259</sup> Even tanks got stuck in the morass, and floundered with their hulls emerging while their tracks churned the mud, unable to get a grip on the ground. The steel monsters of Heavy Armoured Regiment Bäke were particularly affected. In the attack now beginning, the regiment had to make a long march, during which almost all its fighting vehicles broke down owing to mechanical damage: 'The last tanks struggled forward a few metres at a time with the mud reaching up to their track covers. A Panther needed almost a full tank (approx. 730 litres) to move 3.5 to 4 kilometres. Barrels of fuel were dropped in the mud by low-flying Ju-52s often 200 to 300 metres from the tanks. The barrels

<sup>255</sup> III Panzerkorps: divisional daily reports [16th and 17th Armd. Div. and Bäke], 5 Feb. 1944 (fos. 362, 364), BA-MA RH 24-3/110; divisional daily reports [1st Armd. Div. and 'Leibstandarte'], 6 Feb. 1944 (for 5 Feb.), BA-MA RH 24-3/111. Since only fragmentary data is available for 4 February, when the relief attack began, the strength figures reported for 5 February are given. Moreover, some of the subordinate units only arrived on 4 February.

<sup>256</sup> This applies above all to 1st Armoured Division and 1st SS Armoured Division 'Leibstandarte', which provided only 'combat groups' in most phases of the operation.

<sup>257</sup> Schadewitz, 'Einsätze des schweren Panzerregiments Bäke', BA-MA MSg 2/4396, 7; Rubbel, *Tiger-Abteilung 503*, 196; Jahnke, *Der Kessel von Tscherkassy*, 76.

<sup>258</sup> Buchner, *Ostfront 1944*, 18.

<sup>259</sup> Stoves, *1. Panzer-Division*, 492.

then had to be towed in with steel cables by those tanks that still had a little fuel left.<sup>260</sup> Often the fuel could only be supplied in cans, which had to be dragged forward through the mud by the tank crews in an extremely time-consuming fashion, because the fuel-lorries kept getting stuck. During these few days the threat from the Soviet air force grew considerably, since the slow-moving vehicles were an easy prey for enemy low-flying aircraft. Some nights it began to freeze again, so that the next morning the tanks were embedded in concrete, so to speak, and had to be freed painstakingly with pickaxes or blowlamps. In this viscous sea of mud the wide-tracked Soviet T-34, built specially for extreme terrain conditions unknown in central Europe, came into its own. The aid deliveries of hundreds of thousands of American lorries also had an effect, especially as the Studebaker's off-road capability was superior to that of the German trucks, which were not very numerous anyway.

The infantry suffered particularly badly, often sinking knee-deep in the mud. First Armoured Army's war diary records that 'some of the infantrymen had to take their boots off and struggle through the morass in their bare feet'.<sup>261</sup> Troops marching on foot could cover at most 1 kilometre in an hour.<sup>262</sup> The infantry attached to the encircled units lay unprotected in open terrain. Their damp uniforms and wet felt boots sometimes froze at night. They were exhausted, filthy, and hungry. Hot food was a great exception, and often all they had to drink was melted snow. The number of soldiers out of action through cold-related illnesses and frostbite gradually overtook the number of wounded. 'Once again,' wrote General von Vormann, 'the Russian climate seemed to have defeated the intruders.'<sup>263</sup>

The relief attack by III Armoured Corps, designated Operation WANDA, had been due to start on 3 February but had to be put off to the following day because of adverse weather conditions, which gave the enemy more time to make his defensive preparations. On 4 February, however, only 16th and 17th Armoured Divisions and Armoured Regiment Bäke, with a total of 85 tanks and assault guns,<sup>264</sup> were ready for action, and had to attack on their own. In the course of the following days they were joined by parts of 1st Armoured Division and a regimental-strength combat group from 1st SS Armoured Division 'Leibstandarte'. Thus the attack was carried out in dribs and drabs, in total contradiction to Guderian's motto : 'Boot 'em, don't spatter 'em!' The individual units arrived one after the other, since they could only gradually be released from other sectors of the front where there was also fierce fighting. Their arrival was also delayed by the wretched state of the roads and by logistic problems.

On 4 February the German tanks achieved a breakthrough at the outset, but the attack soon got bogged down in the mud. In the following days the Red Army assembled four armoured or mechanized corps in the sector, and they used their

<sup>260</sup> Schadewitz, 'Einsätze des schweren Panzerregiments Bäke', BA-MA MSg 2/4396, 10.

<sup>261</sup> KTB 1. Panzerarmee, 7 Feb. 1944, fo. 119, BA-MA RH 21-1/122.

<sup>262</sup> BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2346, pt. 3: Lieb, 'Tscherkassy', 36 (fo. 111).

<sup>263</sup> Vormann, *Tscherkassy*, 76.

<sup>264</sup> Daily divisional reports, 5 Feb. 1944, fo. 364, BA-MA RH 24-3/110. Since the reports for 4 February are incomplete, the data for the following day has been taken.

numerical superiority mainly for attacks on the flanks of the German spearhead. The tank duels again resulted in an impressive German knock-out rate, but the decimated Soviet units nevertheless achieved their aim of slowing the enemy attack. On 8 February, 16th Armoured Division crossed the Gniloy Tikich river and formed a bridgehead to the west of Boyarka. With that, however, the impetus of the attack was spent. Meanwhile, Manstein had been forced to recognize that it had been a mistake to stick to the idea of a 'wide-ranging' operation. The detour via Medvin had proved to be the wrong approach. Now the simple plan originally proposed by Eighth Army HQ was adopted, namely a direct relief attack by the shortest and quickest route to the pocket.<sup>265</sup> That, however, meant changing the direction of thrust from north to north-west. On 9 February the units of III Armoured Corps had to turn back and assemble in a new marshalling area 15 kilometres south of Boyarka in order to attack from there in the direction of Lisyanka. The new attack could start only on 11 February, so seven days had been lost to no purpose in the previous unsuccessful operation. That had been without doubt a serious error of command and was to have even more disastrous consequences.<sup>266</sup>

For the second attempt at a relief attack, the following formation was adopted: 16th and 17th Armoured Divisions plus Heavy Armoured Regiment Bäke formed the central wedge, while the southern flank was covered offensively by 1st Armoured Division and the northern flank by a combat group from 1st SS Armoured Division 'Leibstandarte'. Although all the assigned units had arrived in the meantime, the numerous mechanical breakdowns left only 149 operational tanks and assault guns available.<sup>267</sup> On the first day of the attack, 11 February, the German forces managed to surprise the enemy and form a bridgehead on the Gniloy Tikich. Then, however, this tank attack also got bogged down,<sup>268</sup> and logistic bottlenecks began to have an effect. With almost all wheeled vehicles stuck in the mud, it was nearly impossible to get supplies forward to the tank spearheads. For that reason, on 13 February for example, 61 cubic metres of fuel and 24 tonnes of ammunition were delivered to III Armoured Corps by air drop.<sup>269</sup> Deployment of the air force was nevertheless prevented for some time by foggy weather. Despite these difficulties, more than 100 Soviet tanks were knocked out on 13 February alone.<sup>270</sup> Yet the number of Red Army fighting vehicles seemed to be constantly increasing. III Armoured Corps had not only to contend with the combined mass

<sup>265</sup> Buchner, *Ostfront 1944*, 18.

<sup>266</sup> Whether this wrong decision is to be blamed on Army Group South HQ or on Hitler, who even wanted to extend the operation as far as Kiev, can no longer be ascertained. No operational documents of Army Group South dating after 5 July 1943 have survived. Regrettably, the last volume of the war diary of the OKH Operations Division (BA-MA RH 2/3062) ends on 12 January 1944, a few days before the relief attack.

<sup>267</sup> Pz.AOK 1, Ia daily report, 10 Feb. 1944, 21.25, fo. 137, BA-MA RH 21-1/128.

<sup>268</sup> As already mentioned, XXXXVII Armoured Corps was to attack at the same time with two divisions further to the east. On 12 February 11th Armoured Division got as far as the area to the south of Zvenigorodka before the attack had to be called off.

<sup>269</sup> KTB 1. Panzerarmee, 13 Feb. 1944, BA-MA RH 21-1/122.

<sup>270</sup> KTB III. Panzerkorps, 13 Feb. 1944, BA-MA RH 24-3/107.

of 5th Guards Armoured Army and 6th Armoured Army; it was also attacked on the left flank by 2nd Armoured Army and units of 1st Guards Armoured Army. In addition, it was in danger from Soviet anti-tank fronts and artillery cannon built into blocking positions. Above all, Lisyanka, which was taken after bitter fighting, proved to be a 'veritable anti-tank hornets' nest'.<sup>271</sup> Most of the German losses, however, resulted from mechanical damage caused by the difficult terrain conditions. On 15 February the 1st SS Armoured Division 'Leibstandarte' combat group had only three operational tanks and one assault gun left, but these could be not used in the fighting because they were busy day and night hauling away damaged tanks.<sup>272</sup>

That day Army Group South HQ was obliged to recognize that the relief forces were exhausted and that the enclosed units could break out only 'with their own forces'. Field Marshal von Manstein therefore decided to give the order for the breakout.<sup>273</sup> The same day Eighth Army relayed the order and sent the following message to the enclosed units ('Stemmermann Group'): 'III. Armd. Corps' intervention capability limited by weather and supply difficulties. Stemmermann Group must carry out decisive breakthrough to Zhurzhintsy-Hill 239, 2 kilometres to the south, with its own forces. Link up there with III Armd. Corps.'<sup>274</sup> The breakout was to take place in the night of 16 to 17 February. Meanwhile, III Armoured Corps had the task of pushing the wedge further east to Hill 239, the intended point of rendezvous with the Stemmermann Group.<sup>275</sup>

A place of almost uniquely momentous significance in the German-Soviet war now entered the picture. The units breaking out of the encirclement had to pass the 'fateful Hill 239',<sup>276</sup> surrounded by deep ravines, in order to join up with their own troops. The Soviets, however, had recognized its importance. There 5th Guards Army had erected the main bulwark of a blocking position consisting of strong field fortifications and, above all, deeply staggered anti-tank defences. The forest immediately south of the road-fork at Point 239.0 had been fortified by a series of strongpoints and was particularly important in what followed. It concealed packs of Soviet tanks, which sprang out time and again in surprise attacks.

On 16 February 1st Armoured Division had the task of taking Hill 239 from the direction of Lisyanka. All the troops still usable for the attack were combined in 'Combat Group Frank'. The hill was also subjected to an assault by ground-attack aircraft as well as a dive-bomber attack by Ground-Attack Wing 'Immelmann'. On that day, however, the attacking forces managed only to take the intermediate locality of Oktyabr. The advance came to a stop barely 2 kilometres from the target. By the evening Combat Group Frank was completely exhausted and its armoured

<sup>271</sup> Jahnke, *Der Kessel von Tscherkassy*, 67.

<sup>272</sup> Lehmann, *Die Leibstandarte*, iv/I. 41; see also KTB III. Panzerkorps, 15 Feb. 1944, BA-MA RH 24-3/107.

<sup>273</sup> Radio message from C-in-C Army Group South to AOK 8, 15 Feb. 1944, 10.40, BA-MA RH 20-8/135.

<sup>274</sup> KTB 8. Armee, 5 Feb. 1944, 11.05, BA-MA RH 20-8/125.

<sup>275</sup> On the detailed course of the German relief attack on 16–17 February 1944, see Proscheck collection: BA-MA MSg. 2/5648-5655, esp. 2/5650.

<sup>276</sup> See, e.g., Buchner, *Ostfront 1944*, 43.

infantry battalion was left with company strengths of 10 to 12 men. All its company and convoy commanders were dead or wounded. It had only 12 operational Panthers left to deploy against the numerically superior T-34s and Joseph Stalin tanks.<sup>277</sup> So on that day the last hope lay with Heavy Armoured Regiment Bäke, which still had nine operational Tigers and the same number of Panthers.<sup>278</sup> It advanced from the north in a flanking movement and at first seemed to be succeeding. Then, only a few hundred metres west of Point 239.0, Lt.-Col. Bäke suddenly went over to a secured halt. That is all the more surprising as his Tigers would most probably have been capable of taking Hill 239 the next day and pushing further to the south-east. The explanation for the sudden halt to the attack on that decisive 16 February lay in the logistics: the tanks were running out of fuel. In his combat report, Bäke wrote: 'There were great difficulties with supplies. The troops had been without food for several days and the tanks were short of fuel and ammunition.'<sup>279</sup> Not until the next day was it possible to get hold of some more petrol. Bäke fetched it in person with his command tank from Lisyanka, where it had been carried over the Gniloy Tikich river in buckets. The result of this action was felt too late, however, since the breakout from the encirclement had already taken place.

To sum up: by the evening of 16 February the German relief forces had managed to fight their way forward to within 8 kilometres of the Cherkassy–Korsun pocket. But the crucially important Hill 239, where the rendezvous with the units that had broken out was to take place, was still in Soviet hands. The foremost German tanks were only a few hundred metres away—a matter of a few barrels of petrol. And so fate took its course.

### (c) The Conflict about the Pocket and the Decision to Break Out

Hitler had at first vehemently refused permission for a breakout, insisting instead that the two encircled army corps were to defend the pocket as a fortress. For that purpose it was necessary to establish a unified command, since XXXXII Army Corps (Lt.-Gen. Theobald Lieb) was assigned to First Armoured Army, while XI Army Corps (Gen. Wilhelm Stemmermann) was under the command of Eighth Army. On 28 January, when the Soviet pincer arms closed, Hitler placed XXXXII Army Corps under the command of Eighth Army and then appointed General Stemmermann 'commander in the pocket'. The geographical centre-point of the pocket was the town of Korsun, where the only airfield was located. That airfield was to become even more important in the days that followed. Despite the failure at Stalingrad, which should have served as an example, Hitler was once again convinced that a pocket could be supplied from the air. Although Korsun was only about 100 kilometres from the Luftwaffe's nearest airfield at Uman, the German

<sup>277</sup> Jahnke, *Der Kessel von Tscherkassy*, 71; Stoves, *1. Panzer-Division*, 517, 522.

<sup>278</sup> Scherf, 'Die Tigerabteilung 503', 223; BA-MA Msg 2/4691, 26.

<sup>279</sup> Heavy Armoured Regiment Bäke, Ia (24 Feb. 1944), 'Bericht über die Verbindungsaufnahme der westlich von Tscherkassy eingeschlossenen Korps am 17.2.1944', fo. 70, BA-MA RH 21-1/141.

aircraft would have to fly over the Lisyanka corridor between the foremost sector of the front and the pocket, where they would come within range of Soviet anti-aircraft fire. Besides which, the Soviet air force had control of the skies. In those circumstances an air bridge to supply the encircled units must have seemed a bold gamble. As it turned out, on certain days it was hardly possible to deploy aircraft anyway because of thick fog. Another problem was the sudden thaw, which made use of Korsun's un-tarmacked airfield difficult and from 10 February almost impossible. Either the aircraft got stuck in the mud on landing and turned over, or they could no longer take off for the return flight. As a result, on some days supplies could be delivered only by air drop from low-flying planes. On 28 January VIII Air Corps began its support of the Stemmermann Group with 832 Ju 52 transport planes, 478 bombers (for air drops), 58 ground-attack aircraft, and 168 fighters. Of those, 32 transport planes, 13 bombers, and five fighters were lost.<sup>280</sup> Eighth Army HQ had calculated that at least 150 tonnes of supplies (including fuel) would have to be flown in daily, but that requirement was far from fulfilled. The total amount of supplies (including fuel) landed or dropped for the Stemmermann Group from 28 January to 15 February was 1,490 tonnes. The daily average of 78 tonnes was thus only about half of the minimum tonnage required.<sup>281</sup>

Eighth Army HQ quickly realised that defence of the pocket was hopeless. On 5 February it already requested permission to break out and made all the necessary preparations. Army Group South's chief of staff responded favourably, stating that the army group would if necessary 'give the order for the breakout on its own responsibility. There can be no question of leaving the two corps sitting in the pocket'.<sup>282</sup> The next day, 6 February, he was nevertheless obliged to admit that the army group had 'not received permission for the breakout'.<sup>283</sup>

The desperate situation in the pocket was no secret to Soviet enemy intelligence either. On 8 February a Soviet negotiator appeared under a flag of truce and demanded surrender. He handed over an ultimatum signed by Marshal Zhukov and Generals Konev and Vatutin guaranteeing 'the lives and security of all officers and men who ceased resistance and, at the end of the war, return to Germany or another country according to the personal wish of the prisoner of war'.<sup>284</sup> This call, however, had as little effect as the propaganda of the National Committee for a Free Germany (NKFD) and the League of German Officers (BDO). General Walther von Seydlitz and Otto Korfes, both in Soviet captivity, wrote personal letters to the German divisional commanders in the pocket, but received no answer.<sup>285</sup> Nor did massive Soviet propaganda over loudspeakers or in leaflets have any results.<sup>286</sup> An account of the battle of the Cherkassy–Korsun pocket contains the laconic

<sup>280</sup> Jahnke, *Der Kessel von Tscherkassy*, 80.

<sup>281</sup> 'Zusammenstellung der zur Gruppe "Stemmermann" geflogenen Versorgungsgüter', BA-MA RH 20-8/226.

<sup>282</sup> KTB 8. Armee, 5 Feb. 1944, fo. 32, BA-MA RH 20-8/125.

<sup>283</sup> Ibid., 6 Feb. 1944, fo. 40.

<sup>284</sup> The wording of the ultimatum is reproduced in Jahnke, *Der Kessel von Tscherkassy* (see 8 Feb. 1944).

<sup>285</sup> Ibid., where such letters, as well as NKFD/BDO leaflets, are also reproduced.

<sup>286</sup> See Frieser, *Krieg hinter Stacheldraht*, 87.

comment that 'no German soldiers believed those promises, and later events fully justified their mistrust'.<sup>287</sup>

Stalin, who had prematurely announced the liquidation of the pocket, grew increasingly impatient. He was keen to present the world public with the spectacle of a new Stalingrad, but all Soviet attempts to split the pocket had failed so far. As a result, he was drawn into an overreaction which led to a crisis of command on 12 February. Early that morning he phoned Zhukov, who was coordinating the operations of 1st and 2nd Ukrainian Fronts. Most unusually, Zhukov proved to be unaware of the latest developments. In his memoirs he gives as an excuse that he had gone to bed with a cold and been rudely woken by Stalin's phone call.<sup>288</sup> The confused situation was exploited by General Konev in such a scheming way as to 'poison his relationship with Zhukov until their deaths decades later'.<sup>289</sup> In a telephone conversation with Stalin, Konev accused Vatutin, the commander-in-chief of 1st Ukrainian Front, and also indirectly Zhukov, of clearly not having the situation in hand. He suggested to the Soviet dictator that he himself could resolve the crisis if responsibility for liquidation of the pocket was transferred to him alone, going so far as to promise that not a single German would escape from the trap. Stalin reacted no later than 12 February by issuing a directive with the following key sentence: 'Command of all troops engaged in action against the Korsun grouping is transferred to the commander-in-chief of 2nd Ukrainian Front, with the task of destroying the Korsun grouping without delay'.<sup>290</sup> For that purpose he ordered all 1st Ukrainian Front troops involved in the encirclement, above all 27th Army, to be placed under Konev's command. At the same time, Zhukov was 'relieved of supervision of the liquidation of the Korsun grouping'.<sup>291</sup> He was to concern himself henceforth only with defence against the forces of III Armoured Corps attacking from the west.

Zhukov refers to this only vaguely in his memoirs, but in reality it was one of the most shameful humiliations he had ever had to endure. The latest official Russian account has this to say: 'In other words, Stalin sidelined Zhukov when it came to coordinating the efforts of the two operationally strategic units on the external and internal front, although that task was particularly important in the destruction of the encircled enemy grouping'.<sup>292</sup> The only task left to him was to hold a single German armoured corps in check—a decidedly subordinate role for a marshal who had been sent to the front as a representative of the Stavka, the highest military command authority. General Vatutin was not only relieved of command of his troops in the Korsun area, but was even required to move his headquarters and take responsibility only for the Rovno–Lutsk Operation by the right wing of 1st Ukrainian Front. This measure proved pointless, however, since the operation in question had been abandoned owing to the complete exhaustion of both attacking armies. Zhukov protested to Stalin, warning him that such a drastic change in the command structure would lead to confusion.

<sup>287</sup> Jahnke, *Der Kessel von Tscherkassy*, 50.

<sup>288</sup> Zhukov, *Erinnerungen* (8th edn.), 224.

<sup>289</sup> Nash, 'No Stalingrad', 125.

<sup>291</sup> Ibid. 122–3.

<sup>290</sup> Konev, *Aufzeichnungen eines Frontoberbefehlshabers*, 122.

<sup>292</sup> Eliseyev and Mikhalev, 'Osvobozhdenie', 37.

Seen from today's viewpoint, Zhukov and Vatutin's approach was correct. They had planned to concentrate as many units as possible in the Lisyanka corridor so as to establish a blocking position between the German troops in the pocket and III Armoured Corps. Konev, on the other hand, had promised Stalin rapid liquidation of the enclosed German forces. He therefore distributed his units around the pocket for a concentric attack. However, some of the Soviet troops found themselves thrusting into empty space, because the soldiers of the Stemmermann Group had pulled back into the south-western part of the pocket in order to break through the Lisyanka corridor. Moreover, the change of command was carried out at a critical point in the operation, which only added to the difficulties.<sup>293</sup> Unintentionally, Konev helped considerably to make the Stemmermann Group's breakout possible. He also played into the hands of a German special unit working in the background which created the preconditions for German success, namely radio intelligence.<sup>294</sup> The complicated regrouping movements ordered by Konev resulted in a perceptible increase in Soviet radio traffic, which was intercepted by the Germans. Manstein's headquarters was thus very well informed of Konev's intentions.

The fate of the German troops caught in the Cherkassy–Korsun trap seemed already sealed, when suddenly the Soviet stranglehold loosened for a moment. Konev's regrouping movements briefly gave rise to a gap in the Lisyanka corridor itself, between Khilki and Komorovka, when the troops positioned there were moved northwards on the evening of 16 February<sup>295</sup> to participate, together with other Soviet units assembled in the area, in the final assault to liquidate the pocket. In the light of intercepted radio messages, the Stemmermann Group was in a position to effect a breakout in the right place at exactly the right time. Field Marshal von Manstein wanted to exploit that advantage at all costs. Well aware of Hitler's hesitant attitude, he refrained from requesting permission from Führer headquarters and gave the order for the Stemmermann Group's breakout on his own authority. The decisive radio message was worded: 'Watchword freedom, objective Lisyanka. Set out at 23.00 on the 16th.'<sup>296</sup>

Meanwhile the Stemmermann Group had been obliged to abandon Korsun. In the final phase the pocket had shrunk to an oval-shaped area 8 kilometres long and 5 kilometres wide. The remaining 45,000 troops<sup>297</sup> crammed into it were exposed to wet weather by day and frost by night, and were constantly threatened by enemy

<sup>293</sup> Nash, 'No Stalingrad', 126.

<sup>294</sup> On 20 April 2001 the author conducted an interview on this subject with Gen. (ret.) Count von Kielmansegg, who based his replies on notes from his diary of the time. Kielmansegg pointed to the decisive role of German radio intelligence as the basis for Army Group South's operational planning at Korsun. Numerous intercepted Soviet radio messages (in German translation) are collected in a special III Armoured Corps file entitled 'NAZ-Sprüche vom 5.1. bis 26.2.1944', BA-MA RH 24-3/121.

<sup>295</sup> Kielmansegg interview; see also Jahnke, *Der Kessel von Scherkassy*, 87.

<sup>296</sup> Buchner, *Ostfront 1944*, 37. The watchword 'freedom' had been proposed by the Stemmermann Group as a general designation for rendezvous with the relief troops of III Armoured Corps.

<sup>297</sup> This figure refers to the actual troop strength as opposed to the ration strength, which included the civilian Wehrmacht retinue and the paramilitary auxiliaries. A total of 4,154 wounded had been evacuated by air.

artillery and aircraft fire. They had hardly any food or medical supplies left. General Stemmermann put the breakout order into effect. The attack was to be made between Khilki and Komorovka. Stemmermann himself took command of the rearguard and appointed Lt.-Gen. Lieb, the commanding general of XXXXII Army Corps, as leader of the breakthrough group.<sup>298</sup> As for supporting armoured vehicles, they had only seven tanks, three assault guns, two self-propelled anti-tank cannon, and 12 armoured howitzers available.<sup>299</sup> Ammunition was available only in small quantities and, above all, there was very little fuel, so that it was questionable whether some of the armoured vehicles would be able to reach the German troops at Lisyanka. On the way to the marshalling areas all the units had to pass through the bottleneck of Shanderovka, later dubbed 'hell's gate',<sup>300</sup> the starting place for the breakout which sealed the fate of so many.

The first drama occurred even earlier, however, at the main assembly area for the wounded in Shanderovka,<sup>301</sup> where there were some 2,150 sick and wounded who could no longer be flown out. Only 700 of them were classified as capable of walking. So the question now was what to do with the 1,450 non-walking wounded.<sup>302</sup> General Stemmermann was faced with an extreme conflict of conscience. The action had to be carried out as quickly as possible under cover of night. But transporting the non-walking wounded would delay it considerably and could even jeopardize it. Stemmermann therefore ordered that those unfortunate soldiers should be left behind in Shanderovka and handed over to the Red Army, 'according to the procedures and rules of the Geneva Convention',<sup>303</sup> and that four medical corps officers and 12 medical corps other ranks should remain with them.<sup>304</sup> This, however, as an originally designated doctor later put it, would have meant a death sentence for all those left behind.<sup>305</sup> Only too often, Red Army troops killed non-walking German prisoners, sometimes even in a cruel manner.<sup>306</sup> Medical personnel left behind were usually also liquidated as witnesses. For that reason

<sup>298</sup> Gen.Kdo. XXXXII. AK, Ia No. 166/44 g.Kdos., 16 Feb. 1944, 10.30: 'Korpsbefehl Nr. 23: Befehl für den Ausbruch', BA-MA RH 24-42/111. See also the preliminary order of 25 Feb., 20.00, repr. in Jahnke, *Der Kessel von Tscherkassy*, 82.

<sup>299</sup> Gen.Kdo. XXXXII. AK, Chef des Generalstabes, 24 Feb. 1944: Meldung zu Pz.AOK 1, Abt. Ia, No. 70/44 geheim, 19 Feb. 1944, BA-MA RH 24-42/111. There were a few more assault guns with 239th Assault Gun Battalion, which was assigned to the reserve.

<sup>300</sup> Buchner, *Ostfront 1944*, 35, 37.

<sup>301</sup> See Büning, 'Das Schicksal der Verwundeten'.

<sup>302</sup> Stellvertretender Korpsarzt XXXXII. AK, 3 Mar. 1944: 'Bericht über Versorgung und Abtransport der Verwundeten im Kessel von Korsun vom 29.1. bis 16.2.1944', 19, BA-MA RH 24-42/111; Generalkommando XI. AK, 23 Feb. 1944, Der Chef des Generalstabes, Ia Br.B. No. 19/44 g.Kdos., 7, fo. 25, BA-MA RH 24-11/97.

<sup>303</sup> Stellvertretender Korpsarzt XXXXII. AK, 3 Mar. 1944: 'Bericht über Versorgung und Abtransport der Verwundeten im Kessel von Korsun vom 29.1. bis 16.2.1944', 19, fo. 26, BA-MA RH 24-42/111.

<sup>304</sup> Generalkommando XI. AK, 23 Feb. 1944: Der Chef des Generalstabes, Ia Br.B. No. 19/44 g.Kdos., 7, fo. 129, BA-MA RH 24-42/111.

<sup>305</sup> Report by NCO Dr Peter Dohrn (2nd Medical Company 172 of 72nd Infantry Division), quoted in Schwarz, *Chronik des Infanterieregiments 248*, iii. 53–4.

<sup>306</sup> The author repeatedly encountered this unpleasant fact during research on his dissertation 'Krieg hinter Stacheldraht' in oral and written accounts by former POWs. See also Friedrich, *Das Gesetz des Krieges*, 580–1.

Col. Schulze, the medical officer of XI Army Corps, protested against the order, invoking a decision of the German medical inspectorate which stated that: 'In view of repeated experience that medical officers and medical personnel left behind with the wounded have been murdered by the Russians, it is hereby decided that, in the east, leaving medical officers and medical personnel behind must be avoided on principle'.<sup>307</sup> Stemmermann took note of the protest but insisted that his order, for which he took personal responsibility, be carried out.

Despite this, the general's order was largely disregarded, since his troops could not bring themselves to leave their wounded comrades in the lurch. They loaded the non-walking wounded onto horse-drawn carts, mostly driven by Soviet para-military auxiliaries.<sup>308</sup> No more than 600 non-transportable, seriously wounded soldiers were left behind in Shanderovka.<sup>309</sup> Accordingly, by independent decision of a staff medical officer, only part of the medical personnel ordered to remain by General Stemmermann stayed behind with the wounded. SS Armoured Division 'Viking', for example, carried 300 wounded with it during the breakout, of whom 110 were saved despite the most adverse circumstances.<sup>310</sup> But a cruel fate awaited the non-transportable wounded who were left behind. They were 'shot en masse at the western exit from Shanderovka or run over by Russian tanks'.<sup>311</sup> Since that time, the troops left in the pocket have been classified as missing. A report by the deputy medical officer of XXXXII Army Corps merely states: 'Nothing is known as to their further fate'.<sup>312</sup>

#### (d) The Breakout on 16–17 February

When the breakout to the west began, at 23.00 on 16 February, the German troops were gripped by euphoria.<sup>313</sup> The watchword 'freedom' fully described their mood. The temperature had fallen to minus 5, making the previously muddy terrain once again passable. In addition, a snowstorm blowing from the east was reducing visibility for the Soviet guards. The breakthrough group consisted of three wedges:

<sup>307</sup> Stellvertretender Korpsarzt XXXXII. AK, 3 Mar. 1944: 'Bericht über Versorgung und Abtransport der Verwundeten im Kessel von Korsun vom 29.1. bis 16.2.1944', 20, fo. 27, BA-MA RH 24-42/111.

<sup>308</sup> Generalkommando XI. AK, 23 Feb. 1944: Der Chef des Generalstabes, Ia Br.B. No. 19/44 g. Kdos., 7, fo. 129, BA-MA RH 24-42/111; BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2346, Lieb: 'Die Kesselschlacht von Tscherkassy', 44, fo. 119; Jahnke, *Der Kessel von Tscherkassy*, 95–6, 110.

<sup>309</sup> Addendum to Stellvertretender Korpsarzt XXXXII. AK, 3 Mar. 1944: 'Bericht über Versorgung und Abtransport der Verwundeten im Kessel von Korsun vom 29.1. bis 16.2.1944', fo. 35, BA-MA RH 24-42/111.

<sup>310</sup> App. 1e to Pz.AOK 1, Abt. Ia, No. 158/44 g.Kdos., 28 Feb. 1944: SS-Pz.Div. Wiking, Ia, 24 Feb. 1944: 'Gefechtsbericht', 3, fo. 115, BA-MA RH 21-1/141; Jahnke, *Der Kessel von Tscherkassy*, 108, 110.

<sup>311</sup> App. 1e to Pz.AOK 1, Abt. Ia, No. 158/44 g.Kdos., 28 Feb. 1944: SS-Pz.Div. Wiking, Ia, 24 Feb. 1944: 'Gefechtsbericht', 3, fo. 115, BA-MA RH 21-1/141.

<sup>312</sup> Addendum to Stellvertretender Korpsarzt XXXXII. AK, 3 Mar. 1944: 'Bericht über Versorgung und Abtransport der Verwundeten im Kessel von Korsun vom 29.1. bis 16.2.1944', fo. 35, BA-MA RH 24-42/111.

<sup>313</sup> On the detailed course of the breakout on 16–17 February, see Proschek collection, BA-MA MSg. 2/5648-5655, esp. 2/5650.

Corps Detachment A on the northern wing at Khilki, 72nd Infantry Division in the centre, and SS Armoured Division 'Viking' (mostly fighting on foot) on the southern wing. The initial phase of the attack was carried out noiselessly and without artillery support, taking the enemy by surprise. The very first assault breached the Soviet positions over a width of 4.5 kilometres, partly by means of bayonet attacks. The Soviet positions were manned by units of 27th Army, which, together with 52nd Army and 4th Guards Army, formed the inner ring of encirclement. The German troops were surprised by the weakness of the resistance, as in many places they encountered only a thin chain of guard-posts. The fact that the Soviet troop movements had given rise to a gap in this very sector was, from the Soviet viewpoint, an unpardonable error on Konev's part.

Under cover of night, the German attack made rapid progress. Individual anti-tank and artillery positions were taken out in close combat. At around 03.30, 105th Infantry Regiment, belonging to 72nd Infantry Division, was the first unit to reach the outer Soviet encirclement ring at the road from Zhurzhinksy to Point 239. This sector was occupied by the reinforced XX Armoured Corps of 5th Guards Armoured Army, whose troops were facing in the opposite direction, looking west towards the German III Armoured Corps.

Suddenly the German vanguard detected the silhouettes of several T-34s and saw that the Russians were mostly fast asleep in their foxholes. The German troops swept through the enemy positions in a lightning attack. Immediately afterwards the vanguard came upon another four tanks, but found to their delight that they belonged to Armoured Regiment Bäke.<sup>314</sup> The breakout had succeeded. Around 04.10 the troops of 105th Infantry Regiment were received by 1st Armoured Division in Oktyabr.<sup>315</sup> It was the only major formation to break through as a single unit, almost without losses.<sup>316</sup>

Meanwhile, most of the Stemmermann Group units in the centre of the breakthrough sector were pushing straight towards Hill 239. This hill exerted a magical force of attraction, since it was designated as the place where the troops of III Armoured Corps would be waiting for the units which broke out of the pocket. To the escaping troops, Point 239 seemed like the gateway to freedom. But suddenly the noise of tanks was heard, spotlights blazed, and the German soldiers ran straight into fire from Soviet tank cannon and machine guns. The hill was in enemy hands! At first there was sheer terror; then the escaping troops surged forward in a desperate attempt to reach the German front lines, only a kilometre away. The assault with small arms failed, and in next to no time the terrain was covered with dead soldiers. Those who survived the fire barrage threw themselves to the ground, but the Soviet tanks rolled forward and crushed them where they lay.<sup>317</sup>

<sup>314</sup> Schweres Panzer-Regiment Bäke, Ia (24 Feb. 1944): 'Bericht über die Verbindungsaufnahme der westlich von Tscherkassy eingeschlossenen Korps am 17.2.1944', fo. 70, BA-MA RH 21-1/141.

<sup>315</sup> KTB III. Panzerkorps, 17 Feb. 1944, BA-MA RH 24-3/107.

<sup>316</sup> App. 3 to Generalkommando XI. AK, Ia No. 19/44 g.Kdos.: '72. Inf.-Division Ia vom 23.2.1944: Gefechtsbericht', fo. 41-2, BA-MA RH 21-1/141; Jahnke, *Der Kessel von Tscherkassy*, 87, 136-7; Buchner, *Ostfront 1944*, 39-40.

<sup>317</sup> Jahnke, *Der Kessel von Tscherkassy*, 88, 103, 137.

Since that time a great deal of ink has been spilt puzzling over the reasons for the disaster. The germ actually lay in the wording of the radio message which Eighth Army HQ sent into the pocket on 15 February: ‘Stemmermann Group must carry out decisive breakthrough to Zhurzhintsy—Hill 239, two kilometres to the south, with its own forces. Link up there with III Armd. Corps.’<sup>318</sup> General Stemmermann therefore assumed that Hill 239 was already in the hands of the relief troops. Later there was wild speculation that Lt.-General Hans Speidel, the Eighth Army chief of staff, had deliberately concealed the truth so as not to undermine motivation for the breakout. That supposedly led to the bloodbath at Hill 239. Those accusations, however, do not fit the facts.<sup>319</sup> In reality, on the afternoon of 16 February the German operations staffs were firmly convinced that ‘the area of Point 239.0 can be reached by the evening’, as can be seen from III Armoured Corps’ war diary.<sup>320</sup> Heavy Armoured Regiment Bäke was gaining ground and was only a few hundred metres from the point in question. How could the operations command at corps and army level have foreseen that the tanks would run out of fuel just before the objective? When a few barrels of petrol were brought up the next morning, a preparatory attack by three Tigers at around 09.00 sufficed to take Point 239, but the Tigers withdrew soon afterwards from their exposed position. In the late morning Heavy Armoured Regiment Bäke attacked again with eight Tigers and six Panthers, and took the hill without any problem.<sup>321</sup> This was followed by a push from Point 239 in the direction of Pochapintsy, but it was broken off because the Stemmermann Group was not in sight.

On the German side there had been a combination of several unfortunate circumstances. III Armoured Corps had been late in learning that Heavy Armoured Regiment Bäke’s attack on Point 239 had been delayed by logistic problems, and it then made repeated attempts to inform the Stemmermann Group accordingly. However, the radio link with the troops in the pocket was broken, so that radio messages, as the war diary records, had to be sent ‘blind’.<sup>322</sup> Meanwhile, General

<sup>318</sup> KTB 8, Armee, 15 Feb. 1944, 11.05, BA-MA RH 20-8/125.

<sup>319</sup> That these speculations are untenable is shown by the following sources. More details are contained in the Speidel papers, which are kept temporarily at the Research Institute for Military History (MGFA) (see: A. Militärisches und Militärpolitisch: II. Weltkrieg, Files 24). The MGFA also holds the following statements of position: Dr Ina Saame, Dr Christa Brunner, Brig.-Gen. (ret.) Hans H. Speidel, Potsdam, 10 Jan. 2002: ‘Richtigstellung zu Veröffentlichungen über General Dr. Hans Speidel’, 6–7.

<sup>320</sup> KTB III. Panzerkorps, 16 Feb. 1944, 14.40, BA-MA RH 24-3/107.

<sup>321</sup> Schweres Panzer-Regiment Bäke, Ia, 24 Feb. 1944: ‘Bericht über die Verbindungsaufnahme der westlich von Tscherkassy eingeschlossenen Korps am 17.2.1944’, fos. 70–1, BA-MA RH 21-1/141; Generalkommando III. Pz.Korps, Abt. Ia No. 379/44 geh., 25 Feb. 1944, to Panzerarmee-Oberkommando 1, fo. 133), BA-MA RH 21-1/141; 1. Panzer-Division, 24 Feb. 1944: ‘Gefechtsbericht über die Kämpfe der 1. Panzer-Division mit unterstellten Gruppen Bäke und Pietsch vom 17.2.1944, 4.00 Uhr, bis 18.2.1944, 24.00 Uhr’, fos. 136–8, BA-MA RH 21-1/141; Panzerarmee-Oberkommando 1, 28 Feb. 1944: ‘Stellungnahme zu den Gefechtsberichten der Gruppe Stemmermann und des III. Panzerkorps über die Kämpfe vom 16. bis 18.2.1944’, fos. 154–5, BA-MA RH 21-1/141; daily report by III. Pz.Korps, 17 Feb. 1944, 19.30, fo. 62, BA-MA RH 21-1/129; KTB III. Panzerkorps, 17 Feb. 1944, BA-MA RH 24-3/107; Scherf, ‘Tigerabteilung 503’, 227–9; BA-MA Msg. 2/4691, 32; Stoves, 1. Panzer-Division, 527; KTB Panzerregiment 11, 77, BA-MA RH 39/677.

<sup>322</sup> KTB III. Armeekorps, 17 Feb. 1944, BA-MA RH 24-3/107.

Stemmermann had met a tragic fate. His death is recounted below, but it meant that the troops breaking out of the pocket were left leaderless at a crucial stage.

The Soviet side had had enough time to react since the beginning of the German breakout.<sup>323</sup> The major role fell to 5th Guards Armoured Army, which was deployed directly in the corridor. XX Armoured Corps blocked the sector on both sides of Point 239, having been reinforced for that purpose by a number of other units, including an anti-tank artillery regiment. The escaping German troops were enclosed in a pincer movement from the north by XVIII Armoured Corps, supported by 27th Army, and from the south by XXIX Armoured Corps, supported by 4th Guards Army and V Guards Cavalry Corps. In addition, they were harried in the rear by 52nd Army, advancing from the east. On the German side, in contrast, III Armoured Corps was unable to continue the relief attack at the decisive moment, since it was forced onto the defensive by massive attacks on its flanks by 6th and 2nd Armoured Armies and 1st Guards Armoured Army.<sup>324</sup>

Meanwhile, the disaster on the eastern slope of Hill 239 was running its course. The German troops tried in vain to break through. They threw themselves into battle, as Konev later wrote, 'with the desperation of the doomed'.<sup>325</sup> But they had to attack tanks with small arms. The few fighting vehicles left to them were engaged in combat with the pursuing Soviet armoured units, and some of them had already run out of fuel and been blown up. Only a few soldiers managed to break through between the tanks that were firing on them.<sup>326</sup> Most of the units that had failed in the frontal attack fled southwards past Pochapintsy, gripped at times by collective panic. General Stemmermann had driven forward around 04.00 to try and get an overall view of the situation, but his vehicle took a direct hit and he was killed instantly. Radio traffic was also cut off, leaving the German units leaderless at the decisive moment. The loss of General Stemmermann was not noticed until much later. In the end, Lt.-Gen. Lieb took over command. He described the situation as follows:

There was no longer any effective control; there were no regiments, no battalions. Now and then small units appeared alongside us. [ . . . ] Behind and alongside me, thousands of men were struggling south-west [ . . . ] The entire area was littered with dead horses, and with vehicles and guns that had either been knocked out by the enemy or simply abandoned by their crews [ . . . ] Despite the general confusion and complete lack of control, one could still recognize the determination in the minds of the troops to break through toward the south-west, in the direction of III Armoured Corps.<sup>327</sup>

<sup>323</sup> On the Soviet side, see *The Battle for the Ukraine* (English translation of the Soviet General Staff study), 29–30, 63, 105–6, 124–5; Konev, *Aufzeichnungen eines Frontoberbefehlshabers*, 124 ff., 130 ff; Nash, 'No Stalingrad', 129 ff.

<sup>324</sup> 6th Armoured Army had V Mechanized Corps and V Guards Armoured Corps at its disposal; 2nd Armoured Army had III Guards Armoured Corps and XVI Armoured Corps; and 1st Guards Army had, above all, XI Guards Armoured Corps. In addition, strong infantry units had been assigned to them as support.

<sup>325</sup> Konev, 'Die Kesselschlacht von Korsun-Schewtschenko', 85–6.

<sup>326</sup> The combat reports of the individual divisions are contained in BA-MA RH 21-1/141 and RH 24-42/111. See also the reports and documents reprinted in Jahnke, *Der Kessel von Tscherkassy*, 125 ff.

<sup>327</sup> BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2346; Lieb: 'Die Kesselschlacht von Tscherkassy', 21, fo. 96.

With the onset of daylight, the fleeing troops were fully exposed to fire from the Soviet tanks, anti-tank cannon, artillery, and machine guns. In columns or smaller groups, they tried to advance in the shelter of woods or ravines. Now all hell broke loose against the seriously wounded, who were mostly carried on wooden carts and were attended selflessly by their comrades and Russian paramilitary auxiliaries. Although the carts were marked with red crosses visible from afar, the Soviet tanks began ‘target-shooting’ at them and simply rolled over some of them.<sup>328</sup> A summary report by Army Detachment B reads: ‘We have irreproachable reports that enemy tanks have rolled over horse-drawn carts carrying the wounded.’<sup>329</sup> That is also confirmed by survivors: ‘A cry went up from hundreds of voices. I turned and saw a horrifying scene I shall never forget as long as I live. The tanks drove at a group of wooden carts loaded with wounded soldiers, overturned them, and crushed them to pulp together with all the wounded.’<sup>330</sup> A member of 5th Armoured Artillery Regiment reported: ‘The tanks push whole horse carts before them—some loaded with wounded—and shove them over the edge of a ravine [...] We look on in helpless rage, unable to intervene.’<sup>331</sup> A seriously wounded soldier who was still able to walk managed to escape the slaughter: ‘I had to watch as the enemy tanks crushed the columns of wounded, and Soviet infantry dragged the helpless, unarmed men from the carts and beat them with their rifle butts.’<sup>332</sup>

These excesses increased the general panic. The mass streamed south past Pochapintsy and Point 222.5 to the Gniloy Tikich river. On the far bank freedom beckoned. But the river, swollen by the floods, was now 25 metres wide and had risen to over 2 metres. The banks were covered in jagged ice, and ice floes were carried by the current. Many soldiers met their fate at the river crossing, where more lost their lives than anywhere else during the breakout, only a few metres from safety on the opposite bank. Although a life-saving team was organized for non-swimmers, many drowned. The steep, smooth west bank, eroded by the current, proved treacherous. Some thought they had already reached safety but slid back into the river and were swept away. Thousands of German soldiers piled up on the east bank, offering a target for the enemy guns and grenade launchers. Suddenly several Soviet tanks arrived from the north and fired on the crowd from a distance of a few hundred metres, until they were driven off by two Panthers rapidly deployed on the west bank. Anyone who managed to swim across the river, in a temperature of minus 5 degrees and an icy wind from the east, had to walk another 2 kilometres in stiffly frozen clothing to Lisyanka, where 1st Armoured Division had its command post. Paradoxically, the disastrous river crossing was quite

<sup>328</sup> Jahnke, *Der Kessel von Tscherkassy*, 110, 121–2; Buchner, *Ostfront 1944*, 42.

<sup>329</sup> Korps-Abteilung B, Ia No. 200/44 geh., 24 Feb. 1944, ‘Originalmeldungen an die Gruppe Mattenklott’, 4, fo. 106, BA-MA RH 21-1/141; see *ibid.* App. 1e to Pz.AOK 1, Abt. Ia, No. 158/44 g.Kdos., 28 Feb. 1944: SS-Pz.Div. Wiking, Ia, 24 Feb. 1944: Gefechtsbericht, 3, fo. 115.

<sup>330</sup> Quoted in Jahnke, *Der Kessel von Tscherkassy*, 96.

<sup>331</sup> Diary entry by August Roddewig (2nd battery/I Battalion/5th Armoured Artillery Regiment), quoted *ibid.* 101.

<sup>332</sup> Report by Hermann Gutmann (platoon leader, II Platoon, SS Brigade ‘Wallonia’), quoted *ibid.* 100.

unnecessary, since the fleeing troops could have reached the German forces without getting their feet wet. Further to the north the Gniloy Tikich bends westwards, and just behind the bend, in Lisyanka, where the troops breaking out of the pocket were awaited, the sappers of 1st Armoured Divisions had built a bridge. But most of the men in the Stemmermann Group had drifted far to the south, to the crossing place at Point 222.5.

By no means all officers, however, were infected by the general panic. Maj.-Gen. Kurt Kruse, the commander of 389th Infantry Division, and his chief of operations, Lt.-Col. Hans Meier-Welcker,<sup>333</sup> assembled their units in a gorge and analysed the situation calmly. They sent out several officer reconnaissance patrols, one of which discovered a crucial gap at the bend in the Gniloy Tikich.<sup>334</sup> By that route they reached Lisyanka relatively unhampered, together with other units which had followed their example. In the course of the afternoon, when the rearguards arrived, the situation stabilized. In the meantime, sappers had built a makeshift bridge at the crossing place south-west of Point 222.5 where so many had lost their lives, and Heavy Armoured Regiment Bäke had liberated Hill 239. Relatively orderly conditions had been restored, so that units which had started out later made a relatively undramatic withdrawal. Nevertheless, the last groups from the pocket did not arrive until the morning of 19 February.

The cruelty perpetrated by some Red Army troops against unarmed wounded soldiers is described above. The men of Stemmermann Group were furious on learning that, according to Soviet accounts, they themselves had allegedly committed similar acts. Marshal Konev, for example, referred in his memoirs to 'reports by the Soviet Bureau of Information' claiming that, 'at the order of the German high command, wounded soldiers and officers were killed and their bodies burnt'.<sup>335</sup> This disinformation stemmed from 2nd Ukrainian Front HQ, as confirmed by an interview with Major Kampov, one of Konev's staff officers: 'The order to kill the wounded was strictly carried out [...] in many cases they [the Germans] set fire to the ambulance vans with the dead inside. One of the oddest sights were the charred skeletons in those burned-out vans, with wide bracelets of plaster-of-Paris round their arms or legs. For plaster-of-Paris doesn't burn.'<sup>336</sup> A striking detail in this account is the statement that most of the wounded were shot through the back of the head, a particularly Soviet method of execution. Elsewhere in his account, Major Kampov makes matters clearer: '[The Soviet cavalry] massacred the Fritzes [...] There was no time to take prisoners. It was a kind of carnage that nothing could stop till it was all over.'<sup>337</sup> Milovan Djilas, a comrade-in-arms of the Yugoslav

<sup>333</sup> Subsequently a general staff colonel in the Bundeswehr and the first head of the MGFA in Freiburg.

<sup>334</sup> 389th Infantry Division, Ia No. 200/44 geh., 22 Feb. 1944, 'Ausbruch am 16.2.1944', 3–4, fos. 61–2, BA-MA RH 21-1/141.

<sup>335</sup> Konev, *Aufzeichnungen eines Frontoberbefehlshabers*, 135.

<sup>336</sup> Quoted in Werth, *Russia at War*, 782. The British journalist and historian Alexander Werth was the only western correspondent to visit Konev's headquarters immediately after the battle. The man assigned there to accompany him was Major Kampov, with whom he remained friendly after the war.

<sup>337</sup> Ibid. 781.

Communist leader Marshal Tito, visited 2nd Ukrainian Front HQ shortly after the battle, where the foregoing course of events was confirmed by Marshal Konev in person:

He described, somewhat gleefully, Germany's latest catastrophe: some eighty, or even a hundred, thousand Germans had refused to surrender and had been forced into a narrow space, then tanks smashed their heavy equipment and machine-gun posts while the Cossack cavalry finally finished them off. 'We let the Cossacks cut them up for as long as they wished. They even hacked off the hands of those who raised them to surrender!' the Marshal said with a smile.<sup>338</sup>

Notwithstanding all the justified indignation of former members of the Wehrmacht,<sup>339</sup> it must not be forgotten that similar wild 'hunting scenes' took place on Ukrainian soil a few years earlier, in the area of Kiev. At that time the victims were several hundred thousand Red Army soldiers who were trying to escape encirclement. It is true that the German front-line troops generally respected the international laws of war and spared the lives of those who surrendered. Nevertheless, in September 1941 alone 665,000 Soviet troops were taken prisoner in the battle of the Kiev pocket.<sup>340</sup> In the camps behind the front lines, however, living conditions were so horrific that large numbers died of hunger and epidemics. The Red Army troops storming forward in the spring of 1944 were not unaware of those misdeeds. They took excessive revenge and so further accelerated the spiral of violence.

#### (e) Summing Up: 'No Stalingrad on the Dnieper'

The American military historian Douglas E. Nash rightly entitled his work on the Cherkassy–Korsun battle 'No Stalingrad on the Dnieper',<sup>341</sup> taking issue with historians like Sergei S. Smirnov, the author of *Stalingrad na Dnepre*.<sup>342</sup> The propaganda of the Stalin era created the picture of a second Stalingrad, to which Konev above all, the victor of the battle, was particularly attached.<sup>343</sup> As late as 1972 he claimed in his memoirs that 'not a single German soldier [...] got through anywhere on the external or internal front'.<sup>344</sup>

In reality, Cherkassy–Korsun ultimately failed as a battle of encirclement. On 16–17 February as many as 36,262 men were still able to break out,<sup>345</sup> and 4,161 wounded had already been flown out by 11 February.<sup>346</sup> This means that at

<sup>338</sup> Djilas, *Conversations with Stalin*, 46.

<sup>339</sup> Thus Günter Jahnke, a survivor of the battle of Cherkassy–Korsun pocket: 'Particularly reprehensible is the fact that the Soviet leadership was apparently still proud of the murder which its troops had committed' (Jahnke, *Der Kessel von Tscherkassy*, 122).

<sup>340</sup> KTB H.Gr. Süd, 26 Sept. 1941, fo. 132, BA-MA RH 19-I/73.

<sup>341</sup> This frequently cited work was published as a dissertation in 1995 in Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.

<sup>342</sup> See Smirnov, *Stalingrad na Dnepre*.

<sup>343</sup> Konev, *Aufzeichnungen eines Frontoberbefehlshabers*, 140, 142; Djilas, *Conversations with Stalin*, 46.

<sup>344</sup> Konev, *Aufzeichnungen eines Frontoberbefehlshabers*, 134.

<sup>345</sup> Final report of the Mattenklotz Group, 2 Mar. 1944, fo. 23, BA-MA RH 21-1/140 a.

<sup>346</sup> Ibid.; the entry for 11 Feb. 1944 in the war diary of the 1st Armoured Army's quartermaster-general confirms that 4,154 wounded had been flown out by that date; see BA-MA RH 21-1/366, fo. 20.

least 40,423 men were rescued. According to the final report of the army medical officer, Stemmermann Group's losses in the fighting in the pocket and during the breakout amounted to 3,000 'counted dead' and around 10,000 missing.<sup>347</sup> Konev's claim that 130,000 men were caught in the trap thus belongs in the realm of fantasy.<sup>348</sup>

From 1 to 20 February, in the course of its relief attack against the superior forces of several Soviet armoured armies, III Armoured Corps lost 559 dead, 347 missing, and 2,252 wounded.<sup>349</sup> The number of tanks and assault guns lost in February seems unusually high at 156,<sup>350</sup> especially as the figure given in the original reports was much lower. The explanation is that only around 30 per cent were knocked out by enemy fire (including mines), while most were blown up by the Germans themselves, often days later, since it had proved impossible to salvage them either because of technical defects or because they were stuck fast in the mud.<sup>351</sup>

As emphasized in a communication from the staff officer responsible for anti-tank combat, almost all the damaged vehicles would 'not necessarily have been write-offs if enough haulage resources had been in place in good time'.<sup>352</sup> Heavy Armoured Regiment Bäke, deployed at the spearhead of the breakthrough wedge, lost 23 Panthers, of which only four were knocked out by enemy fire, as well as seven Tigers, only one of which was destroyed by a Soviet cannon.<sup>353</sup> At the same time, this regiment, deploying on average a dozen Tigers or Panthers on each occasion, destroyed a total of 268 Soviet fighting vehicles.<sup>354</sup> As far as can be judged from the fragmentary surviving documentation, the losses incurred by XXXXVII

<sup>347</sup> Der Heeresarzt, Az.: 1335 (II b), No. I/5214/geheim, 1 Mar. 1944, fo. 13, BA-MA RW 6/559 (losses from 6 to 18 Feb.) However, this figure does not include losses of around 4,000 Soviet paramilitary auxiliaries. Originally numbering around 5,000, only 1,063 were left in the German units after the battle; see Gruppe Mattenklotz: Abschlußmeldung, 2 Mar. 1944, fo. 23, BA-MA RH 21-1/140 a. When the danger of encirclement loomed, the paramilitary auxiliaries left and blended with the civilian population. Though normally considered reliable, they were panic-stricken at the thought of being taken prisoner since they, even more than the German troops, could expect no mercy.

<sup>348</sup> On this, see the criticism in Nash, 'No Stalingrad', 73.

<sup>349</sup> Pz.AOK 1, IIa: 'Verlustübersicht vom 1. bis einschließlich 20.2.1944', fo. 10, BA-MA RH 21-1/198.

<sup>350</sup> Panzerarmee-Oberkommando 1, Stabsoffizier f. Panzer-Bek., 3 Mar. 1944, 'Panzerausfälle', fo. 42, BA-MA RH 21-1/130. Missing from the figure of 138 write-offs given here is the data for SS Armoured Division 'Leibstandarte', which suffered 19 write-offs (of which 10 assault guns), as noted in an earlier report: Pz.AOK 1, 28 Feb. 1944, 'Totalausfälle', fo. 253, BA-MA RH 21-1/129.

<sup>351</sup> Attached to a 1st Armoured Army file is a map on which all write-offs in the Lisyanka area are marked. However, all armoured vehicle losses are shown (incl. infantry fighting vehicles, armoured reconnaissance vehicles, armoured transport vehicles, etc.) Of all the vehicles written off, 75 were lost owing to enemy action, whereas 142 had to be blown up by the German troops themselves: appendix to Gen.Kdo. III. Pz.Korps Ia No. 363/44 g., 28 Feb. 1944, BA-MA RH 21-1/130.

<sup>352</sup> Panzerarmee-Oberkommando 1, Stabsoffizier f. Panzer-Bek., 3 Mar. 1944: 'Panzerausfälle', fo. 42, BA-MA RH 21-1/130.

<sup>353</sup> 'Verluste und Bergung von Panzern und Großwaffen (22.2.1944)', fo. 138, BA-MA RH 21-1/129; Pz.AOK. 1, 28 Feb. 1944: 'Totalausfälle', fo. 253, BA-MA RH 21-1/129; 'Ausfälle' (table), appendix to Stopak No. 349/44 geh., 3 Mar. 1944, fo. 44, BA-MA RH 21-1/130.

<sup>354</sup> For that exploit Lt.-Col. Bäke was awarded the Iron Cross with Oak Leaves and Swords; see Rubbel, *Tiger-Abteilung 503*, 195. From 24 January to 21 February 1944, Heavy Artillery Regiment Bäke reportedly destroyed some 500 Soviet tanks and assault guns; see Schadewitz, 'Die Rettung der 35 000', 1, BA-MA Msg 2/4396.

Armoured Corps, positioned further to the west, were minimal. In any case, it had few fighting vehicles and was mostly deployed in static combat.

In the battle of the Cherkassy–Korsun pocket the Red Army, according to its own figures, lost 80,188 men, of whom 24,286 dead or missing.<sup>355</sup> Here again, as always when heavy losses of armoured vehicles were incurred, no Soviet figures were recorded. Resort must therefore be had to the German reports, which were astonishingly reliable in this phase of the war because of the restrictions on hit recognition. From 4 to 19 February, according to the German reports, 728 Soviet tanks and assault guns were destroyed, as well as 600 anti-tanks guns and 150 cannon.<sup>356</sup> III Armoured Corps alone accounted for 606 fighting vehicles, 336 anti-tank guns, and 71 cannon.<sup>357</sup>

On the Soviet side, it should be noted that at the time of this battle the operational and tactical skill of the Red Army was far from having reached the level it attained by the following summer, for example during Operation BAGRATION. Nevertheless, the battle of the Cherkassy–Korsun pocket showed clear progress compared with earlier Soviet operations, reflected specifically in the role of 5th Guards Armoured Army. Normally, large-scale operations were always conducted in conjunction with general (infantry) armies. In this case, however, the tactical breakthrough was achieved by the armoured units alone. The ensuing advance was also an exclusively armoured operation. Once the connection was made with the spearhead of 6th Armoured Army, the pincer had closed. The Soviet forces had succeeded in trapping two German corps and opening up a 100-kilometre-wide breach in the front. At that point, however, the Stavka made a decisive mistake. Instead of pushing forward in depth and forcing the German troops back, the Soviet armoured units went over to the defensive. From the operational viewpoint, this was clearly a retrograde step compared with Stalingrad. At Stalingrad the forward thrust had been continued, and the front had been pushed back 150 kilometres to the west, with the result that, later on, the German relief troops could get no closer than 50 kilometres. At Cherkassy–Korsun, in contrast, III Armoured Corps was only 40 kilometres from the pocket at the beginning of the relief attack and, despite very adverse terrain conditions, it was able to get within a few kilometres of the encircled troops, thereby making the breakout possible.<sup>358</sup> The Stavka's mistake was compounded by a serious error on the part of Konev, the commander-in-chief of 2nd Ukrainian Front. The realignment which he ordered, conflicting with

<sup>355</sup> *Grif sekretnosti sniat*, 227.

<sup>356</sup> Wehrmacht report of 20 Feb. 1944, quoted in Jahnke, *Der Kessel von Tscherkassy*, 153; Vormann, *Tscherkassy*, 128; Manstein, *Verlorene Siege*, 584.

<sup>357</sup> KTB 1. Panzerarmee, 18 Feb. 1944, fo. 157, BA-MA RH 21-1/122; Appendix A: 'Schilderung der Feindlage vor III. Panzerkorps vom 3.2. bis 18.2.1944', 4, BA-MA RH 21-1/181; KTB III. Panzerkorps, 18 Feb. 1944, 470, fo. 236), BA-MA RH 24-3/107; III. Pz.Korps, Abt. Ic, 18 Feb. 1944, fo. 293, BA-MA RH 24-3/112.

<sup>358</sup> Nash, 'No Stalingrad', 149–50.

Zhukov's intentions, created great confusion and opened up a gap through which the German troops were able to escape.

Soviet propaganda celebrated the battle as a complete victory, in the course of which not a single German had escaped. General Konev became the first front commander promoted to the rank of marshal of the Soviet Union during the war.<sup>359</sup> Zhukov commented bitterly in his memoirs: 'On 18 February our capital city saluted the troops of 2nd Ukrainian Front. Not a word was said about the fighters of 1st Ukrainian Front. I consider this an unforgivable error on the part of the Supreme Commander.'<sup>360</sup> The Red Army had lost a great opportunity. The prey escaped. There was no "Cannae at Korsun".

Cherkassy-Korsun was one of the strangest battles of the war in terms of its reception, for German propaganda too celebrated it as a victory. There was no basis for that at all, and it was no glorious chapter in Field Marshal von Manstein's career. The main blame for the debacle undoubtedly lay with Hitler, who had insisted on holding the salient at all costs, against the demands of his generals, even when encirclement was imminent. In retrospect, however, it can be seen as a mistake to have attempted to encircle the encircling Soviet troops by means of a complicated manoeuvre instead of conducting a relief attack by the direct route. In so doing, Manstein was complying with a basic requirement of Hitler's and could hardly have foreseen the sudden change in the weather which rendered the roads almost impassable for some time. Nevertheless, he stuck too long to the original plan of a wheeling attack in the direction of Medvin. As a result, the final push towards Lisyanka did not get under way until seven days after the first attempted attack and 14 days after the encirclement. And so the counter-attack, instead of striking the enemy in the rear or on the flank as was usually done, was directed frontally against his newly established front.

After the breakout from the pocket, the troops of Stemmermann Group learned that, back home, the counter-offensive at Cherkassy was being celebrated bombastically as a 'great victory'. Once again, the propaganda machine distorted the facts and turned them on their head. The press reported the following announcement by Führer headquarters: 'The troops cut off there since 28 January [...] fought off the assault by far superior enemy forces in heroic battle and then broke through the enemy's enclosing ring in bitter fighting. The commanders and their troops have thus written another glorious page in the history of German soldiery, a further shining example of heroic endurance, daring fighting spirit, and selfless comradeship.'<sup>361</sup> Lt.-Gen. Vormann, whose armoured corps had pushed in vain towards the pocket, commented: 'The troops who took part were astonished and unbelieving when they were told they had won a great victory at Cherkassy in the Ukraine in 1944.'<sup>362</sup>

<sup>359</sup> At the same time, the commander-in-chief of 5th Guards Armoured Army, P. A. Rotmistrov, was promoted to marshal of armoured troops.

<sup>360</sup> Zhukov, *Erinnerungen* (8th edn.), 227.

<sup>361</sup> Quoted in Vormann, *Tscherkassy*, 127.

<sup>362</sup> Ibid. 128.

## 7. THE WITHDRAWAL BATTLES OF FOURTH ARMOURED ARMY IN THE NORTHERN UKRAINE FROM THE END OF JANUARY TO APRIL 1944

The dilemma of Hitler's operational command is aptly summed up by the following observation: 'Hitler committed the strategic "deadly sin" of taking space as his prime operational objective, rather than enemy forces which had to be beaten wherever they were.'<sup>363</sup> In pursuing that objective, the price he had to pay for holding onto front salients that were difficult to defend was much too high. The losses suffered at Cherkassy-Korsun 'flew in the face of all military economy'.<sup>364</sup> But that error did not only affect the sector directly concerned. Since Army Group South had to concentrate all its reserves in the centre of the front at Korsun, both wings were left exposed. The Red Army, however, was so strong numerically that it was also able to conduct two offensives on the wings.

On 30 January, 3rd and 4th Ukrainian Fronts launched the Nikopol-Krivoy Rog Offensive.<sup>365</sup> More than 700,000 men attacked the exposed Sixth Army in the Dnieper bend.<sup>366</sup> Consequently, on 2 February Sixth Army was reassigned to Army Group A, which then consisted essentially only of Seventeenth Army (enclosed in Crimea). Army Group South, however, now had to contend with the problem of a breach in its right flank, where the advancing Soviet troops reached the Ingulets by the end of February. Once again, the price was paid for Hitler's refusal to abandon an untenable salient. Sixth Army barely managed to escape encirclement.

An even greater problem arose on the northern wing, where a gap had been torn in the German front in the autumn of 1943 between Fourth Armoured Army and its neighbour on the left, Army Group Centre. The gap was now over 100 kilometres wide, and the no-man's-land south of the Pripet could only be kept under surveillance but not defended. In addition, large tracts of the Pripet marshes, which stretched from east to west, were controlled by partisans. Field Marshal von Manstein saw the gap as a 'mortal danger' that was bound to lead to the collapse of his army group in the long run.<sup>367</sup> It would provoke the enemy into pushing westward through the breach and then swinging south in order to 'launch a large-scale flanking movement against Fourth Armoured Army, which would be synonymous with outflanking the whole of Army Group South'.<sup>368</sup> Manstein remained convinced that 'the issue was as destined as ever to be settled on the northern wing'.<sup>369</sup> A breakthrough by the enemy on the southern wing was 'the lesser evil', while the 'operational consequences' of a breakthrough on the northern wing 'would be irreparable'.<sup>370</sup> For that reason he once again demanded of Hitler that Seventeenth Army, which was enclosed in Crimea and standing uselessly on

<sup>363</sup> Rieker, *Ein Mann verliert einen Weltkrieg*, 296.

<sup>364</sup> Tippelskirch, *Geschichte des Zweiten Weltkrieges*, 372.

<sup>365</sup> See Part IV, Chapter IV.

<sup>366</sup> *Geschichte des zweiten Weltkrieges 1939–1945*, viii. 98.

<sup>367</sup> Manstein, *Verlorene Siege*, 576, 578. <sup>368</sup> Ibid. 587.

<sup>369</sup> Ibid. 589; see also 591. <sup>370</sup> Ibid. 596.

the sidelines, be inserted in the gap between the two Army Groups.<sup>371</sup> For the dictator, however, possession of the peninsula (which was untenable in the long run) was a strategic chimera that took precedence over all operational necessities. The result was that Seventeenth Army ended up in voluntary imprisonment in Crimea and had to assume responsibility for guarding it.

### (a) The Kovel Gap

In the course of the Soviet Zhitomir–Berdichev Offensive Operation, Fourth Armoured Army had not only lost Korosten, its northern cornerstone, but had been thrown back far to the west beyond Sarny. For the first time, the Red Army crossed the former Polish–Soviet border. This was followed by 1st Ukrainian Front's Rovno–Lutsk Offensive Operation, which lasted from 27 January to 11 February 1944.<sup>372</sup> The offensive was conducted by 13th and 60th Armies, with a total of 19 rifle divisions supported by two armoured corps. What proved most dangerous, however, was the thrust by two cavalry corps on the northern wing, through the 'army group gap' south of the Pripet. I and VI Guards Cavalry Corps surged forward, with the partisans showing them the way through the difficult forest and marshland. After pushing west almost unhindered, they swung to the south, just as Manstein had feared, and took Rovno and Lutsk on 2 February.<sup>373</sup> The left wing of Army Group South had been outflanked.

Gauleiter Erich Koch, the hated Reich commissioner for the Ukraine, had lost no time getting out of Rovno, 'though not before enjoining the civilian agencies and police forces under his jurisdiction to fight to the last'.<sup>374</sup> He behaved similarly in East Prussia later on. Hitler, on the other hand, reacted as he often did when unwilling to admit to a mistake, by looking for a scapegoat. He immediately ordered a court-martial inquiry into the circumstances leading to the loss of Rovno and summoned the battle commander responsible for the town to Führer headquarters.<sup>375</sup> As a result of the inquiry, however, sentence of death was passed not upon the officer originally accused but on the divisional commander of the Rovno area, who had been summoned only as a witness. Nevertheless, following an intervention by Field Marshal von Manstein and General Raus, the commander-in-chief of Fourth Armoured Army, Hitler subsequently quashed the sentence.<sup>376</sup>

The Soviet advance into the Rovno area left Army Group South's left wing hanging in the air, with enemy units positioned deep in the rear of Fourth Armoured Army. Army Group Centre, its neighbour on the left, was also unable to plug the

<sup>371</sup> Ibid. 569–72, 578, 588.

<sup>372</sup> Eliseyev and Mikhalev, 'Osvobozhdenie', 38; *Geschichte des zweiten Weltkrieges 1939–1945*, viii. 97–8.

<sup>373</sup> KTB 4. Panzerarmee, 2 Feb. 1944, fos. 161–2, BA-MA RH 21-4/181. See also the file 'Kampfkommandant Rowno. Februar 1944', BA-MA RH 21-4/212.

<sup>374</sup> Manstein, *Verlorene Siege*, 588.

<sup>375</sup> Radio message from Ia, H.Gr. Süd to Pz.AOK 4, 3 Feb. 1944, 15.35, fo. 32, BA-MA RH 21-4/190 a; KTB 4. Panzerarmee, 3 Feb. 1944, fo. 168, BA-MA RH 21-4/181.

<sup>376</sup> Manstein, *Verlorene Siege*, 588.

huge gap. It had swung its right wing back through ninety degrees to the west and moved Second Army into position along the Pripet. That gave the Red Army two possibilities: it could push further west towards Kovel, south of the Pripet, or veer south with other forces to cut the army group off from its connections to the rear. From the German viewpoint, a push to the west seemed the most threatening, since the Red Army had assembled a new army group, 2nd Belorussian Front, especially for such an operation. On 26 February the new formation was brought into position between 1st Ukrainian Front and 1st Belorussian Front (formerly Belorussian Front). It consisted of 47th, 61st, and 70th Armies and had been assigned the primary task of taking the Kovel transport node. Kovel was of paramount importance in the prevailing situation because of its position at the south-western end of the 400-kilometre-long Pripet marshes. Whoever wanted to circumvent that enormous obstacle had to gain possession of Kovel, when it would then be possible to swing northwards unimpeded to the Bug at Brest-Litovsk. Kovel became the nightmare of the two German army groups, since a successful manoeuvre in that direction could result in the collapse of the eastern front. On 19 March, 2nd Belorussian Front pushed forward to Kovel and encircled the town. On 27 March, with Army Group South unable to intervene, the front sector with the beleaguered town was placed under the command of Army Group Centre. On 5 April, as described above, Second Army's LVI Armoured Corps broke through the encircling ring around the Kovel 'marshes fortress'.<sup>377</sup> The Soviet high command then called off the offensive and the same day ordered the disbandment of 2nd Belorussian Front and the assignment of its units to 1st Belorussian Front.

### (b) The Soviet Attack towards the South

While the German forces managed to stop 2nd Belorussian Front's advance on Kovel, 1st Ukrainian Front's southward offensive from the Yampol area threatened to unhinge Manstein's army group. As a result of Hitler's refusal to withdraw the front on the southern wing of Army Group A and use the units thus freed up to plug the hole on the northern wing of Army Group South, the course of the German eastern front was now very unfavourable. In the Ukraine it had lengthened to 1,200 kilometres, with the northern and southern wings almost 500 kilometres apart. Moreover, the front was continuous only as far as Shepetovka, to the west of which the Yampol gap began. And even beyond the gap, as far as Kovel, there were only isolated sections of front. This problem affected Fourth Armoured Army, whose right wing (LIX Army Corps and XXIV Armoured Corps) ran eastwards from Yampol, while its fragmentary left wing, on which XIII Army Corps and the newly brought-in XXXXVIII Armoured Corps were deployed, ran from there to the west. On the outermost left wing, 'Von dem Bach Group' (later 'Gille Group') had to guard the marshland at Kovel. The town of Yampol, where a dangerous breakthrough was possible, was seen by General Raus as the 'springboard for the

<sup>377</sup> See Part IV, Chapter II.

enemy's southward thrust'.<sup>378</sup> Above all, immediately to the south, between Tarnopol and Proskurov, lay the army group's 'most sensitive place'.<sup>379</sup> Through that area ran the strategically important Lvov–Odessa railway line, the only remaining connection north of the Carpathians, and from there the Red Army could push further south over the Dniester and through Romania to the Black Sea.

Fourth Armoured Army was in an exceptionally critical situation. Its actual strength on 1 March was 115,613 men.<sup>380</sup> Four days later its right wing (LIX Army Corps and XXIV Armoured Corps) was assigned to First Armoured Army east of Yampol, so that it could concentrate on securing the army group's threatened northern flank. That considerably reduced the units available to Fourth Armoured Army. As for operational fighting vehicles, it was left with only 10 tanks, 20 assault guns, and 13 anti-tank cannon on self-propelled carriages.<sup>381</sup> Manstein later commented on the situation on the eastern front as follows:

In non-stop combat since mid-July, the German divisions were literally burned out. Regimental strengths were down to a fraction of their former level [...] How were any further effective counter-strokes to be carried out when, for example, a whole armoured corps possessed only 24 operational tanks? [...] All in all, there were simply not enough men and weapons to cover the large areas in which a many times superior adversary could push time and again through undefended gaps.<sup>382</sup>

In this phase, however, Hitler ruined any attempt at a sensible conduct of operations by refusing to obtain reserves by shortening the front. Instead, he told Col.-Gen. Zeitzler: 'The Russians are bound to stop attacking some time. They have been attacking non-stop since last July and can't go on for ever.'<sup>383</sup> On this Manstein commented in his memoirs: 'In March 1944 it was time to foot the bill for the Supreme Command's cardinal error of never having been willing to give anything up (either in the east itself or in some other theatre) for the sake of being stronger than the enemy, or at least as strong, at the decisive spot.'<sup>384</sup>

Hitler also acted contrary to the findings of Maj.-Gen. Gehlen's Foreign Armies East Department. On 10 February Gehlen had already determined that:

a particularly strong threat exists for the whole of the German forces located between the Black Sea and the Pripet area. This continues to be the *Soviet point of concentration* [...] A decisive success against Army Group South would both completely clear the way for the enemy to the *Balkans* and *Poland* and also render the present course of the eastern front untenable. The outcome of the present operations in the area of Army Group South will therefore [...] determine, first and foremost, the fate of the German eastern front.<sup>385</sup>

<sup>378</sup> KTB 4. Panzerarmee, 29 Feb. 1944, fo. 271, BA-MA RH 21-4/181.

<sup>379</sup> Tippelskirch, *Geschichte des Zweiten Weltkrieges*, 375.

<sup>380</sup> OKH Organisationsabteilung (I), No. I/16628/44 g.Kdos., 5 May 1944: 'Notiz: Iststärke des Feldheeres, Stand 1.3.1944', fo. 12, BA-MA RH 2/1341.

<sup>381</sup> Pz.AOK 4: 'Panzer-, Sturmgeschütz- und Paklage vom 7.3.1944', fo. 100, BA-MA RH 21-4/191 a.

<sup>382</sup> Manstein, *Verlorene Siege*, 601. <sup>383</sup> Ibid. 591. <sup>384</sup> Ibid.

<sup>385</sup> Abt. Fremde Heere Ost (I), No. 103/44 g.Kdos., (No. 85): 'Zusammenfassende Beurteilung der Feindlage vor der deutschen Ostfront im großen, Stand 10.2.1944', fo. 226, BA-MA RHD 18/249.

On 1 March Gehlen correctly predicted the Soviet operational intentions. Observing with concern 1st Ukrainian Front's build-up of a point of concentration in the Yampol area, he assumed that a 'large-scale offensive involving two or three armoured armies' was imminent, with the objective of 'finally smashing the northern wing of Army Group South and cutting off the vital connections of Army Groups A and South while the forces of 3rd and 2nd Ukrainian Fronts conduct a frontal pinning attack'.<sup>386</sup>

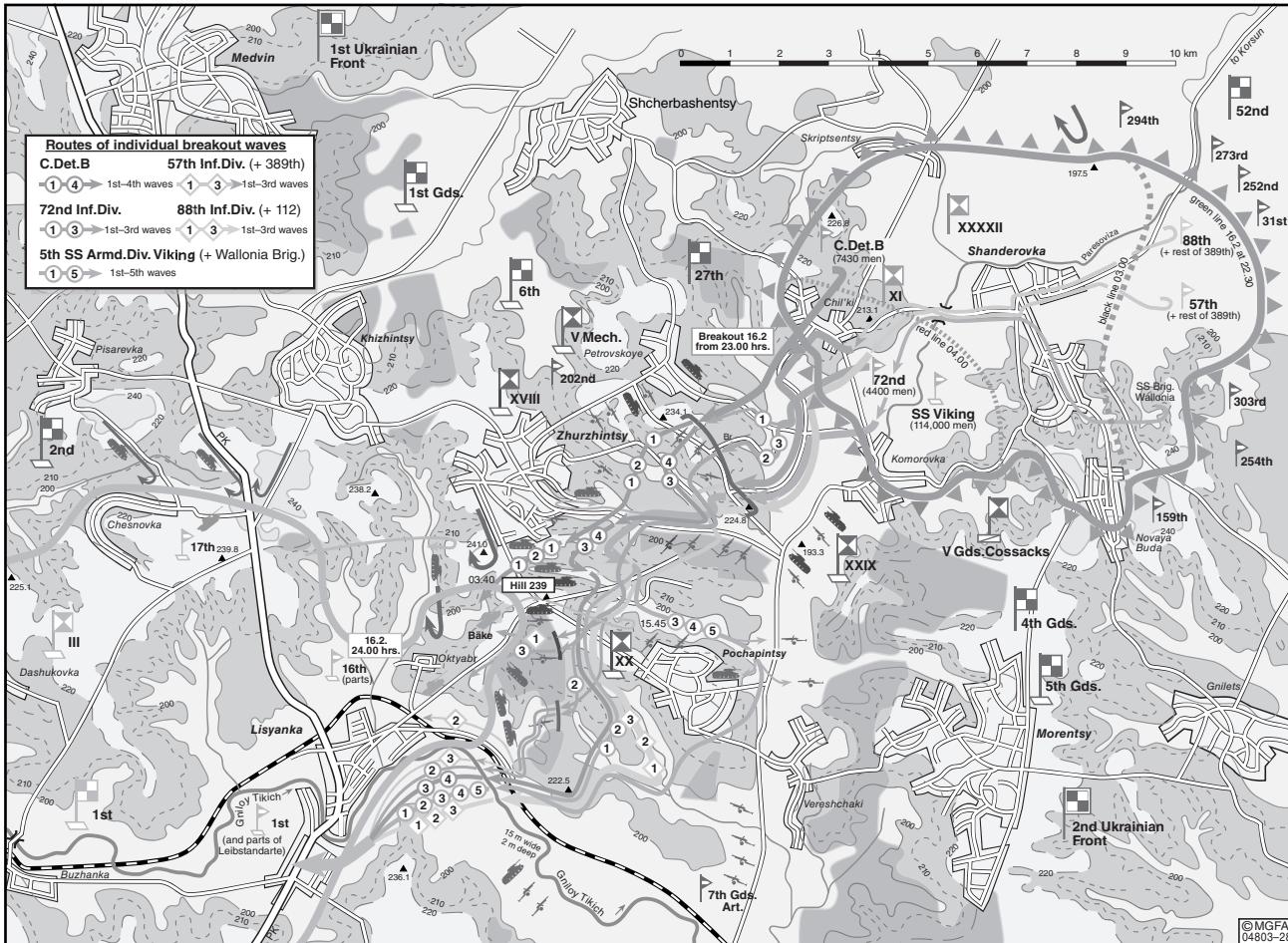
A few days later, on 4 March, 1st Ukrainian Front launched the Proskurov-Chernovits Offensive Operation from the Yampol area. This offensive, which led to the encirclement of First Armoured Army, is discussed in detail in section 8. With regard to Fourth Armoured Army, 1st Ukrainian Front confined itself to a local operational thrust, though with the ambitious aim of penetrating into Galicia as far as Lvov. Fourth Armoured Army's weak northern wing was harried by 18th and 69th Armies, but the attack by 13th and 60th Armies from the Yampol area was more dangerous, as it was supported by units of the Soviet 1st and 4th Armoured Armies. At the same time, the left wing of Army Group South was hanging in the air.

Right at the beginning of the offensive, Fourth Armoured Army's front collapsed on the southern wing. Following the Soviet breakthrough at Yampol, the connection with its neighbour to the right, 1st Armoured Army, was broken. The right wing was therefore pulled back far to the south with the aim of establishing a new defensive line behind the Seret river. Fourth Armoured Army now consisted of only two corps. XIII Army Corps was given the task of holding the northern wing and XXXVIII Armoured Corps the southern wing. The latter, however, had to give up its remaining armoured units for urgent redeployment in a counter-attack to assist the even harder-pressed First Armoured Army and close the gap between the two armies. Some of the German armoured divisions, which had been in action non-stop since the summer, were little more than debris. On 5 March, immediately after the Soviet breakthrough, when 7th Armoured Division was supposed to conduct a counter-thrust, the commander-in-chief of Fourth Armoured Army was informed that the division had 'not a single operational tank. In 2–3 days, after repairs, 10 tanks will again be operational'.<sup>387</sup> The two German armoured armies nevertheless succeeded in re-establishing a continuous front, even though weakly manned, on the inner wings between Tarnopol and Proskurov. 1st Ukrainian Front continued its offensive on 21 March and again achieved a breakthrough. As a result, 7th Armoured Division, 1st SS Armoured Division 'Leibstandarte', and 68th Infantry Division were cut off on Fourth Armoured Army's right wing and had to be reassigned to 1st Armoured Army.<sup>388</sup> Fourth Armoured Army was left with hardly any fighting vehicles.

<sup>386</sup> Abt. Fremde Heere Ost (I), No. 682/44 g.Kdos, (No. 88): 'Kurze Beurteilung der Feindlage vom 1.3.1944', fos. 232–3), BA-MA RHD 18/249.

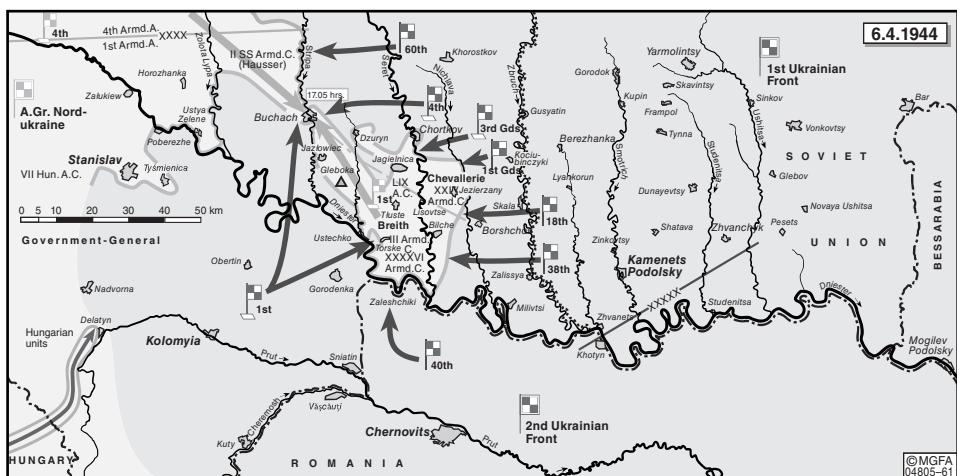
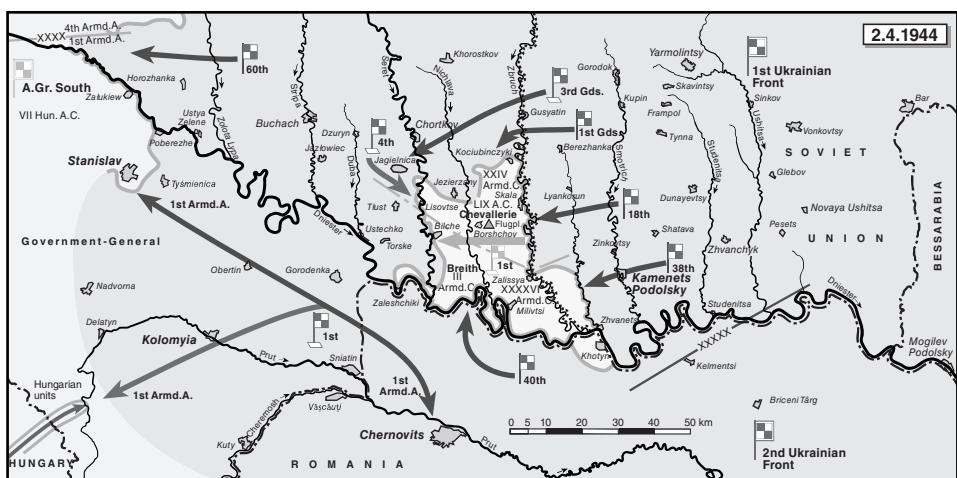
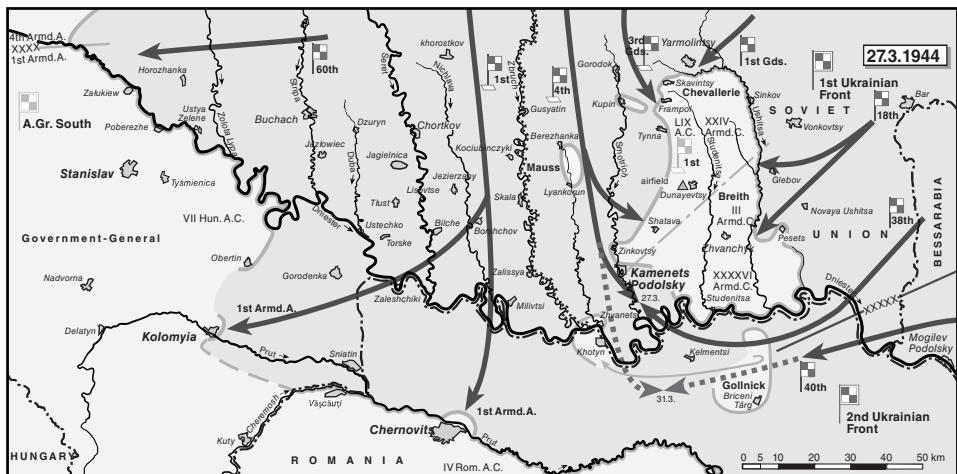
<sup>387</sup> KTB 4. Panzerarmee, 5 Mar. 1944, fo. 29, BA-MA RH 21-4/182.

<sup>388</sup> BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2074, 452.



**Map IV.III.8.** The breakout from the Cherkassy–Korsun pocket on 16–17 February 1944

Sources: First Armd.A., KTB, Anlageband, RH 21-1/141; III. Pz.K., situation maps for 1.2- 21.3.44, RH 20-3/124; XXXXII A.C., KTB No. 1 Anlageband, RH 24-42/111; 11th Armd.Rgt. 11, KTB No. 5 1.7.43- 30.6.44; RH 39/677; MSG 2/4691, TB Hptm. Scherf, Kp.Chef 3./503.



**Map IV.III.9. The breakout by First Armoured Army from the Kamenets Podolsky 'moving pocket' (27 March to 6 April 1944)**

Sources: OKH situation maps for 27.3, 2.4, 6.4, 44, BA-MA, Kart RH 2 Ost/976, 982, 986; OKH 8th. Div., situation maps, RH60/v. 32; A.Gr.South, situation maps for 27.3, 2.4, 5.4, 7.4, Kart RH 2 Ost/5857, 5863, 5866, 5867; 1st Armd.A., KTB 1.3 - 30.4.1944, RH 21-1/123; 1st Armd.A., daily reports, RH 21-1/1321, 133; 4th Armd.A., situation maps, RH 21-4/226 K; III Armd.C., situation maps, RH 24-3/125 K; XXIV Armd.C., situation maps, RH 24-4/278 K, 288 K.

### (c) The Tarnopol Disaster

Fourth Armoured Army's withdrawal battles in the spring of 1944 might not have aroused any great interest on the part of military historians, had it not been for the fact that a fateful idea of Hitler's was born at that time and first put into effect in that sector of the front. This was the establishment of 'fortified places', as required by Führer Order No. 11 of 8 March 1944:

The 'fortified places' will fulfil the function of fortresses in former historical times. They will ensure that the enemy does not occupy these areas of decisive operational importance. They will allow themselves to be surrounded, thereby holding down the largest possible number of enemy forces [...] Each 'fortified place commandant' should be a specially selected, hardened soldier, preferably of general's rank.<sup>389</sup>

Hitler had had 'another of his "inspired" ideas'.<sup>390</sup> He actually believed he had found a new means of permanently stopping the Red Army's irresistible advance on all sectors of the front. The 'fortified places' were to act as breakwaters. In fact, Hitler had fallen back into the thinking of the First World War, when fortresses like Verdun still had a role to play. In the course of the Second World War, however, even costly modern fortifications, such as Eben-Emael and the Maginot Line, had been overrun in an astonishingly short time. The fixed defensive points ordered in the spring of 1944 were mostly towns which possessed no noteworthy fortifications and were proclaimed 'fortified places' from one day to the next. In Manstein's opinion, Hitler's 'invention' of such strongholds was useless because 'in practice they required more troops to defend them than was worth devoting to their retention. Apart from which, the forces required for such purposes could not be made available.'<sup>391</sup> The stipulation that a fortified place could be surrendered only with the personal approval of the Führer<sup>392</sup> was particularly disastrous. Since their encirclement was programmed in advance, these fortress towns, like Kolberg in 1807, became traps for the troops that manned them. The controversy over Hitler's 'fortified places' is dealt with in detail later on in the discussion of the collapse of Army Group Centre.<sup>393</sup>

Tarnopol, in the front sector of Fourth Armoured Army, was the first place to be so designated by Hitler. Soviet units penetrated the city on 9 March, and the following day it was declared a 'fortified place'.<sup>394</sup> Army Group South HQ expressed strong reservations about the proclamation of fortified places in general and Tarnopol in particular. The city possessed neither fortifications nor an airfield for supplying it by air. There were not even enough troops or sufficient supplies

<sup>389</sup> Der Führer, GenStdH/Op.Abt. (I) No. 2434/44 g.K., 8 Mar. 1944: 'Führerbefehl Nr. 11', 1, BA-MA RH 21-4/191 a. See also *Hitlers Weisungen*, 243.

<sup>390</sup> Buchner, *Ostfront 1944*, 75.

<sup>391</sup> Manstein, *Verlorene Siege*, 599.

<sup>392</sup> Der Führer, GenStdH/Op.Abt. (I) No. 2434/44 g.K., 8 Mar. 1944: 'Führerbefehl Nr. 11', 1–2, BA-MA RH 21-4/191 a.

<sup>393</sup> See Part V, Chapter I.5, 'Hitler's "Fortified places": The Doctrine of Self-Imposed Encirclement'.

<sup>394</sup> Radio message from A.Gr. South, 10 Mar. 1944, 08.35, to C-in-C Fourth Armoured Army, BA-MA RH 21-4/191 a.

available in the event of a siege. Maj.-Gen. Schrepffer, who had been appointed ‘fortified place commandant’, also protested that it was hopeless to attempt to hold the city against a massive attack. In the defence of Tarnopol he would have to resort to messengers, since no communications equipment was available.<sup>395</sup> That same day, 10 March, Army Group South HQ nevertheless received a telex stating that ‘the Führer has decided that Tarnopol remains a “fortified place” and must be held to the last’.<sup>396</sup> On 11 March, moreover, Maj.-Gen. Schrepffer was relieved of his command and replaced by Maj.-Gen. Heinrich Kittel, despite having that day managed to drive out the Soviet troops who had penetrated the city.

A new attack took place on 23 March, completely enclosing the city. The resulting pocket lay 20 kilometres east of the front to which the German units had been forced to withdraw. What now followed was a remarkable military folly on the part of Hitler, whose stubbornness was steadily increasing. Tarnopol did not remotely meet the criteria which he himself had laid down for the establishment of a fortified place. Enclosure by the Red Army had occurred so quickly that it had been impossible to lay in sufficient supplies for the troops in the city. In response, Hitler ordered an armoured unit to advance on Tarnopol—not in order to help the enclosed troops break out, but to bring them supplies. On the morning of 25 March, however, when Armoured Combat Group Friebe stood ready as the escort, it transpired that the supply convoy from Lvov, 130 kilometres away, would not arrive in time. Thereupon the tanks were ordered to attack by themselves in the direction of Tarnopol. The action turned into a farce, since the combat group neither had the task of escorting the supply convoy, nor of bringing back the troops enclosed in Tarnopol, nor even of remaining in the city as a reinforcement. Instead, it was ordered to carry out a ‘relief attack’. This episode does not reflect well on the responsible military leadership either, and especially not on Fourth Armoured Army’s commander-in-chief, General Raus. But the generals were increasingly resigning themselves to Hitler’s interventions and carried out his nonsensical orders with a shake of the head. It was the troops who paid the price.

Colonel Werner Friebe’s combat group consisted of an armoured battalion with 36 fighting vehicles, reinforced by two armoured infantry battalions with infantry fighting vehicles and several smaller units. In the initial phase it was temporarily supported by 507th Heavy Armoured Battalion (22 Tigers).<sup>397</sup> On the morning of 25 March the combat group attacked from Ozerna in the direction of Tarnopol, but met with strong resistance.<sup>398</sup> The road was mined, and the group had repeatedly to break through anti-tank gun barriers and massive artillery fire.

<sup>395</sup> Fricke, ‘Fester Platz’ Tarnopol, 41.

<sup>396</sup> Radio message—KR—GHZOX 1529 11.3.1944 0130, g.Kdos., 10 Mar. 1944, ‘O.B. d. H.Gr. Süd an Pz.AOK 4’, BA-MA RH 21-4/214.

<sup>397</sup> KTB 4. Panzerarmee, 23 Mar. 1944, fo. 167, BA-MA RH 21-4/182. On the order of battle, see XXXXVIII. Panzerkorps, ‘Gefechts- und Verpflegungsstärken vom 26.3.1944’, App. 22a, BA-MA RH 24-48/147.

<sup>398</sup> On the course of the fighting, see Col. Friebe’s combat report, repr. in Fricke, ‘Fester Platz’ Tarnopol, 148–51. See also KTB XXXXVIII. Panzerkorps, 25 Mar. 1944, 93–7, BA-MA RH 24-48/144.

It was attacked on the flanks by Soviet tanks and came under fire from enemy ground-attack aircraft. On the other hand, no support from the Luftwaffe was possible because of the critical situation on the rest of the front. The group even had to do without preparatory air reconnaissance. Its losses piled up, especially when the command post was attacked by low-flying aircraft during a briefing. A regimental commander, two battalion commanders, and other officers lost their lives. In the end, Colonel Friebe took the only right decision: although a thrust towards Tarnopol 'would probably have been possible with the last forces', he broke off the operation on his own authority,<sup>399</sup> considering it pointless to continue the mission. The fact that the tanks had set out without the supply convoy proved fortunate in retrospect, since given the enemy fire, as Colonel Friebe observed somewhat ironically in his report, all the supply trucks would have gone up in flames.<sup>400</sup>

While Hitler was indulging in the luxury of a 'fortified place' 20 kilometres from his own front lines, the front itself was threatening to collapse. Colonel Friedrich-Wilhelm von Mellenthin, chief of staff of XXXXVIII Armoured Corps, urgently called for the six battalions tied down to no purpose in Tarnopol to be withdrawn and used to close the gap between 357th and 359th Infantry Divisions.<sup>401</sup> In the end, Hitler's calculation that the 'fortified place' would influence the Red Army's conduct of operations and induce it to halt its offensive was not borne out. Although four Soviet divisions were used to form a ring round the city, Soviet superiority was so great that 60th Army, together with IV Guards Armoured Corps, was able to continue attacking the front held by XXXXVIII Armoured Corps. The aim was to surround the wings while conducting a frontal pinning attack. It appeared to be only a matter of days before the hopelessly inferior defenders of Tarnopol were overrun by the Soviet troops. After the supply convoy failed to arrive on time, the armoured thrust by Combat Group Friebe on 25 March was conducted as a 'relief attack', but even that minimal objective was not achieved. That same day, the Soviet troops even managed to step up their attacks and breach the city's defences. Their concentrated thrusts increasingly constricted the German pocket. On the side of the defenders, serious shortages of all supplies were making themselves felt. They had to watch helplessly as the Soviet artillery moved into position on the hills around the town and opened a barrage of fire. For the encircled German troops, artillery ammunition was in short supply and was saved by many batteries for single shots against tanks. As Tarnopol had no airfield, the Luftwaffe attempted to drop ammunition containers by parachute. Because of the great danger from Soviet anti-aircraft fire, however, the planes could mostly fly only at night, and so most of the supply containers landed in enemy hands. There were spectacular exploits by German pilots who flew transport gliders through the enemy fire and made extremely difficult spot landings, but the supplies they brought in

<sup>399</sup> KTB 4. Panzerarmee, 25 Mar. 1944, fo. 173, BA-MA RH 21-4/182; Gep. Verband 8. Pz.Div., Ia, 'Tagesmeldung für den 25.3.1944', BA-MA RH 24-48/147; Fricke, '*Fester Platz' Tarnopol*', 77. 149–50.

<sup>400</sup> See Fricke, '*Fester Platz' Tarnopol*', 77–8, 150–1.

<sup>401</sup> Ibid. 80.

were a mere drop in the ocean. These were, in any case, suicide missions, since for the pilots there was no way back. From 10 March to 1 April the defenders lost half of the troops fit for action. Out of an original garrison of some 4,600 men, 2,325 were lost (of whom 674 dead or missing).<sup>402</sup>

Maj.-Gen. Egon von Neindorff, who had meanwhile been appointed the third commander of the Tarnopol 'fortified place' in the space of twelve days, considered defence of the city just as pointless as his two predecessors had. On 1 April he sent the following radio message from the pocket: 'Despite bitter resistance, unable to hold out against far superior enemy. Request Führer decision to attempt breakout.'<sup>403</sup> The shattering, laconic reply came only a few hours later: 'Führer decision: Tarnopol must be held.'<sup>404</sup> It was a death sentence for the vast majority of those trapped in the city. The besieging ring closed tighter and tighter around them. The ruined city was under relentless fire from the Soviet artillery, which included heavy-calibre cannon: 'Over the city itself hung a black, brown and grey cloud deck. Fiery flashes shot from the fountains of smoke and dust which marked the points of impact of incoming artillery rounds. The air was filled with thundering, crashing, and roaring sounds. Flames leapt high into the air, houses collapsed, and walls crashed to the ground. Projectiles howled and whistled in from all sides.'<sup>405</sup> The Soviet air force rained bombs on the smoking field of ruins, while four divisions of infantry, supported by tanks, attacked repeatedly. Within the murderous encirclement, every street and house was fought over. Flamethrowers and explosives were used. Conditions were especially bad for the wounded, who lay practically untended in the cellars. On 4 April a radio message reported that 850 seriously wounded were in a disastrous condition.<sup>406</sup> Medical supplies were running out, and even drinking water was lacking.

Hope flared up again on 8 April, when a radio message announcing a relief attack was received from XXXXVIII Armoured Corps. Hitler had finally given in. Now, however, such a thrust had much less chance of success than on 25 March. At that time Colonel Friebe would have been quite capable of conducting a successful relief attack, although that was not what the supreme command had in mind. Since then, the Red Army had established a multiply staggered cordon of anti-tank gun barriers and massed large numbers of troops. Above all, the encircled defenders were now so weakened that they were no longer capable of launching a serious attack from inside the pocket in the direction of the relief units. Once again, the counter-attack was to be conducted by Armoured Combat Group Friebe (with 33 battle tanks), together with 9th SS Armoured Division 'Hohenstaufen', which could deploy 30 tanks and

<sup>402</sup> Pz.AOK 4, 'Funksprüche des Kommandanten F. Pl. Tarnopol', radio message, 1 Apr. 1944, 19.30, 5, BA-MA RH 21-4/216.

<sup>403</sup> Ibid. 4, radio message, 1 Apr. 1944, 09.20.

<sup>404</sup> Ibid.; see also radio message Pz.AOK 4 to commandant, 1 Apr. 1944, 15.10, BA-MA RH 21-4/215.

<sup>405</sup> Buchner, *Ostfront 1944*, 85.

<sup>406</sup> Pz.AOK 4, 'Funksprüche des Kommandanten F. Pl. Tarnopol', radio message, 4 April 1944, 7, BA-MA RH 21-4/216.

30 assault guns.<sup>407</sup> The thrust was to be made from a south-westerly direction, via Gorodishche, on the morning of 11 April.

But then a torrential downpour began, rendering the roads virtually impassable. The war diary reads: 'The mud is so deep that even caterpillar-tracked vehicles get hopelessly stuck; the infantry's speed of movement is around 1 km per hour.'<sup>408</sup> Fourth Armoured Army's commander-in-chief described the prospects of the relief attack as 'hopeless'. 'Everything depends on the weather,' he wrote. 'It is very doubtful whether the garrison in Tarnopol can hold out until better weather makes it possible to resume the relief attack.'<sup>409</sup> VIII Air Corps was also barely able to intervene. After heavy fighting the German troops finally managed to gain a bridgehead at Mlyniec on the east bank of the Vosushka, but construction of the military bridge took a disproportionately long time because a 135-metre-long corduroy track had to be built to enable the tanks to get across. The first vehicles did not cross the bridge until the morning of 14 April.<sup>410</sup>

Meanwhile, the final battle for Tarnopol was under way. The day before, the pocket had been split into two parts joined only by a narrow causeway. A race now began, as the Red Army strove to liquidate the pocket before the arrival of the German relief troops. The Germans were fighting their way forward laboriously and had broken through several blocking positions, although the Soviet troops, entrenched in field fortifications, defended stubbornly and were steadily reinforced with more armoured units and 1st Guards Artillery Division. Velikiy Khodachkov fell on the evening of 15 April, and the German tanks pushed towards the hill to the east of the village. Then the unexpected happened. On Hill 363 there suddenly appeared several dirty, decrepit figures with beaming faces, hardly recognizable as German soldiers. The ten men identified themselves as returning stragglers from Tarnopol and reported that the breakout had already taken place.<sup>411</sup> The attacking German armoured unit therefore expected the rest of the garrison to follow shortly, but only 33 more men arrived that day.

Events in the pocket had taken the following course. On 14 April the defenders' final agony began. Tarnopol came under such massive Soviet fire that the city had to be evacuated. The German troops withdrew to the Zagrobela district on the west bank of the Seret. Once again the cruel moment arrived when over 700 seriously wounded,<sup>412</sup> whimpering from pain and fear, had to be abandoned to a highly uncertain fate at the hands of the Red Army. In Zagrobela there were hardly any cellars in which transportable wounded could be sheltered. The houses were made of clay or wood. The pocket in which the remaining 1,500 men were crammed together was no more than 1,000 metres in diameter. The attackers fired into it with weapons of all calibres, and the Soviet air force flew waves of bombing and strafing missions. The end came on 15 April. At 11.02 Fourth Armoured Army

<sup>407</sup> KTB 4. Panzerarmee, 11 Apr. 1944, BA-MA RH 21-4/183, fo. 74.

<sup>408</sup> Ibid., 12 Apr. 1944, fo. 81. <sup>409</sup> Ibid., fo. 82.

<sup>410</sup> KTB XXXXVIII. Panzerkorps, 13 and 14 Apr. 1944, BA-MA RH 24-48/148, 46-8.

<sup>411</sup> KTB 4. Panzerarmee, 16 Apr. 1944, BA-MA RH 21-4/184, fo. 4; KTB XXXXVIII. Panzerkorps, 16 Apr. 1944, RH 24-48/148, 56; Buchner, *Ostfront 1944*, 91.

<sup>412</sup> Buchner, *Ostfront 1944*, 92; Fricke, 'Fester Platz' Tarnopol, 120.

received a desperate radio message: ‘Relief extremely urgent. Well destroyed. Ammunition?’<sup>413</sup> With the only remaining well destroyed, there was no more drinking water.<sup>414</sup> The last radio message from the pocket, received around noon, reported the death of the commandant, Maj.-Gen. von Neindorff, in an air raid.<sup>415</sup>

Colonel Carl August von Schönfeld, the commander of 949th Infantry Regiment, then took command in the pocket and ordered the breakout on his own authority. Two groups of around 700 men were formed, one of which was to break out westwards and the other towards the southwest. At 02.00 on 16 April both groups succeeded in breaking through the inner encirclement ring, having taken the Soviet troops completely by surprise. The south-westerly group pushed past Yanovka and crossed through the woods to its west, but in the open terrain around Pochapintsy they were surrounded by Soviet troops and cut down. Colonel von Schönfeld fell at the head of the breakout group. On 16 April, as already mentioned, only 43 men reached the spearhead of Combat Group Friebe some 3 kilometres further on. Two days later, another five soldiers arrived. The westerly group, which set out towards Kozlov, fared even worse. Only seven men got through to the German lines.<sup>416</sup> Thus, all in all, only 55 of the original garrison of 4,600 men escaped from the pocket.<sup>417</sup>

On 18 April the curtain fell. Tarnopol, where Hitler first tested the ‘fortified place’ concept, had turned into a ‘miniature Stalingrad’.<sup>418</sup> But the dictator was still convinced he had been right, claiming that the fortified place had tied down strong enemy forces. The military reality was quite different, however. The Red Army had advanced in depth past Tarnopol without allowing itself to be disturbed by the German troops in its rear. It had indeed been obliged to leave strong encircling forces behind for a while but, given its huge numerical superiority, that had not weighed particularly heavily in the balance. The Tarnopol ‘fortified place’ had become an end in itself. Rather than relieving the burden on Fourth Armoured Army, it was itself a burden. The troops sacrificed there to no purpose could have been deployed much more usefully at the front, where dangerous gaps had arisen. Moreover, instead of tying down the Soviet attackers, Tarnopol tied down the few remaining German armoured reserves that had to be assembled for the relief attack. Open criticism of Hitler’s ‘fortified place’ obsession was a risky business, but General Raus, the commander-in-chief of Fourth Armoured Army, was unmistakably clear: ‘The point is whether the loss of a whole garrison of 4,200 troops with

<sup>413</sup> Pz.AOK 4 radio message from Kommandant F. Pl. Tarnopol: ‘Funkspruch 15.4.1944’, BA-MA RH 21-4/216, 23.

<sup>414</sup> Pz.AOK 4 daily report, 15 Apr. 1944, BA-MA RH 21-4/209, fo. 151.

<sup>415</sup> Fricke, ‘Fester Platz’ Tarnopol, 123; Buchner, *Ostfront*, 92; ‘Chef-Notizen vom 15.4.1944’, BA-MA RH 21-4/186 b.

<sup>416</sup> On the returning stragglers, see KTB 4. Panzerarmee, 16 to 18 Apr. 1944, BA-MA RH 21-4/184, and the corresponding daily reports in BA-MA RH 21-4/209. See also Fricke, ‘Fester Platz’ Tarnopol, 125–9; Buchner, *Ostfront 1944*, 93–4.

<sup>417</sup> The list of names of those 55 returning stragglers is found in Pz.AOK. 4: ‘Kampfkommandant Tarnopol, April 1944: Zurückgekehrte Tarnopolkämpfer’, BA-MA RH 21-4/215, fos. 227–8.

<sup>418</sup> Fricke, ‘Fester Platz’ Tarnopol, 129.

their valuable material, as well as human losses of 1,200 men in the relief attack, are in tolerable proportion to what was achieved.<sup>419</sup> But Tarnopol was only the prologue to a much greater disaster that befell Army Group Centre the following summer. Whereas in Tarnopol only troops of regimental strength had been obliged to let themselves be encircled, Hitler went on to apply the 'fortified place' system at the level of divisions and army corps. As a result, the combined mass of three armies ended up in a 'super Tarnopol'.

#### (d) The Behaviour of the Population in the Ukraine and Galicia

In most historical accounts of military operations, events are described as if they took place on an uninhabited battlefield. In the German–Soviet war, however, the dividing line between soldiers and civilian population was blurred.<sup>420</sup> On the one hand, civilians were victims of military violence; on the other, they too engaged in violence as partisans. The front was often invisible, and in the Ukraine it ran through the middle of the population, so that in the hinterland it was often no longer possible to distinguish between friend and foe. On 29 February 1944 General Vatutin, the commander-in-chief of 1st Ukrainian Front, was travelling to Sixtieth Army headquarters. As he passed through the village of Milyatyn, escorted by an armed convoy, he was shot by Ukrainian nationalist partisans and died of his wounds soon afterwards.<sup>421</sup> Here some discussion of the behaviour of the Ukrainian population is called for. In the west there is very little awareness that the Ukrainians were among the greatest victim peoples of the bloody twentieth century. In the space of some 30 years they lost around 11 million lives through democide (excluding military operations).<sup>422</sup> The paroxysm was reached in the winter famine of 1932–3, when the Soviet leadership sealed off the Ukraine hermetically after removing all the foodstuffs it could lay hands on. Within a few months the artificially induced famine cost 7 million people their lives.<sup>423</sup> It was 'the fastest mass murder committed against a single ethnic group in the twentieth century, and possibly in all history'.<sup>424</sup> By such ruthless cruelty Stalin broke the Ukrainians' will for freedom for a long time to come.

When the Wehrmacht marched into the Ukraine in 1941, the German troops were welcomed enthusiastically in many parts of the country. Many Ukrainians

<sup>419</sup> Oberkommando der 4. Panzerarmee No. 2885/44 geh., 24 Apr. 1944: 'Erfahrungen über feste Plätze', BA-MA RH 21-4/192 b, fo. 143. The figure of 4,200 men refers to 23 March, when Tarnopol was finally encircled. On 10 March, when it was proclaimed a 'fortified place', there were as many as 4,600 troops in the city. The figure of 1,200 human losses by the relief troops, however, includes the wounded.

<sup>420</sup> This subject can be dealt with here only in outline. On this see *Germany and the Second World War*, ix/II (chapters by Bernhard Chiari).

<sup>421</sup> Zhukov, *Erinnerungen* (8th edn.), 229.

<sup>422</sup> In a table of the largest democides suffered to date, repr. in Heinsohn, *Lexikon der Völkermorde*, 59, the Ukrainians take third place. Apart from the Chinese and Russians, it was they who suffered the most victims; see *ibid.* 335.

<sup>423</sup> *Ibid.* 58.

<sup>424</sup> *Ibid.* 336, see also 178. An estimated total of 42,672,000 Soviet citizens fell victim to Stalin's terror; see *ibid.* 56, 245, 295–7, 310.

fought on the German side during the war or helped as auxiliaries. The Nazi regime soon showed its true face, however, above all in its intention to destroy 'Judeo-Bolshevik subhumanity'. Two distinct partisan movements arose: one pro-Soviet, the other a Ukrainian nationalist movement directed against both the Germans and the Soviets, with the aim of an independent Ukraine. When the Red Army reconquered the country in the summer of 1943, many inhabitants had mixed feelings about the return of the Soviet commissars. A new wave of terror was unleashed against real or alleged collaborators, but the seemingly uninvolved population was also plunged into the maelstrom of war. Because of its horrendous losses, the Red Army was temporarily short of personnel. Special troops surrounded whole villages and forcibly recruited the majority of the male population, in some places from the age of 13 upwards and in others from 16. Engagements took place in which half of the prisoners captured by the Wehrmacht were less than 18 years old. Such 'booty Ukrainians' were frequently incorporated directly into Red Army combat units, although they had no training or combat experience whatsoever. In some cases they made up 40 per cent of the Soviet infantry, serving in fact only as 'cannon fodder'.<sup>425</sup> 'If these hordes encountered intact German units,' General von Vormann remarked, 'they suffered terrible losses, beyond all imagining.'<sup>426</sup> Instead, many Ukrainians joined the ranks of the partisans. It was they or their sympathizers who killed General Vatutin. The Red Army now experienced a new situation, since it too was henceforth obliged to 'set aside strong forces to combat partisan formations'.<sup>427</sup> What is more, a third group of partisans had formed in the western Ukraine, consisting of members of the Polish minority who were fighting above all against the Ukrainians. The hostilities in the region thus became increasingly complex and confusing.<sup>428</sup>

## 8. THE BREAKOUT BY FIRST ARMOURED ARMY FROM THE KAMENETS PODOLSKY 'MOVING POCKET'

While Fourth Armoured Army was only touched on the edge by the Soviet Proskurov–Chernovits Operation, that offensive hit First Armoured Army full on. It nevertheless consisted of only one of four simultaneously launched Soviet attacks aimed at destroying the German southern wing on which Army Groups A and South were positioned in the spring of 1944. That could have resulted in the collapse of the entire eastern front. The Stavka's plan was to split the southern wing by means of several armoured wedges, surround the German armies, and destroy them one after the other.<sup>429</sup> First Armoured Army was specially threatened, since it was in danger of a gigantic encirclement by the massed forces of two Soviet army

<sup>425</sup> See Ziemke, *Stalingrad*, 279, 281; Nash, 'No Stalingrad', 29; Cartier, *Der Zweite Weltkrieg*, ii. 696.

<sup>426</sup> Quoted in Cartier, *Der Zweite Weltkrieg*, ii. 696–7.

<sup>427</sup> Eliseyev and Mikhalev, 'Osvobozhdenie', 43.

<sup>428</sup> See Manstein, *Verlorene Siege*, 602–3.

<sup>429</sup> Eliseyev and Mikhalev, 'Osvobozhdenie', 41; *Deutschland im zweiten Weltkrieg*, v. 84; *Geschichte des zweiten Weltkriegs 1939–1945*, viii. 106–7.

fronts. The main attack was to be carried out by 1st Ukrainian Front. Its task was to push southwards to the Dnieper as quickly as possible at the interface between the German First and Fourth Armoured Armies in order to cut off First Armoured Army's retreat to the west. At the same time, 2nd Ukrainian Front would smash the left wing of the neighbouring Eighth Army, push forward in turn to the Dnieper, and then swing west with several armies so as to enclose First Armoured Army in a second pincer. The two Soviet army fronts constituted a concentration of 19 armies which included all six Soviet armoured armies and several independent mechanized units.<sup>430</sup> To the east, 3rd Ukrainian Front was to conduct an offensive from the Krivoy Rog area in the direction of Odessa and destroy the German Sixth Army, belonging to Army Group A, on the Black Sea. These three operations were to be launched at daily intervals starting on 4 March. As already discussed, 2nd Belorussian Front on the flank had the task of encircling the northern wing of Army Group South at Kovel.

1st Ukrainian Front alone had 800,000 men, 1,400 tanks and assault guns, 11,900 cannon and grenade launchers, and 477 combat aircraft,<sup>431</sup> and 2nd Ukrainian Front had 691,000 men, 670 tanks and assault guns, 8,890 cannon and grenade launchers, and 551 aircraft.<sup>432</sup> On the other side, the German First Armoured Army had an actual strength 211,545 men and Eighth Army 152,637.<sup>433</sup> How inferior the defenders were in terms of material can be seen from the number of battle tanks, which were the Germans forces' premier weapons system. Although the bulk of all Army Group South's armoured units were concentrated in First Armoured Army, the latter had only 96 tanks and 64 assault guns to deploy against the mass of Soviet armour.<sup>434</sup> Its fleet of motor vehicles was also wretchedly small in comparison with that of the Soviet units. Given the forced de-motorization, the role of the lorry was increasingly taken over by horses, of which First Armoured Army, for example, deployed around 50,000.<sup>435</sup> Field Marshal von Manstein also complained that personnel replacement had come to a halt. His army group had incurred total losses of 405,409 dead, missing, or wounded from July 1943 to January 1944, but only 221,893 replacements had been provided.<sup>436</sup> Of the new arrivals, 25 to 40 per cent did not even have small

<sup>430</sup> 1st Ukrainian Front comprised: 1st and 4th Armoured Armies; 3rd Guards Armoured Army; 13th, 18th, 38th, and 60th Armies, and 69th Army (temporarily on the right wing). 2nd Ukrainian Front: 2nd and 6th Armoured Armies; 5th Guards Armoured Army; 4th, 5th, and 7th Guards Army; 27th, 40th, 52nd, and 53rd Armies.

<sup>431</sup> Grylev, *Dnepr*, 134.

<sup>432</sup> Konev, *Aufzeichnungen eines Frontoberbefehlshabers*, 146.

<sup>433</sup> OKH, Organisationsabteilung (I), No. I/16628/44 g.Kdos., 5 May 1944: 'Iststärke des Feldheeres, Stand 1.3.1944', BA-MA RH 2/1341, fo. 12.

<sup>434</sup> For XXXXVI Armoured Corps and VII Army Corps, see Pz.AOK 1, Ia to Heeresgruppe Süd, 29 Feb. 1944, 21.15, daily report, BA-MA RH 21-1/130, fo. 3. The report does not take into account 1st SS Armoured Division 'Leibstandarte' since it was reassigned to Fourth Armoured Army immediately afterwards. For XXIV Armoured Corps and LIX Army Corps, see 'Heeresgruppe Süd: Panzer-, Sturmgeschütz- und Paklage vom 3.3.1944', RH 21-4/191 a, fo. 4.

<sup>435</sup> Armeeveterinär Pz.AOK 1, 7 May 1944, 'Tätigkeitsbericht der Abteilung IV c für die Zeit vom 1. bis 31.3.1944', BA-MA RH 21-1/378, fo. 109.

<sup>436</sup> Manstein, *Verlorene Siege*, 589.

arms, and 10 per cent had to be sent back as physically unfit.<sup>437</sup> This applied above all to the newly formed infantry divisions of the 24th wave, which were 50 per cent composed of fleetingly trained 18-year-olds.<sup>438</sup>

Furthermore, in the spring of 1944 the consequences of involvement in a war on several fronts on land, at sea, and in the air were increasingly perceptible. Many of the troop and material transports urgently needed on the eastern front were diverted to Italy or, above all, to the western front in order to concentrate strong forces there in view of the expected invasion. At the same time, the Soviet Union was receiving large quantities of weapons, vehicles, and supplies from the western powers, increasing still further the huge country's already massive armament.

At the beginning of March, Manstein's army group had to hold an 850-km-long front with only 33 decimated divisions.<sup>439</sup> The weak German forces were no longer sufficient to form defensive positions, but only thin security lines without reserves. Their only chance of avoiding encirclement and destruction was to withdraw, while fighting a rearguard action, to the rivers Bug, Dniester, and Prut, which ran parallel to their lines, in a race against time with the armoured units of the Red Army. But the German generals had another dangerous adversary, namely Hitler. His operational plan can be summarized in the single phrase: 'Hold firm!' In the front sector of First Armoured Army, it resulted in the following weeks in the greatest battle of encirclement since Stalingrad.

### (a) The Encirclement of First Armoured Army

From 1 March 1st Ukrainian Front was commanded by Marshal Zhukov in person, and on 4 March it launched the Proskurov–Chernovits Offensive Operation. Field Marshal von Manstein had clearly identified the Soviet point of concentration and endeavoured to place his weak forces as best he could. To that end he moved First Armoured Army further to the northwest as a counter-weight. First Armoured Army transferred the corps on its right wing, VII Army Corps, to Eighth Army and took over from Fourth Armoured Army the combat sector and the units of XXIV Armoured Corps and LIX Army Corps.<sup>440</sup> Nevertheless, Army Group South had too few troops to form a continuous front and had to put up with the 'Yampol gap', for example. Not surprisingly, it was there that the attacking forces achieved the breakthrough. The Soviet 60th Army made the decisive breach, through which the fighting vehicles of 3rd Guards Armoured Army and 4th Armoured Army then streamed southward. By 10 March the first wedges had already reached the Proskurov area. Then Manstein launched his pre-planned counter-attack. The flanks of the Soviet breakthrough corridor were attacked from the east by III Armoured Corps, while XXXXVIII Armoured Corps, belonging to Fourth Armoured Army, attacked from the west. The advancing avalanche of the superior Soviet forces was brought to a halt. However, the right wing of

<sup>437</sup> BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2074, 431.

<sup>438</sup> BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2076, 476.

<sup>439</sup> BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2074, 431–2.

<sup>440</sup> KTB 1. Panzerarmee, 3 and 4 Mar. 1944, BA-MA RH 21-1/123, fo. 4–5.

Fourth Armoured Army was broken off during the fighting and was transferred to First Armoured Army. From then on, as the 'Mauss Group' (7th Armoured Division, 1st SS Armoured Division 'Leibstandarte', 68th Infantry Division), it formed the left cornerstone of First Armoured Army.<sup>441</sup>

In his superabundant reserves Zhukov still had 1st Armoured Army, which was put into action later. On 21 March it achieved the decisive breakthrough in the gap between the German First and Fourth Armoured Armies.<sup>442</sup> With that, the dam was finally broken. The three armoured armies of 1st Ukrainian Front pushed south along First Armoured Army's western flank, which had been torn open. At the same time, First Armoured Army was subjected to holding attacks by 1st Guards Army and 18th Army, while 38th Army pushed forward on the eastern flank to strike it from the rear. The Soviet 1st Armoured Army, commanded by General Mikhail Yefimovich Katukov, attacked on the extreme western flank and advanced almost unimpeded deep into the area to the south. On 24 March it crossed the Dniester and five days later reached Chernovits on the Prut.<sup>443</sup> Meanwhile, the Soviet 4th Armoured Army swung east and on 27 March joined up at Kamenets Podolsky with 38th Army, which was advancing apace from the opposite direction. The two arms of 1st Ukrainian Front's pincer attack had closed. The Soviet losses were nevertheless considerable, with 3rd Guards Armoured Army losing 70 per cent of its tanks<sup>444</sup> and Fourth Armoured Army left with only 60 fighting vehicles.<sup>445</sup> The German units had defended vigorously, but in the face of such overwhelmingly superiority they were unable to prevent encirclement. Things went even worse for the German First Armoured Army, since 40th Army, belonging to 2nd Ukrainian Front, was now approaching from the north-east in another (external) pincer movement aimed at forestalling any attempt by the German troops to break out to the south. On 31 March it closed the pincer arms of the two army fronts (4th Armoured Army and 40th Army) at Khotyn. The German First Armoured Army was now trapped in a double encirclement both north and south of the Dniester.

On 5 March, the day after 1st Ukrainian Front began its offensive, 2nd Ukrainian Front launched the Uman–Botoşani Offensive Operation. In the main thrust alone, Marshal Konev deployed three general armies and three armoured armies, with a total of 651 tanks and assault guns.<sup>446</sup> Against such superior forces Eighth Army, still suffering from the consequences of the Cherkassy–Korsun battle, had no chance at all. After Manstein concentrated almost all armoured units with 1st Armoured Army, Eighth Army had been left with only three armoured divisions, equipped with a rudimentary fleet of fighting vehicles, and one armoured infantry division. On 10 March the Soviet units already took Uman, and on 12 March their first troops crossed the Southern Bug. They suffered considerable

<sup>441</sup> Unfortunately there are no Army Group South documents for this period, and the entries from 12 March to 2 April are missing from First Armoured Army's war diary.

<sup>442</sup> Katukov, *An der Spitze*, 271.

<sup>443</sup> Ibid. 272, 276.

<sup>444</sup> Eliseyev and Mikhalev, 'Osvobozhdenie', 43.

<sup>445</sup> Glantz, *When Titans Clashed*, 190.

<sup>446</sup> Konev, *Aufzeichnungen eines Frontoberbefehlshabers*, 147, 156.

losses nevertheless, and 6th Armoured Army had to be ordered back to the reserves after only a few days as only 20 per cent of its original fleet of fighting vehicles remained available.<sup>447</sup> The German units too were in a 'shattering' condition, as XXXXVII Armoured Corps' chief of staff noted after a visit to the front: 'Troops rendered apathetic by exhaustion. Artillery, assault guns, and tanks have no more ammunition. Most field kitchens lost, troops have had no hot food for days.'<sup>448</sup> On 17 March advance troops of the Soviet 5th Guards Army reached the Dniester and crossed it a few days later after constructing a military bridge.

Then, however, there came a fundamental change in the Soviet operational plan which worked to the advantage of the German troops of First Armoured Army, who were fighting for their lives. On 22 March an order arrived from Moscow that 2nd Ukrainian Front was no longer to veer south-west to complete the encirclement manoeuvre by 1st Ukrainian Front.<sup>449</sup> Wrongly assuming that the fate of the German First Armoured Army was already sealed, the Stavka now ordered most of the armies of 2nd Ukrainian Front to be directed towards the south-east to support 2nd Ukrainian Front's faltering operation against the German Sixth Army north of the Black Sea. Given the abundance of forces, numerous units were diverted to the destruction of First Armoured Army. While the Soviet 40th Army entered the fray immediately, other units lunged south into Romanian territory in a movement designed to deny First Armoured Army any possibility of retreating to the Carpathians. In Moscow they believed the encircled German troops would see flight to the south as the only way out. Meanwhile, the Soviet attacking units had driven a huge wedge between First Armoured Army and Eighth Army. The latter was split from Army Group South and pressed more and more tightly against the left flank of Sixth Army, which belonged to Army Group A. Eighth Army was now reliant on Army Group A for supplies too. Unified operational command seemed an urgent necessity.<sup>450</sup> In this situation Field Marshal von Kleist, the commander-in-chief of Army Group A, took an independent decision fraught with consequences. On the morning of 26 March he informed the OKH chief of staff by telephone that 'he had this morning placed Eighth Army under his command, because the situation so demanded. That afternoon he intended to take the momentous decision to withdraw from the Bug to the Dnieper, and to issue the necessary orders. He could no longer take responsibility for remaining in the present position. Someone had to stick his neck out.'<sup>451</sup> Col.-Gen. Zeitzler accepted the takeover of Eighth Army but referred Kleist's intention to withdraw on his own authority to Hitler. Hitler finally gave his agreement, though very reluctantly, and his reluctance later had negative personal consequences for Kleist.

<sup>447</sup> Grylev, *Dnepr*, 165.

<sup>448</sup> KTB 8. Armee, 10 Mar. 1944, BA-MA RH 20-8/126.

<sup>449</sup> Konev, *Aufzeichnungen eines Frontoberbefehlhabers*, 190; Elishev and Mikhalev, 'Osvobozhdenie', 44.

<sup>450</sup> BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2074, 448–9, 519–24.

<sup>451</sup> KTB H.Gr. A (26 Mar. 1944), BA-MA RH 19-V/25, 214. On this, see KTB 8. Armee, 26 Mar. 1944, BA-MA RH 20-8/126, fo. 8; AOK 8, I a No. 445/44 g.Kdos., 26 Mar. 1944, 16.10: 'Fernschreiben an 8. Armee usw.', BA-MA RH 20-8/135.

The reassignment of the separated Eighth Army to Army Group A was doubtless correct on the higher operational level, but it meant that the encircled First Armoured Army was even more isolated and could no longer expect any help from its former neighbour on the right. Its left-hand neighbour, Fourth Armoured Army, was now separated from it by a gap of 80 kilometres, which was widening all the time. On 24 March encirclement already seemed inevitable, and it first took the form of a pocket open to the west. The units of First Armoured Army were positioned in a half-circle: XXXXVI Armoured Corps, which stretched to the Dniester to the west of Mogilev Podolsky, formed the right cornerstone, while the Mauss Group, as the left cornerstone, was left completely hanging in the air at Gusyatin (on the Zbruch). This gave rise to the following configuration: the army's front faced north and east; the south (in the rear) was covered by the Dniester; but in the west there was, so to speak, a vacuum. Between the Mauss Group at Gusyatin and Khotyn on the Dnieper there were no German troops. The Soviet 3rd Guards Army and 4th Armoured Army advanced from the west through the 70-kilometre-wide gap, forcing the commander-in-chief of the German First Armoured Army, General Hube, to evacuate his headquarters in Kamenets Podolsky. The situation map now showed a terrible picture, in which First Armoured Army seemed to be caught in the tentacles of an octopus. It was surrounded by seven Soviet armies, three of them armoured. They included the newly arrived 40th Army of the neighbouring 2nd Ukrainian Front, which was advancing in depth from the north-east with other units in order to block the southward escape route. The River Dniester, a major obstacle, had turned from a shield into a barrier blocking the way south, although there was still a crossing at Khotyn with a bridgehead on the far bank. The situation thus looked even worse than at Stalingrad, where the pocket had at least had a continuous circular front. On 27 March, Goebbels wrote in his diary: 'In the east we are now facing the most serious crisis for a long time [...] our troops are partly engaged in hopeless battles.'<sup>452</sup>

There were about 220,000 men in the Kamenets Podolsky pocket.<sup>453</sup> They belonged to First Armoured Army, three divisions which had been split off from Fourth Armoured Army (the Mauss Group), and the Wehrmacht retinue (rear services, Todt Organization, police, paramilitary auxiliaries, and so on). The actual front-line units were considerably reduced in number. The combat strength of XXXXVI Armoured Corps (excluding 18th Artillery Division), for example, was only 3,677 men.<sup>454</sup> Against the Soviet armoured units fast approaching on several sides, the troops in the pocket could muster only 43 tanks and 50 assault guns.<sup>455</sup> On paper there were 22 divisions, which was a respectable number, but in fact all of them possessed only a fraction of their normal combat capability and some were not even up to regimental strength. While 1st Infantry Division still had 600 men

<sup>452</sup> Goebbels, *Tagebücher*, pt. 2, ix. 563 (27 Mar. 1944).

<sup>453</sup> OKH Organisationsabteilung (I), No. I/17245/44 g.Kdos., 26 May 1944, 'Iststärke des Feldheeres Stand 1.4.1944', BA-MA RH 2/1341.

<sup>454</sup> BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2662, 4a, Table 1.

<sup>455</sup> Pz.AOK 1, Ia to Heeresgruppe Süd, 27 Mar. 1944, daily report, BA-MA RH 21-1/132, fo. 109.

(combat strength) and two batteries of its original artillery equipment, it did not possess a single anti-tank cannon.<sup>456</sup> All the units were extremely short of weapons and vehicles, as well as ammunition and fuel.<sup>457</sup> Ignoring the lessons of the encirclement battles of Stalingrad and Cherkassy–Korsun, Hitler again hoped the logistic problems could be solved by supply from the air. Here too, he overestimated the possibilities of the Luftwaffe, especially as the nearest airfield was 200 kilometres away. The report of 30 March on the supply situation reads: ‘Today air supply once again wholly insufficient [ . . . ] ammunition and fuel supply situation extremely critical. Weapons blown up, vehicles set alight. Supplies for the wounded catastrophic’.<sup>458</sup> And on 1 April: ‘the supply situation is so serious that special requirements are superfluous. The fuel retrieved from burnt-out trucks is used up. Unless fuel arrives tonight, the first tanks will be unable to move.’<sup>459</sup> The same day came the brief report: ‘Fuel exhausted. Tanks of 7th and 16th Armd.Div. already at a standstill.’<sup>460</sup> In addition, the extremely difficult road conditions once again revealed the eastern army’s insufficient supply of tractors. With the weather alternating between snowstorms and thaw, the roads, almost all of which were unpaved, turned into a deep morass. Many vehicles got stuck and had to be destroyed.<sup>461</sup> Food was extremely scarce, and many of the food-supply trucks failed to reach their destination. The psychological condition of the wholly overstrained troops needs no further description.

### (b) Manstein’s Ultimatum to Hitler

Meanwhile, the conflict between Hitler and the commander-in-chief of Army Group South was escalating. In Manstein’s words, ‘it was time to foot the bill for the Supreme Command’s cardinal error’.<sup>462</sup> His army group was facing a catastrophe that would put even Stalingrad in the shade. The whole southern front threatened to collapse like a house of cards. On 19 March, when Vinnitsa had to be evacuated, Manstein made the full seriousness of the situation clear to Hitler at a meeting on the Obersalzburg. Since Sixth Army, at that time belonging to Army Group A, was still positioned far east of the Bug, he demanded that it be withdrawn to behind the Dniester and that the troops thus freed be used to stabilize Eighth Army. That proposal was supported by Field Marshal von Kleist, the commander-in-chief of Army Group A, but Hitler refused. Two days later, as recounted above, the front also collapsed at the interface between First and Fourth Armoured Armies.

<sup>456</sup> Pz.AOK 1, Ia to OKH/Org.Abt., 22 Mar. 1944, weekly report: ‘Wochenmeldung: Kampfwert der Divisionen, Stand 18.3.1944’, BA-MA RH 21-1/131, fo. 200.

<sup>457</sup> Wagener, *Heeresgruppe Süd*, 281–2; Haupt, *Schlachten der Heeresgruppe Süd*, 387–8.

<sup>458</sup> Pz.AOK 1, O.Qu./Qu.1, No. A/4/44 geh., 30 Mar. 1944, ‘Versorgungslage am 30.3.1944’, BA-MA RH 21-1/132, fo. 222.

<sup>459</sup> Pz.AOK 1, O.Qu./Qu.1, No. A/5/44 geh., ‘Versorgungslage am 1.4.1944’, BA-MA RH 21-1/133, fo. 222.

<sup>460</sup> Panzerarmee-Oberkommando 1, Abt. O.Qu./Qu. 1, No. 1223/44 geh., 12 Apr. 1944, ‘Die Versorgung der 1. Panzerarmee während der Durchbruchskämpfe aus dem Einschließungsring vom 23.3. bis 6.4.1944’, BA-MA RH 21-1/371, 6, fo. 60.

<sup>461</sup> Ibid.      <sup>462</sup> Manstein, *Verlorene Siege*, 591.

Strong Soviet armoured units pushed forward in depth towards Chernovits on the Dniester, and First Armoured Army was enclosed on three sides. On 23 March, Manstein demanded immediate permission to break out before the trap closed completely. He also asked for new forces to be brought in from the east to close the gap between Fourth and First Armoured Armies. As in the case of Cherkassy-Korsun, however, Hitler was not prepared to authorize withdrawal even in view of the threatening encirclement. He also refused to make additional units available to help First Armoured Army fight its way free. Col.-Gen. Zeitzler shared the views of the commander-in-chief of Army Group South but could do nothing in the face of Hitler's unbending will.

In this situation Manstein took an unprecedented risk: he gave Hitler an ultimatum. At noon on 24 March he reported that he would give First Armoured Army the breakout order on his own authority unless he received an instruction to that effect by 15.00 hours.<sup>463</sup> The reply from Führer headquarters can only be described as sheer cynicism. Permission was given for First Armoured Army to clear its way to the west, but the previous position should continue to be held. On this Manstein later wrote:

Where the army was to find the forces to drive west and clear its communications zone of the enemy was quite beyond us. It was exactly the same as at Stalingrad in December 1942, when Hitler had likewise been ready to let Sixth Army attempt to break out in the direction of Fourth Panzer Army. In that case, too, he had demanded the simultaneous retention of the city, which simply meant that Sixth Army could not assemble any forces for a breakout.<sup>464</sup>

The next day the field marshal was summoned to Führer headquarters at Berchtesgaden, but before his plane took off he demonstratively issued the order to make preparations for the breakout.<sup>465</sup>

The fate of First Armoured Army was decided on 25 March, far from the eastern front, against the backdrop of the Alps at Hitler's Berghof headquarters. A 'sharp exchange' took place. The dictator bluntly refused Manstein's request for withdrawal and accused him of always 'playing at operations'. For his part, Manstein coolly confronted Hitler with all his operational errors of recent weeks. Probably no one had ever dared criticize the Führer in such a way in front of his closest staff. More and more furious, Hitler finally brought the dispute to an end and ordered a resumption of the talks after the evening's situation conference. Immediately afterwards, Field Marshal von Manstein asked Lt.-Gen. Rudolf Schmundt, the Führer's chief adjutant, to inform Hitler that he considered it futile to remain in

<sup>463</sup> Ibid. 608.

<sup>464</sup> Ibid. 609.

<sup>465</sup> Ibid. 610; telex from OB H.Gr. Süd to 1. Panzer-Armee, 24 Mar. 1944, 17.35, g.Kdos., HZDX/FD 2110, BA-MA RH 21-1/131, fo. 294, which resulted in the First Armoured Army commander-in-chief's warning order for breakout to the west: 'Panzerarmee-Oberkommando 1, Abt. Ia, No. 741/44 geh.', 24 Mar. 1944, BA-MA RH 21-1/387, 11-12. Unfortunately there are no Army Group South documents available for that period. The entries for the period 12 March to 2 April are also missing in the First Armoured Army war diary, while the volumes of annexes to that war diary have survived.

command of the Army Group unless Hitler accepted his recommendations. If that were not the case, he 'wished the command of Southern Army Group to be entrusted to someone else'.<sup>466</sup>

When Hitler appeared at the evening conference, he was in a completely different mood and treated Manstein in a distinctly friendly manner. His first words were: 'I have been thinking the matter over again and agree with your plan to make First Armoured Army fight its way through to the west.'<sup>467</sup> He even acceded to Manstein's request for powerful reinforcements. II SS Armoured Corps would be brought in from France immediately for the proposed assault group, as would two infantry divisions from Hungary. The field marshal had won all along the line, but little knew, as yet, the personal price he would have to pay for his victory.

### (c) **The Breakout by First Armoured Army**

At this time Manstein had to contend with three conflicts simultaneously: Soviet superior force, Hitler's intransigence, and disagreement on the part of his own generals. His plan for rescuing First Armoured Army appeared so bold that by no means all were willing to go along with it, especially not First Armoured Army's commander-in-chief, General Hube. On 24 March Hube's army was enclosed on the north, west, and east, and had been thrown back to the Dniester. At that moment both Soviet wing armies were crossing the river to join up to the south and cut off the last escape route. General Hube's reflex reaction was to demand immediate retreat to the south before the trap snapped shut. Instead, Field Marshal von Manstein decided on a breakout to the west, straight through the middle of the two advancing Soviet armoured armies. At first sight, everything seemed to speak in favour of Hube's preference for a southward breakout. It was, after all, the path of least resistance. His plan could be implemented much more easily, and with far less risk, than a breakout to the west, which would involve getting through enemy lines and crossing several intervening rivers. One of First Armoured Army's corps had similarly run the gauntlet of an encircling ring during the breakout from the Cherkassy–Korsun pocket, but only at the cost of painful losses. On the face of it, and from a tactical viewpoint, General Hube was undoubtedly right. Manstein, however, was thinking several moves ahead, like a chess player, and was guided by the following operational and strategic considerations:

- In the event of a breakout to the south, First Armoured Army would escape encirclement north of the Dniester only to end up enclosed south of the river. Strong Soviet armoured forces pursuing at speed had already crossed the Dniester and were beginning a further pincer movement on both flanks. And even if Hube's army managed to avoid encirclement south of the river, it would be forced back to the Carpathians.
- Withdrawal to the south would open a huge gap between the army and its neighbour, Fourth Armoured Army. The Soviet forces would be able to

<sup>466</sup> Manstein, *Verlorene Siege*, 612.

<sup>467</sup> Ibid. 613.

advance through that gap via Lvov to Cracow and Breslau. First Army would then have failed in its main task of preventing a Soviet breakthrough to Galicia north of the Carpathians.

- In the event of a breakout to the west, the German forces would mainly encounter the enemy's supply columns, since several armoured units had already crossed the Dniester. They could thus break through the Soviet pincer arm and cut it off from its supplies.
- The distance to the German front was shortest to the west, so a relief group could advance towards the breakout forces from the opposite direction. In that way the gap with Fourth Armoured Army could be closed.
- For Manstein, however, the decisive factor, which had brought him success in many seemingly hopeless situations, was surprise.<sup>468</sup>

As we have said, the commander-in-chief of Army Group South had already ordered preparations for a breakout to the west before flying to Führer headquarters at Berchtesgaden on 24 March, and General Hube had issued the corresponding warning order to First Armoured Army.<sup>469</sup> The crisis between Manstein and Hitler reached its peak the following day, when the field marshal submitted his resignation ultimatum. In the middle of that nerve-racking situation he received further disastrous news from the front.<sup>470</sup> In view of the dramatic worsening of the situation, General Hube considered breakout to the west 'impracticable' and insisted that 'the correct solution was to head southwards'.<sup>471</sup> He was so sure of the logic of his situation assessment that during Manstein's absence he rescinded the previous warning order for breakout to the west and replaced it by a new one,<sup>472</sup> stating that 'First Armoured Army shall break through southwards across the Dniester'.<sup>473</sup> Manstein was unimpressed and stuck to what he considered the right decision. Shortly after midnight on 26 March, after Hitler had surprisingly approved Manstein's operational plan at the evening situation conference, the commander-in-chief of Army Group South gave the final order for breakout to the west.<sup>474</sup> Following this, General Hube had to rescind his own order once again and order the breakout to the west.<sup>475</sup>

Manstein did not give the order to start the breakthrough attack until 28 March. With astonishing mastery and cool-headedness, he watched the encirclement growing ever tighter around First Armoured Army and chose exactly the right

<sup>468</sup> On Manstein's thinking, see Manstein, *Verlorene Siege*, 609–11; BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2074, 455–8; Study ZA 1/2346, 7–8; Wagener, *Heeresgruppe Süd*, 286–7.

<sup>469</sup> Panzerarmee-Oberkommando 1, Abt. Ia, No. 741/44 geh., 24 Mar. 1944, BA-MA RH 21-1/387, 11–12.

<sup>470</sup> See, e.g., Pz.AOK 1, Ia to Heeresgruppe Süd, 25 Mar. 1944, 19.20, on the situation at 16.10, BA-MA RH 21-1/132, fo. 39.

<sup>471</sup> Manstein, *Verlorene Siege*, 613.

<sup>472</sup> Wagener, *Heeresgruppe Süd*, 288.

<sup>473</sup> Pz.AOK 1, Ia No. 746/44 geh., 25 Mar. 1944, BA-MA RH 21-1/387, 12.

<sup>474</sup> Manstein's order was forwarded to First Armoured Army from his headquarters: OK.H.Gr. Süd, Ia, No. 1455/44 g.Kdos., radio message No. 46, 26 Mar. 1944, 02.00, to Pz.AOK 1, nachr. AOK 8, BA-MA RH 21-1/132, fo. 59.

<sup>475</sup> Pz.AOK 1, Ia No. 748/44 geh., 26 Mar. 1944, 13.45, ibid., fos. 64–5.

time and place for the breakthrough. The field marshal was fully aware of the enemy's intentions, however, since German radio intelligence had managed to break the Soviet radio code in this important phase too. His army group's Ic Department had even deciphered the twice-daily strength reports of the individual armoured brigades.<sup>476</sup> In the opposite direction, the army group's own intelligence service managed to give Soviet radio surveillance the impression, by means of operational radio deception, that First Armoured Army's breakthrough attack would be carried out southwards across the Dniester.<sup>477</sup> There then arose the paradoxical configuration of a 'pocket within the pocket'. Strong forces of the Soviet 4th Armoured Army and XXX Rifle Corps had broken into the pocket through the originally existing gap in the west and taken Kamenets Podolsky.<sup>478</sup> Those units were now enclosed in turn and, like the German First Armoured Army, had to be supplied from the air. Strangely enough, the two airfields were very close to each other.<sup>479</sup> The German troops nevertheless managed to wear down the encircled Soviet units and retake the town.

When the breakout from the pocket began on 28 March, the Soviet encircling forces in the west were taken completely by surprise and overrun. General Hube had formed two attack groups: in the north the Chevallerie Group (LIX Army Corps and XXIV Armoured Corps) and in the south the Breith Group (III and XXXVI Armoured Corps). In addition, the Gollnick Group already held a bridgehead south of the Dniester at Khotyn. During the first days of the breakout operation there were repeated snowstorms, which provided protection against reconnaissance and, above all, against the enemy air force. By 29 March the Zbruch had already been crossed in several places, while Marshal Zhukov, who had still not seen through the German deception manoeuvre, continued to send troops across the Dnieper towards the south.<sup>480</sup> His orders were as follows: 'On 29 March 1944 the enemy is expected to make determined attempts to break through to Khotyn via Kamenets Podolsky [...] I order the armies to continue the rapid attack and finally destroy the enclosed group by 31 March 1944.'<sup>481</sup> Meanwhile Hube's armoured army, surrounded by seven Soviet armies, was pushing westwards in the form of a 'moving pocket'.

It was only on 1 April, when the foremost German units had already crossed the Seret, that Marshal Zhukov realized he had been taken in by a deception manoeuvre.<sup>482</sup> The commander-in-chief of 1st Ukrainian Front had made a huge mistake, fatally overestimating his own strength because of the overwhelming superiority of the Soviet forces. Thinking the battle already won, he was still concentrating on the destruction of the enemy and sought to close the last loophole

<sup>476</sup> Statement by the former head of Ic Army Group South, Col. (ret.) Blumroeder, repr. in BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2076, 283. See also Study ZA 1/2662, 26.

<sup>477</sup> 'Entwicklung der Feindlage während der Kämpfe der 1. Pz.-Armee in der Zeit vom 23.3. bis 6.4.1944', 2, BA-MA RH 21-1/181.

<sup>478</sup> BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2074, 460.

<sup>479</sup> 'Durchbruchsschlacht der 1. Panzerarmee', BA-MA RH 21-1/387, 29.

<sup>480</sup> Grylev, *Dnepr*, 152.

<sup>481</sup> Moskalenko, *In der Südwestrichtung*, ii. 311.

<sup>482</sup> Grylev, *Dnepr*, 155; *Deutschland im zweiten Weltkrieg*, v. 94.

to the south. With characteristic determination, Zhukov rushed as many armoured units as possible across the Dniester. He also fragmented his forces, fanning the Soviet 1st Armoured Army out in three different directions: towards Stanislav, Kolomyia, and Chernovits. Above all, he wholly misunderstood the enemy's real operational intentions. As he admits in his memoirs, he counted on the Germans' taking the 'rational and possible decision' to break out southwards.<sup>483</sup> His opponent, Field Marshal von Manstein, however, owed his greatest successes to seemingly irrational and impossible decisions. In the western campaign of 1940 it had been his idea—at first considered 'crazy' by the AOK—to attack with tanks through the Ardennes mountain forests. Zhukov had been outmanoeuvred by Manstein on several previous occasions, and this time he must have felt completely duped. But there was no Soviet general less capable of accepting defeat than Zhukov. Normally, when success evaded him, he attacked like a battering-ram, throwing his troops into battle *en masse* without regard for losses.<sup>484</sup> Now, however, they were in the wrong place at the wrong time. Moreover, some of his armoured units south of the Dniester were cut off from their supplies, because the German First Armoured Army had thrust straight through the middle of their supply columns during its breakout north of the river. What now followed can be explained only by Zhukov's excessive frustration. In the afternoon of 2 April several of the German staffs in the pocket received an astounding radio message, written in clumsy, ungrammatical German:

Offer from Front Commander Zhukov, Marshal of the Soviet Union, to the commanders of III and XXXVIII Armoured Army Corps [etc.]:

- (1) To spare further victims, I propose you end pointless resistance by end of 2 April and surrender with supported [*sic*] units. You are surrounded on all sides. No hope from the side [*sic*]. You cannot get out of pocket.
- (2) If not surrender [*sic*] by end of 2 April 44, of all soldiers who do not fulfil the offer to end the pointless resistance, the third [i.e. one in three] will be shot. That is the punishment for pointless resistance. Surrender in groups, you are enclosed in three rings. All officers who voluntarily cease resistance, their arms, decorations, and transport will be kept.<sup>485</sup>

A few hours later a new demand from Marshal Zhukov arrived, this time in correct German. Apparently he had cooled down a bit, as now he only threatened to shoot all the commanders 'in front of their units' unless they surrendered by the evening.<sup>486</sup> This brutal demand for capitulation, which was also propagated

<sup>483</sup> Zhukov, *Erinnerungen* (8th edn.), 232.

<sup>484</sup> A well-known example is the battle of Seelow on the Oder in April 1945, when the breakthrough was initially unsuccessful and Zhukov added 1st and 2nd Guards Armoured Armies to the attack in order to force a tactical breakthrough, carrying the principle of massed deployment to absurd lengths with distinctly counter-productive results.

<sup>485</sup> KTB 1. Panzerarmee, 2 Apr. 1944, BA-MA RH 21-1/123, fo. 8; see also 'Die Kapitulationsaufforderung' in file BA-MA RH 21-1/387, 21.

<sup>486</sup> KTB 1. Panzerarmee, 2 Apr. 1944, BA-MA RH 21-1/123, fo. 8.

by leaflets,<sup>487</sup> met only with scornful laughter, but it should not be forgotten that it was a glaring breach of the international laws of war.

That same day, 2 April, another event occurred which hit the troops of Army Group South like a shock. By order of Hitler, Field Marshal von Manstein was relieved of his command and replaced by Field Marshal Walter Model. That measure, which marks a turning point in the conduct of the war on the eastern front, is discussed in detail in section 9. At all events, it had no further impact on First Armoured Army's breakthrough operation, which was already well under way. In the following days there was again bitter fighting. Zhukov tried furiously to stop the 'moving pocket'. The armies in the encirclement ring thrust into the flanks from the north and south and followed hard in the rear from the east. Above all, Zhukov sent several armoured units westwards to try to overtake First Armoured Army and block its way forward. During those few days, however, the weather thawed, impeding in particular the movements of the Soviet units, which had been wrongly positioned and needed to be extensively regrouped. First Armoured Army was indeed surrounded by seven Soviet armies, but at the decisive point in the west it had relative superiority. Zhukov was no longer able to overcome the operational disadvantage: his measures came too late. Moreover, he had made another mistake with serious consequences. Unlike at Stalingrad and Cherkassy–Korsun, he had not considered it necessary to reinforce the outer encirclement ring against the right wing of the German Fourth Armoured Army.<sup>488</sup> Apparently he had not reckoned with a relief attack, since the two German armies were then more than 100 kilometres apart. Now, however, the reinforcements which Manstein had wrested from Hitler at the dramatic conference at Berchtesgaden rolled in from the north-west. Designated as the 'Hauser Attack Group', they were commanded by SS Obergruppenführer Paul Hauser, the commanding general of II SS Armoured Corps, which had been rushed in from France. It consisted of 9th SS Armoured Division 'Hohenstaufen' and 10th SS Armoured Division 'Frundsberg', plus two units, 100th Light Infantry Division and 367th Infantry Division, brought in from Hungary. The relief attack began on 5th April and immediately achieved a breakthrough. The Hauser Attack Group then pushed 50 kilometres south-east to Buchach on the Stripa. The next day, at 17.05, it joined up with 6th Armoured Division, the attacking spearhead of First Armoured Army,<sup>489</sup> thus breaking the encirclement and restoring the connection with Fourth Armoured Army. Two days later the last rearguard units had reached the German front.

#### (d) Outlook

The Kamenets Podolsky encirclement battle (21 March to 8 April 1944) was the mightiest breakout battle of the war and differed fundamentally from the Cherkassy–Korsun breakout battle which had taken place a few weeks earlier.

<sup>487</sup> Stoves, *1. Panzer-Division*, 604–5.

<sup>488</sup> BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2074, 471.

<sup>489</sup> KTB 1. Panzerarmee, 6 Apr. 1944, BA-MA RH 21-1/123, fo. 22; Tieke, *Im Feuersturm*, 35–72.

This time the breakout was carried out under tight, deliberate leadership. There was no panic or disintegration. Moreover—and this was very important for morale—all the wounded were taken along, as was the heavy material, especially the tanks. First Armoured Army thus remained an operational large formation and could be deployed in a new attack immediately after the breakout. The air supply to the pocket also functioned properly, after a few initial difficulties. The landing places had to be moved constantly as First Armoured Army pushed westwards, and in the end only air drops were possible. Nonetheless, a total of 7,270 wounded were flown out.<sup>490</sup> The breakout succeeded after ‘heavy fighting, but without high losses’.<sup>491</sup> First Armoured Army lost only 2,311 dead, 3,567 missing, and 8,364 wounded,<sup>492</sup> while destroying 399 Soviet tanks and assault guns and 280 cannon.<sup>493</sup> Such a difficult manoeuvre, conducted so swiftly, would have been impossible for the Soviet army. As a First Armoured Army analysis concluded, ‘the Russian middle and lower-level command was probably not capable—in terms of either command or supply—of conducting such an extensive large-scale operation successfully. The Red Army lacked the tradition of a highly trained general staff. Its inferiority in a war of movement became clearly apparent.’<sup>494</sup> Given the disastrous overall situation, such a feeling of superiority was rather rare, but it seems to have been one of the secrets of the successful breakout. Without a heightened awareness of their own qualitative superiority, the German officers would have simply given way to despair and succumbed to the maelstrom of the onrushing enemy masses. The success was also due to General Hube, who implemented Manstein’s audacious operational plan, which he had first considered utopian, with energy and determination. On 20 April he was summoned to Führer headquarters and awarded the Knight’s Cross of the Iron Cross with Oak Leaves, Swords, and Diamonds. He did not enjoy his success for long, however. He died on the return flight from Berchtesgaden, when the plane crashed shortly after taking off. Hube was an invalid, having lost an arm in the First World War, but he was known as a particularly resolute and energetic general. He was very popular with his troops, who called the Kamenets Podolsky breakout battle the ‘Hube moving pocket’ in his honour.<sup>495</sup> By the end of May the front was finally stabilized. North of the Dniester the positions of First Armoured Army ran along the Stripa, while some more ground was gained south of the Dniester in a counter-attack from Stanislav towards the east. The newly arrived 1st Hungarian Army also took part in these engagements.<sup>496</sup> Fourth Armoured Army was able to fend off all further Soviet attacks on the northern wing, so that the

<sup>490</sup> App. 2 to ‘Pz.Armee-Arzt 1’, Az. 11 (Ia), 25 Apr. 1944, ‘Luftabtransport vom 26.3. bis 9./10.4.1944’, BA-MA RH 21-1/371, fo. 21.

<sup>491</sup> BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2346, 11.

<sup>492</sup> ‘Verluste der Pz.AOK. 1 unterstellten Divisionen und Heeres-Truppen: 23.3.–8.4.1944’, BA-MA RH 21-1/198, fo. 7.

<sup>493</sup> BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2346, 11.

<sup>494</sup> ‘Entwicklung der Feindlage während der Kämpfe der 1. Pz.-Armee vom 23.3. bis 6.4.1944’, BA-MA RH 21-1/181, 7.

<sup>495</sup> Stoves, *1. Panzer-Division*, 610; Mellenthin, *Panzerschlachten*, 232.

<sup>496</sup> This army’s actual strength was only 33,669 men; see Organisationsabteilung (I) No. I/17246/44 g.Kdos., 26 May 1944, ‘Iststärke des Heeres. Stand 1.5.1944’, BA-MA RH 2/1341, fo. 18.

Army Group succeeded in establishing a new front line between the Carpathians and Pripet.

In the spring of 1944 one of the longest and bloodiest offensives of the war came to an end on the eastern front. According to official accounts, the 'right-bank Dnieper campaign', also known as the 'Dnieper–Carpathian Strategic Offensive Operation', lasted from 24 December 1943 to 17 April 1944. However, Soviet historiography concealed the fact that the fighting by two of the army fronts involved actually continued for another 19 days before it was abandoned for lack of success. In recent Russian research the concluding date has been corrected to 6 May.<sup>497</sup> All four Ukrainian Fronts took part in the operation, as did 2nd Belorussian Front for some of the time. The combined strength of the Soviet forces (as at 1 January 1944) was 2,230,000 men.<sup>498</sup> The figure given for Soviet losses is extraordinarily high at 1,192,900 men, of whom 288,600 dead or missing.<sup>499</sup> The highest casualty count was that of 1st Belorussian Front, most recently commanded by Zhukov himself, with losses totalling 456,369.<sup>500</sup> In this operation in particular, however, the number of casualties must have been much higher.<sup>501</sup> Numerous newly recruited Ukrainians, for example, were not taken into account in the Soviet reporting system. They were incorporated into the ranks of the Red Army immediately after the liberation of their towns and villages, and often lost their lives in their first action. The vehemence with which the Soviet units were thrown into battle can be seen from the magnitude of the material losses, which are given as 4,666 tanks and assault guns, 7,532 cannon, and 676 aircraft.<sup>502</sup> The combined efforts of these five Soviet army groups—or fronts, as they are called—were directed against four German armies (First and Fourth Armoured Armies, Sixth and Eighth Armies). Although total German losses from January to April were 'only' 250,956 men (of whom 41,907 dead and 51,161 missing),<sup>503</sup> their impact was much more serious than that of the Soviet casualties, which were at least five times higher, since at this stage the German eastern front was only sporadically receiving replacement personnel.

On a higher strategic level, the interdependencies of a war on several fronts were increasingly making themselves felt. In his Directive No. 51, issued in November

<sup>497</sup> The new edition of the standard work, 'The Great Patriotic War', has this to say on the subject: 'The date given in Soviet historiography for the end of the strategic operation (17 April) is incorrect. On that day, on orders from the Stavka, only 1st Ukrainian Front went over to the defensive. Dating the end of the operation in that way avoids analysis of the unsuccessful action of two army fronts which were given another 19 days in which to achieve their initial objectives (after which they too went over to the defensive).' See Eliseyev and Mikhalev, 'Osvobozhdenie', 33.

<sup>498</sup> Ibid. This figure does not include 51st Army, which belonged to 4th Ukrainian Front but was deployed to block off the Crimea, where the German Seventeenth Army (Army Group A) was encircled.

<sup>499</sup> Ibid. 52.      <sup>500</sup> *Grif sekretnosti sniat*, 197.

<sup>501</sup> The Ukrainian historian Viktor Yefimovich Korol postulates the figure of 1,300,000 dead and wounded in this operation (Korol, 'The Price of Victory', 421). For the whole duration of the war, he estimates the corresponding figure for the Red Army at approx. 23 million men (ibid. 423).

<sup>502</sup> *Grif sekretnosti sniat*, 371.

<sup>503</sup> See German casualty tables (Heeresarzt OKH Generalquartiermeister) for the period January to April 1944, including update reports, in BA-MA RW 6/v. 559.

1943, Hitler had announced his intention to transfer the strategic point of concentration from the eastern to the western front.<sup>504</sup> Accordingly, more and more troops were moved to the Atlantic Wall in France to repel the impending Allied invasion. In the spring of 1944, however, the dramatic developments on the eastern front forced Hitler to yield to Manstein's demand and send II SS Armoured Corps right across the continent to support Army Group South. After the successful Allied landing in Normandy, Hitler complained of the absence of that corps, which was to have constituted the operational reserve.<sup>505</sup> The SS armoured units, whose modern fighting vehicles were superior to those of the Americans and British, would have caused the western Allies considerable difficulties if they could have been deployed in the right place at the right time. As this example shows, Germany's military situation had deteriorated so alarmingly that even the absence of two armoured divisions now had operational, rather than merely tactical, consequences. German strategy had literally become a 'system of expedients', in which Hitler's command decisions no longer consisted in anything more than plugging a gap in one front while opening a new one in another.

## 9. MANSTEIN'S DISMISSAL AND THE 'END OF OPERATIONS'

To the troops of the encircled First Armoured Army, their rescue subsequently seemed 'almost like a miracle'.<sup>506</sup> Field Marshal von Manstein had pulled off a brilliant operational coup. Even Russian historiography, which treats German military achievements with great reserve, speaks of a 'daring breakthrough'.<sup>507</sup> Yet Manstein again became the victim of his own ideas. Once before, during preparations for the western campaign in 1940, the OKH had removed him from his command because his proposed plan of an armoured breakthrough through the Ardennes had been considered 'foolhardy'.<sup>508</sup> That plan was finally adopted, but Manstein had to follow its unexpected success from a post in the hinterland. Now, in March 1944, the seemingly impossible happened to him again. His paradoxical idea of a breakout to the west through the Soviet columns, instead of a breakout to the south through the only remaining loophole, resulted in the rescue of First Armoured Army. But it was to be his last great operational achievement.

On 30 March 1944, five days after Manstein had wrested permission from Hitler for First Armoured Army's breakout, he was again summoned to Führer headquarters. On board the plane which Hitler sent to bring him to Berchtesgaden there was already Field Marshal von Kleist, the commander-in-chief of Army Group A. Even before take-off, Manstein had been informed that he and Kleist were to be removed

<sup>504</sup> *Hitlers Weisungen*, 233.

<sup>505</sup> Magenheimer, *Die Militärstrategie Deutschlands 1940–1945*, 282 and 319, n. 63.

<sup>506</sup> 'Durchbruchsschlacht der 1. Panzerarmee', BA-MA RH 21-1/387, 30.

<sup>507</sup> Eliseyev and Mikhalev, 'Osvobozhdenie', 43.

<sup>508</sup> Frieser, *Blitzkrieg-Legende*, 110–16.

from their command. The news had been conveyed to him by the OKH chief of staff, Col.-Gen. Zeitzler, who had been so angered by Hitler's intention that he tendered his own resignation, which the Führer had summarily rejected with the words 'a general must remain at his post'.<sup>509</sup> In the evening a meeting took place at which Hitler adopted the attitude of a magnanimous elder statesman. He began by awarding Field Marshal von Manstein a medal, before informing him that he had decided to place the command of Army Group South 'in other hands'. Hitler's reason for doing so seems of great importance, since it signalled a paradigm change in the future conduct of war on the eastern front. According to Manstein's account, Hitler announced that 'the time for grand-style operations in the east, for which I had been particularly qualified, was now past. All that counted now was to cling stubbornly to what we held. This new type of leadership must be inaugurated under a new name and a new symbol'.<sup>510</sup> On 2 April, Field Marshal Model took over Manstein's command, while Kleist was replaced by Col.-Gen. Ferdinand Schörner. The two new commanders-in-chief had in common a reputation as 'stayers', earned in tenacious defensive battles.

There were several reasons for Manstein's dismissal. For one thing, the Führer did not tolerate strong, self-assured individuals in his proximity, especially if, like Manstein, they were far superior to him in terms of operational competence. In that respect Manstein's dismissal was revenge for the fact that, a few days earlier, Hitler had been forced to yield to the pressure of the field marshal's arguments. Another factor was the dictator's aversion to members of the Prussian military aristocracy, who had regarded him from the outset as a rabble-rouser from the gutter whose vulgarity was just as repulsive as his undisguised brutality. For his part, Hitler the 'revolutionary' despised that caste for its reactionary mentality. Conservative aristocrats did not fit in with his idea of an atavistic ideological war. Manstein, who had been a page at the Kaiser's court in his youth, was therefore suspect from their first encounter,<sup>511</sup> as can be seen from a remark by Hitler to his chief adjutant: 'I don't trust Kleist and Manstein; they're clever chaps but no National Socialists'.<sup>512</sup> Their successors, Model and Schörner, came from the upper middle class, as did Erwin Rommel, for example, whom Hitler, with his petit-bourgeois origins, treated as a special favourite.

Opposing concepts of operational command, however, were much more important factors in determining Hitler's behaviour than the above-mentioned sources of resentment. For Hitler, the very word 'operational' was an irritant. Guderian subsequently commented sarcastically: 'But if Hitler heard the word "operational" he lost his temper. He believed that whenever his generals spoke of operations they meant withdrawals; and consequently Hitler insisted with fanatical obstinacy that ground must be held, all ground, even when it was to our disadvantage to do so'.<sup>513</sup> This was essentially a conflict between the principles of 'static' and

<sup>509</sup> Philippi and Heim, *Der Feldzug gegen Sowjetrussland*, 241.

<sup>510</sup> Manstein, *Verlorene Siege*, 615.

<sup>511</sup> Heusinger, *Befehl im Widerstreit*, 81, 93.

<sup>512</sup> Ibid. 262.

<sup>513</sup> Guderian, *Erinnerungen eines Soldaten*, 293.

'mobile' defence.<sup>514</sup> The battles of Tarnopol and Kamenets Podolsky can be seen as symbolic for both concepts. With his notorious Führer Order No. 11 of 8 March 1944, Hitler had ordered the establishment of 'fortified places', in what was nothing less than a perversion of the principle of 'static' defence. The first such fortified place, Tarnopol, turned into a 'Stalingrad' on a smaller scale. Had Hitler's 'static defence' principle been applied in the encirclement battle of Kamenets Podolsky, First Armoured Army would have been enclosed by seven Soviet armies and crushed to pieces. Thanks to Manstein's mobile defence approach, however, the army was manoeuvred out of the trap. Its commander-in-chief subsequently had his staff draw up a memorandum which can be regarded as a key document in the controversy between Manstein and Hitler. In it we read:

We play into the enemy's hands if we continue to defend and expose ourselves to his superior numbers and barrage of fire without seeking an opportunity for a counter-attack against his weak side by means of mobile warfare [...] The enemy cannot be defeated simply by defending, taking what comes to us, and stubbornly holding our ground. His forces are eroded in the process, but experience shows that the defender's forces are consumed to the same extent. The numerically superior Russians will therefore [...] be able to endure this erosion of forces longer than we can.<sup>515</sup>

The memorandum concludes with a clear statement against a 'war of position' and in favour of mobile defence by means of delaying action and counter-attack, as demanded by Manstein.<sup>516</sup>

On 2 April, when Manstein had to give up his command, Hitler took two measures which seem at first sight mutually contradictory. On the one hand, he did what he always liked to do in crisis situations: he issued an order to hold firm. In Operational Order No. 7 he drew a new line which had to be 'held unconditionally'.<sup>517</sup> On the other hand, he ordered Army Group South and Army Group A to be renamed 'Army Group North Ukraine' and 'Army Group South Ukraine' respectively. That designation was geographically illogical, however, since only a small corner of the Ukraine was still occupied by German troops. For Hitler, the new names were intended to maintain the fiction of a subsequent reconquest of the Ukraine.<sup>518</sup> These two measures make sense, however, if seen against the background of Hitler's two-front strategy of the summer of 1944, which can be summed up in the simple phrase 'strike in the west, hold firm in the east'. The dictator planned to shift the point of concentration temporarily to the western front and fend off the Allied invasion on the Channel coast. Once that was achieved, the divisions thus freed up would be transported back east to reconquer the Ukraine. The temporary period of weakness on the eastern front was to be bridged by

<sup>514</sup> Heusinger, *Befehl im Widerstreit*, 284.

<sup>515</sup> Pz.AOK 1, 'Gedanken über die Kampfführung der letzten Monate im Südabschnitt der Ostfront', repr. in: BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2076, 327–8. The original document, without heading, date, or signature, was attached to a file of First Armoured Army, BA-MA RH 21-1/138, fos. 142–7.

<sup>516</sup> On this, see the analysis in BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2074, 480–2.

<sup>517</sup> OKH/Gens d H/Op.Abt. (I), No. 440 129/44 g.K./Chefs., 2 Apr. 1944, 'Operationsbefehl Nr. 7', RM 7/250, fos. 24–5.

<sup>518</sup> Philippi and Heim, *Der Feldzug gegen Sowjetrußland*, 241.

Hitler's creation of the 'fortified places' system of static defence. His intention, therefore, was to 'barricade' the eastern front for a certain time, and to do so, moreover, in immeasurably distant Russia against a massively superior enemy. The Prussian military reformer General August Graf Neidhardt von Gneisenau defined strategy as 'the science of the use of time and space'.<sup>519</sup> According to that principle, Hitler should have given up space to gain time. Instead, he rejected Manstein's proposal to use space as a weapon for outmanoeuvring the numerically superior enemy.

But the time of Manstein's combat victories was also past. While he managed to make a fool of his adversary, Zhukov, at Kamenets Podolsky, it was only an intellectual triumph. In physical terms the Red Army had won once again, as is clear from a glance at the situation map. Zhukov's troops conquered a vast area, even if, to his chagrin, the prey escaped. For Manstein it had long since ceased to be a matter of 'lost victories', as he entitled his memoirs, but only of 'victoriously' prevented disasters. But even that much was to be made considerably more difficult for the German generals in future, since Hitler decided not on the successful Kamenets Podolsky strategy but on the system that had failed at Tarnopol. Manstein's dismissal thus meant more than the recall of a general. His name symbolized an operational concept, and his dismissal finally paved the road to ruin on the eastern front. From then on, Hitler's troops would no longer counter the rapidly advancing superior Soviet forces by active operational manoeuvres but would defend passively and let themselves be slaughtered in the killing fields of the 'fortified places'.<sup>520</sup>

<sup>519</sup> Letter from Gneisenau to Stein, 27 Jan. 1814, repr. in Stein, *Briefe und amtliche Schriften*, iv. 482.

<sup>520</sup> The 'fortified places' system is analysed in detail in Part V, Chapter I.5 of the present volume, in the discussion of the collapse of Army Group Centre in the summer of 1944.

## IV. The Withdrawal of Army Group A through the Crimea to Romania

*Klaus Schönherr*

With the debacle at Stalingrad the Axis powers lost the military initiative in the eastern theatre of war at the end of 1942. As a result, they found themselves forced onto the defensive from the start of the enemy's winter offensive. At this point the Soviets exploited the advantage they had gained by concentrating their attack on the unstable southern section of the eastern front. This confirmed the indications at the end of the year that the Red Army's winter offensive would be directed primarily against Army Groups Don and A, with a view to encircling them at the Sea of Azov and cutting their rear communication lines. The main threat was to Army Group A, which, in December 1942, still occupied forward positions extending into the Caucasus and south of the Terek river. In view of this danger, the OKH needed to take immediate steps to withdraw the army group from the Caucasus to the Don in order to form a stable defence front to protect the Donets Basin, which was vital to the conduct of the war. But only when Army Group B collapsed in the mid-Don area in December and the position came to a head for the German troops in the Caucasus was Gen. Kurt Zeitzler able to order the withdrawal of Army Group A. Although a rapid retreat over the Don at Rostov was imperative in the tense situation at the end of 1942, Hitler only authorized the gradual withdrawal of the army group from the Caucasus. As a result, only the northern section of First Armoured Army was able to cross the Don at Rostov, while the rest of Army Group A was obliged to withdraw to the Taman peninsula.<sup>1</sup> There, in the Kuban estuary, Seventeenth Army established a bridgehead that was to determine the military situation in the southern section of the eastern front over the coming months. Even so, four weeks were to pass before Hitler took the decision on the redeployment of Army Group A. In accordance with that decision, four of the army group's own divisions and First Armoured Army HQ were to be transferred to Army Group Don, while the southern section of First Armoured Army was placed under the command of Seventeenth Army. In his order of

<sup>1</sup> The promontory in the Kuban estuary between the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov is described in Russian as the Taman peninsula. This area on the Kerch Strait is also known, in connection with the battles on the eastern front, as the Kuban bridgehead or under its operational name, the 'Gothic Head'.

27 January 1943, Hitler gave Army Group A the task of defending the Kuban bridgehead and protecting the Crimea from enemy incursions.<sup>2</sup> The decision was bound up with Hitler's plan to launch a new offensive from the 'Gothic Head' positions in the summer of 1943 in order to recapture the Maikop oilfields, which were vital to the conduct of the war. However, Hitler's decision was influenced not only by this operational objective but also by political considerations. Possession of the Crimea, in particular, would be threatened if the territory to the east of the main battle lines were surrendered. Germany could not afford to lose the peninsula, because this might affect the political attitude of the friendly 'neutral' power, Turkey, and of Germany's allies, Bulgaria and Romania.<sup>3</sup>

At the beginning of February 1943, when the withdrawal had been completed, 20 divisions numbering close on 400,000 men were still stationed in the Kuban bridgehead and the Crimea. In this situation the commanders-in-chief of Army Groups Don and A, unlike Hitler, were in favour of strengthening the front to the north of Rostov and on the Don in order to protect the Donets Basin, which was vital to the war economy. The withdrawal from the Caucasus provided temporary relief and also stabilized the southern section of the eastern front.<sup>4</sup>

## 1. THE KUBAN BRIDGEHEAD

At the end of March 1943 the thaw had set in and Seventeenth Army had largely taken up the necessary defensive positions in the Kuban bridgehead. Then, on 27 March, Hitler gave the army group the task of holding the Taman peninsula and disposing of the enemy beachhead to the south of Novorossiysk. In addition to defending the Gothic Head, the army group was also responsible for military matters in the Crimea, where the commander of the Crimea<sup>5</sup> was supposed to prevent a Soviet invasion. For the defence of the bridgehead, Seventeenth Army had at its disposal the 'Wetzel Group' (V Army Corps, Gen. Wilhelm Wetzel), XXXXIV Army Corps, and XXXIX Army Corps, and a Romanian corps, comprising six German and two Romanian divisions deployed along the 120-kilometre front from Novorossiysk to Kurchanskaya. Despite the numerous combat units at its disposal, there was clearly a danger that Seventeenth Army might not be able to hold these defensive positions in view of its drastically reduced manpower and the shortage of materials. The combined German and Romanian forces, which still comprised some 200,000 men at the beginning of April, faced North Caucasus Front, which had 69 units with a combined strength of more than 350,000 men.<sup>6</sup> As only 60 per cent of these were deployed on the front line, the opposing forces on the southern flank of the eastern front were almost equally matched.

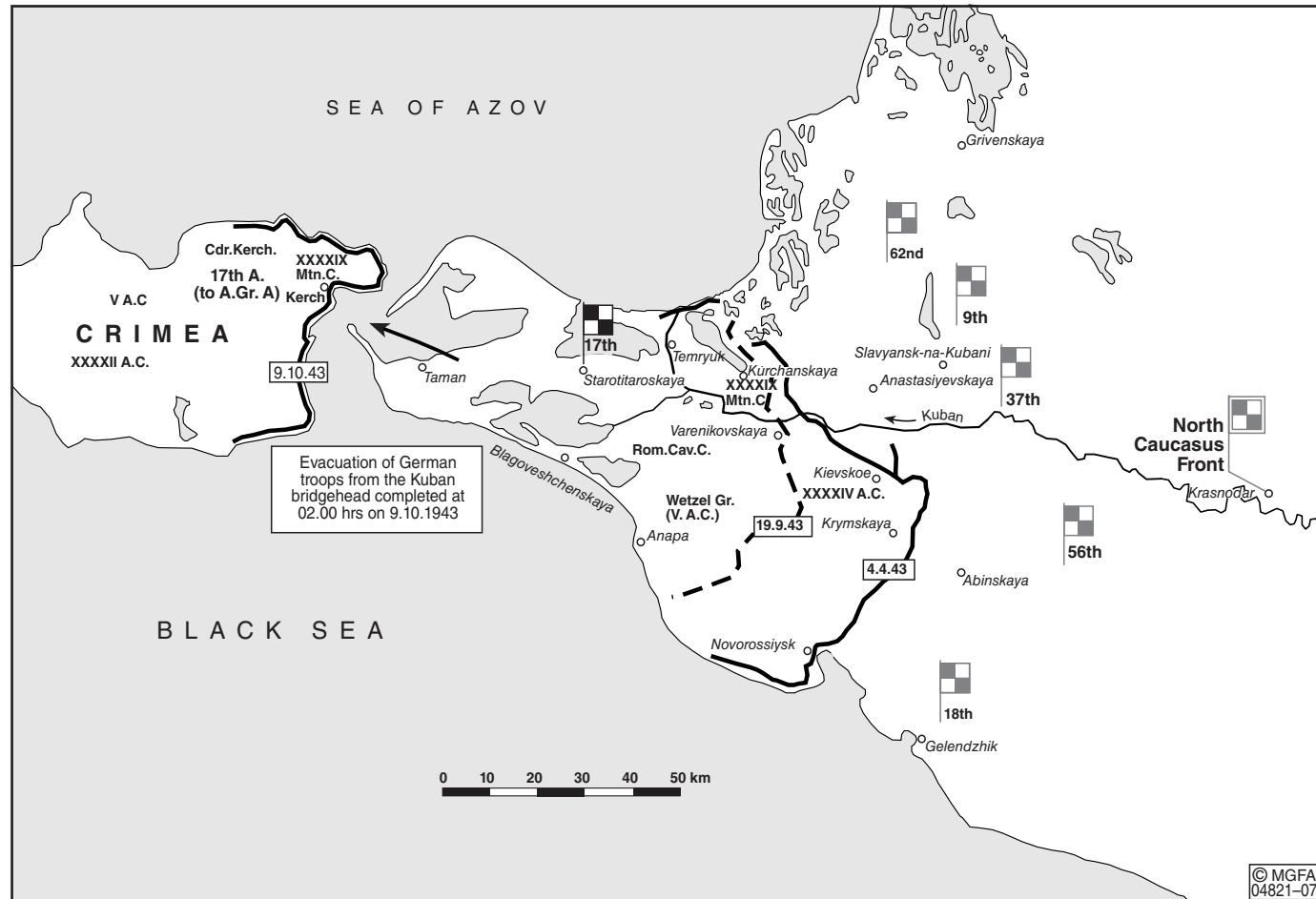
<sup>2</sup> Schwarz, *Die Stabilisierung der Ostfront*, 30–3, 35.

<sup>3</sup> Hillgruber, 'Die Krise', 664.

<sup>4</sup> *Germany and the Second World War*, vi. 1173–84; Zeitzler, 'Die ersten beiden planmäßigen großen Rückzüge', 110–13; Sawjalow and Kaljadin, 'Die Schlacht um den Kaukasus', 199–212.

<sup>5</sup> XXXXII Army Corps HQ served as headquarters for the Crimea command.

<sup>6</sup> Danilevich, 'Srazhenie za kubanskii platsdarm', 128.



Map IV.iv.1. The Kuban bridgehead (beginning of April to beginning of October 1943)

Source: OKH situation maps, 4 Apr., 19 Sept., 9 Oct. 1943, BA-MA, Kart RH2, Ost/629, 656, 801, and 821.

The Luftwaffe had sent I Air Corps to the Crimea at the end of March, to support the army group. That left the enemy with only marginal air superiority in that area of operations. The army group also required considerable support from the navy, which was obliged above all to keep Seventeenth Army supplied in the Gothic Head. In this connection, the responsible Caucasus naval commander in Kerch managed to arrange the transport of the necessary 4,000 tonnes of supplies every day until the Kuban peninsula was evacuated.<sup>7</sup>

Even if it had been possible to form a stable defence front between the Sea of Azov and the Black Sea in the spring of 1943, Seventeenth Army HQ believed that North Caucasus Front under Gen. Ivan Ivanovich Maslennikov would attack again soon. By the end of March the Soviet leadership had already begun planning the 1943 summer campaign, in which the centre of operations was to be in the Kursk area, where they expected a major German offensive. The Soviet high command decided to build up deep and stable defences in all sections of the front, and to launch an offensive from this system of fronts.<sup>8</sup> In the case of North Caucasus Front, the military high command's plan was to liquidate the enemy bridgehead quickly, destroy Seventeenth Army, and so prevent the German and Romanian troops from withdrawing to the Crimea. This objective was to be achieved by Operation KRASNODAR, launched at the beginning of February. Despite a number of attempts, which continued until the middle of March, the Soviet offensive ended in complete failure because the German defence stood firm against almost all attacks. As a result, on instructions from the Stavka, North Caucasus Front went onto the defensive, in order to prepare a new offensive.

For this purpose the Stavka drew up plans for a new operation, in which forces from the north and the south would surround Krymskaya, liberate the town, and attack both wings of the enemy forces, causing the German defence to collapse.<sup>9</sup> Despite the daunting experience in Operation KRASNODAR, Moscow was again pressing for an attack to start as soon as possible, so North Caucasus Front responded by launching the first of a number of offensives in Operation TAMAN on 4 April. However, the first attack, directed against the centre of the German defence line to the east of Krymskaya, met with little success because, on the one hand, XXXXIV Corps stood firm under pressure from the Soviet 56th Army, and on the other, the attacking forces had no air support because of the weather. On the contrary, the German I Air Corps managed to gain temporary air superiority at the beginning of April, enabling the Soviet attackers to be effectively fought off.<sup>10</sup> Above all, the heavy losses on the first day of the attack,<sup>11</sup> and the unexpectedly bad weather, which made the marshes in the northern section of the Kuban front impassable, prompted Marshal Georgii K. Zhukov to conduct an inspection of the Kuban front, as a result of which, with Stalin's consent, he gave orders on 17 April

<sup>7</sup> Hillgruber, *Die Räumung*, 86, n. 3.

<sup>8</sup> *Geschichte des zweiten Weltkrieges 1939–1945*, vii. 138–42.

<sup>9</sup> Danilevich, 'Srazhenie za kubanskii platsdarm', 135.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. 135 ff.

<sup>11</sup> On 5 April the Soviet 56th Army lost not only approximately 2,300 men but also 13 tanks. KTB AOK 17, Abt. Ia, No. 6 (5 Apr. 1943), BA-MA RH 20-17/178, fo. 160.

for operations on that front to be temporarily suspended.<sup>12</sup> A further attempt, ten days later, to get Operation TAMAN going again also had to be abandoned in the face of fierce German resistance.<sup>13</sup> Seventeenth Army too had resumed operations in the first half of April, endeavouring with little success to clear the Soviet beachhead at Novorossiysk.<sup>14</sup>

Although the two enemy offensives did not find Seventeenth Army unprepared, they nevertheless caused multiple crises because the units involved were still suffering from a serious shortage of manpower. Since the withdrawal to the Taman peninsula, Seventeenth Army had lost some 10,000 German troops in the period 1 to 30 April 1943 and had received only about 4,700 men to replace them. The Romanian ally too had lost some 2,000 men. Anticipating the offensive, Seventeenth Army HQ had already applied to the OKH at the end of April for permission to return to the main base west of Krymskaya. But, as it so often did, the OKH put off taking a final decision. Only when North Caucasus Front, with the Soviet 56th Army and strong air support, attacked the centre of the German–Romanian defence line and sent three armies to attack the positions occupied by XXXXIX Mountain Corps at Novorossiysk and on the Kuban river, did the OKH allow parts of Seventeenth Army to return to its main base, on 3 May.<sup>15</sup> As the OKH's decision came too late, the withdrawal took place under constant pressure from the enemy, with the result that the Soviet forces were able to achieve some of their objectives. Nevertheless, in a defensive engagement that lasted for two weeks, Army Group A managed to stand firm in the face of the Taman offensive and to hold the peninsula. Despite this success, dearly bought with the loss of 2,000 men between 1 and 20 May 1943, the army group command believed that Maslennikov would launch another offensive against the Kuban bridgehead after a short rehabilitation and regrouping phase. Previous attempts to break through the centre of the German–Romanian defence system had failed, so Seventeenth Army HQ expected the next Soviet offensive to concentrate mainly on the area between Novorossiysk and Krymskaya.<sup>16</sup>

Anticipating further massive attacks, and under the impact of heavy losses, Hitler approved the transfer of a division to the Gothic Head. By removing these forces from Army Group South, he weakened the defences in the Donets Basin, a move that was to have serious repercussions in the coming weeks. Also, Seventeenth Army was in urgent need of replacements if it was to continue to perform its task. On 26 May, before Seventeenth Army had completed its preparations for the next defensive action, the Soviet 37th Army advanced against XXXXIV Corps in the north-western section of the line, in order to take the important positions on the

<sup>12</sup> Danilevich, 'Srazhenie za kubanskii platsdarm', 137.

<sup>13</sup> KTB H.Gr. A, Abt. Ia, No. 2, iv. 1–11 (1–15 Apr. 1944), BA-MA RH 19 V/13, fos. 3–115; KTB AOK 17, Abt. Ia, No. 6 (1–15 Apr. 1943), BA-MA RH 20-17/178, fos. 151–79; Sawjalow and Kaljadin, 'Die Schlacht um den Kaukasus', 212 ff.

<sup>14</sup> KTB AOK 17, Abt. Ia, No. 6 (17–25 Apr. 1943), BA-MA RH 20-17/178, fos. 182–205.

<sup>15</sup> KTB H.Gr. A, Abt. Ia, No. 2, v. 24 (3 May 1943), BA-MA RH 19 V/14, fo. 26.

<sup>16</sup> KTB AOK 17, Abt. Ia, No. 6 (8–16 May 1944), BA-MA RH 20-17/178, fos. 241–57.

high ground at Kievskoye.<sup>17</sup> Although the German forces were already seriously depleted and the Soviet attack again caused heavy losses,<sup>18</sup> the remaining forces sufficed to halt the enemy offensive once again, forcing the new commander-in-chief, Gen. Ivan E. Petrov, to end the operation at the beginning of June. From June on, in view of the German preparations for an attack in the Kursk salient, the Red Army moved its centre of operations to the area between the Sea of Azov and the Pripet,<sup>19</sup> and was consequently less active in other sections of the front. As a result, Seventeenth Army had time, between early June and mid-July, to reorganize and revive its shattered forces. Field Marshal Ewald von Kleist was well aware that the Stavka would not abandon its plan to press forward into the Kuban bridgehead. Although Seventeenth Army made excellent use of the temporary suspension of operations, by the end of June it still needed more than 23,000 German and 11,000 Romanian troops to bring it up to full strength. In addition to manpower, equipment was a source of deep concern. And it was also short of air support, most flying units having been withdrawn and sent to serve in the Kursk offensive.<sup>20</sup> At the beginning of July, even before the new offensive on the 16th of the month, there were already signs that North Caucasus Front was again preparing to do battle. Seventeenth Army's manpower situation was clearly still a source of extreme tension after the five-week rest, and by the middle of July the shortfall recorded at Seventeenth Army HQ had risen to 26,400 German and 18,500 Romanian troops.<sup>21</sup> Even so, Army Group A and North Caucasus Front were equally matched in respect of manpower at this point. Kleist had about 430,000 men at his disposal, and North Caucasus Front had a total strength of approximately 460,000 men. However, the Soviet enemy forces were considerably better equipped with tanks and artillery.<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless, XXXXIV Corps had the necessary strength to withstand the Soviet 56th Army's four-week onslaught at Krymskaya. At the same time, to the north of Novorossiysk, V Corps was engaged in fierce defensive battles against the Soviet 18th Army, which failed to break through the German lines despite all its efforts. Once again, the defence front between the Sea of Azov and the Black Sea stood firm, with the result that North Caucasus Front ended the operation in the middle of August.<sup>23</sup>

Seventeenth Army had succeeded in withstanding the enemy onslaught in a number of defensive engagements since the beginning of April. By the end of July,

<sup>17</sup> Danilevich, 'Srashenie za kubanskii platsdarm', 139; Study P-114c, pt. 5, ch. 1, 106–9, BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2071, fos. 132–5.

<sup>18</sup> XXXXIV Army Corps lost almost 2,900 men on 26 and 27 May 1943. Study P-114c, pt. 5, ch. 1, 109, BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2071, fo. 135.

<sup>19</sup> See Part II of the present volume.

<sup>20</sup> Study P-114c, pt. 5, ch. 1, 112 ff., BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2071, fo. 138 ff., pt. 6, ch. 2, 135, BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2073, fo. 210.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Army Group A had 65 tanks (53 operational) and 575 heavy artillery weapons at its disposal, whereas the Soviet forces had approximately 200 tanks and 2,000 heavy artillery weapons. OKH, OpAbt, 'Kräftegegenüberstellung vom 20.7.1944', BA-MA RH 2/2649.

<sup>23</sup> KTB AOK 17, Abt. Ia, No. 7, 16 July–12 Aug. 1943, BA-MA RH 20-17/198, fos. 27–91; Danilevich, 'Srashenie za kubanskii platsdarm', 139 ff.

however, developments in the military situation north of the Sea of Azov had been so unfavourable to the German–Romanian side that there no longer appeared to be any justification for continuing to hold the Kuban bridgehead. The heavy losses that had been incurred and the lack of sufficient replacements prompted Seventeenth Army HQ to review the situation on 31 July and to address the question of evacuating the bridgehead. Regardless of the fact that neither the OKH nor Hitler had taken a position on this important issue, Army Group A produced a study on the ‘evacuation of the Gothic Head’. Abandoning the bridgehead, which was now of little operational use, would release about four of the eleven German divisions stationed on the Taman peninsula in the summer of 1943, which could then be deployed at other focal points in the OKH theatre of war. Following the failure in the battle for Kursk and the widespread moves to withdraw to the southern and central sections of the eastern front, there was a strong military and operational case for immediate evacuation. When, in the middle of August, Marshal Ion Antonescu and Tsar Boris of Bulgaria both absolutely rejected any evacuation of the Taman peninsula, Hitler decided to maintain the status quo.<sup>24</sup> Only when the military situation in the area north of the Sea of Azov had deteriorated dramatically, with the result that the southern section of the eastern front was forced to retreat from Mius to the Melitopol–Zaporozhye position, was Hitler obliged to withdraw Seventeenth Army from the Taman peninsula. As the Stavka had already made plans to drive the German enemy out of the peninsula, the evacuation, which started on 7 September, had to be conducted under increasing enemy pressure. The Stavka, on the other hand, intended to penetrate the German–Romanian front in a two-pronged attack and destroy the enemy forces before they reached the Kerch Strait, in order to prevent them from mounting a strong defence of the Crimea.<sup>25</sup> Nevertheless, within a month Army Group A, with support from naval units of Admiral Black Sea, had managed in Operation BRUNHILD to convey not only the entire German–Romanian Seventeenth Army, comprising more than 200,000 men, but also 100,000 tonnes of military equipment and supplies, together with all weapons, motor vehicles, and horses, over the Kerch Strait to the Crimea.

For almost six months Army Group A had fulfilled its mission and held the Kuban bridgehead, with the result that Hitler’s delusions about using the Taman peninsula as a base for recapturing the Maikop oilfields persisted until the summer of 1943. From the Soviet military leaders’ point of view, it was true that the Caucasus had been liberated and the German and Romanian defenders had abandoned the bridgehead, but the Stavka nevertheless regarded the battles in the spring and summer of 1943 as a failure. North Caucasus Front had failed to fulfil its mission to encircle and destroy Seventeenth Army.<sup>26</sup> And Seventeenth Army had shown that, despite the reverses it had suffered in the winter of 1942/3, it still had the necessary strength to prevent a superior enemy force from achieving its operational goals. Once the centre of operations moved to the central section of the eastern front and the area between the Seym river and the Sea of Azov,

<sup>24</sup> Hillgruber, ‘Die Krise’, 664.

<sup>25</sup> Danilevich, ‘Srazenie za kubanskii platsdarm’, 140 ff.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. 144.

the bridgehead became available, because some of the units deployed in the Gothic Head were urgently needed to meet the Soviet offensives north of the Sea of Azov. Although, for political reasons, Hitler was reluctant to evacuate the bridgehead, military developments in Army Group Centre and also in Army Group South left him with no alternative. If a decision had been taken earlier, the German side would at least have been able to achieve some local and fleeting successes. Fortunately for Army Group A and for the whole of the eastern front, the Soviet centre of operations had moved north and the enemy forces consequently did not take full advantage of the German withdrawal.<sup>27</sup>

While Army Group A had succeeded in defending itself against the North Caucasus Front attacks, the situation in the area north of the Sea of Azov had deteriorated dramatically during the summer of 1943. Hitler had hoped that the Kursk offensive would ‘ensure that the German army had the initiative in the coming spring and summer’,<sup>28</sup> but when the offensive collapsed in the middle of July and the Soviets finally gained control of events on the eastern front, the Axis powers were increasingly obliged to withdraw in the face of superior enemy forces. This applied particularly in the southern section of the eastern front, where the Red Army summer offensive began in the second half of July with an attack on the Mius–Donets salient. Prior to the Mius operation, opinion in Moscow had been divided as to how the forthcoming battle should be conducted. Zhukov wanted to organize the attack so that the German troops would be cut off and encircled in the Don Basin, but Stalin would not have it. His idea was to mount a frontal attack on the enemy positions and force the Germans to abandon their defences, and he had his way.<sup>29</sup>

In view of the critical situation in the summer of 1943, Field Marshal Erich von Manstein suggested that the Donets Basin should be abandoned in order to reduce the length of the southern section of the eastern front and build up urgently needed reserves. Hitler categorically rejected this proposal on war-economy grounds. So Army Group South was obliged to remain in the exposed ‘balcony position’ overlooking the Donets and the Mius, where the newly formed Sixth Army had taken over the defence of the right wing. On the Mius, the Soviet South Front launched its offensive against the 200-km-long section of Sixth Army on 18 August. Thanks to superior equipment and air power, it succeeded in breaking through Sixth Army’s defensive positions in the first onslaught.<sup>30</sup> Once again, Sixth Army was in danger of being hemmed in. All attempts to close the gap in the Mius front failed, and Sixth Army HQ was obliged to withdraw its forces and abandon the front. Sixth Army retreated to the ‘Tortoise Line’, where it remained until 4 September.<sup>31</sup> However, even this line of defence could not be held for long, because the Red Army had succeeded in breaking through at a number of points

<sup>27</sup> Duțu, Dobre, and Loghin, *Armata Română*, 134, 262–4; Forstmeier, *Die Räumung*; Hillgruber, *Die Räumung*, 11–14.

<sup>28</sup> Gruchmann, ‘Der Zweite Weltkrieg’, 182.

<sup>29</sup> Kobrin and Abaturov, ‘Sokrushenie vostochnogo vala’, 291.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. 293.

<sup>31</sup> The ‘Tortoise Line’ extended from the Sea of Azov east of Mariupol along the Kalmius river east of Stalino-Konstantinovka to the Donets north of Slavyansk.

in the area held by First Armoured Army, posing a threat to Sixth Army's left flank. In order to avoid encirclement, the OKH approved its withdrawal from the Tortoise Line. Only when Sixth Army reached the Zaporozhye–Melitopol–Sea of Azov line, the so-called 'Wotan Line', in the middle of September before the advancing Soviet forces, was it able to build up new defences, starting on 20 September.<sup>32</sup> In view of the military situation, the OKH had already placed Sixth Army under the command of Army Group A on 17 September, with the result that Army Group A was now also responsible for the area of operations north of the Crimea.<sup>33</sup>

## 2. FROM THE WOTAN LINE TO THE DNIEPER

Despite the rapid move to the Wotan Line, Sixth Army barely had time to prepare its defence in the new line because Gen. Fedor Ivanovich Tolbukhin's South Front was in hot pursuit and launched an attack on the defensive block. Tolbukhin wanted to complete the Stavka's mission without delay, that is, to break through 'the defensive position established by the enemy on the Molochna river [the Wotan Line] and press forward to the lower Dnieper'.<sup>34</sup> The aim of the operation was to establish a bridgehead on the right bank of the Dnieper and cut off Seventeenth Army in the Crimea. In parallel to the South Front operation, South West Front was to advance towards Dnepropetrovsk and Zaporozhye, take the Dnieper Line, and liberate both cities.<sup>35</sup>

On 26 September Tolbukhin launched an attack on the defensive block between the Konka lowlands and the Sea of Azov with 15 divisions and strong tank forces. Although Sixth Army only had 83 tanks,<sup>36</sup> 98 assault guns, and 173 batteries, compared with the enemy force of almost 800 tanks and 400 artillery batteries, it enjoyed a territorial advantage in the Wotan Line.<sup>37</sup> However, supplies were a source of concern. The only available way for supplies to reach Sixth Army was via the single-track Zaporozhye–Melitopol–Crimea railway line. This had ceased to operate even before the battle for the Wotan Line came to a head, when First Armoured Army was obliged to abandon Zaporozhye.<sup>38</sup> Even so, and despite heavy losses,<sup>39</sup> Sixth Army was able to establish itself in the blocking position on the Molochna river, with the result that Tolbukhin ended his offensive on 2 October.

<sup>32</sup> See Part IV, Chapter III of the present volume; AOK 6, 'Die Abwehrschlacht der 6. Armee zwischen Mius und Dnjestr vom 18.8.–20.9.1943', BA-MA RH 20-6/315, fos. 3–25.

<sup>33</sup> KTB H.Gr. A, Abt. Ia, No. 2, ix. 151 (17 Sept. 1943), BA-MA RH 19 V/18, fo. 153.

<sup>34</sup> Geschichte des zweiten Weltkrieges 1939–1945, vii. 259. <sup>35</sup> Ibid. 258 ff, 317.

<sup>36</sup> Only 29 of these were operational. BA-MA RH 20-6/327, fo. 4.

<sup>37</sup> The 'Wotan Line' extended along the eastern edge of the Nogai Steppe and made use of the high ground on the banks of the Molochna river. This territorial advantage was further strengthened by a forward anti-tank ditch.

<sup>38</sup> See Part IV, Chapter III.4(c) of the present volume; AOK 6, 'Die Abwehrschlacht der 6. Armee im Donez-Becken und in der Nogaischen Steppe vom 18.8.–3.11.1943', 31, BA-MA RH 20-6/326; Geschichte des zweiten Weltkrieges 1939–1945, vii. 316 ff.

<sup>39</sup> Sixth Army reported the loss of 5,034 men between 21 October and 3 November 1943. BA-MA RW 6/v. 558, fo. 63.

As Sixth Army had mounted a surprisingly successful defence, Tolbukhin strengthened his forces very considerably over the next few days<sup>40</sup> and, in a fresh advance, broke through the defence line on the edge of the Nogai Steppe. To meet this superior enemy force, Sixth Army had only 13 divisions—12 German and one Romanian—and they were at a particular disadvantage in respect of heavy weapons.<sup>41</sup> Army Group A's primary concern was to continue to provide access to the Crimea. Hitler, on the other hand, insisted that the Dnieper salient must be held in order to prevent the enemy from recapturing the mineral-rich mining areas

**Table IV.IV.1.** Army Group A: order of battle (status: 4 October 1943)

156th F.T.D. (parts)	Cdr. of the Crimea	
Slov. 1st Inf.Div.		
Rom. 1st Mtn.Div.	Rom. Mtn.Corps	
Rom. 2nd Mtn.Div.		
Gr. Col. Krieger		
Rom. 3rd Mtn.Div.	V A.C.	Seventeenth Army
Rom. 6th Cav.Div.		
Rom. 10th Inf.Div.		
4th Mtn.Div.		
97th Lt.Inf.Div.		
50th Inf.Div.	XXXXIX Mtn.Corps	
98th Inf.Div.		
370th Inf.Div.		
Rom. 19th Inf.Div.		
111st Inf.Div.		
336th Inf.Div.		
15th Lw.Fld.Div. (parts)	XXXXIV A.C.	A.Gr. A
Rom. 4th Mtn.Div.		
Rom. 24th Inf.Div.		
9th Inf.Div.		
79th Inf.Div.		
13th Armd.Div. (parts)	XXIX A.C.	Sixth Army
5th Lw.Fld.Div. (parts)		
15th Lw.Fld.Div. (parts)		
3rd Mtn.Div.		
101st Lt.Inf.Div.		
Cbt.Gr. 258th Inf.Div.	IV A.C.	
302nd Inf.Div.		
17th Armd.Div.		
5th Lw.Fld.Div. (parts)		
		Cdr. A.Gr. A

<sup>40</sup> 45 rifle divisions, 5 tank corps, and 400 artillery batteries were transferred to South Front. AOK 6, 'Die Abwehrschlacht im Donez-Becken', 31, BA-MA RH 20-6/326.

<sup>41</sup> Sixth Army had 30 tanks, 22 assault guns, and 173 artillery batteries that were operational on 24 September 1943; KTB H.Gr. A, Abt. Ia, No. 2, x. 262 (24 Sept. 1943), BA-MA 19 V/19, fo. 49.

of Krivoy Rog and Nikopol, which were vital to the conduct of the war.<sup>42</sup> Army Group A was accordingly required to defend the Wotan Line at all costs.

Although the Red Army had succeeded in recapturing the eastern Ukraine in its summer offensive, it still had a long way to go to achieve the real aim of the operation, which was to liberate the Ukraine from German occupation. In view of this situation, the Stavka proposed to liberate Kiev in the autumn, establish bridgeheads on the right bank of the Dnieper, outflank the defensive positions on the Molochna river, and recapture the mineral-rich mining areas in the Dnieper salient. This, it hoped, would provide the basis for a rapid advance into the western Ukraine. While South-West Front was to advance towards Dnepropetrovsk and Krivoy Rog, Tolbukhin's South Front had to attempt, in a second advance, to break through the German positions on the eastern edge of the Nogai Steppe. The offensive against Army Group A was conducted in close cooperation with units of 3rd Ukrainian Front, the new name of South-West Front, which had been renamed on 20 October (South Front was renamed 4th Ukrainian Front as from the same date), and these units were to attack the right wing of Army Group South.<sup>43</sup>

On 9 October Tolbukhin started the second advance against the Wotan Line with an attack by the Soviet 5th Shock Army and 44th Army on the dividing line between the German IV and XXIX Corps. As both corps withstood the enemy assault, save for small incursions, South Front moved its centre of operations to the south after only two days, with the result that XXXXIV Corps saw more action south of Melitopol after 11 October.<sup>44</sup> This corps too withstood the assault and succeeded in preventing South Front from destroying Sixth Army and opening the gateway to the Crimea and the western Ukraine. But it was not the situation on its own defence front at Melitopol that gave Army Group A cause for concern in mid-October 1943, but the position of its neighbours to the left, where 3rd Ukrainian Front was advancing on the Zaporozhye bridgehead and XVII Corps had difficulty in withstanding the pressure. There was thus a danger that, if the enemy succeeded in breaking through on the left flank, Sixth Army would be under threat and the Soviet forces might be able to outflank the Wotan Line from the north and cut off IV and XXIX Corps from the rear. In these circumstances, Kleist asked for XVII Corps to be placed under the command of Army Group A, in order to take over the conduct of operations in the bridgehead. Without informing Army Group South, the high command in Kherson discussed the request with the OKH and, by the middle of October, the discussions had reached a point where Hitler ordered the commander-in-chief of Army Group A to report to him at Führer headquarters. However, Kleist distanced himself from his intentions when the OKH ordered XVII Corps to be strengthened with the army group's resources. Army Group A was not in a position to do this, in view of the strong Soviet pressure

<sup>42</sup> Manstein, *Verlorene Siege*, 549.

<sup>43</sup> *Geschichte des zweiten Weltkrieges 1939–1945*, vii. 320; see also Part IV, Chapter III.4(c) of the present volume.

<sup>44</sup> XXXXIV Army Corps HQ was transferred from Seventeenth Army to Sixth Army HQ on 3 October 1943. KTB AOK 6, Abt. Ia, No. 7, 61 (3 Oct.1944), BA-MA RH 20-6/327, fo. 80.

on Sixth Army's southern wing. Hitler finally decided, after the discussion, that Army Group South should continue to be responsible for the bridgehead.<sup>45</sup>

Despite all the German and Romanian efforts to defend the position, the Soviet 28th Army succeeded in breaking through the defensive block after ten days of continuous assault. After these long battles and heavy losses, Sixth Army no longer had the necessary forces to close the gap in the front, and the Soviet 51st Army was consequently able to advance westwards without encountering any appreciable resistance. The five-week war of attrition had decimated XXXXIV Corps to such an extent that, after Melitopol fell, it could only establish a weak security line.

Although the corps was still able to withstand the Soviet 28th Army's assault on 23 and 24 October, the losses on both days were so heavy that it no longer had the necessary forces to man a complete defence line.<sup>46</sup> Col.-Gen. Karl Adolf Hollidt therefore had no alternative but to withdraw troops from other sections to restore the balance in XXXXIV Corps' front.<sup>47</sup> In taking this measure, Sixth Army HQ weakened its left wing to an almost intolerable extent. In addition to the tactical troop movements resulting from the change in the enemy's point of main effort, logistics were a major source of deep concern to the army group HQ. The relatively inadequate supply lines passed through the area under the command of Army Group South, which had the same difficulties to contend with, and also through Romanian territory, where the Axis partner's agencies handled the passage of transport in a highly restrictive manner. As a result, there was a shortage of supplies and particularly of munitions in the southern part of the area under the army group's command.<sup>48</sup>

Despite all the difficulties, XXXXIV Corps was able to withstand the attacks in the last ten days of October. Finally, on 26 October, the Soviet 51st Army gathered all the enemy forces together and mounted a concentrated attack to the north-west in order to force the units on the corps' left wing to retreat northwards. The corps was divided, creating a 15-kilometre-wide gap in the front, through which the enemy spearheads advanced continuously to the west and north-west. As a result, the enemy spearheads were more than 20 kilometres behind the XXXXIV and XXIX Corps lines at the end of the day. Only by dint of major regrouping and by moving the right wing west was XXIX Corps able to avoid encirclement.<sup>49</sup>

After 26 October Sixth Army was split into a northern group and an extremely depleted southern group. As Sixth Army HQ no longer had any reserves and the OKH could not send reinforcements,<sup>50</sup> the gap in the front could not be closed. 4th Ukrainian Front now had an opportunity to advance rapidly through the Nogai

<sup>45</sup> KTB H.Gr. A, Abt. Ia, No. 3, i. 29 ff., 39, 50 ff. (12, 13 Oct. 1943), BA-MA RH 19 V/20, fos. 31 ff., 41, 52 ff. See Part IV, Chapter III.4(c) of the present volume.

<sup>46</sup> On 25 October 1943 the combined fighting forces of Sixth Army Infantry Division, including reconnaissance and mobile units, numbered only 21,945 men. KTB H.Gr. A, Abt. Ia, No. 3, i. 259 (27 Oct. 1943), BA-MA RH 19 V/20, fo. 261.

<sup>47</sup> 335th Inf.Div., Hvy. Art.Btl. 884, 4th Mtn.Div., and a Cbt.Gr. from 13th Armd.Div.; AOK 6, 'Die Abwehrschlacht im Donez-Becken', 39, BA-MA RH 20-6/326.

<sup>48</sup> KTB H.Gr. A, Abt. Ia, No. 3, i. 181, 187, 361 (23, 31 Oct. 1943), BA-MA RH 19 V/20, fos. 181, 189, 363.

<sup>49</sup> KTB AOK 6, Abt. Ia, No. 7, 167–98 (23–7 Oct. 1943), BA-MA RH 20-6/327, fos. 186–217; *Geschichte des zweiten Weltkrieges 1939–1945*, vii. 320–2.

<sup>50</sup> KTB H.Gr. A, Abt. Ia, No. 3, i. 278 (28 Oct. 1943), BA-MA RH 19 V/20, fo. 280.

Steppe to the Dnieper. But lack of the necessary forces combined with the difficult terrain meant that Sixth Army had little chance of forming an effective defence line east of the Dnieper. In this situation, Kleist had to take steps to restore some stability in the face of these threats. There were two possible ways to re-establish a united front, and the major solution—to close the gap in accordance with the ‘holding line’<sup>51</sup>—appeared to present a considerable risk. In view of the available forces and resources, the breach in the front could be closed only by attacks on the flanks. A more feasible solution would be for the northern group to withdraw to the extended Lepetykha–Nikopol bridgehead and the southern group to the ‘Friesen Line’.<sup>52</sup> On 27 October the army group HQ decided on the riskier solution, according to which XXIX Corps was to attack the flank from the Pokrovka–Veseloye line while an armoured division practising mobile warfare was to prevent any further enemy advance in the breakthrough area.<sup>53</sup> If the army group’s plan were to fail, there was a danger that the whole of the southern section of the eastern front would be in trouble. In fact, the armoured division proved not to be strong enough to halt the enemy advance, and Sixth Army HQ lacked the necessary forces to conduct a successful attack on the flank, so the project had to be broken off after two days.<sup>54</sup>

The danger at Zaporozhye had been averted by the middle of October, but Army Group A faced a new threat on its left flank as October drew to a close. At the end of the month, 3rd Ukrainian Front broke through the dividing line between First Armoured Army and Eighth Army, into the defence position of Army Group South. It was therefore able to advance westwards to Krivoy Rog. This meant that the Soviet spearheads were now located to the west of IV and XXIX Corps’ defence line and presented a considerable threat to the heart of Sixth Army’s left flank.<sup>55</sup>

By 28 October it was already clear that the army group’s aims could not be achieved, and Kleist accordingly decided to arrange for IV and XXIX Corps to withdraw to the Lepetykha–Nikopol bridgehead. However, this measure did not suffice to stabilize the position of Sixth Army, and XXXXIV Corps too was obliged to withdraw to the Friesen Line on the following day. While the northern group was establishing the bridgehead on 30 October, the central section of Sixth Army was in crisis. On 29 October the OKH had again insisted that the position must be held unconditionally. The army group accordingly gave orders that Sixth Army ‘was to defend the Friesen Line protecting the Crimea and was to receive reinforcements from the northern group for the purpose’. Also, XXXXIV Corps was to strengthen its left wing ‘to ensure that the Friesen Line was manned along the whole of its length and, by defending it, to maintain the connection with Seventeenth Army and the Dnieper’.<sup>56</sup> While Sixth Army HQ was still in the process of

<sup>51</sup> The ‘holding line’ was a 130-km-long stretch from the Konskaya lowlands at Balki to the Molochnoye Lagoon, based on old Soviet anti-tank ditches.

<sup>52</sup> The Friesen Line was a weak security line extending from the Dnieper at Kakhovka to the bank of the Sivash, east of the Perekop isthmus.

<sup>53</sup> KTB H.Gr. A, Abt. Ia, No. 3, i. 242 (26 Oct. 1943), BA-MA RH 19 V/20, fo. 244.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid. 295 ff. (28 Oct. 1943), BA-MA RH 19 V/20, fo. 297 ff.

<sup>55</sup> See Part IV, Chapter III.4(c) of the present volume.

<sup>56</sup> KTB AOK 6, Abt. Ia, ‘Die Abwehrschlacht im Donez-Becken’, 44, BA-MA RH 20-6/326.

carrying out the army group's orders and making arrangements to withdraw completely to the Friesen Line, 4th Ukrainian Front was redeploying its forces. On 30 October the Soviet 51st Army had an opportunity to advance round the left flank of XXXXIV Corps, north of Agaymon, and press forward in a south-westerly direction. In this way, the Soviet 51st Army spearhead was able, virtually without impediment, to reach a position where it broke through the defensive block on both sides of Askania Nova. This decisive blow opened a 30-kilometre-wide breach in the line defended by XXXXIV Corps. The Soviet 51st Army and 2nd Guards Army advanced through the gap, cutting off the escape route of the southern group, which was still stationed on the line between Salkovo (approximately 60 kilometres south of Agaymon on the Sea of Azov) and Agaymon. It was now clear that the enemy intended to reach the mouth of the Dnieper before Army Group A, to advance over the Perekop isthmus to the Crimea, and to cut Seventeenth Army's rear communication lines. In this precarious situation XXXXIV Corps had to fight its way back west through the enemy spearheads. But any semblance of unity was completely lost in the process. The corps, split up into a number of separate combat groups, attempted to reach either the Dnieper Line at Kherson or Seventeenth Army's security line at Perekop. While the bulk of the corps reached the Dnieper estuary before the Soviet enemy forces and prepared to defend itself in a bridgehead on the right bank at Kherson, the right wing was driven onto the Perekop isthmus, where Seventeenth Army took in the units in question. Sixth Army was unable to halt the Soviet advance before it reached the Kherzon-Perekop road, so the land link with the Crimea was lost, and Seventeenth Army was cut off at the beginning of November. However, it was able to check the Soviet 51st Army's advance at the Tatar Trench on the land link with the Crimean peninsula at Perekop.<sup>57</sup>

On the army's northern wing, XXIX Corps had launched an attack on 30 October on the flank of 2nd Guards Army at Rubanovka (60 kilometres south of Agaymon) with a view to re-establishing the connection with the southern group of Sixth Army, XXXXIV Corps. Although the initial results were good, XXIX Corps was obliged to suspend the action on instructions from the OKH, because it became clear that the gap between the two corps could not be closed. The Army General Staff then ordered a substantial bridgehead to be established at Nikopol, which Sixth Army was to hold 'until the planned counter-attack could be launched in the area where the breach had occurred'.<sup>58</sup> Both the corps in the northern group were sent back to the Lepetykha-Nikopol bridgehead to prepare for the counter-attack. Surprisingly, the OKH decided on 4 November to place IV and XXIX Corps under the command of First Armoured Army, leaving the responsibility for the conduct of operations in the Nikopol bridgehead entirely in the hands of Army Group South. Sixth Army, with its limited forces, now established a defence line on the lower Dnieper, extending from the mouth of the Bug through Kherson to the

<sup>57</sup> KTB AOK 6, Abt. Ia, No. 7, 199–247 (28 Oct.–3 Nov. 1943), BA-MA RH 20-6/327, fos. 218–66. KTB AOK 6, Abt. Ia, 'Die Abwehrkämpfe der 6. Armee in der "Wotan-Stellung" und in der Nogaischen Steppe vom 26.9. bis 3.11.1943', 7–16, BA-MA RH 20-6/327, fos. 9–19.

<sup>58</sup> KTB AOK 6, Abt. Ia, 'Die Abwehrschlacht im Donez-Becken', 49, BA-MA RH 20-6/326.

army group boundary at Lepetykha. After hard-fought engagements, in which Sixth Army suffered heavy losses,<sup>59</sup> the southern section of the eastern front came to a halt on the Dnieper at the end of November 1943.

In the middle of September Army Group A, which had been responsible for defending the Crimea and the Kuban bridgehead since April 1943, was obliged to take on the additional task, with Sixth Army, of withstanding the massive attacks by South Front on the northern shore of the Sea of Azov and the eastern edge of the Nogai Steppe. Sixth Army HQ was hardly capable of meeting this demand, given its own limited manpower and material resources, and Soviet air superiority.<sup>60</sup> By refusing to evacuate the Kuban bridgehead, Hitler tied forces up in a section of the front that was of only minor importance to the military situation on the eastern front. His decision deprived Army Group A, and also Army Groups South and Centre, of troops that were essential to stabilize the central and southern sections of the eastern front. Although the OKH withdrew a number of units from Seventeenth Army after September 1943, these measures generally came too late to have any decisive effect on the operational situation. Particularly in the case of Sixth Army, the decision to hold the Gothic Head proved to be completely counter-productive because, in spite of everything, the Soviet enemy withdrew forces from the Kuban bridgehead in order to strengthen 4th Ukrainian Front's offensive capabilities. Kleist and Hollidt nevertheless succeeded, with Sixth Army's limited resources, in preserving or restoring the unity of the front to the very last. Only after a three-month defensive battle were the forces no longer sufficient, in view of the shortage of reinforcements, to prevent an operational enemy breakthrough. As a result, not only was Seventeenth Army cut off in the Crimea but Sixth Army was also obliged to use its remaining forces to form a weak security line on the lower Dnieper.<sup>61</sup>

### 3. THE CRIMEA IN THE WINTER OF 1943/4

When the evacuation of the Taman peninsula had been completed at the beginning of October, Seventeenth Army HQ took over the defence of the Crimean stronghold. In view of the tense situation in the central and southern sections of the eastern front, it would have been a good time to abandon the Crimea and, with the help of Seventeenth Army, to stabilize the precarious conditions north of the Sea of Azov. The Crimean peninsula was not of paramount importance to the Stavka's operational plans either, but it was nevertheless of considerable military, political,

<sup>59</sup> Sixth Army reported the loss of some 23,300 men between 1 October and 3 November 1943, of whom 6,400 dead or seriously injured. Study P-114c, pt. 6, ch. 2, 259, BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2073, fo. 334.

<sup>60</sup> As most of the combat units of Air Fleet 6, responsible for the south-eastern front at the time in question, were deployed in Army Group South, the only flying units available to support Sixth Army were Romanian. I Air Corps took part in Sixth Army's battles on the ground for the first time at the end of October. KTB H.Gr. A, Abt. Ia, No. 3, i. 10–31 Oct. 1943, BA-MA RH 19 V/20.

<sup>61</sup> KTB AOK 6, Abt. Ia, 'Die Abwehrkämpfe in der "Wotan-Stellung"', 1–17, BA-MA RH 20-6/327, fos. 3–19.

and strategic significance. It commanded the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov, and provided a useful air base for industrial and military missions.<sup>62</sup>

Even after the evacuation of the Kuban bridgehead, the Crimea was still a highly relevant factor in the OKH's operational plans for defending the southern section of the eastern front, because the peninsula protected its flank. It was this consideration, above all, that made it impossible for Seventeenth Army HQ to evacuate the peninsula. Despite the political and military importance that both Hitler and the OKH attached to possession of the peninsula, Seventeenth Army had only one-and-a-half German and seven Romanian divisions at its disposal in the autumn of 1943. Seventeenth Army HQ had to transfer the rest of the units that became available when the bridgehead was evacuated at once, to strengthen the front on the mainland. It was true that this measure enabled a disaster north of the Sea of Azov to be temporarily averted, but the potential was not enough to strengthen the southern section of the eastern front in the long term.

The danger that Seventeenth Army might be trapped on the peninsula became even greater in late October, when Sixth Army was forced to abandon the Wotan Line under pressure from the enemy forces. Gen. Erwin Jaenecke therefore decided to prepare to evacuate the Crimea. Although Army Group A and Zeitzler were in favour of 'Operation Michael', as it was called, Hitler refused to approve it, and the OKH decreed that 'the Crimea was to be held, even in the event of the overland connection being cut within the next few days, as expected'.<sup>63</sup> On 28 October the first Soviet tanks had already reached the Perekop isthmus, where the Soviet advance was brought to a halt. Even so, the connection with Sixth Army was lost, and the German–Romanian Seventeenth Army was consequently trapped in the Crimea from 1 November on.<sup>64</sup>

On 25 October Hitler had for the first time formally insisted that the Crimea must continue to be held. He explained to the chief of the Romanian General Staff, Gen. Ilie řteflea, that the reason for this decision was that the peninsula 'might serve as a base for an enemy attack on the Romanian–Bulgarian coast'.<sup>65</sup> Hitler's intention did not coincide with the Romanian position on the subject because, for Ion Antonescu, the Crimea was not only of military importance but it was also, above all, a political issue in that Romanian troops bore the main burden of defending it in the autumn of 1943. The peninsula was in danger of being cut off as a result of Sixth Army's situation, and the 'Conducător' therefore thought it likely that the seven Romanian and two depleted German divisions would scarcely suffice to defend the Crimea successfully. He considered that the risk 'associated with evacuating the Crimea was less than the risk of subsequently losing the Romanian units deployed there. He could not be politically responsible for another reverse like Stalingrad.'<sup>66</sup> Hitler responded as usual, glossing over the situation on

<sup>62</sup> *Geschichte des zweiten Weltkrieges 1939–1945*, vii. 278 ff.

<sup>63</sup> Hillgruber, *Die Räumung*, 13.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid. 12–14; Tieke, *Kampf um die Krim*, 251–4.

<sup>65</sup> KTB OKW, iii/2, 1228 (29 Oct. 1943).

<sup>66</sup> Pandea and Ardeleanu, *România in Crimeea*, 287 ff.; see in this connection KTB OKW, iii/2, 1229 (29 Oct. 1943).

Table IV.iv.2. Seventeenth Army: order of battle (status: 2 February 1944)

98th Inf.Div.	V A.C.	
Rom. 3rd Mtn.Div.	73th Inf.Div.	Seventeenth Army
Rom. 6th Cav.Div.		
Rom. 10th Inf.Div.	Rom. Cav.Corps	Konrad Group
Rom. 19th Inf.Div.		
50th Inf.Div.	(XXXXIX Mtn.Corps)	111st. Inf.Div.
336th Inf.Div.		
Rom. 9th Cav.Div.		
Fort.Cdr. Sevastopol	Rom. 1st Mtn.Corps	
Rom. 1st Mtn.Div.		
Rom. 2nd Mtn.Div.		

the eastern front and making promises that he could not possibly keep, given the dire shortage of manpower and materials. He accordingly informed the Romanian head of state on 29 October that he had decided that:

1. The Crimea will be defended in all circumstances and with all available means.
- 2.–3. Sixth Army will be provided with additional forces, and the situation will probably be restored.
4. Sixth Army is in any case to pull back in order to block access to the Crimea.
5. Further German battalions are being sent to the Crimea by land, sea, and air.<sup>67</sup>

The German dictator's position was supported, above all, by the commander-in-chief of the navy. Grand Admiral Karl Dönitz had assured him two days earlier that 'adequate supplies could be conveyed to Seventeenth Army by sea'.<sup>68</sup> This promise led to considerable disputes with Zeitzler, who had recognized the threat to the Crimea at a very early stage and had called for the peninsula to be evacuated immediately in view of the steadily deteriorating situation on the mainland. The chief of the Army General Staff and Seventeenth Army HQ both had extremely serious doubts about the military situation in the Crimea at the end of October.

In Moscow, the decision on the operational arrangements for the liberation of the peninsula had already been taken. In considering the matter, the Stavka had decided at the beginning of October that the Crimea should be attacked from the north by 4th Ukrainian Front and also from the east by North Caucasus Front under Petrov's command. Petrov's troops were to take the Kerch Strait and establish a bridgehead on both sides of the city in 'Operation Kerch–Eltingen', while 4th Ukrainian Front was to advance along the north shore of the Sea of Azov to the Perekop isthmus, and press on into the peninsula from there. North Caucasus Front's plan was to advance westward from the Kerch bridgehead and take possession of the peninsula. At the end of October 1943 the Soviet enemy's preparations for the attack were nearing completion, and the two parallel operations could begin.<sup>69</sup>

<sup>67</sup> KTB OKW, iii/2, 1230 (29 Oct. 1943).

<sup>68</sup> Hillgruber, *Die Räumung*, 15.

<sup>69</sup> Geschichte des zweiten Weltkrieges 1939–1945, vii. 279–81, 321 ff.

The invasion attempts on the north bank of the Sivash and on the Kerch Strait appeared to confirm Seventeenth Army HQ's prognosis. In the first few days of November, 4th Ukrainian Front succeeded in breaking through the front at the Tatar Trench near Perekop, taking the Chigary peninsula (approximately 30 kilometres east of Armyansk), and establishing a bridgehead on Seventeenth Army's northern front. The situation of XXXIX Mountain Corps deteriorated considerably as a result of the enemy success. V Corps too was unable to prevent the enemy from landing and establishing a substantial bridgehead north of Kerch. The Soviet forces also occupied a narrow coastal strip south of Eltingen, which was subsequently encircled but not retaken in a German–Romanian counter-attack. Despite the tense manpower situation, the forces of XXXIX Mountain Corps and V Corps proved strong enough in fierce defensive battles to prevent major enemy incursions. The Soviet forces consequently took no further action after 10 November.<sup>70</sup>

The loss of the land link and the Soviet invasion attempts prompted Army Group A to request that the Crimea be evacuated according to plan. If Hitler refused to agree, the army group had no alternative but to strengthen Seventeenth Army's defence forces and, at the same time, to make preparations on the lower Dnieper for a relief operation to re-establish the land link with the Crimea. The chances of doing so were still relatively good in November 1943. But Kleist had to proceed on the assumption that Hitler would not accept the proposal. The army group and Seventeenth Army HQ therefore endeavoured in the next few weeks to convince Hitler that Seventeenth Army did not have the necessary forces to provide a comprehensive defence, given the length of the coastline. In these circumstances the peninsula should be evacuated without delay. But Hitler held to his decision and was only prepared to send a few battalions, which had originally been intended for Army Group South, to strengthen Seventeenth Army's defence force in the Crimea.<sup>71</sup>

The deteriorating situation on the southern wing of the eastern front forced the high command in Nikolayev to inform Seventeenth Army on 21 November that Hitler still intended 'to re-establish the connection with the Crimea. The army group does not know, and the OKH too cannot say, whether or when this can be done. Personally of the opinion that it will not be possible to relieve the Crimea in the foreseeable future.'<sup>72</sup> This fear, expressed by Gen. Hans Röttiger, was not unjustified, as developments at the end of 1943 in the area north of the Black Sea showed. When Manstein again asked for the Nikopol bridgehead to be evacuated in January 1944, any hope of relieving Seventeenth Army vanished. With the start of the Soviet winter offensive in mind, the commander-in-chief of Army Group South asked the OKH to withdraw Seventeenth Army from the Crimea so that its

<sup>70</sup> KTB H.Gr. A, Abt. Ia, No. 3, ii. 1, 20, 35, 54, 65, 78, 89, 101, 115, 124 (1–10 Nov. 1943), BA-MA RH 19 V/21, fos. 2, 20, 35, 54, 65, 78, 89, 101, 115, 124.

<sup>71</sup> Study P-114c, pt. 6, ch. 3, 336–40, BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2074, fos. 74–8; Hillgruber, *Die Räumung*, 17–19; Hillgruber, 'Die Krise'.

<sup>72</sup> KTB H.Gr. A, Abt. Ia, No. 3, ii. 212 (21 Nov. 1943), BA-MA RH 19 V/21, fo. 212.

forces could be used to support the southern section of the eastern front, but Hitler was not to be swayed. As he did not accept Manstein's requests, and as the requests were also 'completely contrary to his firmly held strategic convictions',<sup>73</sup> Seventeenth Army's fate was sealed.

After the loss of the land link, Seventeenth Army established all-round defences along the 700-kilometre coast in the winter of 1943–4. The army had XXXIX Mountain Corps, V Corps, and the Romanian 1st Mountain Corps at its disposal to complete this task.<sup>74</sup> The German mountain corps protected the Perekop isthmus, the Sivash front, and the west coast, while the Romanian corps was responsible for fighting the partisans in the Yaila Mountains (a mountain range on the south coast of the Crimea) and for protecting the coast in the southern part of the peninsula. V Corps was stationed on the Kerch peninsula, where it was primarily engaged in trying to prevent the invasions attempted at Eltingen and in the Kerch Strait. From January on, the army was able to call on the Crimean Mountain Rifle Regiment as an active reserve force.<sup>75</sup> As for armour, the army had only 45 assault guns, supported in anti-tank defence by 9th Anti-Aircraft Division. The combined German and Romanian forces were nevertheless not strong enough to withstand a massive Soviet invasion and to hold the peninsula for long.<sup>76</sup>

XXXIX Mountain Corps fought the first battles at Perekop from the end of October, while the Soviet 51st Army barred access to the peninsula at the Tatar Trench. The mountain corps was also able to stop, at least in part, the 4th Ukrainian Front invasion on the Sivash front at the beginning of November, with the result that only the Chigary peninsula was lost. The battles on the Crimean front in the first half of November were concentrated on the eastern shore of the Kerch peninsula, where the Soviet forces established bridgeheads at the beginning of the month to the north of Kerch and south of Eltingen. North Caucasus Front managed to extend its territorial gains to the north of Kerch in the course of November, before V Corps brought its advance to a halt. Seventeenth Army HQ planned to launch a counter-offensive to clear the bridgehead at Eltingen when the fighting eased up at the beginning of December. Jaenecke had decided on this move because the prospects of success on this narrow headland appeared to be really good. The combined German and Romanian units launched their offensive at the beginning of December, after the navy had blocked access to the bridgehead for five weeks, and three days later the area was once again in their hands. By means of this successful operation, V Corps forestalled the enemy plans for a pincer movement.<sup>77</sup>

<sup>73</sup> Hillgruber, *Die Räumung*, 19.

<sup>74</sup> XXXIX. Mtn.A.C.: 50th Inf.Div., Cbt.Gr. 336th Inf.Div., 4th Mtn.Div., Rom. 10th Inf.Div.; pts. Slov. 1st. Div.; V A.C.: 98th Inf.Div., Rom. 19th Inf.Div., Rom. 3rd Mtn.Div., Rom. 6th Cav.Div.; Rom. Mtn.A.C.: Rom. 1st, Rom. 2nd Mtn.Div. (Status: 26 Oct. 1943); *Die geheimen Tagesberichte*, viii. 581.

<sup>75</sup> This unit consisted of additional field battalions from 4th Mountain Division, and 97th and 101st Rifle Divisions.

<sup>76</sup> Up to April 1944 Seventeenth Army still had 73rd Infantry Division (Jan. 1944) and 111th Infantry Division (Mar. 1944) under its command.

<sup>77</sup> KTB AOK 17, Abt. Ia, No. 8 (4–10 Dec. 1943), BA-MA RH 20-17/221, fos. 173–201; *Geschichte des zweiten Weltkrieges 1939–1945*, vii. 279–83.

If Seventeenth Army HQ had hoped that it could now proceed to drive the Soviet 51st Army too out of the Chigary peninsula, it was soon obliged to recognize that this plan could not be carried out with the forces currently at its disposal. Although 73rd Infantry Division had been transferred to the Crimea in January 1944, the high command in Simferopol could not achieve its aim of reconquering the peninsula because the division only made up for the heavy losses suffered in the past few weeks. The reinforcement was a mere drop in the ocean, and by the end of January the situation in the Crimea had deteriorated to such an extent that the front at Kerch was in danger of collapse. Fortunately for the German and Romanian troops and to their surprise, the Soviet attacks had become less frequent. After almost three months' fighting, the battle for the Crimea now eased off. However, it was clear to Army Group A and also to Seventeenth Army HQ that the pause would not last and it would not be long before the Soviet forces launched a major offensive to regain possession of the peninsula. The developments in the situation on the mainland indicated that the period of German–Romanian occupation of the Crimea was about to come to an end.

#### 4. NIKOPOL

Despite all the reverses in the southern section of the eastern front, the German and Romanian forces prevented any operational breakthrough by Soviet forces north of the Black Sea at the end of 1943. The Axis powers were able to achieve this success only at a heavy price in men and materials. Moreover, the Axis forces now had no reserves. The critical situation might possibly have been resolved, especially if the length of the front between the Black Sea and the Baltic had been compatible with the available forces and if the Crimea had been evacuated. Also, in view of the dangerous position, Hitler would have had to stop giving<sup>78</sup> ‘express priority to equipping the western theatre of war rather than the eastern theatre of war with men and materials’.<sup>79</sup>

While Army Groups South and A were still endeavouring to establish a defence front along the Dnieper, the operational conduct of the 1943/4 winter offensive was already being discussed in Moscow. Stalin’s impression that the Soviet ‘troops could continue their active operations against the German army [and] move straight on from the summer campaign to the winter campaign’<sup>80</sup> played a central part in the discussions. By continuing the offensive without a break, the Stavka hoped to exploit their past successes to the full and give the German forces no time to draw breath. A massive strategic attack was to be launched against the enemy’s flanks, concentrating on the southern section of the front. The Stavka planned to liberate the Crimea and the Ukraine west of the Dnieper, and destroy Army Groups South and A in its winter offensive. To that end, the Soviet forces engaged in action south of the Pripet marshes would have to concentrate their attack on the

<sup>78</sup> See Directive No. 51 of 3 Nov. 1943, in *Hitlers Weisungen*, 233–9.

<sup>79</sup> Gruchmann, ‘Der Zweite Weltkrieg’, 187.

<sup>80</sup> Stalin, *Briefwechsel*, 577.

south-west. However, the main aims of the operational plan were economic as well as military, because regaining possession of the western Ukraine would mean acquiring a region that was famous for its highly developed mining industry and intensive farming. At the same time, Moscow hoped that a successful winter campaign would have an impact on domestic politics in Bulgaria, Romania, and Hungary, to the benefit of its allies in those countries. Stalin approved the operational plan in mid-December, and the Red Army immediately began making intensive preparations for the attack.<sup>81</sup>

The Wehrmacht, on the other hand, had no detailed plans for conducting operations against the Red Army in the winter of 1943/4. Essentially, they accepted Hitler's maxim that the front lines were to be held at the point where the withdrawal had come to a standstill. Directive No. 51 had a particularly damaging effect on the eastern front, because it reduced the operational capability between the Baltic and the Black Sea to a minimum.<sup>82</sup> In view of the fact that the war was being fought on more than one front, the OKW had no alternative but to reduce the length of the defence front and evacuate the Crimea, if the German forces were to continue to hold the occupied territory for some time to come. An effective defence could be mounted only if the human and material resources were deployed on the shortest possible front. In this connection, the Dnieper salient with the mineral-rich mining areas of Krivoy Rog–Nikopol would have to be abandoned, and the front would have to be taken back to the Cherkassy–Kirovograd–Ingulets–Nikolayev line.

For Army Group A, which had established a weak security line on the lower Dnieper and in Transnistria on the Black Sea coast, 1944 got off to a relatively quiet start, as 1st Ukrainian Front's winter offensive had only an indirect bearing here. However, the major Soviet offensive west of Kiev meant that the Dnieper Line could not be held with the small German forces that were available. The aim of the Red Army's 'Nikopol–Krivoy Rog' operation was to split Army Group A into separate groups so that it could press on to the west through the gaps in the front. 3rd and 4th Ukrainian Fronts had 47 divisions and three special corps at their disposal for this offensive, representing a total force of approximately 700,000 men.<sup>83</sup> However, in view of the massive advances against the left wing of Army Group South, the OKH naturally assumed that the enemy intended to encircle Sixth and Eighth Armies from the north in order to drive them to the Romanian border and the Black Sea.<sup>84</sup>

At the beginning of 1944 Army Group A had under its command the Romanian 3rd Army,<sup>85</sup> which covered the Black Sea coast from the Dniester estuary to Kherson, and also XXXIV Army Corps, with 79th and 370th Infantry Divisions

<sup>81</sup> *Geschichte des zweiten Weltkrieges 1939–1945*, viii. 63–73.

<sup>82</sup> See detailed account in Part III, Chapter III of the present volume.

<sup>83</sup> *Geschichte des zweiten Weltkrieges 1939–1945*, viii. 98.

<sup>84</sup> Wosnenko, 'Die Schlacht', 326–8; see also Part IV, Chapter III of the present volume.

<sup>85</sup> At the beginning of 1944 the Romanian 3rd Army was under Commander West Tauria, together with 5th Luftwaffe Field Division, the Slovakian 1st Division, the Romanian 4th/24th Mountain Division, and the Romanian 15th and 21st Mountain Divisions.

on the lower Dnieper. Sixth Army<sup>86</sup> was deployed to the north, with five corps protecting the mineral-rich mining area of Nikopol in a 'balcony position' covering an extensive area to the east. Although the iron ore that was vital to the conduct of the war had not been extracted or shipped out for some weeks, Hitler held to his decision to defend the area round Nikopol in all circumstances. As a result, forces that were needed to stabilize the southern section of the eastern front and to provide operational reserves were needlessly tied up. The section of the front between Kirovograd and Kherson was inevitably open to a pincer movement by the Soviet forces, cutting off Sixth Army east of the Ingulets river, and an attack in the Nikopol area was therefore to be expected any day. Army Group A had about 550,000 German and allied troops to defend the area against an enemy offensive,<sup>87</sup> and the gravely endangered Sixth Army still had some 260,000 men at its disposal in February 1944.<sup>88</sup>

However, 3rd Ukrainian Front did not start the 'Nikopol-Krivoy Rog' operation against XXX Corps' defensive positions until 30 January.<sup>89</sup> Having suffered heavy losses at the beginning of the action, the corps could not halt the advance of some six rifle divisions, with the result that the enemy was able to break through to Apostolovo in the south. The attack to the east of Krivoy Rog was to be only a diversion from the main attack on Apostolovo, which followed two days later.<sup>90</sup> In this situation, Sixth Army was again placed under the command of Army Group A. 'The transfer, which had been on the cards for weeks in view of developments in the position of Army Group South [...], came at a time when Sixth Army was in an extremely difficult position.'<sup>91</sup> The Soviet spearheads had already reached the Kamenka, a tributary on the right of the Dnieper, and they were now only a few kilometres from Apostolovo. So it seemed certain that 3rd Ukrainian Front would move south, in order to cut off the units of Sixth Army that were still endeavouring to advance eastwards. When 4th Ukrainian Front too began to advance against the southern section of the front at Nikopol, the OKH decided to move Sixth Army back to the Kamenka line. By making this move, which began on 3 February, the Army General Staff's intention was to ward off the major Soviet attack on the Kamenka. However, this rapidly proved to be a delusion. The withdrawal was severely hampered by the dwindling strength of the German units and by the poor condition of the roads as a result of the weather, so some of Gen. Rodion Y. Malinovsky's troops were able to pass the German forces, cross the Kamenka, and advance westwards. As a result, XVII and IV Corps, which were engaged in defending Nikopol in the eastern section of the bridgehead as part of the 'Schörner Group',<sup>92</sup> had to withdraw through the enemy

<sup>86</sup> Sixth Army HQ had been transferred to Army Group South on 29 December 1943. KTB AOK 6, Abt. Ia, No. 8, 115 (29 Dec. 1943), BA-MA RH 20-6/336, fo. 131.

<sup>87</sup> This figure does not include the Seventeenth Army strength of approximately 100,000 men (Jan. 1944). BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2076, fo. 258.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, fo. 261.

<sup>89</sup> *Die geheimen Tagesberichte*, ix. 278.

<sup>90</sup> Eliseyev and Mikhalev, 'Osvobozhdenie', 38 ff.; Grylev, 'Die Zerschlagung', 361.

<sup>91</sup> KTB H.Gr. A, Abt. Ia, No. 3, v. 10 (2 Feb. 1944), BA-MA RH 19 V/24, fo. 11.

<sup>92</sup> The Group, named after its commander Gen. Ferdinand Schörner (commander of XXXX Army Corps), consisted of XXXX Armoured Corps HQ, and the XXIX, IV, and XVII Army Corps HQs attached to it. The Schörner Group included 10th Inf.Div., 1st Lt.Inf.Div., and 1st Mtn.Div.; KTB H. Gr. A, Abt. Ia, No. 3, v. 10 (2 Feb. 1944), BA-MA RH 19 V/24, fo. 12.

lines. When, on 5 February, the Soviet 46th Army took Apostolovo and continued to advance southwards, Kleist decided to marshal the Schörner Group west of Nikopol in order to prepare it for an attempt to break out. Starting on 8 February, the group, with IV Corps on its left, endeavoured to liberate Apostolovo from the south-east, in order to cut off the Soviet 8th Guards Army in the rear and establish a security line along the Krivoy Rog–Apostolovo–Nikopol line. This plan was not really feasible, as Soviet superiority combined with bad weather conditions meant that it was no longer possible to recapture the Kamenka line.<sup>93</sup> Although the IV Corps offensive had broken through, Sixth Army HQ was again ordered by Army Group A HQ to gather its forces together and advance through Apostolovo north-west to Krivoy Rog. Kleist hoped that this tactical move would leave less room for a possible enemy breakthrough and slow the pace of the Soviet attack. Meanwhile, 3rd Ukrainian Front was endeavouring to destroy the German forces in the Nikopol area, in order to focus on continuing the advance to the south-west and forcing Sixth Army back over the Ingulets river. In this way, the Soviet forces intended to stop the relief of the Crimea by land.<sup>94</sup> All sections of the Schörner Group had finally reached the west bank of the Kamenka on 11 February, so the group was able to escape the threat of encirclement and annihilation.<sup>95</sup>

The desperate situation in Sixth Army's area of operations, where 'the capability of almost all units had now been reduced to such a low level in every respect that a successful campaign was no longer being conducted in what was now a very extensive defence area',<sup>96</sup> prompted the army group HQ to request the OKH to move the front back either to the lower 'Bug–Ingul line' or even to the line of the Bug. That would reduce the length of the front from 320 to 200 kilometres, releasing three or four divisions for redeployment.<sup>97</sup> On 17 February, while the high command in Nikolayev was still awaiting the OKH's decision, Malinovsky launched a pincer movement against Krivoy Rog, in which his troops 'closed in on the main German position from the north and the south',<sup>98</sup> in order to encircle LVII Armoured Corps and destroy it. In this critical situation the army group again asked the OKH to move Sixth Army back, at least to the Ingulets section of the front. At the same time, the army group HQ ordered Sixth Army HQ to 'launch an attack to close' the gap between the army's right and left flanks north-west of Krivoy Rog, 'and establish a permanent link between the two groups in all circumstances, at the very latest on the Ingulets'.<sup>99</sup> XXXIX Corps had already succeeded in establishing the missing connection between the southern and northern groups, in a counter-offensive launched on 19 February. The OKH

<sup>93</sup> Ibid. 102 (8 Feb. 1944), BA-MA RH 19 V/25, fo. 127.

<sup>94</sup> Eliseyev and Mikhalev, 'Osvobozhdenie', 40.

<sup>95</sup> KTB H.Gr. A, Abt. Ia, No. 3, v. 126 (10 Feb. 1944), BA-MA RH 19 V/25, fo. 127; AOK 6, 'Die Winterschlacht der 6. Armee im großen Dnepr-Bogen, im Brückenkopf Nikopol und im Raum Nikopol–Apostolow–Kriwoi Rog vom 10.1. bis 18.2.1944', 20–34, BA-MA RH 20-6/358.

<sup>96</sup> KTB H.Gr. A, Abt. Ia, No. 3, v. 159 (10 Feb. 1944), BA-MA RH 19 V/25, fo. 160.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid. 160 (10 Feb. 1944), BA-MA RH 19 V/25, fo. 161.

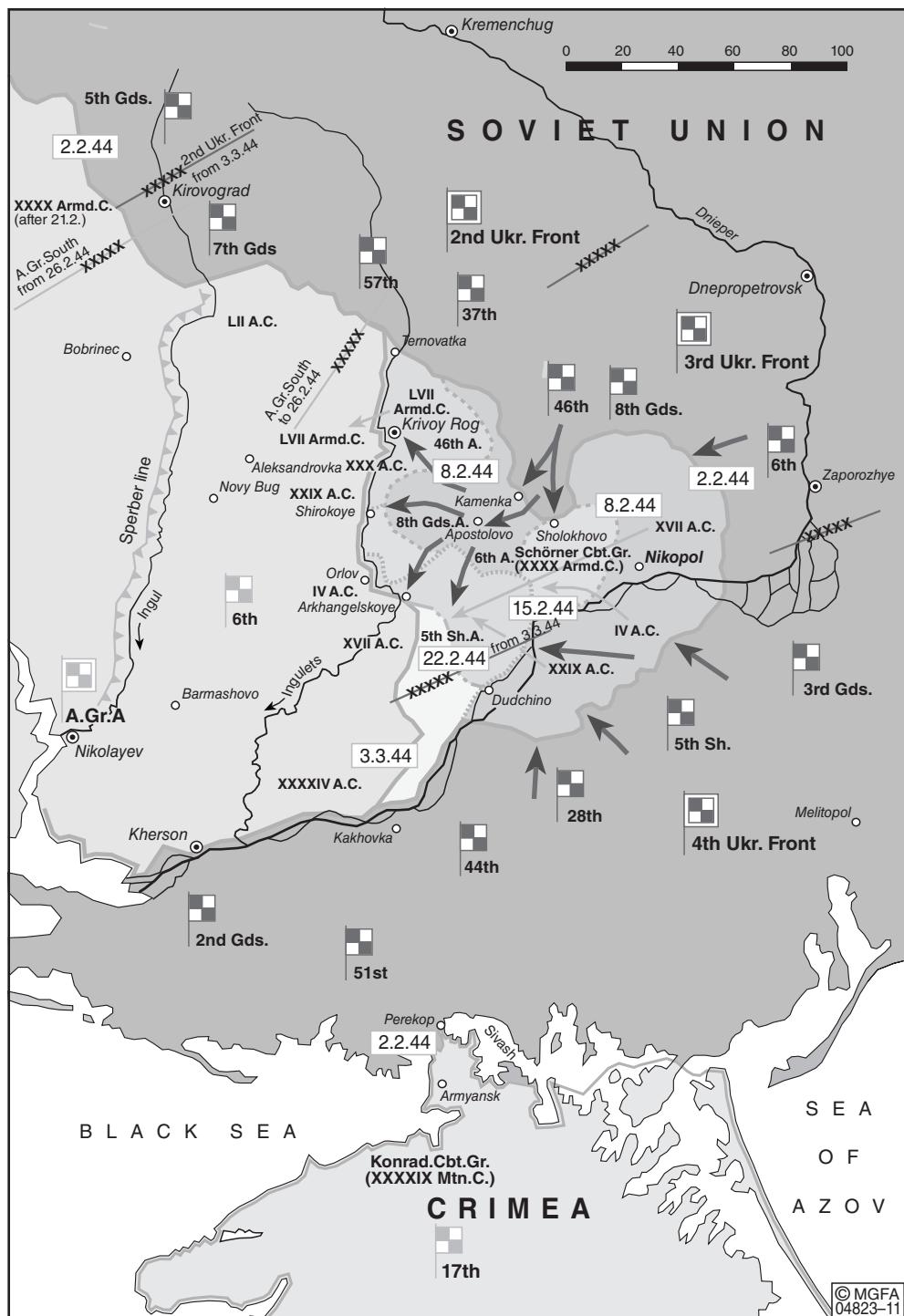
<sup>98</sup> *Deutschland im zweiten Weltkrieg*, vi. 62.

<sup>99</sup> KTB H.Gr. A, Abt. Ia, No. 3, v. 204 (18 Feb. 1944), BA-MA RH 19 V/25, fo. 205; KTB AOK 6, 'Winterschlacht Dnepr-Bogen', 27–39, BA-MA RH 20-6/358.



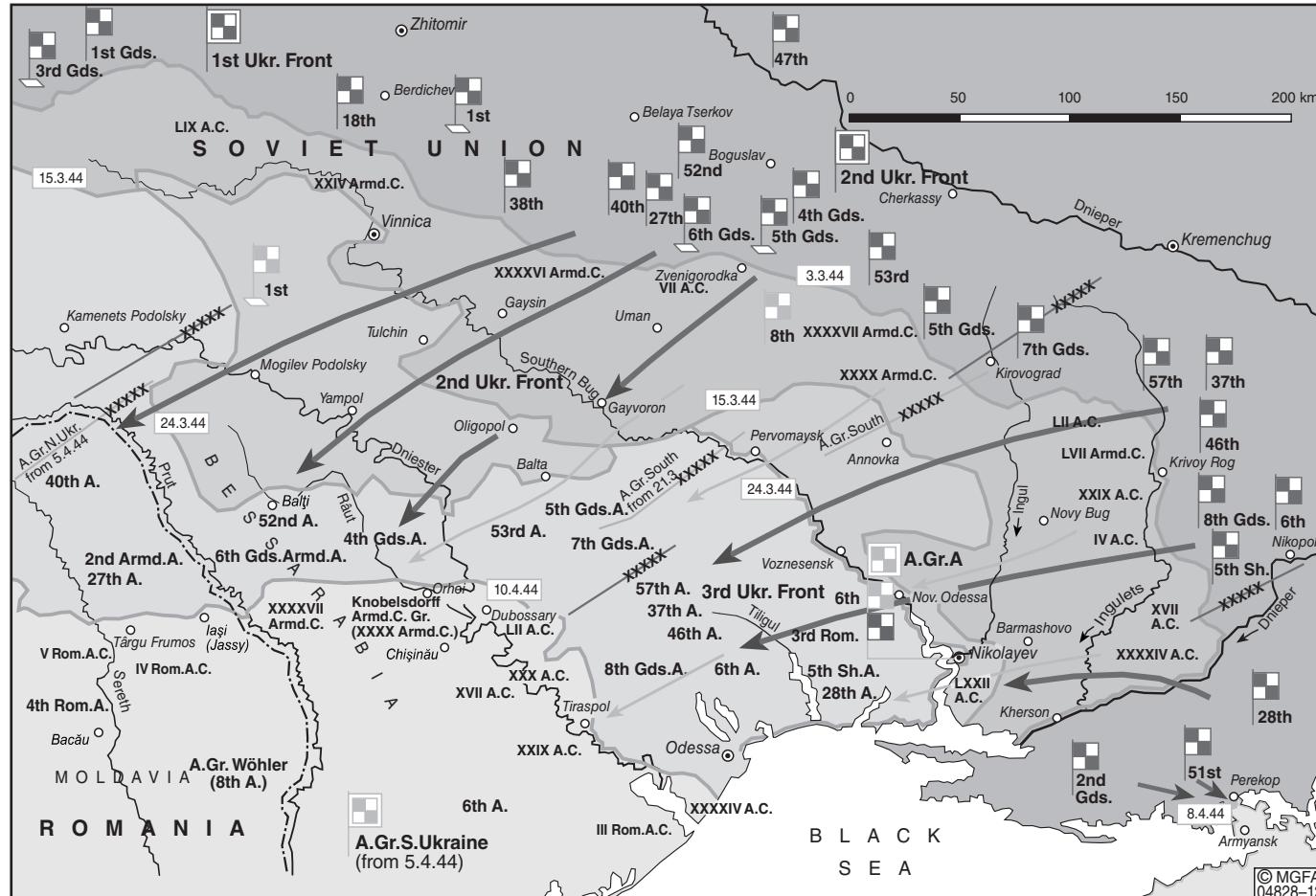
**Map IV.iv.2.** From the Wotan Line to the Dnieper (October 1943 to January 1944)

Source: OKH situation maps, 9 Oct., 27 Oct., 30 Oct., 4 Nov. 1944, BA-MA, Kart RH2, Ost/821, 839, 842, 847, and 906.



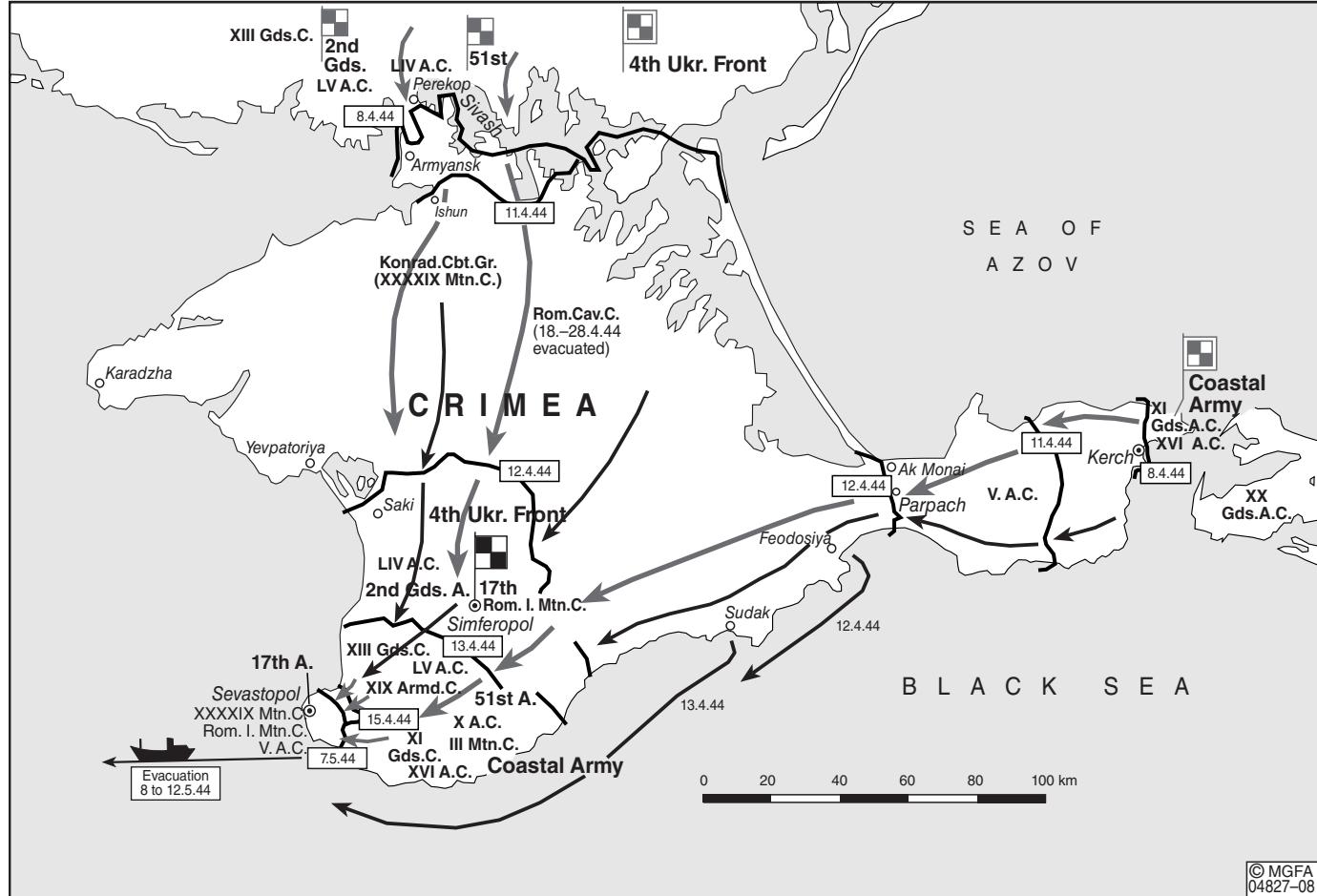
Map IV.iv.3. The battles in the Nikopol area (February 1944)

Source: Study P-114c, Maps 24, 27, 28, pp. 332, 392, 400; BA-MA, ZA 1/2074, fos. 70, 130, and 138.



Map IV.iv.4. The withdrawal from the Ingul to Bessarabia and into Moldavia (March to April 1944)

Sources: OKH situation maps, 3 Mar., 15 Mar., 24 Mar., and 10 Apr. 1944, BA-MA, Kart RH2, Ost/953, 965, 974, and 990.



Map IV.iv.5. The final battle in the Crimea (April/May 1944)

Sources: OKH situation maps, 8 Apr., 10 to 13 Apr., and 7 May 1944, BA-MA, Kart RH2, Ost/998, 990–3, 995, and 1018; Philippi and Heim, *Der Feldzug gegen Sowjetrußland*, Map 5; Hillgruber, *Die Räumung der Krim*, Map 7.

disbanded the Schörner Group on the following day, after the unit had escaped encirclement in the Nikopol area.<sup>100</sup> However, the successful withdrawal was inevitably accompanied by substantial losses in heavy weapons and motor vehicles.<sup>101</sup>

Although the Schörner Group had managed to escape encirclement by enemy forces, its success was immediately followed by a further crisis, when Soviet forces attacked LVII Armoured Corps with a view to recapturing Krivoy Rog. The Schörner Group had lost almost all its heavy weapons, so Sixth Army lacked the necessary resources to provide the armoured corps with adequate support in its defence. The army group now decided to move Sixth Army back to the Dudkhina (Dnieper)–Arkhangelskoye (Ingulets) line according to plan, and to prepare the withdrawal to the Ingulets between Arkhangelskoye and Ternovatka, starting on 18 February. XXXXIX Corps and the troops under Commander West Tauria on the army group's right wing were to continue to hold the positions on the lower Dnieper and in the Bug estuary. While the army group HQ in Nikolayev was still waiting for OKH approval to withdraw to the Ingulets, the Soviet 46th Army pressure on Krivoy Rog had increased to such an extent that, on 21 February, Kleist allowed Sixth Army HQ to evacuate the city and move LVII Armoured Corps back to a position behind the Ingulets. It was only on the next day that Hitler gave permission for Sixth Army to withdraw to the Dudkhina–Arkhangelskoye–Ternovatka line. Despite considerable enemy pressure, Sixth Army succeeded in establishing a shorter defence front by the end of February.

However, the position of its neighbour on the left, where the front extended to the west in a wide loop, meant that Sixth Army's defence positions were in danger of being rolled up from the north. In order to forestall this threat, at least to some extent, the OKH transferred LII Corps to Sixth Army HQ on 26 February. Although this measure increased the length of Army Group A's front by 110 kilometres, it had the advantage of enabling operations in the southern section of the eastern front to be conducted homogeneously.<sup>102</sup>

Although Army Group A was able to deal with the critical situation at Nikopol in February 1944 and essentially maintain its position under enemy pressure by employing delaying tactics until the end of the month, there was still a danger that the enemy forces might break through.<sup>103</sup> At this delicate point in the proceedings the thaw set in at the end of February, with the result that operations were put on hold and Army Group A had time to consolidate its position. However, conditions improved only to a limited extent, because Hitler refused to approve withdrawal to the Ingulets, leaving LII Army Corps stationed south-east of Kirovograd. Meanwhile, the Stavka had already made preparations for the next offensive. It intended 'to destroy the enemy section by section in a series of

<sup>100</sup> KTB AOK 6, Abt. Ia, No. 11, 9 (20 Feb. 1944), BA-MA RH 20-6/372, fo. 51; AOK 6, 'Die Zweite Winterschlacht der 6. Armee zwischen Dnjepr, Ingulec und Bug vom 3. bis 23.3.1944', 6, BA-MA RH 20-6/380.

<sup>101</sup> Study P-114c, pt. 6, ch. 5, 495, BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2074, fo. 233; Kaltenegger, *Schörner*, 227 ff.; *Geschichte des zweiten Weltkrieges 1939–1945*, viii. 99 ff.

<sup>102</sup> KTB AOK 6, Abt. Ia, No. 11, 51 (26 Feb. 1944), BA-MA RH 20-6/372, fo. 93.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid. 60 ff. (26 Feb. 1944), BA-MA RH 20-6/372, fo. 103 ff.

powerful parallel strikes on a 700-km-long front extending from Lutsk to the Dnieper estuary, and complete the liberation of the Ukraine on the right bank of the river'.<sup>104</sup>

## 5. THE WITHDRAWAL TO THE BUG

Army Group A's defensive measures had prevented 3rd and 4th Ukrainian Fronts from achieving their operational objectives, and the result of the winter campaign consequently failed to fulfil the Stavka's expectations, at least in the southern section of the front. It is true that the Soviet forces had succeeded in driving the German forces from the Dnieper, and liberating the mineral-rich mining area of Krivoy Rog–Nikopol, but they had been unable to achieve their real aim—to destroy Army Groups South and A, and recapture the whole of the Ukraine—by the end of February 1944. 1st and 2nd Ukrainian Fronts, which faced Army Group South, had largely completed their respective tasks but the two neighbouring Fronts to the south were still far from having done so. The Stavka was therefore obliged to reduce its operational objectives in the middle of February, with the result that Malinovsky was given only the task of breaking through the Ingulets front so as to outflank the German defensive positions on the lower section of the river and liberate the Nikolayev area. The Stavka withdrew 4th Ukrainian Front from the front line altogether, so that it could prepare to liberate the Crimea.<sup>105</sup>

After Hollidt had taken Sixth Army back to the positions on the Ingulets, with great difficulty and heavy losses,<sup>106</sup> operations in the southern section of the eastern front were temporarily suspended on account of the weather. In the light of the OKH's information on the enemy's intentions, the Army General Staff assumed that the Soviet offensive would continue once the thaw was over. The OKH thought that the spring operation would be directed primarily against the southern section, where the severely depleted Army Groups South and A were stationed on an extremely long front, without adequate supply lines. They were therefore hardly in a position to withstand a massive enemy assault, even for a short time.<sup>107</sup>

As the OKH had feared, the Red Army launched its offensive against the southern section of the eastern front on 3 March. At this point the southern wing of Sixth Army was still stationed on the Dnieper, while the central section of its defence front was on the Ingulets and the left-hand section was already west of the Ingul. The position, which formed a near-semicircle projecting to the east, was approximately 400 kilometres long in all, and was consolidated only on the banks of the Dnieper and at a few points on the Ingulets.<sup>108</sup> At the beginning of March, 3rd Ukrainian Front had completed its approach to the German defence lines with

<sup>104</sup> Eliseyev and Mikhalev, 'Osvobozhdenie', 41.

<sup>105</sup> *Geschichte des zweiten Weltkrieges 1939–1945*, viii. 102 ff.

<sup>106</sup> In the period 11 to 29 February 1944 Sixth Army lost 13,240 men, of whom 8,390 wounded and 4,850 dead or missing. BA-MA RW 6v/559, fo. 8 ff.

<sup>107</sup> Study P-114c, pt. 6, annex 104, 245 ff., BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2076, fo. 10 ff.

<sup>108</sup> AOK 6, 'Zweite Winterschlacht Dnjepr', 1, BA-MA RH 20-6/380.

six armies (7th and 8th Guards Armies, and 6th, 37th, 46th, and 57th Armies), while 4th Ukrainian Front covered the lower Dnieper with two armies (5th Shock Army and 28th Army). Malinovsky launched the operation on 3 March, with two armies south of Krivoy Rog and one army north of the city. The attack concentrated on the section covered by XXIX Army Corps, where the Soviet 8th Guards Army succeeded in breaching the front line and pressing through to the west on the very first day. Although the advance of the Soviet forces was subsequently held up, Sixth Army ultimately lacked the necessary strength to close the gap, especially as the enemy also broke into the complex of positions held by LVII Armoured Corps. By 7 March the 3rd Ukrainian Front spearheads had almost reached Novy Bug, which surrendered on the following day. In view of the critical situation, Sixth Army ought to have been moved west into a shorter defence line. But once again, the army group's plan met with stubborn opposition from Hitler, who issued an order on 8 March that Sixth Army was to 'hold on and close the gap'.<sup>109</sup>

While Sixth Army was still endeavouring to close the gap in the front, the Soviet 8th Guards Army, having taken Novy Bug, was pressing on towards the Bug estuary in the south-west. Malinovsky's decision to advance into the area between the Ingul and the Ingulets rivers created a life-threatening situation for the army group's southern flank, where four corps were still fighting in forward positions some considerable distance to the east. The order to withdraw from the Dnieper to the Ingulets was issued only on 9 March, when developments in the situation left Hitler with no alternative. Once again, Hitler's reaction came too late, destroying any chance Army Group A might have had of taking up new defensive positions according to plan. While the two corps on Sixth Army's extreme right wing managed to withdraw to the Bug estuary after 9 March without too much trouble, and to establish a bridgehead south-east of Nikolayev after 13 March, the withdrawal from the section of the front between Berislav, on the Dnieper 60 kilometres east of Kherson, and Krivoy Rog proved to be fraught with problems. The Soviet 8th Guards Army spearheads had already reached Barmasovo on 11 March, cutting off the withdrawal route to the west for large sections of the southern group. Fortunately for the threatened southern group, Malinovsky divided the 3rd Ukrainian Front spearheads after the capture of Novy Bug. So only the Soviet 8th Guards Army was deployed in the area between Novy Bug and the Bug estuary. The southern group of Sixth Army now found itself obliged to fight its way back to the Bug through the enemy lines and it managed, with strong support from I Air Corps,<sup>110</sup> to break through the weak defences on the Soviet 8th Guards Army's flank. By the middle of March, the southern group had reached the Nikolayev-Trikhati bridgehead and the Bug, where it established a weak security line. The northern group of Sixth Army—the Kirchner Corps Group<sup>111</sup>—returned, in

<sup>109</sup> Quoted in AOK 6, 'Zweite Winterschlacht Dnjepr', 16, BA-MA RH 20-6/380; see also KTB AOK 6, Abt. Ia, No. 11, 81–125 (3–8 Mar. 1944), BA-MA RH 20-6/372, fos. 123–67.

<sup>110</sup> KTB H.Gr. A, Abt. Ia, KTB No. 3, vi. 63 (9 Mar. 1944), BA-MA RH 19 V/25, fo. 65.

<sup>111</sup> The Kirchner Corps Group, comprising LVII and LII Armoured Corps, was formed on 9 March 1944. KTB AOK 6, Abt. Ia, No. 11, 132 (9 Mar. 1944), BA-MA RH 20-6/372, fo. 174.

collaboration with the right wing of Army Group South, to the line between Oligopol (25 kilometres west of Novy Bug) and Annovka, where it was still some 50 kilometres east of the Bug.

The loss of unity in the front undoubtedly posed an existential threat to Sixth Army, but developments in the situation of its neighbour on the left represented a far greater danger to the southern section of the eastern front. 2nd Ukrainian Front had already crossed the Bug at Gayvoron and was pressing on south, advancing with two armies against Army Group South's security line at Bălți and Balta. So Gen. Ivan Stepanovich Konev's armies threatened the deep left flank of Army Group A, which was engaged in the middle of March in a desperate attempt to get Sixth Army to the Bug before the enemy spearheads reached it. The situation gave particular cause for concern, in that the forces deployed between the Bug and the Dniester south of the Bălți–Balta–Pervomaysk line were not really in a position to halt a Soviet advance to the Black Sea.<sup>112</sup>

When the Soviet forces recaptured North Transnistria in February and pressed on into North Bessarabia, the military situation acquired a political dimension. Now that the military operations had moved into Romanian territory, the possibility could no longer be precluded that political opinion in Romania might change, and the kingdom might withdraw from its alliance with Germany and take no further part in the action.<sup>113</sup>

## 6. FROM THE BUG TO THE DNIESTER–IAȘI POSITION

When Army Group A moved to the Bug position in the middle of March 1944, the Red Army had not only reached the eastern border of Transnistria but had also liberated the northern part of the territory annexed by Romania.<sup>114</sup> The first measures to evacuate the area between the Bug and the Dniester had already been taken when the Soviet troops crossed the upper Dnieper in the course of their 1943 summer offensive, and the military operations were approaching the Bug. As a result of the military developments, Antonescu transferred the civil and military control of the narrow strip of land to Gen. Gheorghe Potopeanu in January 1944.<sup>115</sup> When the Red Army advanced towards the Bug and entered the northern part of the Romanian district, Army Group A took full control and Romanian rule in Transnistria effectively came to an end.<sup>116</sup>

<sup>112</sup> AOK 6, 'Zweite Winterschlacht Dnjep', 16–38, BA-MA RH 20-6/380; Philippi and Heim, *Der Feldzug gegen Sowjetrußland*, 238 ff.

<sup>113</sup> This possibility was not ruled out, in view of soundings taken with the Allies since February 1944 on the subject of a ceasefire. Hillgruber, *Hitler*, 180–3.

<sup>114</sup> See, on Transnistria, *Germany and the Second World War*, iv. 1022–6.

<sup>115</sup> Lt.-Gen. Gheorghe Potopeanu (1889–1966) was responsible for the civil and military administration of Transnistria from 1 February to 15 March 1944. Duțu, Dobre, and Loghin, *Armata Română*, 325.

<sup>116</sup> Although Army Group A had assumed executive powers, the German side continued to regard Transnistria as Romanian; Völk, *Transnistrien*, 97–100.

Army Group A had withdrawn to the Bug line at the beginning of the second half of March. It was endeavouring to establish a stable defence line against the approaching forces of 3rd Ukrainian Front, and it had to pay particular attention to developments in the situation of the neighbour on its left. As for Army Group South, 2nd Ukrainian Front had succeeded in breaking through Eighth Army's left flank west of Zvenigorodka at the beginning of March, permanently severing the link between First Armoured Army and Eighth Army, and advancing southwards. By the middle of the month, the 2nd Ukrainian Front spearheads had crossed the upper Bug at Gayvoron, and were approaching the Dniester at Yampol.

In view of the overextended front line, the most sensible move would have been to withdraw Army Groups South and A to the Dniester without delay, consolidate the southern section of the eastern front, and build up urgently needed reserves by reducing the length of the front. The state of the units, in respect of manpower and materials, called for measures that would offer some chance of withstanding the massive onslaught of superior enemy forces, and reviving the exhausted and decimated units. Since the beginning of the year, the commanders-in-chief, Manstein and Kleist, had both repeatedly sought permission to withdraw and reduce the length of the front, but Hitler remained absolutely determined not to surrender voluntarily a single metre of the ground that had been won. By the middle of March, the situation in Army Group South was close to disaster and Army Group A was in danger of destruction, but Hitler was prepared to take this desperate situation into account only on certain conditions.<sup>117</sup> Even when, during a visit to Obersalzberg on 19 March, the two commanders-in-chief asked Hitler to withdraw Army Group A to the Dniester, and to use the forces released by this move to stabilize the front between the Dniester and the Prut and support the northern wing of Army Group South, Hitler refused to approve this broad operational concept. He decided instead that 'Army Group A must remain on the Bug, and announced only minimal measures to support the north wing of Army Group South'.<sup>118</sup>

While the two field marshals were pleading with Hitler for a limited measure of operational control, 2nd and 3rd Ukrainian Fronts were already receiving further orders from Moscow, the execution of which would shortly destroy the German position in the western Ukraine. Konev was to advance to the Prut with the bulk of his troops and take the northern part of Bessarabia. 3rd Ukrainian Front was instructed to continue the offensive in order to ensure that Sixth Army did not establish itself on the west bank of the Bug. The Stavka also expected Malinovsky's troops to liberate Odessa and Tiraspol, and to reach the Prut and the lower Danube. Tolbukhin received orders on 16 March 'to launch the operation in the Crimea as soon as the troops on 3rd Ukrainian Front's left wing had secured the Nikolayev area and were proceeding to Odessa'.<sup>119</sup>

The critical situation at the beginning of the second ten days in March forced Sixth Army HQ to move IV Corps to the Chișinău area with an infantry division,

<sup>117</sup> In this connection, see in particular Part IV, Chapter III.7 of this volume.

<sup>118</sup> Manstein, *Verlorene Siege*, 604 ff.

<sup>119</sup> *Geschichte des zweiten Weltkrieges 1939–1945*, viii. 110.

in a tactical move to delay an enemy advance. By the middle of the month the enemy had succeeded in steadily widening the gap between First Armoured Army and Eighth Army, advancing in force against the Balta–Bălți line, and finally coming to a halt in the Răut–Cula section of the front.<sup>120</sup> At this point, Sixth Army with five corps was stationed in defence positions on the west bank of the Bug, where the Soviet 8th Guards Army had managed to establish a small bridge-head at Nova Odessa. A week later, 3rd Ukrainian Front closed in and ordered seven leading armies in the front line to advance with a view to recapturing Transnistria. On 21 March the OKH moved the boundary of Army Group A west, extending the army group's front line to Pervomaysk in the north.<sup>121</sup>

As Eighth Army's situation was steadily coming to a head, Sixth Army HQ was again obliged to withdraw troops from the Bug and move them to the Balta area. In the light of these grave threats, Hollidt considered that, 'in view of Eighth Army's situation, there is no alternative but to withdraw from the Bug with all speed [...]. If orders to that effect are not issued by the higher authorities, the withdrawal will have to proceed on our own initiative.'<sup>122</sup> On 25 March the army group HQ accordingly ordered Sixth Army HQ and the Romanian 3rd Army high command to prepare to withdraw to the Tiligul estuary–Dniester bridgehead position at Dubossary.<sup>123</sup> When, likewise on 25 March, Eighth Army was obliged to surrender Balta, it was clear that 3rd Ukrainian Front would shortly resume operations on the Bug.

It would now have made sense to place Eighth Army under the command of Army Group A. This would have unified the conduct of operations on the southern flank of the eastern front. As the OKH had not taken a decision in this connection by 26 March, Kleist seized the initiative, and 'placed [...] Eighth Army [...] under his own command [...] by his own decision'.<sup>124</sup> He informed the OKH that he was taking this step and, at the same time, that he proposed to move Sixth Army back from the Bug to the Dniester. The OKH approved the independent decision to take command, but Col.-Gen. Zeitzler refused to sanction Sixth Army's withdrawal to the Dnieper. He accordingly referred Kleist to Hitler, to clarify the matter directly with the dictator. Surprisingly, Hitler accepted the army group's proposal, in that he gave permission for the army to withdraw to the Odessa–Tiraspol bridgehead position, but he insisted categorically that the Crimea must be held. The day after Army Group A took over Eighth Army HQ, the Romanian Grand General Staff placed the Romanian 4th Army under the army group's command, a move that appeared to offer some prospect of relief in the critical situation obtaining in the southern section of the eastern front.<sup>125</sup> Sixth Army's

<sup>120</sup> KTB H.Gr. A, Abt. Ia, No. 3, vi. 156 (19 Mar. 1944), BA-MA RH 19 V/25, fo. 158.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid. 162, 164, 171 (20–1 Mar. 1944), BA-MA RH 19 V/25, fos. 164, 166, 173.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid. 196 (24 Mar. 1944), fo. 198. <sup>123</sup> Ibid. 203 (25 Mar. 1944), fo. 205.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid. 209 (26 Mar. 1944), fo. 211. Manstein claimed, on the contrary, that he had suggested to Hitler that Eighth Army be placed under the command of Army Group A; Manstein, *Verlorene Siege*, 613.

<sup>125</sup> KTB H.Gr. A, Abt. Ia, No. 3, vi. 224 ff. (27 Mar. 1944), BA-MA RH 19 V/25, fo. 226 ff.

**Table IV.iv. 3. Army Group A: order of battle (status: 26 March 1944)**

Rom. 21st Inf.Div.	LXXII A.C.	
Rom. 14th Inf.Div.	(special duties)	
Rom. 4th/24th Inf.Div.		<b>Rom. 3rd Army</b>
Rom. 15th Inf.Div.		
5th Lw.Fld.Div.Cbt.Gr.	Rom. III A.C.	
302nd Inf.Div. Cbt.Gr.		
304th Inf.Div. Cbt.Gr.	XXXXIV A.C.	
370th Inf.Div.		
9th Inf.Div. Cbt.Gr.		
306th Inf.Div. Cbt.Gr.	XVII A.C.	<b>Sixth Army</b>
3rd Mtn.Div.		
97th Lt.Inf.Div. Cbt.Gr.		
17th Inf.Div. Cbt.Gr.	XXIX A.C.	
258th Inf.Div.		153rd F.T.D.
294th Inf.Div. Cbt.Gr.		Slov. 1st Div.
335th Inf.Div. Cbt.Gr.		
15th Inf.Div. Cbt.Gr.	XXX A.C.	
257th Inf.Div.		
384th Inf.Div.		
Corps Det. A		
76th Inf.Div.	LII A.C.	
320th Inf.Div.		
2nd Para.Div.		<b>Army Group A</b>
10th Armd.Inf.Div.		
4th Mtn.Div. Cbt.Gr.		
376th Inf.Div.		Knobelsdorff
198th Inf.Div. Cbt.Gr.		Group
3rd SS Armd.Inf. Div.'T'	VII A.C.	
11th Armd.Div. Cbt.Gr.		<b>Army Det. Wöhler</b>
34th Inf.Div. Cbt.Gr.		(Eighth Army)
106th Inf.Div.		Enroute:
282th Inf.Div.		
13th Armd.Div.	XXXXVII	LVII Armd.Corps
14th. Armd.Div. Cbt.Gr.	Armd.Corps	HQ.24th Armd.
Armd.Inf.Div. 'GD'		Div.
		23rd Armd.Div.
		Cbt.Gr.
79th. Inf.Div.	IV A.C. (Mieth)	3rd Armd.Div.
Blocking Unit 'Haus'	370th Inf.Div.	Cbt.Gr.
Rom. 5th Inf.Div.		46th. Inf.Div.
		Cbt.Gr.
Rom. 7th Inf.Div.		Corps Det. F
Rom. 8th Inf.Div.	Rom. IV A.C.	Rom. 3rd Inf.
Rom. 5th Cav.Div.		Div.
Cantimir Gr.		Rom. 6th Inf.
Raves Gr.		Div.
		<b>Seventeenth Army</b>

withdrawal from the Bug started promptly on 28 March, and was to be completed on 5 April according to the plans.<sup>126</sup>

At the end of March, when Army Group A had three German armies and two Romanian armies under its command, the command structure in the context of German–Romanian cooperation was reorganized. The two armies fighting on the left wing, the German Eighth Army and the Romanian 4th Army, were combined to form Army Detachment Wöhler under the command of Eighth Army HQ. The German Sixth Army and the Romanian 3rd Army were combined as Army Detachment Dumitrescu, in a rather obscure military structure commanded by Col.-Gen. Petre Dumitrescu of the Romanian 3rd Army.<sup>127</sup> As Sixth Army was wedged between the areas in which Army Detachment Wöhler and the Romanian 3rd Army were operating, this singular command structure, which was probably the result of an agreement between Hitler and Antonescu, was contrary to all the criteria for efficient conduct of operations.

In the operational phase at the end of March, Army Group A's intention was that Army Detachment Wöhler should cover the deep left flank of Sixth Army as it withdrew. At the same time, Eighth Army was to delay 2nd Ukrainian Front's continuing southward advance in a holding operation, and finally bring it to a halt at Sculeni, 20 kilometres north of Iași on the Dubossary–Orgeyev–Prut line. The Romanian 4th Army was given the task of preventing Soviet forces from crossing the Prut for as long as possible. When, on 26 March, the Soviet 27th Army captured the first bridgeheads on the upper Prut, in the vicinity of Ștefănești about 50 kilometres north of Iași, and when three Soviet armies moved south and mounted a massive attack on Balta, it became clear that the enemy intended to advance along the Dniester to the Black Sea. Konev's aim, in making these moves, was 'to prevent Army Group A from withdrawing to the other side of the Dniester and, in collaboration with 3rd Ukrainian Front, to encircle and destroy the enemy forces'.<sup>128</sup> Army Group A responded to the Soviet offensive by sending a combat group to cover Iași, and moving the Romanian 4th Army back to the Iași–Târgu Frumos line. It also moved the right wing of Eighth Army and the northern section of Sixth Army south again, to protect Sixth Army's rear on the Tiraspol–Dubossary–Răut (section)–Orgeyev line.<sup>129</sup>

Kleist was endeavouring to deal with the crisis on the southern wing of the eastern front without excessive loss of men and materials, and to establish a united front. But Hitler relieved him of his command on 30 March and appointed Col.-Gen. Ferdinand Schörner to replace him. In doing so, the Führer parted with a commander-in-chief whose warnings he had come to find tedious. He set out his operational intentions in detail, explaining to Manstein that 'the time for grand-style operations in the east [...] was now past. All that counted now was to cling

<sup>126</sup> AOK 6, 'Abwehrschlacht der 6. Armee zwischen Bug und Dnestr vom 28.3. bis 12.4.1944', 1–4, BA-MA RH 20-6/390, fos. 3–6.

<sup>127</sup> KTB H.Gr. A, Abt. Ia, No. 3, vi. 216 ff. (26 Mar. 1944), BA-MA RH 19 V/25, fo. 218 ff.; KTB AOK 6, Abt. Ia, No. 3, 26 Mar. 1944, BA-MA RH 20-6/126, fo. 170.

<sup>128</sup> Eliseyev and Mikhalev, 'Osvobozhdenie', 44.

<sup>129</sup> Study P-114c, pt. 6, ch. 5, 515–22, BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2074, fos. 253–60.

stubbornly to what we held.<sup>130</sup> In addition to making changes in command, Hitler issued an order two days later, Operational Order No. 7, laying down the framework conditions for the conduct of operations in the southern section of the eastern front.<sup>131</sup> However, the instructions entailed no changes for Army Group A, which was to continue to defend the Dniester line and the front between the Dniester and the Carpathians to the north of Chișinău–Iași, and to hold the Crimea. The army group was renamed Army Group South Ukraine on 5 April but the organizational structure remained the same.

Insofar as the army group had had any hopes that its defence front would be stabilized, at least for a time, as a result of the withdrawal to the Tiligul estuary–Dniester bridgehead position, it was very soon forced to abandon them. Malinovsky's troops were hot on its heels, and the withdrawal operation was already under serious threat from the Soviet 46th Army on 2 April. Two days later the Soviet forces broke through XXIX Corps' front line and split Sixth Army; the idea of evacuating Odessa according to plan and shipping supplies to the Crimea from Constanța went up in smoke. Schörner immediately ordered an attack on the enemy flank, in order to cut off the units that had broken through and establish a security line. Sixth Army's strength had been reduced considerably in the course of the withdrawal, so the counter-attack failed and Odessa had to be evacuated, starting on 9 April.<sup>132</sup> Hitler now had no alternative but to approve withdrawal to the right bank of the Dniester.<sup>133</sup> The operation was completed by 14 April, and Army Detachment Dumitrescu set about establishing a defence front on the eastern border of Bessarabia. While Sixth Army HQ attempted to protect the west bank of the Dniester during the first half of April, the danger of being cut off in the rear became slightly less acute because the threatened Soviet counter-attack west of Iași failed to materialize. Although Army Detachment's front line was still under strong pressure from 2nd Ukrainian Front at the beginning of April, Eighth Army strengthened the line from the Răut section to the edge of the Carpathians at Târgu Neamț in a skilful defensive action, in which the German–Romanian army profited from the bad weather conditions.<sup>134</sup>

The battle for the Crimea—4th Ukrainian Front had launched its major offensive to recapture the peninsula—affected operations on the mainland only to a limited extent. There, Army Group South Ukraine withdrew during the second ten days in April to the line approved by the OKH; 3rd Ukrainian Front pressed on towards the Dniester, and 2nd Ukrainian Front advanced from the north in the area between the Prut and the Carpathians. The enemy forces succeeded in establishing bridgeheads on the Dniester in the Tiraspol area.

Meanwhile, Army Detachment Wöhler and the Romanian 4th Army managed to intercept the advancing Soviet forces in the Târgu Frumos–Iași area on 10 and

<sup>130</sup> Manstein, *Verlorene Siege*, 615.

<sup>131</sup> *Hitlers Weisungen*, 250–2.

<sup>132</sup> KTB AOK 6, Abt. Ia, No. 12, 9 Apr. 1944, BA-MA RH 20-6/383, fo. 107.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., fo. 109.

<sup>134</sup> AOK 6, 'Abwehrschlacht Bug', 4–37, BA-MA RH 20-6/390, fos. 6–33.

11 April.<sup>135</sup> On the strength of this positive result, the detachment was in a position to keep its northern flank between the edge of the Carpathians and the Dniester. On the other hand, the gap between the group and its neighbour on the left gave cause for considerable concern, and Army Group North Ukraine accordingly brought the Hungarian 1st Army in to establish a security line on the edge of the Carpathians west of Cernăuți. However, the Hungarian Army had to spend almost a month on the operation, which was successfully completed at the beginning of May.

When the Soviet forces reached the Dniester in the middle of April, the high command in Galați thought that, after a short rehabilitation phase, 2nd and 3rd Ukrainian Fronts would continue the offensive 'that was to lead to a decisive breakthrough to the Balkans'.<sup>136</sup> This was a reasonable assumption, given the 120 rifle divisions and twelve mobile corps deployed opposite the army group's front line. However, it was decided at Soviet headquarters to take no further action in the Romanian area of operations, in view of the bitter resistance from the German and Romanian forces. The Stavka accordingly issued orders on 6 May that 2nd and 3rd Ukrainian Fronts were now to defend the lines they had reached.<sup>137</sup>

Since the end of December 1943, when the Soviet winter offensive was launched, Army Group A had been forced to withdraw westwards from the lower Dnieper for almost 400 kilometres before halting at the Dniester. During that time, the army group had had nothing at its disposal to match the enemy's crushing superiority in manpower and materials. Although the army group had faced a number of crises that posed existential problems, Kleist's troops had nevertheless succeeded above all in preventing 3rd Ukrainian Front from achieving the goal it had been set, namely to advance to the Prut. Thanks to skilful conduct of operations—despite Hitler's restrictive interventions—and to the German units' willingness to fight on, it proved possible to offset the Soviet superiority sufficiently to prevent the complete collapse of the southern section of the eastern front. It must also be acknowledged that the German defence received some help from operational errors and a rigid conduct of operations on the other side. Even so, this successful defence was achieved at the cost of heavy losses,<sup>138</sup> which, given the limited manpower at the Wehrmacht's disposal, could never be made good. Had the army group possessed more freedom of action, operations could probably have been conducted in a more flexible way, and this, in turn, might have improved the army group's situation.

<sup>135</sup> KTB AOK 8, Abt. Ia, No. 3, 10–11 Apr. 1944, BA-MA RH 20-8/127, fos. 50–65; Dușu, Dobre, and Loghin, *Armata Română*, 35.

<sup>136</sup> KTB H.Gr. 'Südukraine', Abt. Ia, No. 3, vii. 162 (16 Apr. 1944), BA-MA RH 19 V/26, fo. 163.

<sup>137</sup> *Geschichte des zweiten Weltkrieges 1939–1945*, viii. 121 ff.

<sup>138</sup> Sixth Army lost about 76,550 men between 1 January and 20 May 1944, of whom 49,500 wounded, 13,850 dead and 13,200 missing; BA-MA RW 6/v. 559, fos. 3–18. 3rd Ukrainian Front recorded the loss of approximately 270,000 men between 24 December 1943 and 17 April 1944, of whom approximately 215,000 wounded and about 55,000 dead or missing; *Grif sekretnosti sniat*, 197 ff.

## 7. THE LOSS OF THE CRIMEA

Tolbukhin launched the offensive to recapture the Crimea with 4th Ukrainian Front on 8 April. According to the Stavka's plans for the operation, 4th Ukrainian Front was to lead the main attack from the north and the north-west, while Primorye Army was to break through the German defences at Kerch and advance on Sevastopol in a pincer movement. Almost 470,000 men were available for the operation to liberate the Crimea.<sup>139</sup> Seventeenth Army had only 165,000 German and 65,000 Romanian troops at its disposal to meet this powerful superior force.<sup>140</sup> Despite the discrepancy in manpower, Schörner still felt able to inform the OKH on 7 April, after visiting Seventeenth Army, that 'he was convinced [...] that the defence of the Crimea [was] secured for some time to come. In his opinion, contrary to the view taken by some, the defence could also be conducted on offensive lines.'<sup>141</sup> In expressing this opinion, Schörner was completely at odds with the Seventeenth Army commander-in-chief, who had been vehemently insisting since October 1943 that the peninsula should be evacuated.

In view of the Soviet attack, Seventeenth Army was obliged to establish two defence centres, with XXXXIX Mountain Corps covering the Perekop isthmus and the Sivash coastline in the north, and V Corps defending the Kerch peninsula in the east. As Seventeenth Army had no tanks and only a few assault guns at its disposal, the Luftwaffe's 9th Anti-Aircraft Artillery Division provided backing in anti-tank operations. The anti-aircraft artillery successfully supported XXXXIX Mountain Corps in the battle against armoured forces on the ground, especially at the Tatar Trench. The German 51st and 336th Infantry Divisions initially succeeded in withstanding the massive onslaught of the Soviet 2nd Guards Army and 51st Army at Perekop and the Sivash. But the superior strength of the enemy forces was so overwhelming that, on 10 April, 50th Infantry Division's defence line was moved back to the positions at Išun, and it became necessary to bring in 111th Infantry Division, which had been held in reserve. Despite these measures, the situation in the area did not remain stable for long, as it was already clear on 9 April that the Romanian 10th Infantry Division could no longer hold its positions in the south-eastern Sivash area.<sup>142</sup> The breach in the German-Romanian defence front at Išun enabled 4th Ukrainian Front to advance rapidly to the centre of the peninsula, as Seventeenth Army had already called up all its reserves on the third day of the operation, and the centre of the Crimea lay unprotected, at the mercy of the advancing Soviet forces. In view of the catastrophic developments, the general commanding XXXXIX Mountain Corps ordered the corps to withdraw to Sevastopol. For the corps, which already had units of the Soviet 51st Army operating behind it, this meant withdrawing across more than 160 kilometres of steppe, where the German troops were completely exposed and had no protection against enemy

<sup>139</sup> *Geschichte des zweiten Weltkrieges 1939–1945*, viii. 132 ff.

<sup>140</sup> Dutu, Dobre, and Loghin, *Armata Română*, 134.

<sup>141</sup> KTB H.Gr. 'Südukraine', Abt. Ia, No. 3, vii. 49 (7 Apr. 1944), BA-MA RH 19 V/26, fo. 50.

<sup>142</sup> KTB AOK 17, Abt. Ia, No. 10 (9–10 Apr. 1944), BA-MA RH 20-17/260, fos. 20–8.

air attacks. The withdrawal started on 11 April, and by 14 April XXXXIX Mountain Corps—essentially in good order, despite setbacks—had reached Sevastopol, where it proceeded to establish a defence front to the north and east of the fortified area.<sup>143</sup>

The northern front was in trouble, and V Corps was still occupying positions to the east of Kerch. On 10 April General Andrei Ivanovich Yeremenko finally launched the operations on the Kerch front. On the same day, Seventeenth Army HQ ordered V Corps to withdraw to the Parpach line at Feodosiya.<sup>144</sup> V Corps did not remain in the line position for long because the Soviet 51st Army was approaching Simferopol and threatening the corps' withdrawal. V Corps and the Romanian I Mountain Corps were therefore instructed to use the narrow coast road when withdrawing to the west. V Corps' late withdrawal too developed into a race with the vastly superior enemy force, culminating in a fiasco for the German and Romanian troops. Both corps reached the fortified area by 17 April, albeit with heavy losses.<sup>145</sup>

The order to withdraw, issued by Seventeenth Army, was directly contrary to Hitler's intentions. He regarded the order as a piece of deliberate disobedience and accused Jaenecke of having 'lost his nerve'.<sup>146</sup> In view of the chaotic situation, Hitler was nevertheless obliged to approve the withdrawal to the fortified Sevastopol area.<sup>147</sup> He qualified his approval the next day, noting that Sevastopol was to be held indefinitely, 'so no combat troops of any kind were to be evacuated'.<sup>148</sup> However, the first evacuations to Constanța, primarily of members of the armed forces, members of the civil and military administration, staff and auxiliary services, started on 12 April, and the navy was able to transport about 100,000 people to the Romanian mainland by the beginning of May.

With V Corps now in the Sevastopol area, Seventeenth Army had a ration strength of about 125,000 men (78,000 Germans, 46,000 Romanians); the active strength amounted to about 20,000 troops.<sup>149</sup> What was left of Seventeenth Army was defending the Sevastopol area and the Crimean peninsula in a semicircular front line about 40 kilometres long. XXXXIX Mountain Corps, with the remnants of 50th and 336th Infantry Divisions, was fighting in the northern section, while V Corps, with combat groups from 73rd, 98th, and 111th Infantry Divisions, continued to occupy the eastern section. In addition to what was left of the divisions, amounting to regimental strength at most, Seventeenth Army HQ continued to deploy combat groups consisting of members of the auxiliary services, navy, and air force, and remnants of Romanian units. 9th Anti-Aircraft Artillery Division was the mainstay of the defence in the fortified area, successfully combating the massive onslaught of enemy tanks and aircraft, alone and unaided, with the 300 cannon remaining at its disposal.

<sup>143</sup> Hillgruber, *Die Räumung*, 31–6; Buchner, *Ostfront 1944*, 102 ff.; Tieke, *Kampf um die Krim*, 259–64; Eliseyev and Milkalev, 'Osvobozhdenie', 49 ff.; *Geschichte des zweiten Weltkrieges 1939–1945*, viii. 131 ff.

<sup>144</sup> KTB AOK 17, Abt. Ia, No. 10 (10 Apr. 1944), BA-MA RH 20-17/260, fos. 29–31.

<sup>145</sup> KTB AOK 17, Abt. Ia, No. 10 (10–17 Apr. 1944), BA-MA RH 20-17/260, fos. 28–70. Pandea and Ardeleanu, *România în Crimeea*, 336–40; Hillgruber, *Die Räumung*, 37–40.

<sup>146</sup> KTB H.Gr. 'Südukraine', Abt. Ia, No. 3, vii. 98 (11 Apr. 1944), BA-MA RH 19 V/26, fo. 99.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid. 98 ff. (11 Apr. 1944), fos. 99 ff. <sup>148</sup> Ibid. 108 (12 Apr. 1944), fo. 109.

<sup>149</sup> Of whom 9,500 Germans and 10,400 Romanians; Hillgruber, *Die Räumung*, 40.

Despite the heavy losses they had suffered during the withdrawal, the German and Romanian forces succeeded in occupying the fortified front and repelling the first onslaught of the massive enemy forces pursuing them. In the middle of April, Seventeenth Army faced three Soviet armies, 8th Guards Army, 51st Army (4th Ukrainian Front), and the independent coastal army, with a combined strength of almost 470,000 men, and 200 tanks supporting the infantry. In this dangerous phase of the operation, the German combat groups bore the main burden of the defence because, as Schörner informed the Chief of the General Staff, 'the Romanians [...] were worn out'.<sup>150</sup> The steadily deteriorating situation prompted Schörner and Jaenecke to approach Hitler in person and seek his permission to surrender Sevastopol and evacuate the remaining German and Romanian troops. Even in this hopeless situation, Hitler was not to be persuaded to change his mind. His decision was based on political considerations, without regard to military factors. His attention was focused on 'neutral' Turkey, which, he assumed, 'already had strong feelings about the forced withdrawal in the Crimea. If Sevastopol were to be lost, Turkey might join the other camp'.<sup>151</sup> In this critical situation Hitler, as usual, promised Seventeenth Army more men and materials. But the Wehrmacht no longer had the necessary resources to comply with this undertaking, so Seventeenth Army only got some anti-tank guns which had actually been earmarked for Army Group South Ukraine's front on the mainland. Although Hitler forbade withdrawal from the Crimea even in the second half of April, he nevertheless agreed to the evacuation of Romanian troops and auxiliary services in response to a request from Antonescu. As 4th Ukrainian Front's attacks diminished at the end of March, Hitler thought that Sevastopol could be held for a few more weeks. But Tolbukhin was only preparing for the final offensive, giving his units an opportunity to regroup, recover, and prepare for the fresh assault.<sup>152</sup>

On 1 May 1944, even before the final Soviet offensive was launched, Hitler relieved Jaenecke of his command of Seventeenth Army on the ground that 'he [Jaenecke] could no longer be entirely trusted to bring the battle for Sevastopol to a successful conclusion in accordance with the orders he had been given'.<sup>153</sup> This measure was Hitler's response to a situation report submitted by the commander-in-chief on 29 April, in which Jaenecke took a highly critical view of the situation in the Crimea and expressed the opinion that Sevastopol could not be held for much longer.<sup>154</sup> Hitler appointed, as his successor, the commander of V Army Corps, Gen. Karl Allmendinger, who had Hitler's sympathetic support because his position on the Crimean problem was more agreeable to the dictator.<sup>155</sup>

<sup>150</sup> KTB H.Gr. 'Südukraine', Abt. Ia, No. 3, vii. 186 (19 Apr. 1944), BA-MA RH 19 V/26, fo. 187.

<sup>151</sup> KTB OKW, iv/1, 811. In making this statement, Hitler's assessment of the political situation in Turkey was absolutely right, in that a considerable change in Turkish foreign policy—a move away from the previous pro-German line—was taking place in the spring of 1944. See also Krecker, *Deutschland und die Türkei*, 248; Önder, *Die türkische Außenpolitik*, 227–31; Schönerr, 'Die Türkei', 409 ff.

<sup>152</sup> Eliseyev and Mikhalev, 'Osvobozhdenie', 50.

<sup>153</sup> KTB H.Gr. 'Südukraine', Abt. Ia, No. 3, viii. 5 (1 May 1944), BA-MA RH 19 V/27, fo. 7.

<sup>154</sup> Buchner, *Ostfront 1944*, 115.

<sup>155</sup> KTB H.Gr. 'Südukraine', Abt. Ia, No. 3, vii. 202 ff. (21 Apr. 1944), BA-MA RH 19 V/26, fos. 203 ff.

Hitler's decision 'sealed Seventeenth Army's fate'.<sup>156</sup> When the final Soviet offensive was launched on 5 May, with an impressive assembly of material, there were still about 60,000 German and Romanian troops in the Sevastopol–Crimean area ready and willing to defend their position against the enemy attack.<sup>157</sup> The operation was opened by the Soviet 2nd Guards Army north of the fortified front, where XXXIX Mountain Corps endeavoured to keep its hold on the harbour and city of Sevastopol. Although they suffered considerable losses, the German and Romanian defenders did not give way under the massive enemy pressure. Two days later Tolbukhin extended the offensive to the south, ordering the Soviet 51st Army to advance on the positions held by V Corps. While XXXIX Mountain Corps overcame the strong advances in its section of the front without losing much ground, the German troops had been forced to abandon the strategically important Sapun Hills. The fortified area extending to the western end of the Crimean peninsula was now open to the advancing Soviet troops.<sup>158</sup> This meant that 'Sevastopol [...] had effectively fallen [and] Seventeenth Army had been placed in an impossible situation'.<sup>159</sup> Under the impression, after 7 May, that Sevastopol could no longer be held and that the front line would have to be moved back to the Crimean position, Schörner again sought permission on 8 May to evacuate the Crimea immediately. In view of the desperate situation, Hitler gave his consent on the following day. And by 13 May the navy had managed to rescue about 30,000 men, safely conveying them from the Crimean peninsula to the Romanian mainland, despite massive enemy intervention.<sup>160</sup> Some 10,000 men died during the last few days of the operation or were lost at sea during the rescue, and almost 12,000 men who surrendered to 4th Ukrainian Front on 13 May, together with all military equipment, had to be left behind in the Crimea.

Holding on to the Crimea, which made very little sense in military terms, cost the lives of almost 60,000 German and Romanian<sup>161</sup> and 17,800 Soviet troops.<sup>162</sup> By taking this decision, Hitler blocked for months on end manpower and material resources that were needed to stabilize the southern section of the eastern front. Despite all the catastrophes during the last days and weeks on the peninsula, the fact remains that it was an extraordinary achievement to get almost 150,000 men out of the inferno within a month.

<sup>156</sup> Philippi and Heim, *Der Feldzug gegen Sowjetrußland*, 244.

<sup>157</sup> Hillgruber, *Die Räumung*, 44 ff. However, only 2,000 of the 64,000 or so troops were infantrymen.

<sup>158</sup> Koltunov, *Die Befreiung*, 390.

<sup>159</sup> Philippi and Heim, *Der Feldzug gegen Sowjetrußland*, 244.

<sup>160</sup> KTB AOK 17, Abt. Ia, No. 10 (5–12 May 1944), BA-MA RH 20-17/260, fos. 117–42; Hillgruber, *Die Räumung*, 59–76; Weitershausen, 'Die Verteidigung', 209–16, 326–36; Duțu, Dobre, and Loghin, *Armata Română*, 135; Koltunov, *Die Befreiung*, 388–91; Eliseyev and Michalev, 'Osvoboždenie', 50 ff.; Pandea and Ardeleanu, *România în Crimeea*, 439–43.

<sup>161</sup> Seventeenth Army alone reported the loss of some 53,500 German troops (dead, missing, or captured) in the various actions between 8 April and 13 May 1944. BA-MA RW 6/v. 559, fo. 19. The Romanian forces were thought to have lost approximately 22,000 men; Duțu, Dobre, and Loghin, *Armata Română*, 135.

<sup>162</sup> *Grif sekretnosti sniat*, 200 ff.

# PART V

## COLLAPSE IN THE EAST

*The Withdrawal Battles from the Summer  
of 1944*



# I. Errors and Illusions

## The German Command's Miscalculations in the Early Summer of 1944

*Karl-Heinz Frieser*

'If ignorant both of your enemy and of yourself, you are certain in every battle to be in peril.'<sup>1</sup> This maxim, coined two-and-a-half thousand years ago by Sun Tzu, the 'Chinese Clausewitz', was eerily apposite in the summer of 1944. In that phase of the war the German command made a series of miscalculations. The point of concentration of the Soviet offensive was wrongly predicted, with the result that the defeat of Army Group Centre, which was in any case inevitable, became a catastrophe. But it was not only the enemy's situation that was miscalculated. The German command also misjudged the situation of its own forces. Hitler and his closest advisers operated with a mixture of fact and delusion that led to a frightening loss of touch with reality, as shown by their overestimation of Germany's remaining potential and options.<sup>2</sup> Hitler lived at Führer headquarters—far from actual events at the front—where he was interested only in the virtual reality of the situation maps. But the divisions shown on those maps were often no more than a façade. Instead of replenishing increasingly weakened and depleted units, Hitler constantly created new formations. As a result, the deployment of forces on the eastern front was becoming 'a gigantic bluff in which regiments were called divisions, battalions were called brigades and brigades corps, and the time was shortly to come when mobile tank-destroyer units were in reality companies of cyclists equipped with anti-tank grenades'.<sup>3</sup> Instead of deceiving the enemy, however, the dictator increasingly succumbed to self-deception.

<sup>1</sup> Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, 84.

<sup>2</sup> See also the telling subtitle of Messerschmidt's article, 'Die Wehrmacht. Vom Realitätsverlust zum Selbstbetrug' [The Wehrmacht: from loss of touch with reality to self-deception].

<sup>3</sup> Seaton, *The Russo-German War 1941–45*, 527. The growing tendency to self-deception on the part of Hitler and his close advisers was already apparent to Lt.-Gen. Adolf Heusinger, chief of the OKH operations department, at the beginning of 1944. See Heusinger, *Befehl im Widerstreit*, 292.

### 1. 'ATTACK OR PERISH': HITLER'S AUTO-SUGGESTIVE VICTORY EUPHORIA

In the final phase of the war Hitler repeatedly fell into apocalyptic moods in which he envisaged his own end, and that of the greatest possible number of Germans, as a 'twilight of the gods'. But in the early summer of 1944 he still seemed by no means ready to accept defeat. In his monologues he talked himself into what Albert Speer later called an 'auto-suggestive euphoria'.<sup>4</sup> Hitler's former armaments minister recounted that, even during the depressing second half of the war, the Führer repeatedly fell prey to a victory mania, characterized by such declarations as: 'All we have to do is to show the enemy once more, by a smashing success, that he cannot win the war. Without Stalin's fanatical determination, Russia would have collapsed in the autumn of 1941. Frederick the Great, too, in a hopeless situation fought on with indomitable energy [...] Gentlemen, the will always wins!'<sup>5</sup>

Percy Ernst Schramm, keeper of the Wehrmacht Operations Staff war diary, wrote of Hitler's extreme voluntarism:

In every situation he emphasized willpower as the decisive positive factor. It reflected the accumulated experience of his revolutionary rise to power. He thought that if he had ever learned to think like a General Staff officer, at every single step he would have had to stop and calculate the impossibility of reaching the next one. Consequently, he concluded, he would never have even tried to come to power since on the basis of objective calculations he had no prospect of success in the first place.<sup>6</sup>

Instead, Hitler was guided by a principle which Schramm called the 'avalanche effect'.<sup>7</sup> At the beginning of the National Socialist movement he had fought for his ideas with a handful of followers, until he eventually succeeded in rallying hundreds, thousands, and finally millions to his cause. He believed in the law of impetus, whereby a decisive initial success can develop an unforeseeable momentum of its own. Hitler trusted that:

further developments would shoot ahead beyond calculations once the first success was achieved and that, with the help of the energy generated on one's own side and sapped on the other, the improbable would then be within reach. That was what he meant by the word 'fanaticism', which he used so often and repeatedly demanded of the Wehrmacht [...] Had he been fond of quoting the Bible, it would surely have been the assurance that faith can move mountains which would have come most readily to his lips.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Speer, *Spandau: The Secret Diaries*, 16.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. 16–17. On Hitler's astonishing assurance of victory, see also Grier, 'Hitler's Baltic Strategy', 594–5, 608.

<sup>6</sup> 'Major der Reserve Prof. Dr. Schramm über den Unterschied zwischen dem militärischen Denken Hitlers und dem des Generalstabs (Herbst 1945), mit Randnotizen des Generalobersten Jodl (April 1946)', in *KTB OKW*, iv/2, 1705–12, hereinafter: Schramm, 'Hitlers militärisches Denken'.

<sup>7</sup> Introduction to *KTB OKW*, iv/1, 52.

<sup>8</sup> Schramm, 'Hitlers militärisches Denken', 1709.

For that reason, dismissing Hitler's ideas as merely irrational and unrealistic falls short of the mark. Rather, he prided himself on being 'the real realist who had predicted actual developments more accurately, precisely because he had included the incalculable in his calculations'.<sup>9</sup> As a politician he had risen miraculously from street agitator to Reich chancellor. And as a military commander he fed above all on the myth of the 'miracle of 1940', when the western powers were overrun in a blitzkrieg.<sup>10</sup> The generals had been appalled by Hitler's plan for a western offensive, privately describing it as 'madness', since according to the General Staff's calculations such a campaign was unwinnable.<sup>11</sup> But the Führer had apparently been right, and that aura clung to him even in the second half of the war when failures were piling up. To the pessimism of many generals who secretly anticipated defeat on the basis of their military calculations, Hitler opposed his positive belief in final victory. It was only a matter of inflicting a new powerful blow, and the impetus of that success would soon burst all the dams.

That mood carried over to Hitler's close circle, as shown, for example, by Alfred Jodl's famous declaration that 'we shall win because we must win, for otherwise world history will have lost all meaning'.<sup>12</sup> Grand Admiral Karl Dönitz, whom Hitler ultimately appointed as his successor because of Dönitz's unconditional determination to hold out, wrote in retrospect: 'Moreover, despite all the difficulty of the situation, there were still reasons to hope for a last-minute turnaround'.<sup>13</sup> Hitler was convinced that the First World War had been lost because the German leadership had given up too soon. In seeking to gain time, he was sustained mainly by two hopes. The first was that the technological superiority of German armaments would result in a turnaround. In the summer of 1943 he was already promising miracles from deployment of the new Tiger and Panther tanks. A year later his expectations lay in the development of jet aircraft and new U-boats, which would reverse the situation in the air and sea war, as well as rockets and other 'miracle weapons'. His second hope was that the 'unnatural alliance' between the enemy powers would eventually collapse.<sup>14</sup> 'We shall fight,' he declared, 'if necessary even on the Rhine. That is a matter of complete indifference. We shall go on fighting at all costs until, as Frederick the Great once said, one of our damned enemies gets tired of fighting'.<sup>15</sup> In his view, the inherent contradictions within the Allied coalition were too great for it to last long. It was, he stressed, a coalition of 'the greatest extremes imaginable in this world: ultra-capitalist states on one side

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> In reality, the western campaign was an unplanned blitzkrieg whose success was achieved despite—not thanks to—Hitler's interventions, owing to independent initiatives on the part of several armoured-forces generals. On this, see Frieser, *Blitzkrieg-Legende*, 433–5.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. 67.

<sup>12</sup> Jodl, speech to Reichleiters and Gauleiters in Munich on 7 Nov. 1943, BA-MA, Jodl papers, N 69/17, pt. VII, 51.

<sup>13</sup> Dönitz, 'Die Deutsche Seekriegsführung', BA-MA RM 6/374, 56.

<sup>14</sup> Hildebrand, *Deutsche Außenpolitik 1933–1945*, 123 ff.; *Lagevorträge*, 537 (9–11 Aug. 1943); Oven, *Mit Goebbels bis zum Ende*, ii. 8; Hillgruber, *Der Zweite Weltkrieg*, 111–12.; Grier, 'Hitler's Baltic Strategy', 595; Jung, *Ardennen-Offensive*, 118.

<sup>15</sup> Hitler's *Lagebesprechungen*, 615 (31 Aug. 1944).

and ultra-Marxist states on the other'. Those states would collide with each other day to day simply because of their objectives.<sup>16</sup> In his 'stand firm' speeches he constantly invoked the 'Miracle of the House of Brandenburg' in the Seven Years War, when Frederick the Great was saved out of the blue by the collapse of the enemy coalition following the death of Empress Elizabeth.

The more desperate the situation, the more Hitler tended to plunge ahead regardless, convinced that the war could be won only by attacking. He had always adhered to the principle of attack and fundamentally rejected Clausewitz's contention that 'the defensive form, with a negative object, is the stronger form, the attack, with the positive object, the weaker'.<sup>17</sup> He had striven 'from the outset to fight the war offensively wherever possible', so as not to let himself be manoeuvred into a position like that of the First World War.<sup>18</sup> Accordingly, he wanted to go over from 'the fruitless defensive to the offensive', since that was the only way to force a decisive turn in the war.<sup>19</sup> At the beginning of 1945 Hitler continued to assure his generals that he was 'still determined, gentlemen, to wage the fight in the east offensively. The defensive strategy of our generals helps only the Bolsheviks! But I have never in my life been a man for the defensive. Now we shall go over from the defence to the attack once more'.<sup>20</sup> According to Speer, who was one of those who knew Hitler most intimately, the dictator followed that maxim almost always. He had already done so in the early Munich years, and he continued in the same way in his aggressive foreign policy, which, after a series of unexpected successes, finally led to the outbreak of war. Given the disastrous setbacks in the second period of the war, it was 'as if Hitler had always known that he had only the choice between the offensive and defeat, and that the loss of the initiative itself was virtually equivalent to his downfall'.<sup>21</sup>

It would be a mistake to interpret Hitler's decisions, which repeatedly drove his generals to despair, in purely operational terms. His obsessions and reckless flights of the imagination, which conflicted with the military reasoning of the general staff, make sense, if only inherently, when seen against the background of his strategic all-or-nothing mentality.

## 2. 'WINDOW OF VULNERABILITY': THE RISKY NEGLECT OF THE EASTERN FRONT IN FAVOUR OF THE WESTERN

After the Red Army's spring offensives abated, a deceptive calm settled on the eastern front. Within the German leadership there then took place a remarkable change of mood that was in total contradiction to the reality of the military situation. That situation could hardly have been worse. The Wehrmacht was on

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. 722 (12 Dec. 1944), 722.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. 720. For the quotation, see Clausewitz, *Vom Kriege*, 615.

<sup>18</sup> Hitler's *Lagebesprechungen*, 720. <sup>19</sup> Ibid. 741–2 (18 Dec. 1944).

<sup>20</sup> Speer, *Spandau: The Secret Diaries*, 15.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

the defensive on all fronts. In the east the Red Army had finally gained the initiative, in the Balkans German troops were increasingly entangled in the web of partisan warfare, and in Italy the Allies were advancing irresistibly. The U-boats had lost the fight in the Atlantic, and the Luftwaffe was able to pit hardly anything against the Allied air raids on the territory of the Reich. Instead of a two-front war, the constant nightmare of German strategists, there was now the threat of a war on all fronts, especially as the western powers had assembled a huge landing-fleet in Britain. The invasion battle was imminent, and its outcome had become 'the issue that would finally decide the war'.<sup>22</sup>

Paradoxically, this expectation aroused a strange euphoria on Hitler's part.<sup>23</sup> He was looking forward to the imminent clash of arms, seeing it as the last chance to turn the situation round by a victory in the west. And when the report that the invasion had started came at last, the dictator was clearly elated.<sup>24</sup> His military advisers were also temporarily carried away by this manic mood. Lt.-Gen. Rudolf Schmundt, the Führer's chief adjutant, went so far as to declare that they had only to beat off the invasion and the war was won.<sup>25</sup> Likewise Joseph Goebbels, though never one for metaphors, invoked the 'new Dunkirk' in store for the Allies.<sup>26</sup> As can be seen from the secret public-mood reports from the Reich Leader SS's security service, the German population also awaited the invasion 'with great hopes'.<sup>27</sup> The news of the start of the Normandy landing was 'welcomed as a release from unbearable tension and oppressive uncertainty' and 'greeted in some parts with great enthusiasm'.<sup>28</sup> The new mood is also apparent in the war diary of the Naval War Staff. An entry for 6 June, the day of the invasion, reads: 'Once again we have the possibility for a rapid decision of the war by means of a short but powerful engagement'.<sup>29</sup>

In his Directive No. 51, issued in November 1943, Hitler had already announced his intention to shift the point of concentration from the eastern to the western front: 'The danger in the east remains, but a greater danger now appears in the west: an Anglo-American landing! In the east, the vast extent of the territory makes it possible for us to lose ground, even on a large scale, without a fatal blow being dealt to the nervous system of Germany. It is very different in the west'.<sup>30</sup> Certain that the war would be decided in the west, Hitler saw the imminent invasion not as a great danger but as a great opportunity.<sup>31</sup> The OKW's assessment

<sup>22</sup> Oven, *Mit Goebbels bis zum Ende*, ii. 8.

<sup>23</sup> See Weinberg, *A World at Arms*, 665 ff., and Salewski, 'Die Abwehr der Invasion', 210 ff.

<sup>24</sup> Most telling is the account by Gen. (ret.) Walther Warlimont, then a member of the OKW: 'With a completely relaxed smile on his lips, and the demeanour of a man who has at last found the long-awaited opportunity to settle scores with his enemy, he approached the maps and, in an unusually strong Austrian dialect, let fall the words "Also, anganga is" [So, we're off]'; see Warlimont, *Im Hauptquartier*, 457. See also Below, *Als Hitlers Adjutant*, 374.

<sup>25</sup> Heusinger, *Befehl im Widerstreit*, 320.

<sup>26</sup> *Wollt ihr den totalen Krieg?*, 228.

<sup>27</sup> *Meldungen aus dem Reich. Auswahl*, 509.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. 511.

<sup>29</sup> KTB Skd, pt. A, lviii/I, 93.

<sup>30</sup> *Hitlers Weisungen*, 233. See also Wegner, 'Im Schatten', 126 ff.

<sup>31</sup> Salewski, 'Die Abwehr der Invasion', 215 ff.; id., *Deutschland und der Zweite Weltkrieg*, 274–5, 280–3.

was similar. On the one hand, it feared that a successful enemy landing would 'quickly lead to the loss of the war',<sup>32</sup> especially as the Ruhr district, 'Germany's industrial heartland' was in dangerous reach of the western powers. On the other, it saw the imminent invasion battle on the Atlantic as the last opportunity to give the war a decisive turn. This was expressed with particular clarity in Jodl's address to the Reich cabinet on 5 May: 'I look forward to this battle with full confidence. A defensive victory will change the military and political situation from top to bottom, because a landing operation of that kind, for which detailed preparations have been years in the making, cannot simply be repeated—not to mention the political repercussions in Britain and America.'<sup>33</sup> In this phase of the war Hitler's overriding strategic objective was to split the western powers from the enemy coalition. At bottom, he saw the dispute with them as no more than a conflict which had been forced upon him and was preventing him from pursuing his real aim, the conquest of 'Lebensraum' in the east. He hoped that victory in the battle on the Channel coast would be decisive both militarily and politically, since he saw the western powers as the weaker enemy that could most easily be shaken by military force.<sup>34</sup> The prospect of a negotiated peace with the western Allies would be further strengthened by the military successes of the Red Army, which were bound to increase fears of Bolshevik domination in Europe.<sup>35</sup>

Hitler's aim of seeking a decision in the west seemed perfectly plausible and in accordance with continued action on internal lines. Given its unfavourable position in the centre of Europe, Germany had always faced the threat of war on two fronts. Mainly under the influence of Count Alfred von Schlieffen, it had developed a quick-decision strategy aimed at prostrating the most important enemy in a 'battle of annihilation' while remaining on the defensive on the opposite front, after which the whole potential could be concentrated on the second enemy. In that way a two-front war could be turned into two wars, each on a single front. According to Michael Salewski, these ideas are reminiscent of 'the old "blitzkrieg" concept, only this time in reverse'.<sup>36</sup> Once again in German military history, strategic disparities were to be circumvented by operational manoeuvres.<sup>37</sup>

From the spring of 1944 on, Hitler and the higher operations staffs awaited the invasion with growing impatience. Interest focused entirely on the western front. As a result of the shift in the strategic point of concentration, the eastern front was now felt to be a secondary theatre, and the threat from the increasingly superior Red Army was disastrously repressed. The plan was to reinforce the western front, first and foremost, with freshly replenished units and newly manufactured arms, especially tanks. With regard to the necessary distribution of forces, however, Hitler was not entirely consistent. In the first half of 1944 a number of units actually

<sup>32</sup> Wehrmacht Operations Staff, 13 Apr. 1944., 'Strategischer Überblick und Verteilung der Gesamtstreitkräfte des deutschen Heeres', BA-MA RW 4/v. 876, 23.

<sup>33</sup> Jodl, 'Die strategische Lage im Frühjahr 1944', BA-MA, Jodl papers, N 69/18, 50.

<sup>34</sup> Oven, *Mit Goebbels bis zum Ende*, ii. 8. <sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Salewski, *Die deutsche Seekriegsleitung*, ii. 408.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid. As Salewski points out, the later Ardennes offensive against the western powers would be conceived on the same pattern.

intended for the western front were transferred to the east or to Italy to help deal with the repeated crises on those fronts.<sup>38</sup> Nevertheless, every division stationed in the west, or held in reserve for that theatre, was sorely missed in Russia. With regard to armaments and supplies, the eastern front had been relegated to the status of 'poor relation'.<sup>39</sup> In any case, the Red Army's impending summer offensive was not supposed to be countered actively by means of counter-attacks, as in the west, but passively by stubborn resistance in 'fortified places'. Hitler's dual strategy can be summed up in the simple phrase 'strike in the west, hold firm in the east'. It was clear that the divisions fighting on the eastern front were by themselves too weak to withstand the assault by the Red Army permanently. They had to be reinforced as soon as possible by units freed up on the western front. Hitler, who had repeatedly shown himself to be a gambler in the past, was ready to stake everything on one card.<sup>40</sup> This was admitted indirectly in an OKW memorandum of 14 April, which reported that 'the Supreme Command, in full knowledge of the crises in the east, has taken a risk which is at the limit of answerability to history and the nation'.<sup>41</sup>

The OKH, which was responsible for the eastern front, viewed the increasing prioritization of the OKW's western theatre with some mistrust. In the eastern army, unease grew all the stronger as the wait for the expected invasion went on. After all, the units on the eastern front were engaged in bloody defensive battles against the Red Army, while the troops in the west were apparently idly enjoying life in France. Sarcastic comparisons were already being made between the western army and the German High Sea Fleet, which had lain idle during the First World War. At that time, a mocking ditty had made the rounds: 'Lieb Vaterland magst ruhig sein, / die Flotte schläft im Hafen ein' ('Dear Fatherland rest easy, the fleet's asleep in harbour').<sup>42</sup> Now the aphorism arose that in 1918 the war had been lost because of the 'fleet in being', while in 1944 the war in the east would be lost because of the 'army in being' in the west. With growing impatience, the OKH asked why only 53 per cent of the army's forces were deployed in the vast expanse of the east.<sup>43</sup> The above-mentioned OKW memorandum purported to show that, of the 341 divisions and comparable units of the army and the Waffen SS, only 131, that is, less than 40 per cent, were deployed in other theatres, but in that apologetic calculation all the units in the territory of the Reich, including all the reserves, were added to those on the eastern front.<sup>44</sup> No amount of juggling with the figures,

<sup>38</sup> Magenheimer, *Die Militärstrategie Deutschlands 1940–1945*, 279 ff.

<sup>39</sup> Hinze, *Hitze, Frost und Pulverdampf*, 285.

<sup>40</sup> Oven, *Mit Goebbels bis zum Ende*, ii. 7–8.

<sup>41</sup> OKH Operations Staff, 13 Apr. 1944, 'Strategischer Überblick und Verteilung der Gesamtstreitkräfte des deutschen Heeres', BA-MA RW 4/v. 876, 23.

<sup>42</sup> Stumpf, *Warum die Flotte zerbrach*, 25.

<sup>43</sup> OKH Operations Staff, 13 Apr. 1944, 'Strategischer Überblick und Verteilung der Gesamtstreitkräfte des deutschen Heeres', BA-MA RW 4/v. 876, 2.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., appendix to the memorandum, 1–2. The OKW attempted to counter criticism from the OKH by arguing that, of the troops deployed elsewhere than on the eastern front, only 41 divisions were fit for action in the east (*ibid.*, memorandum, 5, and appendix, 3). That argument was shaky, however, since many of the divisions deployed in Russia were themselves so weakened that they too could no longer be considered fit for action on the eastern front.

however, could hide the fact that German inferiority to the constantly growing strength of the Red Army threatened to assume dramatic proportions. The OKW's dream of a decisive victory in the west became, for the OKH, the nightmare of a decisive defeat in the east.

The German dictator was already making new plans in anticipation of a turnaround in the west. He 'welcomed the landing' by the enemy, since 'we shall beat him', after which '30 to 35 divisions will be free for operations in the east'.<sup>45</sup> Apparently he was already dreaming of a new Operation BARBAROSSA.<sup>46</sup> At the beginning of May 1944 he went so far as to tell Herbert Backe, the minister of agriculture, that 'Germany would soon retake the richest part of the Ukraine, and that preparations for its control and exploitation should begin immediately'.<sup>47</sup> Significantly, immediately after the loss of the Ukraine in the spring of 1944, he had Army Groups South and A rebaptized 'North Ukraine' and 'South Ukraine' respectively—names which clearly proclaimed his intention to reconquer those territories.<sup>48</sup> As will be discussed later, some of Hitler's mistaken operational decisions in the summer of 1944 were described by German officers as 'crazy'. They are understandable only in the context of his all-or-nothing strategy and conqueror mentality. For example, the front salient in the area of Army Group Centre, which protruded far to the east, had to be held in order to serve as a springboard for a subsequent offensive against the Ukraine. Only that explains why Hitler insisted on holding onto bridgeheads even in the most endangered sectors, despite the urgent demands of the generals on the eastern front for the front to be withdrawn behind rivers such as the Dnieper at Mogilev. Bridgeheads are of interest only to an attacker, whereas a defender, for practical reasons, withdraws behind natural barriers. Hitler, however, seemed instinctively drawn only to the offensive, to 'world power' or downfall.<sup>49</sup> His all-or-nothing maxims assumed increasingly grotesque forms.

An examination of the breakdown of forces on the eastern front immediately raises the question of the operational reserve. It seems impossible to attempt to hold such a long front line against a numerically superior enemy without having freely available forces at hand to react to breakthroughs. Incredible as it may seem, Hitler's 'reserve' was some 2,300 kilometres away (as the crow flies) on the Atlantic coast. As already mentioned, this scenario is reminiscent of the all-or-nothing approach of the Schlieffen Plan before the First World War. At that time the German chief of staff wanted first to throw almost all the German units into the offensive in the west in order to force a rapid decisive victory, and then move the troops from the Seine to the Vistula to halt the oncoming Russian steamroller.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>45</sup> 'Aufzeichnungen des Botschafters z.b.V. [Walter] Hewel über den Empfang des Botschafters Graf [Hiroshi] Oshima beim Führer am 22.1.1944', ADAP, Series E, vii, doc. 179, 345–6.

<sup>46</sup> See, e.g., Philippi and Heim, *Der Feldzug gegen Sowjetrußland*, 226.

<sup>47</sup> Weinberg, *A World at Arms*, 665.

<sup>48</sup> Philippi and Heim, *Der Feldzug gegen Sowjetrußland*, 241.

<sup>49</sup> In *Mein Kampf* (220th edn., 742) Hitler had already written: 'Germany will either be a world power or there will be no Germany.'

<sup>50</sup> Ritter, *Der Schlieffenplan*, 145–60.

In the same way, Hitler apparently planned to transfer his troops to the eastern front at top speed after the victorious invasion battle in the west. The determining factors of his behaviour thus resemble those of 1914. In the west, it was not simply a matter of victory, but of a *rapid* victory. Nevertheless, the temporary relegation of the eastern front to a secondary theatre of war was a serious headache for the OKH. Even if there was a rapid decisive victory on the Channel coast and the 35 divisions envisaged by Hitler were made available immediately, how could they be transported to the east quickly enough? Furthermore, the Soviet command would certainly time its summer offensive to coincide with the invasion by the western powers, so as to take advantage of the Germans' acute moment of weakness. So even with the best possible outcome of German operations in the west, a dangerous 'window of vulnerability' would open at the same time on the eastern front. The Red Army would be able to launch a decisive offensive against the fragile German front at that precise moment and shatter it with a single powerful blow. Clearly, that nightmare weighed heavily on the minds of the German military decision-makers, and it led to a disastrous misreading of actual Soviet offensive intentions.

### 3. 'THE BALKANS OR THE BALTIC': THE DELUSION OF A DECISIVE SOVIET OFFENSIVE

In the summer of 1944 the eastern front comprised an oddly shaped salient, rather like a question mark, dissected by the long stretch of the Pripet marshes. In the northern half the 'Belorussian balcony', occupied by Army Group Centre, protruded to the east, while in the southern half the 'Ukrainian balcony', recaptured by the Soviet forces, bulged out far in the opposite direction. The southern bulge looked like a new, oversized version of the Kursk salient from the summer of 1943. Now, however, the Wehrmacht no longer had any armoured units available with which to attack it on the flanks. The 'Ukrainian balcony' was considered an ideal springboard for future Soviet offensives. As a result, the military operations staffs, above all Foreign Armies East, had their eyes fixed hypnotically on that salient. Since the Red Army had concentrated a large part of its attacking potential there at the end of the spring offensives, the German command took it for granted that, after a break of a few weeks, the enemy would resume his offensive operations in precisely that area, south of the Pripet.

In the assessment of Soviet offensive intentions, two likely directions of thrust crystallized: one to the south-west and another to the north-west. These two variants were designated the 'Balkans option' and the 'Baltic option'.<sup>51</sup> The fear

<sup>51</sup> On this, see the following BA-MA documents: Abt. Fremde Heere Ost (I), No. 1428/44 gKdos, 'Zusammenfassende Beurteilung der Feindlage vor der deutschen Ostfront im großen', RHD 18/249, as at 10 Feb. (226), 19 Apr. (259–60), 3 May (262 ff.), 21 May (272–3), 30 May (274), 13 June (280–1), and 27 June (290 ff.); OKW/WFSt, Ic Ag. Ausland, Feindlagebericht No. 33, 15 May, RW 5/v. 386, 10, fo. 122; Fr.H. Ost (I), 'Kurze Beurteilung der Feindlage vom 19.4.1944', RH 2/1966, 3–4, fos. 27–8; 'Kurze Beurteilung der Feindlage vom 21.5, 28.5, und 27.6.1944', RH 2/1967, fos. 46, 60, 133 ff.; Chef des Generalstabes des Heeres, 'Abwehrmeldung aus im allgemeinen zuverlässiger

was that the Soviet command would launch a large-scale encirclement operation from the Ukrainian balcony against either the northern or the southern German wing, delivering a powerful blow that would cause the collapse of the eastern front.<sup>52</sup> The ‘window of vulnerability’ was thus both temporal and spatial. On the one hand, there would be a dangerous gap in time between the start of the Soviet summer offensive and the expected arrival of German reserves from the west. On the other, there was a geographical window, the ‘Galician gap’, between the Carpathians and the Pripet, into which the ‘Ukrainian balcony’ protruded dangerously. That space, free of significant terrain obstacles, was bound to provoke the Soviet command into attempting the decisive breakthrough right there, in the sector of Army Group North Ukraine. The latter’s commander-in-chief, Field Marshal Walter Model, managed to secure priority of reinforcements for his own army group, since it was assumed that the opposing points of concentration would meet precisely in its area. For Foreign Armies East, too, the question of which front sector was under threat and should be therefore take priority seemed clear in advance. The only remaining question was whether, after the breakthrough in the sector of Army Group North Ukraine, the Soviet command would swing its encirclement forces south towards the Balkans or north towards the Baltic.

### The Balkan Option

At first, the German operations staffs feared that the Soviets intended to thrust into the rear of Army Group South Ukraine, which was positioned between the Carpathians and the Black Sea. The enemy would probably try to break through the eastern front to the north of the army group, in the area of Lvov, and advance westwards across the San. The Soviet attacking units could then veer south through the Carpathians to the Hungarian lowland plain and push into the Romanian hinterland.<sup>53</sup> The Balkan option was rendered probable by the fact that, at the end of the spring offensive, the bulk of the Soviet units were concentrated in the southern sector of the front. All six armoured divisions were stationed between

Quelle vom 27.4.1944', RH 2/v. 2090, fos. 53 ff; App. 4 to Fr.H. Ost (I) No. 1428/44 gKdos, 3 May 1944, 'Wichtige Abwehrmeldungen und Gefangenenaussagen der letzten Zeit über sowjetrussische Operationsabsichten. Stand 3.5.1944', RH 2/2128, 103–4, 114; 'Vortragssnotiz [Maj.-Gen. Reinhard Gehlen] gelegentlich des Gesprächs der Heeresgruppen- und Armeechefs am 14.6.', RH 2/2565, 3, fo. 15; OKH/Chef Op.Abt., No. 4403/44 g.K.Chef, 26 June 1944 (telex), 'Beurteilung der Lage Ost 26.6. mittags', RH 2/2565, fo. 19; KTB Pz.AOK 3, 21 Apr. 1944, RH 21-3/v. 286, 3; 'KTB-Notiz 21.4.1944, Betr.: Feldmarschall-Besuch', RH 21-3/v. 336; telex (KR GWASL 0782 7/5 1825) OKM/1. Skl I A (Koralle), 'Lageunterrichtung 7.5.1944', RM 7/99, fos. 197, (new) 207. See also KTB Skl, pt. A, lvii. 228–9, 13 May 1944, and lviii/l, 'Lagebesprechung 14.6.1944', 357; Heusinger, *Befehl im Widerstreit*, 322. Secondary literature: Kröker, *Fehleinschätzung*, 53–83, 142; Niepold, 'Führung der Heeresgruppe Mitte', 61–2; Hinze, *Der Zusammenbruch* [1995], 75–6; Nes, 'Bagration', 235; Gackenholz, 'Der Zusammenbruch der Heeresgruppe Mitte', 449; Philippi and Heim, *Der Feldzug gegen Sovjetrußland*, 246; Carell, *Verbrannte Erde*, 426, 429–30; Glantz, 'Strategische Operation', 292 ff.

<sup>52</sup> For a while it was even thought that the Red Army, with its massive superiority, would try to carry out both encirclement operations simultaneously.

<sup>53</sup> See in particular Heusinger, *Befehl im Widerstreit*, 322.

the Pripet marshes and the Black Sea. The Soviet command was clearly concerned that its troops be able to secure a foothold in the Balkans before the western Allies. In addition, two goals of traditional Russian expansionist policy, which had already fascinated the Tsars, lay within immediate reach: the Dardanelles and access to the Mediterranean. There was also the war-economy factor of Romanian oil, the loss of which would severely handicap German conduct of the war.<sup>54</sup>

### The Baltic Option

In the spring of 1944 German intelligence still considered the Balkan option as definitely the most probable. Its assessment of enemy intentions changed at the beginning of the summer, however, following numerous reports of Red Army troop relocations. The presumed point of concentration of the enemy attacks shifted ever more clearly northwards.<sup>55</sup> The course of the spring offensive had led to a strong concentration of Soviet troops in the north-western corner of the Ukrainian balcony, known as the 'Kovel bend'. This bulge pointed towards Warsaw and seemed to indicate the direction of thrust of the Red Army's forthcoming attacks. Kovel itself formed the hinge between Army Group Centre and Army Group North Ukraine, and the front made a sharp 90-degree turn to the south at that point. In the spring of 1944 the heavily contested town, which was considered the cornerstone of German defence, became the focal point of the eastern front. As the Red Army had at first attacked only south of the Pripet river, the southern flank of Army Group Centre had grown longer and longer. At Kovel, however, which is near the source of the Pripet, the geographical obstacle of the river and the difficulty of passing through its marshes ended. After taking the town, the Soviet forces would be able to swerve north unimpeded, between the Pripet marshes and the Vistula, towards Warsaw. In the spring of 1944 the front had already threatened to collapse here, but the situation had been stabilized once again with the help of the last reserves. On 5 April LVI Armoured Corps, under General Friedrich Hossbach, had broken through the encircling ring and relieved the Kovel 'fortified place'. At first the spring thaw had prevented the Red Army from resuming its attack. Now the fear was that it would concentrate its forthcoming offensive wholly on this sensitive point—this time with a strategic, rather than merely operational objective, that is, a thrust towards the Baltic coast.

Army Group Centre HQ, above all, was alarmed by this terrifying prospect. On 21 April Field Marshal Ernst Busch already warned of the gathering danger in

<sup>54</sup> Fr.H. Ost (I), No. 1256/44 gKdos, 'Kurze Beurteilung der Feindlage vom 19.4.1944', BA-MA RH 2/1966, 259–60, and Fr.H. Ost (I), No. 1428/44 gKdos, 'Zusammenfassende Beurteilung der Feindlage vor der deutschen Ostfront im großen: Stand 3.5.1944', BA-MA RHD 18/249, 263 ff.

<sup>55</sup> In this connection, a study of the operations maps drawn up by Foreign Armies East in the period February to June 1944 is particularly instructive. The red arrows denoting the suspected offensive intentions of the Red Army drift increasingly to the north, showing how the anticipated point of concentration of the enemy attacks shifted more and more clearly from Army Group South Ukraine to Army Group North Ukraine. They also reveal the beginnings of an encirclement movement from the Ukrainian balcony in a north-westerly direction towards Warsaw. See BA-MA RH 2/1990 (K), 2155 (K), 2156 (K), and 2157 (K).

the rear of his army group: 'A large-scale marshalling of forces is currently under way in the Kovel area. It can be assumed that the Russian command is aiming to overrun Army Group Centre by a thrust via Brest–Warsaw in the direction of Königsberg–Danzig. The first stage of this operation will probably aim at reaching the Lvov–Lublin–Brest line, while the second stage will be a push towards the Baltic.' All in all, he considered that the Soviet command had 'very wide-ranging operational objectives'.<sup>56</sup>

A successful Soviet push to the Baltic would enclose not only Army Group Centre but Army Group North too in an enormous pocket on the coast. Most worrying of all, a breakthrough at Kovel would leave the two army groups with no chance of reacting to the mortal danger in their rear. Because of the unfavourable curve of the front salient, their main forces were far to the east, near Vitebsk, in anticipation of a frontal Soviet attack. Rapid withdrawal to the Vistula near Warsaw also seemed impossible because of the distance.

Moreover, the 'Belorussian balcony' bulged like an enormous shield in front of the section of the Vistula that would have to be crossed in a thrust towards Berlin. Starting from Vitebsk, the Soviet attacking units would have to fight their way to the Vistula through 700 kilometres of Belorussian forests and swamps, whereas from Kovel the distance was less than 200 kilometres and the terrain was favourable to tanks. That being so, rather than beating down the German troops in the Belorussian balcony by means of a direct frontal attack, the Soviet command must have been tempted to achieve the collapse of the front by the 'indirect' method of a thrust in the rear in the direction of Warsaw. The German General Staff officers, trained in the Schlieffen school of thought, were particularly obsessed by the idea of a Soviet 'sickle cut' to the Baltic. For the Soviet encircling forces, a thrust to the Baltic would also have the advantage that their left (western) flank would be covered by the Vistula, so that any relief attack by German reserves from the territory of the Reich could be easily blocked.

It was clear to Foreign Armies East that such an enemy operation would be 'potentially decisive for the outcome of the war'.<sup>57</sup> Let the Red Army achieve a breakthrough at any other place, only not here. Kovel was perceived as the 'solar plexus' of the eastern front, where the Wehrmacht could be dealt a knock out blow, and the horizon of expectation for an enemy offensive narrowed increasingly to that single sector of the front. The one-dimensional fixation of German intelligence on that particular place must also be seen as a result of Hitler's all-or-nothing strategy. Since the dictator was seeking a decisive battle in the west, it was to be expected that the Red Army too would exploit the temporary German weakness to launch a decisive offensive. So while the OKW sought to inflict a 'Dunkirk' on the western Allies on the Channel coast, the OKH feared a 'Dunkirk' on the Baltic coast.

The spectre of a decisive Soviet major operation seems also to have obscured the thinking of Foreign Armies East. In this phase the enemy intelligence section made

<sup>56</sup> 'KTB-Notiz 21.4.1944, Betr.: Feldmarschall-Besuch', BA-MA RH 21-3/v. 336.

<sup>57</sup> Fr.H. Ost (I), No. 1428/44 gKdos, 'Zusammenfassende Beurteilung der Feindlage vor der deutschen Ostfront im großen: Stand 3.5.1944', BA-MA RHD 18/249, 263.

the fatal mistake of paying too little attention to another danger that appeared less terrifying but was nevertheless very real. The Soviet high command chose an option that was less plausible from the German viewpoint. It placed the point of concentration north, rather than south, of the Pripet marshes, and attacked Army Group Centre in the Belorussian balcony frontally from the east. Although the two options favoured by German intelligence, namely a Balkan or Baltic offensive, were taken into consideration, they were both subsequently rejected. Too strong a commitment in the Balkans was less of an option for the Soviet high command at this stage of the war, since it was concerned, first and foremost, to liberate the remaining areas of its own territory still occupied by the Wehrmacht. On the other hand, the idea of a thrust to the Baltic from the Kovel area was very tempting. The Stavka fully recognized the opportunity for a huge encirclement operation that would enable it to eliminate two German army groups at once and would then clear the way for an advance on Berlin from Warsaw.<sup>58</sup> That plan was most probably discussed, but it was nevertheless rejected.<sup>59</sup> Did the Soviet high command make an unforgivable mistake in shrinking from a decisive large-scale offensive in the summer of 1944, thus passing up the chance of an early end to the war? That question is discussed conclusively in the following sections.

#### 4. THE DANGER IGNORED: GERMAN ENEMY INTELLIGENCE AND THE BELORUSSIAN BALCONY

##### (a) The Confusion about the Soviet Point of Concentration

If enemy intelligence ever played a decisive role in the eastern campaign, it was in the early summer of 1944 in the run-up to the expected Soviet large-scale offensive. Normally speaking, an enemy breakthrough does not necessarily signify a catastrophe. It is a fundamental rule of military science to keep an operational reserve ready behind the front in order to react to just such an eventuality. In the summer of 1944, however, there was no such reserve on the eastern front. Instead, the divisions intended for that purpose were in the west, on the Atlantic coast, and were supposed to be transferred to the east as soon as possible after the Allied invasion had been repelled. For the time being, the units on the eastern front had only themselves to rely on in the face of overwhelming Soviet superiority. In the

<sup>58</sup> According to information in the possession of German enemy intelligence, a plan had already been drawn up under Stalin's chairmanship between 24 and 30 March, with the slogan: 'All roads lead to Rome, but the road to Berlin runs via Warsaw.' See *Chef des Generalstabes des Heeres, 'Abwehrmeldung aus im allgemeinen zuverlässiger Quelle'*, 27 Apr. 1944, BA-MA RH 2/v. 2090, 1, fos. 53–4.

<sup>59</sup> Glantz, *Soviet Military Deception*, 348–9; id., 'Strategische Operation', 292 ff.; id., *The Role of Intelligence*, 141; Glantz and House, *When Titans Clashed*, 195–6; Adair, *Hitler's Greatest Defeat*, 49. Another variant was the proposal by Gen. Konstantin Konstantinovich Rokossovsky to begin Operation BAGRATION with the left wing of 1st Belorussian Front from Kovel in the direction of Brest-Litovsk, so as to get to the rear of Army Group Centre. On this the author is grateful for important suggestions from P. Tsygankov of the Moscow Institute of Military History.

first phase of the eastern campaign the Wehrmacht had predominantly initiated the action. In the following phase it had almost only reacted—albeit time and again successfully—in accordance with Erich von Manstein's mobile tactics of striking on the backhand. Now, however, the nadir had been reached. Until the hoped-for reinforcements arrived, the eastern army was no longer even capable of reacting. Confined to static operations, its only chance was to detect the exact time and direction of thrust of the impending Soviet summer offensive and establish the appropriate defensive point of concentration to meet the point of concentration of the enemy attack. Instead of the German General Staff's traditional 'a posteriori' mode of operation, the only remaining possibility was to deploy its own forces 'a priori', in anticipation of the enemy attack. Yet never had it been more difficult for German intelligence to determine the enemy's point of concentration.

The reason was that, instead of launching a single decisive strategic offensive, the Soviet leadership had decided to carry out a series of operational strikes along the entire front. The operations were to be staggered in time, beginning consecutively so as to make it difficult for the Germans to shift their reserves, until all four German army groups were simultaneously entangled in defensive battles with the attacking units of the Red Army. In official Soviet historiography this plan was celebrated as an overall strategic and operational concept of true genius.<sup>60</sup> But one may legitimately ask whether the real reason for it was not simply fear of being too audacious. During that very period of the Wehrmacht's blatant weakness, the Soviet high command did not dare deal its enemy the decisive blow. However impressively the cumulative operational successes and the number of square kilometres of ground conquered are presented in the historiography, they did not bring about the end of the war but only postponed it.

For the summer of 1944, the Stavka planned to begin with an offensive against the Finnish army in Karelia. That was to be followed by the main blow against Army Group Centre in the Belorussian balcony, combined with a secondary thrust against Army Group North. After that, there would be strikes against Army Group North Ukraine and, last of all, Army Group South Ukraine. The Red Army's superiority was then so great that it could attack using a system of multiple simultaneous points of concentration. For each of the successive major offensives, at least two points of concentration and one reserve point of concentration were planned. The individual Soviet army fronts, in their turn, had to form various different points of concentration.<sup>61</sup> This plan achieved at least one objective, that of throwing Foreign Armies East into confusion. Since powerful enemy offensive forces were detected simultaneously in front of Army Group North Ukraine, Army Group South Ukraine, and Army Group Centre, the German defence forces found themselves in the role of the fabled hunting dog whose instinct was blocked when it spotted three equally distant hares.

The Red Army's strongest offensive, Operation BAGRATION, was to be directed against Army Group Centre. Contrary to the Germans' original assumptions,

<sup>60</sup> *Geschichte des zweiten Weltkrieges 1939–1945*, ix. 27 and 609 ff.

<sup>61</sup> Hinze, *Der Zusammenbruch* [1995], 88–9.

however, it was planned as a frontal attack from the east on the exposed Belorussian balcony, and an unprecedented concentration of offensive forces was massed in preparation. Since that time, historians have repeatedly asked how it was possible to assemble such a gigantic attacking potential and yet take the enemy by surprise. In the following section we shall consider whether enemy intelligence really did have so little idea of Soviet intentions.

### (b) Army Group Centre's Inconsistent Assessment of the Enemy Situation

The starting position in the early summer of 1944 was as follows. Army Group Centre had to defend the Belorussian balcony, which was divided on the eastern side into three front sectors: Third Armoured Army in the northern sector near Vitebsk, Fourth Army in the centre near Mogilev, and Ninth Army in the southern sector near Bobruisk. The focus of the semicircular salient was Minsk, the capital of Belorussia, where Army Group Centre's headquarters was also situated. The right wing, which swung far back to the west, ran along the Pripet marshes to Kovel and was covered by Second Army. Army Group Centre was positioned on territory steeped in history. Napoleon's troops had marched on Moscow through the forests of Belorussia across the land bridge between the Dvina and the Dnieper known as the 'Smolensk gate'. Army Group Centre had also pushed towards Moscow through that traditional gateway to the Russian heartland in the summer of 1941, when its forces had attacked along long stretches of the Minsk–Moscow highway.

In the winter of 1943/4 the Red Army had also tried to push across the land bridge in the opposite direction. It had been repelled in the winter battles of Vitebsk and Orsha, although the Soviet forces nevertheless managed to advance south of the Pripet marshes as far as Kovel. That sector was now assigned to Army Group Centre's southern neighbour, Army Group North Ukraine, under Field Marshal Model, thus enabling Army Group Centre to concentrate its attention on the Belorussian balcony in the east. Although the Belorussian balcony was considered to be of secondary importance as a theatre of war, in May and June 1944 there were increasingly frequent instances of intelligence reports which did not match the given picture. It seemed as if a peculiar danger was brewing in that sector, but the threat was assessed differently by the individual army staffs and the army group headquarters.

The assessment of the enemy situation by *Second Army*, which was deployed on the right wing and thus formed the hinge with Army Group North Ukraine, is particularly instructive. Its war diaries show that the threatened point of concentration was perceived as shifting from the right to the left wing.<sup>62</sup> Second Army was at first convinced that the greatest threat lay in the neighbouring Kovel sector on

<sup>62</sup> On this, see Second Army's war diaries for the period from the beginning of April to the beginning of July, which were considered missing until recently but have resurfaced as captured files in the Russian State Military Archives in Moscow: RGVA F 1275-2/270-75.

the northern wing of Army Group North Ukraine, where the Red Army had massed a huge concentration of troops. But it then received more and more reports of an increasing concentration of Soviet forces on the left flank, in the sector of Ninth Army near Bobruisk. That clearly indicated that the threat to Army Group Centre was not from the southern flank but from the east. Maj.-Gen. Henning von Tresckow, Second Army's chief of staff, accordingly informed Lt.-Gen. Heusinger that the enemy was planning to attack Army Group Centre's protruding salient, rather than Second Army.<sup>63</sup>

*Third Armoured Army* was also proved correct in its assessment of the enemy situation. The Vitebsk salient, considered the army group's sensitive point, lay in its sector of the front. During the previous winter the city had been held in the course of heavy defensive fighting but was now increasingly closed in. In those circumstances, *Third Armoured Army* predicted a two-flank pincer attack on the exposed sector.

*Fourth Army* too noted a massing of Soviet offensive forces near the front. Its reconnaissance focused particularly on the area of the Moscow–Minsk highway. An intelligence report of 17 June, for example, stated that 'in the Dnieper highway sector the enemy has almost completed preparations for an attack'.<sup>64</sup> Lt.-Gen. (ret.) Heinz-Georg Lemm recalled that 'during my time in Russia I had seldom seen all the signs point so clearly to an impending attack'.<sup>65</sup> He also described the mood of the officer corps as a mixture of resignation and despair at the way in which the reports from the front were apparently dismissed by the higher operations staffs.

*Ninth Army HQ* went particularly far in predicting the coming disaster. Not only did it analyse the enemy's marshalling of forces directly opposite its own sector of the front, but it also drew operational conclusions about the danger threatening both Army Group Centre and Army Group North. Its enemy intelligence report of 17 June 1944 is particularly instructive. The otherwise soberly written document includes some dramatic emphasis, and the first two sentences should already have alarmed the higher command authorities: '*The situation facing the army has changed fundamentally in a short time.* While the distribution of enemy forces near the front remains unchanged, *a large-scale marshalling of forces* is taking place in depth along the whole of the army's sector of the front'.<sup>66</sup> The first signs had already been detected on 3 June. The Soviet reinforcements brought in by 15 June were estimated at 10 to 15 divisions and one to two armoured corps. Furthermore, enemy intelligence assumed there were many undetected movements, since over large stretches the thickly wooded terrain 'makes insight into the enemy situation almost impossible'.<sup>67</sup> It clearly drew attention to the enemy's intention of 'splitting the army's front by means of independent large-scale offensive thrusts so as to free

<sup>63</sup> Scheurig, *Henning von Tresckow*, 211.

<sup>64</sup> AOK 4, Ic, No. 283/44 g, 'Ic-Abendmeldung vom 17.6.1944', BA-MA RH 20-4/541, 2.

<sup>65</sup> Lemm, 'Die Verteidigung Mogilevs', 358.

<sup>66</sup> AOK 9, Abt. Ic/A.O., No. 1831/44 g, 17 June 1944, 'Feindnachrichtenblatt Nr. 164', BA-MA RH 20-9/314, 1.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid. 3.

the way forward to Minsk via Bobruisk'. The report also referred to 'plans for wide-ranging encirclement'.<sup>68</sup>

Information according to which Rokossovsky and Zhukov would be coordinating the enemy's offensive operations was considered particularly significant.<sup>69</sup> Above all, Ninth Army HQ reached the conclusion that the Soviet command had 'provisionally abandoned its old south-westerly objective (Lvov, the Balkans) [...] in favour of the *reconquest of Belorussia*'.<sup>70</sup> It considered that 'the point of concentration of the enemy offensive should therefore lie undoubtedly in the area of Army Group Centre'.<sup>71</sup> On 22 June, when the staggered Soviet large-scale offensive began, Ninth Army remained largely unscathed. Nevertheless, the war diary contains an entry which, in the words of Lt.-Gen. Gerd Niepold, anticipated the imminent disaster 'in almost prophetic fashion'.<sup>72</sup> It begins as follows: 'Ninth Army is on the eve of a mighty new battle whose extent and duration can only be guessed at. One thing is certain, however: in the last few weeks and days, the enemy has assembled an enormous concentration of forces opposite the army's front, and AOK is convinced that this concentration puts even the enemy's massing of forces opposite the northern wing of Army Group North Ukraine in the shade.'<sup>73</sup>

The following interim conclusion may be drawn regarding the situation as seen by the armies deployed in the Belorussian salient: at the beginning of the summer offensive the Soviet forces were unable to achieve a tactical surprise attack in any single place, since the German armies' Ic sections had correctly identified the points of concentration. While there was still uncertainty about the reserves assembled in depth, the intelligence findings in the area near the front were in themselves so alarming that a major threat had to be assumed. Predicting the starting date of the offensive was no problem either, as 22 June, the third anniversary of the German attack on the Soviet Union, seemed the obvious choice. The spectacular partisan actions which immediately preceded it were also a warning signal.

In comparison, the enemy situation analyses of Army Group Centre HQ seem astonishingly unclear and ambivalent. Vitebsk is a very good example. As already explained, the heavily contested city was the army group's main cornerstone, and its exposed position made it, so to speak, a salient within the salient. From today's viewpoint, the assessment of enemy intentions by Third Armoured Army HQ, whose forces were directly threatened, was perfectly correct.<sup>74</sup> It anticipated that the Soviet forces would attack not frontally but 'on the shanks of the protruding

<sup>68</sup> Ibid. 4.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid. 3; also KTB AOK 9, 19 June 1944, BA-MA RH 20-9/176, fo. 256.

<sup>70</sup> KTB AOK 9, 19 June 1944, BA-MA RH 20-9/176, fo. 256.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., fo. 257.

<sup>72</sup> Niepold, 'Führung der Heeresgruppe Mitte', 64.

<sup>73</sup> KTB AOK 9, 22 June 1944, BA-MA RH 20-9/176, fo. 266.

<sup>74</sup> Kröker (*Fehleinschätzung*, 100–1 and 104 ff.) reached a different conclusion, but his assessment of Third Armoured Army's enemy situation analysis is not entirely logical. Admittedly, not all the sources were available to him at the time, especially not the situation maps marked up by Army Group Centre's intelligence department, which have surfaced as captured files in the Central Archives of the Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation (CAMO) in Podolsk; see CAMO F. 500, op. 12454, d.1690 to 1703.

Vitebsk salient'.<sup>75</sup> Neighbouring Army Group North also predicted an 'impending attack on both sides of Vitebsk', and accordingly feared a thrust against its own southern wing.<sup>76</sup> Foreign Armies East likewise expected 'an attack on both sides' against the salient.<sup>77</sup>

Given this remarkable concordance in the assessments of the enemy situation, it is hard to understand why Army Group Centre HQ made such a wrong prediction. The Ic section's summary assessment of 19 June categorically asserts that 'assessment of the enemy's situation at the present time does not permit the conclusion that it intends a concentrated attack on Vitebsk'.<sup>78</sup> Three days later the army group realized its mistake. An entry in the army group's war diary dated 22 June reads: 'The large-scale attack north-west of Vitebsk came [...] as a complete surprise.'<sup>79</sup>

This partial perception disorder is explained by the fact that on 20 May Field Marshal Busch had dared to refer insistently to the threat to Vitebsk, thereby provoking an angry reaction from Hitler, who bluntly rejected the idea. The shock of Hitler's reaction had a lasting effect, making mention of the Vitebsk scenario taboo, and Army Group Centre HQ thereafter avoided any too obvious reference to that sensitive point. This will be discussed in detail later.

The enemy situation reports conveyed to Army Group Centre HQ from April to June testify to a development whose dynamics were not properly appreciated by the army group's Ic section. At first, the focus was entirely on the area east of Kovel. Lt.-Gen. Hans Krebs, Army Group Centre's chief of staff, asserted that 'the point of concentration of the enemy's operational intentions will be directed against Second Army'.<sup>80</sup> In May, however, there were increasingly frequent reports which strongly suggested a different point of concentration. They pointed to a considerable build-up of Soviet forces in the east, opposite the 'Belorussian bulge'. From 2 June especially,

<sup>75</sup> KTB PzAOK 3, 15 Apr. 1944, BA-MA RH 21-3/v. 286, 6. Personal diary of Col.-Gen. [Georg-Hans] Reinhardt, entry for 16 June 1944 (fo. 69), BA-MA, Reinhardt papers, N 245/3. On this, see [Karl-Heinz] Collee, Major i.G., Ic/AO der 3. Pz.-Armee an den Chef des Generalstabes der 3. Pz.-Armee, 21 Sept. 1944, BA-MA RH 21-3/v. 352, 1, fos. 2-3; Grün, Major i.G., 9 Sept. 1944, 'Stellungnahme zur Entwicklung der Lage bei der 3. Panzerarmee vom 22.6. bis 25.6.1944', *ibid.* 1, fo. 11. Also instructive are the daily enemy intelligence reports in app. C2 (BA-MA RH 21-3/508), in which there are constant reports of enemy activities to the northwest of Vitebsk in the area of IX Army Corps.

<sup>76</sup> KTB HGr Nord, 19 June 1944, BA-MA RH 19 III/310, fo. 15.

<sup>77</sup> This is expressed most clearly in BA-MA RH 2/196, which contains 'brief assessments of the enemy situation' drawn up under the responsibility of Maj.-Gen. Gehlen. From mid-May on, there is repeated reference to the threat to the sector north-west of Vitebsk, especially in the assessments dated 16, 21, 23, and 30 May, and 5, 9-12, 16, 17, 21, and 22 June. The summary assessment of the enemy situation ('Zusammenfassende Beurteilung der Feindlage') dated 13 June also draws attention to the threat 'on both sides of Vitebsk'. See FHO (I), No. 1931/44 gKdos, 13 June 1944, BA-MA RHD 18/249, fo. 279.

<sup>78</sup> Abt. Ic/A.O., No. 917/44, 19 June 1944, 'Zusammenfassende Beurteilung der Feindlage', BA-MA RH 19 II/298, 4, fo. 58.

<sup>79</sup> KTB HGr Mitte, 22 June 1944, BA-MA RH 19 II/197, 1247-8, fos. 95-6.

<sup>80</sup> OK HGr Mitte, Ia, No. 4502/44 g.Kdos, 'Aufzeichnungen über die Besprechung der Chefs der Generalstäbe der Armeen der HGr Mitte am 10.4.1944', BA-MA RH 20-2/908, 6, fo. 62). See also OK HGr Mitte, Abt. Ic/A.O./Auswertung, No. 615/44 g.k., 22 Apr. 1944, 'Aufmarsch einer feindlichen Kräftegruppe im Raum Kowel', BA-MA RH 19 II/298, 3, fo. 44.

the enemy activities took on a new quality, but Army Group Centre's Ic section interpreted the Soviet offensive preparations as diversions or feints.<sup>81</sup>

The decisive turning point in assessment of the enemy situation was 14 June. The entry in the army group's war diary for that date contains the striking statement that 'the enemy situation opposite the eastern front has become increasingly acute'.<sup>82</sup> For the first time, it speaks of a 'systematic build-up of troops'.<sup>83</sup> That same day, the OKH held a meeting of chiefs of staff of the army groups and armies on the eastern front. At the meeting Lt.-Gen. Krebs revised Army Group Centre's assessment of the enemy situation and concluded that 'the point of concentration of the enemy attack' would be directed 'against the wings of the army group's eastern front'.<sup>84</sup> It transpired that only Army Group Centre possessed unequivocal indications of an enemy marshalling of forces which had almost been completed. That was not the case of any other major formation, not even Army Group North Ukraine. The meeting would have been the right moment to react to the danger—eight days before the large-scale offensive expected on 22 June—but there is not the slightest sign that Army Group Centre's chief of staff succeeded in alarming the other participants. Instead, he gave in and accepted the assurance that the (fairly weak) 20th Armoured Division would also be assigned to him.<sup>85</sup>

Meanwhile, the signs of an imminent large-scale offensive continued to mount up. The massing of artillery at the subsequent breakthrough points, for example, was sufficiently detected. The most important pointer, however, was the regrouping of the Soviet air force. In the event of an operational change of point of concentration it is notoriously difficult to move armoured units over a long distance, and even more difficult to move infantry units. In the case of air forces, however, it can be done very quickly, so Ic sections are particularly alert to movements of air squadrons. Such operations are in fact the most conclusive sign of imminent offensives, and it was precisely in that sector that a dramatic development was taking place. On 29 May the 438 German aircraft in the sector of Army Group Centre had been faced with 3,495 identified Soviet planes.<sup>86</sup> By 19 June, in the space of only three weeks, that number had increased by 1,000 to 4,500 aircraft, in a sector that was supposedly in the lee of the wind.<sup>87</sup> The time had come to sound the alarm bells. The situation cried out for action against the impending catastrophe.

In the summary assessment of the enemy situation dated 19 June, which was the last before the start of the attack, Army Group Centre's Ic section noted: 'The picture has [...] changed considerably since 2 June. Until then, what was to be anticipated was local offensive action [...] aiming at operational encirclement.'

<sup>81</sup> KTB HGr Mitte, 11 June 1944, BA-MA RH 19 II/197, 1199–200, fo. 46–7.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 14 June 1944, 1211, fo. 58. <sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid. 1212, fo. 59.

<sup>85</sup> On this point, Kröker is right (*Fehleinschätzung*, 160) in contradicting Gackenholz's account ('Der Zusammenbruch der Heeresgruppe Mitte', 454).

<sup>86</sup> App. 2 to Ic/A.O. No. 795/44, 'Russische Luftwaffe vor Heeresgruppe Mitte. Stand 29.5.1944', BA-MA RH 19 II/298, fo. 54.

<sup>87</sup> Abt. Ic/A.O., No. 917/44, 19 June 1944, 'Zusammenfassende Beurteilung der Feindlage', BA-MA RH 19 II/298, 1, fo. 55.

Developments on the army group's eastern front since that date indicate [...] more extensive enemy intentions.<sup>88</sup> The Ic section now suspected that the aim of the impending enemy offensive was to 'break through the front and bring about the collapse of the protruding salient at several points'.<sup>89</sup> If the enemy situation report had ended with that sentence, the higher operations staffs would have been forced to react. It seems typical of the inconsistency of Army Group Centre HQ, however, that this alarming prediction was immediately tempered in the next sentence by the statement that the disposition of the Red Army forces 'does not permit the conclusion that the enemy has a more ambitious objective, such as Minsk'.<sup>90</sup> Thereupon, the preceding operational conclusions collapsed like a house of cards.

The erroneous interpretation of the situation by Army Group Centre command seems all the more incomprehensible in the light of the Ic section's annotations on the situation maps.<sup>91</sup> These, given the large number of Soviet divisions detected, show a very alarming scenario. Above all, the high concentration of troops on the flanks of the Belorussian bulge near Vitebsk and Bobruisk—that is, just where the subsequent main breakthrough took place—is unmistakable. It takes no great effort of the imagination to see the thrust groups linking up in depth in the area of Minsk. Evaluation of the situation maps with regard to the ongoing Soviet reinforcements shows a dynamic development over time that was unprecedented in the course of the campaign. It is, therefore, puzzling why Army Group Centre HQ played the threat down to such an extent.

The army group's Ic section had clearly detected the operational massing of forces in the area near the front. The only problems concerned detection of the second staggered line of forces and the armoured reserves deeper in the hinterland. Thus, the movement of a Soviet army to each of the wings went undetected or was considered of concern to the neighbouring army group. Nor was there any unambiguous mention of the transfer of 5th Guards Armoured Army to the Smolensk area.<sup>92</sup> Nevertheless, the intelligence results were more than sufficient for a correct appreciation of Soviet offensive intentions. The Red Army's superiority was 'enormous and in some places quite fantastic'.<sup>93</sup> The overkill was such that a fraction of the 4,000 tanks deployed in the first phase of the offensive would have been sufficient to ensure success. To appreciate the enemy's intentions, therefore, it was by no means necessary to identify the full Soviet assembly of forces down to the

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.      <sup>89</sup> Ibid. 5, fo. 59.      <sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> This important source was long inaccessible to historians. The maps are stored in a collection of captured German files in the CAMO archives in Podolsk. See CAMO, F. 500, op. 12454, d. 1690 to 1703.

<sup>92</sup> Reports that Gen. Pavel Alekseyevich Rotmistrov, the C-in-C of 5th Guards Armoured Army, had been sighted there seem to have been taken more seriously by the OKH than by Army Group Centre HQ. The Soviet 5th Guards Armoured Army, which had previously been deployed in the southern sector of the eastern front, had virtually disappeared from the German situation maps at that time. For that reason the OKH operations division paid great attention to this new indication of its presence (verbal communication by retired Bundeswehr general Count Johann Adolf von Kielmansegg).

<sup>93</sup> Van Nes, 'Bagration', 243.

last tank. That is even more true of the artillery, which had been massed near the front in unprecedented concentration. The following comparison of numbers is instructive: at the beginning of the Russian campaign, the whole German eastern army had only 7,000 artillery cannon at its disposal,<sup>94</sup> whereas in the summer of 1944 the Red Army deployed a total of 45,000 cannon and grenade launchers against Army Group Centre in Operation BAGRATION alone, of which 24,383 were already used in the initial phase.<sup>95</sup> So even if only the tip of the iceberg was visible, the signs of an imminent large-scale offensive must have been more than obvious. General Kurt von Tippelskirch was therefore right to conclude in retrospect that ‘the picture of the enemy situation was exceptionally clear, and the multitude of observations no longer left any room for belief that it was a case of feigned troop concentrations and diversionary manoeuvres’.<sup>96</sup> Why then did Army Group Centre HQ—first and foremost Field Marshal Busch—not have the courage to draw the irresistible conclusion and sound the alarm? The underlying reason, a factor of decisive importance, is discussed separately at the end of this chapter.

### (c) The ‘Trilemma’ Faced by Foreign Armies East

The attempt to predict the point of concentration of the Soviet summer offensive involved an equation with three unknowns, since the Red Army’s superiority had increased to such an extent that it was capable of launching a major offensive against three German army groups simultaneously. At first, the Foreign Armies East Department of the OKH had speculated only on whether the point of concentration would be directed against Army Group South Ukraine or Army Group North Ukraine. The dilemma became a trilemma when, from May 1944, enormous preparations for an offensive against Army Group Centre were also reported. Foreign Armies East, under Maj.-Gen. Gehlen, was thus confronted with one of the most difficult tasks of the whole eastern campaign. Surprisingly, it attributed greater significance to the threat to Army Group Centre than did the army group’s own HQ. In its enemy situation assessment of 13 June, it reported that the enemy was ‘planning to go beyond holding attacks and to launch an offensive operation from the Gomel–Smolensk area ultimately aimed at Minsk’.<sup>97</sup>

Foreign Armies East had detected that the Red Army intended to deploy independent ‘mobile armoured groups’ for the first time, which indicated a deep operational thrust.<sup>98</sup> That raised the question as to the main objective of the Soviet summer offensive. Maj.-Gen. Gehlen was not in an enviable position. His Soviet opponents were generally well informed about German plans since the fighting was taking place on Soviet territory, where the civilian population was able to provide sufficient information about German troop movements in the hinterland. The enemy

<sup>94</sup> *Germany and the Second World War*, iv. 318.

<sup>95</sup> *Geschichte des Großen Vaterländischen Krieges*, iv. 226.

<sup>96</sup> Tippelskirch, *Geschichte des Zweiten Weltkrieges*, 460.

<sup>97</sup> FHO (I), No. 1931/44 gKdos, 13 June 1944, ‘Zusammenfassende Beurteilung der Feindlage’, BA-MA RHD 18/249, fo. 280.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, fo. 278.

intelligence departments of the western Allies were also surprisingly well informed about German intentions. Their strategic reconnaissance planes kept a watch on the German hinterland. Above all, British intelligence had managed to break the German 'Enigma' radio code, so that the plans and orders of the German operations staffs could be read like an open book. Gehlen's department, on the other hand, was often groping in the dark. While it could monitor Soviet units deployed near the front, it was scarcely able to detect the assembly of forces in the rear. Thus, Foreign Armies East was sometimes forced to resort to blind guesses based on intuition rather than empirical data.

On 13 June Gehlen made a fundamental assessment of the enemy situation in which he attempted to put the expected Soviet offensives on the eastern front in chronological order. He predicted an operation in two stages. The Red Army would begin with heavy attacks on the wings of Army Groups Centre and South Ukraine in order to 'deceive the German command as to the point of concentration and withdraw the reserves from the area between the Carpathians and Kovel'.<sup>99</sup> Once the centre had been weakened in favour of the wings, the real main offensive would be launched against Army Group North Ukraine. Col.-Gen. Kurt Zeitzler, the OKH chief of staff, agreed with that enemy situation assessment. There was also extensive agreement on the part of the OKW.<sup>100</sup> Hitler too thought the point of concentration of the expected Soviet offensive would be in the area of Army Group North Ukraine, and specifically on the northern wing near Kovel.<sup>101</sup>

On 22 June the offensive against Army Group Centre began exactly as the German armies involved had anticipated, at the expected time and in the expected sectors of the front, but with totally unexpected force. Since then, Foreign Armies East has been repeatedly blamed for the disaster, with Army Group Centre HQ already at the time seeking to divert attention from its own failure. In the post-war period this myth was mainly established by Hermann Gackenholz, formerly the keeper of Army Group Centre's war diary.<sup>102</sup>

To be quite clear: Foreign Armies East was well aware that Army Group Centre was under great threat. Maj.-Gen. Gehlen even considered that threat greater than the army group's own HQ was prepared to admit. But he was also aware of the far greater danger that would arise if the Soviet forces broke through in the area of Army Group North Ukraine, especially at Kovel. That is why his attention remained focused on the sector of the neighbour to the south.<sup>103</sup>

The latter threat had to be considered as very real indeed, since 1st Ukrainian Front, under Marshal Ivan Stepanovich Konev, was massed directly opposite the

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., fo. 280; see also KTB HGr Mitte, 14 June 1944, BA-MA RH 19 II/197, 1212–13.

<sup>100</sup> At an NSFO meeting in Sonthofen on 20 June, Wilhelm Keitel declared that the point of concentration of the Soviet offensive was expected to be in the south rather than in the area of Army Group Centre; see Gackenholz, 'Der Zusammenbruch der Heeresgruppe Mitte', 454.

<sup>101</sup> Kröker, *Fehleinschätzung*, 77–8.

<sup>102</sup> See Gackenholz, 'Der Zusammenbruch der Heeresgruppe Mitte 1944', esp. 453 ff., as well as the 'Dokumentation zum Zusammenbruch der Heeresgruppe Mitte im Sommer 1944', on which Gackenholz's account is based.

<sup>103</sup> Abt. Fremde Heere Ost, 27 June 1944, No. 2096/44 g.Kdos., 'Kurze Beurteilung der Feindlage vom 27.6.1944', fos. 133 ff., BA-MA RH 2/1967.

centre of Army Group North Ukraine. According to Soviet sources, it was 'the largest army front ever assembled for offensive operations in the Great Patriotic War'.<sup>104</sup> In the same official account we read: 'Once the fascist high command had concluded that the main action was taking place there [in the area of Army Group Centre], and had transferred its reserves there from the south, the troops of 1st Ukrainian Front would launch the offensive resolutely in the direction of Lvov'.<sup>105</sup> On 13 July 1st Ukrainian Front broke through the positions of Army Group North Ukraine from the outset. A few days later, on 18 July, the reinforced left wing of 1st Belorussian Army, commanded by Marshal Rokossovsky, attacked near Kovel and also achieved an operational breakthrough.

Looking at the whole eastern front in the early summer of 1944, rather than just the sector of Army Group Centre, it is hard to sustain the allegation of total failure repeatedly levelled at Foreign Armies East since that time.<sup>106</sup> All three enemy offensives predicted by Maj.-Gen. Gehlen did in fact take place within a short time on the front sectors in question. On 20 August, after the attacks on Army Groups Centre and North Ukraine, the Red Army launched a powerful offensive against Army Group South Ukraine which led to the collapse of the whole Balkan front. The fact remains, however, that Foreign Armies East (owing to its fixation on Kovel) classified the offensive against Army Group Centre as no more than a secondary operation. Had the full extent of the danger been recognized in time, defeat could not have been avoided, but the extent of the catastrophe suffered by the units in the exposed salient could have been reduced decisively by timely counter-measures.

#### (d) The Causes of the Erroneous Assessment by German Enemy Intelligence

##### *Distraction by Events on Other Fronts*

For Germany, June 1944 was the most crisis-ridden month in the war so far. On 4 June the Allies liberated Rome, on 6 June the Normandy invasion began, and on 9 June the Red Army launched an offensive in Karelia that resulted in the defection of Finland from the war against the Soviet Union. News of all these disasters distracted attention from the danger to Army Group Centre that was brewing in the east at the same time. In this situation the concentration of power in the person of Hitler played a fateful role, especially the fact that he was not only supreme commander of the OKW but supreme commander of the OKH as well. In June

<sup>104</sup> *Geschichte des zweiten Weltkrieges 1939–1945*, ix. 97.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid. 27.

<sup>106</sup> Kröker (*Fehleinschätzung*, 72 ff.) passes an excessively retrospective judgement on the intelligence findings of Foreign Armies East and focuses too one-sidedly on the sector of Army Group Centre. On p. 72, moreover, he overlooks a crucial slip in one of his key documents; see Fremde Heere Ost (Chef), Aktennotiz, 25 June 1944, BA-MA RH 2/1967, fo. 55. There is clearly a typographical error in the original file note, where the date '26.5' is wrongly rendered as '25.6'. The error is clear both from the chronological arrangement in the file itself and from the substance, since the Soviet-imposed radio silence resulting in the lack of German radio surveillance was lifted after the start of the offensive on 22 June. In any case, Gehlen's situation assessment of 25 June, which Kröker criticizes, was a different one from that of 26 May.

1944 he criminally neglected the latter function, focusing his attention one-sidedly on the OKW theatre in the west and less on the OKH theatre in the east.

### *Lack of Aerial Reconnaissance*

The Luftwaffe had far too few reconnaissance aircraft to cover the vast expanse of Russian territory, and many of them had been transferred to the west in view of the imminent Allied invasion. But even for the aircraft that remained, there was not enough fuel. The forced rationing meant that sometimes reconnaissance flights could be conducted only in good weather, when the Soviet forces suspended their troop movements anyway. In-depth reconnaissance was virtually impossible, given the density of Soviet fighter defence. The aerial reconnaissance results were depressingly poor, as can be seen from a letter of 26 June 1944 from the commander-in-chief of Army Group North, Col.-Gen. Georg Lindemann, to the commander-in-chief of Air Fleet 1, in which he reproached the latter with the fact that the Soviets had withdrawn 37 rifle divisions, eight armoured units, and one artillery division from the front facing his army group, 'without any information to that effect from aerial reconnaissance'.<sup>107</sup>

### *Insufficient Depth of Ground Reconnaissance*

The Soviet front facing Army Group Centre was so densely occupied by troops that German reconnaissance patrols were barely able to get through it. As a result, in most sectors only units located near the front were detected. The undetected number of enemy troops and reserves actually assembled was almost impossible to calculate. Yet in order to assess Soviet operational intentions correctly, it would have been necessary, above all, to reconnoitre the enemy's second staggered line of forces in the hinterland.

### *Radio Silence*

Soviet radio traffic had previously been one of the most important sources of information for German enemy intelligence. But just before this decisive offensive, the Red Army succeeded for the first time in doing without their insecure radio communications and maintaining strict radio discipline. In this crucial phase, the 'electronic oracle' fell silent.

### *Simultaneous Soviet Points of Concentration*

The superiority of the Red Army was so overwhelming that it could prepare and carry out several offensives at the same time. That gave rise to problems, especially for Foreign Armies East, in predicting the main point of concentration.

<sup>107</sup> OB HGr Nord, 26 June 1944, to OB Luftflotte 1, in KTB HGr Nord, 26 June 1944, BA-MA RH 19 III/310, fos. 107–10.

### 'Maskirovka'

The Soviet forces were masters of 'maskirovka' (camouflage and deception). They successfully concealed the massing of forces by exploiting the terrain to best advantage and moving units at night, while simulating offensive preparations in remote sectors of the front. When the decision was taken to direct the main offensive against Army Group Centre rather than against Army Group North Ukraine at Kovel, they continued to divert the enemy's attention to Kovel. The Soviet high command sent empty goods trains to Kovel at night, and then had them return during the daytime, when they were clearly visible to German reconnaissance.<sup>108</sup> Such measures contributed to Foreign Armies East's initial assumption that the main point of concentration would be at Kovel. Only in the final phase of the Soviet assembly of forces did the German Ic sections of the individual armies see through the deception. In any case, the offensive units detected at Kovel were not necessarily a deceptive manoeuvre by the Stavka. That was seen on 18 July, when the Red Army did indeed launch a powerful offensive in that area. Shortly before, an average of 35 tanks and 178 cannon per kilometre of front had been deployed against the armies of Army Group Centre stationed in the Belorussian bulge in the main concentration sectors; at Kovel the average was 83 tanks and 356 cannon per kilometre.<sup>109</sup>

### *Field Marshal Busch's Subservience to Hitler*

The main responsibility for the disaster which befell Army Group Centre lay with its own commander-in-chief. Instead of duly passing on the reports he received and sounding the alarm, he even made light of the danger. Although far from all of the deeply staggered Soviet attacking units had been detected, the intelligence results were more than sufficient. But the army group command seemed blind to the danger. The key to this apparently inexplicable behaviour is an event that took place on 20 May 1944, far from the eastern front, at Führer headquarters. When Busch tried to draw attention to the impending danger of a large-scale Soviet offensive against his army group, Hitler flew into a rage. Brutally rejecting the idea, the dictator delivered himself of a cynical, calculated jibe. He had not known, he said, that Busch too was 'one of those generals who always look backwards'.<sup>110</sup> Hitler, a master of malicious insinuation, had hit the field marshal exactly at his sore point. Busch, who thought of himself as a convinced National Socialist and an absolutely loyal follower of the Führer, was shaken to the core.<sup>111</sup> From then on, he spared no effort to regain Hitler's trust and give proof of unconditional obedience. There could be no more passing on of 'defeatist' reports about an impending Soviet offensive, irrespective of the enormous danger threatening his army group.

<sup>108</sup> Hinze, *Das Ostfront-Drama 1944*, 27.

<sup>109</sup> 'Belorusskaya operatsiya v tsifrakh', 80. The forces deployed at Kovel belonged to the left wing of 1st Belorussian Front.

<sup>110</sup> Gackenholz, 'Der Zusammenbruch der Heeresgruppe Mitte', 452.

<sup>111</sup> On Field Marshal Busch's blind loyalty, see Kröker, *Fehleinschätzung*, 160–1.

Not daring to resist the ideological overruling of his professional judgement, Field Marshal Busch remained strangely silent. Such behaviour, however, had meanwhile become only too typical of part of the German corps of generals. In December 1942 Col.-Gen. Paulus had not dared break out of Stalingrad against Hitler's orders. In the summer of 1944 Field Marshal Busch, faced with the threat of a 'super Stalingrad', did not even dare pass on unambiguous intelligence findings for fear of angering his leader.

## 5. HITLER'S 'FORTIFIED PLACES': THE DOCTRINE OF SELF-IMPOSED ENCIRCLEMENT

The foregoing discussion raises the question of how the German command ought to have reacted to the intelligence findings that forces were being assembled for an offensive against Army Group Centre. Reinforcement by reserves was no solution, since even if all the reserves on the eastern front had been brought in, they would not have been nearly sufficient to stop the avalanche. The other alternative was for Army Group Centre to go over to mobile defence and withdraw to positions in the rear. That would have made it possible to slow the enemy attack and save the exposed units in the Belorussian bulge from the threatening encirclement and destruction. Army Group Centre HQ logically envisaged two withdrawal options.<sup>112</sup>

### ‘Smaller Solution’

In the event of a major Soviet offensive, Fourth Army would withdraw behind the Dnieper, where construction of the 'Bear Line' had already begun on the west bank. That line of defence continued north of Orsha with the 'Tiger Line' prepared by Third Armoured Army, which ran as far as the Dvina. Apart from shortening the front by 80 kilometres, this would also have meant giving up the Vitebsk salient, which was especially threatened with enclosure.

### ‘Larger Solution’

Withdrawal of the front behind the Berezina was considered much more effective operationally. With the silent consent of Army Group Centre HQ, the armies had already prepared the 'Beaver Line', which ran behind the Berezina river from Bobruisk to Polotsk. Withdrawal to that position in good time, with troops intact, was also advisable in view of the intense partisan activity in the forests east of the Berezina. The greatest advantage, however, was that the front would be shortened by some 250 kilometres, thereby freeing up large numbers of reserves. This would also have been in line with the thinking of the OKH, which was contemplating the

<sup>112</sup> BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2054, 2–3; Gackenholz, 'Der Zusammenbruch der Heeresgruppe Mitte', 451; Röhricht, *Probleme der Kesselschlacht*, 106; Niepold, *Mittlere Ostfront*, 19.

formation of a reserve army behind the northern wing of Army Group Centre. The Red Army's ability to take the Germans by surprise by developing unexpected points of concentration could be countered only by means of a freely available large formation. As things stood, the Wehrmacht had to hold a 2,240-kilometre front line in the east without any reserves. Col.-Gen. Jodl had already put the most radical solution to the OKW at the beginning of 1944. He considered it unreasonable that, because of the unfavourable course of the eastern front, with its many salients and bulges, numerous units were tied down unnecessarily when they were urgently needed elsewhere. He had therefore proposed withdrawing to the shortest line between the Baltic and the Black Sea and taking up a defensive position running from Riga to Odessa. Straightening the front in that way would free up 20 divisions at a stroke, which could then be deployed either for operational counter-attacks in the east or for defence against the impending invasion on the Channel coast.<sup>113</sup> Hitler had categorically rejected the proposal. Field Marshal Busch similarly received a curt rebuke on 20 May, when, drawing attention to the disproportion between the length of the front which Army Group Centre had to hold and the forces available to it, he had proposed withdrawal to the Dnieper or Berezina line.<sup>114</sup>

Hitler's strategy of 'holding on' reached its peak with the notorious Führer Order No. 11 of 8 March 1944, decreeing the establishment of 'fortified places' on the eastern front. Hitler declared categorically: 'The "fortified places" will fulfil the function of fortresses in former historical times. They will ensure that the enemy does not occupy these areas of decisive operational importance. They will allow themselves to be surrounded, thereby holding down the largest possible number of enemy forces.'<sup>115</sup> The following passage had a particularly fatal effect in the summer of 1944: 'Only the commander-in-chief of an army group in person may, with my approval, relieve the fortified place commandant of his duties, and perhaps order the surrender of the fortified place.'<sup>116</sup>

Hitler's 'fortified places' were supposed to act as breakwaters to stop the 'Red tide'.<sup>117</sup> These imaginary fortifications were located all over the eastern front, but they had particularly disastrous consequences in the case of Army Group Centre, where at the beginning of the Soviet summer offensive 12 to 13 German divisions fell victim to Hitler's absurd self-containment order.<sup>118</sup> Above all, the troops deployed in the 'fortified place' on the eastern edge of the Belorussian bulge risked being cut off in the very first days of a Soviet attack. For Bobruisk, Mogilev, and Orsha, Hitler had stipulated an occupying force of one to two divisions each, for Vitebsk as many as three. These provisions were criticized by Army Group Centre, whose operations department invoked the following counter-arguments:

- There were too many 'fortified places' in the area of the army group, tying down a number of units that was 'debilitating' for the rest of the front.

<sup>113</sup> Gackenholz, 'Der Zusammenbruch der Heeresgruppe Mitte', 448.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid. 451–2.

<sup>115</sup> *Hitlers Weisungen*, doc. 53, 243–50, here 243. <sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> On the 'breakwater' doctrine, see Percy Ernst Schramm, introduction to *KTB OKW*iv/1, 53–4.

<sup>118</sup> Niepold, *Mittlere Ostfront*, 253.

**Table V.I.1.** Planned distribution of forces in ‘fortified places’ in the sector of Army Group Centre (29 March 1944)

Fortified Place	Command Authority	Security Contingent	Planned Total Contingent
Brest-Litovsk	Second Army	1 Rgt. (reinf.)	2 Div.
Pinsk	Second Army	1 Btl.	1 Div.
Luninets	Second Army	1 Btl.	1 Div.
Bobruisk	Ninth Army	2 Btl.	2 Div.
Mogilev	Fourth Army	2 Btl.	2 Div.
Orsha	Fourth Army	1 Btl.	2 Div.
Borisov	Fourth Army	1 Btl.	2 Div.
Vitebsk	Third Armoured Army	2 Btl.	3 Div.
Minsk	Army Group Centre	1 Rgt.	2 Div.
Vilna	Army Group Centre	1 Rgt.	2 Div.
Slutsk	Army Group Centre	1 Btl.	1 Div.
Baranovich	Army Group Centre	1 Btl.	1 Div.

*Source:* OK HGr Mitte, Ia No. 3900/44 g.Kdos., 29 Mar. 1944, ‘Befehl für die Einrichtung der Festen Plätze im Bereich der HGr Mitte’, BA-MA, RH 19 II/240, 4, fos. 70–1.

- The necessary quantities of building and barrier materials, and so on, as well as the number of sapper units needed to do the work, would be lacking for the construction of the main battle line and for the establishment of rearward positions.
- In view of the tight ammunition situation, no stocks could be laid in for the fortified places.
- Given the shortage of general staff officers, such a concentration of command personnel appeared unjustified.
- The security units needed for the fortified places would be lacking for anti-partisan combat.<sup>119</sup>

On 20 May, however, the highly consequential meeting at Führer headquarters took place. As already mentioned, Field Marshal Busch did a sharp about-turn and rigorously implemented Hitler’s ‘hold on’ orders. He defended the concept of fortified places and invoked Hitler’s maxim: ‘The word “withdraw” no longer exists.’<sup>120</sup> From then on, the commanders-in-chief of the armies had the impression that Busch ‘had no mind of his own and did not even defend the interests of the troops’.<sup>121</sup> This gave rise to a vehement dispute with Col.-Gen. Reinhardt concerning the Vitebsk fortified place, which would tie down three of Reinhardt’s ten divisions. All in all, there were five divisions in the narrow Vitebsk salient, inside a sack that could be tied shut at any moment. Reinhardt considered it a ‘fundamental error’ to concentrate defence efforts on such an exposed city. In his view, it was

<sup>119</sup> HGr Mitte Ia/op, 15 Mar. 1944, ‘Welche Gesichtspunkte stehen gegen die Errichtung einer größeren Anzahl von festen Plätzen im Bereich der H.Gr. Mitte?’, BA-MA RH 19 II/240, fos. 22–3.

<sup>120</sup> KTB 4. Armee, 29 May 1944, BA-MA RH 20-4/533, 157.

<sup>121</sup> Hinze, *Der Zusammenbruch* [1980], 27.

'more important that the whole army front should hold'.<sup>122</sup> In a communication to the OKH dated 15 April, he spoke against giving 'one-sided priority' to the Vitebsk fortified place.<sup>123</sup> At the same time he began, on his own authority, to withdraw from the city personnel intended for the construction of fortifications.

Field Marshal Busch played an ambivalent role, staunchly defending Hitler's concept of fortified places despite his own professional doubts. This led him into remarkable intellectual contortions, such as responding to Reinhardt's arguments with Hitler's assertion that 'the Vitebsk fortified place is certainly tying down 30–40 enemy divisions and so holding back forces that would otherwise be free for the offensive in a westerly or south-westerly direction'.<sup>124</sup> Reinhardt adduced two convincing reasons for his opposition. First of all, it was unrealistic to assume that the Soviet command would actually allow itself to be tied down by the Vitebsk fortified place. After enclosing the city, the Red Army attacking units would probably just continue their advance. In fact, Reinhardt added, the Vitebsk traffic node was already being circumvented by the Russians.<sup>125</sup> The fortified place was thus having exactly the opposite effect to that intended: it was not Soviet but German troops who were tied down in Vitebsk—troops who were urgently needed to hold the whole undermanned German front line. Secondly, once Vitebsk was enclosed, there would be no more troops available to plug the gaps arising and establish a new front line further back. And a relief attack on Vitebsk was out of the question anyway, because of the lack of reserves. It therefore made no sense to 'declare Vitebsk a fortified place and hold it'.<sup>126</sup> On the contrary, in the event of a renewed large-scale offensive, 'everything should be removed from Vitebsk'.<sup>127</sup> Busch was unable to refute Reinhardt's arguments but, invoking Hitler, he nevertheless refused to make any changes to the order already issued.

Reinhardt's reservations were shared by the commanders-in-chief of the group's other armies. An entry in Ninth Army's war diary, for example, reads:

The army command considers that the orders designating the larger towns in the combat zone as 'fortified places' are particularly dangerous [...] The knowledge that one is chained to combat methods that caused enemy defeat in earlier victorious campaigns but of whose correctness in the present circumstances one cannot in all conscience be convinced [...] makes one contemplate coming events with a sense of foreboding.<sup>128</sup>

<sup>122</sup> Col.-Gen. Reinhardt's personal diary, entry for 15 Apr. 1944, BA-MA, Reinhardt papers, N 245/3, fo. 67.

<sup>123</sup> PzAOK 3, Ia No. 3717/44 g.K to OK HGr Mitte, 15 Apr. 1944, BA-MA RH 21-3/v. 336, 1.

<sup>124</sup> KTB 3. Pz.Armee, 21 Apr. 1944, BA-MA RH 21-3/v. 286, 4.

<sup>125</sup> See 'Besprechungspunkte Besuch Feldmarschall bei Pz.AOK. 3 am 21.4.1944', BA-MA RH 21-3/v. 336, 1. It was Hitler himself who had pointed out, a year or so earlier, that 'the Russians were no longer falling for German strongpoint tactics but were simply pushing on past the strongpoints'. See Greiner, *Die oberste Wehrmachtführung*, 439.

<sup>126</sup> KTB-Notiz, 21 Apr. 1944, re: 'Feldmarschall-Besuch', BA-MA RH 21-3/v. 336.

<sup>127</sup> See 'Besprechungspunkte Besuch Feldmarschall bei Pz.AOK. 3 am 21.4.1944', BA-MA RH 21-3/v. 336, 1.

<sup>128</sup> KTB 9. Armee, 22 June 1944, BA-MA RH 20-9/176, 268.

At this point, it will be helpful to examine the various aspects of Hitler's 'fortified places' concept.

### Strategic Aspect

As already mentioned, Hitler's strategy in the summer of 1944 can be summed up in the simple phrase 'strike in the west, hold firm in the east'. The European theatre of war as a whole was like a room with two doors, one of which—the eastern one—was to be barricaded in order to shut out the attackers on one side, at least temporarily, while the defenders strove with all their might to expel the intruders on the opposite side of the room through the other door. The problem was, however, that barricading the eastern front against a superior enemy with strong armoured forces was no easy matter. Above all, Hitler made the mistake of failing to adopt a favourable defensive line. Instead, he was absolutely determined to defend every salient like a fortress. His frequently invoked role model, Frederick the Great, had maintained to the contrary that 'he who seeks to retain everything, retains nothing'.<sup>129</sup> Faced with a scarcely winnable war on multiple fronts, the Prussian king unhesitatingly gave up whole provinces—even including, for a time, his own capital—in order to concentrate on one theatre at a time, and defeated his enemies one after the other in 'lightening campaigns'. Hitler, however, whose troops were deployed in the depths of the Russian interior, could not bring himself to give up territory. Instead of responding flexibly to the Red Army's expected onslaught, he ordered rigid defence and thereby risked the total collapse of the front. Thus, a basically logical concept of strategic defence was opposed by a fundamentally wrong operational approach.

### Operational Aspect

Whereas the Schlieffen school's motto had been 'Operation is movement',<sup>130</sup> Hitler's maxim was 'holding on at all costs'.<sup>131</sup> In the summer of 1944 there was a permanent conflict between him and the corps of generals on the eastern front over the issue of *rigid* versus *mobile* defence. Manstein had always insisted that space be used as a weapon to outmanoeuvre an enemy superior in terms of mass. He demonstrated the correctness of that concept by his 'strike on the backhand' approach after the Stalingrad crisis.<sup>132</sup> In the same sense, Col.-Gen. Heinz Guderian, as inspector-general of armoured troops, declared to the Führer in a presentation on 27 March 1944: 'This war can never be decided in our favour by defence alone. We have to attack again'.<sup>133</sup> Whenever the armoured units had been deployed without regard to the principle of mobility, he said, they had been 'ground to pieces'.

<sup>129</sup> *Unterricht des Königs in Preußen*, 44.

<sup>130</sup> Quoted in Wallach, *Kriegstheorien*, 175.

<sup>131</sup> Manstein, *Verlorene Siege*, 459; see also 315.

<sup>132</sup> See, above all, Klein and Frieser, 'Mansteins Gegenschlag', 12 ff.

<sup>133</sup> Generalinspekteur der Panzertruppen 810/44 g.Kdos, 23 Mar. 1944, 'Führervortrag am 27.3.1944', BA-MA RH 10/89, 1, fo. 53.

Guderian therefore called for a return to 'the form of combat suited to us', with the constitution of an operational reserve as a precondition for mobile defence.<sup>134</sup> For Hitler, however, 'the idea of free operation in free space' was 'a load of rubbish'.<sup>135</sup> On the offensive the dictator was fascinated by bold concepts and technical innovations, but on the defensive he remained a prisoner of the ideas of the First World War. In 1940 the Wehrmacht had achieved its legendary 'blitzkrieg' victory in France by switching from the *positional warfare* of the First World War to an *operational war of movement*, whereas Führer Order No. 11 on the establishment of 'fortified places' sounded like a resurrection of the spirit of Verdun, Fort Douaumont, and the subsequent Maginot Line. Hitler's operational thinking seemed static, linear, and one-dimensional, hardening more and more into a fanatical insistence on 'holding firm'. He demanded that 'every square metre be defended to the last man'.<sup>136</sup> 'I consider it a crime', he declared, 'to give up without bloody combat something that was won through bloody combat'.<sup>137</sup> He accordingly demanded unconditional defence of the fortified places 'to the last breath',<sup>138</sup> or 'until destruction of the garrison force'.<sup>139</sup> Schramm later reported that 'Hitler, in an increasingly irrational manner, ordered positions to be held that it was no longer possible to hold, and at the same time forbade the timely reconnaissance and possible construction of rearward positions'.<sup>140</sup> Schramm considered that Hitler's dogmatic attitude originated in his subjective experience as a corporal in the First World War. In the spring of 1917 the bulge in the front between Arras and Soissons was to be shortened by withdrawal to the Siegfried Line. When the troops learned of this, the retreat took place more quickly than the army leadership had planned. The units deployed in the bulge apparently no longer did their utmost to defend territory which, as everyone knew, was to be evacuated in a few days anyway. 'With Hitler, the memory of that retreat hardened into the principle that fighting troops were "magnetically" attracted to rearward positions and should therefore never be exposed to temptation by premature preparation of defences in the hinterland'.<sup>141</sup>

Manstein's dismissal as commander-in-chief of Army Group South on 30 March 1944 was highly significant in this respect. Hitler explained that 'the time for grand-style operations in the east [...] was now past. All that counted now was to cling stubbornly to what we held'.<sup>142</sup> That concept was heavily criticized by the generals, and Col.-Gen. Zeitzler's judgement is particularly damning: 'Hitler saw his own role as issuing orders from his East Prussian headquarters to "hold firm", "hold on at all costs", "hold on no matter what", meddling in the tiniest details of

<sup>134</sup> Ibid. 2.

<sup>135</sup> Hitlers *Lagebesprechungen*, 584–5.

<sup>136</sup> Kielmansegg, 'Verteidigungskonzeptionen 1944', 575.

<sup>137</sup> Minutes of the meeting between the Führer and members of the Bulgarian Regency Council (Vienna, 21 Mar. 1944), ADAP, Series E, vii. 533.

<sup>138</sup> See, e.g., Hitler's statements on unconditional defence of the Vilnius fortified place, KTB HGr Mitte, 7 July 1944, BA-MA RH 19 II/198, fo. 74.

<sup>139</sup> See Hitler's order on defence of the Brest-Litovsk fortified place, KTB HGr Mitte, 26 July 1944, BA-MA RH 19 II/198, fo. 289.

<sup>140</sup> Introduction to *KTB OKW*, iv/1, 49

<sup>141</sup> Ibid. 50.

<sup>142</sup> Manstein, *Verlorene Siege*, 615.

the affairs of the commanders-in-chief, and reserving even the smallest decisions for himself.<sup>143</sup>

### Tactical Aspect

According to a widespread cliché, Hitler applied the defensive tactics of the First World War. In point of fact, his tactical thinking was even more backward. In 1914–18 the Germans had used a system of mobile defence later known as *Großkampfverfahren* ('major battle procedure'). Under that system, the front-line troops withdrew from the first line of defence shortly before the start of the enemy attack, so that the artillery barrage fell only on positions that had already been evacuated. If the attackers pushed forward in depth, they were no longer covered by their own artillery and suddenly came up against the 'major battle line' to which the defenders had pulled back. The attacking units, now within optimum range of the defenders' staggered artillery, were crushed by the bombardment. The fact that this procedure could lead to notable tactical success in the Second World War too was seen in April 1945 in the battle of the Seelow Heights just before Berlin, where Marshal Zhukov ran straight into the 'open knife' of his adversary, Col.-Gen. Gotthard Heinrici.<sup>144</sup> In the summer of 1944, however, Hitler, in his obstinacy, often refused to allow the preparation of such rearward positions, so that the troops should not 'look backwards'.

It is precisely at the tactical level that psychological factors play an important role. Nothing made the German troops feel more uncomfortable than being deployed in purely static defence, since that involved from the outset the risk of encirclement. According to an occurrence report, the men associated 'the concept of "fortified place" with thoughts of death or imprisonment'.<sup>145</sup> Hitler's 'hold firm' paranoia led to an 'encirclement psychosis' among his soldiers.<sup>146</sup>

### Political/Propaganda Aspect

Short of arguments for retaining the Vitebsk fortified place in his confrontation with Col-Gen. Reinhardt, Field Marshal Busch revealed Hitler's real motive, namely prestige. Vitebsk, he explained, was 'the only place on the eastern front whose loss would make the world sit up and take notice'.<sup>147</sup> Thus, the spectre of Stalingrad loomed on the horizon. That city too had been retained as a 'fortified place', against all military logic. Now that Hitler wanted to extend the dogma of 'holding on at all costs' to the whole eastern front, more than just one army was in danger.

<sup>143</sup> Col.-Gen (ret.) Zeitzler, 'Das Ringen um die großen Entscheidungen im zweiten Weltkrieg', BA-MA, Zeitzler papers, N 63/80, ii. 13.

<sup>144</sup> See Frieser, 'Die Schlacht um die Seelower Höhen', 136 ff.

<sup>145</sup> 18. Flakdivision (mot.) — Kommandeur, 26 Aug. 1944, 'Der Zusammenbruch der Heeresgruppe Mitte im Sommer 1944', BA-MA RL 7/522, 6, fo. 38.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid. 7, fo. 39.                   <sup>147</sup> Ibid.

### **Hitler's Most Important Reason: The Bridgehead Function**

The foregoing considerations do not sufficiently account for the frenetic intensity of Hitler's insistence on the retention of 'fortified places' in front salients and bridgeheads. His irrational behaviour drove the military experts to the brink of despair. A new interpretation suggests itself, however, if the idea behind Hitler's 'hold on' tactics is carried to its logical conclusion. Given the disastrous situation, the dictator's ideas appear visionary and utopian. But Hitler thought only in terms of victory or downfall, and staked everything on a turnaround in the war that might still be possible. Seen in that light, his apparently irrational 'hold on' paranoia has some intrinsic meaning. With his conqueror mentality, Hitler always thought offensively, never defensively. In short, his 'fortified places' were intended not only as defensive 'breakwaters' but also to serve as bridgeheads, even springboards, for future offensives once the tide of war had turned again in his favour. However illusory such thinking appears to us today, in Hitler's obsessional view of the world it was not entirely illogical. The dictator's utopian offensive strategy will be discussed again in detail in connection with Army Group North's Courland pocket, which was designated as a single, oversized fortified place. It was for this folly that the dictator sacrificed so many of his troops.

## II. The Collapse of Army Group Centre in the Summer of 1944

*Karl-Heinz Frieser*

### 1. THE ASYMMETRY OF FORCES

#### (a) The Soviet Potential: An Unprecedented Concentration of Force

The Red Army had repeatedly mobilized huge masses of troops and material in the eastern theatre, but the build-up of forces in June 1944 for the attack on the ‘Belorussian balcony’ put into the shade every concentration of firepower and strike force previously mustered for a single operation. The deployment was staggered over time, in the following stages:

- The first phase of the major Soviet offensive against the Belorussian balcony, in which three of the four armies of Army Group Centre were located, began on 22 June. The German armies were faced by four Soviet army fronts, of which 14 general armies and one armoured army were deployed at the outset. In addition to their organic units, the Soviet armies were reinforced by a multitude of independent armoured units, artillery units, and so on, taken mainly from the central reserve (see Table V.II.2). In the initial phase the attacking forces already consisted of 1,254,300 troops (see Table V.II.3), supported by 24,383 cannon, heavy grenade launchers, and rocket launchers ('Stalin organs'), and 4,070 fighting vehicles (2,715 tanks and 1,355 assault guns). A total of 6,334 aircraft were also deployed. Of these, 5,327 came from the four air armies of the individual army fronts, while 1,007 were long-range bombers (see Table V.II.4).
- On 18 July the left wing of 1st Belorussian Front launched a further offensive on the southern flank of Army Group Centre, where the German Second Army was positioned. Five general armies and one armoured army were deployed in the attack, supported once again by a large number of independent units. They comprised a total of 416,000 troops, 8,335 artillery cannon, grenade launchers, and rocket launchers, 1,748 tanks and assault guns, and 1,465 aircraft specially assigned to the left wing (see Table V.II.3).
- In the course of the operation, which lasted from 22 June to 29 August, in addition to the 172 divisions deployed from the outset, a further 24 divisions

**Table V.II.1.** Breakdown of Soviet forces for the Belorussian operation (1st Phase: 22 June to 4 July 1944)

Stavka coordinator	Army Fronts	Armies	Corps and Divisions	Mobile Groups (Reserve)
Marshal Vasilevsky	1st Baltic Front	4th Shock Army	8th Rfl.Corps	I Armoured Corps
		6th Guards Army	24th Rfl.Div.	
		43rd Army		
		39th Army	11th Rfl.Corps	5th Guards Armoured Army
		5th Army	33rd Rfl.Div.	(initially Stavka reserve)
	3rd Beloruss. Front	31st Army		II Guards Armoured Corps
		11th Guards Army		(of 11th Guards Army)
				Mechanized Cavalry Group (III Guards Cavalry Corps, III Guards Mech. Corps)
		33rd Army	7th Rfl.Corps	several armoured brigades
		49th Army	22nd Rfl.Div.	
Marshal Zhukov	2nd Beloruss. Front	50th Army		
		3rd Army	13th Rfl.Corps	Mechanized Cavalry Group
		48th Army	39th Rfl. Div.	(IV Guards Cavalry Corps, I Mech. Corps)
		65th Army		IX Armoured Corps (of 3rd Army)
		28th Army		I Guards Armoured Corps (of 65th Army)

Source: Niepold, *Mittlere Ostfront*, 48.

(including the operations staffs of 2nd Guards Army and 51st Army), plus 19th Armoured Corps, were thrown into the battle to exploit the initial successes.<sup>1</sup> All in all, the forces deployed in the Belorussian operation numbered over 2.5 million troops, over 45,000 cannon and launchers, 6,000 tanks and assault guns, and around 7,000 front-line aircraft (not including over a thousand long-range bombers deployed at various stages).<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Grif sekretnosti sniat*, 202–3. The list of 172 divisions comprises 160 rifle divisions (four of them Polish) and 12 cavalry divisions. There is a contradiction in the Soviet literature, however. According to Table 1 on p. 75 of ‘Belorusskaya operatsia v tsifrakh’, the number of rifle divisions deployed in the initial phase was 154, not 160. Apparently the four Polish divisions and another two rifle divisions were not taken into account.

<sup>2</sup> *Geschichte des Großen Vaterländischen Krieges*, iv. 226.

### (b) Army Group Centre: A House of Cards about to Collapse

The example of Army Group Centre strikingly illustrates the discrepancy between appearance and reality that increasingly characterized the German high command's assessment of its own force potential. The figures which Hitler so wanted to hear and with which he operated in his headquarters had long lost all relation to reality at the front. In theory, Army Group Centre, with its four armies and the units of the Wehrmacht commander in Belorussia deployed in the hinterland, had an impressive 47 divisions available (see Table V.II.5), giving the corresponding number of little flags on Hitler's situation map.<sup>3</sup> In reality, however, some were still in the process of being created or restructured, while others were simply burned out. Many units, especially the security divisions, were not at the front anyway, but were engaged in the rear on surveillance tasks and anti-partisan combat. During the first phase of the operation, when Second Army on the southern flank was not yet under attack, the three armies in the Belorussian balcony, including the army group's reserves, possessed at most 34 functional divisions,<sup>4</sup> of which 29 were directly at the front.

Attention must be drawn at this point to the striking discrepancy between the target strength of the army group and the daily strength of its divisions and independent combat units. On 1 June the former was 849,000 men, while the latter was only about 486,000.<sup>5</sup> How is the difference of 363,000 men to be explained? For one thing, the target figure includes a conglomeration of all sorts of agencies and units in the army group's huge hinterland which had something to do with the Wehrmacht but were scarcely suitable for deployment at the front. These included administrative departments, security units, the Reich Labour Service, 390th Field Training Division, 103,000 Russian paramilitary auxiliaries, and so on. Moreover, target strength was only a notional quantity used to 'compute the total strength of the German army'.<sup>6</sup> It included men on leave, men seconded to other units, and the sick and wounded. On the reference date in question (1 June), Fourth Army, for example, had 18,069 men on leave and 7,500 sick or wounded in hospital.<sup>7</sup> At Führer headquarters, however, they happily juggled with theoretical target figures instead of recognizing the actual strength, or rather weakness, of the troops at the front. If Second Army<sup>8</sup> is deducted from the daily strength of the army group (486,493), that leaves a total of 336,573 men for the three armies under

<sup>3</sup> The two corps detachments, D and E, were each counted as a division.

<sup>4</sup> This figure excludes 201st and 286th Security Divisions, which were deployed in the rearward area, as well as the units of Second Army.

<sup>5</sup> Note dated 24 July 1944, 'Iststärken und Tagesstärken des Feldheeres aufgegliedert nach Kriegsschauplätzen (Stand 1.6.1944)', BA-MA RH 2/1339, fo. 29.

<sup>6</sup> OKH, GenStdH/Org.Abt. (I), No. 25865/42 geh., 13 Oct. 1942, 'Gefechts- und Verpflegungsstärke', BA-MA RH 2/1107, 2, fo. 37; see also OKH, GenStdH/OrgAbt. No. I/1620/44 geh., 24 Feb. 1944, 'Festlegung der Stärkebegriffe', BA-MA RH 2/60, 1-2; on this, see Zetterling and Frankson, 'Analyzing World War II', 177.

<sup>7</sup> AOK 4, Ia, No. 2050/44 g.k., 'Die Entwicklung der Lage bei der 4. Armee [...]', BA-MA RH 20-4/618, 78.

<sup>8</sup> The daily strength of Second Army was 149,920 men; see 'Stärkemeldung 2. Armee, Muster VI, Stand vom 1.6.1944', BA-MA RH 20-2/906.

Table V.II.2. Number of major formations and independent troop units of the four Soviet army fronts at the start of the Belorussian operation (22 June 1944)

	1st Balt. Front	3rd Beloruss. Front	2nd Beloruss. Front	1st Beloruss. Front right wing	Total	1st Beloruss. Front left wing (17 July)
<i>Combat troops:</i>						
General armies	3	4	3	4	14	5
Rifle divisions	24	33	22	39	118	36
Armoured armies	—	1	—	—	1	1
Indep. arm'd. and mech. corps	1	4	—	3	8	4
Indep. arm'd., mech., and aslt.gun brigades	5	5	4	1	15	4
Indep. arm'd. and aslt.gun regiments	9	23	10	22	64	17
Cavalry corps	—	1	—	1	2	2
<i>Artillery:</i>						
Artillery divisions	2	4	—	4	10	3
Indep. artillery brigades	3	5	6	7	21	11
Indep. artillery regiments	7	10	13	4	34	4
Grenade launcher brigades	1	—	1	1	3	3
Indep. grenade launcher regiments	4	4	4	6	18	5
Rocket launcher divisions	1	1	—	1	3	1
Indep. rocket launcher brigades	—	—	1	—	1	—
Indep. rocket launcher regiments	5	7	5	11	28	7
<i>Other:</i>						
Anti-aircraft divisions	3	5	2	4	14	4
Indep. anti-aircraft regiments	6	7	10	4	27	5
Tank-destroyer brigades	2	3	4	4	13	6
Indep. tank-destroyer regiments	3	4	3	7	17	6
Sapper brigades	7	10	5	8	30	8
Fortified areas	1	1	1	4	7	—

*Note:* Additional reserves included 24 rifle divisions and one armoured corps.

*Source:* ‘Belorusskaya operatsia v tsifrakh’, 75.

attack in the Belorussian balcony. That is the figure used for the comparison of strength on 22 June (see Table V.II.6). However, even this figure needs further refinement. If combat strength is calculated instead of daily strength, the result (excluding Second Army)<sup>9</sup> is the alarmingly low figure of 166,673.<sup>10</sup> It was that number of men who faced the Soviet avalanche at the beginning of the offensive.

Army Group Centre's greatest problem, however, was its lack of tanks. Significantly, the designation ‘Third Armoured Army’ was also wholly misleading. That formation had long possessed not a single tank, but only 76 assault guns. As

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., where the combat strength of Second Army is given as 70,099 men.

<sup>10</sup> The combat strength of the army group, including Second Army, was 236,772 men; see OKH, OrgAbt I, 26 Jul. 1944, ‘Notiz: 1) Verbände: Stand 1.6. sowie 2) Fechtende Heerestruppen: Stand 1.6.’, BA-MA RH 2/1341, fos. 31–2.

Table V.II.3. Soviet strength for Operation BAGRATION

	1st Phase starting 22 June (1st Baltic Front, 2nd and 3rd Belorussian Fronts, right wing of 1st Belorussian Front)	2nd Phase starting 15 July (left wing of 1st Belorussian Front)	Total strength (22 June to 29 August)
Personnel	1,254,300	416,000	2.5 million
Artillery cannon, grenade launchers, and rocket launchers	24,383	8,335	45,000
Tanks	2,715	1,126	over 6,000 (tanks and assault guns)
Assault guns	1,355	622	over 7,000
Front-line aircraft	5,327	1,465	over 1,000
Long-range aircraft	1,007		

Source: 'Belorusskaya operatsia v tsifrakh', 77; *Geschichte des Großen Vaterländischen Krieges*, iv. 226.

Table V.II.4. Strength of Soviet air armies before the start of the Belorussian operation (20 June 1944)

Category:	1st Baltic Front	3rd Beloruss. Front	2nd Beloruss. Front	1st Beloruss. Front (right wing)	
	3rd Air Army	1st Air Army	4th Air Army	16th Air Army	
Fighters	403	767	196	952	2318
Ground-attack planes	368	547	193	636	1744
Bombers	392	—	263	655	1310
Night bombers	79	81	121	150	431
Reconnaissance planes	52	77	18	32	179
Front-line aircraft	902	1864	528	2033	5327
Long-range bombers					1007
<b>Total:</b>					<b>6334</b>

Source: 'Belorusskaya operatsia v tsifrakh', 78.

inconceivable as it may seem, at the beginning of June there was only one major armoured unit in the whole northern half of the eastern front, namely 12th Armoured Division, which belonged to Army Group North. In view of the threatening Soviet concentration of forces, 20th Armoured Division was transferred to Army Group Centre from Army Group North Ukraine immediately before the start of the offensive. But even including its 56 fighting vehicles,<sup>11</sup> the total number

<sup>11</sup> App. to 20. Pz.Div., Ia Nr. 666/44 geh., 4 June 1944, 'Meldung vom 1. Juni', BA-MA RH 10/157, fo. 42.

Table V.II.5. Army Group Centre: order of battle on 22 June 1944

Divisions	Army Corps	Armies	Army Group
252nd Inf.Div.	IX	Third Armd. Army	Reserves:
Corps Det. D			20th Armd.Div.
246th Inf.Div.			14th Inf.Div.
4. Lw.Fld.Div.	LIII	Army reserve:	
6. Lw.Fld.Div.		95th Inf.Div.	Armd.Inf.Div.
206. Inf.Div.			'Feldherrnhall'
197th Inf.Div.		Rearward army area:	(for OKH special duties)
299th Inf.Div.	VI	201st Sec.Div.	
256th Inf.Div.			
78th Aslt.Div.			
25th Armd.Inf.Div.	XXVII		
260th Inf.Div.			
110th Inf.Div.		Fourth Army	
337th Inf.Div.	XXXIX Armd.	Rearward army	
12th Inf.Div.		area: 286th Sec.	
31st Inf.Div.		Div.	
18th Armd.Inf.Div.	XII		
267th Inf.Div.			
57th Inf.Div.			
134th Inf.Div.			
296th Inf.Div.			
6th Inf.Div.	XXXV		
383rd Inf.Div.		Ninth Army	
45th Inf.Div.		Army reserve:	
36th Inf.Div.		707th Inf.Div.	
35th Inf.Div.	XXXXI Armd.		
129th Inf.Div.			
292. Inf.Div.	LV		
102. Inf.Div.			
7th Inf.Div.	XXIII		
203rd Sec.Div.			
Corps Det. E (3rd Cav.Brig.)	XX	Second Army	
5th Lt.Inf.Div.		Army reserve:	
211th Inf.Div.	VIII	Hun. 1st Cav.	
Hun. 12th Res.Div.		Div.	
221st Sec.Div.		Wehrmacht	
52nd Sec.Div.		Commander	
391st Sec.Div.		White Ruthenia	
		390th F.T.D.	

Sources: BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2054, 191; Gackenholz, 'Der Zusammenbruch der Heeresgruppe Mitte', 475; Niepold, *Mittlere Ostfront*, 33; BA-MA, RH 19 II/232, 'Gliederung groß. Verb. (4.6.1944)'.

of tanks was only 118.<sup>12</sup> Assault guns had long been obliged to take over the role of tanks, even though their rigidly built-in cannon were of limited use in mobile

<sup>12</sup> The other 62 tanks were with Fourth Army; see AOK 4, Ia Stopa, 'Einsatzbereite Panzer, Sturmgeschütze u. s.Pak, Stand vom 20.6.1944', BA-MA RH 20-4/1115.

Table V.II.6. Strength of Army Group Centre on 22 June 1944

	Belorussian Balcony (Fourth and Ninth Armies, Third Armoured Army)	Right wing (Second Army)	Total strength
Personnel (daily strength at 1 June 1944)	336,573	149,920	486,493
Artillery cannon	2,589	647	3,236
Tanks	118	—	118
Assault guns	377	75	452
Aircraft	—	—	602

counter-attacks. Of those too, the three armies in the Belorussian balcony had only 377.<sup>13</sup> That was not exactly an impressive number compared with the more than 6,000 tanks and assault guns (4,070 in the opening phase) deployed by the Red Army.

The German inferiority in artillery was to prove particularly disastrous. In the Belorussian balcony (Third Armoured Army and Ninth Army) there were no more than 2,589 artillery systems, of which 1,305 were field guns.<sup>14</sup> As for the infantry, it was not even possible to equip all groups with a machine gun.<sup>15</sup> There was also a shortage of ammunition.<sup>16</sup> While the Soviet artillery was so abundantly supplied with ammunition that at the beginning of the Belorussian operation it was able for the first time to apply a double rolling barrage on an operational scale,<sup>17</sup> the German gun teams were obliged to use most types of ammunition very sparingly.<sup>18</sup>

The main problem, nevertheless, was the lack of mobility of the German units. In the summer of 1944 the Red Army was motorized to an enviable extent, helped by extensive supplies of motor vehicles from the United States and Britain, whereas the German forces, once feared as a 'blitzkrieg army', were engaged in an anachronistic transition from motor vehicles to horse-drawn wagons.<sup>19</sup> 'De-motorization'

<sup>13</sup> Fourth Army (see *ibid.*) had 225 assault guns, and Third Armoured Army 76 (see Pz.AOK 3, Ia, 'Sturmgeschützlage, Stand vom 16.6.1944', BA-MA RH 21-3/v. 326). Ninth Army also had 76 assault guns (see table 'Pak, St.Gesch., Art.Rohre der 9. Armee, Stand 24.6.1944', BA-MA RH 20-9/199, fo. 84. Second Army's 75 assault guns are not included here; see AOK 2, Ia, No. T 175/44 geh., 'Tagesmeldung vom 22.6.1944', BA-MA RH 20-2/902).

<sup>14</sup> Army Group Centre possessed a total of 3,236 artillery systems (of which 2,589 were in the Belorussian balcony); see Fremde Heere Ost (II c), Prüf'No. 1633, 'Kräftegegenüberstellung 1.6.-6.7.', BA-MA RH 2/2649, fo. 22. Of that total, 647 were with Second Army. A calculation based on the figures for the individual units gives a similar result. The 1,305 field guns of Third Armoured Army, Fourth, and Ninth Armies, are listed in detail in Hinze, 'Der Zusammenbruch' [1980], 278 ff. Second Army, on the other hand, possessed 260 field guns; see KR communication of 18 June 1944, 'Wöchentliche Zustandskurzberichte', BA-MA RH 20-2/901.

<sup>15</sup> See Kröker, *Fehleinschätzung*, 174–6.

<sup>16</sup> In the spring of 1944 the shortage of ammunition had already assumed 'catastrophic forms'; see Germany and the Second World War, v/II. 603.

<sup>17</sup> Geschichte des Großen Vaterländischen Krieges, iv. 187.

<sup>18</sup> Hinze, *Hitze, Frost und Pulverdampf*, 285.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. 283.

Table V.II.7. Air Fleet 6: aircraft operational on 20 June 1944

	Target strength	Actual strength	Operational
Strategic reconnaissance aircraft	50	44	21
Tactical reconnaissance aircraft	115	99	69
Fighters	124	104	61
Night fighters	48	43	30
Ground-attack aircraft	99	115	82
Night ground-attack aircraft	82	81	53
Bombers	386	434	286
<b>Total strength:</b>	<b>904</b>	<b>920</b>	<b>602</b>

Sources: OKL LwFüSt, Ia op 1, Prüf Nr. 1869, 20 June 1944, BA-MA: Kart 40/140; on target strength, see Gen.Qu. 6. Abt. (V), 27 June 1944, 'Einsatzbereitschaft der fliegenden Verbände, Stand: 20.6.1944', BA-MA, RL 2 III/731, fos. 1–46.

became the watchword, for two reasons. On the one hand, the German war industry was unable to deliver a sufficient number of motor vehicles. On the other, the fuel shortage was so acute that some motorized divisions were forced to give up their motor vehicles and convert to horses. The 14th and 36th Infantry Divisions had already been de-motorized. Now 18th and 25th Armoured Infantry Divisions had to give up all but 120 of their motor vehicles because the few vehicles available were to be combined in divisions deployed at major points of concentration.<sup>20</sup> The increasing immobility of the German forces is strikingly illustrated by the fact that Third Armoured Army, which did not possess a single tank, instead had 60,000 horses.<sup>21</sup> As a result of this process, the tempo of German military operations in the summer of 1944 was increasingly determined by the marching pace of the infantry and the trotting speed of the horse-drawn wagons. Long-distance troop movements could be effected only by rail, but the railway lines were a highly endangered Achilles' heel, since vast stretches of forest in the Belorussian hinterland were controlled by partisans.

In the course of the campaign so far, the Luftwaffe had repeatedly intervened to compensate for the weakness of the army, but its condition too was now giving rise to considerable concern. Admittedly, the build-up of Soviet air strength had been detected and Air Fleet 6, the force assigned to Army Group Centre, had been reinforced accordingly. Indeed, its actual strength of 920 aircraft was now greater than its target strength of 904.<sup>22</sup> But the lack of spare parts kept many planes grounded, so that only 602 were operational at the beginning of the offensive.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Kröker, *Febleinschätzung*, 176–7.

<sup>21</sup> PzAOK 3, O.Qu./Qu. 1, No. 612/44 g.Kdos., 4 June 1944, 'Monatl. Beurteilung der Versorgungslage', BA-MA RH 21-3/v. 670.

<sup>22</sup> The disproportionately large number of bombers is striking. It is explained by the fact that IV Air Corps contained a concentration of long-range bombers which were required to intervene on other fronts too. On this, see the sketches in Müller, *The German Air War*, 194, 203.

<sup>23</sup> OKL LwFüSt, Ia op 1, Prüf Nr. 1869, 20 June 1944, BA-MA: Kart 40/140. On the target strength see Gen.Qu. 6. Abt. (V), 27 June 1944, 'Einsatzbereitschaft der fliegenden Verbände, Stand: 20.6.1944', BA-MA R, L 2 III/731, fos. 1–46). The calculation was made with help from Ulf Balke (Freiburg).

And even these few aircraft were able to fly only a limited number of missions because fuel had been rationed. The necessary conclusion, therefore, is that the Luftwaffe was in the same situation as the army: the ‘operational air war’ of the initial phase of the war had degenerated into purely tactical support, and Soviet air superiority had assumed overwhelming proportions.<sup>24</sup>

*Direct Comparison of Forces:* Comparison of the Soviet attacking units at the ready on 22 June with the forces available to Army Group Centre yields the following ratios for Soviet superiority in the first phase of the operation: personnel 3.7:1, artillery 9.4:1, tanks 23:1, assault guns 3.6:1, aircraft 10.5:1. On closer examination, however, these figures still appear too favourable to the Germans. In June 1944 Army Group Centre had to fight a war on two fronts: on one side against a frontal attack by three-and-a-half Soviet army groups; on the other, in the rear against some 150,000 partisans.

The length of front which Army Group Centre had to cover was strikingly disproportionate to its front-line forces. Along its 1,100 kilometres of front the army group had 35 divisions (excluding reserves and security units),<sup>25</sup> that is, a 30-kilometre stretch per division. In the Belorussian balcony it had on average (without Second Army) two to three artillery cannon and one to two tanks or assault guns per kilometre of front.<sup>26</sup> The opposing Soviet rifle divisions attacked in breakthrough sections with an attack frontage of around 1.3 kilometres, deploying an average of 178 artillery cannon and 36 tanks or assault guns per kilometre (in staggered lines). The massive deployment of forces on the left wing of 1st Belorussian Front in the second phase was even more concentrated. There the attack frontage of a rifle division was around 1 kilometre, and an average of 356 artillery cannon and 83 tanks or assault guns were deployed per kilometre of front.<sup>27</sup>

In the summer of 1944 the German army had to fight a ‘poor man’s war’ with ‘burned-out’ units.<sup>28</sup> That assessment is particularly apt in the case of Army Group Centre. In the first years of the Russian campaign it had acquired a fearsome reputation, mainly because of its armoured operations. In the winter of 1943/4 it had still managed to beat back all enemy attacks and had been the only German army group to hold its lines until the spring. Since then, however, it had been only a shadow of its former self. To put it in a nutshell: in the summer of 1944 Army Group Centre was no longer capable of action *at operational level*. While its units could still carry out tactical defensive tasks, an operational-style defence involving large-scale counter-attacks (including attacks to relieve temporarily encircled ‘fortified places’) no longer appeared realistic, given its under-armed, under-motorized, and under-supplied units. Nor were there any reserves worth mentioning on the eastern front, as all available German troops had been tied down since 6 June by the invasion battle in Normandy. The only possibility of avoiding disaster was to conduct a delaying withdrawal to in-depth positions, taking advantage of the

<sup>24</sup> Muller, *The German Air War*, 226–7.

<sup>25</sup> The figure of 35 divisions includes Corp Detachments D and E.

<sup>26</sup> Niepold, ‘Führung der Heeresgruppe Mitte’, 62.

<sup>27</sup> ‘Belorusskaya operatsia v tsifrakh’, 77, 80.

<sup>28</sup> *KTB OKW*, iv. 28, 39.

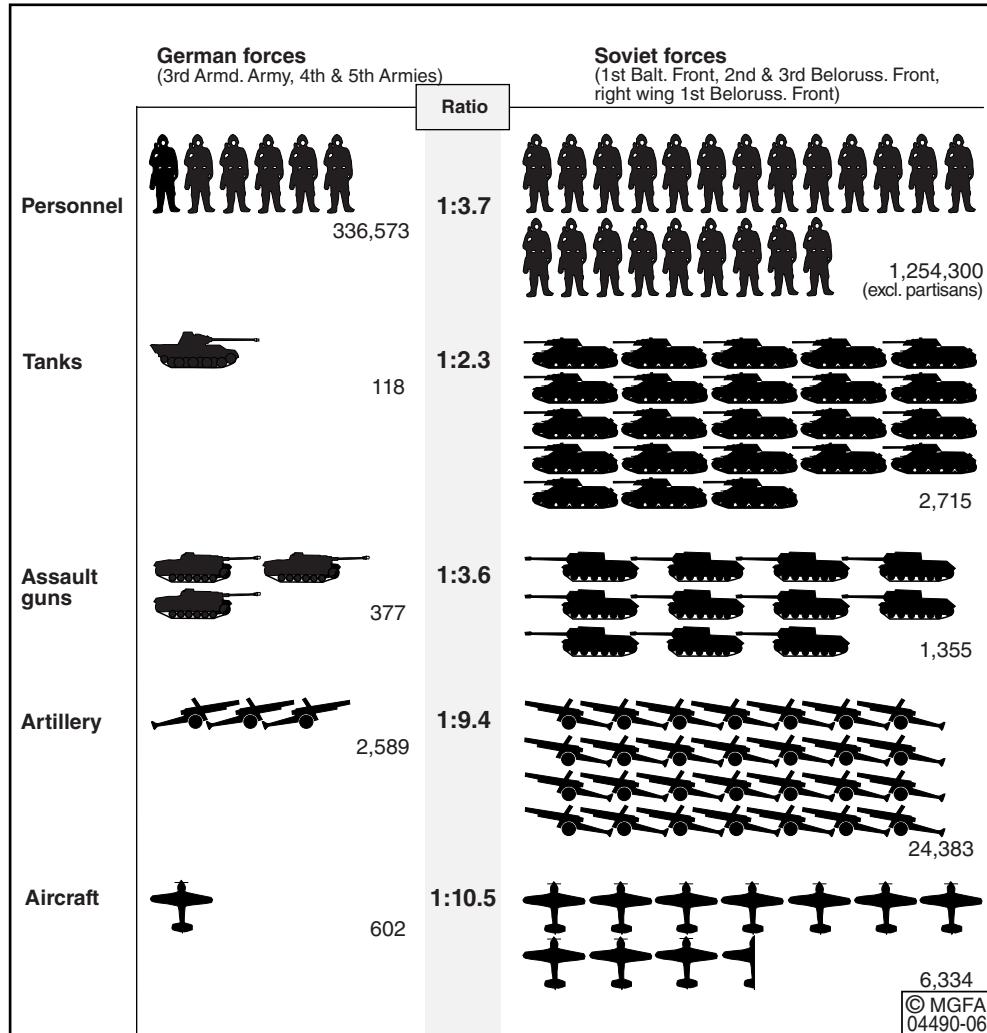


Diagram V.II.1 Strength ratios in the Belorussian balcony (22 June 1944)

river obstacles. But that was precisely what Hitler had forbidden. The conclusion is that, in the summer of 1944, the weakened German eastern front was no more than a façade. Army Group Centre in the Belorussian balcony was a house of cards about to collapse. The generals in charge must have realized that defeat was inevitable and that continuation of the war would involve the senseless sacrifice of still more victims.

## 2. THE MILITARY PLANNING

The operational plan imposed by Hitler—if, given its lack of operational depth, it can be described as such—was very simple. The army group's units were to defend on the foremost front in a linear alignment, alongside each other like a string of pearls. This static system was rendered particularly rigid by Hitler's designation of 'fortified places'.<sup>29</sup> In the Belorussian balcony, the front stretched in the form of a half-circle from Polotsk to Kovel:

- Third Armoured Army, under Col.-Gen. Georg-Hans Reinhardt, was deployed in the northern section, where defence of the Vitebsk salient was particularly problematic.
- In the centre of the Belorussian balcony stood Fourth Army, commanded by Col.-Gen. Gotthard Heinrici. Since, on Hitler's orders, the defensively favourable Dnieper was not to be used as the foremost front line, a large number of Fourth Army units were positioned in a narrow bridgehead further to the east, with their backs to the river. The main defensive point of concentration lay in the northern wing, where the terrain, favourable to armour, was traversed by the Smolensk–Minsk highway.
- Ninth Army, under Gen. Hans Jordan, had to defend the Bobruisk sector in the south-eastern part of the balcony.
- The Army Group's long southern flank, stretching along the Pripet marshes, was covered by Second Army, under Col.-Gen. Walter Weiss. That formation played no part during the first phase of the offensive, when the Soviet units concentrated on smashing the three armies in the northern part of the balcony.

Only two divisions of OKH and army group reserves were available immediately, while another, 20th Armoured Division, was being brought in and was still on its way.

The aim of the Soviet plan for Operation BAGRATION was to crush Army Group Centre and liberate Belorussia. The preliminary decision had already been taken in Moscow on 12 April, and on 31 May Stalin instructed the Stavka to convey the basic directive to the army fronts. The operation was code-named 'Bagration' after a Russian commander who died in 1812 in the battle against Napoleon. In view of the huge concentration of troops, the Stavka decided to assign its two best strategists to coordinate action at the front. Marshal Aleksandr Mikhailovich Vasilevsky was responsible for coordinating the actions of the northern attacking group, which consisted of 1st Baltic Front, under Gen. Ivan Khristoforovich, and 3rd Belorussian Front, under Col.-Gen. Ivan Danilovich Chernyakhovsky. Marshal Georgii Konstantinovich Zhukov was responsible for coordinating the actions of the army fronts deployed in the south, namely 2nd Belorussian Front, under Col.-Gen. Georgii Fedorovich Zakharov, and 1st Belorussian Front, under Gen. Konstantin Konstantinovich Rokossovsky. Only the right wing of 1st Belorussian

<sup>29</sup> See Part V, Chapter I.5.

Front was to take part immediately in the first phase of the offensive, but it had been reinforced to such an extent that it was even larger than a normal army front.

The attacking forces were deployed in two staggered rows. In front, the general armies, supported by armoured units used as battering-rams, had the task of forcing a breakthrough in the sectors of main effort. Behind them, the 'mobile groups' stood ready to make an operational thrust with massed armoured forces through the breaches opened up by the first row, and surround the German front-line units. In the case of 3rd Belorussian Front, for example, II Guards Armoured Corps, with 252 tanks and assault guns, was deployed as a 'mobile group' of 11th Guards Army, while the 'Cavalry Mechanized Group', with 322 fighting vehicles, served as a 'mobile group' of the army front. In addition, 5th Guards Armoured Army, with 524 fighting vehicles, which had initially been kept back as a Stavka reserve, was sent into battle as a further 'mobile group' of the army front.<sup>30</sup>

The plan was for the operation to be carried out in three phases. In the *first phase*, the front row of the attacking forces was to smash the German front-line units and achieve a breakthrough on the two wings of the attack, at Vitebsk in the north and Bobruisk in the south.

The plan for the *second phase* was a pincer attack from the wings to encircle the German troops in the Belorussian balcony, with 1st and 3rd Belorussian Fronts advancing concentrically on Minsk. In this phase the armoured units of the 'mobile groups' would be brought to the front. In the preliminary attack they were to push forward in depth regardless of open flanks and join up in the rear of the German front at Minsk. The force attacking the German balcony in the centre, 2nd Belorussian Front, was considerably weaker. Its task was to hold down the units of the German Fourth Army positioned in the Mogilev area and prevent them from withdrawing rapidly in depth. The main task of 1st Baltic Front, deployed on the right wing, was to protect the flank against possible counter-attacks by Army Group North.

In the *third phase*, for which planning had not yet been finalized, the remaining German units were to be chased westwards in the direction of the Polish border.

A special role in the operation was played by the left wing of 1st Belorussian Front, which stretched along the Pripet marshes to Kovel. It was not to start its attack immediately but to wait until the German armies had been encircled at Minsk and the units of the right wing, which were advancing westward, had reached Baranovichi.<sup>31</sup> It would then break through the northern wing of Army Group North Ukraine and swing north-west into the rear of Army Group Centre. However, this was not the 'major solution' of a thrust along the Vistula to the Baltic so feared by the German operations staffs, but only the 'lesser solution' of an advance on Warsaw. Nor was it planned that the units of the enormously reinforced 1st Ukrainian Front should take part in the swing towards Warsaw: the intention was for them to push frontally westwards. Thus, instead of outmanoeuvring the two German army groups located between the Baltic and the Pripet by

<sup>30</sup> Niepold, *Mittlere Ostfront*, 48.

<sup>31</sup> Rokossovsky, *A Soldier's Duty*, 195.

means of a thrust in the rear, the Red Army attacked Army Group Centre with its main forces directly from the east.

### 3. OPENING PHASE: THE OPERATIONAL BREAKTHROUGH ON THE WINGS (22 TO 28 JUNE 1944)

The start of the battle of Belorussia was staged by the partisans. While the Germans troops stared spellbound at the front ahead of them, they received a blow in the back from what was probably the largest partisan operation of the Second World War. Belorussia, with its vast forests and inaccessible marshes, was ideal territory for partisan warfare.<sup>32</sup> Around 143,000 partisans were active in the region, organized in 150 brigades and 49 independent detachments.<sup>33</sup> They were directed by the Red Army, which supplied them with weapons and ammunition. As well as these, there were autonomous partisan groups fighting both against the Germans and against Soviet rule. Army Group Centre had constantly to devote large numbers of troops to 'bandit repression'. Although it developed successful tactics, such as 'shrinking encirclement',<sup>34</sup> the enemy was too numerous for it make a lasting impact. The partisans were hard to catch, since they confined themselves to sporadic tactical stabs. Then came the great surprise: partisan action on an operational scale in the 'railway war'. On the night of 19 to 20 June all railway links in the hinterland of Army Group Centre as far as west of Minsk were severed by a total of 9,600 explosions. A further 2,500 explosive charges were discovered in time and defused. This operation partially paralysed supply traffic for more than 24 hours,<sup>35</sup> but it also had the probably unwanted side effect that all German troops in the area of Army Group Centre, down to the last man, were now on the alert. The blocking of the lines of retreat in the hinterland could only mean the start of a large-scale operation at the front.

As generally expected, the Red Army began its offensive against Army Group Centre on 22 June, the third anniversary of the German attack on the Soviet Union.<sup>36</sup> The attacks were staggered, however, to allow the bulk of the air combat forces to be concentrated each time on the sector of main effort. Third Armoured Army was attacked on 22 June, Fourth Army on the 23rd, and Ninth Army on

<sup>32</sup> On this, see *Germany and the Second World War*, v/II. 179–85.

<sup>33</sup> *Geschichte des Großen Vaterländischen Krieges*, iv. 174.

<sup>34</sup> These hunting methods were applied, for example, in the anti-partisan operations code-named CORMORANT, RAIN SHOWER, and SPRING FESTIVAL.

<sup>35</sup> OKH, FHO, appendix to Lagebericht Ost No. 1101, 21 June 1944, 'Feindlage (Banden)' No. 464, BA-MA RH 2/1944, fo. 111; OKH HGr Mitte Ia, No. T 2891/44 geh., 'Bandenmeldung vom 21.6.1944', BA-MA RH 19 II/245, fo. 26. Reports that 40,000 railway tracks were blown up and 147 trains derailed in the course of that night (see, e.g., Grenkevich, *The Soviet Partisan Movement*, 259) are clearly propaganda exaggerations.

<sup>36</sup> Some Soviet accounts give the date of the actual start of the offensive as 23 June, considering 22 June as a day of preliminary attacks. According to the German view, however, the attacks on 22 June were already so massive as to mark the beginning of the battle of Belorussia.

the 24th. The Wehrmacht had been fighting the Red Army for years and thought it knew the enemy inside out. Now, after the long summer pause, came a great surprise. The Soviet attacks were conducted with unimaginably superior numbers and the force of an avalanche. Moreover, the Red Army did not attack, as it always had done, on the broadest possible front. This time it concentrated its forces tightly on the German pattern at the points of main effort, and in those sectors Soviet superiority attained grotesque proportions. For example, 3rd Belorussian Front deployed 204 cannon per kilometre of front against only two to three per kilometre on the German side.<sup>37</sup> Since the Soviet artillery was, for the first time, firing a double rolling barrage 'of operational dimensions', two curtains of fire swept back and forth over the German trenches for more than two hours without pause. Rejecting the tactic which had proved effective up till then, Hitler had refused to allow the front-line troops to withdraw from the foremost trenches to a major battle line in the rear just before the start of the enemy attack. His obstinacy sealed the fate of many German soldiers, since much of the foremost defence system was literally pulverized.

The Soviet air force was an even greater surprise. After suffering extensive destruction in the early months of the campaign, it had been gradually rebuilt at great effort. Now, with large numbers of German aircraft tied down by the invasion in the west, it ruled the skies. In the sector of Army Group Centre the Luftwaffe was able to deploy only 61 fighters against a total of 6,334 Soviet aircraft (see Tables V.II.7 and V.II.4). Maj.-Gen. Schürmann, who managed to escape from the pocket to the east of Minsk, reported the 'absolutely enormous deployment of enemy ground-attack aircraft and the total absence of our own planes'.<sup>38</sup>

In the weeks preceding the offensive, the commanders-in-chief of the German armies had warned repeatedly that the trenches were seriously undermanned, with an average of only 80 infantrymen per kilometre of front. The German lines were now attacked by an average of 750 Soviet infantrymen per kilometre, a numerical superiority of almost 10:1. And that calculation takes account of only the first wave of attacking forces. If the following waves are included, the ratio increases to at least 15:1.<sup>39</sup> That figure, however, is purely theoretical, since it assumes a 100 per cent survival rate for the defenders. In reality, not many were left after the barrage of fire by the Soviet artillery and aircraft. In addition, the Red Army already employed large masses of tanks and assault guns in the first wave of the attack. So all hell broke loose on the German front-line forces, who had no chance whatever of withstanding the attack. It was now up to the higher operations staffs to react to this catastrophic development.

<sup>37</sup> 'Belorusskaya operatsia v tsifrakh', 80; Niepold, 'Führung der Heeresgruppe Mitte', 62.

<sup>38</sup> AOK 4 Ia, No. 2050/44 g.K., 'Die Entwicklung der Lage bei der 4. Armee während der russischen Sommeroffensive 1944 und die Vorgänge bei den abgesprengten Verbänden 22.6. bis 5.7.1944', BA-MA RH 20-4/618, 8.

<sup>39</sup> Niepold, *Mittlere Ostfront*, 58.

### (a) The Disaster of Third Armoured Army at Vitebsk

Col.-Gen. Reinhardt now had to carry out a defensive task which he had vehemently opposed. In his view, the Vitebsk salient was a trap, and the German troops had to get out before it was too late. Hitler, however, was obsessed with the idea of defending the Vitebsk ‘fortified place’ to the last extremity. Immediately after the start of the Soviet offensive, the German forces were faced with the scenario of which Reinhardt had warned, that is, a pincer attack on either side of Vitebsk. On the east of the salient, IX Army Corps was attacked by 1st Baltic Front’s 43rd Army and 6th Guards Army, followed by the I Army Corps ‘mobile group’.<sup>40</sup> On the south-east, VI Army Corps was attacked by 3rd Belorussian Front’s 39th and 5th Armies, followed by the armoured units of the Cavalry Mechanized Group. After only two days the front collapsed in both sectors. The Soviet armies which had broken through now swung in concentrically, threatening to encircle LIII Army Corps in Vitebsk. On 22 June, given the force of the Soviet attack, Col.-Gen. Reinhardt had already requested permission to withdraw parts of his army’s left wing to a rearward position. Field Marshal Ernst Busch initially played it down, arguing that ‘once we start moving back, we’ll soon be completely adrift’,<sup>41</sup> but as the situation became increasingly acute, he soon had to accede to Reinhard’s request. Nevertheless, since Vitebsk had been declared a ‘fortified place’, it was, so to speak, beyond the field marshal’s territorial jurisdiction, and was subject to Hitler’s sole authority.

The fate of Army Group Centre was decided on 24 June. On that date it would still have been possible to avoid the catastrophe and withdraw the front-line units threatened with encirclement and destruction. But the tragedy of Vitebsk quintessentially illustrates Hitler’s operational dilettantism and cynical inhumanity. The battle of Vitebsk was fought not only on the battlefield but also inside the German command, between the Führer and his generals. Col.-Gen. Reinhardt, who only four months earlier had been hailed by the press as the ‘victor of Vitebsk’ after successfully beating off the Soviet winter offensive, now requested, indeed adjured, his superiors to abandon the city. The fate of almost five divisions threatened with encirclement was in the balance, and the whole of the Third Armoured Army front was in danger of collapse. LIII Army Corps, deployed in the Vitebsk salient, had initially been spared by the Soviet attacking forces, which had passed by to the left and right of it, forcing back the two corps on the wings of Third Armoured Army. On 24 June there was a wide gap between those two major formations, through which more and more Soviet troops were pouring in the rear of LIII Army Corps. That morning Col.-Gen. Kurt Zeitzler, the OKH chief of staff, arrived at Army Group Centre HQ in Minsk to inform himself about the critical situation. Field Marshal Busch explained that the front could no longer be held, and urgently requested the abandonment of Vitebsk and withdrawal to the Tiger Line.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>40</sup> Bagramyan, *So schritten wir zum Sieg*, 268 ff., 278 ff.

<sup>41</sup> KTB HGr Mitte, 22 June 1944, BA-MA RH 19 II/197, 1254.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 24 June 1944, 1270.

Zeitzler flew straight back to Berchtesgaden to convey the request in person to the Führer. From there, at 15.20, he again telephoned Col.-Gen. Reinhardt, who insisted that the last possible moment had come for ordering the breakout.<sup>43</sup> Immediately afterwards, however, Zeitzler had to pass on Hitler's incomprehensible decision that Vitebsk, as a fortified place, must still be held.<sup>44</sup> A few minutes later Reinhardt received an alarming radio message. Soviet troops had just taken possession of the last passable road to Vitebsk, thereby almost closing the ring round LIII Army Corps.<sup>45</sup> The bad news was immediately conveyed to Hitler via Busch, but the dictator continued to insist that the city be defended. Meanwhile, precious time was being lost. Finally, the Führer decided on a strange compromise: the Vitebsk fortified place would continue to be held, but only by a single division, while the bulk of LIII Army Corps was given permission to break out to the west.<sup>46</sup>

A more foolish decision is hard to imagine. On the one hand, it was impossible for a single division to defend Vitebsk on its own, as the defensive positions had been constructed for three divisions. On the other, every man was needed in order to force a breakout and subsequently close the huge gap in the front, which had meanwhile been pushed back far to the west. In response to this half-measure, Field Marshal Busch tried once again, that same evening, to persuade Hitler to release all the units for the breakout attempt. But Hitler refused, insisting that, 'for political reasons (the threat of defection by Finland), Vitebsk had to be held at all costs'.<sup>47</sup> That argument made no sense either, since the threatened encirclement and destruction of an army corps in Vitebsk would necessarily cause much more damage in terms of foreign policy than a successful breakout. Hitler's considerations of political prestige were only an excuse. What he was really concerned about was his own prestige. For him, Vitebsk was a precedent. If he gave up the city of his own free will, that would mean the general abandonment of his principle of 'fortified places' and his whole doctrine of static defence. So he kept putting off permission for the breakout until it was too late. For that reason too, not all divisions were allowed to break out: at least one, 206th Infantry Division, had to remain in Hitler's imaginary fortress. He maintained that it was too soon to abandon the Vitebsk fortified place, which needed to be held for at least another six or seven days. And so the men of 206th Infantry Division were to be sacrificed to the dictator's folly.

The next day, 25 June, he reaffirmed his intention: '206th Div. shall hold Vitebsk until relieved'.<sup>48</sup> This order met with bewilderment and outrage at Army Group Centre HQ.<sup>49</sup> It was not only a lie, but a demonstration of pure cynicism with regard to the desperate situation of the encircled troops. The dictator had

<sup>43</sup> Heidkämper, *Vitebsk*, 153–4.

<sup>44</sup> KTB 3. Pz. Armee, 24 June 1944, BA-MA RH 21-3/v. 345, 8, fo. 59; Ferngespräche O.B., 24 June 1944, BA-MA RH 21-3/v. 394, 2.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid. The encirclement of Vitebsk was completed the same day at around 23.00, when tanks of 39th Army, which was attacking from the south, crossed the Dvina at Ostrovno. Advance troops of 43rd Army were already on the north bank.

<sup>46</sup> KTB HGr Mitte, 24 June 1944, BA-MA RH 19 II/197, 1271.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid. 1272.

<sup>48</sup> See Gackenholz, 'Der Zusammenbruch der Heeresgruppe Mitte', 460.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid. 463.

neither the possibility nor the intention to liberate the encircled units by means of a relief attack. Friedrich Gollwitzer, the commanding general of LIII Army Corps, considered himself no longer bound by Hitler's order, and intended to break out with all units. But the tragedy now took on farcical overtones. Despite the fact that the order for 206th Infantry Division to hold Vitebsk had already been delivered by radio message, the Führer demanded in all seriousness that a general staff officer of Third Armoured Army be parachuted into Vitebsk in order to deliver it personally to General Gollwitzer in writing.<sup>50</sup> Col.-Gen. Reinhardt, however, was not prepared to play a part in the farce, and asked Field Marshal Busch to 'inform the Führer that I refuse to order a general staff officer or any other soldier to be parachuted into Vitebsk'.<sup>51</sup> When Reinhardt explained that only he personally would perform that task, Hitler withdrew his order. Meanwhile, the situation was becoming increasingly hopeless. On 25 and 26 June the encircled defenders made several breakout attempts. As the enclosing ring had already been massively reinforced, however, it became clear that permission to break out had come much too late. In the early hours of 27 June, when much of the front was already 80 kilometres from Vitebsk, the men of LIII Army Corps tried once again, with the courage of despair, to break out to the west. The following radio message was received; it was sent at 03.45 from a point some 13 kilometres south-west of Vitebsk: 'Breakthrough by night with pers. involvement of CG [commanding general] started successfully'.<sup>52</sup> That was the last sign of life from LIII Army Corps. Of the 28,000 men trapped in the encirclement, around 10,000 were taken prisoner,<sup>53</sup> while most of the others perished in the forests and marshes of Belorussia. Only a few units got through to the German lines.

In the maelstrom of the destruction of LIII Army Corps, the whole of Third Armoured Army threatened to break up. Through the gap in the centre of the front, which had widened to 100 kilometres, the Soviet units, mainly the Cavalry Mechanized Group and the newly brought-in 5th Guards Army, were pushing westwards with almost no resistance. German VI Army Corps, deployed on the right wing, was forced so far south by the advancing Soviet forces that it had to be assigned to the neighbouring Fourth Army. Reinhardt now had available only IX Army Corps on the left wing, which consisted of two divisions reinforced by a conglomeration of rear service units, security units, and fragments of combat units. The army was left with only 70 artillery cannon. Since, on Hitler's orders, 252nd Infantry Division had not been allowed to withdraw in time behind the Ulla, the retreat turned into an undisciplined flight in which many soldiers were able to save their bare skins, quite literally, only by swimming across the river.<sup>54</sup> Every minor withdrawal required authorization from above, and that had to be obtained 'in

<sup>50</sup> Prior telephone call: 'Befehl Feldmarschall im Gespräch an O.B., 25.6.1944, 18.45 Uhr', BA-MA RH 21-3/v. 354, fo. 89; KTB 3. Pz.Armee, 25 June 1944, BA-MA RH 21-3/v. 345, 11.

<sup>51</sup> Heidkämper, *Vitebsk*, 160.

<sup>52</sup> 'Funkspruch 340—dringend,—27.6. 0345, aufg. 27.6. 0831', BA-MA RH 21-3/v. 392.

<sup>53</sup> *Geschichte des zweiten Weltkrieges 1936–1945*, ix. 62.

<sup>54</sup> Heidkämper, *Vitebsk*, 167.

most cases not even from the army group' but only from Führer headquarters.<sup>55</sup> By the time the order finally reached the troops, if it ever did, it had usually long been overtaken by events. In a subsequent analysis by Third Armoured Army, we read: 'during those days scarcely an order or decision reached the army which did not have to be marked "too late".<sup>56</sup> Col.-Gen. Reinhardt was so enraged by this constant interference in his conduct of operations that he applied to be relieved of his command.<sup>57</sup> Field Marshal Busch refused, however, knowing how much support he had from Third Armoured Army's commander-in-chief. In the chaos of a withdrawal battle against overwhelming superiority, Reinhardt employed the only correct tactics, using the remains of his army as 'one large blocking unit' to 'prevent breakthroughs' by means of delaying action.<sup>58</sup> His situation was made worse by the fact that, following a thrust by 1st Baltic Front on the northern wing, the link with Army Group North on the left of his army was also broken. Although the gap was only about 10 kilometres wide at first, the erosion continued in the following weeks until Reinhardt's forces were completely cut off from Army Group North.

### (b) The Withdrawal of Fourth Army at Mogilev

Vitebsk was only the beginning of the catastrophe. Fourth Army, deployed further to the south, was facing an even worse disaster. The situation was particularly critical on the left wing at Orsha, where, on 23 June, XXVII Army Corps was attacked head-on by three Soviet armies. But the real danger arose when the southern wing of neighbouring Third Armoured Army was broken through and a gap opened up between the two armies. The mass of 3rd Belorussian Front stormed westward through the breach, following an operational preliminary attack by the armoured units of II Guards Armoured Corps, the Cavalry Mechanized Group, and, above all, 5th Guards Armoured Army. The main thrust followed the course of the Moscow–Minsk highway. Remnants of VI Army Corps, which really belonged to Third Armoured Army but had been forced southwards, were now deployed to protect the increasingly long left flank. The right flank, where XII Army Corps was positioned, was also hanging the air, since the lines of the neighbouring Ninth Army had been overrun at Rogachev. In the centre of the Fourth Army front stood XXXIX Armoured Corps, which in fact consisted of four weak infantry divisions. It was able to withstand the pressure from 2nd Belorussian Front for only a short time before Soviet units broke through the main battle line and pushed forward to the Dnieper behind the German front, to the north of Mogilev. The Red Army's numerical superiority was so great that often a single German battalion

<sup>55</sup> General Staff Major [Hellmuth] Balve, Pz.AOK 3/Id, 31 Aug.1944, 'Gründe für die Vernichtung Großer Teile der 3. Panzerarmee in der Sommerschlacht 1944', BA-MA RH 21-3/v. 352, 4, fo. 18.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Personal diary of Col.-Gen. Reinhardt, entry for 25 June 1944, BA-MA, Reinhardt papers, N 245/3, fo. 70.

<sup>58</sup> KTB 3. Pz.Armye, 28 June 1944, BA-MA RH 21-3/v. 345, fo. 111.

was pitted against one or two Soviet divisions.<sup>59</sup> In this critical situation the only way to avoid encirclement and destruction was to withdraw to rearward positions as fast as possible.

On the evening of 24 June, given the impossibility of fulfilling the defensive mission assigned to Fourth Army, Field Marshal Busch had already applied unsuccessfully to Hitler for permission to withdraw the front. The next day, with the enemy pressure constantly increasing, Busch authorized the partial withdrawal of two divisions—a wholly inadequate measure that further aggravated the situation of the divisions remaining in the foremost positions, which were now even more exposed. Thereupon General Kurt von Tippelskirch, in command of Fourth Army while Col.-Gen. Heinrici was on leave, took a brave decision. On his own authority he ordered the whole army to withdraw to the Dnieper Line, a prepared defensive position between the existing main battle line and the Dnieper. When Busch learned of this, he reacted very sharply: ‘You are acting contrary to Hitler’s orders.’ He ordered the troops to return to their former positions, accompanying his order by the instruction: ‘notify on completion’.<sup>60</sup> Clearly the field marshal, in his dedication to Hitler, had lost touch with reality. In the chaotic situation of a collapsing front, such an order was bound to create total confusion. The German divisions were in the process of retreat, pursued by an enemy who had already caught up with them in several places. Now that retreat was supposed to be halted in the middle of the night, in darkness, and turned into an attack in the opposite direction, although the former positions were already in Soviet hands. General von Tippelskirch, however, found a way out by framing his new order in diplomatic terms: the troops were instructed to ‘remain on all sections of the front that were not under attack [...] until attacked and forced back by superior enemy forces’.<sup>61</sup> The corps commanding generals immediately understood that a back door was open to them, and managed to continue the retreat in almost all places. Things had gone so far that German generals had to resort to trickery and, often enough, false reports in order to save their troops from the senseless destruction caused by Hitler’s ‘stand firm’ paranoia.

The following day, 26 June, Busch flew to Berchtesgaden to present Hitler with the extent of the danger facing his troops. But the Führer was primarily interested in how the Mogilev und Orsha ‘fortified places’ were holding up as supporting pillars of the Dnieper Line. His ‘stand firm’ orders had long been overtaken by events, however, since Soviet advance forces had already crossed the Dnieper before the German units, which had been pulled back far too late, had been able to establish a new front. But the real danger was brewing on the wings. North and south of Fourth Army, Soviet armoured units had advanced far to the west and were threatening the lines of retreat. Field Marshal Busch still felt bound by Hitler’s

<sup>59</sup> Niepold, *Mittlere Ostfront*, 119.

<sup>60</sup> Niepold, ‘Führung der Heeresgruppe Mitte’, 66; similarly KTB 4. Armee, 25 June 1944, BA-MA RH 20-4/554. See also ‘Die Entwicklung der Lage bei der 4. Armee (22.6.-5.7.1944)’, BA-MA RH 20-4/618, 13.

<sup>61</sup> KTB 4. Armee, 25 June 1944, BA-MA RH 20-4/554.

directive that the withdrawal to the Berezina should be carried out only in stages, but the next day the situation accelerated and the race to the river began. At first with the silent consent of General von Tippelskirch, then with the permission of the army group, the divisions set out on the perilous march west. Before them lay a vast area of forest and marshland which had only a few roads and was under concentrated attack by the enemy air force. The terrain was controlled by partisans, who had destroyed the river crossings and lay in ambush. The roads on the edge of the primeval thicket were already being used by the Red Army to pursue the retreating German forces. Its armoured units rolled westward with infantry riding on the tanks. Alongside, sometimes even in between the enemy columns, the German units attempted to fight their way through. Some were encircled but fiercely attacked the encircling forces, forcing them further and further to the west. A number of units forced a way to the Berezina through several encirclements and were already in sight of the road to Minsk, their escape destination, when they met with a dreadful surprise. After escaping tactical encirclement by Soviet divisions, they unexpectedly found themselves in an operational encirclement by two Soviet army fronts, whose two pincers were beginning to close irresistibly at Minsk. In this situation, despite the general retreat of the army, Hitler continued to demand the defence of Mogilev and Orsha, insisting that the two fortified places be held 'for at least a few days'.<sup>62</sup> In reality, by the time the order reached Fourth Army, both towns had long been in the hands of the Soviet attackers.<sup>63</sup>

### (c) The Encirclement of Ninth Army at Bobruisk

Ninth Army was the last to be attacked but the most swiftly overtaken by disaster. The main reason for this was the particularly overwhelming quantitative superiority of the Soviet forces, but the brilliant operational command of Konstantin Rokossovsky, the commander-in-chief of 1st Belorussian Front, was also an important factor.<sup>64</sup> Against initial resistance from Stalin and the Stavka, Rokossovsky had implemented the plan of a pincer attack on Bobruisk from the east and south. It was compounded by the surprise effect of the massive deployment of tanks in a marshland area generally considered impassable. The Russian troops, accustomed to that sort of terrain, again proved their talent for improvisation by transporting weapons and material on swamp sledges. In the previous weeks, moreover, they had secretly built numerous corduroy tracks for heavy vehicles. Although the work of the Soviet sappers had by no means gone unnoticed everywhere, the Germans did not have enough artillery ammunition to disrupt the construction activities effectively.

On the morning of 24 June all hell broke loose on Ninth Army. The hail of shells from the Soviet artillery was so dense that the German infantrymen, and even the gun crews, scarcely dared leave cover. The Soviet air attacks, especially the waves of

<sup>62</sup> Telex OB HGr Mitte, Ia No. 8141/44 g.Kdos. Chefs., 28 June 1944, BA-MA RH 20-4/565.

<sup>63</sup> See Lemm, 'Die Verteidigung Mogilevs', 352 ff., 363 ff.

<sup>64</sup> On 29 June, immediately after Bobruisk was taken, Rokossovsky was promoted to the rank of marshal of the Soviet Union.

ground-attack aircraft, also reached unprecedented intensity. On the left wing, XXXV Army Corps was subjected to the onslaught of two massively reinforced armies, followed by the Soviet IX Armoured Corps. According to Soviet accounts, 27 Soviet infantry battalions plus 15 companies of sappers were deployed on every 5 kilometres of front against three German battalions.<sup>65</sup> The defenders were forced back but were nevertheless able to prevent an operational breakthrough. The attack on XXXXI Armoured Corps (a complete misnomer, given its lack of tanks) in the southern sector at Parichi was even fiercer. On the first day the two Soviet armies achieved a breakthrough 30 kilometres wide and 10 kilometres deep. In the evening, when I Guards Armoured Corps was sent forward in a second wave, the breakthrough increased to a total depth of 20 kilometres.<sup>66</sup> The next day Rokossovsky deployed the Cavalry Mechanized Group in a third wave to exploit the breakthrough in operational depth.

The great lack of an operational reserve on the eastern front now became frighteningly clear to the German generals. Army Group Centre had a reserve of only one-and-a-half infantry divisions, although 20th Armoured Division had also been assigned to it in view of the identified Soviet offensive intentions. The confusion surrounding deployment of that armoured division shows the dilemma facing the German operations staffs, since it was needed simultaneously at several critical points. On 24 June it was first sent to stabilize the situation at a breach on the northern wing of Ninth Army. Then, when alarming reports of a breakthrough in the southern sector were received, Field Marshal Busch ordered 20th Armoured Division to make a 180-degree turn in the middle of the attack and set off in the opposite direction. It now had to march 100 kilometres at night on bad roads. By the time it began its attack at noon on 25 June, it was already too late. Its remaining 40 operational tanks made little impact, given the breadth of the enemy breakthrough. Although the division managed to destroy 213 enemy tanks at Bobruisk within a few days, this was operationally insignificant in view of the overwhelming Soviet superiority.<sup>67</sup> The senseless transposition of 20th Armoured Division calls for the following remarks: its deployment on the northern wing came too late, but its sudden redeployment on the southern wing was an even greater mistake, because it was bound to arrive there too late. As a result, it was unable to achieve anything on either sector of the front. But even an attack by the division's 40 tanks at the best possible time and place could certainly not have stopped the 900 or so fighting vehicles which Rokossovsky deployed on the front sector in question.<sup>68</sup> Hitler blamed the failure on the commander-in-chief of Ninth Army, General Jordan, who was dismissed and replaced by General Nikolaus von Vormann, but the

<sup>65</sup> According to an account by the Frunze Military Academy in Moscow, quoted in Hinze, 'Der Zusammenbruch' [1980], 133–4.

<sup>66</sup> Rokossovsky, *A Soldier's Duty*, 201.

<sup>67</sup> On this, see Hinze's chronicle of the division, *Hitze, Frost und Pulverdampf*, 294.

<sup>68</sup> Ninth Army did not possess a single tank, but only—as already pointed out—76 assault guns. It was faced on the right wing of 1st Belorussian Front by a concentration of 896 tanks and assault guns; see 'The Defeat of the Germans in Belorussia', 871.

dictator's anger was directed at the wrong person, since Field Marshal Busch had been solely responsible for the decision to give up the army group's reserve.<sup>69</sup>

Events now escalated rapidly, and not only because of the massive Soviet attacks. On 27 June the crisis of command in Ninth Army far exceeded the confusion which Hitler's constant interference had caused in the other two armies. XXXV Army Corps and XXXX Armoured Corps had been forced back into the area around Bobruisk and were almost completely enclosed. Now the army group finally gave permission to break out from the threatening encirclement, which Ninth Army HQ had been urgently demanding for 24 hours. At 09.00 Ninth Army received the long-overdue order for a breakout by both corps in the direction of Osipovich, supported by an attack by 20th Armoured Division.<sup>70</sup> Immediately, a mad rush began by troop components of all kinds attempting to escape through the corridor still held open.

Then, at 09.15, came a counter-order from the army group, at the instigation of Führer headquarters, cancelling permission for the breakout.<sup>71</sup> Instead of breaking out, the encircled units were now ordered to continue defending the area around Bobruisk. Chaotic scenes ensued. While some troop components obeyed the order and streamed back into the pocket, they collided at the intersections with other units which had not received the counter-order or did not believe that such an insane order could be genuine. The chaos was made even worse by the fact that several units had been left without commanders. The commander of 134th Infantry Division committed suicide out of despair.

Around 16.00 Ninth Army received yet another counter-order almost identical to that received at 09.00, again ordering retreat to the north-west.<sup>72</sup> But by now it was too late, since the pincer attack by the two Soviet armoured corps had meanwhile closed the pocket. Some 70,000 men were caught in the trap. 'Total confusion! Operational madness'—such were the comments in Ninth Army HQ on the orders issued by the higher command.<sup>73</sup> When the second counter-order was received around 16.00, the army's chief of staff exclaimed: 'It's a madhouse! That's the very thing we had to call off this morning.'<sup>74</sup>

The situation was even more paradoxical, however, since Hitler's permission to break out did not apply to all troop units.<sup>75</sup> As in Vitebsk and Mogilev, one of the encircled divisions was ordered to remain in the Bobruisk pocket. This time the victim was 383th Infantry Division. Hitler's disastrous decision showed once again how little he cared about the fate of his troops. He was more concerned about his

<sup>69</sup> On this, see Kröker, *Fehleinschätzung*, 286.

<sup>70</sup> KTB 9. Armee, 27 June 1944, BA-MA RH 20-9/176.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.; see also 'Gefechtsbericht der 9. Armee über die Schlacht in Weißruthenien', BA-MA RH 20-9/201, 11.

<sup>72</sup> KTB 9. Armee, 27 June 1944, BA-MA RH 20-9/176.

<sup>73</sup> AOK 9, handwritten notes by the keeper of the war diary, 26 June 1944, BA-MA RH 20-9/177, fo. 88.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 27 June 1944, fo. 91, reverse side.

<sup>75</sup> Hitler did not authorize abandonment of the Bobruisk 'fortified place' until 28 June, by which time the order was totally meaningless; see KTB HGr Mitte, 28 June 1944, BA-MA RH 19 II/197, fo. 138.

obsession with 'fortified places'. But reality made nonsense of Hitler's order. Since every breakout attempt failed, all the other encircled divisions also had to remain in the Bobruisk pocket. All attempts to break out to the north were thwarted, above all, by the Soviet air force. In the space of one-and-a-half hours the major intersection at Titovka alone, where the columns of trucks piled up, was attacked in waves by a total of 526 aircraft from 16th Air Army.<sup>76</sup> For Ninth Army, the situation on the evening of 27 June was that the bulk of two of its corps was encircled, while the remaining LV Army Corps had been transferred to Second Army, its neighbour on the right. Although preparations for a relief attack were under way, Ninth Army had ceased to exist as an operationally available major formation.

On 28 June Field Marshal Busch was removed from his post as commander-in-chief, and his dismissal met with obvious satisfaction within the army group. He had shown great loyalty to his supreme commander but astonishingly little consideration for the troops entrusted to his command. While his army group was suffering a catastrophe without precedent, he took not a single independent decision but carried out Hitler's stupid 'stand firm' orders like a puppet in marshal's uniform. A typical description of his 'command activity' at the time reads: 'No combat instructions at all from the army group. Only stand firm, stand firm!'<sup>77</sup> Seldom had a top-level military commander on the eastern front failed so strikingly as Busch. Although he clearly recognized that Hitler's static defence concept was doomed to failure, he caved in completely after his reprimand at Führer headquarters on 20 May. From then on, he no longer dared properly report the alarming build-up of enemy forces against his army for fear of provoking his Führer once again. He carried out Hitler's 'stand firm' orders against his better judgement, thereby condemning tens of thousands of his troops to their doom. Thus, he remained to the end the faithful servant of his master, until the latter finally dropped him, although he had always carried out his instructions to the letter. Now he had to render his leader one last service by assuming the role of scapegoat.

#### 4. THE FORMATION OF THE POCKET AT MINSK (28 JUNE TO 4 JULY)

When Field Marshal Walter Model, the new commander-in-chief of the army group, arrived on 28 June, he was confronted with a crisis that could hardly have been worse. The German front had broken down over a breadth of more than 400 kilometres, and Soviet units had advanced in places as far as 150 kilometres to the west. As well as two army corps, almost all the army group's divisions were either already encircled or threatened with encirclement. Until then, Fourth Army had been attacked only head-on by the relatively weak 2nd Belorussian Front, but the Soviet plan for its twofold concentric envelopment was now clearly apparent. In the

<sup>76</sup> *Geschichte des zweiten Weltkrieges 1939–1945*, ix. 65.

<sup>77</sup> AOK 9, handwritten notes by the keeper of the war diary, 26 June 1944, BA-MA RH 20-9/177.

first phase the Red Army had put the main effort on the wings against Third Armoured Army and Ninth Army. After the encirclement of strong German forces at Vitebsk and Bobruisk, however, the armoured units of 1st and 3rd Belorussian Fronts swung inwards towards Minsk. As a result, Fourth Army was not only in danger of being cut off in its withdrawal from the Drut to the Berezina, but was also threatened in its rear with enclosure by another huge pincer movement at Minsk, 150 kilometres further west. The trap had already closed on Ninth Army, most of whose units were encircled in the area of Bobruisk, but there was still a chance of breaking through the still weak Soviet encircling forces in the north. Before the start of the Soviet summer offensive Ninth Army HQ had already warned of an intended operational pincer movement, as had Foreign Armies East. Now a further threat appeared, which no one had taken into account. After the encirclement of numerous units and the concentrated thrust on Minsk, the Soviet command was clearly planning a third phase of the offensive in which it would push further west beyond Minsk and take possession of the transport nodes of Molodechno and Baranovichi.<sup>78</sup> If that happened, Army Group Centre would finally be cut off from any possibility of westerly retreat. The situation called for all units still capable of combat to force their way west as fast as possible, out of the deadly trap.

That was precisely when Hitler issued one of the most absurd ‘stand firm’ orders of the war, Operational Order No. 8, according to which the withdrawal was to be halted well to the east, right in the middle of the emerging Minsk pocket, along a categorically designated holding line. By the time that order arrived on 29 June, however, that line—from Lake Chernovo in the south, through Berezino, to Lake Lukomlskoye and ‘the present position of Third Armoured Army’—lagged one or two days behind actual developments and sounded totally anachronistic. Hitler further insisted that ‘no longer shall an inch of ground be given up without a fight’.<sup>79</sup> He ordered withdrawal to the designated holding line to be carried out ‘as slowly as ever possible’, and went so far as to demand a counter-attack, ‘with ruthless deployment of all available forces’ (even deeper into the trap) in the event that ‘the enemy has already passed this line’.<sup>80</sup>

With such an immense disaster looming, only a counter-attack of operational proportions could have gone some way towards saving the situation. But the forces Hitler so grandly referred to, which were supposed to achieve a turnaround ‘through rapid, hard offensive blows’,<sup>81</sup> turned out to be two incomplete armoured divisions capable only of inflicting tactical pinpricks. Since Army Group Centre no longer had any reserves worth mentioning, Army Group North had to sacrifice its only large armoured unit, 12th Armoured Division, and 5th Armoured Division was transferred from Army Group North Ukraine. The deployment of those two divisions, which first had to be brought in by rail, is described in the following section.

<sup>78</sup> KTB HGr Mitte, 28 June 1944, BA-MA RH 19 II/197, fos. 128–31, and KTB HGr Mitte, 1 Jul. 1944, BA-MA RH 19 II/198, 3.

<sup>79</sup> OB HGr Mitte, Ia No. 8141/44 g.Kdos. Chefs., telex of 28 June 1944, BA-MA RH 20-4/565, 1.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid. 2. <sup>81</sup> Ibid.

### (a) The Counter-Attacks by 5th and 12th Armoured Divisions

The directives for 12th Armoured Division, which was assigned the task of relieving the encircled units of Ninth Army, make it absolutely clear that Hitler was living in a military dream world. The so-called ‘intervention group’, which was pitted against the overwhelming force of 1st Belorussian Front, consisted on paper of two armoured divisions. One of those divisions, however, namely 20th Armoured Division, was itself already trapped in the Bobruisk pocket when the order was issued. So all hopes rested with 12th Armoured Division, whose designation was nothing more than a euphemism anyway, since it was at best half a division and lacked some of its structural components, for example the armoured reconnaissance battalion and the anti-aircraft artillery battalion. As for tanks, this ‘armoured division’ had only one tank battalion (II Battalion of 29th Armoured Infantry Regiment) with 44 Panzer IIIs and IVs.<sup>82</sup> There were delays in transporting the units from Army Group North, so they arrived only gradually, one after the other. On the evening of 30 June all that was ready for the relief attack on Bobruisk was I Battalion of 25th Armoured Infantry Regiment (minus one company), reinforced by one armoured company. In other words, the operational counter-attack of Hitler’s imagination was in reality a mere tactical assault by one incompletely mechanized infantry battalion, supported by a dozen tanks. Against all expectation, however, the action, led by the battalion commander, Capt. Gustav-Adolf Blancbois, was successful. The main factor was surprise. Clearly, the Soviet operations staffs did not consider the likelihood of any German counter-action at that time, and were certainly not expecting so foolhardy an attack by such a weak force. When the assault began at 02.00 on 1 July, under cover of darkness, the Soviet troops were taken completely by surprise. Another factor which worked in favour of the German troops was the use of mission-type tactics, which were still applied at the middle and lower levels of command, especially when rapid improvisation was needed and there was no possibility of intervention by Hitler. Both the divisional commander and the battalion commander entrusted with execution of the attack had freedom of action. In a swift attack, the German assault troops advanced southwest towards Bobruisk from the direction of Marina Gorka and created a narrow corridor. The encircled units had meanwhile begun the attempt to break out from the south, and in the early afternoon the spearheads of the two German attacks met at Svisloch. Around half of the 70,000 men trapped in the pocket were freed,<sup>83</sup> but the Soviet units thrust forward after them to cut off the retreat of the German troops, most of whom had escaped with only their small arms. In the end, about 25,000 men from the two encircled army corps managed to get through to the area south-west of Minsk.<sup>84</sup>

<sup>82</sup> Niepold, ‘Der Abwehrkampf der 12. Panzerdivision’, 423. On the relief attack by 12th Armoured Division, see also Niepold, *Von Minsk bis Lyck*, 14 ff., 29 ff.; Buchner, *Ostfront 1944*, 211 ff.; Hinze, ‘Der Zusammenbruch’ [1980], 197 ff.; Adair, *Hitler’s Greatest Defeat*, 134 ff.

<sup>83</sup> ‘Gefechtsbericht der 9. Armee über die Schlacht in Weißruthenien’, BA-MA RH 20-9/201, 13.

<sup>84</sup> To the 25,000 rescued troops should be added a number of wounded men evacuated shortly before the pocket was enclosed; see Hinze, ‘Der Zusammenbruch’ [1980], 210.

The task of 5th Armoured Division, which had also been brought in, was even more difficult. Reinforced by a few units that had been cobbled together,<sup>85</sup> it was assigned the mission of repelling the Soviet armoured forces in the Borisov area which were pouring westwards through the gap, around 100 kilometres wide, between Third Armoured Army and Fourth Army.<sup>86</sup> Such a mission must have seemed wholly illusory, however, since the Soviet forces attacking through the gap now comprised 5th Guards Armoured Army, II Guards Armoured Corps, and both corps of the Cavalry Mechanized Group, followed by several armies which also had strong armoured units.

Against them, 5th Armoured Division had only 55 Panzer IVs and 70 Panzer Vs,<sup>87</sup> reinforced by 505th Heavy Armoured Battalion with 20 Panzer VIIs. Within six days it nevertheless destroyed 295 Soviet tanks,<sup>88</sup> mainly owing to the fighting power of its Panthers and Tigers, against which the Soviet tanks were clearly at a disadvantage. However, given the 1,810 fighting vehicles with which 3rd Belorussian Front started its offensive, such losses were negligible.<sup>89</sup> The successes of the German tanks, depicted so impressively in the combat reports, were of a purely tactical nature and had scarcely any operational effect. During the fighting the following radio message was intercepted by 77th Armoured Reconnaissance Battalion: 'On contact with 5th Armoured Division, fall back wherever possible.'<sup>90</sup> The message filled the men of 5th Armoured Division with pride, but on closer consideration it showed that the Soviet tank commanders had learnt the right lesson from earlier engagements. They avoided tactical clashes with German tanks, which brought them little apart from high losses, and instead pressed forward in depth as fast as possible to fulfil their operational mission, just as the German armour had done in 1941. At first, 5th Armoured Division managed to stop the advance of 5th Guards Armoured Army, under General Pavel Alekseyevich Rotmistrov, bringing the Soviet frontal attack along the highway in the direction of Minsk to a halt at Borisov. Then, however, the Soviet armoured units shifted the point of concentration and attacked to the north and south of the Germans' Borisov bridgehead. On 1 July they crossed the Berezina at Studenka.<sup>91</sup> As it now risked being outflanked, 5th Armoured Division had to be pulled back. Above all, a much greater danger was looming. While strong forces of 1st and 3rd Belorussian Fronts streamed towards Minsk from the north and south, other Soviet units were pushing further west on the wings to take possession of the Molodechno and Baranovichi narrows. In view of the danger, 5th Armoured Division had to be

<sup>85</sup> On the composition of the 'Von Saucken Group', which was also assigned to 5th Armoured Division, see KTB 4. Armee, 28 June 1944 BA-MA RH 20-4/554, 59.

<sup>86</sup> See 'Operationsbefehl Nr. 8', telex OB HGr Mitte, Ia No. 8141/44 g.Kdos. Chefs., 28 June 1944, BA-MA RH 20-4/565.

<sup>87</sup> Plato, 'Der Abwehrkampf der 5. Panzerdivision', 380, 385. On the deployment of 5th Armoured Division, see also Plato, *Geschichte der 5. Panzerdivision*, 339 ff; Adair, *Hitler's Greatest Defeat*, 119 ff.

<sup>88</sup> Plato, 'Der Abwehrkampf der 5. Panzerdivision', 395.

<sup>89</sup> 'Belorusskaya operatsiya v tsifrakh', 77.

<sup>90</sup> Plato, 'Der Abwehrkampf der 5. Panzerdivision', 398.

<sup>91</sup> This was where Napoleon had had two bridges built over the Berezina during his retreat at the end of November 1812, in which he had suffered such heavy losses.

withdrawn to the area west of Minsk, leaving the way free for 5th Guards Armoured Army to advance on Minsk from the north on 3 July. There it joined up with I Guards Armoured Corps of 1st Belorussian Front, which was attacking from the south. Fourth Army, still standing far in the east, was now threatened with a fate like that of Sixth Army at Stalingrad.

### (b) The Downfall of Fourth Army in the 'Moving Pocket'

Of all the armies belonging to Army Group Centre, Fourth Army was the worst-affected by Hitler's 'stand firm' order. According to Operational Order No. 8, received on 28 June, it was to withdraw to the Berezina line 'as a compact front'.<sup>92</sup> That order turned into a farce, however, since the Soviet forces had already advanced far to the west on both wings. Hitler's permission to withdraw from the Dnieper Line, where the Mogilev and Orsha fortified places had to be defended at all costs, had been granted so late that the withdrawal was tantamount to flight in places. Discipline was still intact, but the officers, who were repeatedly exposed in the midst of the confusion, suffered unusually high losses. On 28–9 June four commanding generals or their up-and-coming deputies were killed in the space of 24 hours, mostly in air raids.

The Wehrmacht had already had considerable problems advancing through the marshy primeval thicket of some regions of Belorussia during its 1941 offensive. The same miserable road conditions now proved fatal to Fourth Army on its way back. There was only one major road, albeit unsurfaced, namely the Mogilev–Berezino–Minsk highway. The events which took place during the 'highway battle', as it was called, were some of the most harrowing which German troops had to endure during the whole eastern campaign. For them too, as for Napoleon's troops in 1812, the Berezina was the river at which they met their fate. There were few possible crossings, so the bridge at Berezino became the eye of the needle through which the numerous units of 13 divisions tried to pass. In addition, there were independent units, security units, supply troops, administrative units, and so on, all converging on the Berezino bridge. On the highway to Berezino there was 'a column of vehicles around 60 km long, often two or three abreast, constantly brought to a complete standstill'.<sup>93</sup> A combat report tells of chaotic scenes on the approach to the Berezino bridge, where 'an immeasurable multitude of horse-drawn and motor vehicles of all kinds piled up: cannon, howitzers, supply trucks, assault guns, tanks, light and heavy anti-aircraft artillery. Column after column [...] all heading for the bridge crossing. The only thing that counted was to get across the river'.<sup>94</sup>

In view of the permanent enemy air attacks to which the retreating Wehrmacht troops were exposed almost without defence, the virtual absence of any Luftwaffe support was particularly frustrating. On the morning of 29 June the Berezino

<sup>92</sup> Telex OB HGr Mitte, Ia No. 8141/44 g.Kdos. Chefs., 28 June 1944, BA-MA RH 20-4/565, 2.

<sup>93</sup> KTB 4. Armee, 30 June 1944, BA-MA RH 20-4/554, 73.

<sup>94</sup> Combat report quoted in Hinze, 'Der Zusammenbruch' [1980], 225.

bridge was shattered by a direct bombing hit. It took seven hours to repair, but in the meantime the German sappers managed to erect several emergency bridges and put a number of ferries into operation.

Any German soldiers who managed to escape from the Berezino inferno, however, found themselves facing even greater dangers west of the river. Numerous Soviet units had already crossed the Berezina to the north and south of Fourth Army, and were converging in a pincer movement to cut off the German troops' retreat. On 1 July they reached the highway at Cherven, about 40 kilometres (linear distance) south-west of Berezino. The German units fought their way forward in desperation: they were pursued in the rear, stopped by obstructions in front, attacked on the flanks, shot at and bombed from the air. In addition, the enemy employed diversionary tactics which further increased the confusion. Several times, German-speaking Soviet agents or German POW collaborators appeared, dressed in the uniforms of Wehrmacht officers, and sent columns in the wrong direction.<sup>95</sup> Nightmarish scenes took place on the highway, at Poplav, for example, where a German combat group broke through an enemy position and witnessed Soviet atrocities: 'Behind the position we had overcome, a horrific picture met our eyes. A kilometre-long stretch of highway was covered with vehicles that had been shot to pieces, mutilated soldiers, and the half-naked bodies of murdered Russian women.'<sup>96</sup> Such descriptions recur constantly in Fourth Army's collected reports on returning stragglers. The Red Army troops behaved with particularly brutality towards their own countrymen, that is, Russian paramilitary auxiliaries and civilians who had attached themselves to the retreating German troops. 'Their dead bodies lay in the road, mutilated and defiled.'<sup>97</sup>

The greatest shock of all came on 3 July, with the news that Minsk had fallen. It meant that, in addition to the inner encirclement ring at Cherven, an outer ring had closed more than 60 kilometres (linear distance) further west. The situation of the doubly encircled units of Fourth Army was now almost hopeless, but there were, nevertheless, hardly any signs of disintegration. The troops managed to break through the inner ring, but on 5 July three pockets formed: the most westerly at Gatovo, immediately before the outer encirclement ring, containing units of 110th Infantry Division; the second around the ammunitions depot at Dubniki, 15 kilometres east of Minsk, to which three divisions had fought their way; and the largest, in which six divisions were enclosed, between Belya Luzha and Pekalin, some 40 kilometres east of Minsk. On 5 July a conference of generals took place in the largest pocket, attended by the commanding generals of the two army corps and four divisional commanders.<sup>98</sup> The situation was now utterly desperate. Owing to

<sup>95</sup> Buchner, *Ostfront 1944*, 163–4; on this subject, see also Frieser, *Krieg hinter Stacheldraht*, 92–3.

<sup>96</sup> Auffrischungsstab AOK 4, Ic, 6 Aug. 1944, 'Niederschrift der Aussagen des Rückkehrers Hptm. Haun, Heinrich, FEB der 57. Inf.Div., geb. 10.6.1908', BA-MA RH 20-4/566, files, fo. 8.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 'Bericht des Uffz. Hans Döbert, 10./A.R. 256', 8 Aug. 1944, 3, fo. 19. See also the Fourth Army assessment of returnees' testimony, BA-MA RH 20-4/618, e.g. 86, 88, 104.

<sup>98</sup> The sources are in contradiction on this point. According to the summary account 'Vorgänge bei den abgesprengten Verbänden' (BA-MA RH 20-4/618, 89), the conference of generals took place on 4 July. However, the minutes kept by Lt.-Gen. Schürmann, who was the only general to get back to the

lack of fuel, it had been necessary to blow up almost all the tanks, motor vehicles, and cannon. Ammunition too was largely exhausted, so that many men were fighting with bladed weapons. There was hardly any food. Most depressing of all was the fact that the front had been pushed back even further to the west. The new marching destinations, Molodechno and Baranovichi, were 95 and 170 kilometres distant as the crow flies. In the Pekalin pocket it was therefore decided to merge the splintered units in two corps: XXVII Army Corps was ordered to fight its way past Minsk to the south-west, and XII Army Corps to the north-west. That attempt failed because of the enemy's overwhelmingly superior firepower. It was then decided to dissolve the still existing two-corps command structure. Instead, each division was to fight its own way through. That day, 5 July, the last signs of life were received at army group HQ in the form of a radio message from XII Army Corps at 08.30 and one from XXVII at 17.10.<sup>99</sup>

The last halfway coordinated action by the encircled divisions began on 5 July at 22.30. Most of the assault groups managed to overrun the encircling Soviet forces, who were taken by surprise. But the Soviet troops were motorized, and so they set off in pursuit the next morning, overtook the Germans, and formed new positions together with partisan units. The German units fought their way desperately through the rough terrain in 'moving pockets'. Remnants of XII Army Corps, mixed with splinter units from other divisions, broke out of Pekalin and pushed north-west. They managed to cross the highway to Minsk and reach the German lines at Molodechno in separate groups. Lt.-Gen. Vincenz Müller, on the other hand, abandoned the troops of his XII Army Corps and gave himself up voluntarily at the Polevtsy–Minsk highway on 8 July.<sup>100</sup> The components of XXVII Army Corps pushing in a south-westerly direction seemed to have more success at first, but then came up against several blocking positions. Conditions were better for the units enclosed in the Gatovo and Dubniki pockets further to the west. The remnants of 110th Infantry Division managed to cross the Minsk–Dzherzhinsk railway line, but on 9 July they fell into an ambush 10 kilometres further to the west and were dispersed.<sup>101</sup> Meanwhile all tactical cohesion had been lost and the units split into smaller and smaller groups.

According to Russian accounts, the fighting against the dispersed groups lasted until 13 July. As shown by recent research in the files,<sup>102</sup> however, the final

German lines, give the date and time as 5 July, 16.30. (BA-MA RH 20-4/566, 127). It can therefore be assumed that the correct date is 5 July.

<sup>99</sup> KTB 4. Armee, 5 July 1944, BA-MA RH 20-4/554, fo. 125.

<sup>100</sup> The euphemistic account by Lt.-Gen. Müller (subsequently chief of staff of the National People's Army) in *Ich fand das wahre Vaterland*, 396–9, 411–12, is not borne out by the reports in the archives. See, e.g., OKH HGr Mitte, IIa, 'Zusammenfassung der Berichte von Rückkämpfern. Rekonstruiertes KTB des XII. AK', entry for 5 July 1944, BA-MA RH 19 II/315, fos. 34, 130: 'When the mass of 18th Armd.Inf. Div. [...] encountered another enemy blockade, Lt.-Gen. Müller and his staff left them in order to break through alone. By so doing, he resigned command of the corps.' A note in the same source reads: 'Lt.-Gen. cannot have surrendered together with compact components of his corps since he was no longer in command of same.'

<sup>101</sup> Hinze, 'Der Zusammenbruch' [1980], 252–3.

<sup>102</sup> See Timokhovich, 'Operatsiya Bagration', 68.

destruction of the groups enclosed in the pockets was by no means as easy for the Red Army as official Soviet historiography subsequently claimed. The formation tasked with destroying the remnants of Fourth Army was 2nd Belorussian Front, reinforced by 3rd Belorussian Front's 31st Army. Col.-Gen. Zakharov, commander-in-chief of 2nd Belorussian Front, described the first days of the arduous fighting as follows: 'Liquidation of the encircled enemy groups is surprisingly slow and disorganized. Owing to the indecision and lack of initiative of the army high command, the enemy is switching from one side to the other in search of a way out, attacking corps and army staffs, depots and vehicle columns, thereby disrupting smooth operation of the rear service units and command posts.'<sup>103</sup>

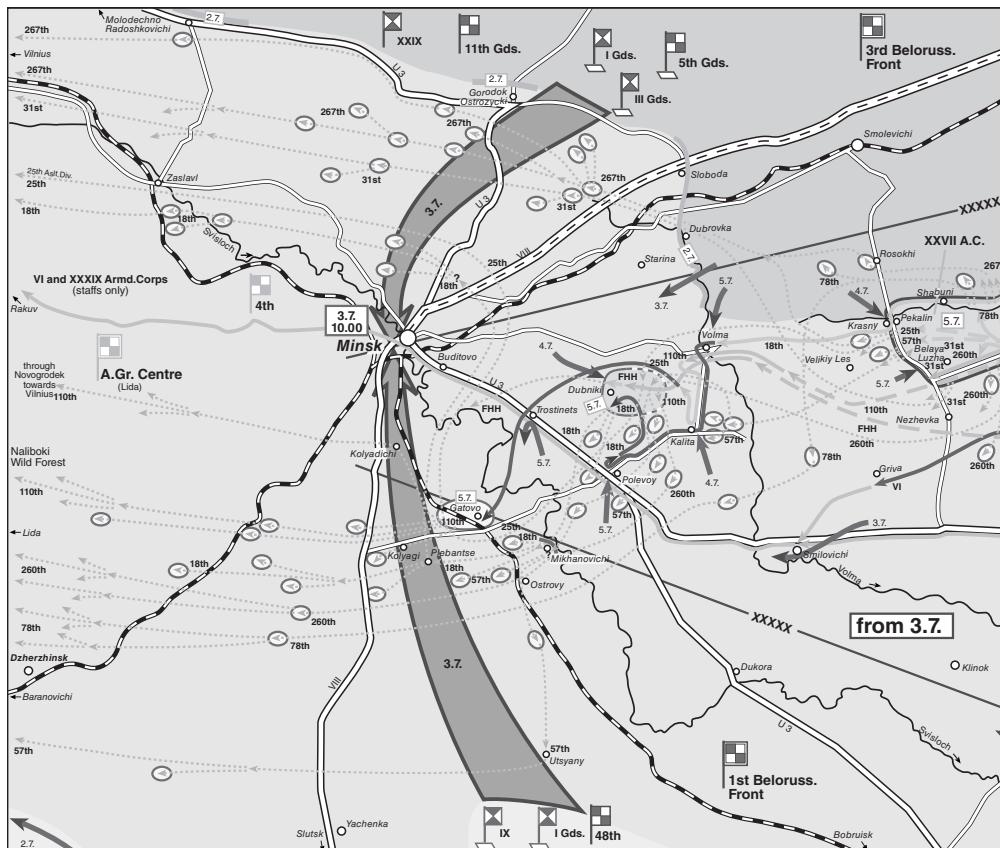
The dispersion of the German units was by no means the end of the drama. A new figure came to the fore, that of the 'returning straggler' making his way back to the German lines.<sup>104</sup> The fear of falling prisoner to the Soviets gave many soldiers unsuspected strength. They were not prepared to give up, preferring to embark on the long trek west, regardless of all the dangers and hardships, and make their way back to the ever more distant German front. Small groups formed, but they were primary groups endowed with enormous cohesion and endurance. Some dispersed soldiers even tried to struggle back alone. Returning stragglers were hunted by raiding parties and under constant threat from partisans. They crossed dense forests, swam wide rivers, and waded through swamps, surrounded by clouds of mosquitoes. Often their only food consisted of berries, mushrooms, and raw vegetables. Some fell ill, especially after drinking swamp water, and struggled on with difficulty. As many reports on returning stragglers show, some survived only thanks to the help of the local population. In the former area of eastern Poland, above all, but also in Lithuania, many needy German soldiers found surprisingly friendly support.<sup>105</sup> Until mid-July the chances of reaching the German lines were still relatively good. Thereafter the prospects worsened by the day as the front was forced back further and further to the west. The number of returnees declined rapidly in August, but 'miracles' still happened. From 10 August to the end of October a total of 80 officers and 838 NCOs and other ranks rejoined the German forces as returning stragglers from the former Fourth Army. Many of them had made their perilous way back to the East Prussian border, over a distance of almost 400 kilometres.<sup>106</sup>

A detailed balance-sheet of the Army Group Centre disaster is drawn up at the end of this chapter. The Belorussian operation (BAGRATION) lasted until 29 August, but the Germans suffered by far their greatest losses during the first phase, from

<sup>103</sup> Quoted ibid. <sup>104</sup> See, above all, Hinze, *Rückkämpfer*.

<sup>105</sup> This is testified above all by a file of collected reports on returning stragglers, BA-MA RH 20-4/566, fos. 7, 33, 47, 75, 80, 176. On Belorussian soil the behaviour of the civilian population varied, but in Lithuania 'the mass of the population was well disposed towards the Germans'. The Polish population in particular was 'praised unanimously by all returning stragglers'. German soldiers falling into the hands of Polish nationalist partisans were usually merely relieved of their weapons, which, they were told, were needed to fight the Red Army. See also Hinze, 'Der Zusammenbruch' [1980], 260.

<sup>106</sup> See 'Die Entwicklung der Lage bei der 4. Armee [...] und die Vorgänge bei den abgesprengten Verbänden', BA-MA RH 20-4/618, 106; also Niepold, *Mittlere Ostfront*, 227.

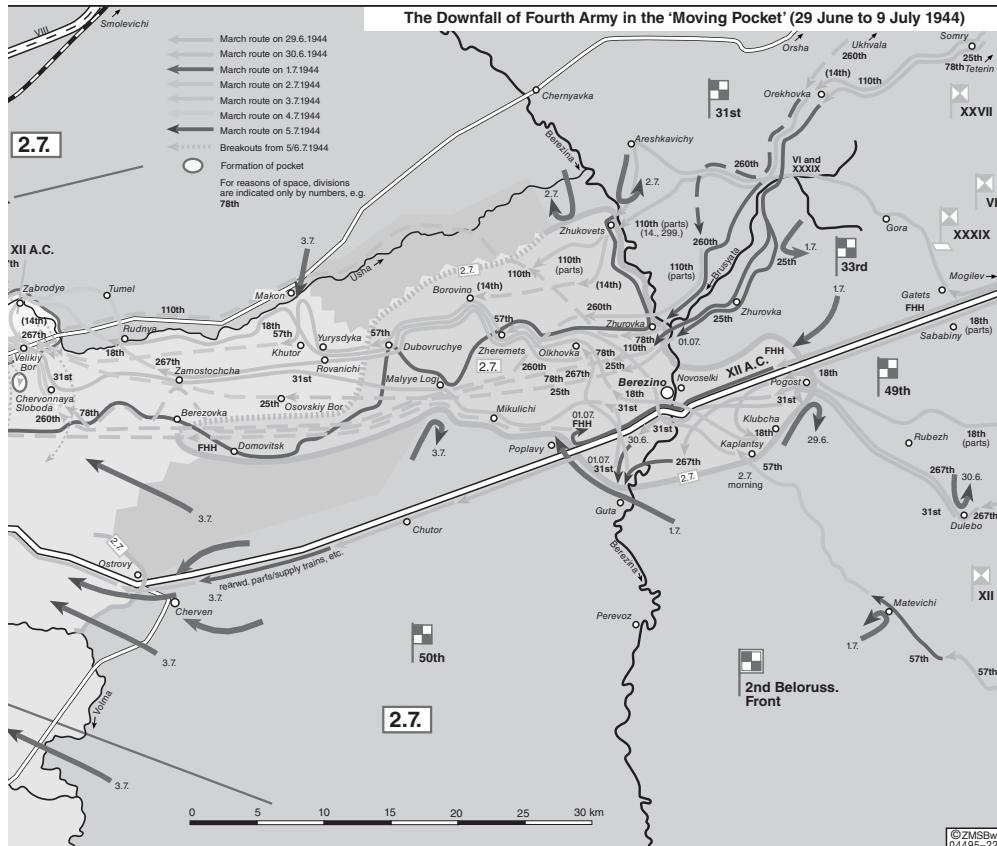


Map V.II.1. The downfall of Fourth Army in the 'moving pocket' (29 June to 9 July 1944)

Sources: A.Gr. Centre, situation maps 29.6–9.7.1944, BM-MA, Kart RH 2 Ost 2721-2731; Fourth Army KTB No. 24, text vol. 22.6–3.7.1944, RH 20-4/554; Fourth Army KTB No. 24, 'Entwicklung der Lage 22.6–5.7.44, RH 20-4/618; Fourth Army KTB No. 24, map vol. 1a, 22.6–3.7. 1944, RH 20-4/559 K; Fourth Army KTB No. 24, map vol. 1c, 22.6–22.9.1944, RH 20-4/793 K; Fourth Army, 'Sonderkarte Zusammenbruch', RH 20-4/618 K; Fourth Army, 'Rückkämpfer-Berichte', vol. 1, RH 20-4/566; Fourth Army, 'Rückkämpfer-Berichte', vol. 2, RH 19 II/315; VI A.C. KTB 8.6–25.6.1944, attach. vol., No. 248, RH 24-06/186; VI A.C. KTB 26.6–22.7.1944, RH 24-06/187.

22 June to 10 July, that is, up to the final liquidation of the Minsk pocket. Neither before nor afterwards did the Wehrmacht incur such horrendous losses as in those nineteen days. They certainly exceeded those of Sixth Army in the Stalingrad pocket (60,000 dead and 110,000 taken prisoner),<sup>107</sup> but the estimates put forward in the literature so far, ranging from 300,000 to 400,000 men, seem greatly exaggerated. Computation of the OKW's 'Wehrmacht-Verlustwesen' statistics for the period 22 June to 10 July, including all update reports, yields total losses of

<sup>107</sup> Overmans, 'Das andere Gesicht des Krieges', 446.



264,444 men (22,165 wounded, 6,622 dead, 235,657 missing).<sup>108</sup> By far the greatest number were incurred by Fourth Army, which lost 130,670 men (16,870 wounded, 5,315 dead, 108,485 missing).<sup>109</sup> The number of soldiers who were initially reported missing but subsequently managed to get back to the German lines is estimated at around 15,000,<sup>110</sup> which means that actual losses were approximately 250,000 men. While Fourth Army was reduced to a few units,

<sup>108</sup> See the detailed lists of the OKH medical officer dated 4 and 14 July, and the summary of the update reports of 14 Sept. and 14 Nov. 1944 in 'Wehrmacht Verlustwesen' file BA-MA RW 6/v. 559. The figure for total losses is nevertheless somewhat too high, since there was a residue in the case of Fourth Army, where the loss reports took 20 July as the reference date, rather than 10 July, which was the case for the other armies.

<sup>109</sup> See *ibid.* The Fourth Army's study of developments from 22 June to 4 July also gives losses of 130,000 men; see BA-MA RH 20-4/618, 78.

<sup>110</sup> Most estimates of the number of returning stragglers missing from the statistics run to five figures; see e.g. Hinze, *Rückkämpfer*, 134.

Ninth Army and Third Armoured Army each still possessed a reinforced army corps. All in all, 28 divisions were so shattered or weakened as to be no longer operational.

Comparable losses by the Red Army, however, were treated for decades as a state secret, and were revealed only as a result of research in the files by a historian from the Institute of Military History in Moscow. Despite the favourable course of the operation, the victorious Soviet troops suffered astonishingly high losses. From 23 June to the end of July they totalled 440,879 men (29.8 per cent of personnel), of whom 97,232 dead.<sup>111</sup>

In Belorussia, where the Germans had exercised brutal occupational rule for years, there were now numerous revenge atrocities. Many Wehrmacht soldiers who fell into enemy hands suffered a gruesome fate. Where larger units were taken into custody *en bloc* after formal surrender negotiations, the Soviet officers predominantly adhered to the rules of international law. Nevertheless, anyone unable to keep up with the convoy in the exhausting march to the transit camps was shot immediately.<sup>112</sup> The wounded scarcely had any chance of survival anyway. A particularly dreadful massacre was perpetrated by Soviet troops in the Bobruisk citadel, where around 5,000 wounded soldiers from Ninth Army were slaughtered. That orgy of violence was subsequently reported by the few survivors who had managed to hide in the cellars.<sup>113</sup> There were thus very real reasons for the panicky fear of Soviet captivity felt by many German soldiers.<sup>114</sup> Anyone taken prisoner alone or in a small group was entirely at the victors' mercy. Worst of all, the Red Army finally moved on west with its motorized troops, leaving the hunt for dispersed German soldiers to the partisans, who now took cruel revenge on Wehrmacht soldiers for the long years of the 'war on bandits'. They took pleasure in humiliating and torturing them, and thought up 'barely imaginable sadistic forms of death'.<sup>115</sup> Rolf Hinze, a lawyer speaking from personal experience who has thoroughly researched the tragic subject, concludes that for German soldiers who fell into the hands of the partisans death by shooting must have been 'the less frequent but more pleasant form of death'.<sup>116</sup>

On 17 July the prisoners from Army Group Centre entered the international limelight, when Stalin had 55,000 prisoners of war paraded through the streets of Moscow like an ancient triumphal procession.<sup>117</sup> Escorted by Red Army soldiers with raised bayonets and Cossacks on horseback, the German prisoners were

<sup>111</sup> Timokhovich, 'Operatsia Bagration', 77.

<sup>112</sup> Such treatment was not specific to the summer of 1944 but was the usual practice in the Red Army throughout the war. See the author's aforementioned dissertation, *Krieg hinter Stacheldraht*, 36 ff.

<sup>113</sup> Hinze, *Rückkämpfer*, 59–60, 121–2; Hinze, *Hitzé, Frost und Pulverdampf*, 300.

<sup>114</sup> See, *inter alia*, the above-mentioned Fourth Army study, BA-MA RH 20-4/618, 88, 104. Numerous reports of such atrocities run like a red thread through the literature on returning stragglers; see, e.g., the discussion of the topic by Rolf Hinze.

<sup>115</sup> Hinze, *Das Ostfront-Drama 1944*, 14. See also Hinze, *Rückkämpfer*, 28.

<sup>116</sup> Hinze, 'Der Zusammenbruch' [1980], 261.

<sup>117</sup> Wolkogonow, *Stalin*, 644–5.

forced to march past the crowds of onlookers in the direction of the Kremlin. Such a public display of prisoners was a flagrant contravention of international law, but it saved the lives of many who would otherwise have been killed, since Stalin wanted to put the greatest possible number of German troops on show.

## 5. THE FIGHTING DURING WITHDRAWAL TO POLAND AND LITHUANIA (4 TO 31 JULY)

### (a) Model's Crisis Management

'A greater crisis [...] is hard to imagine. When Field Marshal Model arrived, Army Group Centre was nothing but a hole.'<sup>118</sup> That was how Hitler described Model's seemingly impossible task. He took over command of Army Group Centre from Busch on 29 June while retaining command of Army Group North Ukraine, and was thus now in charge of more than half of the eastern front. Never before had Hitler placed so much military responsibility in the hands of a single general. Model was a specialist in crisis situations, and had the reputation of a man without nerves whom nothing could faze. Full of energy and with a talent for improvisation, he had time and again saved near hopeless situations. Now, however, he shocked the high command of his new army group with the sober announcement that there was nothing left to save. On the contrary, if the few reserves continued to be deployed to relieve the units trapped east of Minsk, the whole army group would be threatened with destruction. Model saw that the Red Army command was already aiming at deep operational objectives in the area west of Minsk. There, the primeval Naliboki forest formed a difficult-to-penetrate barrier, with the Molodechno and Baranovichi narrows to the north and south. The two passages were of military importance, since they channelled all movement in a westerly direction. Although Hitler was still issuing orders to stand firm and wanted Minsk defended as a 'fortified place', Model managed to have the city evacuated on 2 July. The next day the Soviet armoured units were able to take the city without resistance and complete the encirclement of Fourth Army. Meanwhile, 5th and 12th Armoured Divisions, which had also been threatened with encirclement, had pulled back and were available for battle at Molodechno and Baranochi.

After the fall of Minsk the situation looked bleak indeed. The remnant of Third Armoured Army was isolated on the north wing, separated from Army Group North by a gap of 60 kilometres.<sup>119</sup> In the centre, where hardly anything was left of Fourth Army, there was no longer a connected front. On the right wing, the units of the decimated Ninth Army had been assigned to Second Army on 3 July. Second

<sup>118</sup> Hitlers *Lagebesprechungen*, 615 (31 Aug. 1944 in the Wolf's Lair).

<sup>119</sup> OB HGr Nord, Ia, No. 90/44 g. Kdos. Chefs., 29 June 1944, to Chef d. Genst. des Heeres, BA-MA RH 19 III/15, fo. 110.

Army had scarcely come under attack so far, but most of its units were tied down in defence of the long-drawn-out southern flank. There, to the east of Kovel, stood the left wing of 1st Belorussian Front. It was the strongest concentration of troops ranged against Army Group Centre, but had as yet taken hardly any part in the fighting. There had been a gross disproportion between the strengths of the Soviet attackers and German defenders from the very start of the offensive. Now, as a result of Army Group Centre's enormous losses and the arrival of many new Soviet units, Soviet superiority assumed monstrous dimensions. As Model explained, he had to fight on the breakthrough front with eight mostly depleted divisions against superior forces of 116 rifle divisions, 6 cavalry divisions, 16 motorized rifle brigades, and 42 armoured brigades.<sup>120</sup> In a report dated 6 July, the army group pointed out that '155 kilometres of its 430-km-long eastern front were still unmanned'.<sup>121</sup> In its assessment of the situation the Army General Staff also concluded that Army Group Centre was 'no longer able to pit anything more than regiments and battalions against whole armies'.<sup>122</sup> Yet Field Marshal Model nevertheless managed to stabilize the situation. His recipe for success was very simple: since he was too weak to defend, he chose to attack. He did not even attempt to establish a linear defensive front in accordance with Hitler's concepts, but deployed his few forces in mobile fashion. Using newly brought-in armoured reserves, he attacked the enemy spearheads by surprise, hitting them in the flanks. After Model took command of Army Group Centre, the Red Army created no more pockets worth mentioning.

How greatly Model's command of operations contrasted with that of his predecessor Busch (and thus with Hitler's) is clear from Marshal Zhukov's memoirs. With reference to the first phase of the operation, Zhukov wrote:

Observing and analysing the behaviour of the German troops and their high command [...] we were somewhat surprised, frankly speaking, by their gross errors, which boded a catastrophic outcome for the German forces. Instead of withdrawing rapidly to rearward defensive lines and deploying strong covering detachments on the flanks threatened by Soviet shock troops, the German troops let themselves be entangled in protracted frontal battles to the east and north-east of Minsk.<sup>123</sup>

His judgement of Model's operational command was quite different. Model:

found the right method in this extremely critical situation. Since the Germans no longer had a continuous defensive front nor the forces necessary to form a new one, the German high command decided to stop our offensive mainly by means of short counter-attacks, under cover of which German troops brought in from Germany and other sectors of the Soviet-German front built up rearward defensive positions.<sup>124</sup>

Field Marshal Model also differed fundamentally from his predecessor in his behaviour towards Hitler. Whereas Busch had passively carried out orders from the OKW, Model acted independently, repeatedly presenting Hitler with a fait

<sup>120</sup> KTB HGr Mitte, 3 July 1944, BA-MA RH 19-II/198, fo. 30.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., fo. 57.

<sup>123</sup> Zhukov, *Erinnerungen* (1969 edn.), 523.

<sup>122</sup> KTB Skl, pt. A, lviii/II. 821 (30 June 1944).

<sup>124</sup> Ibid. 530.

accompli. In this, the high regard in which Hitler held him, and which the Führer accorded to scarcely any other general, stood him in good stead, although he often strained it to the limits of Hitler's tolerance. Model had already given a sample of his temerity at the Wolf's Lair on 28 February. Although he should have been grateful to Hitler for his promotion to colonel-general, which had just taken place, and for the award of the oak leaves to his Knight's Cross, he had the nerve to contradict Hitler vehemently and forbid him to interfere in the command of his army, famously demanding to know: '*Mein Führer*, who commands Ninth Army, you or I?'<sup>125</sup>

Model's method of 'defence by attack' is exemplified by his deployment of 5th Armoured Division, which mostly faced enemy superiority of 20:1 in tanks and 25:1 in artillery, with the Soviet air force frequently proving the most dangerous adversary.<sup>126</sup> In such a situation it would have been absurd for the division to seek a frontal engagement or to let itself be tied down in defence in accordance with Hitler's concepts. Instead, its armoured units flexibly evaded confrontation and exploited every opening in the ranks of the westward advancing Soviet forces to strike a rapid counter-blow and withdraw from contact with the enemy in good time. In the space of a month or so, 5th Armoured Division destroyed a total of 486 tanks, 11 assault guns, 119 anti-tank cannon, and 100 trucks.<sup>127</sup> The German tank commanders repeatedly sought meeting engagements, in which they were able to exploit the weak point of the Soviet front-line officers, that is, their inflexibility in situations of surprise, and take advantage of their own ability to react swiftly in a tactical environment. It has often been asked why the German front did not simply collapse. The answer is to be found in a multitude of individual tactical successes directed flexibly by Model. The field marshal was, nevertheless, unable to do more than disrupt the enemy's operational command and delay his advance. Given the Red Army's immense superiority, Model had no chance of bringing the Soviet offensive to a lasting halt. That would have required a large-scale operational solution.

### (b) The 'Zeitzler Plan' Controversy

At the end of June, faced with the threatening collapse of Army Group Centre, the OKH had developed an operational idea for a bold manoeuvre that could solve the two fundamental problems on the eastern front at a single stroke. Col.-Gen. Zeitzler, the chief of staff, had no reserves available with which to stop the Soviet assault on Army Group Centre. In addition, a gap had opened up on the army group's north wing through which strong Soviet forces were advancing towards the Baltic, threatening to enclose the neighbouring Army Group North on the Baltic coast. To cope with the situation, Zeitzler conceived an operational plan

<sup>125</sup> See Görlitz, *Model. Der Feldmarschall*, 116; Stein, *Model*, 74–5.

<sup>126</sup> Plato, 'Der Abwehrkampf der 5. Panzerdivision', 397; Adair, *Hitler's Greatest Defeat*, 397.

<sup>127</sup> Plato, 'Der Abwehrkampf der 5. Panzerdivision', 401.

reminiscent of Manstein's 'castling manoeuvre' of February 1943.<sup>128</sup> The idea was the same: to give up territory so as to gain forces for a counter-attack on the backhand. Zeitzler called for evacuation of the northern Baltic area and the withdrawal of Army Group North to the lower reaches of the Dvina. That would achieve two aims at the same time:

- Army Group North could pull back from the 'Baltic trap' in time and free up half its troops by shortening the front.
- The troops thus released would be used to support Army Group Centre by attacking southwards in a thrust into the flank of the far-advanced Soviet forces.

At the end of June Hitler's Berghof at Berchtesgaden witnessed one of the fiercest operational controversies of the war.<sup>129</sup> For several days Col.-Gen. Zeitzler tried to convince Hitler of the merits of his plan, but to no avail. Meanwhile, an 'enormous operational danger' had arisen at the interface of the two army groups.<sup>130</sup> As a result of Third Armoured Army's withdrawal on the left wing of Army Group Centre, the right wing of Army Group North was left 'hanging in the air'.<sup>131</sup> Units of the Soviet 1st Baltic Front were pushing inexorably through the 40-kilometre-wide gap between the two army groups, aiming to advance on Riga south of the Dvina and enclose Army Group North on the Baltic coast. The 'Baltic hole', as it came to be called, was getting larger by the day. In addition, 2nd Guards Army and 51st Army were drawing closer, which would further increase Soviet offensive strength at this critical location.<sup>132</sup> Hitler wanted to close the gap in the front by means of local counter-attacks—an idea which Field Marshal Model dismissed as a 'pointless experiment'.<sup>133</sup> It would have required both of the armies which were threatened at their interface to withdraw units from an already overburdened front. Like Col.-Gen. Lindemann, the commander-in-chief of Army Group North, Model also rejected Hitler's 'lesser solution' as a purely tactical action and called for a 'major solution' on an operational scale.

Meanwhile Lt.-Gen. Adolf Heusinger, the head of the operations division, was standing in as chief of staff for Col.-Gen. Zeitzler, who had fallen ill. Heusinger, who had worked with Zeitzler on the plan for a castling manoeuvre, now turned to the commanders-in-chief of the two army groups for help in pushing the proposal through. Given the dramatic situation, switching Army Group North from Lake Peipus to the Dvina seemed the only effective solution, and Heusinger considered it 'the cardinal issue on the eastern front'.<sup>134</sup> In his view, most of the Baltic area could

<sup>128</sup> See Klein and Frieser, 'Mansteins Gegenschlag', esp. 14.

<sup>129</sup> Col.-Gen. (ret.) Zeitzler, 'Das Ringen um die großen Entscheidungen im zweiten Weltkrieg', pt. 2, BA-MA Zeitzler papers, N 63/80, 161 ff.

<sup>130</sup> BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2046, 706.

<sup>131</sup> OB HGr Nord, Ia, No. 90/44 g. Kdos. Chefs an Chef d. Genst. des Heeres, 29 June 1944, BA-MA RH 19 III/15, fo. 110.

<sup>132</sup> Glantz and House, *When Titans Clashed*, 209.

<sup>133</sup> KTB HGr Mitte, 1 Jul. 1944, BA-MA RH 19-II/198, fo. 11.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., fo. 17, entry for 2 July 1944. On Heusinger's reasoning, see Heusinger, *Befehl im Widerstreit*, 328–9, 331, 333, 335–6, 342–3, 346 ff.

not be held for long anyway, so the troops stationed there should be withdrawn behind the Dvina between Riga and Daugavpils. As a result of the shortening of the front and the use of the wide river as an obstacle, half of Army Group North would be freed up to form a new operational reserve, which could then carry out a counter-attack in support of Army Group Centre. The conditions for rescuing both army groups would thus be created by a single manoeuvre. In the meantime, the increasingly long right flank was making the Soviet high command nervous. As Marshal Bagramyan, the commander-in-chief of 1st Baltic Front, later wrote: 'In the north, Army Group North hung over our heads like the sword of Damocles.'<sup>135</sup>

The OKH's plan met with the full agreement of the commanders-in-chief of both army groups as the only remaining way to avoid disaster. Significantly, the agreement on a 'major operational decision' is recorded in the war diaries of both army groups in almost identical terms.<sup>136</sup> Notwithstanding that agreement, however, there now began 'a new disaster in the history of the German eastern army'<sup>137</sup>—the battle between Hitler and his generals over the withdrawal of Army Group North. Once again, the Führer refused to give up territory voluntarily. His largely implausible reasoning, based mainly on grounds of maritime strategy and political considerations, is discussed later in the section dealing with Army Group North. Now not a day went by without the generals—Model, first and foremost—challenging what they considered a nonsensical decision. Col.-Gen. Lindemann officially requested withdrawal of his army group behind the Dvina, and announced that he would tender his resignation in the event of a refusal.<sup>138</sup> Hitler promptly reacted by replacing him with General Johannes Friessner on 4 July. Much to Hitler's annoyance, however, immediately upon taking command Friessner embraced the idea which had cost his predecessor his post. He flew with Model to Führer headquarters, where Hitler once again rejected the 'major solution' on 9 July.<sup>139</sup>

By this time a counter-attack by Army Group North to rescue Army Group Centre would have been too late anyway, since most of the units in the Belorussian balcony were already enclosed. The real fateful day must be considered to have been 30 June, when the conflict with Zeitzler took place at Hitler's Berghof. At that juncture it might still have been possible to avoid the worst. When all attempts to change Hitler's mind had failed, Zeitzler accused him of bringing catastrophe upon them. '*Mein Führer*', he added, 'you have twice forced me to act against my convictions. Once at Stalingrad, and again in the Crimea. I shall not allow you to do so a third time.'<sup>140</sup> Declaring that the war was 'militarily lost' and must be

<sup>135</sup> Bagramyan, *So schritten wir zum Sieg*, 290.

<sup>136</sup> KTB HGr Nord, 3 July 1944, BA-MA RH 19 III/311, fo. 72; similarly KTB HGr Mitte, 3 July 1944, BA-MA RH 19 II/198, fo. 35.

<sup>137</sup> Tippelskirch, *Geschichte des Zweiten Weltkriegs*, 465.

<sup>138</sup> Heusinger, *Befehl im Widerstreit*, 348.

<sup>139</sup> KTB HGr Mitte, 9 July 1944, BA-MA RH 19-II/198, fo. 94.

<sup>140</sup> Col.-Gen. (ret.) Zeitzler, 'Das Ringen um die großen Entscheidungen im zweiten Weltkriege', pt. 2, BA-MA Zeitzler papers, N 63/80, 165.

ended, he requested Hitler to relieve him of his command.<sup>141</sup> Following that dramatic meeting, Zeitzler fell so ill that he was no longer able to carry out his duties anyway. In retrospect, he commented sarcastically: ‘The chief of staff left. The Courland encirclement arrived.’<sup>142</sup>

How decidedly Hitler’s lone decision concerning Army Group North was rejected by the generals is shown clearly by the fact that, when the attempt to assassinate Hitler on 20 July was assumed to have succeeded and the conspirators tried to seize power, one of their first measures was to order the withdrawal of Army Group North. The order came from Col.-Gen. Ludwig Beck, who was supposed to take over from Hitler as provisional head of state, whereupon Army Group North HQ asked the OKH operations division which of the conflicting orders it was supposed to obey.<sup>143</sup> But the coup was defeated. The disaster took its course, and not only for Army Group North.

### (c) The Counter-Attack at Vilnius and Withdrawal to the Brest-Litovsk–Kaunas Line

The rigid defence of the Vitebsk, Mogilev, and Bobruisk ‘fortified places’ had brought disaster on Army Group Centre, but Hitler was still not prepared to change his approach. He now sought to set a real example by declaring Vilnius too a fortified place. Meanwhile, the Red Army had forced its way through the Molodechno and Baranovichi narrows after heavy fighting and had reached Lithuanian territory. Vilnius was attacked by strong forces of 3rd Belorussian Front, and on 8 July the city was completely surrounded by 5th Guards Armoured Army, 5th Army, and parts of 11th Guards Army and the Cavalry Mechanized Group.<sup>144</sup> A total of 4,000 German troops were caught in the trap. Now, however, it was Model, not Busch, who was in command. Moreover, after the Minsk fiasco the generals were no longer prepared to accept Hitler’s ‘stand firm’ orders without opposition. Yet the stronger the resistance Hitler encountered, the more stubborn he became. He declared categorically that, because of its ‘enormous operational importance’, Vilnius had to be ‘defended to the last breath’.<sup>145</sup> Instead of withdrawing troops in time, he even sent more men into the impending encirclement. On the evening of 7 July, that is, just before Vilnius was finally enclosed, 16th Paratroop Regiment’s II Battalion landed at the city’s airport on a ‘suicide mission’. Hitler then had Maj.-Gen. Rainer Stahel flown into the already encircled city as the newly appointed ‘fortified place’ commander. Some of the reinforcements sent to the area arrived too late anyway. A combat group led by Lt.-Col. Tolsdorff was itself enclosed in another pocket near Lentvaris,

<sup>141</sup> Ibid. 166.      <sup>142</sup> Ibid. 167.

<sup>143</sup> Verbal communication from Gen. (ret.) Count Johann Adolf von Kielmansegg, who, as Ia of the OKH operations division at the time, personally received the inquiry from Army Group North HQ.

<sup>144</sup> Glantz and House, *When Titans Clashed*, 208–9.

<sup>145</sup> KTB HGr Mitte, 7 July 1944, BA-MA RH 19-II/198, fo. 74.

10 kilometres from Vilnius, and never reached the city. The decision to hold the fortified place at all costs—moreover, with wholly insufficient forces—met with total incomprehension on the part of the generals in charge. According to an entry dated 9 July in Third Armoured Army's war diary, Col.-Gen. Reinhardt described this Führer order to his superior, Field Marshal Model, as ‘insane’.<sup>146</sup> The war diary goes on to state that the field marshal ‘endorsed the view of the commander-in-chief [of Third Armoured Army]’ and presented it ‘to the higher leadership’.<sup>147</sup> But not even Model could get Hitler to change his mind.

Lt.-Gen. Heusinger then succeeded in doing something very rare: he persuaded Hitler to rescind a decision that had already been confirmed. On 11 July he repeatedly pressed the Führer to allow the garrison to break out of Vilnius, but each time his request was brusquely rejected and only made Hitler even angrier. Hitler declared categorically that Maj.-Gen. Stahel was to ‘hold the city or go under with it’. That was what was required of every warship captain.<sup>148</sup> His answer was a death sentence for the 4,000 troops enclosed there. With barefaced cynicism, Hitler added that it made no difference anyway whether those men died in hopeless defence or in a hopeless attempt to break out. Thereupon Heusinger had the surprising idea of asking Hitler to allow the encircled troops at least to choose the manner of their death, and therefore to permit a breakout attempt. ‘It is easier to die on the attack’, he urged, ‘than in hopeless defence’.<sup>149</sup> The Führer was so irritated by Heusinger’s proposal that he gave way.

The unexpected turn of events gave rise to great euphoria at Third Armoured Army HQ. Col.-Gen. Reinhardt immediately formed a combat group for a relief attack. It consisted of parts of 6th Armoured Division, which was just arriving from the Reich, and a Panther battalion from Armoured Regiment ‘Grossdeutschland’. The Vilnius garrison began the breakout in the night of 12–13 July, and the relief attack was launched the next morning from the area to the east of Kaunas, led by Col.-Gen. Reinhardt in person. The attackers managed to break through the Soviet front and pushed forward some 30 kilometres to the pocket occupied by Toldorff’s group. Meanwhile the Vilnius garrison, swimming a river en route, fought their way through to Lt.-Col. Tolsdorff’s troops. The relief forces, ‘led by the commander-in-chief in the foremost armoured spearhead’,<sup>150</sup> succeeded in breaking the encirclement. Reinhardt, as he later wrote, was greeted by liberated troops ‘beaming and waving’.<sup>151</sup> Of a total of 4,000 men trapped in the pocket, 3,000 were rescued.<sup>152</sup>

<sup>146</sup> KTB 3, Pz.Armee, 9 July 1944, BA-MA RH 21-3/347, fo. 76.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

<sup>148</sup> Heusinger, *Befehl im Widerstreit*, 348.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid. 349.

<sup>150</sup> KTB 3, Pz.Armee, 12 July 1944 BA-MA RH 21-3/348, fo. 21.

<sup>151</sup> Col.-Gen. Reinhardt’s personal diary, 13 July 1944, BA-MA, Reinhardt papers, N 245/3, fo. 74.

<sup>152</sup> On the relief attack on Vilnius, see also KTB HGr Mitte, 13 July 1944, BA-MA RH 19 II/198, fos. 133, 139–40; ‘Bericht über die Verteidigung des Festen Platzes Wilna vom 8. bis 12.7.1944’, BA-MA RH 19 II/241, fos. 5 ff.; PzAOK 3, Ia-Tagesmeldung an Obkdo. H.Gr. Mitte, 13 Jul. 1944, BA-MA RH 21-3/360; ‘Vor- und Durchstoß der 6. Panzer-Division zur Befreiung und Rückführung der in und westlich Wilna eingeschlossenen Kampfgruppen’, BA-MA, Study ZA 1/1428. This study by Lt.-Gen. (ret.) Baron Rudolf von Waldenfels was published with annotations in Newton, *German Battle Tactics*, 207–18. For secondary literature, see Hinze, *Das Ostfront-Drama 1944*, 103 ff., 120–1.

The conflict at Führer headquarters over the counter-attack at Vilnius is a typical example of the ‘two-front war’ which the German generals had to wage on the eastern front and in the OKH: on the one hand, against the superior strength of the Red Army, and on the other, against the overriding will of Hitler, who had barricaded himself behind a doctrine of rigid defence. His erroneous operational decisions seemed increasingly divorced from reality, and his contempt for human life was now frighteningly clear. The Führer would rather sacrifice whole armies than correct a mistake. Above all, his instinct for aggression and his destructive urge were increasingly directed against his own troops. He showed not the slightest sympathy for the men whom he sent to their doom, regarding their cruel fate as just punishment for a supposed failure to fight hard enough for him.

On 20 July the rage and despair which many officers felt towards Hitler erupted in a bomb attack at the Wolf’s Lair. But the Führer survived the assassination attempt led by Count Claus von Stauffenberg, a colonel on the general staff. He vented his rage both on the conspirators and on the general staff itself, which he had always considered ‘politically unreliable, spiritless, and intellectually contaminated’.<sup>153</sup> Of the officers of Army Group Centre, Maj.-Gen. Henning von Tresckow, the chief of staff of Second Army, was probably the most active in resistance to the Nazi regime. He committed suicide to escape inevitable seizure by Hitler’s agents.<sup>154</sup> Lt.-Gen. Heusinger, head of the operations divisions of the OKH general staff, and his Ia, Col. Count von Kielmannsegg, were also held under arrest for a while as suspected accomplices to the conspiracy, and Col.-Gen. Zeitzler was replaced as chief of the OKH general staff by Col.-Gen. Heinz Guderian.

The attempt to assassinate Hitler nevertheless had no mentionable effect on the course of operations on Army Group Centre’s front. The Red Army offensive had slackened considerably since 16 July, mainly as a result of logistic problems due to overextended supply lines. In this phase, the greatly decimated Soviet armour no longer played the main role, which now fell to the infantry. Moreover, Model had used his newly brought-in reserves to establish a new defence line well to the rear—rather than at the forefront, as Hitler had intended—to which his forward-deployed units now withdrew, fighting a delaying action. Along that line, stretching between the cornerstones of Kaunas and Brest-Litovsk, the German troops managed to stabilize the front. In the Kaunas area, on the army group’s northern wing, Third Armoured Army successively beat off assaults by 3rd Belorussian Front, which attacked from Vilnius. However, the gap to Army Group North, through which 1st Baltic Front was advancing, was widening all the time. Unable to close the ‘Baltic hole’, Model had to be content with sealing off the northern flank as far as possible. In the middle section of Army Group Centre’s front, where the newly established Fourth Army was deployed, 2nd Belorussian had crossed the Niemen at Grodno but was stopped by a German counter-attack. Since Ninth Army HQ had been temporarily withdrawn from the front, Second Army formed the southern wing.

<sup>153</sup> Heusinger, *Befehl im Widerstreit*, 257.

<sup>154</sup> Scheurig, *Henning von Tresckow*, 218 ff.

It was slowly forced back by the right wing of 1st Belorussian Front past Pinsk to Brest-Litvosk. Soviet superiority was still very impressive. As Field Marshal Model had shown in a situation analysis, even if all the scheduled reinforcements arrived by 21 July according to plan, the army group would have to continue the unequal fight with at most 16 operational units against 160 Soviet formations.<sup>155</sup> Despite this, after retreating almost 400 kilometres the German forces managed to bring the enemy advance to a halt. A mood of cautious optimism was spreading at Army Group Centre HQ, when the front held by Army Group North Ukraine, its neighbour on the right, collapsed dramatically.

#### (d) Danger on the Flanks: 1st Belorussian Front's Advance to the Vistula

Col. Gehlen, head of Foreign Armies East, had rightly drawn attention to the enormous concentration of enemy forces massing opposite Army Group North Ukraine in the area to the south of Kovel. The Soviets had brought up 1st Ukrainian Front, which was then 'the largest army front ever assembled for offensive operations in the Great Patriotic War'.<sup>156</sup> On 13 July it launched the attack, led by Marshal Ivan Stepanovich Konev as commander-in-chief, and within a few days it had smashed the German front to pieces. The Soviet armoured units then pushed deep into Galicia, forcing Army Group North Ukraine back towards the Carpathians.<sup>157</sup>

A few days later, on 18 July, the army group's stationary northern wing, on which two corps of Fourth Armoured Army were deployed, was attacked by the left wing of 1st Belorussian Front. For weeks the German operations staffs had been staring as if hypnotized at this Kovel section of the front, where they expected by far the most dangerous attack on the whole eastern front. In the event of a successful breakthrough in that sector, the Red Army would be able to advance north-west as far as Warsaw and the Baltic Sea, and cut off the retreat of both of Germany's northern army groups. Paradoxically, the operational configuration of the German forces was now more favourable after Army Group Centre's withdrawal than it had been before 22 June. Then the Belorussian balcony, seen from Kovel, had extended more than 500 kilometres to the east, so that, following a successful breakthrough, the left wing of 1st Belorussian Front would have been able to advance without resistance into the rear of Army Group Centre. In the meantime, however, the German front in that sector had been pushed back so far to the west that Army Groups Centre and North Ukraine were almost level with each other. Moreover, Field Marshal Model had evacuated the difficult-to-defend Kovel salient over the period 4 to 8 July as a precautionary measure,<sup>158</sup> in order to

<sup>155</sup> KTB HGr Mitte, 13 July 1944, BA-MA RH 19-II/198, fo. 136.

<sup>156</sup> *Geschichte des zweiten Weltkrieges 1939–1945*, ix. 97.

<sup>157</sup> On this, see the detailed account in Part V, Chapter V.

<sup>158</sup> BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2077, 13.

avoid a pre-programmed encirclement—as had happened at Vitebsk—and gain reserves by shortening the front.

What happened now, however, should have been prevented at all costs, namely an immediate operational breakthrough right in the most securely defended section of the German eastern front. Against the two German corps deployed at Kovel, Rokossovsky had massed five general armies, one armoured army, and numerous independent units, with a total of 416,000 men. Following a devastating barrage by 8,335 artillery cannon, grenade launchers, and rocket launchers, the Soviet units launched their onslaught with the support of 1,748 tanks and assault guns. A total of 1,465 aircraft were assigned to this specific sector of the front, supported during the breakthrough phase by planes from other fronts and long-range aircraft.<sup>159</sup> The concentration of forces was even greater than that amassed for the breakthrough in the sector of Army Group Centre. The attack frontage of a rifle division was about 1 kilometre, with an average deployment of 356 artillery cannon and 83 tanks or assault guns per kilometre of front.<sup>160</sup> The Red Army's superiority was so crushing that the German defenders were simply overrun. After only two days the Soviet units had crossed the Bug into Polish territory. Then, on 22 July, 2nd Armoured Army launched a deep operational thrust. On the German side, VIII Army Corps, positioned on the left wing, had been separated from Army Group North Ukraine. Its remaining units withdrew hastily to the north, where they were incorporated in the right wing of Army Group Centre at Brest-Litovsk. At the same time, LVI Armoured Corps, which had been deployed on the right wing, was forced to withdraw south-west to the Vistula. As result, a gap of 100 kilometres opened up between the two army groups, through which Rokossovsky's armies were able to advance unopposed. Lublin was taken on 24 July. The next day, the first advance troops were already on the Vistula. The Soviet 69th Army crossed the river and established a first bridgehead on 29 July at Puławy.

The left wing of 1st Belorussian Front had then pushed directly west with most of its units, forcing Army Group North Ukraine back to the Vistula. In their 180-kilometre-long advance, the Soviet attacking forces had far outflanked Army Group Centre's southern cornerstone at Brest-Litovsk and, by swinging northwards, were able to push forward in its rear without resistance.

The situation now developed very much to Rokossovsky's advantage. The two wings of his army front had originally been separated by the Pripet marshes, but had since left that obstacle behind them. With his right wing, Rokossovsky now attacked Second Army frontally on the southern wing of Army Group Centre, while swinging his left wing, which had advanced far to the west, in a northerly direction to get to Second Army's rear. The manoeuvre comprised three directions of thrust. The Soviet 70th Army, which formed the lynchpin of the rotation, attacked the southern cornerstone of Second Army at Brest-Litovsk. To the south-west, XI Armoured Corps and II Guards Cavalry Corps, followed by 47th Army, moved on Siedlce to cut off Second Army's retreat. The greatest threat,

<sup>159</sup> 'Belorusskaya operatsiya v tsifrakh', 77.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid. 77, 80.

however, came from the armoured units which had advanced far to the west in the gap between the two German army groups. After 2nd Armoured Army reached the river at Puławy, Rokossovsky swung it north in a decisive thrust towards Warsaw. In the meantime, the armoured forces massed on 1st Belorussian Front's right wing had broken frontally through Second Army's positions at Kleszczele, between Brest-Litovsk and Białystok. The two wings of 1st Belorussian Front were closing like gigantic jaws, and Second Army appeared to be facing the same fate of encirclement as Army Group Centre's other three armies at the beginning of Operation BAGRATION. The crisis was made even more acute by the fact that the northern wing was under attack by units of 2nd Belorussian Front. Białystok, Second Army's northern cornerstone, had already had to be abandoned.

Now, of all times, a new operational controversy erupted within the German leadership, when Hitler ordered the Brest-Litovsk 'fortified place' to be held at all costs. The events of 20 July must have been an indirect factor in the dictator's decision, since some changes of personnel had taken place in the OKH general staff on his instructions and he apparently believed he would encounter less resistance from the new incumbents. In fact, the behaviour of Col.-Gen. Guderian, the new chief of staff, was causing some irritation on the part of the generals on the eastern front, since the former champion of the modern war of movement now supported Hitler's 'stand firm' orders, as if he wanted to emulate the French generals whom he had outmanoeuvred with his armoured units in the western campaign of 1940. Guderian's temporary change of heart is probably explained by gratitude to Hitler for appointing him chief of staff. However, his military know-how soon dispelled his ambivalence. Given his fiery temper, conflict with Hitler was inevitable.

On 23 July confusion was caused by a new Führer directive concerning the conduct of operations on the eastern front. On the one hand, Hitler demanded that the existing front line be held, including the Brest-Litovsk 'fortified place'. On the other, obviously on Guderian's advice, he called for an offensive conduct of operations by means of counter-attacks, quoting the aphorism 'attack is the best form of defence'.<sup>161</sup> The two demands were mutually contradictory, since the only way to release forces for a counter-attack was to straighten the front, and above all to abandon untenable strong points. Model's concept of mobile defence while giving up territory was diametrically opposed to Hitler's categorical 'stand firm' orders. In view of the threatening disaster, he was not prepared to share responsibility for the senseless maintenance of a 'continuous front',<sup>162</sup> and, on his own authority, he withdrew the endangered front line of Fourth Army to a rearward position west of Grodno.<sup>163</sup> By that time, however, the situation at the front was so critical that Hitler put up with Model's open disobedience. Thereupon Model, in view of the enemy's breakthrough at Kleszczele, demanded the withdrawal of

<sup>161</sup> KTB HGr Mitte, 23 July 1944, BA-MA RH 19 II/198, fo. 257. Significantly, only extracts from this remarkable Führer directive were transmitted to the armies; see telex of 24 July 1944, Okdo. H.Gr. Mitte an AOK 2 usw., Ia No. 9612/44 g.Kdos, BA-MA RH 19 II/209, fo. 136.

<sup>162</sup> KTB HGr Mitte, 23 July 1944 BA-MA RH 19 II/198, fo. 257.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid., fos. 258–9.

Second Army's sector of the front and the abandonment of Brest-Litovsk. The exposed 'fortified place' was under attack by three Soviet Armies from the south, east, and north. But Hitler—probably again under the influence of the events of 20 July—now proved even more obdurate and merciless than before. On 26 July, when Brest-Litovsk had already been encircled for a day, he ordered unconditionally that the city be defended 'until the destruction of the garrison'.<sup>164</sup> He relented only when Model graphically evoked the consequences of such a decision and declared categorically that he could not again afford to lose two divisions. That same evening, the Führer gave permission for the enclosed units to break out. The breakout, which was supported by relief forces from the west, led to bitter fighting from 27 to 29 July. Losses were very high, because once again, as at Vilnius, Hitler's permission for the breakout had come much too late.

Meanwhile Model had started two counter-attacks which led to the rescue of Second Army. The first was a pincer attack directed against the enemy forces advancing from the east, in which SS Armoured Division 'Viking', newly placed under Model's command, was deployed together with Fourth Armoured Division. The two German armoured divisions succeeded in stopping the enemy forces which had broken through to the north of Brest-Litovsk in the Kleszczele area. This pincer attack enabled the endangered German troops to retreat in good order. Even more important was Model's decision to withdraw SS Armoured Division 'Totenkopf' from the Fourth Army front further to the north, and deploy it rapidly in a south-westerly attack on the Soviet units advancing in the rear of Second Army. At Siedlce (approx. 100 kilometres west of Brest-Litovsk) a fierce engagement ensued on 27 July with the Soviet XI Armoured Corps, II Guards Cavalry Corps, and parts of 47th Army. The Soviet attacking forces were beaten back and lost a large number of tanks. Model was thus able to swing the right wing of Second Army to the west and temporarily establish a new front line. Nevertheless, the loss of Brest-Litovsk was highly symbolic, since the assault on that stronghold had marked the start of the eastern campaign on 22 June 1941.

## 6. THE STABILIZATION OF THE FRONT BETWEEN WARSAW AND RIGA UP TO THE END OF AUGUST

### (a) The Tank Battle before Warsaw as an Operational Turning Point

Model's temporary stabilization of the front in the second half of July proved deceptive. At the end of that month a new disaster took shape that put all previous calamities in the shade. This time it was not confined to Army Group Centre but spread like wildfire to the whole eastern front. On 30 July Army Group North was struck by the crisis which Zeitzler, the former chief of staff, had predicted to Hitler. The Soviet 1st Baltic Front broke through at the interface with Army Group Centre and reached the Baltic at Tukums, thereby enclosing Army Group North on the

<sup>164</sup> Ibid., KTB HGr Mitte, 26 July 1944, fo. 289.

Baltic Coast. Army Group Centre's neighbour on the right, Army Group North Ukraine, had also been unable to withstand a new major Soviet offensive. As a result, Model, who had been personally commanding both army groups since 29 June, now had to transfer command of Army Group North Ukraine to Col.-Gen. Josef Harpe. But Harpe too was unable to prevent the breakthrough in Galicia. The front only came to a halt some 200 kilometres further west, along the Vistula and the Carpathians, so that the whole southern flank of Army Group Centre was torn apart. Meanwhile, there were growing signs that Army Group South was also about to face a large-scale offensive by the Red Army. Army Group Centre could therefore no longer expect any reinforcement by units from that quarter. Worst of all, at this very time the German western front in Normandy collapsed. After repeated unsuccessful attempts to break out of their bridgehead, the Allies had achieved the decisive breakthrough at Avranches, and their armoured units were advancing deep into the French hinterland. Hitler's risky strategy of temporarily shifting the main effort to the west, and then sending the troops freed up after defeat of the invasion to the eastern front, had failed.

The situation of Army Group Centre had also become extremely critical. On the left wing, the connection with Army Group North had been severed by the Soviet advance to the Baltic Coast. Third Armoured Army had to throw all available forces to the north to secure the endangered flank. To the south of Kaunas, Soviet units had broken through at the interface between Fourth Army and Third Armoured Army and had almost reached the German border. On 2 August Wehrmacht units came under fire for the first time on German soil, near the East Prussian town of Schirwindt, from 33rd Army's 142nd Cannon Artillery Brigade.<sup>165</sup> Most alarming of all, however, was the situation of Second Army, with its southern wing entirely hanging in the air. It was now separated by a gap of around 100 kilometres from Army Group North Ukraine, whose northern wing reached to the bridge over the Vistula at Puławy. The rear of Second Army, still standing far to the east, was also threatened by a thrust through that gap from the south. Although Second Army's right wing had meanwhile been swung westwards into the Siedlce area, the distance to the Vistula was still around 60 kilometres, and between Siedlce and Warsaw there were hardly any German troops. In the meantime, Army Group Centre HQ had decided to build a new front along the Vistula. Joining up with Army Group North Ukraine, the new line was intended to run from Poławy to Warsaw and from there to extend east of the Vistula to create a connection with the right wing of Second Army. On 25 July this task was assigned to Ninth Army, which actually existed only on paper and had first to be replenished by troops yet to be brought in. Following the disaster at Bobruisk, Ninth Army HQ had been withdrawn from the front and moved all the way back to Warsaw, where the formation of a new army was planned. For the time being, 'Ninth Army' consisted only of a conglomeration of stand-by and security units, some of which had exotic-sounding names like '1st Company 818th Azerbaijani Battalion' or '2nd Company 791st Turkish

<sup>165</sup> *Geschichte des zweiten Weltkrieges 1939–1945*, ix. 80.

Battalion'.<sup>166</sup> The only large unit was the newly assigned 73th Infantry Division, which was still being restructured and trained. It was deployed south-east of Warsaw to protect the district of Praga on the east bank.

Foreign Armies East was alarmed by the developments. In its enemy-situation assessment of 23 July it already assumed that 'the Soviet command would see the present operations as decisive for the outcome of the war'.<sup>167</sup> It noted with some relief, however, that for the time being the Red Army was conducting the greatly feared thrust on Kovel only in a westerly direction, rather than north-west towards Warsaw and the Baltic Sea. Gehlen's department nevertheless feared a 'turn in a general northerly direction' for a 'thrust into East Prussia'.<sup>168</sup> Similarly, on 23 July Army Group Centre HQ was already reckoning with the 'marshalling of forces for the battle for Warsaw'.<sup>169</sup>

After reaching the Vistula near Puławy, the Soviet 2nd Armoured Army did indeed swing northwards, and on 27 July it began the assault on Warsaw. In it were concentrated some 800 fighting vehicles out of the original total of almost 1,800 tanks and assault guns belonging to the left wing of 1st Belorussian Front.<sup>170</sup> It was followed by 8th Guards Army and 1st Polish Army. Forward and to the right of it, a preliminary attack by XI Armoured Corps, II Guards Cavalry Corps, and 47th Army, directed at the southern flank of the German Second Army at Siedlce, had already begun. The aim of the thrust by 2nd Armoured Army was to cut off Army Group Centre's retreat westwards.<sup>171</sup> According to Marshal Rokossovsky's memoirs, the plan was first to neutralize the Warsaw suburb of Praga on the right bank of the Vistula.<sup>172</sup> But clearly the main objective, in accordance with the Stavka directive of 27 July, was a northward thrust, passing by Warsaw on the east, to take possession of the important Narew crossings at Zegrze and Serock.<sup>173</sup> Following the course of the Vistula, the Soviet spearheads could then go on to capture the bridges at Modlin. By doing so, they would cut off the Germans in the Vistula–Narew–Bug river triangle from all possibility of retreat to Warsaw. The Polish capital would fall into the hands of the Red Army like a ripe fruit. Moreover, the whole German hinterland in East Prussia lay unprotected before the advancing Soviet armoured units, since there were practically no Wehrmacht forces between Warsaw and the Baltic.

The attack by 2nd Armoured Army in the direction of Warsaw, which began on 27 July, initially encountered a vacuum. The Soviet forces broke through the

<sup>166</sup> 'Meldung der Belegung der Weichsel-Stellung durch 9. Armee vom 26.7.1944', BA-MA RH 19 II/216, fo. 35.

<sup>167</sup> Fremde Heere Ost, No. 2392/44 gKdos, 23 July 1944, 'Kurze Beurteilung der Feindlage vom 23.7.1944', BA-MA RHD 18/249, 298.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid. 298–9.

<sup>169</sup> Telex Obkdo. H.Gr. Mitte an OKH, 23 July 1944, BA-MA RH 19 II/298, fo. 83.

<sup>170</sup> Petrov, 'O sozdanií udarnoi gruppovki', 85–6. These figures refer to the beginning of the operation.

<sup>171</sup> Glantz and House, *When Titans Clashed*, 212.

<sup>172</sup> Rokossovsky, *A Soldier's Duty*, 208.

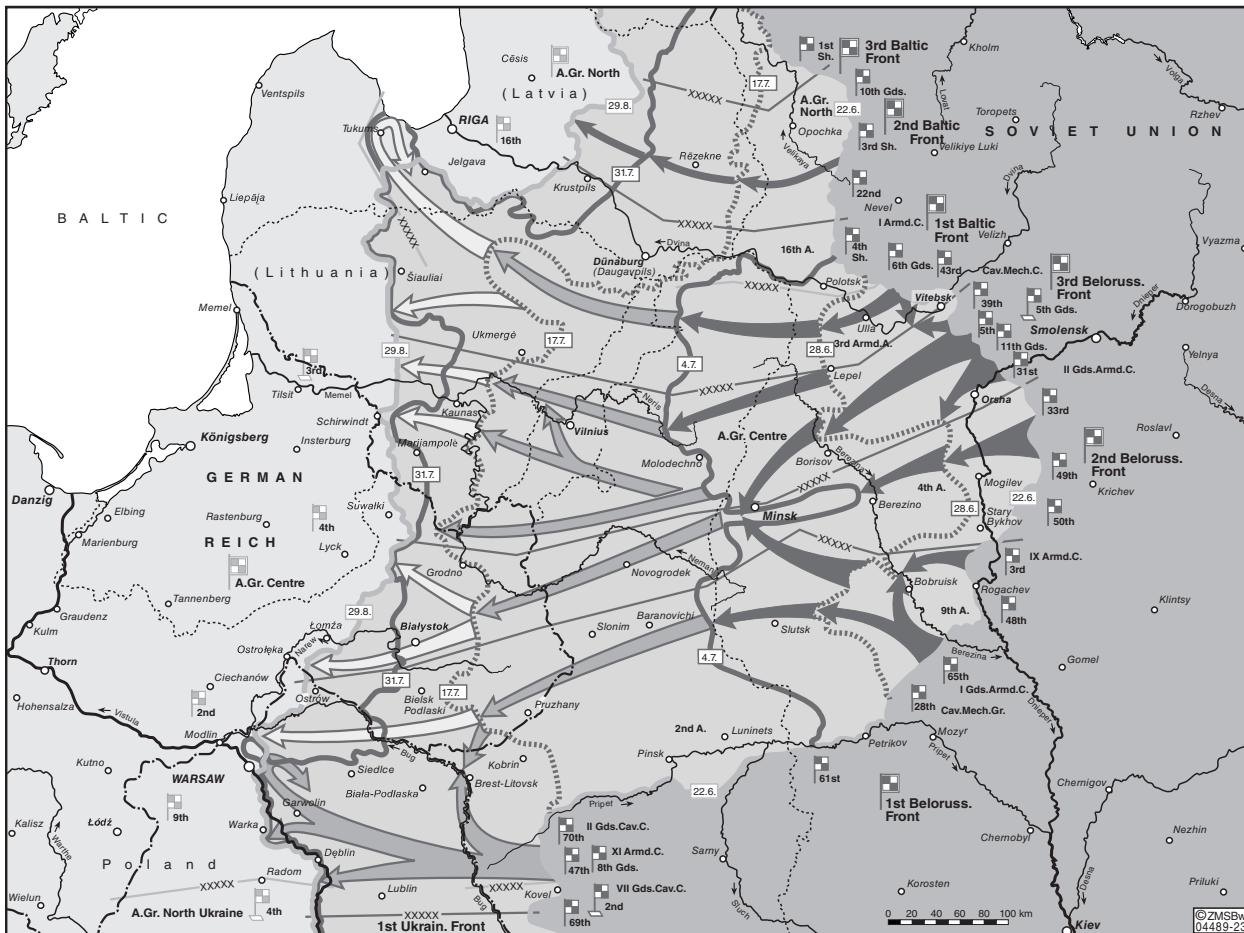
<sup>173</sup> On the interpretation of the Stavka directive, see Bezymensky, 'Der sowjetische Vorstoß', 91, and Jaczyński, 'Die Rote Armee an der Weichsel', 198–9; see also Vasilevsky, *Sache des ganzen Lebens*, 428–9.

thin German blocking line the following day, severing the connection between Second Army and the still rudimentary Ninth Army. In this phase only the Luftwaffe was able to intervene by deploying ground-attack aircraft. On 29 July the Soviet 2nd Armoured Army crossed the important Warsaw–Siedlce highway, advancing with three armoured corps. On the left wing, XVI Armoured Corps pushed along the Vistula directly towards the Warsaw suburb of Praga, but was stopped at first by the German 73th Infantry Division. Less resistance was encountered in the centre by VIII Guards Armoured Corps in its advance towards Okuniew. On the right wing, III Armoured Corps was able to advance northwards almost unopposed, and on 30 July it reached Radzymin, approximately 15 kilometres north-east of Warsaw. The Soviet armoured units were thus already deep in the rear of the German front and only about 3 kilometres from the important bridge over the Narew at Zegrze. On 31 July Siedlce, the southern cornerstone of Second Army's defensive front, was lost.

The decisive escalation of the crisis came on 1 August. On that day 8th Guards Army, commanded by Col.-Gen. Vasily Ivanovich Chuikov, crossed the Vistula at Magnuszew, south of Warsaw, and established a bridgehead. Ninth Army, with its insufficient forces, now faced the task of blocking a second bridgehead in addition to the one at Puławy. Above all, 1 August 1944 saw the beginning of the Warsaw Uprising, an event which has since occupied the attention of many historians. The situation in the rear of the German front-line units was now extremely critical, since Warsaw was a central node for road and rail traffic. The crucial supply lines of Second, Fourth, and Ninth Armies passed through the city, in which numerous rear supply facilities, hospitals, arms factories, and so on were also located. So the German operations staffs also feared logistic collapse. The disaster facing Army Group Centre, threatened with being completely cut off, seemed almost inevitable. In this phase, the Warsaw area was not only the decisive basis of Army Group Centre's lines of supply and retreat, but also, according to German enemy intelligence, the springboard for continuation of the Soviet offensive towards the Baltic Sea. Given the alarming prospect of the amputation of the whole of the eastern front's northern wing, Warsaw was of strategic importance. From the German viewpoint, therefore, 1 August was the fateful day, since the eastern front threatened to collapse like a house of cards.

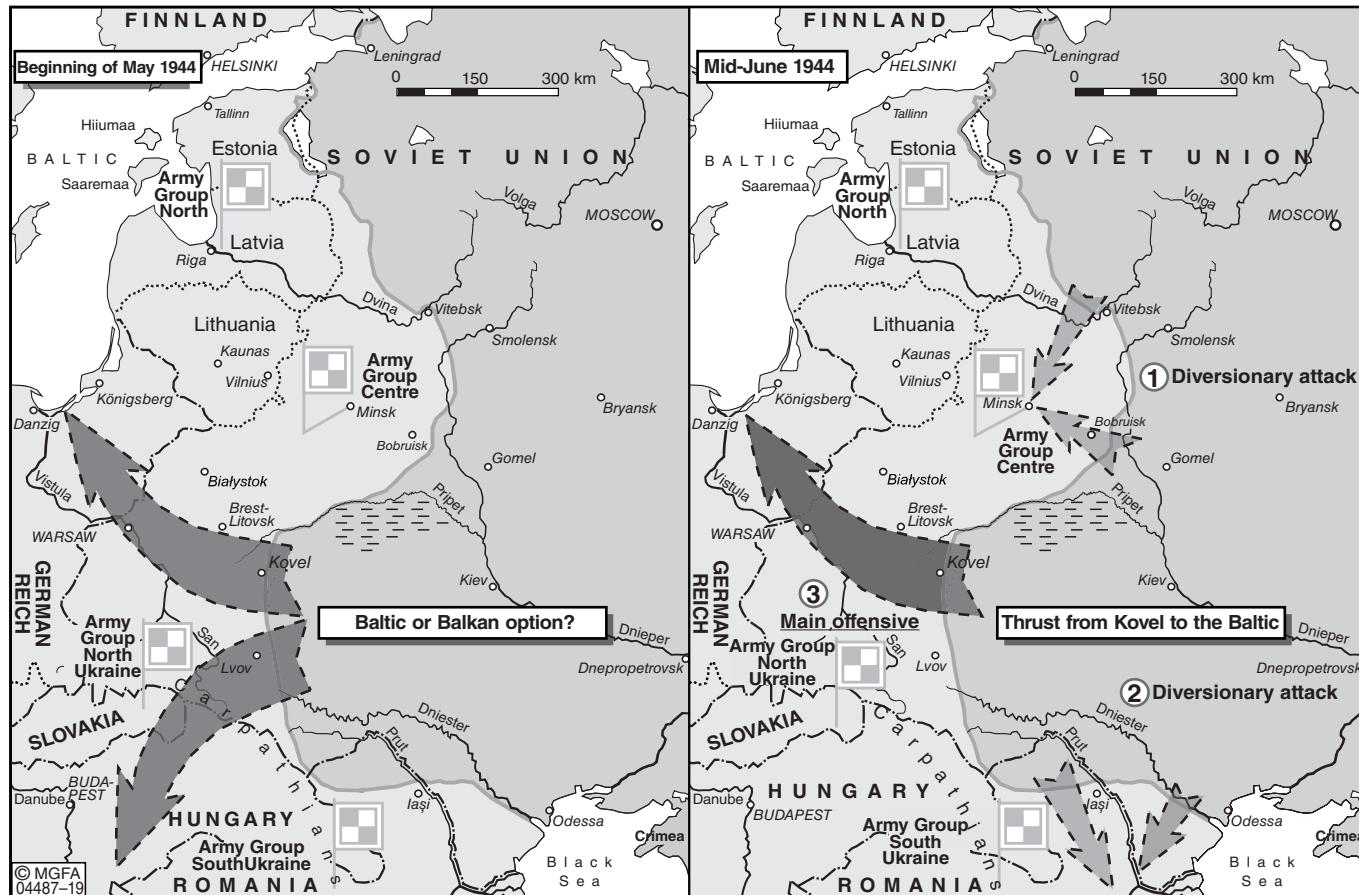
What now followed was a complete surprise. As if from nowhere, four German armoured divisions launched a sudden concentric attack on the area to the east of Warsaw, and the Soviet armoured units which had thrust forward in a preliminary attack were caught in the trap. The situation of Army Group Centre in July 1944 was similar to that of Army Group South on the Donets in February 1943, when the southern wing of the eastern front was threatened with encirclement and a 'super-Stalingrad'. On that occasion Manstein had gained an armoured army as a mobile reserve by shortening the front, and had deployed it in a counter-blow after a wide-ranging castling movement.<sup>174</sup> Exactly the same situation repeated itself in

<sup>174</sup> See Klein and Frieser, 'Mansteins Gegenschlag', 13 ff.

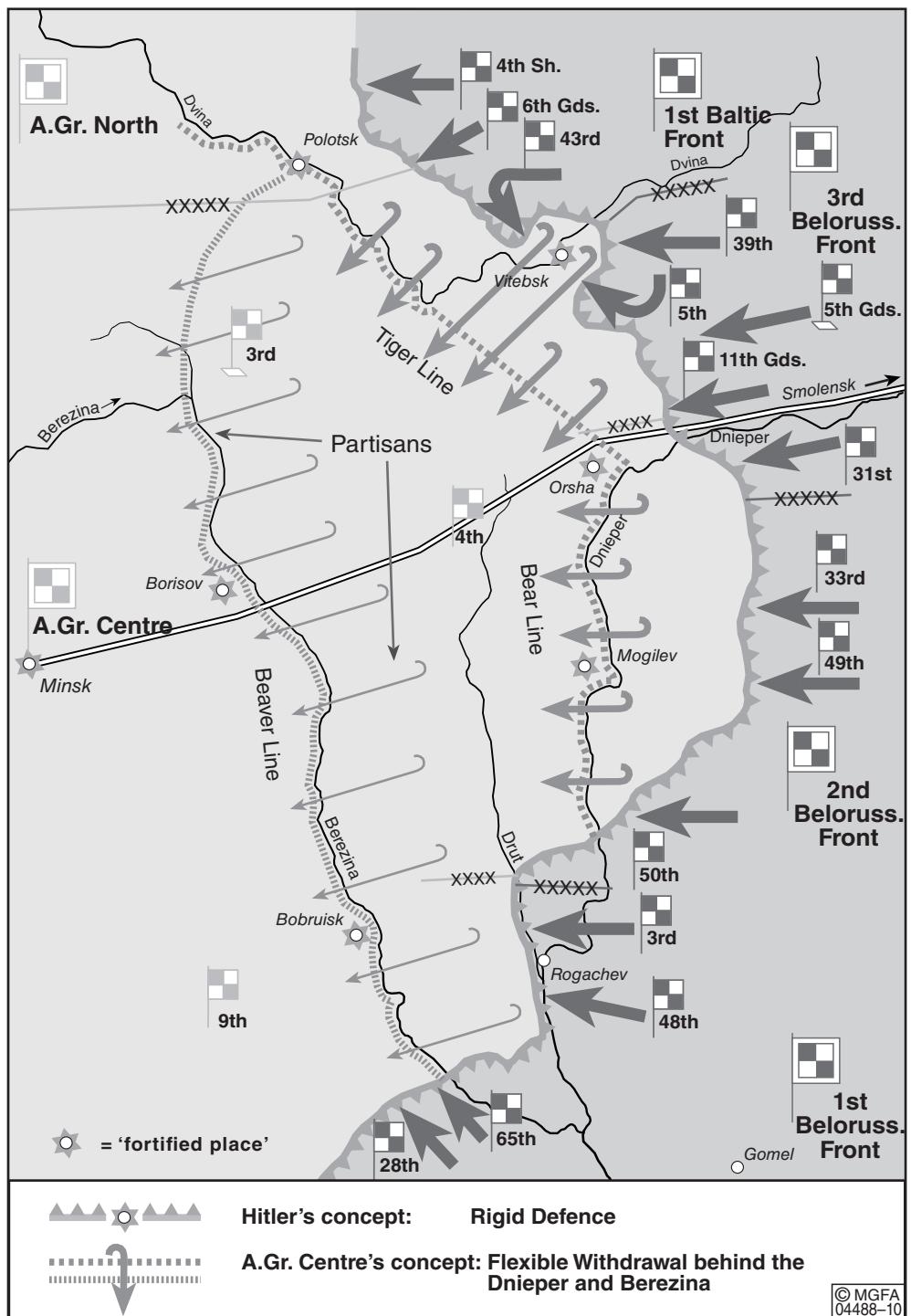


Map V.II.2. Operation BAGRATION: the Soviet offensive against Army Group Centre (22 June to 29 August 1944)

Sources: OKH situation maps, 22.6, 17.7, 31.7, 29.8.1944, BA-MA, Kart RH 2057/1064, 1089, 1104, 1140.

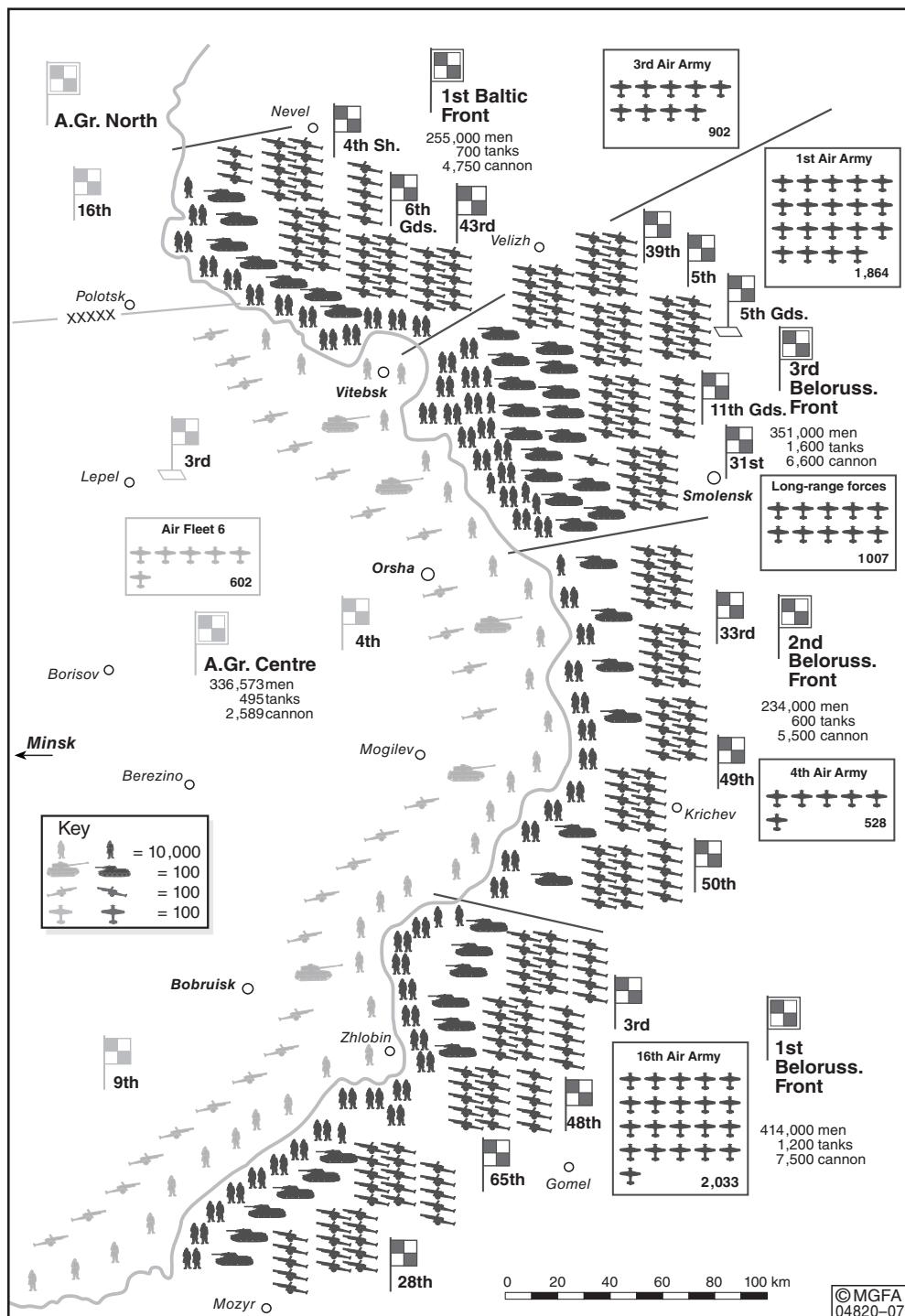


Map VII.3. Assessment of Soviet offensive planning by Foreign Armies East

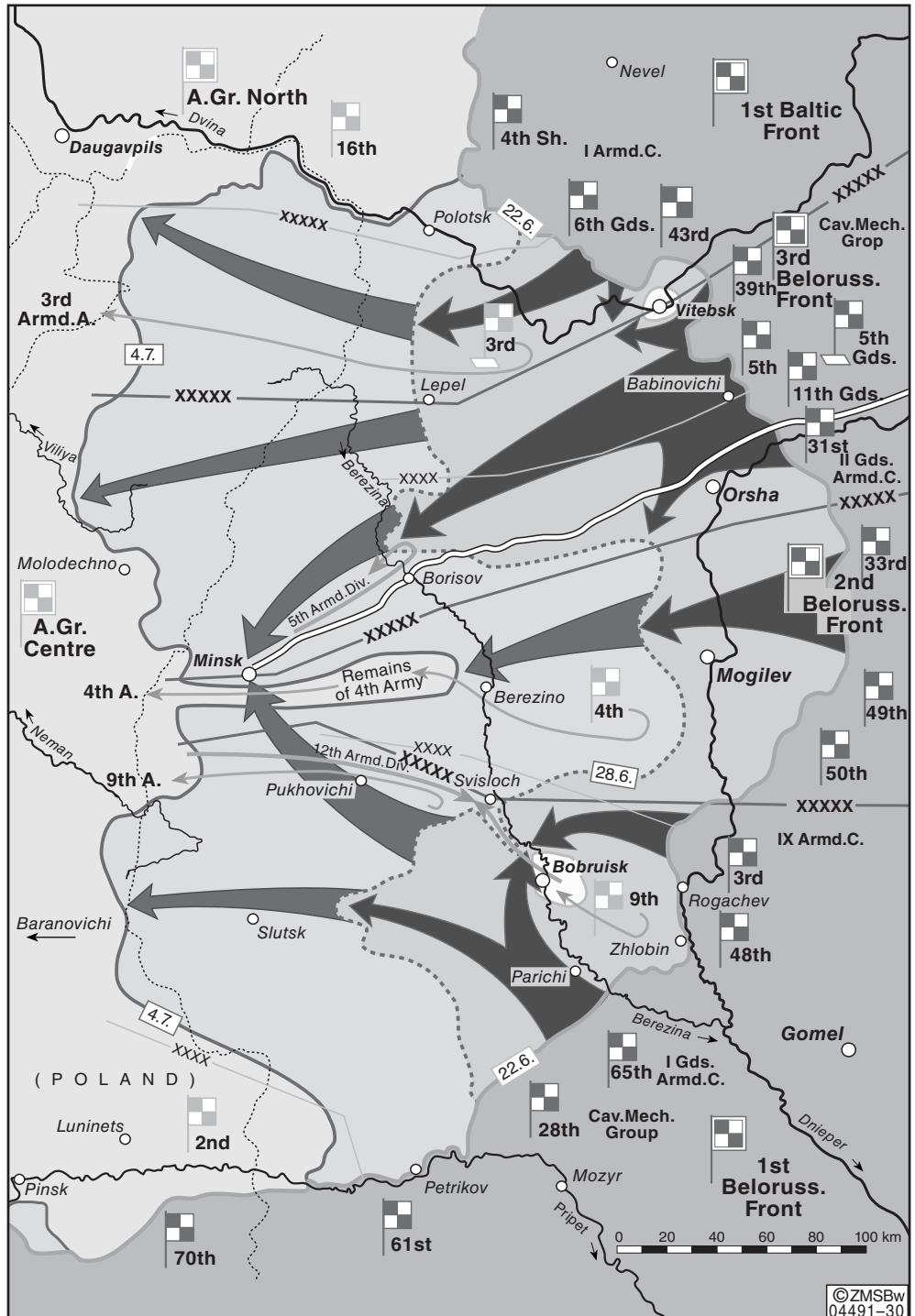


Map V.II.4. Rival defensive concepts in the summer of 1944

Source: OKH situation map, BA-MA, Kart RH 2 Ost/1064.

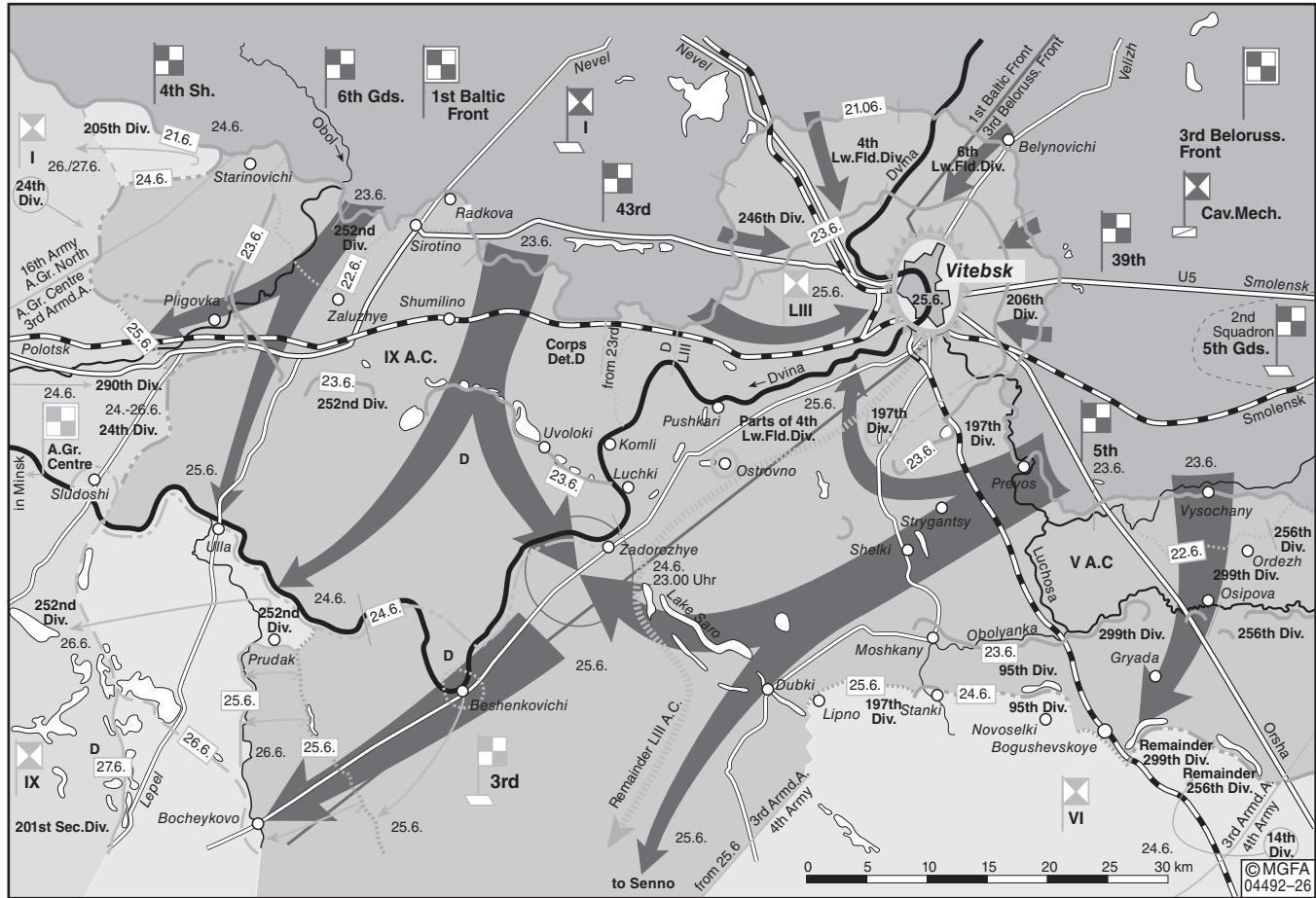


Map V.II.5. Comparative strength for Operation BAGRATION on 22 June 1944



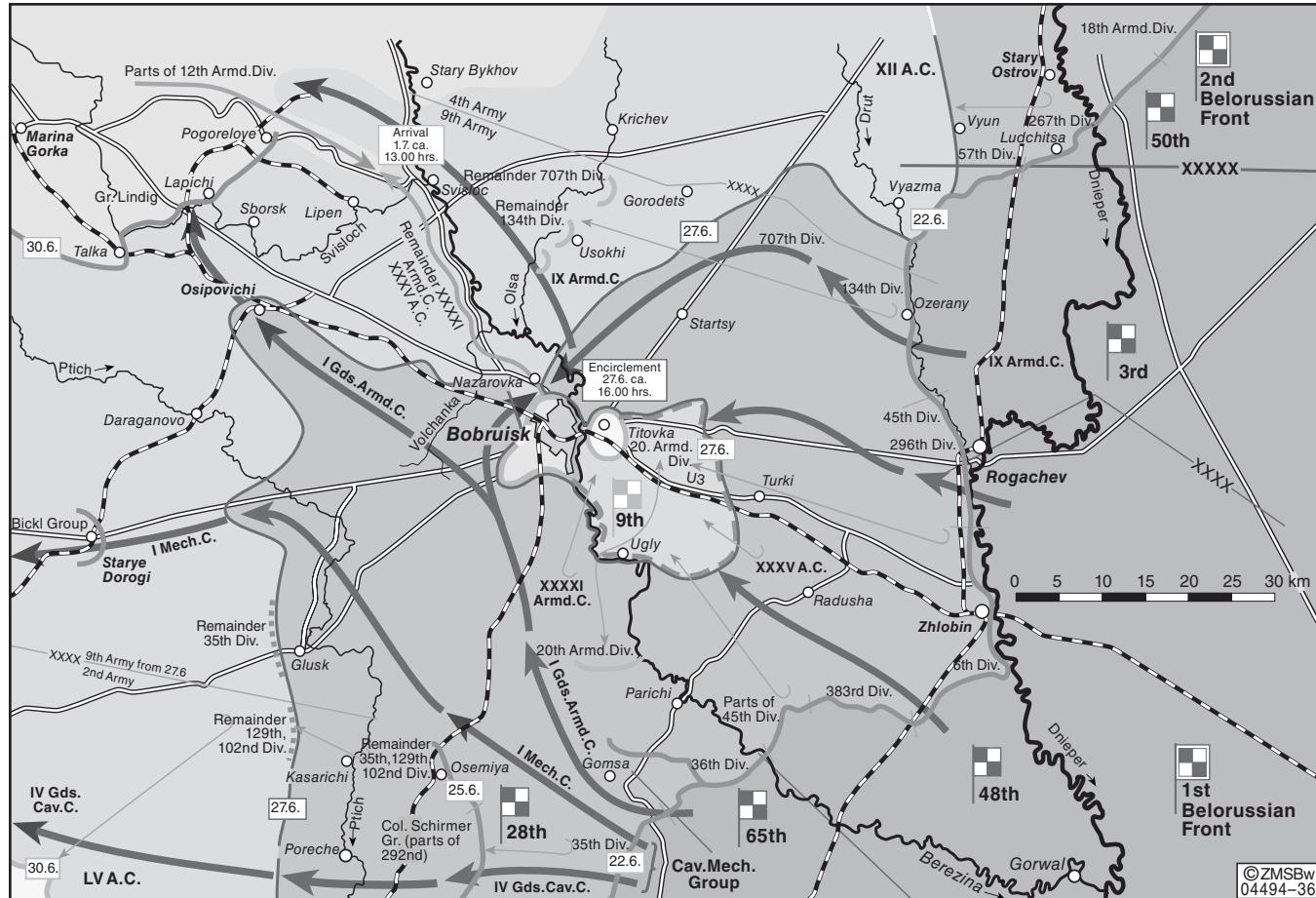
Map V.II.6. The collapse of Army Group Centre (22 June to 4 July 1944)

Sources: GenStdH, op. maps 22.6–4.7.1944, BA-MA, RH 60/v. 36; A.Gr. Centre, situation maps, 28.6.–2.7.1944, BA-MA, Kart RH 2 Ost/2220–2226.



Map V.II.7. The encirclement of LIII Army Corps (Third Armoured Army) in Vitebsk (22 to 27 June 1944)

Sources: OKH situation maps, 22.6.–27.6.1944, BA-MA, Kart RH 2 Ost/2714-2719; Sixteenth Army situation maps, RH 20-16/404 K; Third Armd.Army situation maps, BA-MA, RH 21-3/387 K; IX A.C. situation maps, BA-MA, RH 24-9/122 K; KTB VI A.C., BA-MA, RH 24-6/185, 187.



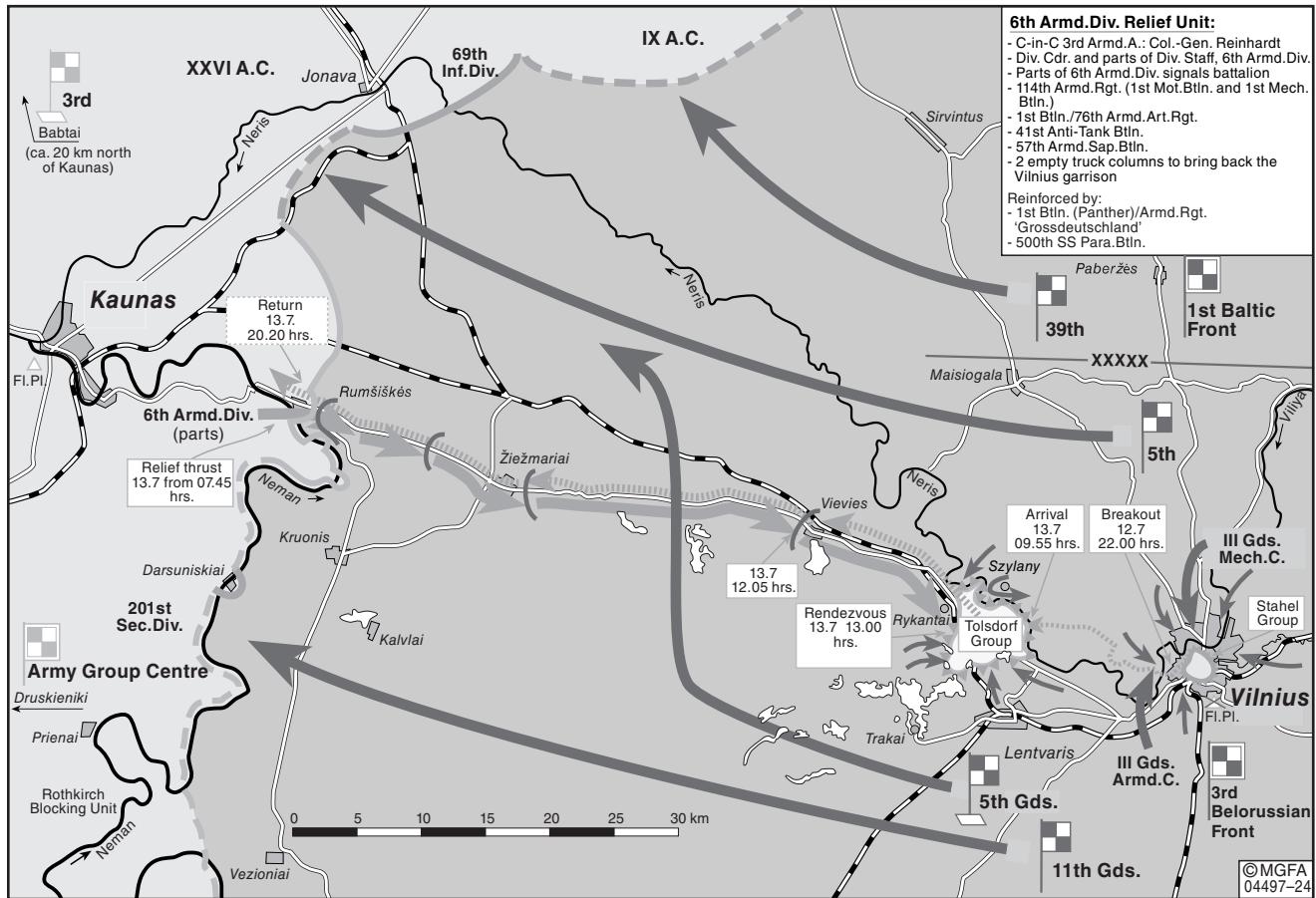
Map V.II.8. The encirclement and partial breakout of Ninth Army at Bobruisk (22 June to 1 July 1944)

Sources: OKH situation maps, 22.6.–2.7.1944, BA-MA, Kart RH 2 Ost/2714-2727; AOK 9, KTB No. 10, 1.1.–10.7.1944, RH 20-9/176; AOK 9, combat report 24.6–10.7.1944, RH 20-9/636.



Map V.II.9. Zeitzler's plan for saving the northern section of the eastern front (end of June 1944)

Source: OKH situation map, BA-MA, Kart RH 2 Ost/1072.



the summer of 1944 before Warsaw, although this time everything went much faster. Model had no time left to argue with Hitler for operational freedom of action. He simply took it for granted. In the given crisis, he had no alternative but to scrap Hitler's rigid principle of linear defence and, like Manstein, pursue free combat in the rear. Model too took remarkably bold risks, withdrawing three armoured divisions from his army group's shaky front for a counter-attack, which could only be done by yielding territory. In addition, Armoured Paratroop Division 'Hermann Göring' had just arrived in Warsaw. Together, these four armoured divisions possessed 223 tanks, plus 54 assault guns and tank destroyers. Those figures are purely theoretical, however, since the divisions in question did not arrive all at the same time but one after the other, and sometimes had to be withdrawn again at the height of the battle in order to 'put a fire out' at other places on the front. On the other side, 2nd Armoured Army had around 800 tanks and assault guns, although an unknown number had been lost in the meantime. The initial armoured strength of the Germans divisions on 2 August was as follows:<sup>175</sup>

- 19th Armoured Division: 26 Panzer IVs, 26 Panzer Vs, 18 light tank destroyers;
- Armoured Paratroop Division 'Hermann Göring': 35 Panzer IVs, 5 Panzer Vs, 23 Panzerjäger IVs;
- SS Armoured Division 'Viking': 8 Panzer IVs, 45 Panzer Vs, 13 assault guns;
- 4th Armoured Division: 40 Panzer IVs, 38 Panzer Vs.

According to Model's operational plan, the first phase was to be a pincer attack on Okuniew to cut off the rear of the Soviet III Armoured Corps, which had advanced far to the north. The second phase was to be a concentrated attack by the four armoured divisions to destroy the units of the encircled Soviet corps. After that, the plan was to attack VIII Guards Armoured Corps, and finally XVI Armoured Corps. The assembly phase was the most complicated, however, since the four armoured divisions were located in completely different front sectors, from which they had to be withdrawn. Once that was done, they were to be shifted in a castling manoeuvre to the area east of Warsaw, and then to attack simultaneously from the four points of the compass. Given the far greater strength of the enemy, the right troops had to be concentrated in the right place at exactly the right time. The encirclement manoeuvre was extremely difficult to coordinate at operational level. Owing to the rapid course of events, tactical implementation could be carried out successfully only by officers trained in mission-type command. Knowing how much depended on the success of the operation, Field Marshal Model led the attack himself, leading his troops from the front.

At first only Armoured Paratroop Division 'Hermann Göring' was available, having just arrived in Warsaw from Italy. Although the bulk of the division was temporarily classified as 'inoperational',<sup>176</sup> on 28 and 29 July its few already

<sup>175</sup> AOK 9, Ia, 'Panzer u. Panzerabwehrwaffen, Stand 2.8.1944', BA-MA RH 20-9/231; AOK 2, Ia No. T 215/44 geh., daily report, 2 Aug. 1944, BA-MA RH 20-2/949.

<sup>176</sup> KTB HGr Mitte, 26 Jul. 1944, BA-MA RH 19 II/198, fo. 289.

available tanks were able, together with 73rd Infantry Division, to prevent the Warsaw suburb of Praga from being taken in short order by the advance troops of the Soviet 2nd Armoured Army. In the meantime, 19th Armoured Division had been withdrawn from its sector of the front at Białystok. Its first units arrived on 29 July, just in time to stop the Soviet tanks a little way short of the important Narew bridge at Zegzre. In a combined pincer attack, SS Armoured Division 'Viking' and 4th Armoured Division had just stopped the enemy forces which had broken through at Kleszczele. Now they too were hastily withdrawn from the front and reached the new deployment zone on 31 July and 2 August respectively.

The tank battle before Warsaw began on 1 August with a pincer attack on Okuniew. The spearheads of a combat group of 19th Armoured Division attacking from the west, and SS Armoured Division 'Viking' from the east, met to the north of Okuniew at 19.15, thereby cutting off the Soviet III Armoured Corps, which had advanced as far north as Radzymin. The attack by 4th Armoured Division, which had just arrived in the area, and by parts of 19th Armoured Division, was led by Field Marshal Model in person. The tank battle reached its climax on 3 August, when the Soviet III Armoured Corps was tightly concentrated in the area of Wołomin. The four German armoured divisions attacked concentrically from four directions: 4th Armoured Division from the north-east, SS Armoured Division 'Viking' from the south-east, Armoured Paratroop Division 'Hermann Göring' from the south-west, and 19th Armoured Division from the north-west. That day most of the Soviet units in the Wołomin area were destroyed, and the noise of the battle could be heard as far away as the centre of Warsaw. The next day, 4 August, the remaining sections of the Soviet 2nd Armoured Army were attacked, together with 47th Army, which had rushed to its assistance. The fighting was concentrated on Okuniew, where the Soviet VIII Guards Armoured Corps had taken up position. The plan had been to enclose and destroy that major formation too, but more bad news had since arrived from other sectors of the front. That same day 19th Armoured Division had to be withdrawn, and the following day it was the turn of Armoured Paratroop Division 'Hermann Göring'. One after the other, the two divisions set off round the contested city of Warsaw towards Magnuszew to attack the Soviet bridgehead west of the Vistula, where 8th Guards Army, supported by 1st Polish Army and strong armoured forces, was trying to enlarge the bridgehead. In the evening of 4 August the German units at Okuniew went back on the defensive. The purpose of the operation—to prevent the enemy from advancing into the area east of Warsaw by means of 'offensive defence'—had been achieved.<sup>177</sup>

<sup>177</sup> Surprisingly, the literature contains no comprehensive account of the crucial tank battle before Warsaw, which coincided with the Warsaw Uprising. One of the reasons must be that Second Army's war diary is missing for that period. The author was able to examine the almost complete war diaries of Second Army when looking through the captured German files in the Moscow special archive. But precisely for the crucial days around 1 August (the start of the Warsaw Uprising), the file was missing. It may possibly be located in another, difficult-to-access Russian archive. However, the course of the battle can be reconstructed by consulting the Second Army volumes of annexes in the BA-MA. See daily reports 20 July to 5 Aug. (BA-MA RH 20-2/946-952). See also KTB AOK 9, 28 July to 7 Aug.,

It was probably the still continuing controversy about the Warsaw Uprising, which began at the same time, that cast Model's counter-blow into the historiographical shade. Yet that tank battle was, for the Germans, by far the most important action during the BAGRATION offensive. Without that successful counter-attack before Warsaw, Army Group Centre's front would probably have collapsed and the Soviet armour would have been able to advance to the Baltic Sea unimpeded. With regard to the starting position and course of the operation, the tank battle before Warsaw in August 1944 is astonishingly similar to the battle of encirclement at Tannenberg in August 1914. On the earlier occasion Eighth Army, stationed in East Prussia, was attacked frontally by Russia's Nieman Army, while the Narew Army attacked it in the rear from the south in order to block its retreat to the Vistula and enclose it on the Baltic Coast. Thereupon the strongest German units were withdrawn from the front in a castling manoeuvre and shifted south in a straight line through East Prussia. Four army corps suddenly advanced from four different directions on the area around Tannenberg, where they established a pocket into which the Russian Narew Army marched unsuspectingly. In 1944 an operation on exactly the same lines was carried out some 100 kilometres further south, but this time at top speed. Under Model's command, four armoured divisions withdrawn from the front thrust into the area to the east of Warsaw, and the advanced units of the Soviet 2nd Armoured Army fell into the trap.

The tank battle was exceptionally fierce, and the Soviet units suffered painful losses. On 4 August 2nd Armoured Army, which had begun the thrust in depth on 22 July with 810 tanks and assault guns, was left with only 263 fighting vehicles.<sup>178</sup> III Armoured Corps was completely shattered, VIII Armoured Corps badly hit, and XVI Armoured Corps also incurred considerable losses.<sup>179</sup> By 5 August the condition of 2nd Armoured Army was so bad that it had to be withdrawn from the front.

Given the bitter fighting at the gates of Warsaw, it is hard to believe that the Soviet command had from the outset deliberately refrained from taking the city. This raises an interesting point of discussion. According to many Poles, what happened then was a cynical conspiracy, a second Hitler–Stalin pact, whereby the Soviet tanks deliberately stopped outside Warsaw so that Hitler, as Stalin's

BA-MA RH 20-9/205, and the daily reports in the volumes of annexes RH 20-9/210, 212, 214, 215, 220, and 231; KTB HGr Mitte, 28 to 31 July 1944, BA-MA RH 19 II/198, and for the period 1 to 5 Aug. 1944, BA-MA RH 19 II/199. The army group's operational orders for the period in question are contained in file RH 19 II/208. See also Hinze, *19. Infanterie- und Panzer-Division*, 678–88; Neumann, *Die 4. Panzerdivision*, 437–48. In the Soviet literature, this surprising defeat is either ignored or mentioned only in passing. Essentially, there is only an essay by Col.-Gen. Aleksei Ivanovich Radzievsky, who (then a major-general) was replacing the army's wounded commander-in-chief at the time and led the failed armoured thrust towards Warsaw; see Radzievsky, 'Na puti k Varshave', 74–7. On this, see Glantz and House, *When Titans Clashed*, 212–13, and Glantz, 'The Failures of Historiography', 800 ff.

<sup>178</sup> Bezymensky, 'Der sowjetische Vorstoß', 92.

<sup>179</sup> For the German view, see KTB 9. Armeec, 3 Aug. 1944, BA-MA RH 20-9/205, 26, fo. 29, and the corresponding daily report in RH 20-9/210, fo. 45. For 4 August there is a very informative daily report from Ninth Army in a Second Army file, BA-MA RH 20-2/951. See also Neumann, *Die 4. Panzerdivision*, 442, 447.

'willing executioner', could liquidate the bourgeois resistance movement. This theory seems inapplicable to the first phase at least, since on 27 July the Soviet 2nd Armoured Army suddenly raced towards Warsaw as if the devil were on its tail. The attack took place so quickly that all the basic military rules were ignored: there was no reconnaissance, no intelligence, no flank protection, no logistic back-up. That is all the more astonishing as, up to that point, Stalin had been remarkable restrained about the thrust on Warsaw which the German high command so feared. Then, all at once, there was a swing to the opposite extreme. Stalin's change of mind seems plausible, however, since he clearly wanted to forestall the Polish resistance movement. The Red Army was supposed to take Warsaw, or at least the suburb of Praga on the right bank of the Vistula, in short order. Moreover, Soviet units had already crossed the Vistula at Magnuszew and established a bridgehead, which appeared to have created the precondition for enclosing Warsaw from the south as well by means of a second pincer movement. In those circumstances, Model's counter-strike came as a complete surprise.<sup>180</sup>

This unexpected turn of events, however, led, by a tragic chain of circumstances, to a catastrophe for the Polish capital. The first thing to note is that the Warsaw Uprising, which broke out at the same point in time, is judged in very different ways by Polish historians too. For some, it was a heroic battle for the honour of the nation. For others, it was irresponsible, self-destructive activism.<sup>181</sup> In terms of its objectives, the uprising seems very ambivalent. It was directed militarily against the Germans, but politically against the Soviet Union. The Polish underground army, *Armia Krajowa*, was strictly anti-Bolshevik, rejecting both Hitler's regime and Stalin's rule. Its leaders wanted to liberate the capital with their own hands and so light a beacon for a future sovereign Poland. They began the uprising without any significant logistic reserves, however, assuming that the fighting would last only about three days (in fact it lasted 63 days), and that on the fourth day the Red Army would march in.<sup>182</sup> At first their calculation seemed to make sense, for on 31 July the seemingly unstoppable Soviet troops reached Praga, the eastern suburb of Warsaw. Thereupon the leaders of the uprising decided to start fighting the next day, 1 August. They could not know that the Germans, who seemed already beaten, would then be launching a counter-attack. Even the renowned Soviet enemy intelligence was taken completely by surprise. The tank battle before Warsaw, which resulted in the encirclement and destruction of large parts of the Soviet 2nd Armoured Army, began at exactly the same time as the uprising.

However, after several Soviet armies had arrived as reinforcements, something happened which the insurgents had even less expected: the Red Army units waited—as the Poles see it—at the gates of Warsaw, without doing anything, until the Germans had defeated the uprising. The situation may perhaps be

<sup>180</sup> According to Guderian's memoirs (*Erinnerungen eines Soldaten*, 324), 'We Germans had the impression that it was our defence which halted the enemy rather than a Russian desire to sabotage the Warsaw uprising.'

<sup>181</sup> See, e.g., Ciechanowski, 'Die Genese des Aufstandes', 100–17.

<sup>182</sup> Sawicki, 'Strategie', 127.

summed up as follows: at first the Soviets wanted to take Warsaw but could not; later, they could have taken Warsaw but no longer wanted to. There are no accessible files in the Soviet archives which could answer the question unambiguously, and so the controversy among historians concerning Stalin's 'hold back' order continues to this day.<sup>183</sup>

The tank battle before Warsaw was a dramatic turning point in Operation BAGRATION. For the first time, the German troops, constantly defeated and on the retreat, reversed the course of events and again achieved a victory. This decisive turnaround clearly showed that the Soviet offensive had, in Clausewitz's terms, passed its culminating point. After weeks of uninterrupted combat, the Red Army's troops were exhausted and its supply lines overstretched. A report by Maj.-Gen. Radzievsky, then in command of 2nd Armoured Army in its advance on Warsaw, typifies the situation. On 30 June he radioed his commander-in-chief, Marshal Rokossovsky: 'I'll soon be out of breath.'<sup>184</sup> At that very moment he was hit by Model's counter-attack. Army Group Centre's front, which had threatened to collapse, was stabilized once again.

From the German point of view, things could have turned out much worse. In mid-June, as already mentioned, Foreign Armies East had feared the Red Army would try to bring about the collapse of the German front at one stroke by means of a decisive offensive from Kovel to the Baltic. Seen from Warsaw, the Kovel salient was only about 250 kilometres away, whereas the distance to the Belorussian balcony, which protruded far to the east, had been around 700 kilometres. The Red Army command nevertheless decided on a frontal offensive from the east. At the decisive moment, however, the Soviet troops were exhausted after struggling through the forests and swamps of Belorussia, and their offensive force was insufficient.

It is worth noting in this connection that, at a situation conference in Moscow on 8 July, Zhukov called for a change in the point of main effort in view of the surprisingly favourable course of the operation. Invoking the plan for an encirclement offensive, Zhukov proposed that the Soviet attacking forces in the central sector turn northwards in the direction of Warsaw and advance on East Prussia.<sup>185</sup> That bold manoeuvre would have cut off the whole northern wing of the German eastern front. Interestingly, the idea was a revival of the old Soviet plan drawn up by Boris Mikhailovich Shaposhnikov in 1938 and of Zhukov's plan of 15 May 1941 for a preventive strike against the assembling German forces.<sup>186</sup> All these operational ideas were inspired by the same geographical determinants, above all, the course of the Vistula. As in 1941, however, Stalin again rejected Zhukov's proposal. And so both 1st Ukrainian Front and the left wing of 1st Belorussian Front attacked only frontally to the west, with the aim of conquering the territory around

<sup>183</sup> On this, see the two collective works *Der Warschauer Aufstand 1944* and *Die polnische Heimatarmee*. Notable recent works include Borodziej, *Der Warschauer Aufstand 1944*, and Davies, *Rising '44*. See also Part V, Chapter III.1 and Chapter III.2 of the present volume.

<sup>184</sup> Quoted in Bezymensky, 'Der sowjetische Vorstoß', 92.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid. 90–1; see also Zhukov, *Erinnerungen* (8th edn.), 259–63.

<sup>186</sup> Bezymensky, 'Der sowjetische Vorstoß', 91.

Lvov and Lublin. These two parallel offensives, however, both of which deployed very powerful forces, by no means led to the collapse of the eastern front. Instead, they were brought to a halt frontally at the Carpathians and the Vistula. Significantly, Zhukov dealt resolutely with his dispute with Stalin only in the revised eighth edition of his memoirs. At the time he had called for a pincer-type thrust north-westwards to the Vistula estuary: 'That could have been done if our troops had been reinforced in time. According to the calculations, 1st Belorussian Front would have needed another 300 to 400 tanks and self-propelled guns, and 2nd Belorussian Front one general army and one armoured army, one rifle corps, and a few armoured and self-propelled gun regiments.' 'With those reinforcements,' Zhukov continues, 'all three Belorussian fronts would, in my opinion, have been capable of taking East Prussia and advancing to the Vistula, including the Bay of Danzig, or could at the same time have cut East Prussia off from the rest of Germany by means of the thrust to the Vistula.'<sup>187</sup> In retrospect, Zhukov is highly critical of Stalin's refusal: 'I believe it was a serious mistake on Stalin's part, which subsequently made necessary the extremely complicated East Prussian operation that cost us such heavy losses.'<sup>188</sup>

It was not until 27 July 1944 that Rokossovsky was instructed to turn part of the forces on his left wing northwards 'in the general direction of Warsaw'.<sup>189</sup> Now the thrust came too late. Moreover, it was carried out with only a fraction of the troops which the Red Army could have concentrated in that area if the decisive point of main effort had been moved there in the early summer of 1944. Then—rather than Radzievsky's 800 fighting vehicles—8,000 tanks, or even more, could have attacked in the direction of Warsaw. Instead, the Red Army spread its huge mass of forces along the whole eastern front, with the point of main effort in the marshy primeval forests of Belorussia. The ease with which the operational breakthrough was achieved at Kovel at the outset shows how much greater a disaster the German eastern army would have suffered if the decision had already been forced at the strategically most effective point in June 1944. But even Radzievsky's thrust, though no longer carried out with full force, was extremely dangerous from the German viewpoint, since it was directed behind the German front at the wholly unprotected area east of Warsaw. Ultimately, Army Group Centre was saved by Stalin's decision to have the left wing of 1st Belorussian Front attack first westwards towards Lublin and Puławy, rather than directly north-west in the direction of Warsaw. That gave Model enough time to stop the exhausted Soviet armoured units at the last moment. And so there was a second 'miracle on the Vistula' after that of 1920, when Stalin had been to blame for the Red Army's decisive defeat in the same place in a counter-attack by Poland's Marshal Józef Piłsudski.

<sup>187</sup> Zhukov, *Erinnerungen* (8th edn.), 261.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid. 263.

<sup>189</sup> Bezymensky, 'Der sowjetische Vorstoß', 91; see also Jaczyński, 'Die Rote Armee an der Weichsel', 197 ff.; Vasilevsky, *Sache des ganzen Lebens*, 428–9.

**(b) Operation DOPPELKOPF: Reconnection with Army Group North**

Hitler had rejected a ‘major solution’ on an operational scale, despite the fact that Army Group North was threatened with encirclement. That put him in opposition to his generals, especially Col.-Gen. Zeitzler, who was then the OKH chief of staff. At the end of June 1944 the generals had already demanded abandonment of the northern Baltic area, which could not be held in any case. They wanted the troops thus freed up to be used for a counter-attack on the flank of the Soviet units advancing against Army Group Centre. That would have made it possible to close the gap between Army Group Centre and Army Group North. Meanwhile, three Soviet armies and strong armoured units of 1st Baltic Front had thrust into the ‘Baltic hole’ and increased it to a width of more than 100 kilometres by the end of July. The spearhead of the attack was III Guards Mechanized Corps, which reached the Gulf of Riga at Tukums on 31 July. Soviet tanks now stood on the coast, and Army Group North was enclosed in the Baltic area. Since that army group was at the same time under frontal attack from the east by superior forces, it was unable to react to the crisis on its right flank. Nor did it have a single armoured division with which to carry out a powerful counter-thrust. It was now up to Army Group Centre to close the dangerous gap, although that would increase the length of its front line to 1,100 kilometres. Third Armoured Army, deployed on its northern wing, was also in trouble and no longer able to withstand the pressure of the frontal attack by 3rd Belorussian Front. Following a Soviet breakthrough to the south of Kaunas, it was thrown back to Vilkaviškis, just before the East Prussian border. At the same time its left flank was endangered by the advancing 1st Baltic Front, so that it had to withdraw its northern wing, threatened with encirclement, to Raseiniai. Between Raseiniai and the Gulf of Riga there were only a few weak blocking groups, so Courland too was now exposed, almost without protection, to the assault of the Red Army.

Army Group Centre had just repelled the Soviet armoured thrust towards Warsaw on its right wing and was attempting to deploy all available forces against the Vistula bridgeheads at Magnuszew and Puławy. Now an even greater threat appeared on its left wing. The OKH, with its newly appointed chief of staff Guderian, also saw the point of main effort as being on the left wing, and on 8 August it put forward an initial plan for a counter-attack. The aim of the operation, code-named ‘Doppelkopf’, was for two improvised armoured corps to thrust through the ‘Baltic hole’ in a north-easterly direction and re-establish the connection with Army Group North. Two of the five armoured divisions in question, however, were still on their way from Romania. The following deployment of forces was planned:<sup>190</sup>

- XXXIX Armoured Corps, consisting of 4th, 5th, and 12th Armoured Divisions and commanded by General Dietrich von Saucken, was to assemble in the area

<sup>190</sup> See OK HGr Mitte, Ia No. 10 729/44 g.Kdos. Chefs., 10 Aug. 1944, BA-MA RL 7/522, fos. 18–21; see also KTB HGr Nord, 18 Aug. 1944, RH 19 III/316, fos. 140–1.

between Memel and Liepāja and from there, after breaking through the lines of 1st Baltic Front, push forward 80 kilometres straight across the enemy's hinterland to the positions of Army Group North at Jelgava. Once the fighting vehicles still on their way by sea had arrived, the 'Strachwitz Group' was to follow with two armoured brigades and take over protection of the northern flank.

- For XXXX Armoured Corps, commanded by General Otto von Knobelsdorff, a secondary thrust on the right wing was envisaged. At first the attack was to be carried out by 14th Armoured Division and Armoured Infantry Division 'Grossdeutschland', to be followed by 7th Armoured Division and 1st Infantry Division. The aim was to attack from the area of Tauragė and secure the right flank by taking Šiauliai.

These armoured divisions, however, were no longer comparable to those of earlier years. The German counter-offensive began not with 1,000 tanks, as Marshal Bagramyan later claimed,<sup>191</sup> but with the pitiful number of 141 tanks and 54 assault guns.<sup>192</sup> After further units were brought in, the final total on 26 August was 299 tanks and assault guns.<sup>193</sup> On the opposite side, 1st Baltic Front had started the summer offensive with three armies, supported by 687 tanks and assault guns,<sup>194</sup> and had since been reinforced by 51st Army, 2nd Guards Army, and III Guards Mechanized Corps. In addition, 5th Guards Armoured Army and XIX Armoured Corps were also brought in for the decisive battles in August. The inferiority of the two German corps in their attack on several Soviet armies possessing strong armoured units must have given cause for concern, so it is hard to understand why the original German operational plan was blown up by Hitler into the crazy idea of a huge battle of encirclement in Lithuania. The envisaged north-easterly push through the 'Baltic hole' to Jelgava was in itself an almost impossible task. Now, in addition, 'after establishing the connection with Army Group North', the troops were required to 'turn south in the direction of Kaunas [...] and thrust into the rear of the enemy forces facing the eastern front of Third Armoured Army'.<sup>195</sup> By means of this grandiose castling manoeuvre, the two German armoured corps, supported by infantry divisions of Army Group North, were supposed to encircle several armies of the Soviet 1st Baltic Front and 3rd Belorussian Front simultaneously.<sup>196</sup> Hitler even deluded himself that the manoeuvre would result in the encirclement of 'as many as 50 or 60 divisions'.<sup>197</sup> This was yet another example of the Führer's extreme mood swings. Only a short while

<sup>191</sup> Bagramyan, 'Der Durchbruch', 125. For the Soviet view, see also Bagramyan, 'Na zavershayushchem etape Shyaulyaiskai operatsii', 51 ff.; Bagramyan, *So schritten wir zum Sieg*, 342 ff.

<sup>192</sup> PzAOK 3, Ia No. M 915/44 geh., 17 Aug. 1944, Ia-Tagesmeldung; see also Nachmeldung Ziffer 6, BA-MA RH 21-3/v. 375.

<sup>193</sup> PzAOK 3, Ia No. M 951/44 geh., 26. Aug. 1944, Ia-Tagesmeldung, BA-MA RH 21-3/v. 379.

<sup>194</sup> 'Belorusskaya operatsiya v tsifrakh', 75, 77.

<sup>195</sup> KTB HGr Mitte, 9 Aug. 1944, BA-MA RH 19 II/199, fo. 96.

<sup>196</sup> Philippi and Heim, *Der Feldzug gegen Sowjetrußland*, 254; Tippelskirch, *Geschichte des Zweiten Weltkrieges*, 474; BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2046, 760.

<sup>197</sup> Hitlers *Lagebesprechungen* (1 Sept. 1944), 630; see also ibid. 628–9.

before, wholly committed to rigid defence, he had described ‘the idea of free combat in free space’ as ‘rubbish’.<sup>198</sup> Now he himself indulged in a dizzying flight of fancy. Apparently, Model’s successful castling manoeuvre with the armoured units at Warsaw had gone to his head.

On 16 August Field Marshal Model was appointed GOC West in France, Col.-Gen. Reinhardt took over command of Army Group Centre, and Col.-Gen. Erhard Raus succeeded Reinhardt as commander-in-chief of Third Armoured Army. Operation DOPPELKOPF began that same day, and at first made considerable territorial gains.<sup>199</sup> The Soviet operations staffs had not been expecting such an offensive, but this time they reacted quickly, which was relatively easy owing to their multitude of motorized troops. The front-line units went over temporarily to the defensive, while in the rear, armoured units—I Armoured Corps, III Guards Mechanized Corps, and 5th Guards Armoured Army—were made ready for counter-attacks. This procedure, taken over from the Wehrmacht, was by no means unfamiliar to the German attackers. What did come as a surprise, however, was the encounter with the Soviet anti-tank fronts. The Red Army had amassed such a multitude of anti-tank cannon that it was now able to form special anti-tank brigades. These were deployed in threatened sectors in a staggered anti-tank front which, partly protected by minefields, constituted a considerable danger for German tanks breaking through. The fact that during this attack a total of 595 Soviet anti-tank cannon were reported destroyed within 12 days shows how great the threat had been.<sup>200</sup>

Soviet air superiority was another problem. Although the German advance on 17 August was supported by 114 ground-attack aircraft, 116 fighters, and 30 reconnaissance planes,<sup>201</sup> on other days almost only Soviet aircraft were seen in the sky. The essential precondition for the blitzkrieg successes of earlier years, namely massive deployment of the Luftwaffe as flying battlefield artillery, was long a thing of the past. The tank and dive-bomber combination invoked by Guderian had also become obsolete. Not only did the Germans not have enough aircraft as a supporting component of their armoured forces, but the multitude of Soviet ground-attack aircraft was a permanent threat to movements of the Wehrmacht’s armoured units. The Luftwaffe’s insufficiency was not only a matter of grotesque numerical inferiority. The shortage of fuel was also a major factor. The Air Fleet 6 order for the provision of support to Operation DOPPELKOPF contained the following instruction: ‘Careful calculation of fuel allocation is an urgent operational

<sup>198</sup> Ibid. (31 July 1944), 598–9.

<sup>199</sup> On the course of Operation DOPPELKOPF, see KTB HGr Mitte, 16 to 27 Aug. 1944, BA-MA RH 19 II/199; KTB 3. Pz.Armee, 16 to 20 Aug., RH 21-3/v. 349, and 21 to 27 Aug., RH 21-3/v. 350; also Anl. Ia for the same period, RH 21-3/375–80; KTB XXXX. Pz.Korps, 16 to 27 Aug., RH 24-40/75, fos. 37–78, and the volumes of annexes RH 24-40/76 and 77. Files of XXXIX Armoured Corps are not available for this period. For secondary literature, see the standard work, Niepold, *Panzeroperationen*.

<sup>200</sup> KTB 3. Pz.Armee, 27 Aug. 1944, BA-MA RH 21-3/350, fo. 62.

<sup>201</sup> Niepold, *Panzeroperationen*, 40.

measure taking precedence over all other considerations.<sup>202</sup> The following passage is also significant: 'Combat units of IV Flying Corps are standing ready but will probably not be deployed owing to the fuel situation.'<sup>203</sup>

The German armoured thrusts were very successful at first, but eventually the main problem proved to be the lack of motorized infantry support, which was urgently needed to secure the flanks and take action against the Soviet anti-tank defences. XXXIX Armoured Corps' thrust towards Jelgava came to a halt halfway at Žagarē. XXXX Armoured Corps, advancing on the right wing, was also unable to take the key area around Šiauliai from far superior enemy forces.

At this critical juncture, just when Operation DOPPELKOPF seemed to have failed, another breakthrough was achieved by the Strachwitz Group, a unit which had only been thought of as flank cover. It had been assigned the task of attacking along the coast on the northern wing, but Maj.-Gen. Count Hyazinth Strachwitz was unable to engage his two brigades in the operation until 19 August, owing to a delay in arrival of the tanks for his unit, which were brought in by sea. Although he had only 60 fighting vehicles,<sup>204</sup> Strachwitz launched a furious attack, helped by the fact that the attention of the Soviet operations staffs was distracted by the two German thrusts on Šiauliai and Žagarē. After achieving the breakthrough, the Strachwitz Group rapidly pushed forward in depth. The next day, 20 August, it reached an advance unit of Sixteenth Army to the east of Tukums, thereby re-establishing the connection with Army Group North.

A noteworthy aspect of this operation was that the German armoured units lacked artillery support, which the Soviet enemy had in abundance. That was the great weak point of the Strachwitz Group, which consisted mainly of tanks. Massive help arrived, nevertheless, although from an unusual source. For the first time ever, a unit of Army Group Centre was supported by warships. On the morning of 20 August a naval unit commanded by Vice-Admiral August Thiele entered the Gulf of Riga. The heavy cruiser *Prinz Eugen* fired 284 rounds from its 203-mm gun turret at the Soviet positions at Tukums to clear the way for the Strachwitz Group. At the same time, the two destroyers Z-25 and Z-28 fired 168 rounds in support of the advance forces of Army Group North pushing forward from the east.<sup>205</sup> The effect was enormous, both practically and psychologically,

<sup>202</sup> 'Flottenbefehl für Unterstützung des Unternehmens Doppelkopf', 13 Aug. 1944, Rober Ritter von Greim, Lfl.Kdo. 6, Br.B.No. 715/44 g.Kdos./Chefs, BA-MA RL 7/522, fo. 22.

<sup>203</sup> 'Einsatzabsichten für Doppelkopf', 13 Aug. 1944, von Greim, Lfl.Kdo. 6, Br.B.No. 716/44 g. Chefs, fo. 25. See also KTB Ia Lw-Angelegenheiten, vol. III, Ia No. 10 463/44 g.Kdos, telex from Lfl.Kdo. 6, Chef d. Genst. to Okdo.H.Gr. Mitte, Chef des Genst., 6 Aug. 1944, BA-MA RH 19 II/235.

<sup>204</sup> Niepold, *Panzeroperationen*, 48.

<sup>205</sup> Haupt, *Heeresgruppe Mitte*, 233; Haupt, *Heeresgruppe Nord*, 224. See KTB Skl, pt. A, Ix/II, 'Lagebesprechung 22.8.1944', 543, fo. 278; MOK OstseeOp B Nr. gKdos 4341 F III, 22 Sept. 1944, 'Kurzer Rückblick auf August 1944', BA-MA RM 7/90, 2, fo. 338; Nahauklärungsgruppe 5 (Eins.), Bb. No. 1176/44 geheim, 23 Aug. 1944, 'Fliegerbeobachtung für Landzielschießen durch Kreuzer "Prinz Eugen" am 20.8.1944', BA-MA RM 45 I/162 B; 2. Kampfgruppe, B.No. Gkdos 82/44 Al, 17 Aug. 1944, 'Operationsbefehl Nr. 1', BA-MA RM 7/162, fos. 449–56; App. 15 to KTB MOK Ost/Führstab, 14 to 26 Aug. 1944, BA-MA RM 31/3217, fos. 64–8; 2. Kampfgruppe Gkdos. 100 A I, 21 Aug. 1944, 16.25, 'Gefechtskurzbericht', ibid., fo. 69.

and the German navy thus played a very important part in re-establishing the connection between the two army groups.

The point of main effort now shifted to the northern wing, where the fighting continued, with territorial gains by the Germans, until 27 August, after which a long pause set in on both sides. Operation DOPPELKOPF had lasted for 12 days in all, covering an area 180 kilometres wide and around 50 kilometres deep.<sup>206</sup> Its success led to the abandonment of the Soviet offensive (Operation BAGRATION). Even if the German counter-attack did not fulfil all the high expectations of the German command, especially Hitler, it was now quite clear that the Red Army units had worn themselves out. They needed a long period of recuperation and rehabilitation, and above all a new logistic base. It remains to conclude that, contrary to reports at the time, Operation DOPPELKOPF had in fact already failed when the situation was reversed by the individual exploit of a single tank general.

This episode is symptomatic of that phase of the war, when there were numerous individual successes which mostly remained tactical and fragmentary. They could not affect the outcome of the war, which had long been lost, but only influence its duration. The German counter-measures, especially those taken by Model, had now saved the eastern front once again, and a continuous front was re-established. This led Hitler to the dangerously wrong conclusion that the tide of war could yet be turned by an offensive in another theatre of operations. Guderian, however, had advised him to adopt a consistent defensive strategy. He urged Hitler to evacuate the Balkans and Norway and shorten the Apennine front in Italy, since that was the only way to obtain reserves for the highly endangered eastern front. But Hitler, determined to forge ahead regardless, switched the main effort back to the western front.<sup>207</sup> The Allies had marched into Paris from Normandy on 25 August and were pushing further east. The Führer now decided to strike the decisive blow and, with the last German armoured reserves, carry out the operation later known as the Ardennes offensive. In reality, however, in the summer of 1944 the German military effort was already entering its death throes. The retired Bundeswehr general Count von Kielmansegg expressed it as follows: 'It was the beginning of the end—the end of the eastern front—and in conjunction with the Allied invasion in France, it was also the beginning of the end of the war.'<sup>208</sup>

## 7. ANALYSIS OF THE WORST DEFEAT IN GERMAN MILITARY HISTORY

### (a) Importance in the Framework of the Eastern Campaign

Operation BAGRATION, also known as the 'Belorussian Operation', took place on historic terrain. The Red Army units pushed west along the same axis along which

<sup>206</sup> Niepold, *Panzeroperationen*, 82.

<sup>207</sup> Philippi and Heim, *Der Feldzug gegen Sowjetrussland*, 256–7.

<sup>208</sup> Verbal communication of 10 Oct. 1997 by Gen. (ret.) Count von Kielmansegg.

Army Group Centre had previously attacked eastwards. Nor was it a coincidence that the Soviet offensive was launched on 22 June 1944, three years to the day after the beginning of the German attack. At that time, Army Group Centre had stormed forward from the border at Brest-Litovsk with dizzying success. After only six days Armoured Groups 2 and 3, the two arms of the pincer attack, had joined up at Minsk. The battle of Białystok–Minsk was the first battle of encirclement of the campaign and became a model for all subsequent German battles of encirclement, as well as for those conducted by the Soviet forces. A total of 40 Soviet divisions, with some 324,000 Red Army troops,<sup>209</sup> were caught in the trap. According to Russian sources, total losses during the Belorussian defensive operation were 417,729 men<sup>210</sup> and 4,799 tanks and assault guns.<sup>211</sup> Army Group Centre's most comprehensive operation was the double battle of Vyazma–Bryansk, where the Red Army suffered personnel losses of around a million men, of whom 673,000 taken prisoner.<sup>212</sup>

The hazardous nature of the enterprise on which the German command had embarked can be seen from the fact that it was able to deploy only 3,350 tanks, 7,042 artillery cannon, and 2,549 operational aircraft in a 'blitzkrieg' attempt to overrun the huge Soviet empire.<sup>213</sup> Nevertheless, the initial successes were enormous. Within half a year 3.35 million<sup>214</sup> Soviet troops had been taken prisoner, and—according to Russian statistics—20,500 tanks and assault guns, 101,100 artillery cannon and grenade launchers, and 17,900 aircraft had been destroyed.<sup>215</sup> Then, however, the German blitzkrieg came to a standstill in the icy winter before Moscow. The Wehrmacht troops could not understand how the Red Army was able to survive such defeats. While Germany, now cut off from supplies of raw materials, had to expend more and more energy in a war on multiple fronts, the Soviet Union, with its almost inexhaustible resources, was building a huge armament industry. In the end, the Red Army's superiority was so overwhelming that in the summer of 1944 it was able to attack all four German army groups almost simultaneously, with enormously superior force in each case. It put the point of main effort, however, in the offensive against Army Group Centre.

Operation BAGRATION was one of the biggest operations of the Second World War, surpassed only by the battle in the Kursk salient (which consisted of three separate operations). In four army fronts the Red Army concentrated 2.5 million

<sup>209</sup> See *Germany and the Second World War*, iv. 536.

<sup>210</sup> *Grif sekretnosti sniat*, 163. The number of irretrievable losses is given as 341,012 men.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid. 368. <sup>212</sup> Glantz and House, *When Titans Clash*, 337, n. 18.

<sup>213</sup> See *Germany and the Second World War*, iv. 318; *ibid.* 371.

<sup>214</sup> The OKW's original estimate was almost 4 million Soviet POWs for the period from 22 June to end of December 1941; see the OKW table reproduced in Schustereit, *Vabanque*, 73. An amended calculation gave a total of 3.35 million up to mid-December (OKH/GenQu., No. I/6562/41 gKdos. v. 25.12.1941, App. 5); see *KTB OKW*, i. 1106. It is striking that the standard Russian work on military losses, *Grif sekretnosti sniat*, often gives personnel losses that are obviously far too low. That applies particularly to the war's chaotic initial phase, when the Soviet reporting system collapsed just like the armies beaten in the encirclement battles. More recent Russian accounts assume much higher losses; see Sokolov, 'The Cost of War', 183, where the Red Army's losses in the initial period of the campaign from 22 June to the beginning of December 1941 are put at 8,235,000 dead, missing, or wounded.

<sup>215</sup> *Grif sekretnosti sniat*, 367.

men, 45,000 cannon, grenade launchers, and rocket launchers, more than 6,000 tanks and assault guns, and over 8,000 planes (including long-range aircraft). In addition, the biggest partisan operation of the German–Soviet war, in which around 150,000 combatants were deployed, was taking place in the rear of Army Group Centre. As Soviet accounts stress, the frontage of Operation BAGRATION was approximately 1,100 kilometres and the depth of the thrust 550 to 600 kilometres. The operation's duration of 69 days (22 June<sup>216</sup> to 29 August) also seems astonishingly long, given the intensity of the fighting. The Soviet attacks were conducted with great force and without regard to losses. The price of victory was correspondingly high, with personnel losses totalling 770,888 men (180,040 dead or missing and 590,848 wounded).<sup>217</sup> In addition, the Soviet units lost 2,957 tanks and assault guns, 2,447 artillery cannon, and 822 aircraft.<sup>218</sup>

The collapse of Army Group Centre was the heaviest defeat in German military history. According to OKW statistics ('Wehrmacht-Verlustwesen'), personnel losses for the period 21 June to 31 August (including update reports) were 26,397 dead, 262,929 missing, and 109,776 wounded. That gives a total of 399,102 personnel losses.<sup>219</sup> Allowing for returnees, who are not taken into account in the statistics, the actual figure must have been around 390,000. Apart from the battle of the Somme in 1916, in which the Germans and British massacred troops to no avail without any territorial gain worth mentioning, there is no battle in German military history that can be compared with this Armageddon. Even the battle of Verdun, the notorious 'mill on the Meuse', cost the Germans 'only' 330,000 men (including wounded). In the Stalingrad pocket the Wehrmacht lost 60,000 dead and 110,000 wounded.<sup>220</sup> In contrast, German losses in the first phase of the Belorussian Operation (22 June to 10 July 1944), in the course of the battle of encirclement at Minsk, already amounted to around 250,000 men (including wounded).

In comparison with Operation BAGRATION, the battle of Stalingrad, where individual ruined buildings were bitterly fought over, was a microcosm in terms of its spatial dimensions. It nevertheless became the symbolic synonym for German defeat in the war against the Soviet Union. German propaganda had played down the winter battle before Moscow as a setback due only to weather conditions, so it was on the Volga, at Stalingrad, that the myth of German invincibility was shattered. The far worse defeat in Belorussia, on the other hand, seems strangely absent from the awareness of the German public even today. There are two main reasons for this. The first is that, at the time, interest was concentrated almost entirely on the western front, where the battle of Normandy invasion was

<sup>216</sup> In some Soviet accounts the start of the offensive proper is given as 23 June, while 22 June is accounted as a day of preliminary attacks. See this chapter, n. 36.

<sup>217</sup> *Grif sekretnosti sniat*, 203.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid. 371.

<sup>219</sup> See the detailed lists of the OKH medical officer for the period in question, as well as the update reports of 14 Sept. and 14 Nov. 1944; see BA-MA RW 6/v. 559. How many troops were taken prisoner is unclear. According to an estimate by Böhme (*Die deutschen Kriegsgefangenen in sowjetischer Hand*, 55), they may have numbered 150,000.

<sup>220</sup> Overmans, 'Das andere Gesicht des Krieges', 446.

raging. The second is the attempt on Hitler's life on 20 July 1944, which Nazi propaganda placed in the foreground.

### (b) The Causes of the Catastrophe

#### *The Quantum Leap in Soviet Superiority*

As Clausewitz teaches us: 'Superiority of numbers [...] is in tactics, as well as in strategy, the most general principle of victory.'<sup>221</sup> The weapons potential of the Red Army was many times superior at the start of the campaign in the summer of 1941, but within a few months it had been largely destroyed. Yet the Wehrmacht troops were thrown into despair by their pyrrhic victory. However great the losses they inflicted, the enemy seemed to be getting stronger and stronger. In the course of the war, according to the most recent Russian accounts, the Red Army lost 96,500 tanks and assault guns,<sup>222</sup> 106,400 aircraft,<sup>223</sup> and 317,500 cannon and grenade launchers.<sup>224</sup> But the production figures of the Soviet factories were even higher, in addition to which the western powers were supplying huge quantities of weapons and materials. The summer of 1944 saw a veritable quantum leap. The Soviet potential had grown so much that it was no longer a matter of quantitative increase. What had happened was a qualitative transition to a new manner of operational warfare. This will now be demonstrated by reference to the two main combat parameters, that is, firepower and mobility.

In the sectors of main effort, the destructive power of the consolidated Soviet artillery units had attained such a degree of efficiency that rigid defence of a front sector was no longer possible. Everything in the foremost line was simply pulverized. From now until the end of the war, the Red Army rapidly achieved an *operational* breakthrough in almost all major offensives. It did so even in the particularly well-secured Kovel sector, where all Soviet attacks were still beaten off in the spring of 1944. The greatest surprise, however, was the massive deployment of the Soviet air force, which had not played a major role since its enormous losses in the first year of the campaign. Now, with numerous German fighter units tied down on the western front, it had mastery of the skies. The greatest danger came from the huge number of ground-attack aircraft, which constantly intervened in the fighting. In the breakthrough sectors the German artillery was pinned down for hours by waves of bombing and strafing missions. According to Soviet accounts, the air force flew 55,000 sorties in the first twelve days alone, and 153,000 in the course of the whole operation.<sup>225</sup> This is also described as unprecedented in the 'Great Patriotic War'.<sup>226</sup>

Increasing motorization and mechanization had also enabled the mobility of the Soviet units to attain a new *operational* dimension. Hitherto, the losses incurred by Soviet armour during a breakthrough had mostly been so high that successful

<sup>221</sup> Clausewitz, *Vom Kriege*, 373.

<sup>222</sup> *Grif sekretnosti sniat*, 358.

<sup>223</sup> Ibid. 360.

<sup>224</sup> Ibid. 356.

<sup>225</sup> *Geschichte des zweiten Weltkrieges 1939–1945*, ix. 68, 81.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid. 81.

penetration could not be followed up by an operational thrust in depth. Now, however, its huge arsenal of tanks allowed the Red Army to form large reserves for the second staggered wave. It should also be borne in mind that the western powers sent 22,800 tanks to the Soviet Union during the war.<sup>227</sup> Even more important were the 456,000 trucks and jeeps which the western Allies supplied.<sup>228</sup> They alone made it possible for deep armoured thrusts to be accompanied by infantry and technical supplies. In the opinion of David M. Glantz and Jonathan House, without these deliveries of vehicles from the west, every Soviet offensive from 1943 to 1945 would have ended quickly with only a shallow inlet in the German front. The Wehrmacht would have had enough time to build a new line of defence in the rear.<sup>229</sup> At the end of the war, two-thirds of all the Red Army's trucks had been produced in the west. In the summer of 1944 it was already normal to see Wehrmacht troops marching on foot, accompanied by horse-drawn wagons, pursued by Red Army soldiers on tanks and trucks.

### *Hitler's Disastrous Operational Command*

The motto of the Schlieffen school had been 'Operation is movement.'<sup>230</sup> In the summer of 1944 it would have been 'Immobility means destruction.' Rigidly holding defensive positions inevitably meant delivering up all the personnel and material exposed at the front to the firestorm of the Red Army. Hitler's demand to stand firm in 'fortified places' was thus literally self-destructive. He did not even allow withdrawal to a staggered defence line<sup>231</sup> but insisted that, even in the foremost line, 'every square metre be fought for to the last man'.<sup>232</sup>

The armoured units of the Soviet 'mobile groups' advanced far to the rear of the German front-line troops in order to encircle them. There now remained only the alternatives of withdrawal or destruction. But Hitler was completely fixated on rigid defence and forbade any mobile conduct of operations. Instead, units threatened with encirclement were to remain in place and, if necessary, go over to perimeter defence. The 'fortified places' were a perversion of purely static defence, since encirclement was determined in advance. This obsession of Hitler's was alone responsible for the loss of 12 to 13 divisions of Army Group Centre.<sup>233</sup>

Hitler's style of command was another defect. He 'had extended his dictatorship to the very battlefield'.<sup>234</sup> The more critical the situation became at the front, the more Germany's political and military leader was inclined to decide everything himself, meddling even in tactical details. Field Marshal von Manstein reported a discussion with Field Marshal von Kluge in which the latter complained that 'he

<sup>227</sup> Of these, however, 1,981 fighting vehicles were sunk by German U-boats; see Tsouras, *The Great Patriotic War*, 246.

<sup>228</sup> Glantz and House, *When Titans Clashed*, 150.

<sup>229</sup> Ibid.

<sup>230</sup> Quoted in Wallach, *Kriegstheorien*, 175.

<sup>231</sup> Niepold, 'Der Abwehrkampf der 12. Panzerdivision', 431.

<sup>232</sup> Kielmansegg, 'Verteidigungskonzeptionen 1944', 575.

<sup>233</sup> Niepold, *Mittlere Ostfront*, 253.

<sup>234</sup> Niepold, 'Der Abwehrkampf der 12. Panzerdivision', 431.

had to consult Hitler before any operation involving forces of a battalion or more could be mounted'.<sup>235</sup> Hitler's incapacitation of the military experts went so far that battalion commanders were sometimes afraid 'to move a sentry from the window to the door',<sup>236</sup> as Col.-Gen. Heinrici later sarcastically remarked. 'You are bound by the Führer's order. No freedom of decision!'<sup>237</sup>—such were the stereotypical instructions governing command of the eastern front in the summer of 1944. Hitler sought to render inoperative one of the most important principles behind German success, namely mission-type tactics. He really believed he could assess the situation better at the map table in Führer headquarters than the officers responsible at the front. However, by the time a new development was marked on his map, it had often been overtaken by events at the front. Simultaneous critical developments in several theatres of operations repeatedly led to decision bottlenecks. As a result, important decisions where every hour counted frequently arrived at the front 24 to 48 hours too late.

In the disastrous months of June and July 1944 Hitler's dilettantism as a military commander, and above all his operational incompetence, were clearly apparent. All he achieved was tactical tinkering, as can be seen from the comment by retired Bundeswehr general Count von Kielmansegg, who was then serving in the operations division of the Army General Staff: 'The only decisions taken by Hitler and the OKW concerned the transfer of troop units from one sector of the front to another.' That was 'simply opening up a new hole in order to plug another one'.<sup>238</sup> The collapse of Army Group Centre thus marked the absolute nadir of 'the art of operational command' in the German military. Although defeat in Belorussia was inevitable, given the German army's inferiority in forces, it was only Hitler's disastrous wrong decisions that turned it into a complete catastrophe. His ridiculous 'stand firm' orders led to the encirclement of whole armies.

### *Reciprocal Developments in the Two Armed Forces*

The course of the German–Soviet war was marked by a strange phenomenon: the two sides came increasingly to resemble each other, albeit conversely. Thus, in 1944 the Wehrmacht conducted the same war of position which the Red Army had fought in 1941, whereas in 1944 the Soviet forces, at least in part, conducted the operational war of movement fought by the Wehrmacht in 1941. In the first years of the Second World War the Soviet leadership, in an overestimation of its own abilities bordering on hubris, had ignored the German blitzkrieg successes, especially those against Poland and the western powers. All the greater was the shock at the beginning of the German attack, when the Red Army units, many

<sup>235</sup> Manstein, *Verlorene Siege*, 315.

<sup>236</sup> Liddell Hart, *The Other Side of the Hill*, 225.

<sup>237</sup> This was the radio message which Third Armoured Army HQ had to send to the commander of LIII Army Corps encircled in the Vitebsk pocket, after Col.-Gen. Reinhardt had applied in vain to the commander-in-chief of Army Group Centre for permission to break out. See radio message from Pz. AOK 3, Ia, 26 June [1944], 12.50, to Gen. Gollwitzer and Gen. Hutter, BA-MA RH 21-3/v. 392.

<sup>238</sup> Kielmansegg, 'Verteidigungskonzeptionen 1944', 575.

times superior in material resources, were literally overrun. The Soviet officers had only outmoded methods with which to resist the modern German war machine. The learning process lasted until the summer of 1944, by which time the Red Army had managed to copy most of the German recipes for success and to develop successful methods of its own.<sup>239</sup>

In the initial phase of the campaign, the deployment of Soviet troops was dreadfully ineffective. Minimal success was achieved at the cost of maximum losses. The Germans, on the other hand, operated with relative small attacking units, but were repeatedly able to concentrate their forces in the right place at the right time. In comparison, the numerically superior Red Army seemed like a clumsy giant unable to use its strength effectively. Instead of forming a point of concentration, the Red Army's reserves were spread over the whole front, as in the Soviet spring offensives of 1942 and 1943. Even breakthrough battles were launched on a broad front according to the method adopted by Brusilov in the First World War, which the Germans dubbed 'the steamroller tactic', with the Soviet troops attacking in tight successive waves. The human losses were horrendous, for no particularly notable successes. All the greater was the surprise when, in the summer of 1944, the Red Army applied the principle of concentration long practised by the German forces. The Soviet commanders massed their units, which were in any case numerically stronger, in a narrow sector, thus achieving overwhelming superiority at the decisive place. Within its 140-kilometre-wide sector of the front, for example, 3rd Belorussian Front established a breakthrough sector 37 kilometres wide, where it concentrated 25 of its 37 divisions.<sup>240</sup>

The change was most striking in the case of the Soviet armour. According to the German armoured warfare expert Friedrich Wilhelm von Mellenthin, the deployment of Soviet armour in 1941 and 1942 was 'still very awkward', and the first armoured operations were 'a complete failure'.<sup>241</sup> The learning process continued in 1943, when success at Kursk was purchased at the cost of dramatic losses.<sup>242</sup> The great transformation came with the summer offensive of 1944, when, in Mellenthin's words, Soviet armour developed into a 'highly mobile, sharply honed tool in the hands of daring, capable Russian commanders'.<sup>243</sup> It is well illustrated by the conduct of the noted armour commander General Pavel Rotmistrov. On 12 July 1943, at Prokhorovka, Rotmistrov had still launched the newly established 5th Guards Armoured Army in a cavalry-style frontal attack on two German armoured divisions, which ended in disaster. By the beginning of Operation BAGRATION, however, he had learned how to deploy his armoured army operationally, and thrust deep into the German hinterland without getting involved in tactical skirmishes. His pincer attack on Minsk, deep in the rear of Fourth Army, was the decisive blow that led to the collapse of Army Group Centre. But then the Germans adapted to the change, and Model's tactic of short counter-blows inflicted

<sup>239</sup> See Glantz and House, *When Titans Clashed*, 286 ff.; Niepold, *Mittlere Ostfront*, 252.

<sup>240</sup> Niepold, *Mittlere Ostfront*, 249. <sup>241</sup> Mellenthin, *Panzerschlachten*, 256.

<sup>242</sup> Soviet losses at Kursk totalled 6,064 tanks and assault guns (*Grif sekretnosti sniat*, 370).

<sup>243</sup> Mellenthin, *Panzerschlachten*, 258.

painful losses on the Soviet armour. From 26 June to 16 July, 5th Guards Armoured Army shrank from 524 tanks to only 50, which was too much even for a Soviet leadership rather insensitive to losses. Rotmistrov was relieved of his command and transferred to an administrative post.<sup>244</sup> It remains to be said, however, that no other major formation gave the German command such problems as those caused by 5th Guards Armoured Army, ruthlessly driven forward by Rotmistrov.

Whereas in the first phase of the campaign Soviet tanks were mainly deployed in support of infantry, from the summer of 1944 Soviet armour was predominantly used operationally. In the Belorussian operation overall, only 38 per cent of Soviet fighting vehicles were assigned to tactical breakthrough. The remaining 62 per cent, that is, the mass of Soviet armour, was kept back in 'mobile groups' for operational deployment as a second wave during thrusts in depth.<sup>245</sup> Those groups were composed of armoured armies, independent armoured corps, mechanized corps, and cavalry corps. Previously, the armoured forces of the second wave had been thrown into battle on the first day, as soon as a breakthrough 3 to 8 kilometres deep had been achieved. In the 1944 summer offensives, however, the Soviet command waited until the breakthrough was 25 to 40 kilometres deep.<sup>246</sup> Only then did the 'mobile groups' thrust forward with collective force. In this phase of the war, the first wave already had so many tanks available that it was able to force a breakthrough by itself.

The Red Army now adopted the German practice of attacking with strong advance detachments, with disastrous consequences for Army Group Centre. The advance detachments were ordered to push forward in depth without regard to enemy units left in position or to open flanks, and without getting involved in time-consuming engagements with the enemy. Their task was to capture important pieces of territory such as road junctions, or to establish bridgeheads and hold them until the main forces arrived, so as to prevent the enemy from bringing up operational reserves and establishing a new line of defence in the rear. During Operation BAGRATION, Soviet advance detachments often penetrated as far as 50 kilometres to the fore of the main forces, and the armoured corps sometimes attacked more than 60 kilometres to the fore of the general armies.<sup>247</sup> Like the Germans in 1941, the Soviet armoured units now engaged in 'overtaking pursuit', thrusting forward parallel to the paths of retreat of the enemy forces so as to join up in their rear and encircle them. Both the range and speed of the thrusts exceeded those of all previous Soviet offensives. Within ten days 5th Guards Armoured Army, together with 11th Guards Army, had reached Minsk, which was 217 kilometres away, covering an average of 21.7 kilometres a day.<sup>248</sup> That attack came as a shock to the Wehrmacht command, although the Soviet thrusts were still appreciably

<sup>244</sup> Glantz and House, *When Titans Clashed*, 209, 360 (nn. 22 and 29). The recently published (fully revised) Russian account of the Great Patriotic War also speaks of 'the inadequate operations of 5th Guards Armoured Army'; see Timokhovich, 'Operatsiya Bagration', 78.

<sup>245</sup> Niepold, *Mittlere Ostfront*, 249.

<sup>246</sup> Piekalkiewicz, *Krieg der Panzer*, 272.

<sup>247</sup> Niepold, *Mittlere Ostfront*, 250.

<sup>248</sup> Zetterling and Frankson, 'Analyzing World War II', 196–7.

slower than those of the German forces in 1941. At the beginning of the Russian campaign, XXXIX Army Corps (motorized) had advanced 325 kilometres to the Minsk area in four days, covering an average of 81.3 kilometres a day.<sup>249</sup> Model, then in command of 3rd Armoured Division, had needed only six days for the 460 kilometres from Brest-Litovsk to Bobruisk.

A further surprise was the Red Army officer corps' increasing capacity for initiative and flexibility. Breakthrough operations were still carried out by detailed-order tactics, but once a breakthrough had been achieved there was now a tendency to allow commanders greater autonomy in pursuing the attack. In the summer of 1944 there was 'a tendency towards improvisation wholly unknown in 1942 and 1943'.<sup>250</sup> The struggle over the operational plan for the attack on Bobruisk in May 1944 is a telling illustration of the Soviet generals' increasing self-confidence. In opposition to the Stavka, Rokossovsky argued for a two-sided pincer attack rather than a single attacking wedge. What happened next was previously unthinkable. The commander-in-chief of 1st Belorussian Front stood up against the plan endorsed by Stalin and even threatened to resign his command. After heated discussions with Stalin, he finally managed to get his opinion accepted.<sup>251</sup>

The main reason for this unexpected development is to be found in the contrasting behaviour of the two main protagonists, Hitler and Stalin. For the Soviet dictator, the fact that he had made his mistakes at the beginning of the war had a positive effect. From then on, he paid attention to advice from military experts like Vasilevsky and Zhukov. Hitler, on the other hand, increasingly lost touch with reality after the Wehrmacht's initial successes. Succumbing to the delusion that he was a great military commander, he surrounded himself with uncritical 'extras' like Wilhelm Keitel. His mistakes in the final phase of the war were very similar to those of Stalin in the initial phase. The Soviet dictator had used draconian methods to enforce the rigid defence of all front lines, and was thus to blame for creation of the pocket to the west of Minsk, for example. Three years later, Hitler's 'stand firm' orders led symmetrically to the creation of a similar pocket to the east of that city. As Count Alfred von Schlieffen put it, a complete battle of encirclement like the battle of Cannae requires 'on one side a Hannibal' and 'on the other side a Terentius Varro'.<sup>252</sup> In 1941 the role of Terentius Varro was played by Stalin, and in 1944 by Hitler.

Operation BAGRATION in the summer of 1944 marked the decisive turning point in the Red Army's development into a modern, efficient fighting force. It was nothing less than a mutational leap, since the Soviet leadership had used the preceding long spring break to reform the combat forces assigned to the offensive. The Soviet command also took the risk of adopting, for the first time, new methods regarding the operational deployment of its troops. The fact that the Soviet units suddenly attacked in the manner of a German blitzkrieg caused huge surprise and

<sup>249</sup> Ibid. 194.

<sup>250</sup> Glantz, 'Strategische Operation', 348.

<sup>251</sup> Erickson, *Stalin's War*, ii. 203.

<sup>252</sup> Schlieffen, *Cannae*, 262.

contributed considerably to their success.<sup>253</sup> For that reason, BAGRATION was probably the most brilliant Soviet operation of the whole Great Patriotic War.

Some qualification is needed, nonetheless. The new flexibility was demonstrated only at the top level of command, while the middle and lower levels continued to act in a mechanical, stereotypical fashion.<sup>254</sup> Despite the very noticeable progress in the deployment of armour, by the end of the war the Red Army had still not succeeded in harmonizing its armour with other arms and in waging a fully effective ‘combined-arms combat’, which the Germans had already mastered in 1941. As a result, the armour in particular suffered considerable erosion. Every second fighting vehicle deployed in Operation BAGRATION had to be totally written off.<sup>255</sup> According to Russian statistics, the Red Army lost a total of 23,700 tanks and assault guns in the course of 1944.<sup>256</sup> As already discussed, this was partly due to technological factors.<sup>257</sup> In the summer of 1943 the German armoured forces had been raised to the peak of technical development with the Panther and Tiger tanks. Although the Red Army introduced improved tank models such as the T-34/85 in 1944, the modern German tanks were still far superior, as can be seen clearly from a technical comparison.<sup>258</sup> In the summer of 1944 the numerically small but qualitatively superior German armour was thus once again able to save the front. In carrying out rapid improvised counter-strokes, on which Hitler was able to exert only limited influence, mission-type tactics still prevailed, allowing middle- and lower-level commanders a high degree of flexibility. Despite the astonishing metamorphosis of the Red Army, which the Germans had thought impossible, the Soviet command continued to suffer from the main problem of insufficient military efficiency. Right until the end of the war, against the background of seemingly inexhaustible reserves, it tended to crush the enemy by force of numbers, suffering horrendous losses in the process. Such was the case even in Operation BAGRATION, when it was only in the first phase that the enemy was outmanoeuvred operationally instead of being overwhelmed at the tactical level. In the course of that operation, according to the calculations of the Swedish military historian Niklas Zetterling, the ‘casualty-inflicting capability’<sup>259</sup> of the German forces was 5.4 times

<sup>253</sup> Dunn, *Soviet Blitzkrieg*, 2 ff.

<sup>254</sup> See Niepold, ‘Der Abwehrkampf der 12. Panzerdivision’, 430; id., *Mittlere Ostfront*, 60.

<sup>255</sup> 2,957 of the approximately 6,000 tanks and assault guns were lost in the course of the operation; *Grif sekretnosti sniat*, 371.

<sup>256</sup> Ibid. 367.

<sup>257</sup> See the technical and tactical analysis of the tank battle of Kursk in Part II, Chapter III.3 of the present volume.

<sup>258</sup> The result of an OKH study in the summer of 1944 is very revealing: (a) the Panther (75 mm KwK 42/L70) was far superior to the improved, newly introduced T-34/85 for frontal fire, and approximately equal for side and rear fire; it was superior to the Josef Stalin-122 for frontal fire, but inferior for side and rear fire; (b) the Tiger I (88 mm KwK 36/L56) was superior to the T-34/85 and inferior to the Josef Stalin-122 at long range; (c) the Königstiger (88 mm KwK 43/L71) was far superior to the T-34/85 and the Josef Stalin-122; (d) the Jagdtiger (128 mm Pak 44/L 55) was far superior to both the T-34/85 and the Josef Stalin-122. See Panzeroffizier beim Chef GenSt d H, No. 793/44 g.Kdos., 29 June 1944 BA-MA RH 10/59, fos. 25–31. Probably the clearest graphical comparison of the combat strengths of the German and Soviet tanks is found in Baginski, ‘Übersicht’, 340–5.

<sup>259</sup> For the definition of this term, see Zetterling, ‘Loss Rates’, 900–1.

greater than that of the Red Army.<sup>260</sup> The Wehrmacht's ability to inflict many times more losses on the enemy (in relation to its own strength) was significant even in the case of this bitter defeat.

### *Wrong Assessment of the Enemy Situation*

The importance of this factor, discussed previously in the context of German enemy intelligence, is overestimated in most of the accounts which have appeared so far. Even if the Soviet operational plan had fallen into German hands in advance, it would have made no difference to inevitable defeat. Soviet superiority was simply too great for the Wehrmacht to react successfully, and its own 'operational reserve' was tied down in the west defending against the Allied invasion forces. Furthermore, it is illusory to assume that Hitler would have abandoned his fanatically held 'fortified places' principle and evacuated the Belorussian balcony in time, if it had been identified as the point of main effort of the Soviet offensive. Nevertheless, the Red Army leadership was itself very surprised by its overwhelming victory and by the penetrating effect of the newly adopted methods. This raises the question whether the Soviet command had not also made an inaccurate assessment of the enemy position and underestimated its own possibilities.

### **(c) Operation BAGRATION: The Soviet Missed Opportunity for a Swift End to the War**

The Soviet operation in Belorussia doubtless achieved a great deal, but it did not do what appears to have been possible with hindsight, that is, bring about the collapse of the German eastern front with a single mighty blow. In the spring of 1944 the war was not only lost for Germany, but was already almost over. The situation was particularly critical in the east, where the Wehrmacht's inferiority had attained dramatic proportions.

In those circumstances the OKH feared the Soviet command would exploit Germany's acute vulnerability at the beginning of the invasion in the west to launch an offensive that would decide the war. It was believed that the Russians would concentrate all available forces in one place to deliver a death blow to the German eastern army. Foreign Armies East, under Maj.-Gen. Gehlen, had long since located the Archimedean point at which the German front could be operationally dislodged. That point was the Kovel salient, from which Red Army armoured units could rapidly advance to the Baltic via Warsaw and enclose two German army groups. Then the whole eastern front would collapse and the road to Berlin would be open.

In retrospect it seems highly likely that such an encirclement attack would have succeeded. Today, unlike the Soviet leadership in the early summer of 1944, we possess precise information as to the real relative strength of the two sides and the

<sup>260</sup> Ibid. 902.

subsequent course of events. At all events, in the summer of 1944 the Red Army rapidly achieved an operational breakthrough in every offensive. On 18 July, 1st Belorussian Front began a secondary offensive at Kovel and, although only its left wing took part in the attack, the German defenders were simply swept away. Only a few days later there was a gap almost 100 kilometres wide in the German front. It is therefore easy to imagine the avalanche that would have been set in motion if Operation BAGRATION had been carried out from Kovel in the direction of Warsaw, rather than from the Belorussian balcony in the direction of Minsk. It was, after all, the greatest mass of forces ever deployed in an offensive till that time. The Red Army command nevertheless made the mistake of dispersing its strategic potential at operational level. The glorificatory Soviet historiography repeatedly invoked Stalin's 'ten blows' (offensives) of 1944, but close examination shows that they were several blows too many. The fact is that in the summer of 1944 the Soviet command did not risk mustering its forces for the decisive death blow, but contented itself with inflicting a multitude of wounds on the enemy. Instead of a decisive strategic offensive in a single sector, it conducted a series of operational strikes along the whole front. Operation BAGRATION against Army Group Centre was only the main blow of the summer of 1944. It was followed by other major offensives, staggered from the outset, with the result that all four German army groups on the eastern front were attacked simultaneously.

So why did the Soviet command shrink from the risk of a decisive offensive? In previous years it had repeatedly pursued excessive strategic objectives and taken great risks. But that was precisely the reason for what the Germans saw as its unexpected restraint. Past experience of failed offensives with huge losses proved too painful. The Soviet command had already tried to force a decisive battle in the winter of 1941–2, and in so doing had 'neglected the possible in quest of the impossible'.<sup>261</sup> Even more painful were the memories of February–March 1943, when the Red Army high command, intoxicated by victory after the triumph of Stalingrad, tried to bring about the collapse of the whole eastern front and fell into Field Marshal von Manstein's trap. Whereas on several occasions the Soviet command had fatally underestimated the Wehrmacht and considered it beaten, it now strangely overestimated its hopelessly inferior enemy. The Red Army high command suddenly showed a reluctance to take risks that was inversely proportional to its actual strength.

Moreover, the idea of a bold thrust on Warsaw evoked a personal trauma of Stalin's. It seems to have conjured up the spectre of Warsaw in 1920, when the Red Army pushed far into Poland at the end of the Russian Civil War, despite its overextended front lines. At that time the offensive had been continued in the direction of Warsaw mainly at the initiative of Stalin, who was a member of the military council, after which Marshal Piłsudski had launched the counter-offensive against the Red Army's exposed flank which led to the famous 'miracle on the Vistula'. Stalin clearly shrank from attempting a decisive offensive by means of an

<sup>261</sup> For the aphorism, see Clausewitz, *Vom Kriege*, 1040.

advance along the Vistula at Warsaw, which would again expose the Red Army's flanks, and the Soviet command considered a pincer attack in the style of Manstein's 'sickle cut' in 1940 during the western campaign to be too risky.

During the ongoing offensive there was nevertheless a second chance to put that idea into practice. On 8 July, given the surprisingly favourable course of the operation, Zhukov called for the establishment of a new point of concentration. The plan which the German general staff so feared was now on the table. The Soviet attacking forces concentrated near Kovel were to turn north towards Warsaw, and from there advance on East Prussia in a bold manoeuvre that would have cut off the whole north wing of the German eastern front. But Stalin refused. Not until 27 July did he instruct Rokossovsky to turn a section of his troops north towards Warsaw. It was too late, however, since Field Marshal Model had meanwhile brought up his last armoured reserves, with which he was able to stop the advance on Warsaw at the last moment. The result was a second 'miracle on the Vistula'. Having lost the first battle by risking too much, Stalin lost the second by risking too little. Thus, the end of the war was needlessly postponed. Hitler and his regime were granted another stay of execution, and the bloody battles ended only in 1945.

### III. The Defensive Successes of Army Group Centre in the Autumn of 1944

*Karl-Heinz Frieser*

The Soviet Operation BAGRATION offensive had been stopped, but Army Group Centre now had its back to the wall, with several of its units already positioned just before the border of East Prussia. What ought to have been done then was to concentrate all available forces on defence of Germany's heartland, the territory of the Reich. That, however, was contrary to Hitler's operational approach, which was eccentric in the literal meaning of the word. The Army General Staff (OKH), as well as the commanders-in-chief of the army groups involved, wanted a 'concentric' solution, that is, withdrawal of Army Group North, which was stationed on the northern periphery in the Baltic area, to behind the threatened central front. Those units would then make up the operational reserve without which defence of the eastern front appeared unthinkable. Hitler, however, was completely fixated on the idea of the 'Baltic stronghold', and went so far as to transfer even more units from the centre to the northern wing. The transfer of Third Armoured Army to Army Group North, ordered on 20 September, was felt by the Army Group Centre command to be a serious reduction of its forces, leaving it with only 29 infantry divisions and five armoured divisions.<sup>1</sup> In terms of equipment, moreover, Army Group Centre's remaining units had little similarity to those which had formerly fought in its ranks. Its air force too was only a shadow of its former self, as can be seen from the following two reports. In September, 52nd Fighter Wing, deployed in the area of Army Group Centre, reported its 10,000th kill, although by far the greater part of the tally had been scored during the first phase of the Russian campaign.<sup>2</sup> All the more sobering is a contemporaneous report from the commander-in-chief of Air Fleet 6, Col.-Gen. Robert Ritter von Greim, pointing out that fuel rationing had become inevitable. According to von Greim, in the area of Army Group Centre only three sorties a day of 20 to 25 ground-attack aircraft and a total of 40 fighters were now possible. He added that further very stringent economy measures were to be expected, so that in future it would sometimes be impossible to fly at all.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2054, 224–5.

<sup>3</sup> BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2054, 119.

<sup>2</sup> Haupt, *Heeresgruppe Mitte*, 236.

## 1. THE PROBLEM OF THE VISTULA BRIDGEHEADS

Ninth Army was deployed on Army Group Centre's right wing along the west bank of the Vistula, although its front line protruded eastwards across the river in an 'L' shape just before Warsaw, seeking to connect with Second Army's positions on the Bug. At the end of June it was disbanded and its HQ was withdrawn to the Warsaw area, where a completely new Ninth Army was to be formed. However, the units intended for the new formation arrived only sporadically, so that it was able to cover only part of the front sector assigned to it on 25 July.<sup>4</sup> On 29 July the Soviet 69th Army had already crossed the Vistula at Puławy and established a bridgehead ultimately 25 kilometres wide and 3 to 4 kilometres deep, of which only the northern third lay in the combat zone of Ninth Army while the larger part came within the front sector of Army Group North Ukraine. The Vistula bridgehead at Magnuszew, south of Warsaw, which was 40 kilometres wide and 20 kilometres deep, appeared even more dangerous. There 8th Guards Army had crossed the river on 1 August, followed by 1st Polish Army and XVI Armoured Corps.

On the same day, 1 August, the Polish Home Army (*Armia Krajowa*) had begun the Warsaw Uprising, which the Germans did not finally manage to suppress until 2 October.<sup>5</sup> Surprisingly, the files of Ninth Army make very little reference to the fighting in the Polish capital.<sup>6</sup> The reason is that the city was temporarily 'extra-territorial', since suppression of the uprising had been assigned to Reich Leader SS Heinrich Himmler. The forces deployed in the fighting were, first and foremost, units of the police and General SS (not the Waffen SS), but they distinguished themselves more by the atrocities they committed than by their professional conduct of combat operations, so that later troops of Ninth Army also had to be deployed. From the operational viewpoint, the uprising failed after only a few hours, since the Polish resistance fighters were able to occupy neither a bridge over the Vistula nor any other important strongpoint. Although German transport movements had to be diverted around Warsaw during the first days of the insurrection, the Germans soon succeeded in enclosing the insurgents in individual quarters of the city. Once that had been done, the danger point was isolated and did not weigh decisively on Ninth Army's operational command. Rather, its main problem was containment of the two Vistula bridgeheads at Puławy and Magnuszew.

The German operations staffs were getting very nervous about the different offensive options open to the Soviet forces, which were in a position to attack both westwards and northwards.<sup>7</sup> They feared a double encirclement of Warsaw, on the

<sup>4</sup> KTB 9. Armee, 25 Jul. 1944, BA-MA RH 20-9/205, 2, fo. 4.

<sup>5</sup> The controversy about the Red Army's halt before Warsaw is discussed in Part V, Chapter II.6(a): 'The Tank Battle before Warsaw as an Operational Turning Point'. See also *Germany and the Second World War*, v/II. 188–90.

<sup>6</sup> An exception is a sub-chapter of the army's war diary entitled 'On the Warsaw Uprising'; see BA-MA RH 20-9/205, 70–4, fos. 73–7.

<sup>7</sup> On German assessments of the enemy situation, see Winkler, 'Abwehrkämpfe der Heeresgruppe Mitte', 76 ff. and 327 ff.; Abt. Fremde Heere Ost (I), 'Kurze Beurteilung der Feindlage', esp. the reports of 31 July to 27 Aug. 1944, BA-MA RH 2/1968, fos. 16–91; Abt. Fremde Heere Ost (I), 'Beurteilung der Feindlage im großen (Stand 4.8. abends)', BA-MA RH 2/2158; Abt. Fremde Heeres

one hand by a pincer movement from the south from the Magnuszew bridgehead, and on the other, from the northern part of the Vistula bend.<sup>8</sup> In the event, most of the units of 1st Belorussian Front first advanced north towards the Vistula–Narew–Bug river triangle north-east of Warsaw. Their main objective was the Vistula crossing at Modlin, from which a second pincer movement to encircle the Polish capital could be launched. This dangerous northward thrust failed at the beginning of August, but a new danger had arisen in the meantime, that of a concentric Soviet attack on Radom from the bridgeheads at Magnuszew and Puławy. If that offensive succeeded, it would inevitably lead to an operational breakthrough and an in-depth advance of the Red Army to the west. What caused the OKH most concern, however, was the even larger bridgehead at Sandomierz (also referred to as the Baranów bridgehead), which lay further to the south in the sector of Army Group North Ukraine. From there, there was the possibility of a westward advance by 1st Ukrainian Front in the direction of Silesia, especially if such an offensive were supported by a push by the southern wing of 1st Belorussian Front from the Puławy bridgehead. Col.-Gen. Heinz Guderian considered the threat on the Vistula south of Warsaw particularly serious. While a deeply staggered system of defences had been established in the Narew sector in the forefield of the East Prussian border, such defensive preparations were lacking in the Vistula bend. If the front were to collapse there, then in Guderian's opinion there would no longer be any chance of 'halting the enemy before Silesia'.<sup>9</sup>

At that point in time Ninth Army was able to form only a thin security line to contain the Soviet bridgeheads, so two infantry divisions and a few smaller units were hastily brought in. The situation became so acute, however, that at the height of the tank battle before Warsaw, 19th Armoured Division and Armoured Paratroop Division 'Hermann Göring' had to be pulled out and moved past the embattled city to the west bank of the Vistula.<sup>10</sup> Their allotted task was to carry out counter-attacks on the two Soviet bridgeheads as soon as possible,<sup>11</sup> but an assault against such overwhelmingly superior forces seemed absurd, especially when the Soviets put a multitude of anti-tank and artillery cannon into position and concentrated strong armoured units behind them. In bitter fighting, the German units nevertheless managed to constrict the bridgeheads but not to eliminate them. Soviet attempts to break out of the two Vistula bridgeheads were similarly

Ost (I), No. 2683/44 g.Kdos., 15 Aug. 1944, 'Beurteilung der Gesamtfeindlage vor deutscher Ostfront', BA-MA RH 2/2086; KTB HGr Mitte, 12 and 18 Aug. 1944, BA-MA RH 19 II/199, fos. 120 and 171; KTB 9. Armee, 17 and 20 Aug. 1944, BA-MA RH 20-9/205, 56, fo. 59, and 65, fo. 68; AOK 9, Ia No. 4142/44 g.Kdos. an Obkdo. HGr Mitte, 17 Aug. 1944, 'Lagebeurteilung der 9. Armee vom 17.8.1944', BA-MA RH 20-9/225; AOK 9, Ia, No. 4250/44 g.Kdos., 21 Aug. 1944, 'Lagebeurteilung' (*ibid.*).

<sup>8</sup> This situation assessment corresponded to the actual Soviet planning; see Stemenko, *Im Generalstab*, ii. 103 and 111 (map).

<sup>9</sup> KTB HGr Mitte, 26 Aug. 1944, BA-MA RH 19 II/199, fo. 256.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 2 Aug., fo. 28.

<sup>11</sup> On the action taken by Ninth Army against the Vistula bridgeheads, see BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2054, 82 ff., 109–10, 113–14, 116–17; Winkler, 'Abwehrkämpfe der Heeresgruppe Mitte', 332 ff., 336 ff., 341 ff.

unsuccessful. In September the fighting died down and the situation stabilized. This was due partly to the arrival of German reserves but mainly to the fact that the Red Army had transferred its point of main effort to the Narew sector north-east of Warsaw. On 25 November the OKH took the incisive step of transferring Ninth Army to the command of Army Group A (formerly North Ukraine). As a result, the whole Vistula sector, including Warsaw, now came within the area of responsibility of Army Group A, leaving Army Group Centre free to concentrate on the defence of East Prussia. Front-line activity on the Vistula had meanwhile taken on the form of a war of position, but that was only the calm before the storm which was unleashed from those bridgeheads on 12 January 1945.

## 2. PREVENTION OF THE BREAKOUT TO THE NORTH IN THE BUG–NAREW SECTOR

The boundary between Ninth and Second Armies ran about 35 kilometres east of Warsaw. That proved to be the location of a neuralgic point on the eastern front, that is, the Vistula–Bug–Narew triangle. It was becoming increasingly clear that the main Soviet thrust was directed northwards past Warsaw towards East Prussia. Although the Soviet 2nd Armoured Army had been beaten back in the tank battle before Warsaw, most of the German armoured units had had to be withdrawn again. The Red Army, on the other hand, had brought up new forces and continued to direct its attacks against the endangered front sector to the east of Warsaw, where Ninth Army had deployed the two armoured divisions of IV SS Armoured Corps and 73rd Infantry Division. On 17 August the balance of forces was as follows. Ninth Army had four armoured divisions and three infantry divisions with which to defend its 180-kilometre stretch of front (including the Vistula line). Arraigned against it were five Soviet armies and several armoured or mechanized corps, giving the enemy a superiority of around 7 to 1 in infantry and armour.<sup>12</sup>

In the case of the neighbouring Second Army, which consisted mainly of 12 infantry divisions, the enemy superiority seemed less dramatic,<sup>13</sup> but it had been obliged to give up its two armoured divisions and no longer had a single large armoured unit at its disposal. The Red Army command nevertheless concentrated the mass of 1st Belorussian Front against the interface between Second and Ninth Armies. As already discussed, there was nothing the OKH feared more than an offensive with precisely that direction of thrust. Following a breakthrough in the lower reaches of the Bug and Narew, the Soviet attacking forces would be able to advance almost unimpeded along the Vistula to the Bay of Danzig. At the same time, 2nd Belorussian Front stepped up the pressure on the left wing of Second

<sup>12</sup> AOK 9, Ia No. 4142/44 g.Kdos. an Obkdo. HGr Mitte, 17 Aug. 1944, 'Lagebeurteilung der 9. Armee vom 17.8.1944', BA-MA RH 20-9/225; see also BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2054, 219.

<sup>13</sup> See BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2054, 219.

Army, while Fourth Army, its neighbour to the north, was hard pressed by 3rd Belorussian Front, which was attacking frontally towards East Prussia.

On 18 August, 1st Belorussian Front opened a new offensive exactly at the expected place.<sup>14</sup> Second Army had to yield to the overwhelming pressure and withdraw its right wing to the Bug, but it nevertheless managed to prevent an operational breakthrough by the enemy. Ninth Army pulled back only part of its left wing, otherwise continuing to hold a strong bridgehead on the Vistula next to the Warsaw suburb of Praga. On 22 August Second Army's left wing was also attacked by 2nd Belorussian Front from the east and forced back. Then, towards the end of the month, the exhausted Soviet units halted their offensive.

At the conclusion of Operation BAGRATION, the German troops had been thrown back almost to their starting position at the outset of the eastern campaign in June 1941. The front now ran more or less along the line established by the Hitler–Stalin pact for the partition of Poland. It therefore seemed logical for the Soviet general staff to turn once again to the plan conceived at that time as a hypothetical study for an attack on Germany.<sup>15</sup> Georgii Konstantinovich Zhukov, as chief of staff of the Red Army, had drawn up a plan in which the second phase was a thrust along the Vistula to the Baltic, aimed at enclosing the German troops stationed in East Prussia in an enormous pocket on the coast. When he put the idea to Stalin on 15 May 1941, however, the latter rejected the concept as too risky, and the plan was shelved.<sup>16</sup> We shall not enter here into the discussion of the preventive war thesis. The concept of military geography determinants which channel the advance of attacking forces is a more interesting idea. In this particular case, it is the lower reaches of the Vistula, running into the Baltic Sea, which, in the course of military history, have repeatedly predetermined the operational direction of thrust. Thus, the Russian pincer attack on East Prussia at the beginning of the First World War had been carried out according to a plan similar to that adopted in the autumn of 1944. In 1914 Russia's Narev army had advanced from the south towards the Baltic to cut off the German troops stationed in East Prussia from retreat behind the Vistula, while the Neman army attacked frontally from the east. On that occasion, however, the Narev army suffered a debacle at Tannenberg.

A similar pincer attack seemed to be in the offing in the spring of 1944, with German enemy intelligence fearing a Soviet advance from Kovel to the Vistula estuary via Warsaw. That plan, as we have seen, was initially rejected by the Soviet leadership, but the unexpectedly favourable course of Operation BAGRATION had put it back on the table. On 8 July Zhukov had again put to Stalin his proposal to

<sup>14</sup> On the fighting in the Bug–Narew sector in the second half of August, see *ibid.* 114 ff.; Winkler, 'Abwehrkämpfe der Heeresgruppe Mitte', 352 ff., 406 ff. See also the daily reports of Second Army, BA-MA RH 20-2/959 to 970.

<sup>15</sup> This plan had been drawn up by Zhukov in collaboration with Semyon Konstantinovich Timoshenko, the People's Commissar for Defence, in a memorandum entitled 'Considerations on the Plan for Strategic Deployment of the Armed Forces of the Soviet Union in Case of War with Germany and its Allies'; see Danilow, 'Präventivschlag', 42, 49–51, and the collective volume *Präventivkrieg?*

<sup>16</sup> Bezymensky, 'Zur Frage des Zhukov-Plans', 133 ff., 137–8.

cut off East Prussia in a huge pincer operation. In operational terms it was an updated version of his earlier plan of 15 May 1941.<sup>17</sup> However, Stalin had once again refused, and subsequently made only insufficient forces available for a push in the direction of Warsaw. As a result, Model managed to halt the dangerous Soviet advance.

At the end of August the course of the front to the east of the Vistula was surprisingly similar to the ‘30-day line’ which was to have been reached at the end of the first operational phase under Zhukov’s plan of 1941.<sup>18</sup> It may, therefore, be reasonably assumed that he was again planning an offensive thrust aimed at the Vistula estuary. While 3rd Belorussian Front was to advance frontally against East Prussia from the east, strong forces of 1st and 2nd Belorussian Front were to cross the Narew and push forward along the lower reaches of the Vistula as far as the Baltic. After the conclusion of Operation BAGRATION, which had been extremely exhausting, there was a noticeable decline in combat operations throughout the northern half of the eastern front. Nevertheless, the Soviet leadership considered the Vistula–Narew–Bug triangle to the east of Warsaw so important, as the springboard for an advance to the Baltic Coast, that it resumed its attacks in that key area after only a short break.<sup>19</sup>

On 3 September several armies belonging to 1st and 2nd Belorussian Fronts began a new offensive against the right wing of Second Army.<sup>20</sup> The pressure was so great that withdrawal behind the Narew was authorized only a day later. For Army Group Centre HQ, ‘the deployment of forces and direction of thrust’ left ‘no doubt that this was the anticipated decision-seeking enemy attack on East Prussia’.<sup>21</sup> Clearly, the Red Army wanted to take possession of the Bug–Narew crossings at Serock, Pułtusk, Różan, and Ostrołeka, so as to be able to continue the operation in a north-westerly direction against the lower reaches of the Vistula. It now became apparent once again that the German eastern army was no longer capable of mobile conduct of operations. It lacked motor vehicles everywhere and, for the few which it did have, there was hardly enough fuel.<sup>22</sup> As the German units attempted to withdraw behind the Narew, mostly on foot and with numerous horse-drawn vehicles, the pursuing Soviet troops, massively equipped with armoured and motor vehicles, overtook them in various places and reached the river first. By 4 September the Soviet advance forces had already reached the Narew, and in the following days they succeeded in establishing a bridgehead to the north of Serock

<sup>17</sup> Bezymensky, ‘Der sowjetische Vorstoß’, 90–1.

<sup>18</sup> Danilow, ‘Präventivschlag’, 44, 49. See also Winkler, ‘Abwehrkämpfe der Heeresgruppe Mitte’, 312.

<sup>19</sup> Stemenko, *Im Generalstab*, ii. 110.

<sup>20</sup> Unfortunately, apart from the Second Army’s daily reports (BA-MA RH 20-2/972–986), the German archives contain only a few files relating to these combat operations. On this topic, see the captured German files in the Russian State Military Archives in Moscow (RGVA), which include the following Second Army war diaries, hitherto considered missing: KTB 1 to 9 Jun. 1944, RGVA, F. 1275-2-279; KTB 7 to 11 Sept. 1944, RGVA, F. 1275-2-278), and KTB 12 to 19 Sept. 1944 (RGVA, F. 1275-2-280).

<sup>21</sup> KTB HGr Mitte, 4 Sept. 1944, BA-MA RH 19 II/200, fo. 24.

<sup>22</sup> Winkler, ‘Abwehrkämpfe der Heeresgruppe Mitte’, 440.

and another to the south of Różan. Second Army was scarcely able to take immediate offensive action against those bridgeheads. The combat strength of 5th Light Infantry Division, for example, was down to 350 men.<sup>23</sup>

On 10 September 1st Belorussian Front opened an offensive against the left wing of the neighbouring Ninth Army east of the Vistula. As German enemy intelligence had established, the Soviets had massed nine armies, partly staggered in depth, in a 140-kilometre stretch of the Narew front between Warsaw and Łomża. They comprised a total of 71 rifle divisions, five armoured and mechanized corps, and one or two cavalry corps.<sup>24</sup> On 14 September the German troops had to evacuate Praga, the Warsaw district on the east bank of the Vistula, following which the Soviet 1st Polish Division crossed the river in the night of 16 September and established a temporary bridgehead in the western part of the capital, although its units were then forced to retreat with heavy losses. Stalin apparently considered a frontal attack too unlikely to succeed: 'To take Warsaw in a frontal attack, we would have to bring heavy armour and heavy artillery over to the far bank.'<sup>25</sup> Instead, Warsaw was to be taken by means of an outflanking movement. For the Polish resistance, the prolongation of the fighting caused by such an indirect attack would be fatal, since the insurgents in Warsaw were running out of food and ammunition and their situation was completely desperate.

The German operations staffs also got very nervous when 1st Belorussian Front again attacked with great force northwards along the Vistula in order to take possession of the strategically important Narew estuary at Modlin. If the Red Army succeeded in crossing the river there to the north of Warsaw, not only would the city be lost but the whole southern wing of Army Group Centre would threaten to collapse. Above all, the German command seemed hypnotized by the repeatedly conjured-up danger of a north-westerly thrust by the enemy to the Vistula estuary.<sup>26</sup> In the event, the Soviet attack encountered the strongest position on the German front, defended by Ninth Army's two SS armoured divisions. It failed, with painful losses. Attempts by 2nd Belorussian Front to break through the Narew line further to the east were equally unsuccessful.

On 2 October the last pocket of resistance in Warsaw surrendered and the insurgents gave themselves up as prisoners of war.<sup>27</sup> The capitulation was conducted 'on chivalrous terms', since there had meanwhile been a change of course in German policy and propaganda. It was recognized that the Polish Home Army (*Armia Krajowa*) was strenuously opposed to Bolshevism and feared Sovietization of its strongly Catholic country. Moreover, there was great bitterness among the

<sup>23</sup> KTB 2. Armee, 7 Sept. 1944, RGVA, F. 1275-2-278, 52.

<sup>24</sup> KTB HGr Mitte, 17 Sept. 1944, BA-MA RH 19 II/200, fo. 136.

<sup>25</sup> Quoted in Timokhovich, 'Operatsia Bagration', 76.

<sup>26</sup> KTB 9. Armee, 16 Sept. 1944, BA-MA RH 20-9/205, 137, fo. 140; on this, see Winkler, 'Abwehrkämpfe der Heeresgruppe Mitte', 375, and the sketch 'Wichtige Frontaufklärungsmeldungen im September 1944' attached to App. 4 to Frd. H.Ost (I), No. 3508/44 g.Kdos., 7 Oct. 1944, BA-MA RHD 18/251.

<sup>27</sup> All in all, an estimated 16,000 *Armia Krajowa* combatants and up to 150,000 civilians lost their lives in the fighting in Warsaw; see Chiari, 'Die Heimatarmee', 2.

insurgents about the behaviour of the Red Army, which had halted its offensive just before Warsaw. As a result, attempts were made by the German side to win over the Poles for the common fight against the Stalin regime, but they appeared half-hearted and ambivalent. Above all, the change of direction came too late.<sup>28</sup> Since that time there have been accusations from the Polish side that Stalin cynically sacrificed the ‘bourgeois’ uprising to the Germans. Russian historians, on the other hand, invoke the vigorous defence put up by the Germans. Be that as it may, in August–September 1944, according to Russian sources, the Red Army lost 246,000 men (including 11,000 Polish soldiers fighting in its ranks) in combat in the Warsaw area.<sup>29</sup>

Despite the repression of the Warsaw Uprising, the situation of Army Group Centre remained extremely critical. In September the OKW issued a special directive warning of the threat posed by the Soviet bridgeheads on the Narew.<sup>30</sup> It resulted in Operation SONNENBLUME, in which Army Group Centre again massed all available forces for an attack on the Serock bridgehead. On 4 October, XX Army Corps, which was stationed in the area, launched the attack with the support of two armoured divisions. The opposing enemy force, 65th Army, was taken so much by surprise that the German units made considerable territorial gains at first, even reaching the bank of the Narew in some places. Then the Soviet resistance stiffened, and the operation was broken off in the evening of 8 October.<sup>31</sup>

In the meantime, preparations for a new Soviet large-scale offensive on the Narew had been detected. The Red Army was apparently planning a ‘breakthrough to the Baltic to cut off East Prussia’.<sup>32</sup> The offensive by 1st and 2nd Belorussian Fronts got under way on 10 October.<sup>33</sup> In the ensuing battle of the Narew, which lasted with some interruptions until 30 October, the Soviet troops managed to enlarge the Serock and Różan bridgeheads considerably, but they were unable to take Pułtusk, the key position between the two bridgeheads. In this battle too, the German units were threatened by logistic collapse, as can be seen from the following entry in the Second Army war diary: ‘The present shortage of ammunition cannot be stressed seriously enough.’<sup>34</sup> The front was several times on the point of collapse, mainly because many German regiments were left with no more

<sup>28</sup> On this, see Schwendemann, ‘Die Kapitulation’, 234 ff., 244 ff.

<sup>29</sup> Timokhovich, ‘Operatsia Bagration’, 76.

<sup>30</sup> KTB HGr Mitte, 20 Sept. 1944, BA-MA RH 19 II/200, fo. 163.

<sup>31</sup> The copy of the Army Group Centre war diary in the BA-MA unfortunately ends on 24 Sept. 1944. However, the copy held by the Central Archives of the Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation (CAMO) in Podolsk continues until the end of September and thus includes the preparatory phase for Operation SONNENBLUME, which began in October; see CAMO Podolsk, F. 500, Op. 12454, d. 732. The RGVA in Moscow holds the Second Army war diary for October 1944 (RGVA, F. 1275-2/276), which was believed lost. It also holds numerous Second Army documents with daily reports and other messages, which also contain situation reports from neighbouring armies and Army Group Centre HQ: RGVA, F. 1275-2/130 to 153, F. 1275-2/179, F. 1275-2/217; see also the volumes of annexes F. 1275-2/124, 125, 256, 350.

<sup>32</sup> Fremde Heere Ost (I), ‘Kurze Beurteilung der Feindlage vom 11.10.1944’, BA-MA RH 2/1969, 2.

<sup>33</sup> In addition to Second Army, the left wing of Ninth Army east of the Vistula also came under attack in this offensive; see KTB 9. Armee, 10 Oct. 1944, BA-MA RH 20-9/205, 181 ff., fos. 184 ff.

<sup>34</sup> KTB 2. Armee, 17 Oct. 1944, RGVA, F. 1275-2/276.

than 40 officers, NCOs, and other ranks.<sup>35</sup> In the end, the German forces repelled the Soviet attacks once again with their last remaining strength, and the Red Army offensive petered out in purely tactical successes with considerable losses. According to a report from Army Group Centre, as many as 1,990 Soviet tanks may have been destroyed in the period from 1 to 28 October,<sup>36</sup> of which 609 kills were attributed to Second Army alone.<sup>37</sup>

After this disappointing operation, which official Soviet historiography subsequently mentioned only in passing or simply concealed, the Red Army ceased offensive action. From then until the beginning of the next year no more operationally significant engagements took place. Instead, the Soviets concentrated on preparations for a new major offensive, for which a huge attacking force was assembled.<sup>38</sup> So the Soviet thrust to the Vistula estuary, which the German operations staffs had already feared in the summer of 1944, did not come about until January 1945.

### 3. THE REPULSION OF THE SOVIET THRUST TOWARDS EAST PRUSSIA (16 OCTOBER TO 5 NOVEMBER 1944)

In the course of their withdrawal battles at the beginning of August, the German units had reached the forefield of East Prussia. On 17 August Soviet troops, namely advance forces of 5th Army's 184th Rifle Division, crossed the German border for the first time.<sup>39</sup> They were thrown back, however, and the front stabilized for several weeks following the conclusion of Operation BAGRATION. The defence of East Prussia against a frontal attack by 3rd Belorussian Front was the task of Fourth Army, and its commanders were therefore greatly concerned about developments on its right flank, where the front of the neighbouring Second Army bent back westwards along the Narew. After a breakthrough on the Narew, 2nd Belorussian Front, together with the right wing of 1st Belorussian Front, could push north towards the Baltic and cut Fourth Army off. Foreign Armies East also feared a Soviet pincer attack from the south and east.<sup>40</sup>

There was also the threat of an advance from the north, that is, an attack by 1st Baltic Front on Tilsit and Königsberg. On 5 October the three Baltic army fronts'

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 21 Oct. 1944.

<sup>36</sup> Okdo. H.Gr. Mitte, Ia, No. T 5548/44 geh., daily report, 29 Oct. 1944, RGVA, F. 1275-2/137, 2.

<sup>37</sup> Okdo. H.Gr. Mitte, No. T 5576/44 geh., daily report, 31 Oct. 1944, RGVA, F. 1275-2/130, 1.

<sup>38</sup> With regard to events concerning Ninth Army up to the end of 1944, the main reference document in the BA-MA is the war diary (RH 20-9/205), which has been cited many times earlier in this chapter. Most of the Second Army written documents for this period are in Moscow. The most important are the war diaries for November and December (RGVA, F. 1275-2/126 and 277) and the volumes of annexes F. 1275-2/124, 125, 154 to 160, 256, 264 to 269, 350, and 385.

<sup>39</sup> *Geschichte des zweiten Weltkrieges 1939–1945*, ix. 80; see also KTB HGr Mitte, 17 Aug. 1944, BA-MA RH 19 II/199, fo. 164.

<sup>40</sup> Abt. Fremde Heere Ost (I), No. 3496/44 g.Kdos., 'Kurze Beurteilung der Feindlage vom 7.10.1944', BA-MA RH 2/1969, fo. 54, 2.

decisive major offensive against Army Group North began,<sup>41</sup> and by 10 October Soviet armoured units had already reached the Baltic coast at Memel. In the course of this Soviet advance, the bulk of Third Armoured Army, which was deployed on the southern wing, was split off. As a result, the army was reassigned on the same day to Army Group Centre.<sup>42</sup> It then turned its eastward-facing front through almost 90 degrees to face the lower reaches of the Memel river, which ran into the Baltic, in order to protect the left flank of Fourth Army against 1st Baltic Front's thrust from the north.

As a result of the German withdrawal movements on the Narew and the Memel, the course of the front was now very unfavourable for Army Group Centre. East Prussia formed an eastward-protruding balcony with highly endangered flanks. The main threat in mid-October, however, was a frontal attack by 3rd Belorussian Front directly from the east on the apex of the bend where Fourth Army was deployed. Army Group Centre HQ feared the offensive against East Prussia might be only the beginning of a 'large-scale enemy attack aimed at breaking through to Germany' before the onset of winter.<sup>43</sup> In fact, the plan approved by Stalin and the Stavka envisaged a far-reaching westward offensive by 3rd Belorussian Front.<sup>44</sup> Following a successful in-depth breakthrough in East Prussia, its units were to divide into two thrust wedges, one directed at Königsberg and the other at the Vistula delta. The Red Army general staff considered that 'a powerful attack right across East Prussia [...] representing a penetration of some 220–250 kilometres' was possible.<sup>45</sup>

In the collapse of Army Group Centre, Fourth Army had been most strongly sucked into the downward spiral. Since then, an attempt had been made to rebuild the army around its few remaining units. The result was a heterogeneous formation that in no way resembled the structure of other major units, such as those of Army Group North. The new Fourth Army's task was to hold a 350-km-long front between Memel and Narew. For that it had 15 divisions available, only seven of which had combat experience. Above all, in the opinion of the army's commander-in-chief, General Hossbach, the six newly formed Volksgrenadier ('people's infantry') divisions 'bore the hallmark of improvisation in instruction and training'. In terms of mobility, they were not even up to the standard of a division at the end of the First World War: 'Their fleet of horses and motor vehicles was wholly insufficient, so artillery could be repositioned only in stages.'<sup>46</sup> Even worse was the combat value of

<sup>41</sup> See Part V, Chapter IV, Section 4, 'The Final Separation of Army Group North in Courland'.

<sup>42</sup> Third Armoured Army, which actually belonged to Army Group Centre, had been placed under the command of Army Group North on 21 September, against the will of the OKH. The transfer was the result of a special order from Hitler, who was so fixated on the 'Baltic stronghold' that he even put East Prussia temporarily at risk.

<sup>43</sup> The start of the major offensive was anticipated between 20 and 27 October. If the Red Army command set a later starting date, it would run the risk of being unable to conclude the offensive before the onset of winter. On this, see 'Fernschreiben des Oberkommandos der Heeresgruppe Mitte an die Oberbefehlshaber der 2., 4. und 9. Armee vom 18.10.1944', file reference Ia No. 14783/44 geh. Kdos., BA-MA RH 19 II/211.

<sup>44</sup> Galitsky, *V boyakh za Vostochnuyu Prussiu*, 18–21 (see also the sketch on p. 20).

<sup>45</sup> Stemenko, *Im Generalstab*, 315.

<sup>46</sup> Hossbach, *Die Schlacht um Ostpreußen*, 28.

the two security divisions, which were normally only good for policing the hinterland, since ‘their over-age personnel and wholly inadequate supply of artillery and modern weapons rendered them unsuitable for serious combat’.<sup>47</sup> A further problem was that Fourth Army had only 41 operational tanks at its disposal. Although it also possessed 277 assault guns and tank destroyers,<sup>48</sup> these were more suitable for defence than for counter-attack. The right wing and centre of the front were partly protected by natural obstacles such as rivers and lakes, but the largely open terrain on the left wing, where XXVI and XXVII Army Corps were deployed, held more problems in store.

The units of 3rd Belorussian Front were concentrated against this vulnerable sector, while Fourth Army’s southern wing came under pressure from the right wing of 2nd Belorussian Front. Headquarter reserves had been brought in to reinforce 3rd Belorussian Front, which now comprised five armies with a total of 40 rifle divisions, two armoured corps, and five armoured brigades.<sup>49</sup> According to the Soviet operational plan, 5th and 11th Guards Armies were to attack as the first wave, with the task of breaking through the German front. The second wave, consisting of 2nd Guards Armoured Corps and the newly brought-in 28th Army, would then push through the gap to achieve an operational thrust in depth. At the same time, 31st and 39th Armies would attack on the wings, with the additional task of shielding the flanks from possible German counter-attacks.<sup>50</sup>

On 16 October an exceptionally heavy artillery barrage broke out along a 40-kilometre stretch of front either side of Vilkaviškis, pounding the German positions for three or four hours.<sup>51</sup> At the same time, the German artillery was pinned down by Soviet air attacks of ‘a force unprecedented on the eastern front’,<sup>52</sup> while the Luftwaffe had almost nothing to pit against them. Then the armoured units of 3rd Belorussian Front began to roll, with an axis of attack along the Vilkaviškis–Gumbinnen–Insterburg railway line. Since Fourth Army had almost no reserves, the front seemed several times on the point of collapse. Fighting back desperately, the German units retreated westwards. On 18 October the Soviet troops crossed the border of the Reich on a broad front,<sup>53</sup> but the phase of ‘penetrating the tactical depth of the enemy defence’<sup>54</sup> lasted altogether from 16 to 19 October. The 3rd Belorussian Front command then decided to throw II Guards Armoured Corps forward to force an operational breakthrough. On 20 October the unit succeeded

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> AOK 4, Ia Nr. 104/44 geh., Ia-Tagesmeldung vom 17.10.1944, BA-MA RH 20-4/590. This report also takes account of the number of fighting vehicles which had already arrived and belonged to 20th Armoured Division’s ‘Löwen’ combat group, newly assigned to Fourth Army.

<sup>49</sup> Stemenko, *Im Generalstab*, 425, n. 23.

<sup>50</sup> Alekseyev, ‘Nachalo boyev v Vostochnoi Prussii’, 120; Glantz, ‘The Failures of Historiography’, 803. Stalin wanted to be able to claim the first conquest of a strip of German Reich territory at the celebration of the 27th anniversary of the October Revolution; see Fisch, *Nemmersdorf*, 21 ff.

<sup>51</sup> ‘Lage 9. und 4. Armee am 16.10.1944’, RGVA, F. 1275-2/131.

<sup>52</sup> AOK 4, Ia No. T 103/44 geh., daily report, 16 Oct. 1944, BA-MA RH 20-4/590.

<sup>53</sup> On 16 October there was already fighting on German territory near the border town of Schirwindt.

<sup>54</sup> Alekseyev, ‘Nachalo boyev v Vostochnoi Prussii’, 120.

in penetrating the German rear defence lines and advanced as far as Grosswaltersdorf (Walterkehnen) on the Rominte river. The next day, after the Soviet 28th Army had been deployed in a second wave at the interface between 5th and 11th Guards Armies, the central section of the German front finally collapsed. But the real crisis developed in the rear of the German front, where II Guards Armoured Corps was advancing in depth with almost no resistance. What happened next was something which, according to the German operational plan, should have been prevented at all costs. On 21 October a Soviet armoured unit captured an undestroyed bridge over the Angerapp river and established a bridgehead on the west bank around the village of Nemmersdorf, penetrating the Wehrmacht's planned Angerapp–Inster rearward defence line before it had even been occupied. The lightning capture of Nemmersdorf thus marked the high point of the Soviet offensive.<sup>55</sup>

To the Germans this seemed like the beginning of a catastrophe. The way west was now open, and the earlier German blitzkriegs had shown how great an effect even small armoured units could have if they paralysed the enemy's unprotected nerve centres in the hinterland. The Soviet armour could have exploited this success operationally to push on to Insterburg or turn in on both sides of the breakthrough point and attack the German front from the rear. Above all, it had the option of a thrust on Gumbinnen, the major detraining point for incoming German reserves, which was already outflanked. Simply disrupting the railway lines, which were within immediate reach, would have been enough to paralyse any German operational counter-measures, since the German armoured units were suffering from an acute shortage of fuel and were therefore dependent on rail transport. But at this decisive moment, to the astonishment of Fourth Army HQ, the Soviet units stayed put in Nemmersdorf, strikingly inactive.<sup>56</sup> This puzzling lack of action is discussed below in greater detail.

What, then, were the German counter-measures? *In extremis*, the German command adopted the procedure (anathema to Hitler) of shortening the front in the neighbouring sector in order to gain reserves for a counter-strike. To that end,

<sup>55</sup> Unfortunately, the surviving war diaries of Fourth Army and Army Group go only to the end of September, but the combat operations can be reconstructed from the comprehensive volumes of annexes; see above all BA-MA RH 20-4/551, 590, 594, 604, 605, 607–9, 619 (K), 620 (K), and N 24/39 (General Hossbach papers). Additional insight was gained by studying the captured German files in the RGVA in Moscow, where the almost wholly preserved files of the German Second Army were found to contain numerous situation reports of Fourth Army and Army Group Centre. See also BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2054, 131 ff.; BA-MA, Study ZA 1/1968 (= Dethleffsen, 'Durchbruch russischer Panzerkräfte im Oktober 1944 in Ostpreußen'); Hossbach, *Die Schlacht um Ostpreußen*, 26 ff.; Dieckert and Grossmann, *Der Kampf um Ostpreußen*, 57 ff.; Plato, *Die Geschichte der 5. Panzerdivision*, 367 ff.; Haupt, *Heeresgruppe Mitte*, 243 ff.; Tippelskirch, *Geschichte des Zweiten Weltkrieges*, 489 ff.; Philippi and Heim, *Der Feldzug gegen Sowjetrußland*, 267; Zeidler, *Kriegsende im Osten*, 67–75; Salomon, 'Die Panzerabwehrschlacht', 303–10; Schön, *Tragödie Ostpreußen*, 55–61; Winkler, 'Abwehrkämpfe der Heeresgruppe Mitte', 583 ff.; Galitsky, *V boyat' za Vostochnuyu Prussiu*, 16–179; Alekseyev, 'Nachalo boyev v Vostochnoi Prussii', 119 ff.; Glantz, 'The Failures of Historiography', 803 ff.

<sup>56</sup> That point was emphasized by Fourth Army's former chief of staff in a later study; see Maj.-Gen. (ret.) Erich Dethleffsen, 'Durchbruch russischer Panzerkräfte im Oktober 1944 in Ostpreußen', in BA-MA, Study ZA 1/1968, App. 5, 7–8, 10–11.

Third Armoured Army, which was under attack by 1st Baltic Front, was ordered to withdraw completely to a favourable defensive position behind the Memel and transfer a large part of its armoured force to Fourth Army. The units concerned were 5th Armoured Division, which was seriously battle-worn, and Armoured Paratroop Division 'Hermann Göring', for which the available units did not even amount to a complete armoured division and were still arriving one after the other by rail. The newly formed 'Führer Grenadier' Brigade was also brought in, but was wholly without combat experience.<sup>57</sup> No great penetrative force was to be expected from these three attack units anyway, since they had only 77 operational tanks and 39 assault guns available in all.<sup>58</sup> Moreover, General Hossbach was faced with the problem of having to fend off two Soviet thrusts at the same time: one in the area of Gumbinnen, the other further south near Goldap. Above all, Soviet armoured spearheads were already positioned further west in the German hinterland at Nemmersdorf. Hossbach's operational plan was therefore conditioned by the following two elements:

- At first, the counter-attack would be concentrated only on the Soviet thrust in the Gumbinnen area, at the cost of a considerable risk near Goldap.
- No attempt would be made to stop the westward-advancing armoured units frontally. Instead, the counter-strike would be aimed—as an indirect measure in the enemy's rear—at the narrowest point of the Soviet thrust wedge immediately behind the breakthrough area at Grosswaltersdorf. It would consist of a pincer attack by 5th Armoured Division from the north and Führer Grenadier Brigade from the south, which would encircle and destroy all enemy units west of the Rominte.

The German counter-blow deep in their flank took the Soviet attackers completely by surprise. This may seem strange in retrospect, as General Hossbach decided on a manoeuvre which, in German military history, had frequently resulted in success against superior Russian and Soviet attacking forces. It had been applied in East Prussia itself in August 1914. On that occasion, the German Eighth Army command initially ignored the advance of the Russian Neman army at Gumbinnen. Instead, it concentrated entirely on the Narev army, which was attacking in the south, and encircled it in a concentric attack at Tannenberg. In October 1944, however, the practical execution of the manoeuvre was made much more complicated by the overwhelming superiority of the Soviet forces. As a result, Armoured Corps 'Hermann Göring' took hardly any part in the pincer attack itself. Shortly after disembarking at Gumbinnen, it became tied up in a series of combat

<sup>57</sup> The numerical weakness of the three newly transferred units is shown by the fact that their combined combat strength (on the reference date of 30 October) was no more than 3,697 men. The breakdown was 453 in the Führer Grenadier Brigade, 1,543 in Armoured Paratroop Division 'Hermann Göring', and 1,701 in 5th Armoured Division; see AOK 4, Ia, 30 Oct. 1944, 'Kampfstärken, Stand 30.10.1944', BA-MA RH 20-4/593.

<sup>58</sup> App. to AOK 4 Ia, No. T 109/44 geh., 22 Oct. 1944, 'Panzer- und Sturmgeschützmeldung', BA-MA RH 20-4/592.

engagements, leaving 5th Armoured Division (with 22 operational tanks)<sup>59</sup> to attack Grosswaltersdorf largely on its own. Meanwhile, further potential breakthrough points had arisen all along the 150 kilometres of front, and especially on the southern wing.<sup>60</sup> But instead of plugging the ‘tactical gaps’, Fourth Army HQ decided on the operational solution of offensive defence, since only a surprise counter-strike could overcome the crisis. It began with preliminary attacks on 21 October. On 22 October, 5th Armoured Division succeeded in pushing south along the Rominte to Grosswaltersdorf, while at the same time Führer Grenadier Brigade thrust northwards through Daken into the same area. When the two spearheads met at Grosswaltersdorf, the pincer closed.<sup>61</sup>

The encirclement of superior Soviet armoured units by weaker German forces was, of course, a risky manoeuvre, but that act of desperation resulted in success. The unexpectedly encircled units (belonging to II Guards Armoured Corps and 11th Guards Army) immediately ceased their attack. In fact, under cool-headed and determined leadership they could have exploited their numerical superiority, in conjunction with other units advancing from further east, to enclose the two German pincer arms in their turn. Yet once again the psychological shock had its effect, and the extent to which the German bluff succeeded is confirmed indirectly by a Soviet account in which the number of German tanks supposed to have attacked at Gumbinnen is put at 500.<sup>62</sup> Apart from the failure of tactical reconnaissance, the Russian setback testifies to the lasting after-effect of the Tannenberg trauma of 1914.<sup>63</sup> Some Soviet units fled eastwards in panic, leaving their heavy material behind. Führer Grenadier Brigade, in particular, was broken through several times in the process but nevertheless managed to reclose the encircling ring. Even though some of the encircled units managed to escape, what was decisive was the operational effects, that is, the halting of the Soviet westward advance towards Königsberg. 3rd Belorussian Front command was so impressed by the German counter-strike that it immediately went over to the defensive in the central sector, and on 27 October halted its offensive in the other sectors too.

Of great importance was the fact that 1st and 2nd Belorussian Fronts’ offensive against the southern flank of East Prussia failed at the same time, and above all, that 1st Baltic Front’s thrust towards Tilsit from the north was also unsuccessful. Third Armoured Army had withdrawn behind the Memel with its remaining units and successfully repelled all attacks. As a result, the dangerous Soviet thrust into the rear, which would have trapped the whole northern wing of Fourth Army in the pincer, did not take place. After 3rd Belorussian Front withdrew, Fourth Army was

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> A crisis arose on the northern wing when 28th Army reinforced the Soviet attacking forces as a second staggered wave. The situation on the southern wing appeared even more dangerous as the front crumbled on either side of Suwałki. In the end, the German defenders were driven back westwards to a line between Augustów and Goldap.

<sup>61</sup> The final joining of the two pincer arms did not take place until 23 October (see Plato, *Die Geschichte der 5. Panzerdivision*, 367), but the onrushing Soviet units were already cut off from their rearward connections on the previous day.

<sup>62</sup> Alekseyev, ‘Nachalo boyev v Vostochnoi Prussii’, 120.

<sup>63</sup> Zeidler, *Kriegsende im Osten*, 73.

able to gather forces for a further counter-attack. By 3 November it had temporarily freed Goldap, which had fallen to the Soviet forces. The fighting in East Prussia ended on 5 November. Although it had seemed for a while as if a dam was about to burst, the German forces had managed to repel the enemy and stabilize the front once again. There were no more major combat engagements in the sector of Army Group Centre until the large-scale Soviet offensive in January 1945.

According to the American military historian David M. Glantz,<sup>64</sup> the 'Gumbinnen operation' (or 'Goldap operation') is one of a series of important operations that were largely blanked out by official Soviet historiography.<sup>65</sup> Clearly, the offensive operation by 3rd Belorussian Front under General Ivan Danilovich Chernyakhovsky, which failed despite considerable superiority, was not considered one of the Red Army's greatest deeds of glory. After the successful operational breakthrough, victory seemed within its grasp, but the expectation was frustrated by General Hossbach's surprise counter-attack right in the middle of the advancing Soviet units, which led to a complete turnaround. This 'first battle for East Prussia' was fought with exceptional bitterness and, given its short duration, the losses seem relatively high. According to German figures, 914 Soviet tanks and assault guns were shot down,<sup>66</sup> while the Wehrmacht's own losses totalled 48 tanks and 67 assault guns.<sup>67</sup> The Red Army suffered particularly high losses in breaking through the East Prussian border fortifications,<sup>68</sup> but the terrain was also strewn with wreckage after the four-day battle of encirclement south of Gumbinnen. In that narrow area alone, 295 tanks, 79 cannon, and 23 anti-tank guns were captured or destroyed.<sup>69</sup> According to Russian figures, 3rd Belorussian Front lost 79,527 of the 377,300 troops deployed (of whom 16,819 dead or missing).<sup>70</sup> At first sight, the German total losses of 16,236 men seem very low in comparison.<sup>71</sup> In percentage terms, however, they were higher than the Soviet losses, since the combat strength of the divisions was reduced by more than one-third, and on 30 October totalled no more than 29,916 men, including the newly assigned units.<sup>72</sup> The high number

<sup>64</sup> Glantz, 'The Failures of Historiography', 803 ff.

<sup>65</sup> Almost the only relevant work in the literature of Soviet origin is Alekseyev's short essay 'Nachalo boyev v Vostochnoi Prussii', which in any case conceals more than it reveals. The work by the former commander-in-chief of 11th Guards Army, Col.-Gen. Kuzma Nikitovich Galitsky, *V boyakh za Vostokhnuyu Prussiu*, is a highly apologetic account.

<sup>66</sup> Okdo. H.Gr. Mitte, Ia No. T 5548/44 geh., daily report for 29 Oct. 1944, RGVA, F. 1275-2/137, 1.

<sup>67</sup> Stopa/AOK 4, 30 Oct. 1944, 'Betr. Aufstellung über Total-Verluste der panzerbr. Waffen vom 28.10.1944', BA-MA RH 20-4/593.

<sup>68</sup> A total of 469 Soviet tanks were reported shot down in the period 16 to 20 October alone; see the Fourth Army statistics (no file number) for 23 October, 'Bisherige Panzerabschüsse während der jetzigen Abwehrschlacht', BA-MA RH 20-4/592.

<sup>69</sup> Telex from Lt.-Col. Starck, AOK 2-Ia, No. 2362/44 g.Kdos, 26 Oct. 1944, 'Lage am 25.10.1944', RGVA, F. 1275-2/140. See also Okdo. H.Gr. Mitte, Ia No. T 5484/44 geh., 26 Oct. 1944, daily report for 25 October, BA-MA RH 20-4/592, 3.

<sup>70</sup> *Grif sekretnosti sniat*, 227.

<sup>71</sup> AOK 4, IIa, 30-31 Oct. 1944, 'Verluste vom 29./30.10. und Nachmeldungen', BA-MA RH 20-4/593.

<sup>72</sup> Although the terminology was defined precisely in an OKH ordinance of 24 Feb. 1944, 'Festlegung der Stärkebegriffe', BA-MA RH 2/60, the term 'infantry combat strength' is also used in

of dead or missing, at 6,801, also shows how bitterly the men of Fourth Army had fought.<sup>73</sup>

The Wehrmacht troops' will to resist increased dramatically when the Red Army set foot on German soil. In particular, men from the German eastern territories fought with wild determination. But the fact remains that many of them were insufficiently trained and armed. For want of tanks of their own, they were often expected to eliminate Soviet fighting vehicles in infantry close combat. Nevertheless, after heavy resistance, they actually managed to stop the 'Soviet steamroller'. The Red Army had attacked on a front of 150 kilometres and advanced up to 60 kilometres to the west, pushing into German territory. The counter-attack forced the Soviet troops back, but a border strip about 100 kilometres wide and up to 27 kilometres deep remained in their hands.

#### EPILOGUE: NEMMERSDORF, THE WRITING ON THE WALL

The war had entered a new phase. For the first time, the German civilian population now also suffered the effects of a land operation.<sup>74</sup> The excesses committed by Red Army troops on German soil are discussed in volume x/I of the present series,<sup>75</sup> but in October 1944 Nemmersdorf experienced a brief prelude to the violence that was in store. The foregoing account of the military events left unanswered the question why the advance troops of 3rd Belorussian Front made a short pause on 22 October that was fraught with consequences, although they had already achieved an operational breakthrough and had taken possession of an undestroyed bridge over the Angerapp at Nemmersdorf. The German counter-attack would have had not the slightest chance of success if the Soviet offensive had continued immediately. In the event, however, it resulted that same day in the encirclement of the Red Army units that were positioned between the Rominte and the Angerapp. It was initially assumed that the Soviet troops had paused for logistic reasons. What really happened during the period in question in the areas 'liberated' by the Red Army

the Fourth Army files alongside the official term 'combat strength'. In any case, the discrepancies are not serious, since the figures were clearly based on similar criteria. According to that source, Fourth Army's 'infantry combat strength' was 48,532 men before the fighting began; see AOK 4, 8 Oct. 1944, 'Infanterie-Kampfstärken der Divisionen, Stand 7.10.44', BA-MA RH 20-4/588. For 30 Oct. the 'combat strength' is given as 29,916 men; see AOK 4, Ia, 30 Oct. 1944, 'Kampfstärken, Stand 30.10.1944', BA-MA RH 20-4/593. The files for 11 November contain a report entitled 'Infanteristische Kampfstärke der 4. Armee, Stand 11.11.44' (no file number), according to which the figure had risen to 38,904 men; see BA-MA RH 20-4/596.

<sup>73</sup> AOK 4, IIa, 30-31 Oct. 1944, 'Verluste vom 29./30.10. und Nachmeldungen', BA-MA RH 20-4/593.

<sup>74</sup> On the conflict between military and civilian agencies during evacuation, see Winkler, 'Abwehrkämpfe der Heeresgruppe Mitte', 169-221.

<sup>75</sup> See the chapters by Manfred Zeidler in *Germany and the Second World War*, x/I.

was revealed by eyewitness reports from German troops who entered the reconquered villages. They were met by scenes of apocalyptic horror, especially in Nemmersdorf.<sup>76</sup> The Soviet troops had fought their way for years through their own devastated territory to the border of the Reich. When they first set foot on German soil there was an explosion of violence, as they unleashed an orgy of revenge on the civilian population. In some of the reconquered villages German troops found the raped and mutilated corpses of women and girls.

Nemmersdorf (now Mayakovskoye), where the Soviet attacking units advanced furthest to the west, was not only the military culmination of the battle. It was also the place where the Soviet atrocities reached their climax, after a relatively large number of German civilians fell into the hands of the Red Army.<sup>77</sup> What was particular about Nemmersdorf, however, was that it was retaken by the Wehrmacht and the corpses were examined by an international medical commission. The Soviet attack had been carried out by 2nd Guards Armoured Corps under Maj.-Gen. Burdeinyi. On 21 October the spearhead of 25th Guards Brigade, consisting of 2nd Armoured Battalion, the motorized machine-gun battalion, and a battalion of 4th Motorized Rifle Brigade, took the village in a preliminary attack. In an astonishing understatement, Col. Bulygin, the commander of 25th Guards Armoured Brigade, noted in his combat report that Nemmersdorf had been 'cleared of infantry and the non-combatant population'.<sup>78</sup> Nemmersdorf etched itself into German consciousness as the synonym for Soviet atrocities. That 'place of horror' was the writing on the wall, the prelude to the immeasurable tragedy which befell the German population in the east from January 1945. Ralph Giordano, who, because of his Jewish origins, saw the Soviet advance as a liberation at the time,

<sup>76</sup> There is ample documentary evidence of the events in Nemmersdorf; see, e.g., AOK 4, Abt. Ic A.O. (Abw. III), 26 Oct. 1944, 'Bericht von Hauptmann Fricke', BA-MA RH 20-4/593, and 'Nachtrag zur Tagesmeldung Fs.Pz.K. H.G. vom 24.10.44 (Oblt. Hartmann vom 25.10.44, 2.00 Uhr)'. Some of these reports of Soviet war crimes in East Prussia are documented in file BA-MA RH 2/2684, 168, fos. 1–40 (= 382–434). See also 'Liste 1 über die von der RA in den besetzten deutschen Gebieten verübten Völkerrechtsverletzungen und Greuelaten', BA-MA RH 2/2685, fo. 168 = 39, and *Dokumentation der Vertreibung*, vol. I/1: Document No. 3, 'Erlebnisbericht des ehemaligen Landrats von Angerapp (Darkehmen) i. Ostpr., Uschdraweit', 4–7; Document No. 4, 'Erlebnisbericht des Volkssturmmannes K.P. aus Königsberg i. Ostpr.', 7–8. Bernhard Fisch quotes further sources in his work *Nemmersdorf, Oktober 1944*, in which he sought to refute certain exaggerations by those who reported the events and falsifications by Nazi propaganda. In so doing, however, Fisch adopted a strange yardstick, since he was to some extent only willing to accept testimony which he (as a former citizen of the GDR) was able to check half a century later by questioning surviving witnesses.

<sup>77</sup> A total of 46 civilians were probably murdered in Nemmersdorf itself, including a column of refugees run over in the immediate neighbourhood. But massacres took place in other villages too, e.g. in Brauersdorf; see the eyewitness report by Captain Jaedtke, quoted in Plato, *Die Geschichte der 5. Panzerdivision*, 368. The fate of the civilians in the villages which were not liberated by the Wehrmacht has not been established. Through the fault of NS Gauleiter Erich Koch, the evacuation order was given far too late, so that some refugee columns were unable to set off westwards in time.

<sup>78</sup> Quoted in Fisch, *Nemmersdorf*, 80 (nn. 2 and 5 on pp. 100–1). The source given is a file in the Russian Military Archive, ZAMV, F. 3105, L. 1, A. 28, Map 19502, fos. 60–76, which also contains the archive numbers of other relevant Soviet combat reports.

later described it as the 'darkest chapter in mankind's history of war, and probably the greatest mass rape of all time'.<sup>79</sup>

The 'Nemmersdorf factor' was to have serious consequences for Soviet conduct of the war:

- On the purely military level, it disastrously disrupted the relentless advance of the Soviet attacking forces. Instead of immediate operational exploitation of the breakthrough achieved, there ensued an interruption or delay of combat operations, because many Red Army soldiers were occupied at the time with plundering and excesses. With marauding troops, however, there is no chance of an operational war of movement, which is based on rapid combat operations. The Nemmersdorf factor repeated itself on a larger scale the following year when the German front collapsed and the Soviet armoured units, at the beginning of February, had crossed the Oder and were only a few kilometres from Berlin. Marshal Zhukov was later strongly criticized for failing to launch the thrust on the almost defenceless German capital at that time. One of his problems, however, was that some Soviet commanders had lost control of their troops, who were then interested in quite other things than their combat mission.
- The Red Army atrocities strongly boosted the motivation of the Wehrmacht troops. That can be seen, for example, from the memoirs of Count Heinrich von Einsiedel, then vice-chairman of the National Committee for a Free Germany, which collaborated with the Soviets. Von Einsiedel, who was one of the few Germans to accompany the Red Army's advance, reported his outrage at excesses 'which were out of control and had turned into a paroxysm of destructive fury'.<sup>80</sup> A captured Hitler youth told him: 'We East Prussians would rather go down fighting than suffer this without resistance.'<sup>81</sup> Stalin, however, could not, or would not, put an end to the excesses. His failure to do so led to a temporary stabilization of the rule of his already defeated adversary, Hitler. Joseph Goebbels' propaganda machine, forced onto the defensive by the many retreats and defeats, had now found a powerfully effective theme, constantly conjuring up the image of what the German population could expect if the Red Army invaded Germany. For many soldiers from Germany's eastern territories, surrender was no alternative, and they increasingly resorted to 'suicidal resistance'.<sup>82</sup> This in turn led to huge losses on both sides, wholly unjustified from the Soviet viewpoint, since the war had long been won.
- The Red Army's behaviour in Germany's eastern territories had a long-term effect whose importance cannot be overestimated, even if it did not become apparent until the post-war period. The rearming of West Germany would by no means have been a matter of course if not for the enduring memory of the

<sup>79</sup> Giordano, postscript to Fisch, *Nemmersdorf*, 187.

<sup>80</sup> Einsiedel, *Tagebuch der Versuchung*, 148; see also 154.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid. 155.

<sup>82</sup> Thus the British journalist Alexander Werth, who accompanied the Red Army's advance; Werth, *Russia at War*, 832.

dreadful trauma which had its beginnings in Nemmersdorf. Above all, NATO's nuclear strategy, criticized as defence through self-destruction, could scarcely have been implemented had many Germans not still been under the impression of the atrocities committed by Soviet troops. For the Red Army, therefore, Nemmersdorf 1944 was more than a military defeat. It was the first moral defeat in the dawning Cold War.

# IV. Army Group North's Withdrawal Battles to Courland

*Karl-Heinz Frieser*

In the summer of 1944 operational movements in the area of Army Group North mainly took place at the interface with Army Group Centre. In our discussion of the collapse of Army Group Centre, no satisfactory explanation was found for some of Hitler's 'stand firm' orders, which were contrary to military logic. Some of the questions can be given a plausible answer only if analysed in conjunction with the strategically much more revealing developments in the area of Army Group North. There too, the cardinal problem is Hitler's refusal to give up territory of his own free will. What was to be defended, however, was not an individual 'fortified place' like Vitebsk but the Baltic region as a whole, with its three countries, which Hitler wanted to hold onto as one gigantic fortress.

## 1. THE DISMAL STARTING POSITION IN THE SUMMER OF 1944

In the spring Army Group North had been obliged to withdraw from the forefield of Leningrad to the Panther Line, which stretched along the east coast of the Baltic. In the northern section, between the Bay of Finland and Lake Peipus, Army Detachment Narva was deployed along the river of the same name. From there, the positions of Eighteenth Army extended along the western shore of Lake Peipus and further south through Pskov to Ostrov. Sixteenth Army, continuing from Army Group Centre, had the task of holding the southern section with the cornerstone of Polotsk. In the summer of 1944 Army Group North was rapidly declining in strength as the OKH withdrew more and more of its units for deployment at other critical points on the eastern front. It now consisted of only 30 divisions, three more of which were due to be withdrawn by the end of July.<sup>1</sup> At the beginning of July, its (purely theoretical) actual strength was around

<sup>1</sup> OKH, Org.Abt. No. I/45556/44 g.Kdos., 6 July 1944, 'Stärke der Heeresgruppen der Ostfront (Gliederung vom 28.6.1944)', BA-MA RH 2/1336.

500,000. However, more than 140,000 of those men were not front-line troops<sup>2</sup> but were deployed, for example, as construction engineers, railway troops, army supply troops, and in various staff departments, as well as on security tasks in the hinterland. On 1 July the (hypothetical) actual strength of the divisions and independent combat units was 342,742 men. However, the only meaningful figure for a comparison of strength is daily strength, which was 215,664 men. The figure is much lower if only the combat strength of the army group, that is, 110,248, is taken into account.<sup>3</sup> The transfer of 12th Armoured Division to Army Group Centre at the end of July was a heavy loss, depriving Army Group North of its only armoured divisions and leaving it with only 30 tanks (502nd Heavy Armoured Battalion) and 206 assault guns.<sup>4</sup> With increasing frustration, Army Group North HQ discussed how it was to fend off the expected assault by four Soviet army fronts, supported by four air armies, with only such means at its disposal. No significant help was to be expected from the Luftwaffe either. At the end of June the only operational aircraft available to Air Fleet 1, apart from a few reconnaissance planes, were four bombers and 14 fighters. Other than that, it had only 85 outdated night ground-attack aircraft at its disposal.<sup>5</sup> In March Army Group North had already been obliged to reduce its fuel allocation for motor vehicles by 60 per cent, necessitating a total ban on motorized troop movements. Furthermore, a broad restriction on flight operations was imposed on 8 June owing to shortage of fuel.<sup>6</sup> The most serious problem in the summer of 1944, however, was the withdrawal of the neighbouring Army Group Centre, as a result of which Army Group North's southern flank increased in length and had to be secured by divisions withdrawn from the main front. While the Soviet army fronts were constantly reinforced, Army Group North even had to give up a few more units, so that its headquarters estimated the enemy's current superiority at 8 to 1.<sup>7</sup>

The forces arraigned against it were, in the south, at the interface with Army Group Centre, 1st Baltic Front; connected to it, in the centre, 2nd and 3rd Baltic Fronts; and far to the north, on the Bay of Finland, Leningrad Front. Each of the four army fronts had an air army attached to it, and there was also massive intervention by long-distance units during ongoing operations. At the outset, 12 armies and numerous independent units were standing ready to attack. A special role was played by 1st Baltic Front. In June, during the first phase

<sup>2</sup> OKH, Organisationsabteilung (I), No. I/18240/44 g.Kdos., 23 July 1944, 'Stärke der H.Gr. Nord', BA-MA RH 2/1341, fo. 29. As noted in the document, the strength on 1 July cannot be determined precisely. The figure of approximately 550,000 for 1 June must be reduced by around 50,000 men whose units had been transferred in the meantime.

<sup>3</sup> OKH, Organisationsabteilung (I), No. I/8897/44 geh., 11 Aug. 1944, BA-MA RH 2/1341, 14–15, fos. 35–6.

<sup>4</sup> BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2046, 708.

<sup>5</sup> Köhler, 'Einsatz der Luftwaffe', 87. In addition, 4th Ground-Attack Wing, with 43 operational ground-attack aircraft, was transferred to Air Fleet 1 at the beginning of July; on this, see OKL LwFüSt, Ia op 1, Prüf No. 2079, 4 July 1944 (brit.: ME 10), 'Gliederung und Liegeplätze', BA-MA, Kart 40/154. On operational status, see Gen.Q.Mstr., 6. Abt., 30 Jun. 1944, BA-MA RL 2 III/731.

<sup>6</sup> BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2046, 849.

<sup>7</sup> Friessner, *Verratene Schlachten*, 23.

Table V.IV.1. Air Fleet 1: aircraft operational in the summer and autumn of 1944

	26 Jun.	2 Jul.	5 Sept.	3 Oct.	15 Oct.
Strategic reconnaissance aircraft	17	11	16	19	–
Tactical reconnaissance aircraft	17	18	43	32	20
Fighters	14	29	66	63	56
Ground-attack aircraft	–	–	104	80	70
Night ground-attack aircraft	85	79	86	73	24
Bombers	4	8	6	–	–
<b>Total strength:</b>	<b>137</b>	<b>145</b>	<b>321</b>	<b>267</b>	<b>170</b>

Source: Köhler, 'Der Einsatz der Luftwaffe', 87.

of Operation BAGRATION, it had been deployed *en masse* against the northern wing of Third Armoured Army, which was part of Army Group Centre. Then it had swung north-west into the open flank of Army Group North, and in the further course of the summer and autumn offensives it proved to be the most dangerous of all the attacking Soviet army fronts. It had originally consisted of three armies and an independent armoured corps, totalling 359,000 men,<sup>8</sup> but in July and August it was reinforced by 39th, 51st, and 2nd Guards Armies, plus 5th Guards Armoured Army, XIX Armoured Corps, and III Guards Mechanized Corps, which considerably increased its original stock of 687 tanks and assault guns.<sup>9</sup> For their part, 2nd and 3rd Baltic Fronts had 391,200 and 258,400 men respectively.<sup>10</sup> Leningrad Front tied down strong German forces in the northern sector but only took part in the combat operations later on.

It is noteworthy that, before the beginning of the Soviet summer offensive, Army Group North had only vague information about the enemy's strength.<sup>11</sup> The number of reconnaissance aircraft at its disposal was by no means sufficient to cover such a huge area, and fuel rationing meant that there were not enough supplies even for the few planes it had. Consequently, reconnaissance missions could be flown only in ideal weather conditions, when the Soviet units did not undertake troop movements in any case. Despite these difficulties, Army Group North managed to make an accurate assessment of enemy intentions. On 13 May it had already drawn the attention of the army's chief of staff to the danger at the interface with Army Group Centre. It calculated that 'the enemy will seek to divide the army groups by means of a thrust along the Dvina'.<sup>12</sup> On 25 May the enemy situation assessment indicated that the Soviet forces would probably attack 'via Polotsk–Daugavpils towards Riga'.<sup>13</sup> Thus, at this early stage, enemy intelligence already predicted a Soviet thrust to the Baltic coast with the aim of enclosing Army Group North in the Baltic region. It also forecast the timing of

<sup>8</sup> *Grif sekretnosti sniat*, 203.

<sup>9</sup> 'Belorusskaya operatsiya v tsifrakh', 77.

<sup>10</sup> *Grif sekretnosti sniat*, 227.

<sup>11</sup> OB HGr Nord an OB Luftflotte 1, 26 June 1944, in KTB HGr Nord, 26 June 1944, BA-MA RH 19 III/310, fos. 107–10.

<sup>12</sup> KTB HGr Nord, 13 May 1944 (07.00), BA-MA RH 19 III/308.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 25 May 1944 (20.00).

the offensive correctly, although it was helped in this by the lucky chance that a Soviet air-force officer carrying highly informative documents had been shot down shortly before.<sup>14</sup> In contrast to Army Group Centre, whose commander-in-chief had blindly accepted Hitler's preconceived idea of the enemy situation, Army Group North arrived at a thoroughly correct assessment. But even this accurate analysis would prove to be of no significance, since the forces available were by no means sufficient to stop the accurately predicted Soviet thrust to the Baltic coast in the direction of Riga.

## 2. THE WITHDRAWAL IN THE BALTIC REGION UP TO THE END OF AUGUST

### (a) Hitler's Reasons for Holding on to the 'Baltic Fortress'

As previously during the 'Zeitzler Plan' controversy at the end of June, both the OKH general staff and the commanders-in-chief of the two army groups concerned pressed hard for evacuation of the northern Baltic area. They were unanimous that breakthrough in the sector of its southern neighbour necessitated Army Group North's withdrawal from Lake Peipus to the Dvina. The commander-in-chief of Army Group North, Col.-Gen. Georg Lindemann, argued for the withdrawal in order to avoid the threatening enclosure on the coast, while Field Marshal Walter Model saw it as the only chance of gaining forces for a counter-attack in support of Army Group Centre, since it would shorten the front considerably and free up half the units of Army Group North.

But despite all the arguments with which his generals assailed him, Hitler rejected the idea of voluntary evacuation. There ensued one of the fiercest conflicts of the whole campaign between the Führer and his generals. How resolutely it was pursued can be seen from the fact that it led not only to the resignation of Col.-Gen. Kurt Zeitzler and sharp clashes with his successor, Heinz Guderian, but also to the dismissal of two successive commanders-in-chief of Army Group North. The differences of opinion were particular evident during the conferences at Führer headquarters on 9, 14, and 18 July.<sup>15</sup> Hitler invoked the following five arguments:

- Evacuation of Estonia would lead to Finland's withdrawal from the Axis. The alliance with Finland was already very fragile since the repulsion, with heavy

<sup>14</sup> KTB HGr Nord, 20 Jun. 1944 (20.00), BA-MA RH 19 III/310. See also KTB Skl, pt. A, lviii/II, 17 Jun. 1944, 453, fo. 232.

<sup>15</sup> On this, see FRR GWNOL 01428 19.7.1946 [correct date = 1944] to OKM 1. Skl (Koralle), 'Lageunterrichtung 19.7.' (known as the 'Assmann Report'), BA-MA RM 7/101, fos. 99–103, repr. in Salewski, *Die Deutsche Seekriegsleitung*, ii. 639–40. See also KTB HGr Nord, 9 July 1944, BA-MA RH 19 III/311, fo. 177–8; KTB HGr Nord, 14 and 18 July, BA-MA RH 19 III/313, fos. 44 and 134–5; Col.-Gen. (ret.) Zeitzler, 'Das Ringen um die großen Entscheidungen im zweiten Weltkriege', 162–3, Part II, BA-MA, Zeitzler papers, N 63/80; KTB Skl, pt. A, lix/II, 409–10 and 431; Heusinger, *Befehl im Widerstreit*, 333 ff.; Friessner, *Verraten Schlachten*, 21; Salewski, *Die deutsche Seekriegsleitung*, ii. 463; Grier, 'Hitler's Baltic Strategy', 79–80, 93 ff., 495 ff., 602–3; Kröker, *Fehleinschätzung*, 330 ff.; Weinberg, *A World at Arms*, 707 and 720–1.

losses, of a Soviet offensive in Karelia at the beginning of June. Moreover, Finland was Germany's only supplier of nickel.

- Estonia produced shale oil, which the German navy needed.
- Possession of the Estonian coast was a precondition for the blockade of the Soviet fleet. Following a German withdrawal, it would be able to break through the mine barriers in the Bay of Finland and penetrate the Baltic Sea.
- Loss of Germany's hitherto unrestricted command of the Baltic Sea would also harm relations with Sweden, resulting in cessation of the Swedish deliveries of 9 million tonnes of ore a year, which Germany urgently needed.
- Command of the Baltic Sea was a precondition for the testing and combat training of the new U-boat types, since the Baltic ports were important bases for the training fleets. The vessels in question were the newly developed Types XXI and XXIII, which represented a technical breakthrough in U-boat construction, and Hitler wanted to use them to regain the initiative in the war at sea and sever the British and American forces' sea connections. Hence his rejoinder to Lt.-Heusinger: 'Unless we resume the U-boat war, I can end the war right now.'<sup>16</sup>

The army generals too could contemplate such withdrawal only with a heavy heart. The emotional factor was by no means the least important, as the Baltic population, largely well disposed towards Germany, had already been left in the lurch by the Germans once before when Hitler did a deal with Stalin in the summer of 1939. Following the occupation of the area by Soviet troops, the dreaded NKVD security service had imposed a reign of terror which remained imprinted in the minds of the traumatized middle classes in particular. As a result, many men, especially from Estonia and Latvia, had voluntarily joined the Waffen SS after the German troops marched in. There was now a danger that the area would once again be Sovietized against the will of its inhabitants. Despite these misgivings, however, the German generals did not refrain from a sober analysis of the military situation. With the insufficient forces available, defence of the northern Baltic area appeared impossible, and it therefore had to be evacuated without delay. If that exposed sector of the front were to be held onto any longer, it would be not only the naval bases and raw-material supplies invoked by Hitler that would be lost, but also all the German troops deployed in the area. Ultimately, the whole of Army Group North was threatened with enclosure. That being so, the only right decision was to take the bull by the horns. The divisions freed up by withdrawal behind the Dvina should therefore come to the assistance of Army Group Centre by thrusting from the north into the flank of the Soviet attacking forces. That 'major solution' at operational level was the only remaining way of saving both army groups.<sup>17</sup> Reich Marshal Hermann Göring, the commander-in-chief of the Luftwaffe, also

<sup>16</sup> Heusinger, *Befehl im Widerstreit*, 335. See the chapters by Werner Rahn in volume x/I of the present series.

<sup>17</sup> See Part V, Chapter II.5(b), 'The "Zeitzler Plan" Controversy'.

supported the arguments of the army generals and pleaded for a withdrawal behind the Dvina.<sup>18</sup>

Surprisingly, Hitler's naval strategy considerations met with scepticism in the navy too, although he had expressed himself in decidedly pro-navy terms. In the sober analysis of the 'Assmann Report', Hitler's arguments were examined point by point and finally largely rejected. Captain Heinz Assmann, head of the naval division of the Wehrmacht operations staff, held the Führer's fears of the negative consequences of a withdrawal by Army Group North to be exaggerated. Above all, he estimated the threat from the Soviet Baltic fleet as 'very slight'. Instead, Assmann accepted Heusinger's argument that East Prussia could not be defended without forces from Army Group North, and he accordingly described withdrawal behind the Dvina as the 'lesser evil'. He held that if Army Group North were enclosed, it was very doubtful whether it could be supplied in the longer term. His conclusion, therefore, was that retention of the Bay of Danzig was more decisive than loss of the Baltic coast.<sup>19</sup>

At this point we must take issue with the claim that Karl Dönitz, as a commander-in-chief of the navy jealously guarding the interests of his own service, demanded of Hitler that the 'Baltic Fortress' be held at all costs. That is incorrect, at least for the summer of 1944. On 9 July Führer headquarters witnessed 'a conference of decisive importance for the further fate of the eastern front',<sup>20</sup> in which the commanders-in-chief of Army Groups Centre and North also took part. Dönitz began by pointing out that evacuation of the northern Baltic area would have considerable disadvantages for the navy, whereupon Hitler decided in favour of Dönitz's considerations of naval strategy and ordered Army Group North to remain in Estonia. It must be stressed, however, that the commander-in-chief of the navy then asked for the floor once again and performed a remarkable about-turn. He aligned himself completely with the army generals' argument that possession of the whole of Estonia, including the Baltic islands, would be worthless if the Soviets succeeded in pushing further south to the Lithuanian or East Prussian coast. Once they had established air-force bases, it would be perfectly possible for them to control the Baltic Sea from there. Dönitz ended his concluding remarks unequivocally with the assertion that the 'crucial requirement, to which everything else, including the possible withdrawal of Army Group North, must be subordinated, is thus the prevention of a Russian breakthrough to the Baltic Sea'.<sup>21</sup> In so doing, the commander-in-chief of the navy was following the insistent advice of several officers in his operations section who had already spoken out at the end of June in favour of the withdrawal of Army Group North from the Baltic area. In their view, Army

<sup>18</sup> KTB HGr Nord, 18 July 1944, BA-MA RH 19 III/313, fo. 134.

<sup>19</sup> See the previously mentioned 'Assmann Report' of 19 July 1944, BA-MA RM 7/101, fos. 99–103.

<sup>20</sup> BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2379, fo. 38.

<sup>21</sup> *Lagevorträge*, 596; KTB HGr Nord, 9 July 1944, BA-MA RH 19 III/311, fos. 177–8. On this, see letter to [Friedrich] Ruge, 11 July 1961, in the Dönitz papers, BA-MA N 236/7, fos. 61–4.

Group North had to ‘get out of the pincer before it closes’,<sup>22</sup> or it would share the fate of Army Group Centre. In the further course of the war, however, Dönitz adopted an ambivalent attitude and temporarily drew closer to Hitler’s position. This development will be examined in more detail in the discussion of the enclosure of Army Group North in Courland.

### (b) The Open Southern Flank and the Danger of Enclosure

Army Group North’s problem was Polotsk. Designated by Hitler as a ‘fortified place’, it was both the southern cornerstone of its front line and the hinge with its neighbour, Army Group Centre. When the Soviet Operation BAGRATION began on 22 June in the Belorussian balcony, Vitebsk had been enclosed within days and Third Armoured Army had collapsed. Its remnants were forced back far to the west, leaving the Polotsk hinge hanging in the air. That raised two problems for Army Group North. At the interface with Army Group Centre a gap opened up, dubbed the ‘Baltic hole’, into which the Soviet 6th Guards Army, supported by armoured units of 1st Baltic front, immediately plunged. By the end of June the breach had widened to some 40 kilometres. At the same time a new front had arisen on the southern wing, starting at Polotsk, and it was getting longer all the time as the Soviet attacking units pushed further and further west towards the Baltic Sea. By the end of June the ‘southern front’ was already 60 kilometres long, and in the following weeks it developed into the main front. To occupy the new defence line, numerous units had to be withdrawn from the eastern front on both sides of Lake Peipus, which was itself still under threat. Since more divisions also had to be transferred to the hard-pressed Army Group Centre, Col.-Gen. Lindemann reported to the Führer that Army Group North’s forces were ‘no longer sufficient’ for fulfilment of its defence task.<sup>23</sup> He also warned of the danger of enclosure on the Baltic coast, since the Soviet command was intending a thrust either via Vilnius and Kaunas to Königsberg (‘major Baltic operation’) or via Polotsk and Daugavpils to Riga (‘lesser Baltic operation’).<sup>24</sup> Lindemann accordingly requested freedom of action on the exposed right wing of Sixteenth Army, so as to be able to react to the enemy attacks ‘as the situation required, by occupying the shortest line’.<sup>25</sup>

Hitler, however, brusquely rejected any thought of voluntary withdrawal. The Polotsk ‘fortified place’ had to be defended unconditionally. Thereupon, Col.-Gen. Lindemann tendered his resignation.<sup>26</sup> But the Führer’s demands went much further. He ordered a forceful counter-attack to close the gap with Third Armoured Army, despite the fact that Army Group North could muster only two infantry divisions with a total of eight battalions and 44 assault guns for that purpose. Those units were to advance south-westwards from the Polotsk salient and break through

<sup>22</sup> KTB Skl, pt. A, lviii/II. 772, fo. 392, 28 June 1944; Salewski, *Die deutsche Seekriegsleitung*, ii. 460–1.

<sup>23</sup> OB HGr Nord, Ia No. 90/44 g.Kdos.Chefs. to the Führer (via Chef GenSt Heer), 29 June 1944, BA-MA RH 19 III/15, fo. 111.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., fo. 110.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., fo. 111.

<sup>26</sup> Heusinger, *Befehl im Widerstreit*, 348.

the 'Baltic hole' along a '60-km-long stretch'<sup>27</sup> in which the Soviets had massed 6th Guards Army, I Armoured Corps, and parts of 43 Army.

When the two divisions began their thrust on 2 July, Polotsk was burning 'like a flaming torch'<sup>28</sup> after a bombardment by the enemy air force. The German counter-attack foundered immediately in the face of an attack by superior Soviet units. Although the latter were stopped south of Polotsk, the Soviet 4th Shock Army achieved a dangerous breakthrough north-east of the town. Col.-Gen. Lindemann then did the only right thing and stopped the pointless counter-attack on his own authority. Furthermore, he applied to Hitler for immediate evacuation of the Polotsk salient to avoid encirclement.<sup>29</sup> The Führer had no alternative but to give way to Lindemann, but shortly afterwards he relieved him of his command.

The new commander-in-chief of Army Group North from 4 July was Gen. Johannes Friessner, who was raring to go and determined to carry out the task personally assigned to him by Hitler. His optimism, however, did not last even 24 hours. Once he had studied the situation in detail, it was clear to him that Hitler's 'stand firm' order was illusory and that withdrawal of the right wing was inevitable. Shortening the front in that way was the only means of gaining units for an attack in support of Army Group Centre. Moreover, the counter-attack which he had been ordered to carry out appeared to have been already overtaken by events at operational level, given the rapid westward advance of the Soviet forces.<sup>30</sup> Friessner reported this to Hitler, who was considerably angered.

On 9 July the conference at Führer headquarters to which we have already referred took place, with both Model and Friessner pressing for evacuation of the northern Baltic region and withdrawal behind the Dvina. The Führer resolutely refused, but the increasingly critical situation soon showed how rash that decision had been. Until then, the Soviet offensive against Army Group Centre had only grazed the extreme left wing of Army Group North's Sixteenth Army. After the capture of Minsk on 3 July, however, the first phase of Operation BAGRATION was over, and 1st Baltic Front, on the right wing of the Soviet forces, was free to shift its point of main effort to encirclement of the southern wing of Army Group North. It was ordered to push towards the Baltic Sea via Šiauliai. There was now a mood of crisis on Army Group North's eastern front too. Although there was hardly any more fighting in that sector, the front was far too thinly occupied, and ten divisions had been withdrawn from it in a very short space of time: one to Finland, four to support Army Group Centre, and five to secure the newly established southern front.<sup>31</sup>

On 10 July the Soviet summer offensive entered its decisive second phase. The long-expected major offensive against the eastern front of Army Group North now

<sup>27</sup> Telex OB HGr Nord, Ia No. 1022/24 to the Führer, 30 June 1944, BA-MA RH 19 III/15, 2, fo. 131.

<sup>28</sup> Haupt, *Heeresgruppe Nord*, 205.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid. 205–6; KTB HGr Nord, 2 July 1944, BA-MA RH 19 III/31, fos. 38 ff., 45, 47 ff.; BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2046, 712–13. On these engagements, see also BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2569, 284, 303–4; Köhler, 'Einsatz der Luftwaffe', 27–8.

<sup>30</sup> KTB HGr Nord, 5 July 1944 BA-MA RH 19 III/31, fo. 112.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., fo. 188.

began. The Soviet 2nd Baltic Front, with 391,200 men, attacked the left wing of Sixteenth Army in a thrust towards Rēzekne.<sup>32</sup> The next day 3rd Baltic Front, with 258,400 men, opened an offensive further to the north against the right wing of Eighteenth Army.<sup>33</sup> Its aim was to break through between Pskov and Ostrov and then push north-west to cut off Army Detachment Narva, which was deployed in the north and was also facing an imminent frontal attack by Leningrad Front. There the Soviets had brought up two armies with a total of 136,830 men in order to break through the isthmus between Lake Peipus and the Bay of Finland.<sup>34</sup> General Friessner was no longer in any doubt that the northern Baltic area had to be abandoned. On 12 July he criticized Hitler's conduct of operations in an astonishingly courageous letter to the Führer.<sup>35</sup> Friessner made it clear that the two tasks assigned to Army Group North were mutually contradictory. It was supposed to hold the existing front and at the same time carry out an attack to restore the connection to Army Group Centre, although the forces needed for such an attack were already tied down by Hitler's categorical 'stand firm' order. Hitler's refusal to pull back the exposed southern wing had even led to the formation of a new southern front that was now 200 kilometres long and required considerable forces. For Friessner, the best solution was to withdraw Sixteenth and Eighteenth Armies behind the Riga-Kaunas line and get Army Detachment Narva out by sea via Tallinn. Stressing that this would be 'the last chance to save the army group [...] from encirclement, if not destruction',<sup>36</sup> he demanded that Hitler either grant him freedom of action or 'relieve him of his duties'.<sup>37</sup>

In reaction to his 'threatening letter', as Hitler called it,<sup>38</sup> Friessner was summoned to Führer headquarters on 14 July. Model was also invited to attend. At this meeting, and at the following meeting on 18 July, both commanders-in-chief insistently stressed the critical situation of their army groups. They declared, in agreement with the OKH general staff, that the only remaining option was the radical operational solution of withdrawal behind the Dvina. Hitler nevertheless insisted that the whole Baltic area had to be held. He attempted to counter Friessner's arguments with a promise to bring in new forces for a counter-attack. Meanwhile, the situation had become dangerously acute, since the far superior attacking units of 2nd and 3rd Baltic Fronts had achieved a breakthrough at the interface between Sixteenth and Eighteenth Armies. Now Hitler too saw no other solution but to approve the withdrawal of Army Group North to the 'Latvia line' on Latvia's eastern border, which the army group had already begun.

<sup>32</sup> According to *Grif sekretnosti sniat*, in the offensive against Rēzekne and Daugavpils 2nd Baltic Front incurred personnel losses of 57,995 men from 10 to 27 July, 12,880 of which are classified as irretrievable.

<sup>33</sup> In the course of the Pskov-Ostrov Offensive Operation (11–31 July 1944), 3rd Baltic Front incurred 33,584 personnel losses, of which 7,633 were irretrievable; see *ibid.* 227.

<sup>34</sup> The Narva Offensive Operation began on 24 July 1944. It was conducted by 2nd Shock Army and 8th Army, with a total of 136,830 men, supported by 13th Air Army; see Gurkin, 'Liudskie poteri Sovetskikh Vooruzhennykh Sil', Table, No. 52, 'Narva Offensive Operation'.

<sup>35</sup> Letter from Gen. Friessner to the Führer, 12 July 1944, BA-MA RH 19 III/6, fos. 3–7. Also repr. in Friessner, *Verratene Schlachten*, 18–21.

<sup>36</sup> BA-MA RH 19 III/6, fo. 6.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, fo. 7.

<sup>38</sup> Friessner, *Verratene Schlachten*, 22.

The situation on the southern wing was becoming even more critical. On 16 July the 'Baltic hole' between the two army groups widened to 70 kilometres. In the gap, through which more and more Soviet units were pushing west, there stood only a few German blocking units, but between them and the Baltic Sea there was simply a vacuum. Daugavpils, the 'gateway to the Baltic', had meanwhile become the new cornerstone in the south. The city was attacked by two armies of 1st Baltic Front on both sides of the Dvina. Mechanized units also took part in the attack, some of them equipped with the new 'Joseph Stalin' heavy tank and its 122-mm cannon. On 22 July they clashed with the second company of 502nd Heavy Armoured Battalion at Krivani, northeast of Daugavpils. The company's eight Tigers shot down 17 Joseph Stalin tanks and five T-34s in the first encounter. After destroying the Soviet advance detachment, the German armoured company also beat off the attack by the main force, destroying another 28 enemy tanks without any losses of its own.<sup>39</sup> The astonishing thing about this is that Army Group North, which had to defend the whole Baltic area against assault by four Soviet army fronts, did not have a single armoured division at its disposal at that time. All it had was one armoured battalion, 502nd Heavy Armoured Battalion, whose 30 tanks, deployed like a 'fire brigade' against breakthroughs by Soviet armour, were on the move almost round the clock.<sup>40</sup> While the army group's 200 or so assault guns were effective in defensive combat, they could not take the place of tanks for counter-attacks in open terrain. On the German side, tanks were an almost exotic rarity. While a total of 792 enemy tanks destroyed were reported to Army Group North HQ from 24 June to 24 July, not all of the kills were effected by the army group's own fighting vehicles.<sup>41</sup> In some sections of the front, anti-tank close-combat infantry troops had become the main means of defence against the large number of Soviet tanks. At the risk of their lives, 'anti-tank close-combat specialists' let T-34s and Joseph Stalin tanks roll over them in order to attach explosive devices. That is what Hitler's one-time 'blitzkrieg army' had been reduced to. Because of the shortage of tanks, Army Group North had to fight a 'poor man's war' to an even greater extent than Army Group Centre.

Under the pressure from the Soviet attacking units, Army Group North Front threatened to collapse. In the end, Gen. Friessner demanded permission to withdraw to the Marienburg Line (between the Dvina and Lake Peipus) to avoid the encirclement of his southern wing. On 23 July he received notification of his

<sup>39</sup> Carius, *Tiger im Schlamm*, 172, 176; Kleine and Kühn, *Tiger*, 204–5; Schneider, *Tiger im Kampf*, 97. In its counter-attacks, Heavy Armd. Btln.'s 2nd Company zigzagged between I and II Army Corps. The files of both corps contain several reports of this Tiger company's astonishingly high kill rates. During a brief engagement at Viški on 22 July, for example, it destroyed 14 enemy tanks; see Tätigkeitsbericht I. AK, Abt. Ia/Stopak, 22 July 1944, BA-MA RH 24-1/225. In the evening of 24 July, three Tigers in the sector of 290th Infantry Division shot down 17 enemy tanks and one assault gun; see Morgenmeldung II. AK, 25 July 1944, 06.25, BA-MA RH 24-2/277.

<sup>40</sup> The figure of 30 operational fighting vehicles and 206 assault guns applies to the reference date of 30 June; see BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2046, 708. Since then, their number had been depleted considerably by constant deployment.

<sup>41</sup> Central Archives of the Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation (CAMO), F. 500, Op. 12459, d. 73, fo. 518: KTB HGr Nord, 26 July 1944, 00.40.

dismissal. Formally, it looked like an exchange of command with Gen. Ferdinand Schörner, since Friessner was now to take over Schörner's command of Army Group South Ukraine, but there can be no doubt that Hitler had been angered by Friessner's protests and saw Schörner as the right man to carry out his orders unquestioningly.

Hitler had given the new commander-in-chief unusually extensive powers, and Schörner used them at once to implement the withdrawal movements for which his predecessor had vainly sought permission. On 26 July the OKH was informed by Army Group North HQ that Schörner had ordered the evacuation of Daugavpils and withdrawal to the Marienburg Line. Lt.-Gen. Walther Wenck, the new chief of the OKH operations staff,<sup>42</sup> pointed out that this measure would run counter to Hitler's instructions. But the army group's chief of staff replied laconically: 'Cannot be changed. Troops already in position.'<sup>43</sup> For a short time there were tensions with the OKH's newly appointed chief of staff, Col.-Gen. Guderian, who initially departed from the operational approach of his predecessor Zeitzler, and made Hitler's ideas his own. On 21 July, a day after the attempt on Hitler's life, Guderian had already tried to get the chiefs-of-staff of the army groups to agree to hold the existing defence positions unconditionally. Lt.-Gen. Eberhard Kinzel, who was dismissed as chief of staff of Army Group North shortly afterwards, had argued uncompromisingly that such a demand would inevitably result in 'destruction of the army group'. 'The Führer', he continued, 'would thereby lose not only two armies, but Germany's eastern territories too.'<sup>44</sup> Col.-Gen. Guderian had interrupted him angrily, declaring that he would not listen to 'defeatism and pessimism'.<sup>45</sup> Guderian's remarkable behaviour was partly due to the desire to show loyalty to Hitler for appointing him chief of staff, but also to the fact that he was not yet acquainted with the specific circumstances on the eastern front. Shortly afterwards, however, Guderian did a radical about-turn, to become the 'chief advocate'<sup>46</sup> of withdrawal from the Baltic.

Schörner's unauthorized order to withdraw to the Marienburg line had saved Army Group North from collapse. Not only had the pressure from 2nd and 3rd Baltic Fronts become overwhelming, but Leningrad Front had also launched an offensive in the northern sector at Narva. The really catastrophic threat, however, was on the southern wing, where more and more armies of 1st Baltic Front were pushing westwards through the 'Baltic hole'. On 28 July they took Šiauliai and the outer districts of Jelgava. The same day, the following message was received from a German reconnaissance plane: 'Approx. 900 vehicles, including heavy tanks, advancing from

<sup>42</sup> Lt.-Gen. Wenck had been appointed as Heusinger's successor. However, his newly created post put him in command not only of the operations department but also of the organization department and Foreign Armies East, since Guderian was keen to have the whole operations administration in one pair of hands; see Guderian, *Erinnerungen eines Soldaten*, 311.

<sup>43</sup> See Haupt, *Heeresgruppe Nord*, 214; also KTB HGr Nord, 26 July 1944, BA-MA RH 19 III/314, fos. 30, 33, 35, 37.

<sup>44</sup> Notiz No. 555, 21 July 1944, 17.00, 'Besprechung beim Chef des Generalstabes d. Heeres', BA-MA RH 19 III/20, fo. 186.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Grier, 'Hitler's Baltic Strategy', 420.

Jelgava in a north-easterly direction towards Tukums.<sup>47</sup> This information produced a mood of panic. The German operations staffs were powerless: they had no more troops with which to influence the further course of events. Army Group North's worst fears came true on 31 July, when Soviet tanks reached the Gulf of Riga at Tukums. The army group was now enclosed on the Baltic coast, cut off from the rest of the eastern front. That same day was fateful for Army Group Centre too. It saw the fall of Kaunas, the northern cornerstone of Army Group Centre's front. The gap between the two army groups was now 120 kilometres wide. What isolation from the territory of the Reich meant for Army Group North may be judged from a technical problem of telecommunications: henceforth telephone calls between the army group's headquarters and the OKH were possible only via the Sigulda (Latvia)–Helsinki–Oslo–Berlin–Zossen civilian telephone line.<sup>48</sup>

The connection with Army Group North was restored on 20 August by Operation DOPPELKOPF. That armoured operation was carried out almost exclusively by Army Group Centre<sup>49</sup> since, given its overextended frontage, Army Group North was not in a position to assign any significant units to removal of the danger in its rear. Although the success of the operation was celebrated in due form by German propaganda, the military operations staffs were not entirely satisfied. In their opinion, Hitler had imposed the wrong operational approach, obliging them to carry out an eccentric, rather than a concentric, operation. Army Group North, situated on the periphery, should have abandoned its untenable positions and broken through to Army Group Centre, instead of which Army Group Centre had been ordered to push through to Army Group North. Thus it was the Strachwitz Group which had restored the connection with Army Group North at Tukums. As subsequent events were to show, however, the operation was only a temporary success. The narrow connecting corridor which it had established on the coast was extremely threatened and was bound to provoke the Red Army into attempting another breakthrough to cut off Army Group North definitively.

The armoured thrust by Maj.-Gen. Count Hyazinth Strachwitz was certainly a tactical feat, but it was counter-productive at the strategic level since it further strengthened Hitler's disastrous 'stand firm' mindset. As Gen. Kurt von Tippelskirch puts it, 'fate again offered the chance of a "major solution"'.<sup>50</sup> What should have been done then was to bring the mass of Army Group North back through the Tukums corridor and deploy it in the defence of East Prussia. Guderian, above all, insistently demanded the 'major solution'. But Operation DOPPELKOPF resulted in the exact opposite of what the commanders-in-chief of the two army groups had been seeking to achieve. Instead of finally transferring troops from the exposed Army Group North to Army Group Centre, Hitler sent even more units northwards. Thus Maj.-Gen. Strachwitz and his tanks were dispatched to Estonia immediately after the breakthrough at Tukums, and Army Group North was

<sup>47</sup> Haupt, *Heeresgruppe Nord*, 215. On this, see KTB HGr Nord, 28 July 1944, BA-MA RH 19 III/314, fos. 85, 95–6.

<sup>48</sup> Haupt, *Heeresgruppe Nord*, 218.

<sup>49</sup> See Part V, Chapter II.6(b).

<sup>50</sup> Tippelskirch, *Geschichte des Zweiten Weltkrieges*, 475.

further reinforced by 14th Armoured Division. Now at last, having been deprived of its only armoured division in June, it once again possessed a large armoured unit. The army group's command, however, was not overjoyed at the equivocal gift, which came, so to speak, as an exclamation mark emphasizing Hitler's demand for unconditional defence of the Baltic region.

### 3. THE EVACUATION OF ESTONIA

The battle for the Tukums corridor was of great importance to Army Group North. At the same time, however, it had to focus most of its attention in the opposite direction, on developments in the east, where new waves of attack threatened to smash the German units to pieces. On 24 July Leningrad Front had also opened an offensive aimed at breaking through Army Detachment Narva's positions in the isthmus between Lake Peipus and the Bay of Finland. While the Germans were forced to abandon their bridgehead on the east bank of the Narva, they managed to hold the front, though at the cost of considerable losses. The main forces deployed in that sector were Waffen SS units of volunteers from Estonia, Finland, Norway, Denmark, and Belgium, who fought bitterly. On 1 August, 2nd Baltic Front, with 390,000 men, launched a new offensive in the direction of Madona.<sup>51</sup> It was followed on 10 August by yet another offensive operation by 3rd Baltic Front, with 273,800 men, aimed at Tartu, via Võru.<sup>52</sup> A few days later, 1st Baltic Front launched a powerful attack from the south in the direction of Riga.<sup>53</sup>

On 6 August Schörner had submitted the same proposal to the OKH as his predecessor Friessner, that is, that Sixteenth and Eighteenth Armies be withdrawn to a bridgehead position at Riga. He also proposed that, at the same time, Army Detachment Narva be evacuated by sea via Tallinn.<sup>54</sup> But Hitler again refused, holding out instead the prospect of reinforcements. In view of the imminent crisis, Schörner repeated his demands in the form of an ultimatum. He announced that, in the absence of sufficient support, he would have no alternative but to order withdrawal. Hitler and the OKH were alarmed and ordered the Luftwaffe to intervene.<sup>55</sup> Several Soviet armoured units were then attacked by Group III, 2nd Ground-Attack Wing, commanded by the famous dive-bomber pilot Maj. Hans-Ulrich Rudel. In addition, 31st Infantry Division and several other units were flown to Latvia by Ju-52 transport planes. The fact that Hitler approved such major logistic operations despite the fuel shortage clearly shows the importance which

<sup>51</sup> In the course of the Madona operation (1 to 23 Aug. 1944), 2nd Baltic Front suffered 65,406 personnel losses, of which 14,669 were irretrievable; see *Grif sekretnosti sniat*, 227.

<sup>52</sup> During the Tartu operation, 3rd Baltic Front incurred 71,806 personnel losses, of which 16,292 were irretrievable; see *ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> Most of the original (i.e. first copies) of Army Group North's war diaries for the period in question are in the Russian military archives in Podolsk (CAMO), where the author was able to examine them. They are mostly identical to the copies in the German Military Archives in Freiburg (BA-MA). In what follows, the references in the footnotes, unless otherwise stated, are to the Freiburg version.

<sup>54</sup> KTB HGr Nord, 6 Aug. 1944, BA-MA RH 19 III/315, fos. 95–6.

<sup>55</sup> Köhler, 'Einsatz der Luftwaffe', 58 ff.

possession of the Baltic area had attained in his eyes. In the ongoing defensive battles the greatest threat came from 3rd Baltic Front, which had broken through Eighteenth Army's positions south-west of Pskov and was now advancing northwards via Võru, west of Lake Peipus, to get to the rear of Army Detachment Narva. The German forces narrowly managed to stop the offensive at a blocking position north of Tartu.

At the beginning of September, Soviet broad-front attacks came to a standstill. Not only was Operation BAGRATION against Army Group Centre at an end but, to the Germans' surprise, a sudden relaxation of the overwhelming pressure was also noted in the sector of Army Group North. During the ensuing pause in operations, the usual ritual took place. The army generals tried once again to get Hitler to agree to withdraw from the Baltic area, and the Finnish government's decision on 2 September to withdraw from the coalition with Germany added two more arguments to their arsenal. On the one hand, there was no longer any need to take political account of their former Axis partner. On the other, the Finnish armistice had released so many Soviet troops in Karelia for deployment in the neighbouring Baltic area that there was no longer the slightest chance of being able to carry on defending that exposed territory. Guderian, above all, now thought the most favourable time had come to push through the 'major solution' for which he had long been calling. On 5 September he told Army Group North's chief of staff that evacuation of the Baltic area 'could not be avoided and that he would certainly be needing the units of Army Group North very soon at other threatened places on the eastern front'.<sup>56</sup> Significantly, he asked him to 'make the preparations for implementation of this decision in a camouflaged manner'<sup>57</sup>—a conspiratorial precaution that speaks volumes, given the relationship between the generals and Hitler. In the event, the attempt to get the Führer to change his mind failed once again. On 6 September Guderian nevertheless instructed Army Group North HQ to make the necessary preparations for the evacuation of Estonia in accordance with a game plan, code-named 'Königsberg', drawn up by the army group in secret in the preceding weeks. The OKH chief of staff stressed that 'the preparations must be practical, and not only on paper'.<sup>58</sup> In so doing, Guderian riskily embarked on the opposite course to Hitler, if only in secret. Significantly, he refused to 'issue anything in writing'.<sup>59</sup>

Finland's withdrawal from the Axis coalition made the German naval command nervous, and it promptly overreacted. Grand Admiral Dönitz feared a thrust by the Soviet fleet from the Bay of Finland, and therefore wanted to occupy the Finnish island of Hogland (Suursaari). A plan code-named 'Tanne Ost' had already been prepared for the purpose, but it was considered controversial even within the Naval War Staff because of doubts as to whether the German mine barriers could be monitored from the island. Moreover, Hogland would be hard to capture and very difficult to supply in the longer term. The Luftwaffe thought it would also be

<sup>56</sup> KTB HGr Nord, 5 Sept. 1944, BA-MA RH 19 III/318, fo. 49.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 6 Sept. 1944, fo. 58. See also Forwick, 'Der Rückzug der Heeresgruppe Nord', 106.

<sup>59</sup> KTB HGr Nord, 6 Sept. 1944, BA-MA RH 19 III/318, fo. 58.

unable to take on the task. Above all, the idea was rejected by the army generals, who were still intent on evacuating Estonia. The OKH was therefore excluded from the planning process, and the Naval War Staff went ahead with the project on its own. In comparison with the perfectionism with which lighting actions such as the attack on the Belgian fort of Eben Emael were planned and rehearsed up till then, the negligence displayed in this case is truly amazing. The decisive mistake on the part of the Naval War Staff was its assumption that, despite the changed political situation, the Finnish garrison on the island would put up no, or only symbolic, resistance to its erstwhile German ‘brothers-in-arms’.<sup>60</sup> In fact, it was clear to Finland’s military leadership that it was obliged to engage in a demonstrative act of resistance; otherwise the Soviet government would be given an excuse to break its guarantee of Finnish neutrality. The Finnish troops were therefore determined to defend the island to the last extremity.

On 12 September, on advice from Dönitz, Hitler gave the order to begin the operation. Two days later an improvised German unit consisting of minesweepers, S-boats, and landing craft set out under the command of Capt. Mecke. On board were parts of an infantry regiment, reinforced by naval artillery units. The amateurish operation was conducted so hastily that there was not even a radio link with Admiral East Baltic. It ended in fiasco. Above all, the Finns were warned by a prior German call for peaceful surrender, and opened fire by surprise on the far-too-weak landing force. The Soviet air force also intervened. The attempted landing began on 15 September shortly after midnight and failed the same day, leaving 132 dead, 1,200 captured, and several vessels sunk.<sup>61</sup> As one author puts it, ‘the most senseless German operation of the year 1944 was over’.<sup>62</sup> In comparison with the army’s operations, Dönitz’s Hogland escapade was merely a marginal curiosity. It is nevertheless of symbolic importance, since it clearly reveals the divergent forces within the German leadership. While the operations staffs of the army and Luftwaffe wanted to withdraw southwards from the Baltic area, Dönitz and Hitler were bent on taking possession of an exposed island in the far north.

How senseless it really was to give even a moment’s thought to holding on to Estonia is clear from the massing of Soviet forces that was taking place at the same time, which was no secret to the German command. On 14 September, the very day on which the German ships set out for Hogland, Army Group North was hit by the most powerful offensive that its units had ever experienced. The Soviet command, seeking the decisive blow, was out to enclose the German troops positioned north of Riga in Estonia and northern Latvia. In the offensive now beginning, it deployed four army fronts with a total of 1,546,400 men. They comprised 14 armies and one armoured army, totalling 135 divisions, six armoured corps, and one mechanized corps, as well as other independent units.<sup>63</sup> They were

<sup>60</sup> Salewski, *Die deutsche Seekriegsleitung*, ii. 467.

<sup>61</sup> KTB Skl, pt. A, lxi/II, 20 Sept. 1944, 528–9, fo. 271.

<sup>62</sup> Haupt, *Heeresgruppe Nord*, 232. See also Grier, ‘Hitler’s Baltic Strategy’, 99 ff., 109 ff., 115; Gersdorff, ‘Operationsplan Tanne’, 145 ff.; BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2046, 773; on this, see the ‘Tanne Ost’ dossier, BA-MA RM 31/3281.

<sup>63</sup> *Grif sekretnosti sniat*, 208.

supported by 17,480 cannon and grenade launchers, 3,080 tanks and assault guns, and 2,640 combat aircraft.<sup>64</sup>

Given the enemy's overwhelming superiority, it seemed illusory for Army Group North to attempt to hold a front more than 700 kilometres long with its two-and-a-half armies. In August it had suffered losses of 70,566 men and had received only 41,839 in replacement.<sup>65</sup> Only the shortage of armour had been somewhat relieved. Whereas in July, Army Group North essentially had only one armoured battalion (502nd Heavy Armoured Battalion) at its disposal, it had since been reinforced by 14th Armoured Division and the two armoured brigades of the Lauchert Group (formerly the Strachwitz Group). That brought the number of operational tanks, of which there had been only 30 on 30 June, to 262. At the same time, the number of assault guns had risen from 206 to 299.<sup>66</sup> The newly brought-in armoured units had been taken from the hard-pressed Army Group Centre, as Hitler wanted to transfer as many forces as possible to the Baltic area, his favoured theatre of operations. Air Fleet 1 also received considerable reinforcements. Instead of 137 operational aircraft on 26 June, it had 321 on 5 September (see Table V.IV.1). That rate of increase seems enormous, but compared with the Red Army, whose army fronts in the Baltic area had, as we have seen, over 2,640 combat aircraft at their disposal (excl. long-range aircraft), it hardly weighed in the balance.

Beginning at 04.00 hours on 14 September, the German front between Lake Peipus and Šiauliai was subjected to a ninety-minute artillery barrage 'of hitherto unimagined force'.<sup>67</sup> At the same time, Soviet aircraft attacked *en masse*. The Red Army broke through in several places, above all at Bauska to the south of Riga. The following day Col.-Gen. Schörner applied to the OKH for permission to proceed with Operation ASTER, the new name given to the 'Königsberg' game plan for the evacuation of Estonia.<sup>68</sup> Despite his position as OKH chief of staff, Guderian had no power to authorize major withdrawals, and so he referred Schörner to Hitler. Schörner flew to Führer headquarters on 16 September, and presented the situation in such dramatic terms that Hitler gave permission for the evacuation of Estonia and northern Latvia after only fifteen minutes.<sup>69</sup> The movement was initiated by Army Detachment Narva in the night of 18 to 19 September. The units stationed right in the north, on the Bay of Finland, withdrew along the coast to Riga. From there, as well as from other Estonian ports, German naval units evacuated a total of 108,825 persons by sea from 17 to 23 September.

<sup>64</sup> *Deutschland im zweiten Weltkrieg*, vi. 2.

<sup>65</sup> KTB HGr Nord, 21 Sept. 1944, BA-MA RH 19 III/319, fo. 132. The same entry gives the actual strength (on paper) at 1 Sept. 1944 as 571,579 men and 42,833 paramilitary auxiliaries. That figure seems irrelevant to a comparison of strength, however. What was decisive was the daily strength of the divisions and independent combat units, i.e. 215,664 men at the beginning of July. No corresponding figures are available for August and September.

<sup>66</sup> BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2046, 708, and Study ZA 1/2047, 1047.

<sup>67</sup> Haupt, *Heeresgruppe Nord*, 229.

<sup>68</sup> KTB HGr Nord, 15 Sept. 1944, BA-MA RH 19 III/318, fo. 167.

<sup>69</sup> KTB HGr Nord, 15 Sept. 1944, 'Punkte für Führervortrag am 16.9.44', BA-MA RH 19 III/318, fos. 189–94. See also KTB, 16 Sept. 1944, RH 19 III/319, fo. 3.

Their number was made up of 46,168 soldiers, 13,049 wounded, 26,131 civilians, and 23,474 prisoners of war.<sup>70</sup> The remaining units of Army Detachment Narva, whose staff was subsequently disbanded, withdrew southwards into the sector of Eighteenth Army, while the latter, on Schörner's orders, pulled back to the Segevold line in the forefield of Riga. Operation ASTER was brought to a close on the morning of 27 September. The Red Army had tried in vain to prevent the German withdrawal, mainly by attacking at Tartu and Valga. Nevertheless, despite heavy pressure from the Soviet forces, Army Group North managed to evacuate Estonia and northern Latvia in good order.

The point of concentration of the fighting during Operation ASTER, however, was in the sector of Sixteenth Army south-west of Riga, where the enemy did everything in its power to cut off the German units by means of a thrust to the coast. The situation had already attained critical proportions by 19 September, when the Soviet attacking units reached Baldone, only 20 kilometres from the outskirts of Riga. Developments further west in the Tukums sector were considered equally serious, with strong enemy forces, separated from the coast by only a narrow corridor, standing ready to attack. Army Group North was now threatened with a repeat of the Soviet attack of 31 July, which had cut it off in exactly the same place. It was perfectly clear that, without support from Army Group Centre, it would be unable to prevent a breakthrough. There was also repetition on the German side, since, from the operational viewpoint, the planned supporting attack by units of Army Group Centre was strikingly similar to Operation DOPPELKOPF, which had been carried out in the same place in August. The difference was that the second armoured operation, code-named 'Caesar', was preventive—a relief attack with a limited objective. The plan was for the German tanks to hit the Soviet attacking forces before they were in a position to break through Army Group North's positions and reach the Gulf of Riga. To that end, Army Group Centre was to mass its mobile units on the left wing in the area of Third Armoured Army.<sup>71</sup> Execution of the attack was entrusted to XXXIX Armoured Corps, comprising 4th and 7th Armoured Divisions, parts of 5th and 12th Armoured Divisions, and Armoured Infantry Division 'Grossdeutschland'. The attack was launched on 16 September, with a total of 323 tanks and assault guns. The surprise effect was so great that a breakthrough was achieved immediately. The German units advanced from Auce to Dobele, where the operation was broken off on 18 September. Although the territorial gain was small, the indirect effects were very important in two respects. For one thing, the Soviet attacking units were unable to exploit their tactical breakthrough at Baldone, south of Riga, because they now had to use their reserves to fend off the armoured thrust by Army Group Centre. Above all, the planned Soviet thrust towards the coast at Tukums could not even

<sup>70</sup> KTB Skl, pt. A, lxii/I, 3 Oct. 1944, 72, fo. 42. See the chapters by Werner Rahn in vol. x of the present series.

<sup>71</sup> On the course of the attack, see KTB HGr Mitte, 16–20 Sept. 1944, BA-MA RH 19 II/200, fos. 127 ff.

begin, since the attacking units brought up for the purpose were under attack from the rear.<sup>72</sup>

Given the balance of forces, this was yet another astonishing defensive success for the Germans.<sup>73</sup> On 24 September, when the Red Army ceased its attacks on Army Group North, it nevertheless did not suspect that the enemy was scarcely capable of continuing the fight. Schörner had told Guderian: 'It's hard for me to say this, but we're finished.'<sup>74</sup> He subsequently informed him that 'our own divisions are no more than weak combat units'.<sup>75</sup> Many of the German units were down to their last remaining stocks of fuel and ammunition, and the Luftwaffe was also largely paralysed by logistical bottlenecks. From the Soviet viewpoint, the outcome of the offensive, especially in the direction of Riga, was highly unsatisfactory. The Red Army had been unable to prevent an orderly German withdrawal from Estonia, despite doing its utmost to split the units of Army Group North and cut them off. In effect, it had achieved the opposite of its original intention, since Schörner had managed to concentrate all his units around Riga, making an attack on that important city considerably more difficult than it had been at the start of the offensive.<sup>76</sup> As a result, the Stavka changed its whole plan of attack and switched the main direction of thrust from north to west.<sup>77</sup> Army Group North was no longer to be enclosed by means of a thrust to the Gulf of Riga but by a thrust to the Baltic coast at Memel. The attacking forces were restructured for that purpose, the whole point of main effort now being on the left wing, with the hugely reinforced 1st Baltic Front. The new operational plan showed that the Soviet command had learned well from its mistakes. Now an offensive was to be launched against East Prussia at the same time, to prevent Army Group Centre from once again coming to the help of its neighbour to the north.

With the Red Army preparing to deliver a new blow, it was now Army Group North's last chance to escape enclosure by withdrawing south through the Tukums corridor, which it had narrowly managed to hold. Furthermore, its neighbour, Army Group Centre, was not in a position to repel a new major offensive on its own. The Red Army was concentrating strong attacking units immediately before the East Prussian border too, so that every single unit of Army Group North, especially every armoured unit, was urgently needed as reinforcement.<sup>78</sup> To general amazement, however, Hitler even transferred Third Armoured Army from Army

<sup>72</sup> On this, see Niepold, *Panzeroperationen*, 87–99, 114; BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2047, 911–12, and Study ZA 1/2054, 107–8; Grier, 'Hitler's Baltic Strategy', 126.

<sup>73</sup> The ferocity of the fighting to repel this Soviet offensive is shown by the following comparison: whereas the total number of enemy tanks reported shot down from 22 June to 13 September was 1,900, the corresponding figure for the short period of time from 14 to 30 September was 1,192; see 'Feindliche Panzerverluste vor Heeresgruppe Nord 1944' in KTB HGr Nord, 28 Nov. 1944, CAMO, F. 500, Op. 12459, d. 80, fo. 393.

<sup>74</sup> KTB HGr Nord, 17 Sept. 1944, BA-MA RH 19 III/319, fo. 25.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 19 Sept. 1944, fo. 82. <sup>76</sup> Grier, 'Hitler's Baltic Strategy', 131.

<sup>77</sup> Muriev, 'Nekotorye kharakternye cherty', 26 ff.

<sup>78</sup> Guderian was mistaken in supposing (*Erinnerungen eines Soldaten*, 320, 322, 341) that Schörner halted the oncoming Army Group North armoured units at Jelgava on his own authority, contrary to a strict directive from the OKH. In reality, the commander-in-chief of Army Group North had no freedom of action in the matter, owing to an 'extremely categorical Führer order'; see BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2047, 1064.

Group Centre to Army Group North. Obsessed with offensive operations, he intended to deploy it in yet a third armoured thrust, after Operations DOPPELKOPF and CAESAR, against the salient between Šiauliai and Jelgava, in order to cut off the Soviet troops in the northern part of the salient and thus shorten the front.<sup>79</sup> In the event, there was no time to launch the new operation, code-named 'Blitz', because the Soviet offensive in the direction of Memel had already started.

The Red Army used the pause between the Riga and Memel operations to take possession of the Baltic islands to the west of Estonia.<sup>80</sup> Although Hitler wanted to hold the islands at all costs in order to shield the Gulf of Riga, Army Group North HQ thought this was unrealistic since there were no forces available for the purpose. In 1941 there had been seven Soviet divisions on the island of Saaremaa alone, but the German landings had not been prevented. In September 1944 Army Group North was able to send only 23rd Infantry Division, which had been decimated in previous fighting, to defend the islands. On the other side, Leningrad Front had marshalled 78,000 men for an amphibious operation.<sup>81</sup> On 26 and 29 September respectively, Soviet units took possession of the islands of Vormsi, abandoned by the Germans, and Muhu, which was only lightly defended. On 2 October they landed on Hiumaa, which was cleared after a brief fight. The only sustained fighting was on Saaremaa, where the Soviets' first landing took place on 5 October. In the end, the German garrison withdrew south to the Sörve peninsula, whose isthmus was defended by a blocking position. Possession of the finger-shaped peninsula opposite Courland was considered important by the German naval command because from there it was possible to conduct an effective fight against a breakout by Soviet naval units from the Gulf of Riga into the Baltic Sea.<sup>82</sup> The naval command accordingly supported the army garrison with artillery fire from ships' cannons. Nevertheless, by the beginning of October all of Estonia was lost, except for a small peninsula.

#### 4. THE FINAL SEPARATION OF ARMY GROUP NORTH IN COURLAND

##### (a) The Soviet Advance to the Baltic Coast in October

While the Red Army's attacking units in the Baltic were being continuously reinforced, above all by the troops freed up on the former Finnish front, the condition of Army Group North was visibly worsening. September's defensive success had been achieved at the cost of considerable losses, and 37 battalions had

<sup>79</sup> Ibid. 925–6; Grier, 'Hitler's Baltic Strategy', 130–1.

<sup>80</sup> On this fighting, see Melzer, *Kampf um die Baltischen Inseln*, 58 ff., 94 ff.; Forwick, 'Der Rückzug der Heeresgruppe Nord', 137 ff., 159 ff.

<sup>81</sup> *Geschichte des zweiten Weltkrieges 1939–1945*, ix. 180.

<sup>82</sup> KTB Marineoberkommando Ostsee: Annex 3 to KTB section 16 to 30 Sept. 1944: OKM 1. Skl. Eins A 31447/44 Gkdos.: Telex 17 Oct., 23.10: 'Bedeutung Halbinsel Swörbe für Seekriegsführung', BA-MA RM 31/3217, fo. 359; Marineoberkommando Ostsee—Führungsstab—B.No. Gkdos 600/45, 17 Mar. 1945: 'Rückblick auf die wesentlichen Ereignisse und Aufgaben im Bereich MOK Ost im Kriegsjahr 1944', BA-MA RM 31/3219, 12–14, fos. 244–6.

to be disbanded. Even so, the average combat strength of the remaining battalions was no more than 150 men.<sup>83</sup> The Luftwaffe too, which had repeatedly compensated for army weaknesses in the previous years of the war, could no longer provide any support worth mentioning. On 3 October Air Fleet 1 had only 267 operational aircraft at its disposal and not a single bomber.<sup>84</sup> Above all, the assignment of Third Armoured Army to Army Group North did not prove to be of much benefit, since its front now stretched almost 200 kilometres further south, as far as Memel, and it was precisely in that section that the point of concentration of the imminent Soviet offensive had been detected. After the conclusion of Operation CAESAR, the armoured units temporarily assigned to it from Army Group Centre had been withdrawn again, so that Third Armoured Army now had only one armoured division and five infantry divisions. Although the endangered section of the front had been specially reinforced, only an average of 86 men (combat strength) and one artillery cannon could be deployed per kilometre.<sup>85</sup> Moreover, there was so little fuel left that most of the motorized units were no longer even capable of tactical manoeuvres.<sup>86</sup> In previous weeks the Red Army had made astonishing mistakes, especially during the attack on Riga, and given proof of striking weaknesses in operational technique. It did not understand how to turn its manifold superiority to best advantage and failed to exploit tactical successes at operational level. Now, however, it put up a remarkable performance in moving the point of concentration to the south in a very short time. Within six days some 500,000 men, 9,300 artillery cannon, and 1,340 tanks and assault guns were moved to reinforce the units already in the starting position.<sup>87</sup>

On 5 October Third Armoured Army's positions in the section to the west of Šiauliai were subjected to a powerful artillery barrage, accompanied by massive bombardment by the Soviet air force.<sup>88</sup> There then ensued an attack by a total of seven armies, plus strong armoured forces.<sup>89</sup> The first wave consisted of 2nd and 6th Guards Army, 43rd Army, and 4th Shock Army. It was followed by a second wave consisting of 5th Guards Armoured Army and 51st Army, while 39th Army (belonging to 3rd Belorussian Front) pressed forward on the left wing towards Tauragė. The hopelessly inferior German Third Armoured Army could expect only little support, since shortly afterwards Army Group North's two other armies were also attacked by 2nd and 3rd Baltic Fronts. By 7 October the breach in Third Armoured Army's lines was already 50 kilometres wide, and on 10 October Soviet advance forces reached the Baltic coast at Palanga, to the north of Memel. Although XXVIII Army Corps had managed to withdraw to the port of Memel and establish a bridgehead on the coast,<sup>90</sup> Army Group North was cut off for the second time, this time for good.

<sup>83</sup> BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2047, 922.

<sup>84</sup> Köhler, 'Einsatz der Luftwaffe', 87.

<sup>85</sup> Pz.AOK 3, Id, 'Kräfteeinsatz Pz.AOK 3 (Infanterie und Artillerie), Stand 30.9.1944', BA-MA RH 21-3/v. 386.

<sup>86</sup> KTB HGr Nord, 5 Oct. 1944, BA-MA RH 19 III/330, fos. 65–6.

<sup>87</sup> *Geschichte des Großen Vaterländischen Krieges*, iv. 400.

<sup>88</sup> See Winkler, 'Abwehrkämpfe der Heeresgruppe Mitte', 512 ff.

<sup>89</sup> Including, e.g., I and XIX Armoured Corps.

<sup>90</sup> On the fighting for the Memel bridgehead, which was not evacuated until the end of January, see Kabath, 'Seebrückenköpfe', 219 ff.

The OKH planned a pincer attack by units of Army Groups Centre and North to explode the enclosing corridor. On 11 October Third Armoured Army was reassigned to Army Group Centre for that purpose. Meanwhile, Army Group North attempted to establish a new southern front running from Mažeikiai to the coast, south of Liepāja, to block the Soviet breakthrough. Its only possibility of releasing forces for that purpose was to abandon Riga and withdraw behind the Tukums line on the eastern coast of Courland. But Hitler stubbornly ordered that Riga be held. Thereupon Schörner flew to Führer headquarters on 11 October and finally managed to get permission to withdraw to Courland. It should not go unmentioned that Schörner had already begun the withdrawal of Sixteenth Army from the Latvian capital, Riga, on his own authority.<sup>91</sup> As a result, it proved possible to complete the complicated manoeuvre by 17 October.

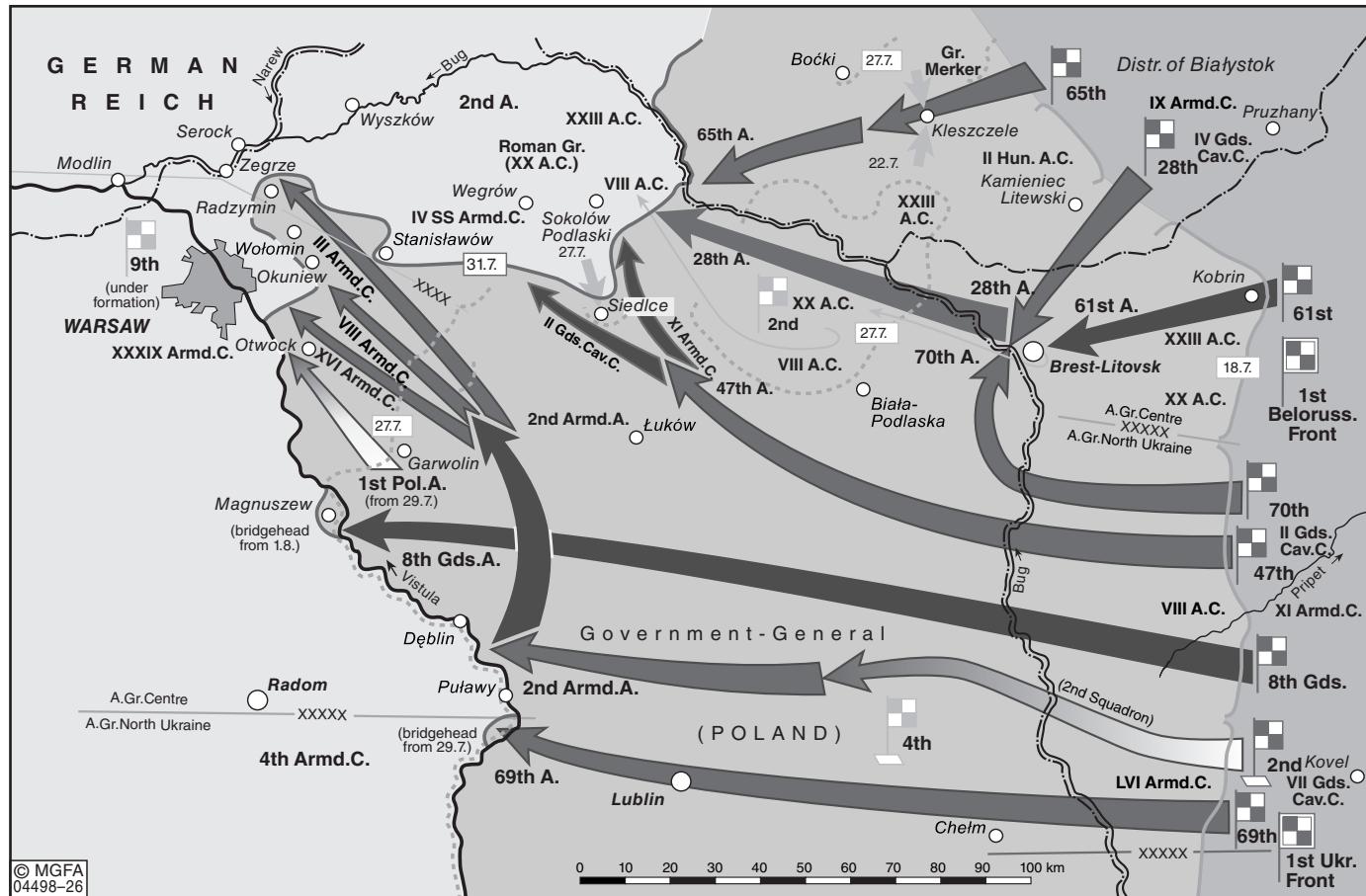
The pincer counter-attack by Army Groups Centre and North was supposed to begin that same day, but the previous day the Red Army opened two new offensives with its virtually inexhaustible forces. One thrust, discussed in a later chapter, was directed at the left wing of Army Group Centre in East Prussia (towards Gumbinnen). The other, carried out by 1st and 2nd Baltic Fronts, struck Army Group North, which was enclosed in Courland. Once again the German counter-attack had to be called off, since the newly occupied blocking front threatened to collapse. The main thing was to prevent a Soviet breakthrough on the right wing, on the coast, to the important port of Liepāja. There now arose one of the worst crises that Army Group North had ever had to face. Its still unconsolidated front came under continuous attack by far superior Soviet units. For the Red Army, which repeatedly conducted unsuccessful offensives with enormous losses in this very sector right up to the end of the war, this would have been its greatest chance to overrun the German troops, who were fighting from hastily occupied positions. But rapidly improvised attacks were not the Soviet staffs' strong point, and their middle-level commanders in particular showed very little flexibility. The German units managed *in extremis* to prevent an operational breakthrough to Courland and thus avoided total collapse. On 20 October the Red Army halted its offensive. It had by no means achieved its perfectly realistic aim of smashing Army Group North. The intensity of the attacker's efforts is shown by the casualty figures. Above all, in the offensive directed at Riga and Memel, which lasted from 14 September to around 20 October, personal losses amounted—according to Soviet figures—to 280,090 men, of whom 61,468 dead or missing.<sup>92</sup> At the same time, 522 tanks and self-propelled guns, 2,593 cannon, and 779 aircraft were lost.<sup>93</sup> For Army Group North, the files show only the personnel losses for the month of October, which totalled 30,834 men.<sup>94</sup>

<sup>91</sup> Grier, 'Hitler's Baltic Strategy', 136; Haupt, *Heeresgruppe Nord*, 246.

<sup>92</sup> *Grif sekretnosti sniat*, 208. The individual major formations were deployed for different lengths of time: 1st and 2nd Baltic Fronts from 14 Sept. to 20 Oct.; 3rd Baltic Front from 14 Sept. to 10 Oct.; 39th Army (3rd Belorussian Front) from 1 to 10 Oct.; Leningrad Front from 14 Sept. to 24 Nov.

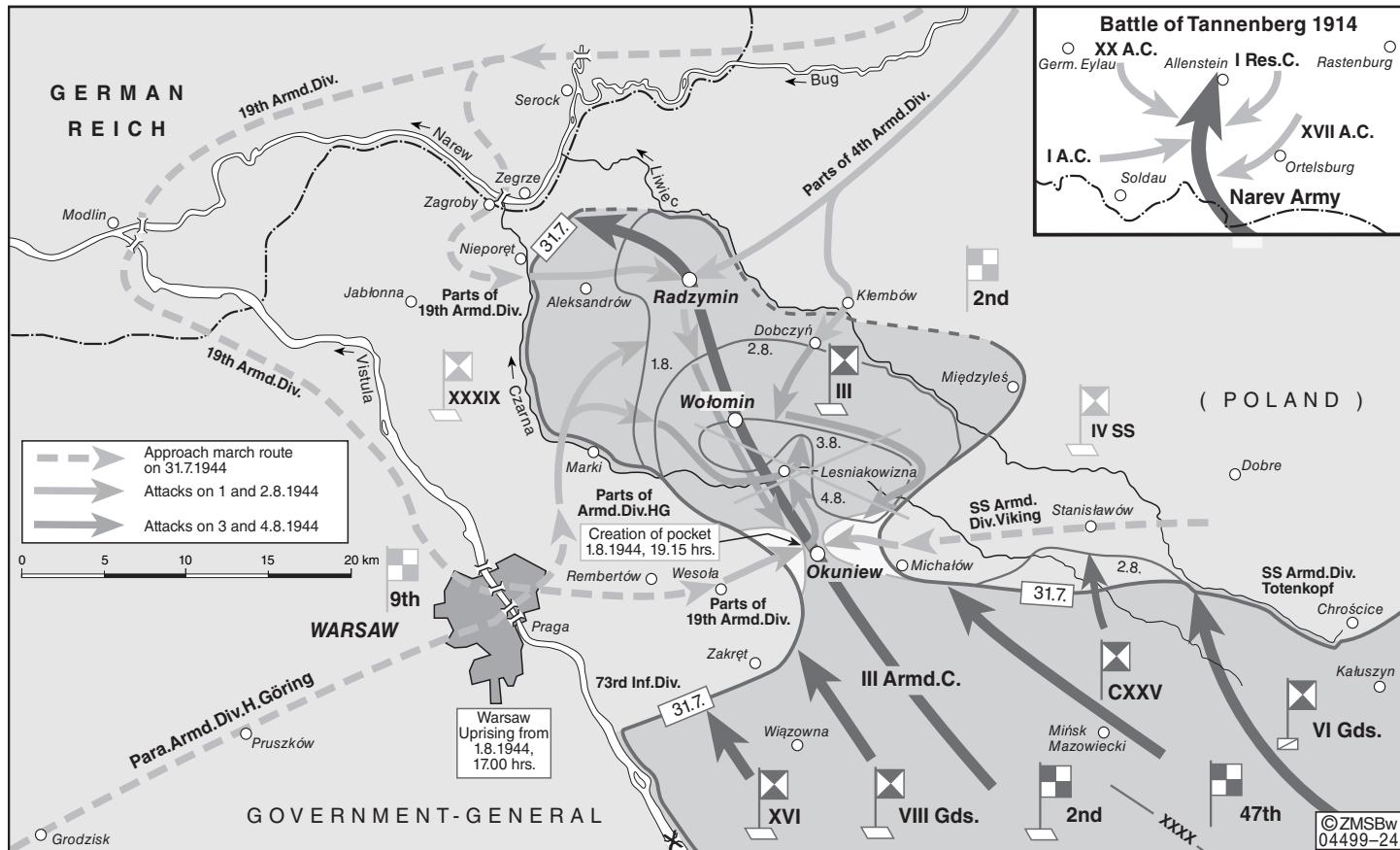
<sup>93</sup> Ibid. 372.

<sup>94</sup> App. to Org. I/14151/44 g.: 'Gegenüberstellung blutige Verluste/Ersatzbereitstellung Oktober für die einzelnen H.Gr. der Ostfront', BA-MA RH 2/1341.



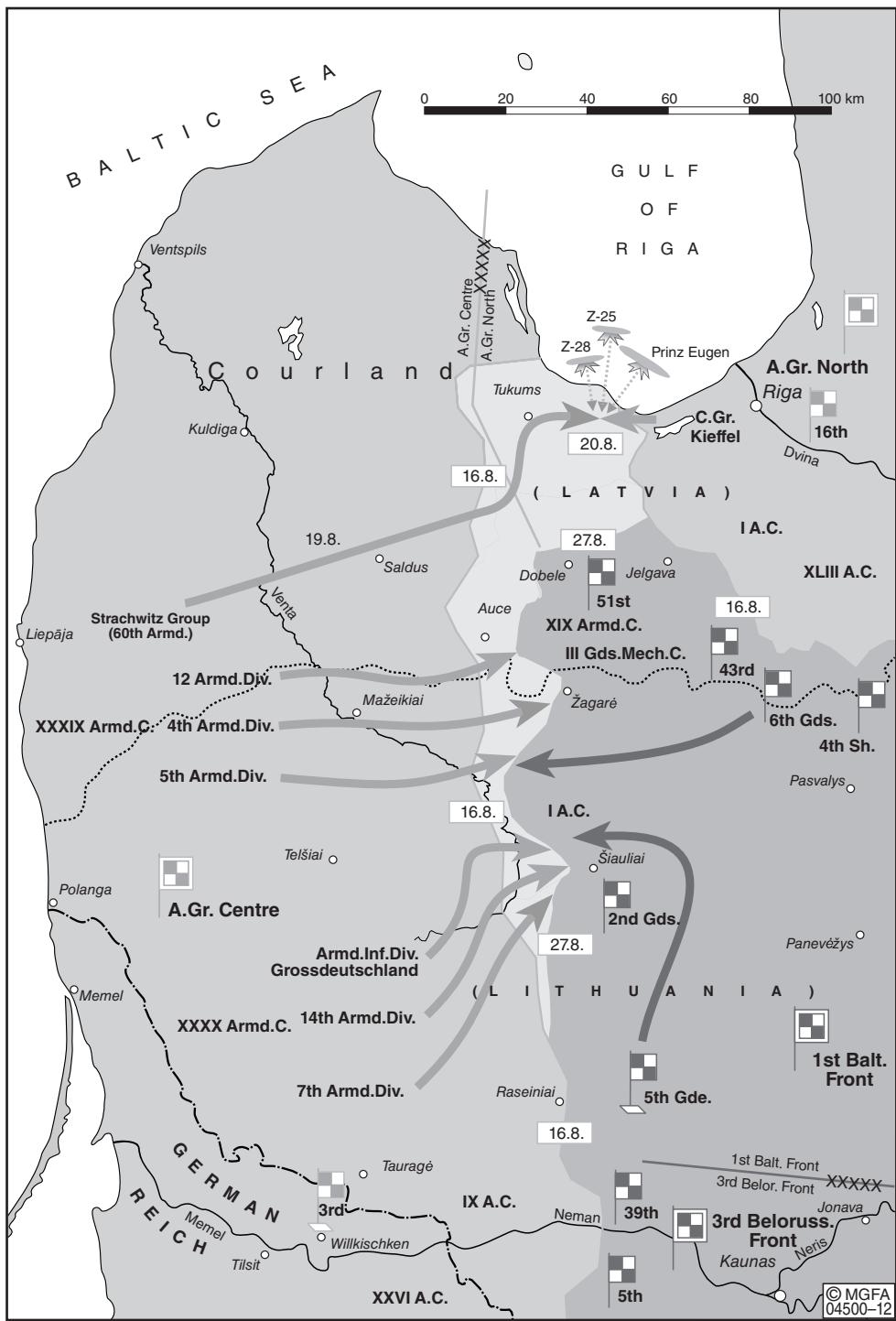
Map V.iv.1. The offensive by the left wing of 1st Belorussian Front from Kovel to Warsaw (18 to 31 July 1944)

Sources: Situation maps for relevant dates, BA-MA Kart RH 2 Ost/1090, 1099, 1105, 1108, 1120, 2749-53; OKH, 8. Abt., 'Durchbruch bei H.Gr. Mitte', RH 60/v. 35.



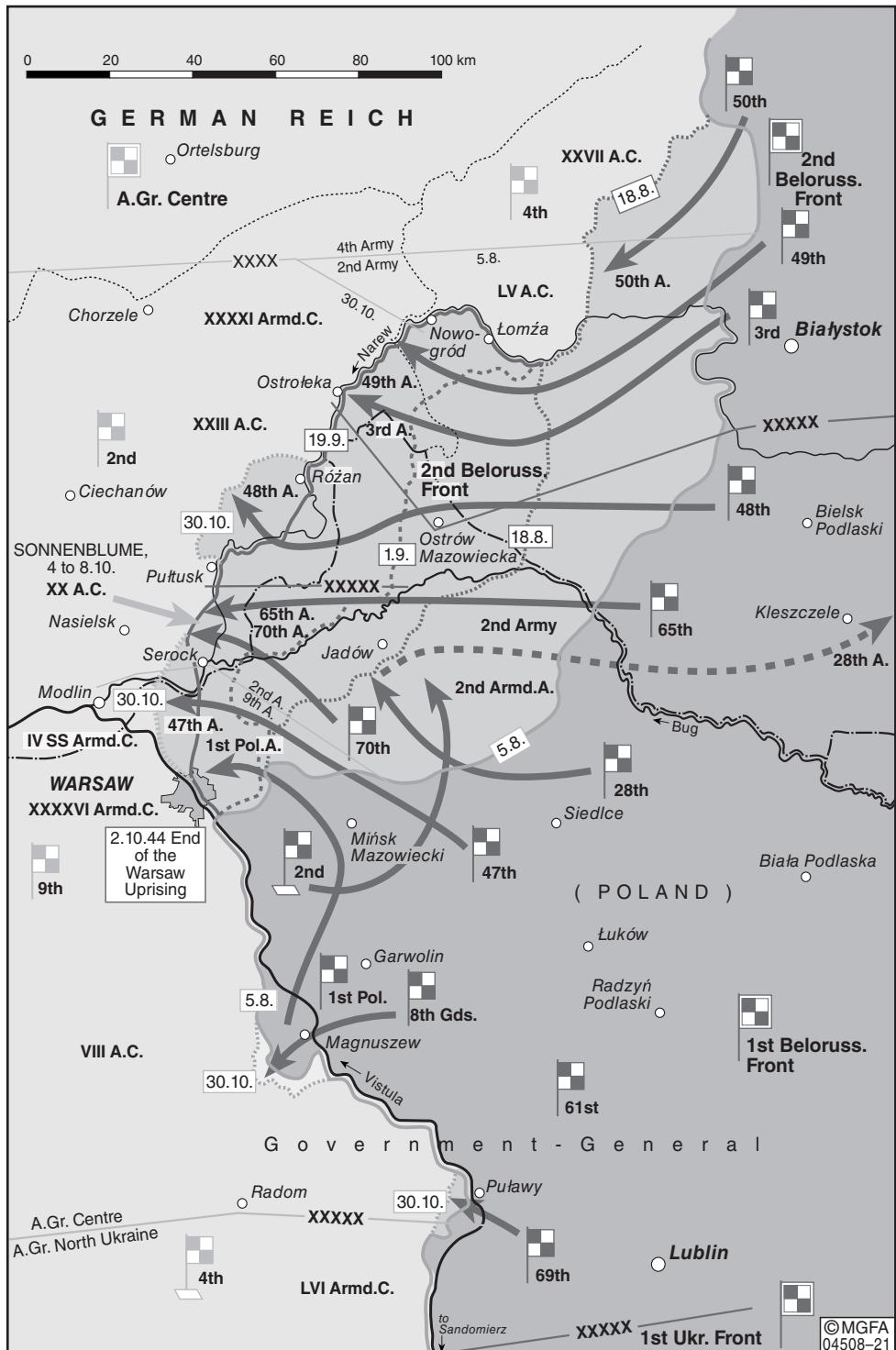
Map V.IV.2. The tank battle before Warsaw (1 to 4 August 1944)

Sources: Second Army, daily reports, BA-MA Kart RH 20-2/946-952; Ninth Army, daily reports, RH 20-9/212; A.Gr.Centre, daily reports, RH 19 III/220; OKH, situation reports 31.7. to 4.8.1944, Kart RH 2 Ost/2753-7.



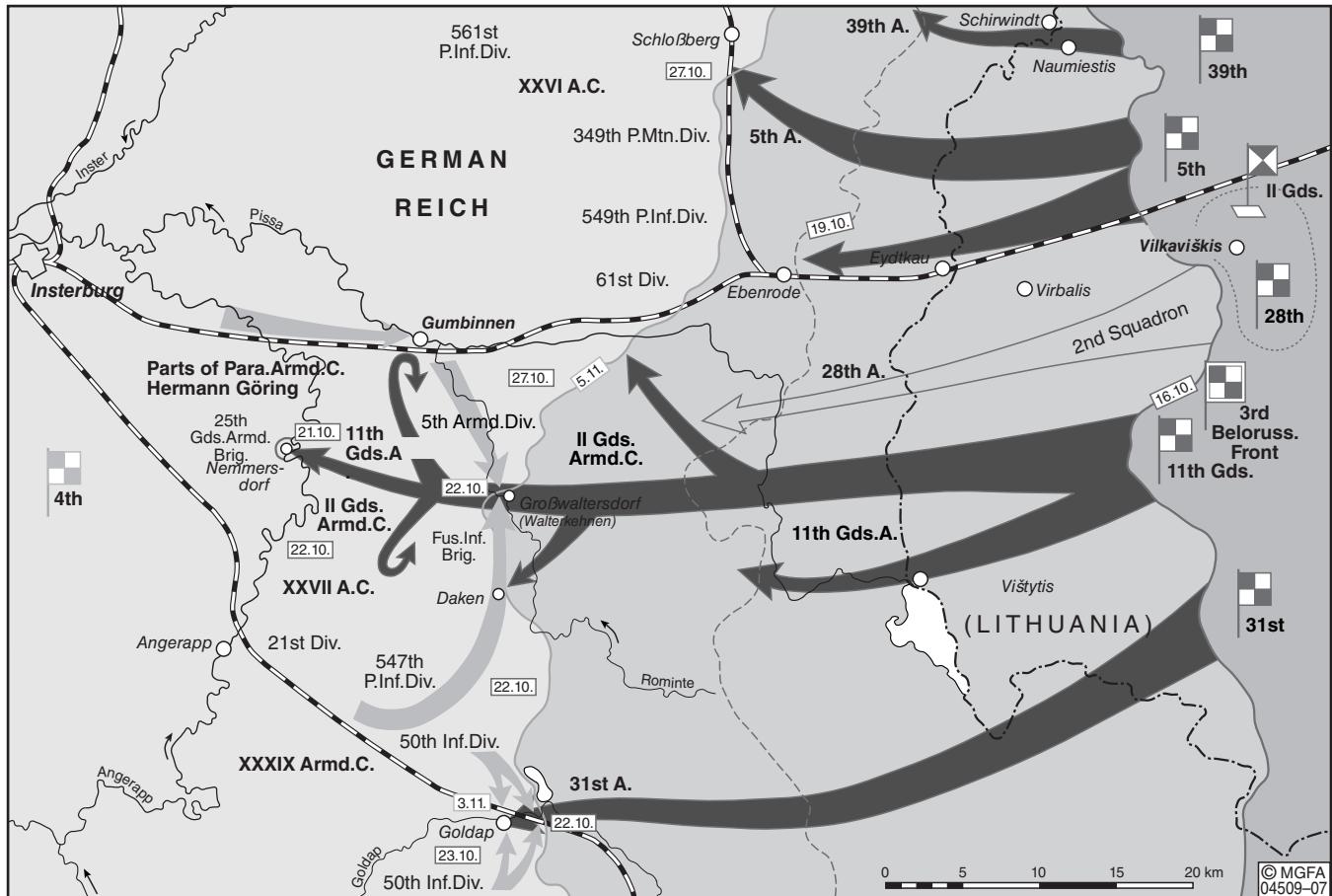
Map V.IV.3. Armoured Operation DOPPELKOPF (16 to 27 August 1944)

Sources: OKH, situation reports for relevant dates, BA-MA, Kart RH 2 Ost/1120, 1121, 1126, 1137, 1138.



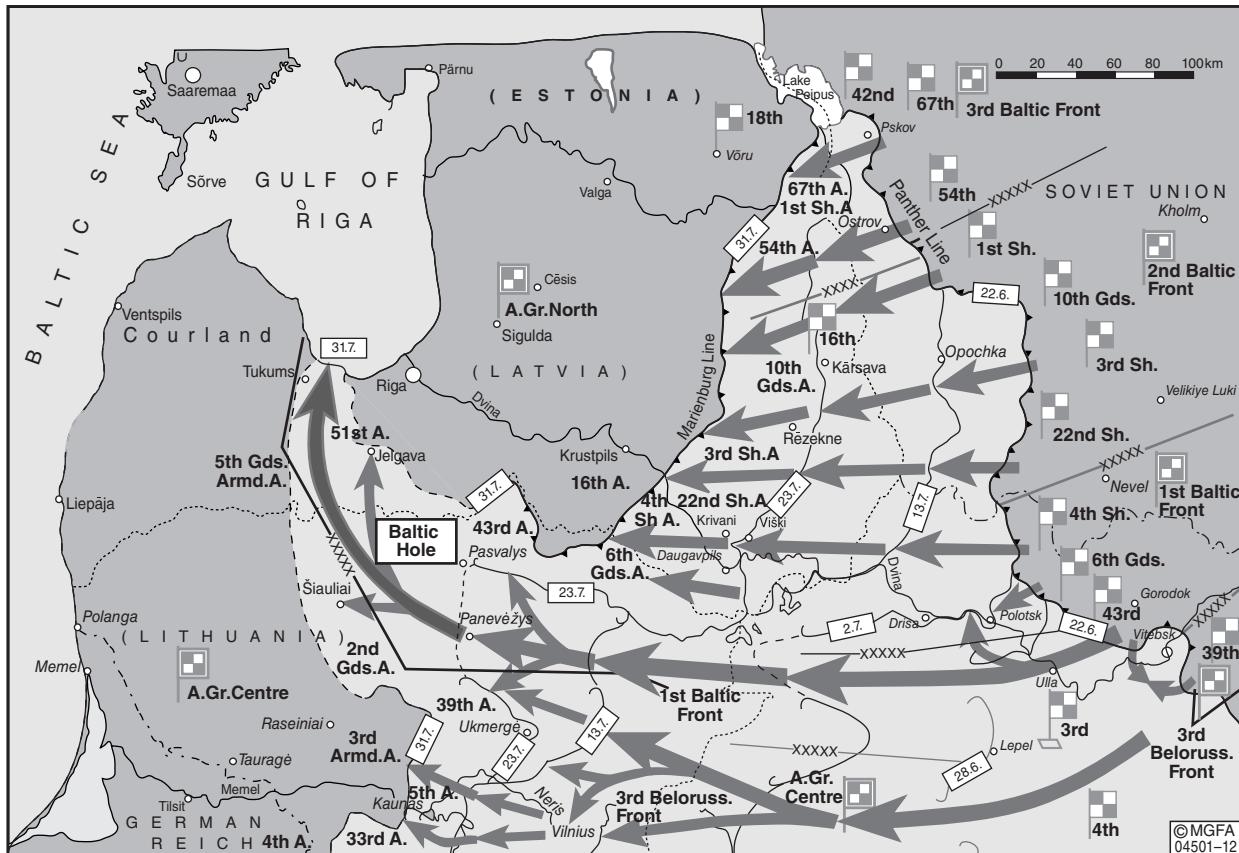
Map V.iv.4. The defensive battles on the Vistula and the Narew (5 August to 30 October 1944)

Sources: OKH, situation maps 5.8, 1.9, 19.9, 24.20, 30.10.1944, BA-MA, Kart RH 2 Ost/1109, 1143, 1165, 1206, 1213.



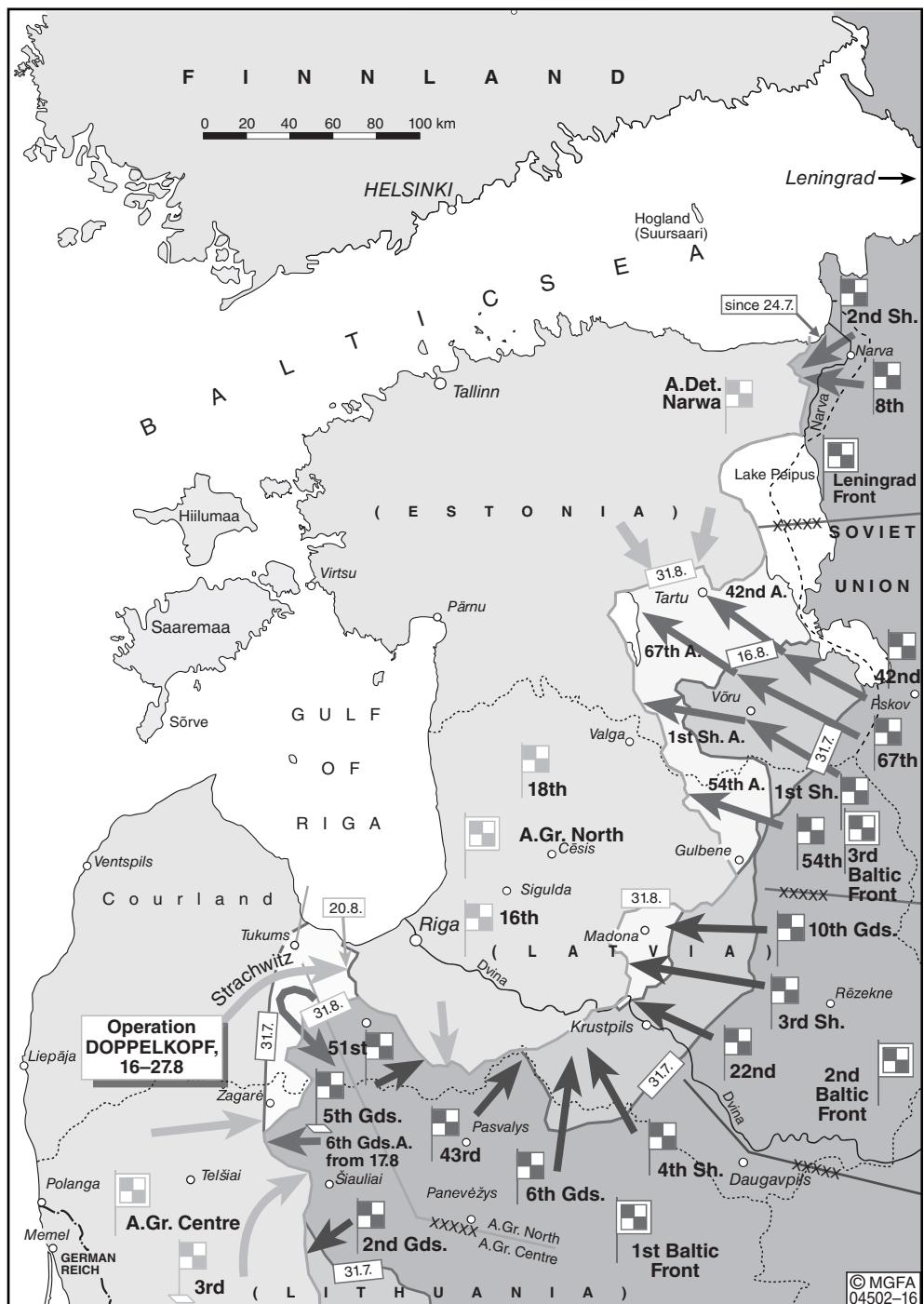
Map V.iv.5. The defence against the Soviet advance on East Prussia (16 October to 5 November 1944)

Sources: OKH, situation maps for relevant dates, BA-MA, Kart RH 2 Ost/1195, 1200, 1201, 1203, 1204, 1205, 1210.

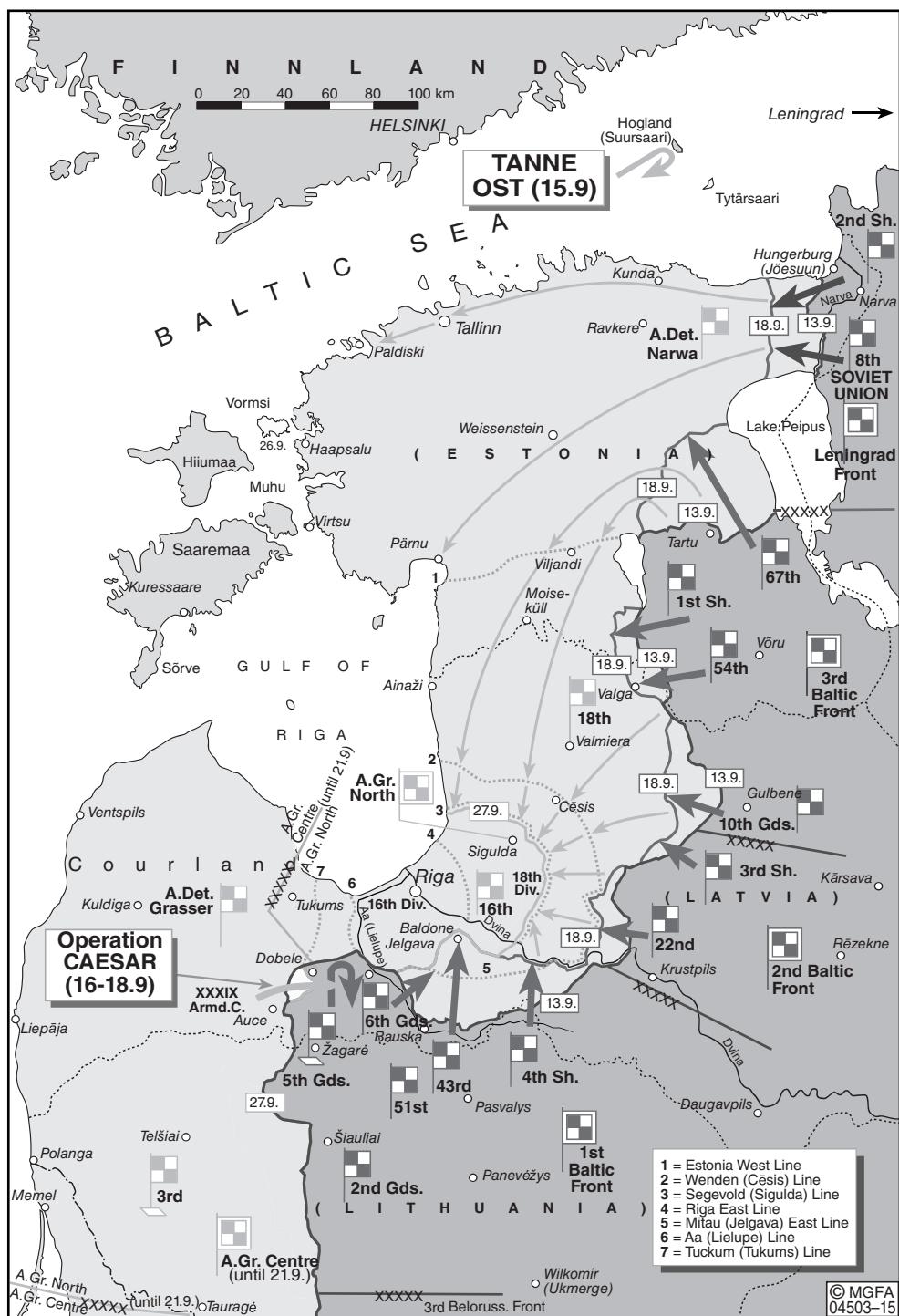


Map V.iv.6. The temporary enclosure of Army Group North (developments up to the end of July 1944)

Sources: OKH, situation maps for relevant dates, BA-MA, Kart RH 2 Ost/1064, 1085, 1095, 1104.

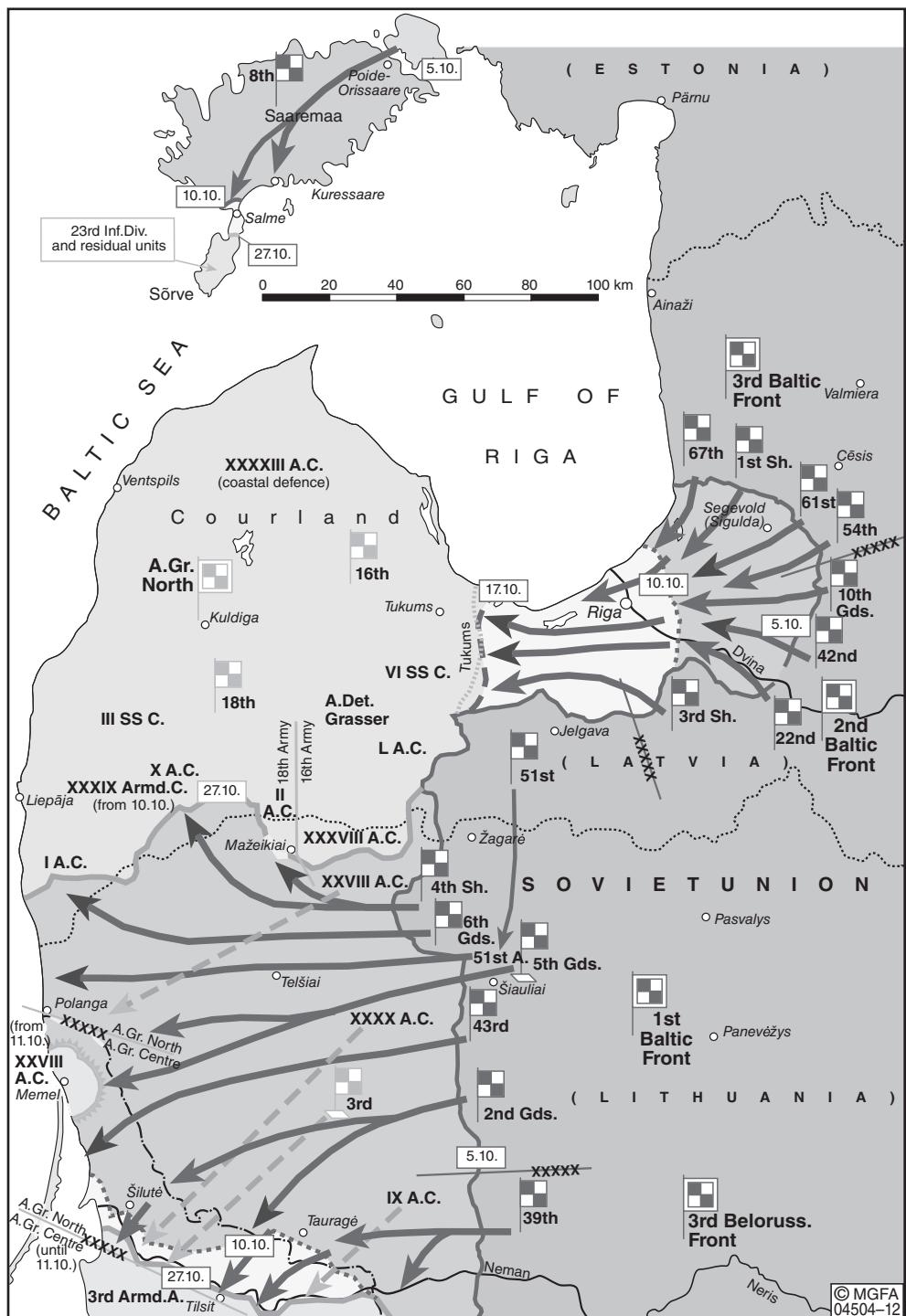


Map V.IV.7. Army Group North withdrawal operations in August 1944



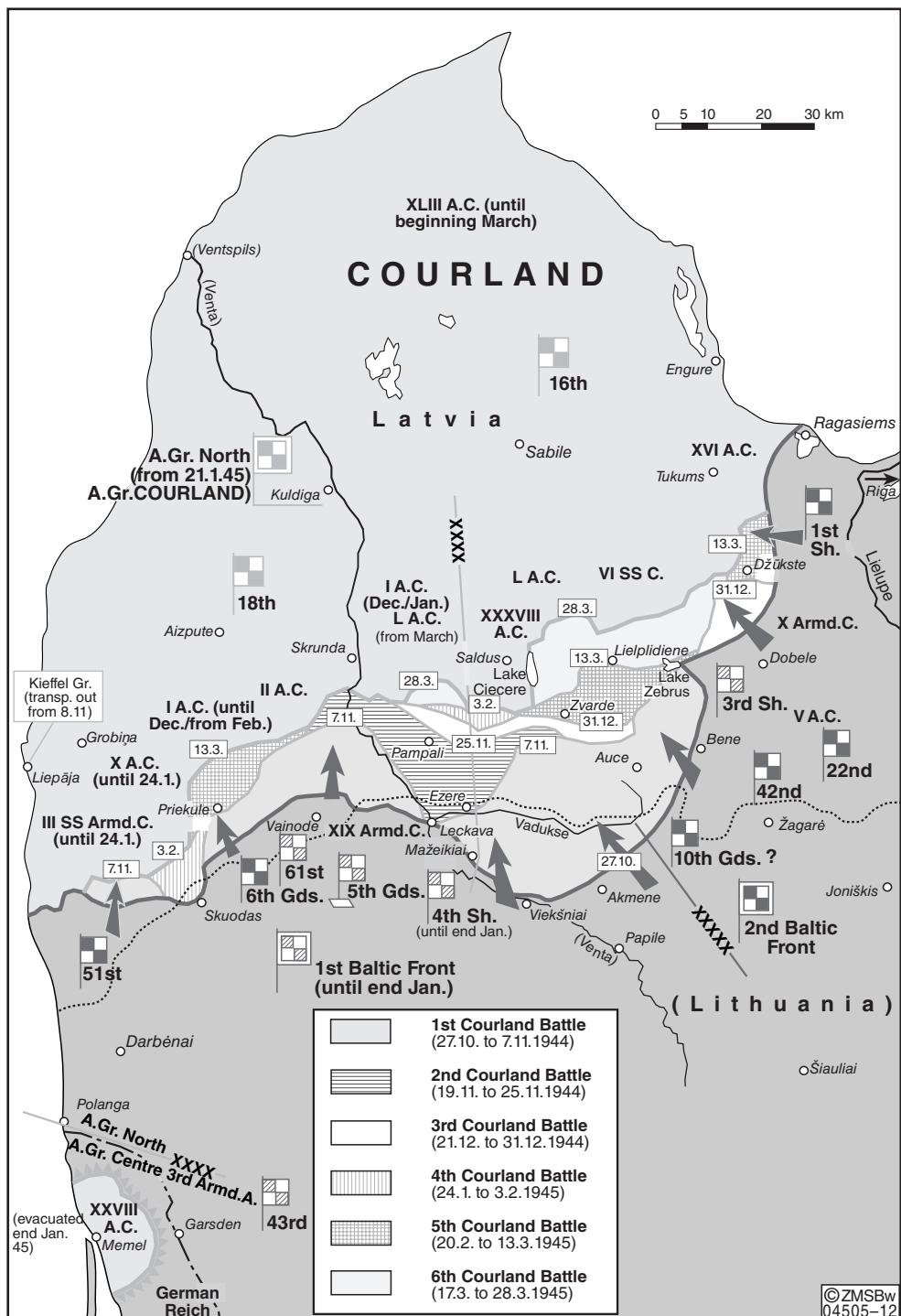
Map V.IV.8. Operation ASTER: the evacuation of Estonia (18 to 27 September 1944)

Sources: OKH, situation maps for relevant dates, BA-MA, Kart RH 2 Ost/1156, 1163, 11164, 1174.



Map V.IV.9. The enclosure of Army Group North in Courland in October 1944

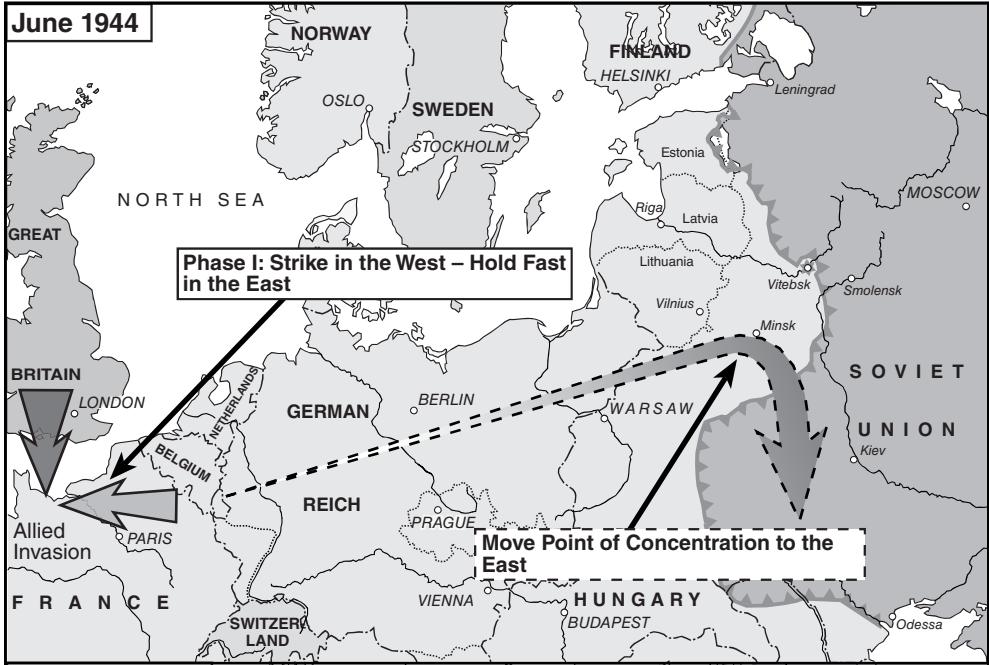
Sources: OKH, situation maps for relevant dates, BA-MA, Kart RH 2 Ost/1182, 1190, 1210.



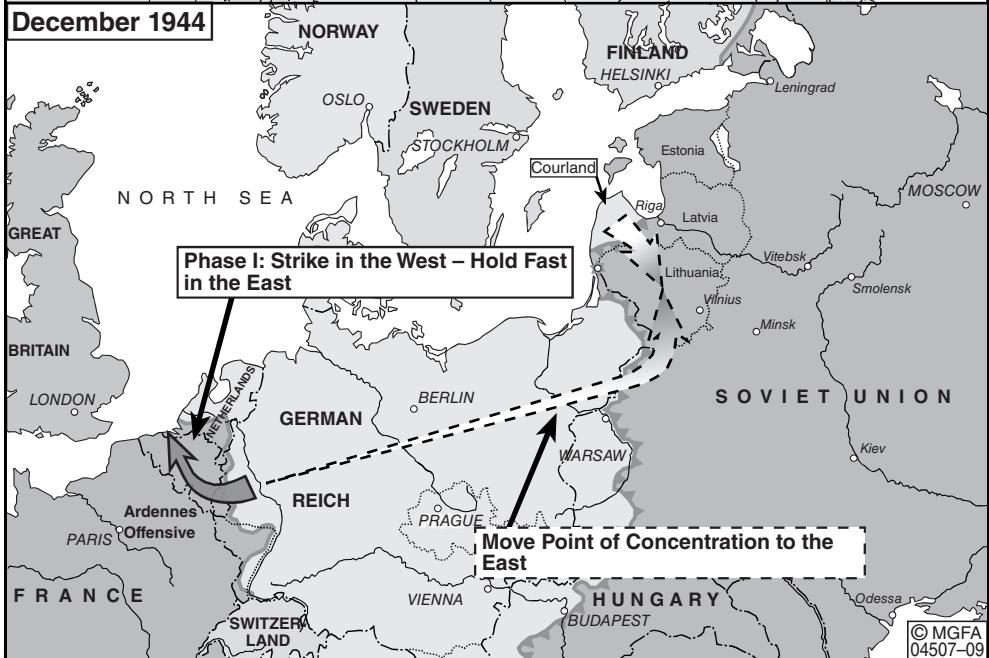
Map V.IV.10. The six Courland battles (27 October 1944 to 28 March 1945)

Sources: OKH, situation maps for relevant dates, BA-MA, Kart RH 2 Ost/1210, 1222, 1234, 1240, 1266, 1277, 1320, 1340, 1374, 1411, 1415, 1426.

**June 1944**



**December 1944**



Map V.iv.11. Hitler's utopian two-front strategy (1944)

### (b) The Plans for a Breakout to East Prussia

In this phase of the war, the conflicts within the staffs were sometimes just as dramatic as those at the front. October saw the last act in the dispute over the withdrawal of Army Group North. The demand for its withdrawal had dominated Hitler's conflicts with the Army General Staff, and with Army Groups Centre and North HQs, since the end of July. Hitherto, except during a brief period of enclosure in August, a withdrawal of that kind would have been relatively easy to carry out in the form of a large-scale march manoeuvre. Since 10 October, however, when the Soviet troops had reached the Baltic coast, there remained only the possibility of a major breakthrough by force through the Soviet enclosing corridor.

There now flared up, as Guderian wrote, a 'bitter struggle between Hitler and me over the withdrawal of these valuable troops, which were indispensable for the defence of the Reich'.<sup>95</sup> The army's chief of staff wanted at all costs to deploy the units of Army Group North in defence of East Prussia, since Army Group Centre's front was overstretched. Now Hitler, 'pressed on all sides', was about to launch Army Group North on a decisive thrust southwards.<sup>96</sup> On 9 October, with enclosure in the offing, Guderian had already tried in vain to change Hitler's mind. Shortly afterwards, Maj.-Gen. Oldwig von Natzmer, the chief of staff of Army Group North, appeared at Führer headquarters with the same demand, but was equally unsuccessful.<sup>97</sup> Instead, on 10 October, as already mentioned, the Führer gave the order for a pincer attack by both Army Groups on the flanks of the Soviet enclosing ring.<sup>98</sup> However, since at that point in time Army Group North, at Hitler's insistence, still had to hold not only Courland but Riga too, there were not enough forces available for a thrust southwards. The intended northward attack by Army Group Centre was a non-starter anyway, since Third Armoured Army, which had been reassigned to it, was tied down sealing off East Prussia's northern border. The intended two-pronged pincer attack was then reduced to a single prong. Army Group North was now to attack essentially on its own. The first phase was to be a thrust against the Memel bridgehead, where XXVIII Army Corps was enclosed, and in the second phase the attack was to be continued southwards against Heydekrug to restore the connection with Third Armoured Army.<sup>99</sup> For this operation, code-named 'Vulture', there were in any case only three armoured divisions and two infantry divisions available. They had to break through a section of the front in which four to five Soviet armies were standing. In mid-October, however, the Red Army opened two offensives: one against East Prussia and the

<sup>95</sup> Guderian, *Erinnerungen eines Soldaten*, 322.

<sup>96</sup> Tippelskirch, *Geschichte des Zweiten Weltkrieges*, 489.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.; see also BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2047, 943.

<sup>98</sup> OKH/GenStdH/Op.Abt. (Ia), No. 440630/44 gKdos. Chefs., 10 Oct. 1944, BA-MA RH 19 III/16, fos. 83–4.

<sup>99</sup> BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2047, 945. See also KTB HGr Nord, 13 Oct. 1944, BA-MA RH 19 III/330, fos. 260–2; OKH/GenStdH/Op.Abt., No. 440645 Chefs., 16 Oct. 1944, BA-MA RH 19 III/16, fo. 89.

other against Courland. As a result, the armoured divisions intended for Operation VULTURE had to be deployed to fend off the Soviet attacking forces.<sup>100</sup>

On 20 October the dangerous Soviet offensive against Courland had finally been beaten back, but that very day Hitler called off Operation VULTURE and ordered Army Group North to go over to the defensive in Courland.<sup>101</sup> In the meantime Col. Bogislaw von Bonin, the new chief of the operations division of the OKH General Staff, had drawn up a plan for the evacuation of Courland and the thrust to East Prussia. On 19 October he communicated his ideas to Col.-Gen. Schörner, who finally agreed to a modified version of the plan, whereby Army Group North would withdraw to a bridgehead around Liepāja. Some units could be evacuated from that port, but the bulk of the army group's forces were to advance along the coast to Memel and from there push forward to Tilsit to connect with the front held by Army Group Centre.<sup>102</sup> Hitler, however, rejected the 'Bonin plan'.

Now, in a final attempt, Schörner had plans prepared for an operation code-named 'Viper'. So as not to provoke rejection by Hitler from the outset, he aimed at a partial solution, namely unification of the Courland and Memel bridgeheads. The port city of Memel, still held by XXVIII Army Corps, was to be the target of a thrust by three armoured divisions and three infantry divisions.<sup>103</sup> Although Schörner avoided revealing his longer-term intentions, it can be clearly assumed that for him Memel was merely the springboard for a thrust towards East Prussia.<sup>104</sup> But Hitler saw through the game and rejected Operation VIPER too.<sup>105</sup> That finally drew a line under the conflicts over withdrawal of Army Group North. It was now firmly established, once and for all, that Army Group North would have to stay and fight a losing battle. Hitler had got his way: 'The German soldier does not voluntarily yield a metre of ground; the army group fights where it stands!'<sup>106</sup> And thus came about one of the strangest curiosities of the final phase of the eastern campaign. The Courland pocket became a 'Dunkirk' voluntarily created by Hitler, but with a ban on evacuation.

## 5. THE COURLAND BATTLES

### (a) The First Three Courland Battles up to the End of 1944

'Fortress Courland' consisted of a peninsula open to the south, with the cornerstones of Liepāja on the Baltic coast and Tukums on the Gulf of Riga. It had to be

<sup>100</sup> On the plan of attack for Operation VULTURE, see Forwick, 'Der Rückzug der Heeresgruppe Nord', 168 ff.

<sup>101</sup> OKH/GenStdH/Op.Abt. (Ia), No. 440562, gKdos. Chefs., 20 Oct. 1944, BA-MA RH 19 III/16, fo. 91. See also KTB HGr Nord, 21 Oct. 1944, BA-MA RH 19 III/331, fo. 88.

<sup>102</sup> Grier, 'Hitler's Baltic Strategy', 139 ff.

<sup>103</sup> KTB HGr Nord, 25 Oct. 1944, BA-MA RH 19 III/331, fo. 134.

<sup>104</sup> Grier, 'Hitler's Baltic Strategy', 141.

<sup>105</sup> KTB HGr Nord, 26 and 27 Oct. 1944, BA-MA RH 19 III/331, fos. 153 and 155; OKH/GenStdH/Op.Abt. (Ia), No. 440662/44 gKdos. Chefs., 26 Oct. 1944, BA-MA RH 19 III/16, fo. 96.

<sup>106</sup> Lederer, 'Kurland', BA-MA RH 19 III/667, 4, fo. 6.

defended along a 240-kilometre land front and secured against enemy landing attempts along 320 kilometres of coastline. At the beginning of the encirclement, Army Group North's actual strength on paper was around 500,000 men, including all attached units (as well as civilian personnel).<sup>107</sup> Of those, some 250,000 must have been front-line troops.<sup>108</sup> In many divisions, however, as much as three quarters of the fighting strength consisted of 'scrapings', that is, a hotchpotch of rear service units and navy and air-force troops hastily trained for deployment at the front.<sup>109</sup> Initially, 33 divisions or combat groups, that is, rudimentary divisions, were deployed in Courland, but three of them had to be evacuated immediately.<sup>110</sup> Since the OKH regarded the Courland divisions as a 'standby reserve', it subsequently transferred further divisions by sea for deployment in threatened sectors of the front. By the spring of 1945 the number of divisions remaining had fallen to 19. That erosion carried a considerable risk in view of the far superior opposing Soviet forces, which repeatedly launched offensives to force a decision. On 25 October the Courland divisions had only 248 operational tanks and assault guns available.<sup>111</sup> The lack of spare parts was also making itself felt. Air Fleet 1, for example, was left in mid-October with only 170 operational aircraft and not a single bomber.<sup>112</sup> In comparison with the 4,700 Soviet aircraft with which Army Group North was directly confronted, its own air power seemed almost non-existent.<sup>113</sup> On 21 October Schörner, who was in reality opposed to remaining in Courland, issued one of his notorious 'stand firm' orders: 'The Führer has ordered us to hold Courland and at first go over to the defensive on the present main front. Our task, now more than ever, is not to yield a foot of the territory we hold, to tie down the 150 enemy units facing us [...] and thereby to facilitate the defence of the homeland.'<sup>114</sup>

The ensuing battles, which lasted seven months until the end of the war, are a blank space in official Soviet historiography.<sup>115</sup> All we find are suggestions that the Red Army essentially remained passive and was content to seal off the German units. In reality, however, the Soviet command was firmly determined to annihilate the German defence forces, and to do so as quickly as possible.<sup>116</sup> This also

<sup>107</sup> Grier, 'Hitler's Baltic Strategy', 256.

<sup>108</sup> Lederer, 'Kurland', BA-MA RH 19 III/667, 4, fo. 6.

<sup>109</sup> BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2047, 1078.

<sup>110</sup> For breakdown and composition, see *ibid.* 951, 956–7, 961, as well as 1076–7 in the appendix. Also belonging to Army Group North were those sections of 23rd and 218th Infantry Divisions which, together with a small contingent of navy and air-force troops, were defending the Sõrve peninsula (on the island of Saaremaa).

<sup>111</sup> BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2047, 1077.

<sup>112</sup> Köhler, 'Einsatz der Luftwaffe', 87.

<sup>113</sup> Even towards the end of the year, the number of Soviet aircraft in the Baltic region was estimated at 4,750. That figure consisted of the 4,200 aircraft of Air Fleets 3, 13, and 15, which were assigned to the two Baltic Fronts and Leningrad Front, plus 550 aircraft in the area of the Baltic fleet; see Grier, 'Hitler's Baltic Strategy', 401.

<sup>114</sup> KTB HGr Nord, 21 Oct. 1944, BA-MA RH 19 III/331, fo. 88.

<sup>115</sup> On this, see Haupt, *Heeresgruppe Nord*, 291.

<sup>116</sup> This is also the finding of recent Russian research. As the author learned from P. Tsygankov at the Military History Institute in Moscow on 22 March 2000, there were three main reasons for the Red Army's vehement offensive efforts against the Army Group North forces enclosed in Courland: (1) the threat to the right flank; (2) fear of a German breakout towards East Prussia; (3) the risk of timely

involved a change in the Red Army's strategy. Instead of attacking further west in the direction of East Prussia, it moved the point of main effort northwards and massed huge troop concentrations round the Courland peninsula. Army Group North was caught in the trap. Meanwhile, Stalin had prematurely announced the final destruction of the German army group to the western Allies and had thus put his generals under pressure.<sup>117</sup> In the six Courland battles which now followed, the Red Army units bitterly attacked the Germany front time and again but, despite great losses, did not succeed in breaking through. The main target of attack in all these battles was the same, namely the coastal city of Liepāja, without whose port the army group could not be supplied or evacuated. All the enclosed German troops were aware that they were fighting with their backs to the sea and that a single lost battle would inevitably mean the end of Army Group North. Clearly, the contribution of that awareness to the morale of the German troops should not be underestimated.

The first *Courland battle* lasted from 27 October to 7 November 1944.<sup>118</sup> Meanwhile, enormous efforts had been made on the German side to build up its positions, which had hitherto been only fleetingly occupied, into a halfway stable defensive system. 'Trenches not graves!' was the slogan.<sup>119</sup> Nevertheless, given the impressive enemy superiority, there seemed little likelihood of being able to hold out in the long term. The Red Army tried to overpower the Germans, deploying its armoured units, particularly 5th Guards Armoured Army, like battering-rams. When all his reserves were used up, Schörner, acting against Hitler's orders, evacuated all those front salients that were not directly under attack in order to gain new forces. For a while it seemed that the thin German line between Auce and Zeitweilig was bound to be broken through on a broad front. But then came an unexpected turnaround: 'It was like a miracle. The Soviets gave up!'<sup>120</sup> Army Group North may have been saved by a lucky accident, for just then the Red Army's meteorological department made an inaccurate weather forecast, as a result of which the time of the main attack was badly chosen. The Soviet air force, which up till then had sovereign control of the skies, was mostly grounded by the cloud cover. Most of all, however, the already muddy terrain was further softened by sudden downpours of rain, and numerous T-34s and Joseph Stalin tanks got stuck in the mud. Furthermore, the German units managed to shoot down 522 fighting vehicles.<sup>121</sup> Thus, despite some losses of ground, the front was held. In the course of the fighting Army Group North lost a total of 21,292 dead and wounded.<sup>122</sup>

German evacuation. Moreover, the Soviet forces tied down in Courland were needed for the planned attack on Germany. The Soviet command therefore assembled a very strong concentration of forces in order to resolve the Courland problem as quickly as possible.

<sup>117</sup> Grier, 'Hitler's Baltic Strategy', 228 ff.; Haupt, *Heeresgruppe Nord*, 239.

<sup>118</sup> The periodization of the Courland battles adopted here is based on the files of Army Group North. Haupt's monograph, *Das war Kurland*, adopts a different periodization, in which the Soviet offensive of 13 to 24 October, which led to the enclosure of Army Group North, is counted as the first Courland battle.

<sup>119</sup> Haupt, *Heeresgruppe Nord*, 300.

<sup>120</sup> See ibid. 297.

<sup>121</sup> See *Hitlers Lagebesprechungen*, 679.

<sup>122</sup> KTB HGr Nord, 31 Dec. 1944, CAMO, F. 500, Op. 12459. d. 81, fo. 345.

Immediately before the *second Courland battle* (19 to 25 November 1944), according to German estimates, the Soviets had assembled 16 armies comprising around 200 units against the two armies of Army Group North.<sup>123</sup> They included some 130 infantry divisions and over 50 armoured units—even more than during the first Courland battle. What was decisive, however, was not just the Soviets' multiple superiority in military units but their superiority in material supplies. Not only were the Soviet troops largely motorized, but they clearly had no shortage of fuel or ammunition. On 23 November alone, the Soviet artillery fired approximately 275,000 shells.<sup>124</sup> In this battle the Red Army made positively furious efforts to force a decision at last. The front was held only *in extremis*, as is clear from an entry in the army group's war diary for 24 November: 'Today's headline: "It turned out well again!"'<sup>125</sup> But this success was due not only to the Germans' own defensive efforts. To the Germans, the Soviet attacks 'almost gave the impression of a lack of planning'. It seemed 'remarkable' that the enemy, 'despite his superiority, especially in tanks and rapid operational forces, had failed to achieve a decisive breakthrough'.<sup>126</sup> This time too, at the cost of 13,667 casualties, the Red Army's offensive was brought to a halt—but only just.<sup>127</sup>

At the same time, the battle for the small Sõrve peninsula came to an end. On the advice of the Naval War Staff, Hitler had insisted that the southern tip of the island of Saaremaa opposite Courland be held at all costs in order to secure entry to the Gulf of Riga. In Col.-Gen. Schörner's estimation, however, the peninsula was no longer of any importance after the abandonment of Riga. Above all, the fate of his army group hung by a thread, so he needed every soldier for the front in Courland. Moreover, it seemed only a matter of time before the defenders of Sõrve were overrun by the superior strength of the Soviet attacking forces. In those circumstances, Schörner disregarded Hitler's explicit order and had the peninsula evacuated on his own authority. The army group's war diary contains the following telling comment: 'The OKH is to be informed accordingly.'<sup>128</sup> Thus Schörner once again presented the higher command with a *fait accompli*. In the night of 23 to 24 November 4,491 troops and 678 wounded were evacuated from Sõrve.<sup>129</sup> The battle for the Baltic islands was finally over.<sup>130</sup>

The strength of the German military personnel on the Courland peninsula at 1 December 1944 is given rather vaguely as approximately 500,000 men.<sup>131</sup> But this was the figure for ration strength, which is scarcely meaningful since, apart from members of the army, air force, and navy, it included the SS, police, and

<sup>123</sup> Grier, 'Hitler's Baltic Strategy', 398.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid. 219.

<sup>125</sup> KTB HGr Nord, 24 Nov. 1944 (20.15), CAMO, F. 500, Op. 12459, d. 80, fo. 348.

<sup>126</sup> BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2047, 981.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid. 973; see also KTB HGr Nord, 31 Dec. 1944, CAMO, F. 500, Op. 12459, d. 81, fo. 345.

<sup>128</sup> KTB HGr Nord, 23 Nov. 1944, BA-MA RH 19 III/333, fo. 125.

<sup>129</sup> KTB Skl, pt. A, Ixiii/II, 24 Nov. 1944, 554–5; Grier, 'Hitler's Baltic Strategy', 180.

<sup>130</sup> KTB Skl, pt. A, Ixiii/II, 24 and 26 Nov. 1944, 537 and 588–9; Marineoberkommando Ostsee—Führungsstab—B.No. Gkdos 600/45, 17 Mar. 1945, 'Rückblick auf die wesentlichen Ereignisse und Aufgaben im Bereich MOK Ost im Kriegsjahr 1944', BA-MA RM 31/3219, 12–14, fos. 244–6.

<sup>131</sup> KTB HGr Nord, 2 Dec. 1944, CAMO, F. 500, Op. 12459, d. 81, fo. 21.

German and Baltic civilian personnel, as well as prisoners of war. The first differentiated data available is for the end of December; according to those figures the daily strength of the divisions totalled 200,355 men, and the combat strength was still 98,234 men.<sup>132</sup> The pause in the fighting of around four weeks after the second Courland battle was used for logistic purposes, especially for repairs. As a result, the number of operational armoured vehicles rose to 525.<sup>133</sup>

The *third Courland battle*, which lasted from 21 to 31 December, was the heaviest of all. According to German figures, the Soviet air force flew some 11,430 sorties.<sup>134</sup> Once again, the attacking forces were on the brink of a decisive breakthrough but failed to exploit their initial tactical successes to operational advantage. The German command threw the last reserves, mainly Baltic volunteers, into the battle in order to plug the numerous gaps. In the end, the Soviet attacks failed, with heavy losses. According to German figures, 513 Soviet tanks were shot down, bringing the total figure for tanks shot down in the first three Courland battles to 1,237 enemy fighting vehicles.<sup>135</sup> However, the Germans' own personnel losses were particularly high this time, at 27,114 men.<sup>136</sup>

### (b) The Fighting up to May 1945

On 12 January the Red Army launched the large-scale Vistula–Oder Offensive Operation, which led to the collapse of large parts of the eastern front. The OKH was unable to react, since it had no operational reserve. It could now be seen how urgently Army Group North, cut off in Courland, was needed. Guderian, as chief of the Army General Staff, demanded its accelerated withdrawal.<sup>137</sup> He managed to get two armoured divisions and two infantry divisions transported out of the peninsula,<sup>138</sup> but that was a really half-hearted measure. It was both too little to constitute any significant support on the home front, and too much to permit the defence of Courland with the troops remaining there. The extent to which the enclosed troops were marginalized is shown symbolically by two of Hitler's actions. He ordered his 'favourite general' Schörner to return, and on 18 January 1945 appointed him commander-in-chief of Army Group A. His former post was to be taken over provisionally by Col.-Gen. Lothar Rendulic. Secondly, on 25 January Hitler had Army Group North renamed 'Army Group Courland', and the designation 'Army Group North' was transferred to the former Army Group Centre. The Courland units were thus marginalized in name also.

Seeking to exploit the weakness of the German troops, the Red Army began the *fourth Courland battle*, which lasted from 24 January to 3 February. Whereas the previous offensives had been carried out in very stereotypical fashion, the Soviet units now adopted a different tactic. They attacked in several places simultaneously

<sup>132</sup> BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2047, 1086.

<sup>133</sup> KTB HGr Nord, 21 Dec. (19.00), CAMO, F. 500, Op. 12459, d. 81, fo. 173.

<sup>134</sup> BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2047, 982. <sup>135</sup> Ibid. 1081.

<sup>136</sup> KTB HGr Nord, 31 Dec. 1944, CAMO, F. 500, Op. 12459, d. 81, fo. 345.

<sup>137</sup> BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2047, 987. <sup>138</sup> Grier, 'Hitler's Baltic Strategy', 421.

and shifted the point of main effort in an attempt to shatter the few German reserves. But this time too they failed to achieve the breakthrough. After suffering heavy losses, especially 541 tanks, the Red Army called off the attack.<sup>139</sup> While this battle was going on, the Memel bridgehead, situated between East Prussia and Courland, was evacuated. The divisions of Third Armoured Army deployed there were withdrawn across the Baltic by the end of January. From the beginning of December to the beginning of February, 87,000 combat-fit troops from Army Group North/Courland were also evacuated.<sup>140</sup> On 3 February the daily strength of the divisions was 155,820 men and the combat strength 79,880.<sup>141</sup>

After the military disaster in January 1945, when the Red Army advanced to the Oder and enclosed East Prussia, there was hardly a conference at Führer headquarters at which Guderian failed to expressly demand immediate withdrawal from Courland. He needed those divisions—which had been placed in quarantine, as it were—urgently for defence of the Reich. His demands were motivated not only by military operational considerations. As a Prussian by birth, he also had a subjective motive. He was very well aware of the violent excesses committed by Soviet troops the previous October against the German civilian population which had fallen into their hands. As a result, he had several clashes with Hitler, including a ‘dramatic scene’ at the beginning of February.<sup>142</sup> During a conference with the Führer, Guderian had become so furious in his demand for the evacuation of Courland that Göring, to avoid further escalation, dragged him into a side-room. When he was summoned back and again broached the subject of Courland, Hitler burst into a rage: ‘He stood in front of me shaking his fists, so that my good chief of staff, Thomale, felt constrained to seize me by the skirt of my uniform jacket and pull me backwards lest I be the victim of a physical assault.’<sup>143</sup>

Army Group Courland HQ had also undertaken a new initiative, which resulted in a compromise. At the end of January, Col.-Gen. Heinrich von Vietinghoff-Scheel had been appointed as the new commander-in-chief. Immediately realizing the operational absurdity of continuing to defend Courland, he had ordered the preparation of a study code-named ‘Fall Laura’ (the Laura Case),<sup>144</sup> which proposed withdrawal to the two bridgeheads of Liepāja and Ventspils. The mass of the divisions cut off in Courland were to be evacuated from those two port towns.<sup>145</sup> Hitler nevertheless remained absolutely insistent on holding the existing positions.

There now began the *fifth Courland battle*, which took place in two phases. The initial phase, from 20 to 27 February 1945, seemed to go very well for the Red Army. With the German army group further weakened by the withdrawal of several

<sup>139</sup> Haupt, *Heeresgruppe Nord*, 309. The German losses amounted to 13,315 men; see BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2047, 991.

<sup>140</sup> BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2047, 993, 1084, 1109. <sup>141</sup> Ibid. 1086.

<sup>142</sup> Guderian had already demanded withdrawal from Courland from Hitler on 17 occasions in the preceding weeks, at the situation conferences on 9, 16, and 5 Oct.; 11, 18, 20, 23, 26, and 28 Nov.; 5 and 12 December; 9, 18, 19, 20, 22, and 28 January; see Haupt, *Kurland. Die letzte Front*, 66.

<sup>143</sup> Guderian, *Erinnerungen eines Soldaten*, 375. See also Grier, ‘Hitler’s Baltic Strategy’, 420–1.

<sup>144</sup> On the ‘Fall Laura’ study, see BA-MA RH 19 III/338.

<sup>145</sup> Haupt, *Heeresgruppe Nord*, 309–10; BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2047, 992 ff.

divisions, the Soviet units succeeded in capturing Priekule, which had been heavily fought over in previous battles. They then pushed forward to within 20 kilometres of the port city of Liepāja, before being stopped after losing 399 tanks and assault guns.<sup>146</sup> At that point, according to German figures, 21 German divisions, two of which were armoured, were facing approximately 100 corresponding enemy formations, including 25 armoured units.<sup>147</sup> The defenders' infantry combat strength was no more than 39,067 men. In the second phase of the battle (3 to 13 March), the Germans were able to reconfigure their units and stop the Soviet advance.<sup>148</sup> Immediately after the conclusion of the fighting, Gen. Carl Hilpert, until then commander-in-chief of Sixteenth Army, took over command of the army group.

The subject of Courland was raised at Führer headquarters for the last time on 18 March, when Grand Admiral Dönitz submitted a plan for a large-scale operation that would enable a considerable portion of the units enclosed on the peninsula to be evacuated. When Hitler categorically refused, the fate of the army group was finally sealed. The previous day had seen the start of the *sixth Courland battle* (17 to 28 March), the last battle fought on the peninsula. The violence of the attacks made it clear that the Soviet command was determined to deal the enclosed army group a death blow and resolve the Courland problem once and for all. Yet again, the Red Army massed all available forces for the decisive battle so as to be able, after the destruction of the German army group, to deploy as many units as possible in the offensive against Berlin. Its aim was to break through the German positions with 10th Guards Army as its spearhead and then push west via Saldus to the port city of Liepāja. To the defenders, 18 March seemed 'a day full of dread and terror'.<sup>149</sup> The Soviet artillery hammered the German positions with a rolling barrage, sparing only a few corridors through which the T-34s and Josef Stalin tanks rolled forward. This time the battle dissolved into a chaotic mêlée of separate engagements in which, in the endless expanse of forest and marsh, individual farms, road junctions, and bunkers were fought over.<sup>150</sup> The attackers' losses rose by leaps and bounds, with 263 tanks shot down in the first few days.<sup>151</sup> That was too much even for the Soviet high command, which broke off the offensive on 28 March. There was no seventh Courland battle. Instead, the mass of the Soviet units were withdrawn for deployment in the final attack on Germany.

Once again the army group was saved by good fortune. The attackers gave up just when the German units were at the end of their tether and another offensive thrust would probably have finished them off. The remaining 19 Courland divisions<sup>152</sup> were supplied only sporadically with ammunition and fuel. Moreover,

<sup>146</sup> BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2047, 1092.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid. 1000.

<sup>148</sup> Personnel losses on the German side in the fifth Courland battle amounted to approximately 22,500 men; see *ibid.* 1005.

<sup>149</sup> Haupt, *Das war Kurland*, 172.

<sup>150</sup> During the sixth Courland battle the Germans lost 17,037 men, 13 tanks, and 31 assault guns; see BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2047, 1016.

<sup>151</sup> Haupt, *Das war Kurland*, 181.

<sup>152</sup> See BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2047, 1023. According to Grier ('Hitler's Baltic Strategy', 310), there were 20 divisions. That makes no significant difference, however, since most of the divisions were no more than rudimentary combat units.

as a result of the increasing evacuations, they were so short of personnel that the 240-kilometre land front could be secured only by double sentries placed every 100 metres or so.<sup>153</sup> Yet in the last days of the war the defenders of Courland were more or less a 'forgotten army group'. The Soviet units adopted a waiting attitude, and in some sectors hardly a shot was fired. When the news of Hitler's death and the fall of Berlin arrived, it seemed like a far distant, almost unreal event. Attention was paid to the Courland units one last time, 'five minutes before the end', as it were. On 3 May a radio message arrived from the headquarters of Grand Admiral Dönitz, Hitler's successor, ordering withdrawal to the bridgeheads round the port towns of Liepāja and Ventspils, and 'the accelerated evacuation of numerous troop units'.<sup>154</sup> In any case, withdrawal of the front could be effected only on the extreme left wing near Tukums.

The enclosed troops learned of the impending German capitulation on 7 May. The war finally ended for them at 00.00 hrs on 9 May.<sup>155</sup> A total of 189,112 troops from Army Group Courland and Air Fleet 1, as well as 14,000 Latvian volunteers, were taken into captivity.<sup>156</sup> Before that, in the six Courland battles, the German defenders had suffered total losses of 117,871 dead, wounded, and missing.<sup>157</sup> The losses incurred by the Soviet forces, who repeatedly attacked the German positions frontally, must have been many times higher.<sup>158</sup>

## 6. CONCLUSION

### (a) Military-Operational Analysis

While the rest of the German eastern front was collapsing in the summer of 1944, Army Group North was able to hold its positions for a long time and finally make an orderly withdrawal. After its enclosure in Courland, which had been avoidable but was ordered by Hitler, it held off the Soviet attacks for seven months and was the only German army group remaining intact when the war ended. The following factors lay behind its successful defence:

<sup>153</sup> Haupt, *Heeresgruppe Nord*, 316.

<sup>154</sup> See *ibid.* 317. From 1 to 8 May 1945, 18,000 troops and 7,000 wounded were evacuated from Liepāja by ship; see KTB Skl. pt. A, lxviii, 468–9, 508.

<sup>155</sup> KTB Skl. pt. A, lxviii, 455.

<sup>156</sup> Haupt, *Das war Kurland*, 212. Of these approximately 203,000 men, around 125,000 were actual front-line troops; see BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2047, 1023.

<sup>157</sup> See list in Grier, 'Hitler's Baltic Strategy', 220.

<sup>158</sup> According to Haupt (*Heeresgruppe Nord*, 343), from October 1944 to May 1945 the Soviet units incurred total losses of 90,000 dead, 300,000 wounded, and 4,000 taken prisoner, and also lost 2,651 tanks and 722 aircraft. In his statistical appendix, however, Haupt gives no source for those figures. Comparable Soviet figures are largely missing. Gurkin provides some statistical data in a more recent account, but they relate only to 2nd Baltic Front and specifically to the period from 16 February to 8 May 1945, when the Red Army had already withdrawn a large number of its units and was fighting only half-heartedly in the final phase. In that period 2nd Baltic Front nevertheless lost 160,948 men, of whom 30,501 were irretrievable losses; see Gurkin, 'Liudskie poteri Sovetskikh Vooruzhennykh Sil', Table 1, No. 67.

### *Adaptation*

In the summer of 1944 Army Group North was fortunate to be attacked relatively late and thus had time to adapt to the new Soviet attacking methods. Its neighbour, Army Group Centre, fared very differently at the start of Operation BAGRATION. Thus Army Group North was able to react immediately and position deeply staggered blocking units and armoured reserves along the enemy's presumed main direction of thrust. Another reason for the collapse of Army Group Centre was Hitler's crazy idea of 'forward defence'. The destructive power of the Soviet artillery had increased to such an extent that several German front-line units were pulverized by rolling barrages of unimagined dimensions right at the beginning of the offensive. For that reason, Army Group North repeatedly adopted the 'major battle procedure' developed in the First World War, withdrawing the bulk of its units to a rearward major battle position in good time, before the start of the enemy's artillery barrage.<sup>159</sup>

### *Commander's Personality*

Army Group Centre was commanded by Field Marshal Ernst Busch, an unconditional Hitler 'yes man'. In exceptional situations requiring independent action—against wrong orders from the supreme command—he was no use at all. It was thus an advantage for Army Group North to have commanders-in-chief at the time who were cut from very different cloth. Although Generals Lindemann and Friessner were dismissed by Hitler very quickly, they had already taken independent decisions that protected their troops from disaster. During the critical phase from 23 July 1944 to 18 January 1945, command of the army group was in the hands of Col.-Gen. (later Field Marshal) Schörner, one of the Wehrmacht's most controversial generals.<sup>160</sup> He is repeatedly portrayed as a man who adhered slavishly to Hitler's concept of rigid defence and whose talent as a commander consisted solely in the ability to impose draconian measures that deterred his men from running away—hence the unflattering nickname 'Wild Ferdinand'. Detailed study of the files, however, yields a much more differentiated picture, as can be seen from recent research by the American military historian Howard Davis Grier.<sup>161</sup> Grier describes Schörner as a 'talented commander',<sup>162</sup> and shows the astonishing organizational skill with which he carried out a series of extremely difficult withdrawal operations in the Baltic region, such as Operation ASTER.<sup>163</sup> The attempt by a whole army group of half a million men to evade a far more motorized enemy could easily have ended in disaster if it had been less skilfully managed. Grier also takes issue with the

<sup>159</sup> Niepold, *Panzeroperationen*, 127.

<sup>160</sup> Kaltenegger's biography of Schörner is useful as a source of factual information but, in terms of historical analysis, sheds little light on his deployment as commander-in-chief of Army Group North.

<sup>161</sup> The author was also able to consult the German booty files in the Russian Military Archive in Podolsk, on which Grier himself drew in his doctoral thesis on 'Hitler's Baltic Strategy'. Examination of those files confirmed Grier's account.

<sup>162</sup> Grier, 'Hitler's Baltic Strategy', 613.

<sup>163</sup> See *ibid.* xiii–xiv, 167, 235–6, 243–4.

popular cliché of Schörner as a devoted follower of Hitler who carried out his orders uncritically. In reality, Schörner displayed harshness to his superiors as well as to the men under his command. In that phase of the war there were few German generals who opposed Hitler's wrong decisions so resolutely, and even fewer who managed to get their own way. At all events, Schörner had a mind of his own and was anything but a 'yes man'. No other military commander, with the possible exception of Model, dared so often to contravene Hitler's orders when they were obviously wrong.<sup>164</sup> The evacuation of the Sôrve peninsula on his own authority, for example, was an act of open disobedience. This clarification of Schörner's military qualities, however, should by no means be taken as throwing his whole personality into a new light. There can be no doubt that he was a fanatical Nazi who enforced his decisions with extreme harshness. Nevertheless, as Grier puts it, the contemporary portrait of Schörner needs some 'revision'.<sup>165</sup>

### *Primary Group Effect*

The battles fought by Army Group North during the Russian campaign took a distinctly untypical course compared with those of the other army groups. Until the summer of 1942 the German troops on the southern wing stormed forward over huge distances to the Volga at Stalingrad and right into the Caucasus. They subsequently had to fight protracted and dramatic withdrawal battles over the same distances. In contrast, in the summer of 1941 Army Group North managed in only a few weeks to advance 800 kilometres into the Leningrad–Lake Lagoda area, its operational target. It held that position almost unchanged until the beginning of 1944, when it had to make a relative short withdrawal to the Narva on the eastern border of the Baltic region. Thus it had gone through the war until then relatively unscathed. While the armies in the southern sector of the eastern front had suffered painful losses and had been through the mill in terms of personnel resources, the units of Army Group North had remained remarkably intact. Many of those units still contained men who had been fighting in them since 1941 and were firmly welded together in primary groups. Those who had joined them later were also fully integrated. The importance of such a cohesion factor in the inferno of war cannot be overestimated. Immediately after the end of the Second World War, American military sociologists had already reached the conclusion that the military impact of an army was primarily a function of the internal cohesion of the 'small fighting community', from squad to company level.<sup>166</sup>

<sup>164</sup> Ibid. 167; see also 243–4, 613.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid. 613.

<sup>166</sup> The article by Shils and Janowitz, 'Cohesion and Disintegration in the Wehrmacht in World War II', has become a classic on the subject. During the war the two military sociologists interviewed numerous German prisoners on behalf of the US Army, which led them to revise fundamentally their preconceived ideas about the role of ideology. One German officer told them: 'the political indoctrination and rhetoric were total nonsense'. Rather, 'the readiness of men to obey their officers' depended on the latters' personality; *ibid.* 29. The role of the internal cohesion of primary groups was later also analysed in the context of the US Army's shortcomings in the Vietnam War; see, e.g., Gabriel and Savage, *Crisis in Command*.

Furthermore, the phenomenon of the ‘Courland divisions’ confirms once again the argument of the Israeli military historian Martin van Creveld that the fighting power of the Wehrmacht was attributable less to National Socialist conviction than to ‘the army’s internal organization’.<sup>167</sup> At all events, Army Group North possessed probably the best units on the eastern front, on account of its largely intact primary groups, which was certainly one of the reasons why it was able to hold out so long against such enormous superiority. That also explains why Hitler’s decision to place those valuable divisions on the sidelines in Courland aroused such incomprehension and fury on the part of Guderian and other generals. Instead of them, numerous newly formed units, lacking both combat experience and group cohesion, were thrown into the front line to defend the Reich territory.

### *Enemy Inefficiency*

The defensive successes of Army Group North were of course due not only to the ability of its own forces but also to mistakes on the part of the enemy. The following example is particularly telling: while the officers of Army Group Centre who reported after Operation BAGRATION were full of astonishment at the new Soviet attacking methods, those of Army Group North wondered why the enemy, with his superior strength, was still unable to prevail. It seemed as if the qualitative leap which had led to the Red Army’s surprising successes in the summer of 1944 had not affected all troop units. Only two operational phases impressed the German General Staff officers: the unstoppable advance of 1st Baltic Front to the Gulf of Riga in June–July and its surprisingly swift change of the point of main effort on the left wing at the beginning of October 1944. In any case, the enemy was by no means underestimated, as a later study shows: ‘The Russians were the most dangerous enemy imaginable. The danger lay in the primitive toughness, willingness to serve, and endurance of the individual soldier, the numerical superiority of the units and personnel reserves, and the brutality of the commanders.’<sup>168</sup> Their closeness to nature, the ability to cross seemingly impassable swamps and even to fight in arctic conditions, also made them thoroughly awkward opponents. However, what could never be sufficiently eliminated, despite all the progress in the course of the campaign, was the remarkable conventionality and sluggishness of the Soviet command. The numerous tactical successes were almost never exploited at operational level. In the words of the study, the enemy achieved ‘no victory of annihilation, only “ordinary” successes. His troops clearly lacked autonomy, decision-making capability, and manoeuvrability at the middle, lower, and lowest levels of command.’<sup>169</sup> These observations culminate in the sentence: ‘The execution of purely tactical assaults by the Russians against the front of the weak Army Group North can only [ . . . ] be described as unimaginative and, as regards the high level of forces deployed, absurd.’<sup>170</sup> The astonishing failures of the army fronts deployed on the northern wing aroused displeasure even on the part of their own

<sup>167</sup> Creveld, *Fighting Power*, 163.

<sup>168</sup> BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2047, 1034.

<sup>169</sup> BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2046, 697.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid. 781.

command. This can be seen even from the Soviet-era *History of the Great Patriotic War of the Soviet Union*, despite the fact that this serial work otherwise inclines to a decidedly iconographic presentation of history. Thus, the discussion in the chapter on offensive operations in the Baltic region ends with the noteworthy sentence: ‘There were also considerable shortcomings in the command of troops.’<sup>171</sup>

### (b) Hitler’s Utopian Strategy: Courland as a Bridgehead for ‘Final Victory’

The ‘fortified places’ designated by Hitler were large towns that were usually defended by a single division. The concept had now been taken so far that the whole of Courland was to be held, as a ‘fortified area’, by an entire army group. The consequent ‘sidelining’ of Army Group North was later described as an operational and strategic ‘enormity’.<sup>172</sup> Almost all the arguments which Hitler had still been invoking in the summer of 1944 to justify keeping the army group in the Baltic area were invalid by September at the latest: Finland was out of the war; the Soviet fleet had broken through the German mine barriers and advanced into the Baltic; Sweden had closed its ports to German ships and was no longer delivering any ore.<sup>173</sup> Thus, after the loss of almost the whole Baltic area, possession of the Courland peninsula seemed strategically irrelevant. But the most important reason to evacuate Courland was that the divisions stationed there were needed urgently to defend the Reich on the eastern front. Guderian was propounding the idea of a core-area defence of central Europe, and wanted all troops withdrawn from the periphery—from Italy, Norway, and the Balkans, and above all from Courland.<sup>174</sup> Opposition was growing even within the Party. Erich Koch, for example, the Gauleiter of East Prussia, called insistently for the withdrawal of Army Group North.<sup>175</sup> The units in Courland constituted the largest troop contingent ever enclosed by the Red Army. The number of soldiers was about twice as high as that of the Sixth Army troops in the Stalingrad pocket, with the difference that Army Group North had let itself be enclosed in the pocket ‘voluntarily’, on Hitler’s orders. We shall now examine the real or imagined grounds for Hitler’s decision.

#### *Tying Down Enemy Forces*

At the end of November Army Group North HQ asked why the Red Army would not attack East Prussia or the centre of the eastern front ‘with all available forces’ and use only ‘the necessary minimum’ to keep the Courland divisions enclosed in

<sup>171</sup> *Geschichte des Großen Vaterländischen Krieges*, iv. 413. Muriev’s article also contains critical remarks, especially about the deployment of tanks; see Muriev, ‘Nekotorye kharakternye cherty’, 28.

<sup>172</sup> BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2047, 1027.

<sup>173</sup> Grier, ‘Hitler’s Baltic Strategy’, 213. On Hitler’s estimate of Swedish neutrality, see *ibid.* 452 ff. and 601–2. On Germany’s long-lasting trade relations with Sweden, see *Germany and the Second World War*, v/II, 547–50.

<sup>174</sup> Guderian, *Erinnerungen eines Soldaten*, 337, 374.

<sup>175</sup> Lasch, *So fiel Königsberg*, 28.

the peninsula. It believed the answer to that question was as follows: ‘The peripheral fortress of Courland is close enough to the concept of a “flanking position” in Moltke’s meaning of the word [...] for the Russians, however unwillingly, not to bypass it operationally.’<sup>176</sup> That calculation seemed accurate at first sight. Even though both sides were continually withdrawing troops, the number of Soviet units was always many times greater than the German. At the end of October there were two German armies in the Courland pocket, with a total of 33 divisions or combat groups. In contrast, the Soviet forces numbered around 200 units.<sup>177</sup> In May 1945 there remained 19 emaciated German divisions, and they were still faced by nine Soviet armies with some 86 rifle divisions and up to 85 armoured units.<sup>178</sup> It is a remarkable fact that in the spring of 1945 relative Soviet superiority was even greater than during the first Courland battle in October 1944.<sup>179</sup> Hitler’s plan of tying down the greatest possible number of enemy units in Courland seemed to have succeeded.

However, as Lt.-Gen. (ret.) Friedrich Sixt showed in a later study, the absence of the Courland divisions on the home front weighed ‘many times more heavily’ than that of the Soviet forces tied down by them. Moreover, Army Group North had ceased to be an ‘operational factor’ and was primarily engaged in a struggle for ‘self-preservation’ that had ‘virtually no effect’ on the main front.<sup>180</sup> At that point in time the German forces on the eastern front were barely sufficient to cover the front lines. But the main problem was the lack of any operational reserve. In the event of a major Soviet offensive there was the danger that a single operational breakthrough would bring down the front like a house of cards. In those circumstances, the deployment of an entire army group—one of a total of four on the eastern front—in Courland, far from the main front, must have seemed positively absurd. In the summer of 1944, when that army group had a huge area to defend, there had been hardly any tanks at its disposal. Now, however, when the army group was pressed together in a small area, Hitler had a large number of fighting vehicles deployed on the small peninsula. In March 1945 there were 510 tanks and assault guns, of which 330 were operational, in that confined space. As Guderian pointed out sarcastically, that was about as many fighting vehicles as there were on the whole western front.<sup>181</sup>

The deployment of German units in Courland was successful tactically but it proved to be a mistake at the strategic level. That was shown by the speed with which the Vistula front collapsed in January. Hitler’s decisions had disastrous consequences above all for the civilian population of Germany’s eastern territories which fell into the hands of the Red Army. As explained in the previously mentioned study by Friedrich Sixt, Army Group North felt ‘called upon to defend East Prussia’.<sup>182</sup> Motivation must have been a factor, since most of its troops came from East Prussia or Germany’s other eastern provinces. Now those men were

<sup>176</sup> KTB HGr Nord, 30 Nov. 1944, CAMO, F. 500, Op. 12459, d. 80, fo. 414.

<sup>177</sup> Grier, ‘Hitler’s Baltic Strategy’, 398. <sup>178</sup> Ibid. 399.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid. 403. <sup>180</sup> BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2047, 1027–8.

<sup>181</sup> Grier, ‘Hitler’s Baltic Strategy’, 223. <sup>182</sup> BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2047, 1024.

required to defend a distant peninsula instead of their endangered homeland. When the Red Army on the Oder began its storming advance on Berlin in April 1945, it finally became clear that the defence of Courland had been perverted into a pure end in itself. The troops stationed there shared the fate of the Wehrmacht soldiers who had been obliged to stay behind on the Channel Islands after the withdrawal from France. In the middle of the war they had already established their own prisoner-of-war camp.<sup>183</sup>

In conclusion, the tying down of enemy forces, successful at first sight, was carried to absurd lengths given the negative consequences for defence of the Reich. It would nevertheless be wrong to see it as only one of many wrong operational decisions on the part of the 'dilettante' Hitler. For Hitler, tying down forces—even if he often made use of that argument for propaganda purposes—was in fact of secondary importance. After all, the temporary tying down of enemy forces could only win time, not the war.

### *Testing New U-boats*

The army generals could not offer Hitler a recipe for victory. All their proposals were aimed at delaying the inevitable defeat. The prospects opened up by the naval command were of a wholly different order.<sup>184</sup> Dönitz wanted to regain the initiative in the sea war by deploying the new Type XXI and Type XXII U-boats.<sup>185</sup> The two new models represented a qualitative leap in terms of technology in comparison with conventional submarines.<sup>186</sup> But the navy needed a little more time to test the new U-boats and train the crews. In that respect, possession of Courland was definitely important: on the one hand, because of its naval bases, and on the other, because of control of the eastern Baltic. One may therefore suppose that Hitler may have been thinking less of the eastern front than of the Atlantic Ocean. That would also accord with his main strategic idea of first forcing the Anglo-American adversaries in the west out of the war and then concentrating on the real enemy in the east. Hitler's overall strategy envisaged a combined land-sea operation against the western powers, in which the planned Ardennes offensive was intended to defeat them decisively on the European mainland.<sup>187</sup> It was by no means accidental that the said offensive was directed towards Antwerp, whose port was particularly important.

At this point, a word of clarification is needed. However necessary the testing of the new U-boats and the training of their crews may have been, it could have also been carried out to a limited extent off Germany's Baltic coast. The 'Assmann Report' of 19 July 1944 had already pointed out that the Gulf of Danzig was considerably more important for E-boat and U-boat training than was the Baltic Coast.<sup>188</sup> In the

<sup>183</sup> See Weinberg, *A World at Arms*, 721.

<sup>184</sup> Dönitz, 'Die Deutsche Seekriegsführung', 56, BA-MA RM 6/374.

<sup>185</sup> Grier, 'Hitler's Baltic Strategy', 602 ff.; see also 213, 495, 499 ff.

<sup>186</sup> Salewski, *Die deutsche Seekriegsleitung*, ii. 528.

<sup>187</sup> Weinberg, *A World at Arms*, 720–1.

<sup>188</sup> See the previously quoted 'Assmann Report', BA-MA RM 7/101, fos. 101–2.

literature so far, Grand Admiral Dönitz has repeatedly been blamed for talking the Führer into holding on to Courland unconditionally. In reality, the matter is not so clear-cut. It is true that Dönitz originally demanded categorically that the Baltic area be defended. At the end of July 1944, however, under the shock of the collapse of Army Group Centre, his staff—as already mentioned—submitted ideas regarding the evacuation of Estonia, designed to spare Army Group North a similar fate. During the conference at Führer headquarters on 9 July, the commander-in-chief of the navy surprisingly switched sides and contradicted Hitler, who was refusing withdrawal on grounds of maritime strategy. In the grand admiral's view, possession of the Baltic coast was of no value if the Red Army succeeded in advancing to the Baltic Sea further south.<sup>189</sup> That was precisely what happened in mid-October, when Army Group North was enclosed in Courland. Dönitz had started shifting his ground anyway, and finally, with considerable reluctance, he took the opposite course to that of the Führer.<sup>190</sup> It suited him very well that Hitler was now taking a great interest in the navy's new U-boats, and that he himself was becoming a favourite of Hitler's, but unconditional retention of Courland was by no means a demand of his.<sup>191</sup> This misunderstanding apparently arose because, without Dönitz's knowledge, Hitler invoked reasons of naval strategy vis-à-vis the Army General Staff.<sup>192</sup> On 17 March 1945, Guderian sought a meeting with Dönitz in order to clarify the matter. The grand admiral assured him that he had 'no interest in holding on to Courland' and that 'supplying Courland was simply a burden for the navy'.<sup>193</sup> That was also confirmed at the following situation conference by Hitler, who stressed that his reasons for holding Courland lay 'solely in the field of land warfare'.<sup>194</sup> Dönitz stated clearly after the war: 'In no form, and at no Führer conference, did I ever demand that Courland be held.'<sup>195</sup> As he went on to explain, 'holding a strip of land in the Baltic

<sup>189</sup> *Lagevorträge*, 596; KTB HGr Nord, 9 July 1944, BA-MA RH 19 III/311, fos. 177–8. On this, see the letter to Ruge of 11 July 1961 in the Dönitz papers and the appended record of the conference at Führer headquarters on 9 July 1944, BA-MA N 236/7, fos. 61–3.

<sup>190</sup> A particular role was played indirectly by the assassination attempt on Hitler on 20 July. The day before, Capt. S. Assmann, an operations staff officer in the Naval Operations Division of the OKW Operations Staff, had taken the initiative on evacuation of the Baltic region. Via Grand Admiral Dönitz, he had tried to persuade the Führer of the need for a partial withdrawal of Army Group North. But Assmann had been wounded during the assassination attempt and was absent during this important phase. In addition, the assassination attempt had suddenly altered the mood: now only 'stand firm' slogans were acceptable. Given the heated atmosphere, Dönitz temporarily accepted Hitler's concept of rigid defence of the Baltic region; Salewski, *Die deutsche Seekriegsleitung*, ii. 464–5.

<sup>191</sup> Dönitz's role in the retention of Courland is frequently overstated. That is also one of the few weaknesses in Grier's otherwise excellent dissertation. See Grier, 'Hitler's Baltic Strategy', 114, 602–3, 606–7. On the one hand, Dönitz did not consider Courland particularly important in terms of naval strategy; on the other, it was Hitler who influenced Dönitz with regard to Courland—not the other way round.

<sup>192</sup> On this, see the letter to Ruge of 11 July 1961 in the Dönitz papers, BA-MA N 236/7, fos. 61–2, in which a whole series of minutes of conferences are cited in support.

<sup>193</sup> Admiral z.b.V. beim Ob.d.M. Brief-Nr. 244/45 Gk. Chef-Sache, 'Teilnahme des Ob.d.M. an der Führerlage am 17.3.1945 um 16.00 Uhr' (copy), BA-MA, Dönitz papers, N 236/7, fo. 64.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid.

<sup>195</sup> See the previously cited letter from Dönitz to Ruge, BA-MA N 236/7, fo. 61.

area [ . . . ] which served no blocking purpose' was 'of no major significance in terms of naval strategy'.<sup>196</sup>

### *Courland as a Strategic Bridgehead for 'Final Victory'*

Hitler is often described as a pure "stand firm" strategist<sup>197</sup> who confined himself in the second half of the war to preventing (necessary) withdrawals. The fate of Army Group North enclosed in Courland is cited as a prime example. However, comparison with other front sectors does not confirm that cliché. In the summer and autumn of 1944, when Army Group North was repeatedly stopped by his 'stand firm' orders, Hitler approved a whole series of large-scale withdrawal movements in other theatres of war. In the west, his armies retreated from the Atlantic coast through France and Belgium, in some places as far as the German border. The northern sector of Finland was evacuated, as were parts of northern Italy and most of the Balkans, especially Greece, Albania, and Serbia. In western Europe, Hitler abandoned several regions which were important for the war economy or for reasons of prestige, without further ado. The same criteria did not apply to the relatively unimportant area of Courland. It follows that Hitler must have been pursuing a quite specific plan with regard to that peninsula.

There appears to be a parallel in the case of the Kuban bridgehead. At the end of 1942 Army Group A was similarly deployed on the periphery, in the Caucasus, like Army Group North later on in the Baltic region. In both cases a disaster occurred in the neighbouring sector of the front: first at Stalingrad and then with the collapse of Army Group Centre. On each occasion the generals called for a counter-attack by the army group stationed on the periphery, but Hitler refused. Instead, at the beginning of 1943, the bulk of Army Group A, consisting of some 400,000 men, was ordered to withdraw to a bridgehead on the Kuban peninsula, opposite Crimea. Supposedly, the purpose was to tie down the Red Army's Transcaucasian units on the east coast of the Black Sea. In the medium term, however, Hitler adopted an offensive strategy, since he intended to use the bridgehead as a springboard for the conquest of the Maykop oilfields in front of the Caucasus, which he did not want to relinquish for reasons of war economy. Hence his motto, as recorded by Zeitzler: 'I shall attack there again.'<sup>198</sup> During the second half of the war Hitler pursued similar aims with other bridgeheads too, such as the Tunis bridgehead to which the Africa Corps had withdrawn.<sup>199</sup>

Hitler thought strategically, whereas his generals tended to think in operational and tactical terms. As a result, the far-reaching ideas the dictator was actually

<sup>196</sup> Ibid., fo. 62.

<sup>197</sup> The expression "stand firm" strategy is inherently self-contradictory. The term 'standing firm' (= static defence) is a tactical concept and is not equivalent to strategic defence. Operational defence itself comprises several *tactical* combat methods, from static defence to active delaying tactics and mobile defence by means of counter-attacks.

<sup>198</sup> Col.-Gen. (ret.) Zeitzler, 'Das Ringen um die großen Entscheidungen im zweiten Weltkriege', pt. 2, BA-MA, Zeitzler papers, N 63/80, 30, fo. 31,

<sup>199</sup> The author is grateful to Capt. (ret.) Gerhard Schreiber for drawing attention to this.

pursuing in the case of Courland did not even occur to many of them. Even those who did learn of them, like General Otto Lasch, tended to dismiss them as 'wanton fantasy'.<sup>200</sup> Yet in internal discussions Hitler declared unmistakably his intention to 'return to the attack from this bridgehead'.<sup>201</sup> His grounds were as follows: 'I am expecting a change in the situation shortly and will need Courland in order to thrust into the Russian flank'.<sup>202</sup> Thus, the Courland bridgehead was intended to be used as the springboard for a future offensive, just as Hitler had intended to do with the Kuban bridgehead at the time. Not only did that idea seem like reckless fantasy to the generals who were in the know, but almost all historians subsequently failed to take it seriously.<sup>203</sup>

In reality, the solution to the Courland puzzle lies not in the waters of the Baltic Sea but in the forests of the Ardennes. That is where Hitler's sought-after 'change in the situation'<sup>204</sup> was to be achieved, since he planned to inflict a decisive defeat on the supposedly war-weary western Allies by means of a 'lightning offensive'. That in turn was to be the precondition for an ensuing offensive in the east, which he intended to launch against the Red Army from Courland.<sup>205</sup> Hitler's top priority was to force the western powers out of the war: he considered them, in any case, as adversaries imposed on him and, once they were out of the way, he would be able to throw all his forces against the real enemy in the east. That, in his view, was where the great area lay for expansion of the German people's 'Lebensraum'. The dictator considered the inherent contradictions in the Allied coalition so serious that in December 1944 he predicted it would soon split apart, 'with a huge clap of thunder'.<sup>206</sup> He even speculated on the possibility of the western powers' changing sides, in which case Courland could be an important bargaining counter.<sup>207</sup> Those musings were not entirely devoid of substance, since the mistrustful Soviet leadership also feared that, if the tide of war turned in the west, the United States and Britain might leave the alliance owing to the mood of disappointment in their own countries. Nor did it rule out the possibility that those two countries might later come to an arrangement with Hitler or another German government and turn against the Soviet Union. That being so, the Courland bridgehead must have

<sup>200</sup> Lasch, *So fiel Königsberg*, 28.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid.

<sup>202</sup> Haupt, *Kurland. Die letzte Front*, 66. See also Tippelskirch, *Geschichte des Zweiten Weltkrieges*, 489; Dieckert and Grossmann, *Der Kampf um Ostpreußen*; Görlitz, *Der Zweite Weltkrieg*, 462; Kabath, 'Seebrückenköpfe', 253.

<sup>203</sup> The best example is the study by Lt.-Gen. (ret.) Sixt, to which we have already referred several times, 'Feldzug gegen die Sowjetunion im Nordabschnitt der Ostfront' ('The campaign against the Soviet Union in the northern sector of the eastern front'); see BA-MA, Study ZA 1/2046 and 2047. While the military-operational relations are analysed brilliantly, it lacks a strategic interpretation that examines Hitler's overriding ideas.

<sup>204</sup> See Haupt, *Kurland. Die letzte Front*, 66. See also Tippelskirch, *Geschichte des Zweiten Weltkrieges*, 489; Dieckert and Grossmann, *Der Kampf um Ostpreußen*; Görlitz, *Der Zweite Weltkrieg*, 462; Kabath, 'Seebückenköpfe', 253.

<sup>205</sup> Grier pointed to this connection in his dissertation supervised by Professor Weinberg; see Grier, 'Hitler's Baltic Strategy', 438 ff.

<sup>206</sup> See Jung, *Ardennen-Offensive*, 118.

<sup>207</sup> Lakowski, 'Ostseebrückenköpfe', 31–2.

seemed a serious threat.<sup>208</sup> It should be remembered in this connection that the Baltic region had already served as a German bridgehead in 1919.

A chronological comparison of the withdrawal from the Baltic countries with the course of planning for the Ardennes offensive reveals remarkable connections. While Hitler was preparing the next offensive in the Ardennes, he was already planning the next but one, namely an offensive from the Baltic region against the Red Army. That strategic view also explains his rejection—against all operational logic—of his generals' repeated demands for the withdrawal of Army Group North. At the end of July, when the invasion battle in Normandy was lost, Hitler had already decided on an offensive against the western powers. On 16 September—for the first time at a widely attended conference—he revealed his plan to launch an attack from the Ardennes in November in the direction of Antwerp.<sup>209</sup> That same day he authorized Schörner to evacuate Estonia, but ordered Riga to be held unconditionally with Courland as hinterland. When the Red Army temporarily halted its attacks in the Baltic region on 24 September, the last chance had arrived to extract Army Group North from the 'Baltic trap'. Hitler rejected that demand,<sup>210</sup> and almost simultaneously (on 25 September) instructed Alfred Jodl to draw up a detailed plan of operations for the Ardennes offensive.<sup>211</sup> Then, in October, the Red Army launched a new large-scale offensive and immediately achieved an operational breakthrough. As Hitler still forbade withdrawal, Army Group North was cut off in Courland. The decisive date was 20 October, when the exhausted Soviet troops stopped their attacks. Yet that same day, to Schörner's great disappointment, Hitler banned Operation VULTURE, the intended breakthrough to East Prussia. Instead, the Führer definitively ordered Army Group North to remain in Courland. Two days later, on 22 October, he announced that the Ardennes offensive was to begin on 25 November, that is, in about a month's time.<sup>212</sup> The start of the operation had to be postponed in any case, since more troops had to be withdrawn from other fronts. And to the amazement of his generals, Hitler left an entire army group, including strong armoured units, standing in Courland, when it would have been urgently needed in the Ardennes.<sup>213</sup> When the Ardennes offensive failed, however, the dictator had a noticeable change of mind. Whereas he had previously uncompromisingly refused the removal of units from Courland, in January 1945 he allowed the withdrawal of several divisions, and even had the Memel bridgehead to the south evacuated completely. Clearly, the Courland bridgehead had lost strategic importance as the result of a far-distant event in the Ardennes.

<sup>208</sup> The author is grateful for this pointer from the Russian military historian Tsygankov, whom he was able to consult at the Military History Institute in Moscow on 22 March 2000.

<sup>209</sup> Jung, *Ardennen-Offensive*, 101–2.

<sup>210</sup> Significantly, Hitler further assigned Third Armoured Army to Army Group North to reinforce his intention to hold part of the Baltic region.

<sup>211</sup> Jung, *Ardennen-Offensive*, 102.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid. 108–9.

<sup>213</sup> At the beginning of December, for example, Waffen SS General Felix Steiner demanded of Heinrich Himmler 'the evacuation of the Courland pocket, which is now urgently necessary'. In his view, 'an estimated 30 divisions' were lacking for the attack on Antwerp. That was more or less the number of divisions stationed in Courland at that point in time; see Steiner, *Die Freiwilligen*, 310.

Astonishingly, Hitler could not even now be persuaded to withdraw his troops from the Baltic region entirely, although the eastern front collapsed in January and the Soviet units could advance from the Oder to the Vistula. There would have been enough time for a comprehensive evacuation, since the Red Army had then to prepare its final offensive against Berlin. In the spring of 1945, while improvised German units struggled in vain to hold back the onrushing Soviet divisions, the number of battle-tried troops still in Courland would have sufficed to repel the attacks of the nine enemy armies. Hitler's refusal to allow their withdrawal was one of the strangest acts in the final phase of the war. His determination to hold on to Courland in that desperate situation, however, proves that he had not yet finally given the war up for lost. On the home front the Courland divisions could only have delayed defeat, whereas from their exposed position in the Baltic region they were intended, in the event of the turnaround which Hitler was awaiting, to play a decisive role in 'final victory'.

It is precisely the fate of Army Group Courland that reveals Hitler's irrational 'all-or-nothing' strategy with shocking clarity. He despised the operational damage-limitation management of his general staff, which was entirely geared to what Clausewitz termed the 'negative purpose' of war.<sup>214</sup> Instead, he worked himself up into an 'auto-suggestive victory euphoria'.<sup>215</sup> He apparently believed in a last-minute 'miracle', comparable to the 'miracle of the House of Brandenburg',<sup>216</sup> when Frederick the Great had been saved by the sudden collapse of the enemy alliance after the war seemed already lost. Hitler was clearly no longer counting on a military solution, and positioned his remaining military potential with regard to the political turnaround which he still hoped would happen. He was like a gambler going for broke who puts all his remaining money on a single risky throw of the dice. Thus he also refused to evacuate 'Fortress Norway', despite Guderian's vehement insistence that he needed every man for defence of the Reich. In October 1944, when the Red Army first set foot on German soil in East Prussia, half a million Wehrmacht troops were stationed in Norway, ready to take part in 'final victory'.<sup>217</sup>

As we have seen, Hitler was convinced that wars could not be won defensively, but only offensively. In the view of his armaments minister, Albert Speer, he had manoeuvred himself into such a hopeless position that there remained only the choice between 'the offensive or defeat'.<sup>218</sup> It therefore seems wrong to see Hitler's

<sup>214</sup> Clausewitz, *Vom Kriege*. Pt. 2, Bk. 6, Ch. I/2, 615.

<sup>215</sup> On this, see the author's remarks in Part V, Chapter I.1 of the present volume.

<sup>216</sup> The radio message sent by the newly established Dönitz government to the German embassy in Tokyo on 7 May (!) 1945 is particularly telling. It begins with the words: 'The Führer seems to have believed to the last moment that he would be able to achieve a turnaround in this war by means of a military success in the decisive battle for Berlin.' See Oberkommando der Kriegsmarine, Marine Attaché [sic] Abteilung z.Zt. Flensburg-Mürwik, 7 May 1945, '[Johann Ludwig] Graf Schwerin von Krosigk an Mar. Att. Tokio für Botschafter [Heinrich Georg] Stahmer', BA-MA RM 7/854, fos. 154–5.

<sup>217</sup> October 1944 saw a huge increase in German forces in Norway with the arrival of 20th Mountain Army, which had been deployed in Finland up till then; see Bohn, 'Der Rückzug am Eismeer', 115.

<sup>218</sup> Speer, *Spandau: The Secret Diaries*, 15.

decision of 20 October 1944 to keep Army Group North in the Courland pocket simply as a rigid operational ‘stand firm’ order. ‘Fortress Courland’ had more than the defensive function of a dike against the advancing Red Army. Rather, that bridgehead was intended to serve as the springboard for an offensive once the tide of war had turned in the west as a result of the thrust from the Ardennes.<sup>219</sup> The dictator was acting absolutely consistently, within the confines of his own imminent logic. The Courland plan was a re-edition of his strategy in the early summer of 1944, which can be expressed by the simple formula ‘hold on in the east, strike in the west’. At that time, the idea had been to inflict a decisive defeat on the western powers in the invasion battle on the Atlantic coast so as to force them out of the war, while the German units on the eastern front rigidly defended Hitler’s ‘fortified places’. The divisions which had been deployed in the west could then be transferred to the eastern front and all forces concentrated against the exhausted Red Army.

Let us now take another look at Hitler’s concept of ‘fortified places’ in the light of his Baltic strategy. Like ‘Fortress Courland’ at a later stage, the ‘fortified places’ in the Russian interior in the summer of 1944 by no means had only a defensive function. Rather, they were intended to serve as springboards for a new offensive in the east after the expected turn in the war.<sup>220</sup> That also explains many incongruities in the designation of those areas and in the course of the front, which sometimes appeared to defy all military logic. From the defensive viewpoint, it made no sense to mass so many divisions in what was probably the most endangered sector of the eastern front, namely the Vitebsk salient—hence the protest by Col.-Gen. Georg-Hans Reinhardt. The assessment is quite different, however, if such front salients were intended to serve as points of departure for a future offensive. Similarly, it seemed incomprehensible on tactical grounds that, further to the south, Hitler required Fourth Army to hold an enormous bridgehead east of the Dnieper at Mogilev instead of withdrawing the main defence line to the elevated west bank of the river. That decision too can be understood only in the light of plans for a future offensive. Hitler pursued an extremely risky ‘all or nothing’ strategy which, in the event of failure, was bound to have catastrophic operational consequences. Thus, Army Group Centre was forced to hold the Belorussian balcony, which protruded far to the west, from exposed positions, instead of developing a favourable defensive position in depth along the Berezina as its HQ demanded. The subsequent fiasco was thereby programmed in advance.

Hitler was absolutely determined to get out of the ‘permanent defensive’<sup>221</sup> and seize the initiative, and his attacking mania finally assumed bizarre forms. The more desperate the situation became, the more resolutely he plunged ahead regardless. He no longer believed in anything but the ‘power of the will’.<sup>222</sup> But although at

<sup>219</sup> Grier (‘Hitler’s Baltic Strategy’, 438 ff., 601 ff.) explicitly assigns an offensive bridgehead function of that kind to Courland alone. In reality, Hitler applied the same offensive concept to the ‘fortified places’ located in Germany’s interior.

<sup>220</sup> The ‘Belorussian balcony’ was seen by the Soviets as a ‘strategic bridgehead’ of the Wehrmacht; see Timokhovich, ‘Operatsia Bagration’, 55.

<sup>221</sup> See Jung, *Ardennen-Offensive*, 103.

<sup>222</sup> Manstein, *Verlorene Siege*, 307.

the end of 1944 he again staked everything on one card and threw his last reserves into the balance against the western powers, that effort too proved insufficient, precisely for reasons of logistics. The 1944 Ardennes offensive turned into a parody of the first Ardennes offensive in 1940—a ‘blitzkrieg without petrol’.<sup>223</sup> Some of the armoured units did not even have enough fuel to reach the Allied supply camp, which the German forces were supposed to capture so as to refuel and continue the attack to Antwerp. The failure of that second ‘sickle cut’ to the Channel coast put paid to the preconditions for Hitler’s unrealistic plans in the Baltic. With the Ardennes offensive ending in a farce, the planned Courland offensive proved a chimera.

By that time Hitler’s visions and utopias could scarcely still be transformed into a strategy. He was engaged in a pure all-or-nothing wager in which he placed his only hope in a last-minute collapse of the enemy alliance. Such an act of desperation was a criminal risk, given what total defeat would mean for the German people. The German quartermaster-general, Erich Ludendorff, later designated the ‘prophet of total war’,<sup>224</sup> had shown no qualms about the numbers of lives sacrificed in earlier battles of attrition, but even he finally came to realize that ‘warfare had assumed the character [...] of a reckless game of chance, which I have always considered pernicious. For me, the fate of the German people was too important to gamble with. The war had to be ended.’<sup>225</sup> Hitler, on the other hand, had no such scruples. For him there was only ‘final victory’ or downfall. At the end of 1941 he had already cynically declared: ‘In this, too, I am as cold as ice. If the German people proves no longer strong enough, or sufficiently self-sacrificing, to pay for its existence with its own blood, then let it perish and be destroyed by another, stronger power [...] then I shall shed no tears for the German people.’<sup>226</sup>

<sup>223</sup> Frieser, *Ardennen–Sedan*, 311.

<sup>224</sup> See Wallach, *Das Dogma der Vernichtungsschlacht*, 352 ff.

<sup>225</sup> Ludendorff, *Meine Kriegserinnerungen*, 551.

<sup>226</sup> Quoted in Haffner, *Anmerkungen zu Hitler*, 152. A similar pronouncement is reported in Speer, *Erinnerungen*, 446.

# V. The Battles for Galicia and the Beskid Mountains

*Klaus Schönherr*

When Army Group South halted in eastern Galicia at the end of March 1944, it had been obliged to move back more than 300 kilometres since December 1943 in the face of enemy forces that were superior in almost every respect. Albeit with great difficulty, the German troops had managed to withstand the Red Army's latest attempts to destroy them while they were still east of the Carpathians and the Beskids. Fortunately for the army group, after an offensive lasting several months, 1st and 2nd Ukrainian Fronts no longer had the necessary strength to achieve their operational objectives. The Soviet attack lost its drive and momentum, and the German withdrawal was put on hold for the time being.

## 1. ARMY GROUP NORTH UKRAINE IN GALICIA

After a three-month retreat Army Group North Ukraine, as Army Group South had been called since 5 April, was able to establish a weak defensive front on the Kovel–Brody–Kolomyia line at the beginning of the month. The Galician territory, which the army group was now shielding to the east, covered the northern slopes and the foothills of the Carpathian forest between the upper Vistula and the upper Prut, and was of considerable strategic and economic importance.

From a military point of view, the area consisted of two parts. While the northern part of Galicia formed a bridge to the industrial district of southern Poland and Upper Silesia, the mountain barrier of the Carpathian forest provided almost perfect protection for the Hungarian lowland plain. The Brody–Lvov–Cracow axis, pointing directly through the centre of Galicia to the Polish–German industrial area, was destined to be the theatre of extensive operations, as it was ideal terrain for tanks and was consequently bound to be of particular interest to the Soviet military leaders.

From an economic point of view, both the manufacturing industries and the raw-material resources were of considerable importance. Apart from the coal deposits at Sokal and Rava Ruska, the petroleum extracted and refined in the

Drohobych area was urgently needed.<sup>1</sup> Galicia also contained substantial deposits of potash and phosphates, essential to German war production, and it also had an important role to play in respect of food supplies for the Reich. However, optimal exploitation of these resources was hampered by the problem of the partisans. Although partisans represented a destabilizing factor for the German occupation, Galicia could be regarded as a relatively stable hinterland from a military point of view, in that the armed conflicts between Polish and Ukrainian nationalists almost completely absorbed any resistance to the occupying forces.<sup>2</sup>

### (a) The Army Group's Situation in the Spring of 1944

On 2 April, while First Armoured Army was still fighting for its life and attempting to escape from the deadly enemy encirclement,<sup>3</sup> Hitler issued a directive setting out the basic principles for the conduct of operations on the left wing of the southern section of the eastern front. A front was to be established on the Kolomyia–Tarnopol–Brody–Kovel line. And the encircled First Armoured Army was to be relieved by a newly formed assault group, which would launch an attack from the Lvov area.<sup>4</sup> The Soviet 1st Ukrainian Front too had suffered substantial losses in the course of its three-month offensive, with the result that, by 6 April, Field Marshal General Walter Model was able to extricate First Armoured Army, reduce the length of the front, and move forward again to the east.<sup>5</sup> The Soviet breakthrough in the Carpathians, to the west of Kolomyia, was also halted, with the assistance of the Hungarian 1st Army, and the enemy forces were driven back to the eastern edge of the mountain range.

At the end of the Soviet winter and spring offensive, the army group, with Fourth Armoured Army, the rest of First Armoured Army, and the Hungarian 1st Army, occupied the almost 450-km-long section of the front between Kovel and Kolomyia. To protect this defensive line, the high command in Lvov deployed nine German and two Hungarian corps, with 34 German and five Hungarian divisions, including ten armoured units, and two Honved mountain brigades. The German divisions were now reduced to regimental strength as a result of the heavy losses suffered in engagements during the withdrawal. Although the army group had lost a great many men in the past few months,<sup>6</sup> it now had the Hungarian 1st Army under its command, so its actual strength was still approximately 400,000 men. However, the stock of heavy weapons was also severely depleted. Thus, in

<sup>1</sup> *Germany and the Second World War*, v/II. 472.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. 18, 186 ff.

<sup>3</sup> Philippi and Heim, *Der Feldzug gegen Sowjetrussland*, 237–41; Elishev and Mikhalev, 'Osvoboždenie', 41–4.

<sup>4</sup> *Hitlers Weisungen*, 251.

<sup>5</sup> See Part IV, Chapter III.8(c) of the present volume.

<sup>6</sup> Between 1 January and 10 April 1944 First Armoured Army HQ lost approximately 74,700 men and Fourth Armoured Army HQ about 44,400 (BA-MA RW 6/v. 559, fos. 3–14, 18). As a result, the strength of Army Group South/North Ukraine dropped from approximately 400,000 to about 350,000 men between 1 March and 1 May 1944 (BA-MA RH 2/1341, fos. 14, 36, 37).



**Map V.v.1.** Army Group North Ukraine: course of the front in June 1944

Source: OKH situation map, 1.6.1944, BA-MA, Kart RH2, Ost/1043, Study P-114c, pt. VII, i. 2.

April 1944 the army group had approximately 850 tanks and assault guns, about 480 of which were operational, and 845 artillery cannon.<sup>7</sup>

If it was to comply with Hitler's directive, the army group would have to attempt within the next few weeks to restore its units' manpower and materials, and secure the lines that had been reached. That was the only possible way to withstand the Red Army's attacks for a reasonable length of time.

### (b) The Enemy Forces and Their Plans

On the Soviet side, 1st Ukrainian Front was taking a break in April 1944 in order to enable the exhausted units to recover and prepare to continue the offensive. However, Marshal Ivan Stepanovich Konev was obliged to hand some units over to his northern neighbour at the beginning of June to reinforce the planned offensive against Army Group Centre in Belorussia.

The Red Army showed every sign of achieving an outstanding success in the opening phase of the offensive, so Stalin issued a directive on 24 June ordering the operations to be extended to the south. Konev was to prepare the Lvov–Przemyśl operation<sup>8</sup> against Army Group North Ukraine with the aim of liberating Galicia. 1st Ukrainian Front was to destroy the German forces in the Rava Ruska–Lvov area in the first phase of the attack. It was then to press on with all speed to the San and capture the strategically important crossing points. The Soviet high command's directive required Konev to plan an operation with two spearheads. He accordingly launched the offensive against the right wing of Fourth Armoured Army from the area south of Lutsk, and also against the central section of First Armoured Army from the area between the Seret and Tarnopol.

In the right-hand section of the front, 1st Ukrainian Front had four armies on the Styr to the north of Lutsk, which were to advance to Rava Ruska to the south-west. The 3rd Guards Armoured Army was to lead the main attack, which was to break through XXXXII Corps' defensive positions at Gorokhov and proceed to Sokal. In addition to these massive offensives against the German front, the Soviet 13th Army deployed further to the south was to attack the section held by XXXXVI Corps and open up a breach in the front at this point through which the Soviet forces could advance directly to Rava Ruska. After disposing of the enemy's defence systems, the Soviet 13th Army was then to press on to the south-west and, with the assistance of 60th Army, encircle and destroy the German troops at Brody.<sup>9</sup>

Under the operational plans for the southern group of forces, the Soviet 60th Army was to lead the attack on First Armoured Army's defensive line in the area covered by XXXXVIII Armoured Corps south of Koltov and break through the German positions. Once it had succeeded in breaching the defensive front, 60th

<sup>7</sup> OKH/GenStdH, comparison of forces as at 1 May 1944 (tanks/artillery guns: 1 Apr. 1944), BA-MA RH 2/2949.

<sup>8</sup> Traktujew, 'Die Zerschlagung', 446; Glantz and Orenstein, *The Battle for the Ukraine*, xi.

<sup>9</sup> Glantz and Orenstein, *The Battle for the Ukraine*, 17–19.

Army, assisted by 3rd Guards Armoured Army and 38th Army, was to destroy the enemy forces at Lvov. In order to perform this task, 60th Army would have to move north to the west of Brody, while parts of 3rd Guards Armoured Army advanced towards Busk and trapped the German defenders between the Prinz Eugen Line and Strumilova–Busk. After he had reached the two intermediate destinations, Rava Ruska und Lvov, Konev hoped to advance on a broad front to the San. It would then be possible to proceed rapidly across the Vistula plain, which was ideal terrain for tanks, and so reach the industrial district of Cracow in southern Poland.

The Soviet high command's directives required Konev to concentrate his troops in the northern command area, leaving only 18th Guards Armoured Army to protect the left wing from its position in the Kolomyia area. Although the army was only supposed to undertake defence duties, it nevertheless had to prepare for an offensive along the Carpathian forest to Przemyśl. This would not only roll up the enemy defence system on the Strypa river from the south but also capture the Drohobych oilfields, which were vital to German conduct of the war.

When the operation was launched on 13 July 1944, 1st Ukrainian Front numbered more than a million men,<sup>10</sup> almost 850,000 of whom were in the foremost line.<sup>11</sup> Konev had ten armies under his command, of which nine were deployed in the area of operations while 5th Guards Army was held in reserve in the rearward area of the front. The eight armies that were to take central Galicia comprised, in all, 74 rifle divisions, seven armoured corps, three mechanized corps, two cavalry corps, five artillery divisions, and numerous army units and special units. As to heavy weapons, 1st Ukrainian Front was equipped with more than 2,200 tanks and assault guns,<sup>12</sup> 13,800 artillery cannon and mortars, and 2,400 anti-tank cannon. And, to support the troops on the ground, Konev also had 2nd Air Army, with close on 3,250 aircraft.<sup>13</sup>

In addition to the Lvov–Przemyśl operation, the military leaders in Moscow also planned an offensive—to be launched at much the same time by Marshal Konstantin Konstantinovich Rokossovsky's 1st Belorussian Front—against the extreme right wing of Army Group Centre and the left section of Army Group North Ukraine on the southern edge of the Pripet marshes. In conducting the offensive in Belorussia, the Soviet high command decided that the Brest–Lublin operation should not be confined exclusively to the central section but should include the southern flank, where it should focus on the boundary between Army Group Centre and Army Group North Ukraine. Rokossovsky was accordingly ordered to prepare an offensive to be launched in the direction of Lublin–Warsaw.

In view of the difficult conditions on the ground in 1st Belorussian Front's section of the front, Rokossovsky decided to launch the operation primarily from the Kovel area, advancing in a north-westerly direction, so as to avoid the enemy

<sup>10</sup> 1st Ukrainian Front strength on 13 July 1944 was about 1,002,000 men; *ibid.* 165 (annex 4).

<sup>11</sup> With the Second Air Army units at the front, the combat units contained altogether 843,772 men on 13 July 1944; *ibid.* 162 (annex 2).

<sup>12</sup> This figure includes approximately 530 artillery cannon on self-propelled carriages.

<sup>13</sup> Glantz and Orenstein, *The Battle for the Ukraine*, 22–8, 149–62 (annexes 1–3).

troops in the Brest-Litovsk area to the south-west and, at the same time, bring pressure to bear on the German units fighting east of the Bug. In order to ensure that the Brest–Lublin operation was conducted successfully, the forces south of the Pripyat had to be expanded considerably.<sup>14</sup> By the time the offensive was launched, on 18 July, 1st Belorussian Front had five armies in all, most of them starting from positions in the greater Kovel area. The two German corps—LVI Armoured Corps and VIII Army Corps—defending the section of the front from the Pripyat north of Kamin-Kashirskiy to the bend in the Turiya east of Dubenka, faced the Soviet 47th, 69th, 70th, and 8th Guards Armies, and the Soviet 2nd Armoured Army, numbering approximately 400,000 men in all. The five Soviet armies had almost 1,700 tanks and assault guns, and more than 8,000 artillery cannon. With this enormous power, 1st Belorussian Front was able to deploy an average of 350 artillery cannon and 80 tanks per kilometre in its centre of attack. Rokossovsky also had almost 1,500 fighters at his disposal, to ensure Soviet command of the air in the operational area.<sup>15</sup>

### (c) The Operational Possibilities of Securing Galicia

In his directive of 2 April, Hitler had made it clear that ‘it is imperative [...] to hold or win back the following line: Dniester to the north-east of Chişinău–Iaşi–Târgu Neamţ—the eastern exit from the Carpathians between Târgu Neamţ and Kolomyia–Tarnopol–Brody–Kovel’.<sup>16</sup> This meant that Army Group North Ukraine, with its decimated units,<sup>17</sup> was required to drive the enemy forces out of the Turiya salient south of Kovel, out of the salient north-west of Brody, and out of the Carpathians west of Kolomyia. Although the two corps at Kovel—LVI Armoured Corps from Army Group Centre and XXXXII Army Corps from Army Group North Ukraine—and XIII Army Corps north-west of Brody only partly fulfilled the task set by Hitler, the Hungarian 1st Army counter-offensive at Kuty in the Carpathians, conducted with the assistance of III Armoured Corps, was eminently successful. In the face of increasing resistance from three Soviet armies, the forces in the northern Carpathians managed to move the front forward in the second half of April to the north-eastern edge of the mountains near Kolomyia.<sup>18</sup>

For its own purposes, the army group needed to know what operations 1st Ukrainian Front was planning. On the basis of the deployment of enemy forces, the high command in Lvov concluded that the Soviet offensives would probably be launched from the Tarnopol, Brody, or Kovel areas. The OKH’s Foreign Armies East section also ascertained at the end of April that ‘a concentrated attack by Belorussian Front forces was to be expected, striking west to Lublin from the Lutsk–Kovel area, to provide initial cover for the enemy operations that were

<sup>14</sup> Lessnjak, ‘Die Operation von Lublin–Brest’, 431–4.

<sup>15</sup> See detailed account in Part III, Chapter II.5(d) of the present volume.

<sup>16</sup> *Hitlers Weisungen*, 251.

<sup>17</sup> By the end of April, the strength of First Armoured Army had dropped from approximately 211,500 men (1 Mar. 1944) to 172,450; BA-MA RH 2/1341, fos. 14, 37.

<sup>18</sup> Study P-114c, pt. 6, 472–5, BA-MA ZA 1/2074, fos. 210–13.

expected to be launched against the Lvov–Przemyśl area from the Stanislav–Tarnopol and Brody area'.<sup>19</sup> The troop concentrations in the vicinity of Brody and Tarnopol, in particular, suggested that 1st Ukrainian Front might attack First Armoured Army and attempt to encircle it in the Lvov–Stryi area. A deep defence system was therefore established, extending from the Dniester north of Kolomyia to Kovel.

The army group was aware that, in May, 1st Ukrainian Front was still moving substantial forces from the Dniester to the area round Brody and Tarnopol. This appeared to confirm the OKH findings. So Model dispatched II SS Armoured Corps to the Berezhany–Brody area to strengthen the section of the front east of Lvov.

Despite the signs of a new offensive, the Red Army did not resume its attacks immediately, so the army group used the short break to restore its decimated forces. Within two months it had managed to increase its strength by almost 150,000 to a total of 550,000 men. The strength of the Hungarian 1st Army also increased from 30,000 to close on 255,000 men. These increases were achieved partly by obtaining replacements, but in particular by extending the army group's area of responsibility. This included, above all, command of LVI Armoured Corps, which had previously formed the right wing of Army Group Centre. So Fourth Armoured Army HQ alone was responsible for the conduct of operations in the Turiya salient from the end of May. The army group's boundary moved north again at the beginning of July, when VIII Corps was incorporated in Fourth Armoured Army.<sup>20</sup> The high command in Lvov now had two German armoured armies and a Hungarian army under its command, with ten German corps and two Honved corps.<sup>21</sup>

Both wings had to be strengthened first of all, in view of what was assumed to be 1st Ukrainian Front's operational intentions. The Hungarian ally assigned further units to 1st Army, and Army Group North Ukraine submitted a request to the OKH for additional divisions. Despite the tense situation, the OKH dispatched three divisions to the Galician area of operations by the end of June: 88th Infantry Division, 28th Light Infantry Division, and 14th Waffen SS Division 'Galicia'. To enable the forces to withstand a massive Soviet offensive, the high command in Lvov produced an operational plan under which mobile units would be deployed in the rearward area of the front, ready to conduct mobile combat. This, it was thought, would deal with any enemy breakthroughs. This was a good start, but the available transport capacity posed a problem. The army group was short of trucks, in particular, so supplies were under threat and troops could not be transferred quickly on demand. Even so, in June 1944 Army Group North Ukraine was still reasonably confident that the Galician front could be held, at least for a limited time.

This changed when the army group was seriously weakened as a result of the Soviet offensive against the central section of the eastern front. By mid-July the high command in Lvov had been obliged to transfer nine of its 33 divisions to Army Group Centre. Model reacted to the situation by regrouping his reserves,

<sup>19</sup> OKH/GenStdH/Abt. Fremde Heere Ost (Chef), No. 1349/44 g.Kdos., 26 Apr. 1944, quoted in Study P-114c, pt. 6, App. 137, 312, BA-MA ZA 1/2076, fo. 77.

<sup>20</sup> KTB Pz.AOK 4, Abt. Ia, 1 July–15 Aug. 1944 (3 July 1944), BA-MA RH 21-4/237, fo. 13.

<sup>21</sup> *Die geheimen Tagesberichte*, x. 504.

**Table V.v.1.** Army Group North Ukraine: order of battle (status: 8 July 1944)

Hun. 1st Mtn.Div.		<b>Hun. 1st Army</b>
Hun. 27th Lt.Div.	Hun. 6th A.C.	Hun. 2nd Armd.Div.
101st Lt.Inf.Div.		Hun. 7th Inf.Div.
Hun. 24th Inf.Div.		
Hun. 25th Inf.Div.	XI A.C.	
Hun. 18th Res.Div.		Hun. 19th Res.Div.
68th Inf.Div.		
Hun. 16th Inf.Div.	Hun. 7th A.C.	
1st Inf.Div.	XXXXVI Armd.	<b>First Armd.Army</b>
168th Inf.Div.	Corps	20th Armd.Inf.Div.
208th Inf.Div.		
Hun. 20th Inf.Div.	LIX A.C.	3rd Armd.Corps
		1st Armd.Div.
100th Lt.Inf.Div.		8th Armd.Div.
75th Inf.Div.		
254th Inf.Div.	XXIV A.C.	
371st Inf.Div.		
96th Inf.Div.		<b>Army Group North</b>
349th Inf.Div.	XXXXVIII Armd.	<b>Ukraine</b>
357th Inf.Div.	Corps	14th SS Vol.Div.
359th Inf.Div.		
361st Inf.Div.		
Corps Det.C	XIII A.C.	
454th Sec.Div.		
Maj.-Gen. Beutler		<b>Fourth Armd.Army</b>
Corps Group		17th Armd.Div.
291st Inf.Div.		5th SSArmd.
340th Inf.Div.	XXXXII A.C.	Div.'Viking'
72nd Inf.Div.		
88th Inf.Div.		
214th Inf.Div.		
1st Ski Div		
26th Inf.Div.		
131st Inf.Div.	LVI Armd.Corps	213th Sec.Div.
253rd Inf.Div.		
342nd Inf.Div.		
5th Lt.Inf.Div.		
211st Inf.Div.		
Hun. 12th Res.Div.	VIII AC	

assigning three mobile units to each of the two armoured armies for reserve purposes.<sup>22</sup> However, the army group was seriously concerned not only about

<sup>22</sup> 20th Armoured Infantry Division was to cover the Tarnopol area and the army group's southern section. III Armoured Corps was stationed with 1st and 8th Armoured Divisions between the focal points of Tarnopol and Brody. 16th and 17th Armoured Divisions were available in an area south of

the mobile units it had lost,<sup>23</sup> but also about the number of units that were left. Every division on the main battle line had to defend a section of the front that was 15 kilometres wide on average. And, as the army group could not expect the OKH to send any reinforcements, the only solution was to shorten the front.

The OKH met the army group's demands at the end of June by agreeing to 'abolish the Kovel and Brody fortified places'.<sup>24</sup> At the same time, the army group command ordered LVI Armoured Corps to move the main battle line at Kovel back to a shortened defensive line west of the city, so that it could withdraw at least two divisions from the front to hold in reserve. In addition to straightening the front at Kovel, XXXXVI Army Corps also moved the main battle line at Torczyn back to a shortened defensive line.<sup>25</sup> Ultimately, the army group benefited from these measures only to a limited extent, as it was obliged to transfer one of the two divisions to Army Group Centre immediately. However, the situation in the Galician area of operations was now slightly less tense, and there was some hope that a Soviet advance could be halted, at least for a time.

## 2. THE WITHDRAWAL BATTLES IN GALICIA

Although Army Group North Ukraine had used the three-month pause in the fighting on the Galician Front to prepare for a new offensive by 1st Ukrainian Front, the disastrous events experienced by its neighbour on the left had demolished important parts of its defence plans. So, at the beginning of July, the army group found itself without any reserves or armoured units worth mentioning. Indeed, with the departure of six armoured divisions and three infantry divisions, the very idea of defence could no longer be entertained.<sup>26</sup>

The army group was also obliged to take over Second Army VIII Corps at the beginning of July, with the result that its left wing now extended to the southern edge of the Pripet marshes.<sup>27</sup> In view of this development, Col.-Gen. Josef Harpe<sup>28</sup> was afraid that the army group would not be able to hold its ground for long against a massive offensive by 1st Ukrainian Front. There were almost no

Volodymyr–Volynskiy to be deployed with Fourth Armoured Army in its northern or central section. And 5th SS Armoured Division 'Viking' stood ready west of Kovel.

<sup>23</sup> Of the 9 divisions that had been taken from Army Group North Ukraine by the middle of July 1944, only 7 were armoured divisions (4th, 5th, 6th, 7th, 20th Armoured Divisions; 9th, 10th SS Armoured Divisions).

<sup>24</sup> KTB Pz.AOK 4, Abt. Ia, 1–30 June 1944 (30 June 1944), BA-MA RH 21-4/227, fo. 71.

<sup>25</sup> KTB Pz.AOK 4, Abt. Ia, 1 July–15 Aug. 1944 (12–14 July 1944), BA-MA RH 21-4/237, fos. 63–86.—The aim was to recuperate at least one reinf. Rgt.Gr from the Roczn area.

<sup>26</sup> Situation report 15 July 1944, 2, H.Gr. Nordukraine, Abt. Ia, No. 3291/44 g.Kdos., BA-MA RH 19 VI/19, fos. 243–5.

<sup>27</sup> KTB Pz.AOK 4, Abt. Ia, 1 July–15 Aug. 1944 (2 and 3 July 1944), BA-MA RH 21-4/237, fos. 10, 13.

<sup>28</sup> After Hitler had decided on 28 June 1944 that the C-in-C of Army Group North Ukraine, FM. Gen. Model, was also to be C-in-C of Army Group Centre, the C-in-C of Fourth Armoured Army, Col. Gen. Harpe, took command of Army Group North Ukraine; KTB Pz.AOK 4, Abt. Ia, 1–30 June 1944 (28 June 1944), BA-MA RH 21-4/227, fo. 67.

available reserves, and it was therefore to be feared that Army Group North Ukraine might suffer the same fate as its northern neighbour if there were to be a breach in the front.

At the beginning of July the army group had about 630,000 German and 210,000 Hungarian troops at its disposal to defend the eastern front between Kolomyia and the Pripet. As to heavy weapons, it had more than 1,550 artillery cannon and 1,510 tanks and assault guns, about 1,300 of them operational.<sup>29</sup> 1st Ukrainian Front, on the other hand, had 1.1 million men, 950,000 of them deployed on or near the front. And as to relevant weapons, the Soviet forces had 2,050 assault guns and tanks, and close on 4,900 artillery cannon to use in the battle.<sup>30</sup> In this situation, all that the high command in Lvov could do at the beginning of July 1944 was hope against hope that its section of the front would be spared a major Soviet offensive.

### (a) **The Battles in the Army Group's Central Section (13 to 19 July 1944)**

The situation had remained relatively quiet in Army Group North Ukraine's section of the front until the beginning of July, but increased troop movements indicated that a new 1st Ukrainian Front offensive was in the offing. On 24 June Stalin had already approved Konev's operational plan for an offensive aimed primarily in the direction of Rava Ruska and Lvov. Konev's intention was to split Army Group North Ukraine, and to encircle and destroy the bulk of it while it was still east of the Bug at Brody. To achieve this objective, about 70 per cent of the available artillery and 90 per cent of the tanks and assault guns were to be deployed at the points where it was planned to break through the enemy front.<sup>31</sup>

The Soviet 3rd Guards Army launched the operation against the southern wing of Fourth Armoured Army on 13 July.<sup>32</sup> Although the German front northeast of Gorokhov was breached in the first attack, Fourth Armoured Army HQ did not consider that this advance posed a direct threat to its defensive positions. The army HQ was convinced that 'there were as yet no signs of the attack being extended to other sections of the front'.<sup>33</sup> As a result, Fourth Armoured Army thought it could clear the breach in the front with its own resources, despite the fact that the enemy forces were now more than 8 kilometres inside the German defence system.<sup>34</sup> However, a counter-attack by 16th and 17th Armoured Divisions failed to achieve the desired result, so the army group decided to move XXXXVI Armoured Corps from the Dniester to the Bug at Sokal.

The high command in Lvov had already realized, on the second day of the action, that 'in view of the situation of the enemy forces and our own, there now

<sup>29</sup> BA-MA RH 2/2649, fo. 22.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.; *Geschichte des zweiten Weltkrieges 1939–1945*, ix. 101.

<sup>31</sup> *Geschichte des zweiten Weltkrieges 1939–1945*, 97 ff. The offensive concentrated on two sections of the front, covering only 26 km of the 440-km-long front.

<sup>32</sup> Glantz and Orenstein, *The Battle for the Ukraine*, 56 ff.

<sup>33</sup> KTB Pz.AOK 4, Abt. Ia, 1 July–15 Aug. 1944 (13 July 1944), BA-MA RH 21-4/237, fo. 78.

<sup>34</sup> Glantz and Orenstein, *The Battle for the Ukraine*, 57.

appears to be no prospect of continuing the counter-attack to secure the main battle line'.<sup>35</sup> The armoured army had already deployed all its reserves on 14 July, so the army group was obliged to bring in 20th Armoured Infantry Division from the front on the Strypa river, a tributary on the left of the Dniester south-west of Tarnopol, in order to contain the Soviet breakthrough. However, Konev exploited the success at Gorokhov to good effect, with 1st Ukrainian Front despatching substantial forces to the breakthrough area to speed the advance.<sup>36</sup>

Apart from the critical situation at Gorokhov, the developments in Army Group Centre's situation were also giving Harpe considerable cause for concern. The military disaster north of the Pripet had forced the army group to move Second Armoured Army back to the Brest–Grodno line, and the high command in Lvov had consequently been obliged to move VIII Corps back too. Harpe therefore withdrew the left wing of the army group to the west bank of the Bug at Włodawa on 19 July,<sup>37</sup> while the tense situation at Gorokhov immediately to the south meant that Fourth Armoured Army HQ had no alternative but to allow XXXXVI Armoured Corps to go to its defence. Despite the Soviet 3rd Guards Army's massive inroads, the army HQ was still under the illusion that the enemy offensive could be repelled and the main battle line re-established.<sup>38</sup>

After the breakthrough, Konev ordered 3rd Guards Army to press on south-west, through Rava Ruska, to the San at Jarosław. And, following its success at Gorokhov, 1st Ukrainian Front launched a further attack on 15 July, against First Armoured Army's left wing, in the area north-west of Tarnopol. By the third day of the operation, Fourth Armoured Army was no longer really in a position to prevent the Soviet 3rd Guards Army and 13th Army from breaking through. However, against all expectations, XXXXVI Armoured Corps was just able to block the enemy advance. In view of the critical situation, the armoured corps sought permission to move back to the Prinz Eugen Line, in order to re-establish the defensive front in that position. The army HQ and the army group both refused to grant permission, as the move would not have saved any forces worth speaking of.<sup>39</sup> The battles on Fourth Armoured Army's southern wing continued unabated, but the army managed to prevent any enemy breakthrough, at least for a time, though it used all its reserves in the process.<sup>40</sup> First Armoured Army's situation became critical only when the Soviet 3rd Guards Armoured Army succeeded in breaking through in the section covered by XXXXVI Armoured Corps. A counter-attack by 1st and 8th Armoured Divisions failed because the units were unable to close the gap at Gorokhov and cut off the enemy forces that had broken through.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>35</sup> KTB Pz.AOK 4, Abt. Ia, 1 July–15 Aug. 1944 (14 July 1944), BA-MA RH 21-4/237, fo. 80.

<sup>36</sup> KTB Pz.AOK 4, Abt. Ia, 1 July–15 Aug. 1944 (14 July 1944), BA-MA RH 21-4/237, fos. 79–85; Glantz and Orenstein, *The Battle for the Ukraine*, 58.

<sup>37</sup> H.Gr. Nordukraine, Abt. Ia, No. 3311/44 g.Kdos., 18 July 1944, BA-MA RH 19 VI/19, 238; KTB Pz.AOK 4, Abt. Ia, 1 July–15 Aug. 1944 (18 July 1944), BA-MA RH 21-4/237, fo. 119.

<sup>38</sup> KTB Pz.AOK 4, Abt. Ia, 1 July–15 Aug. 1944 (14 July 1944), BA-MA RH 21-4/237, fo. 86.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid. (15 July 1944), fo. 90. <sup>40</sup> Ibid., fo. 94.

<sup>41</sup> Study P-114c, pt. 7, i, 18, BA-MA ZA 1/2077, fo. 70.

In the light of events, Army Group North Ukraine had concluded by 15 July that '*shortly after the enemy operation was launched*, it was faced with the fact that it had been obliged to deploy *almost all its reserves* in the sections of the front north-west of Tarnopol and south-west of Lutsk, *even before* the enemy forces were fully engaged [...] It had been obliged to deploy its few reserves in a rapid gathering of forces, designed at all costs to prevent the army group from breaking up.'<sup>42</sup> In the circumstances, the army group 'was obliged to take the risk of withdrawing units from quiet sections of the front in order to deploy them at focal points in the defences'. Harpe also asked the OKH to assign '20,000-strong marching units immediately',<sup>43</sup> to replace the substantial losses. The army group commander believed that this was the only way to stabilize his front and mount a successful defence against the Soviet enemy.<sup>44</sup>

Despite numerous efforts, none of the measures had any appreciable effect. 1st Ukrainian Front continued to advance without let or hindrance. The army group thought the best answer to Konev's operational plans was to withdraw to the Prinz Eugen Line. So First Armoured Army was assigned the task of closing the gap at Koltov again in an extensive counter-attack from that position. To achieve this operational objective and support the units that were under attack on both sides of Brody, the army group command brought two German divisions in from the Carpathian section of the front.<sup>45</sup> Despite all impediments, on 16 July Harpe still had hopes that the First and Fourth Armoured Army counter-attacks would be successful, and would prevent 1st Ukrainian Front from taking central Galicia.<sup>46</sup>

The Red Army, having broken through the defensive lines north and south of Brody on 17 July, pressed on into the heart of the German defence system protecting Lvov. While the armoured enemy spearheads in the southern section of the breakthrough reached the Bug at Busk, 1st and 3rd Armoured Guards Armies were able to cross the river at Kamyanka Strumilova in the northern section. As a result of this enemy pincer movement, XIII Army Corps was trapped between the Prinz Eugen Line and the Bug. Neither the speed of the Soviet spearhead attacks nor the considerable amount of ground lost in the first few days of the Soviet offensive persuaded the OKH to move the left wing of First Armoured Army back to the positions on the Zolota Lypa and Bug rivers. So the decision taken by the army group HQ, which had moved to Łanicut on 17 July, namely to conduct the defensive battle on the Prinz Eugen Line, still stood. In order to achieve this objective, the army group's plan was that First Armoured Army should close the gap at Zolochiv, while Fourth Armoured Army HQ was assigned the task of covering the battle, on the one hand, and preventing the enemy from breaking

<sup>42</sup> ObKdo H.Gr. Nordukraine, Abt. Ia, No. 3291/44 g.Kdos., 15 July 1944, 3, BA-MA RH 19 VI/19, fo. 245 (emphasis in original).

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> 101st Light Infantry Division left the Prut section west of Kolomyia on 16 July 1944, and 68th Infantry Division left its position in the section south of Stanislavov on 18 July 1944.

<sup>46</sup> H.Gr. Nordukraine, Abt. Ia, No. 3304/44 g.Kdos., 16 July 1944, BA-MA RH 19 VI/19, fo. 240. KTB Pz.AOK 4, Abt. Ia, 1 July–15 Aug. 1944 (16 July 1944), BA-MA RH 21-4/237, fos. 103 ff.

through the Prinz Eugen Line, on the other.<sup>47</sup> The plan could be executed only if Fourth Armoured Army moved its right wing back to that line, and Hitler gave the necessary permission for the move on 18 July.<sup>48</sup>

By that time, 1st Ukrainian Front had 20 rifle divisions and five tank corps in the breakthrough area at Zolochiv–Busk, and 14 rifle divisions and three tank corps already stationed south-west of Lutsk.<sup>49</sup> On the same day, Rokossovsky's 1st Belorussian Front launched the expected offensive against the LVI Armoured Corps and VIII Army Corps defensive positions west of Kovel. The forces on the boundary separating the army group from Army Group Centre proved to be too weak to repel this massive attack at the outset. As a result, 1st Belorussian Front established a 20-kilometre-wide breach in the LVI Armoured Corps system of positions on the very first day.

As Army Group North Ukraine's defensive measures had still had no success by the end of the day, and the gap had not been closed, Harpe decided to gather all the available forces together in order to prevent an enemy breakthrough on both sides of Lvov. In the commander-in-chief's view, it was 'essential that the army group hold on to Lvov, which is an exceptionally important hub for all troop movements, that it stop the enemy armoured forces breaking through to Lvov, that it prevent First Armoured Army from being driven back to the Carpathians in any circumstances and, lastly, that it succeed in closing the gap in Fourth Armoured Army's southern wing at Krystynopol'.<sup>50</sup> There were not enough troops in Lvov to perform the necessary tasks, nor were they strong enough. Harpe brought additional forces in from the right wing of First Armoured Army HQ. The commander-in-chief thought he could do this without running any great risk, because 1st Ukrainian Front was moving forces back to its section at Kolomyia. In addition to strengthening the troops in the Lvov area, the army group HQ intended to move First Armoured Army back to the established 'Drohobych–Lvov defensive position', reducing the length of the front from 210 to 160 kilometres. In accordance with the commander-in-chief's plan, the preparations for these measures were to be timed so that the troop movements in the Lvov area and the operations to shorten the front could start on 24 July.<sup>51</sup> However, Army Group North Ukraine as a whole reacted much too statically, and above all much too late, to the 1st Ukrainian and 1st Belorussian Front offensive in the Galician area; it was unable to hold out, even for a short time, against the opposing Soviet forces and their flexible tactics.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>47</sup> ObKdo H.Gr. Nordukraine, Abt. Ia, No. 3309/44 g.Kdos., 17 July 1944, BA-MA RH 19 VI/19, fo. 237.

<sup>48</sup> KTB Pz.AOK 4, Abt. Ia, 1 July–15 Aug. 1944 (18 July 1944), BA-MA RH 21-4/237, fo. 118.

<sup>49</sup> ObKdo H.Gr. Nordukraine, Abt. Ia, No. 3338/44 g.Kdos., 18 July 1944, BA-MA RH 19 VI/19, fo. 226.

<sup>50</sup> ObKdo H.Gr. Nordukraine, Abt. Ia, No. 3338/44 g.Kdos., 18 July 1944, 2, BA-MA RH 19 VI/19, fo. 227. Krystynopol is 10 kilometres south of Sokal.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Study P-114c, pt. 7, i, 16–26, BA-MA ZA 1/2077, fos. 68–78. *Geschichte des zweiten Weltkrieges 1939–1945*, ix. 95–105; Glantz and Orenstein, *The Battle for the Ukraine*, 56–68; Traktujew, 'Die Zerschlagung', 449–52; *Die geheimen Tagesberichte*, x. 346, 349, 352, 355, 359, 362.

It was already clear to the army group, at a very early stage, that the 38th Army attack at Gorokhov marked the opening of the major 1st Ukrainian Front offensive. Despite all the experience of recent months, the high command in Lvov believed it could halt the offensive, at least for a time. This is borne out, in particular, by Harpe's plan to conduct the defensive battle on the Prinz Eugen Line, even at this late stage. This is all the more surprising in that, so far, the counter-attacks had not been successful, nor had it been possible to close the breaches in the front and cut off the enemy spearheads. Ultimately, all the measures taken and the orders given by Army Group North Ukraine indicated that the high command had simply underestimated the force of the major offensive, at least until 18 July. As a result, the army group was too late in ordering XIII Army Corps to break out of the pocket. That being so, Fourth Armoured Army was obliged to fight a defensive battle for a week, and then to move back across the Bug and employ delaying tactics in an attempt to slow down the massive Soviet attacks. And First Armoured Army only had enough forces left, in the second half of July, to delay the offensive before it reached Lvov. By 20 July, therefore, Army Group North Ukraine had almost no chance of holding eastern Galicia.

### (b) The Enclosure of XIII Army Corps

The army group HQ had learned, from experience during the 1943 withdrawal, to move particularly exposed sections of the front back from the first to the second defensive position as soon as Soviet offensives were launched. This was designed to avoid substantial losses of men and materials during the initial artillery and air bombardment. However, Konev foiled any such plan Army Group North Ukraine might have had: he planned an envelopment operation on both sides of Brody, an operation which was to cause the centre of the army group's front to collapse and opened up the possibility of pressing forward into the heart of Galicia along the Brody–Lvov–Przemyśl axis. XIII Army Corps was stationed at the first point on this strategically important axis, since First Armoured Army had moved it back to the Prinz Eugen Line to protect the highway to Lvov, which was essential for transporting supplies to the army group front. However, within a few days, the Soviet 1st Mechanized Cavalry Group and 3rd Guards Armoured Army met north of Busk on the Bug, thus successfully completing the first phase of the operation—the enclosure of XIII Army Corps.<sup>53</sup>

XIII Army Corps—with Corps Detachment C,<sup>54</sup> 349th Infantry Division and 454th Security Division, 14th Waffen SS Division 'Galicia', and 349th Infantry Division from XXXXVIII Armoured Corps—was trapped in the pocket. On

<sup>53</sup> Glantz and Orenstein, *The Battle for the Ukraine*, 135–44; *Geschichte des zweiten Weltkrieges 1939–1945*, ix. 102–6; Jaggi, 'Der Ausbruch', 227 ff.

<sup>54</sup> The heavy losses in the withdrawal battles in the autumn of 1943 prompted the OKH to form corps detachments from the remnants of several divisions (division groups). Corps Det.C consisted of Div.Gr. 183, 217, and 339. Division groups were more or less equivalent to infantry regiments in terms of strength.

16 July First Armoured Army HQ had still been confident that the gap at Koltov could be closed again by 1st and 8th Armoured Divisions mounting an attack on the Soviet 3rd Guards Armoured Army flank from the south, while 349th Infantry Division attacked it from the north. It had therefore felt that there was no need to move XIII Army Corps back behind the Bug. Although there were already signs of impending enclosure on 16 July, the high command in Łajćut did not decide to move XIII Army Corps west until 18 July. By that time, the army corps was already surrounded. The only possibility now was to break out of the pocket.<sup>55</sup>

As XIII Army Corps was to aim for the escarpment south-west of Zolochiv, the commanding general, Gen. Arthur Hauffe, had to realign the corps so that Corps Detachment C, which was to be the spearhead, turned to the south. 349th Infantry Division, which was to open the circle to the south, was stationed on its left.<sup>56</sup> The other two divisions were assigned the task of protecting the breakout on the north. In making his plans, Hauffe hoped that XXXXVIII Armoured Corps would break through from the south and open up a corridor. Although it was essential to act quickly in this precarious situation, the corps HQ decided not to start the breakout until the next day. As a result of poor organization, which prevented preparations being made in good time and delayed the initial attack,<sup>57</sup> the plan could not be executed in time. Even so, the operation got off to a very good start because the enemy did not respond immediately. The breakout was the target of heavy air attacks, which caused such high losses in Corps Detachment C and 349th Infantry Division that the operation almost had to be wound up.<sup>58</sup> And errors on its own part, such as loss of communications in Corps Detachment C, caused serious friction and made unified leadership in the pocket impossible. The spearheads finally attempted to fight their way through to XXXXVIII Armoured Corps front lines.<sup>59</sup> On 20 July the First Armoured Army commander-in-chief, Gen. Erhard Raus intervened, ordering the enclosed army corps 'to break through with all divisions on the morning of 21 July, and move east past Zolochiv into the wooded mountains south of the highway',<sup>60</sup> but that too had no effect.

As a result of serious command errors by XIII Army Corps HQ and divisional staff, as well as the massive resistance of the enemy forces and their overwhelming superiority in the air, only parts of Corps Detachment C and 349th Infantry Division were able to escape from enemy enclosure. They succeeded in fighting their way through to 1st Armoured Division at Zolochiv.<sup>61</sup> The bulk of XIII Army Corps did not manage to escape from the surrounding enemy forces, and ended up in Soviet prisoner-of-war camps. All in all, as a result of the enclosure

<sup>55</sup> Lange, *Korpsabteilung C*, 97–103.

<sup>56</sup> ObKdo H.Gr. Nordukraine, Abt. Ia, No. 3319/44 g.Kdos., 19 July 1944, BA-MA RH 19 VI/19, fos. 232 ff.

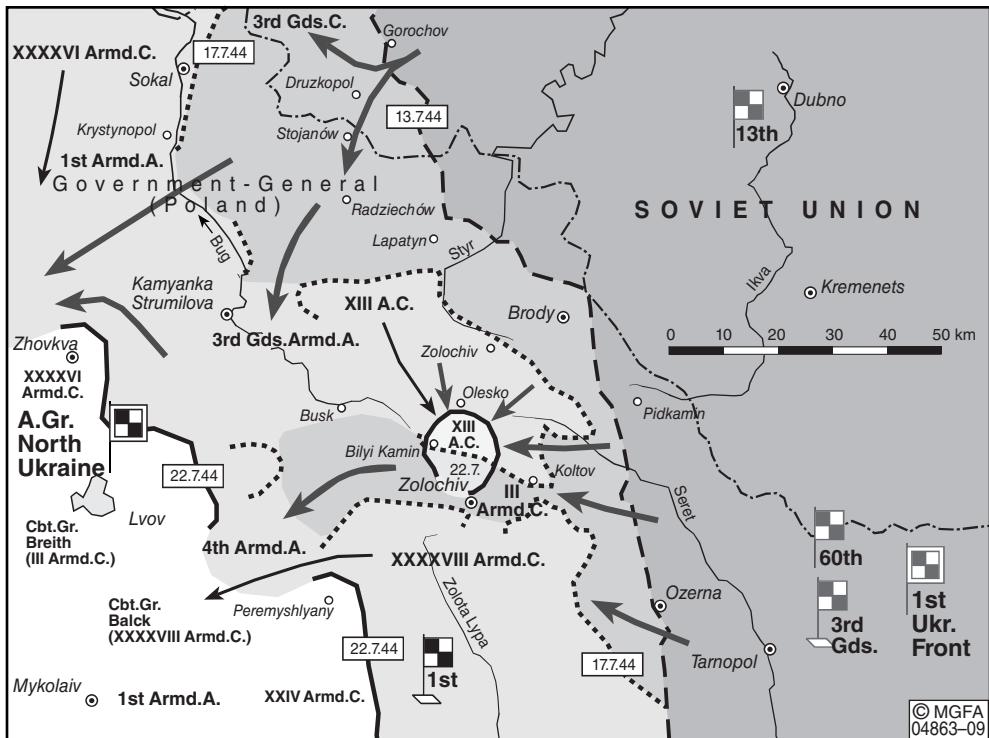
<sup>57</sup> Jaggi, 'Der Ausbruch', 228 ff.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid. 229.

<sup>59</sup> Lange, *Korpsabteilung C*, 103–9.

<sup>60</sup> Raus, 'Die Schlacht bei Lemberg', 842.

<sup>61</sup> About 11,000 men in XIII Army Corps managed to escape enclosure by 23 July. *Die geheimen Tagesberichte*, x. 368, 371.



Map V.v.2. The encirclement of XIII Army Corps (13 to 23 July 1944)

Source: OKH situation maps, 13.7, 17.7, and 22.7.1944, BA-MA, Kart RH2, Ost/1085, 1089, and 1094.

of XIII Army Corps, the army group lost some 40,000 men and all their heavy equipment.<sup>62</sup>

### (c) The Loss of Unity in the Front North of Lvov

Although First Armoured Army endeavoured to relieve XIII Army Corps, establish a line of interception east of Lvov, and preserve the connection with Fourth Armoured Army, the forces available were insufficient. XXXXVIII Armoured Corps could not open up the ring round the enclosed army corps, nor could XXXXVI Armoured Corps<sup>63</sup> re-establish the connection with its neighbour on the left. The situation was becoming much more critical in the northern part of the army group area, where the enemy had launched a massive attack on both wings of Fourth Armoured Army and achieved deep breaches in the front.

<sup>62</sup> Raus, 'Die Schlacht bei Lemberg', 839–43; Jaggi, 'Der Ausbruch', 227–31; Lange, *Korpsabteilung C*, 110–19; *Geschichte des zweiten Weltkrieges 1939–1945*, ix. 102–10.

<sup>63</sup> This corps had been placed under First Armoured Army command on 19 July 1944. KTB Pz.AOK 4, Abt. Ia, 1 July–15 Aug. 1944 (19 July 1944), BA-MA RH 21-4/237, 124.

First Ukrainian Front, attacking westwards with three armies between Sokal and Zolochiv, broke through the German defences in the Krystynopol and Kamyanka Strumilova line on the Bug at the first assault. Kamyanka Strumilova was held but, with XIII Army Corps out of the picture, XXXXVI Armoured Corps had been forced to move south-west and was consequently unable to intercept the 1st Guards Armoured Army offensive north of the town. Harpe now faced the problem that the unity of the army group front was in danger of being lost, both in the central section and on the left wing, where 1st Belorussian Front had launched an offensive.

Within a few days, Fourth Armoured Army HQ was obliged—under strong enemy pressure—to move its front back to the Chełm–Hrubieszów line. Above all, the enemy advance south of Sokal had forced the army to extend its defensive line far to the west. Meanwhile, the Soviet 1st Guards Armoured Army had succeeded in extending the deep breach at Kamyanka Strumilova, establishing an operational breakthrough to the south and west and breaking the connection between the two German armies. This created a 120-kilometre-wide gap between the southern wing of XXXXII Corps north of Rava Ruska and the northern flank of XXXXVIII Armoured Corps at Zolochiv, a gap through which Konev's troops were able to press forward to the west unimpeded. In this situation, the high command in Łanicut ordered First Armoured Army HQ to form two groups of forces, one to protect the broad area round Lvov, the other to establish a weak security line with Fourth Armoured Army to the west of Rava Ruska. The only option was to engage in delaying action, since most III Army Corps and XXXXVI Armoured Corps units were still moving in. Nevertheless, the army group had to ensure that the Lvov and Tomaszów Lubelski–Zamość area remained in its hands, because the traffic arteries that were essential for conveying supplies to both armies all ran through that area.

While First Armoured Army was able to keep its left flank in the Lvov area relatively stable, Fourth Armoured Army was exposed to constant attacks on its deep southern flank. Gen. Walther Nehring therefore decided to form the Meden Combat Group southwest of Sokal,<sup>64</sup> which was 'to attack the rear and flanks of enemy forces advancing south of Krystynopol'.<sup>65</sup> The gap in the front in the area of XXXXVI Armoured Corps was also to be closed, with 17th Armoured Division endeavouring to extend its section of the front to the south. Fourth Armoured Army HQ's plan could not be carried out because the forces available were insufficient. In view of the position of the troops in the Rava Ruska area, the army group was obliged to place XXXXVI Armoured Corps under the command of First Armoured Army, as it had been forced to move south, while the Meden Group remained under the command of Fourth Armoured Army HQ.<sup>66</sup>

<sup>64</sup> The combat group, led by the commander of 17th Armoured Division, Lt.-Gen. Karl-Friedrich von der Meden, under the overall command of Fourth Armoured Army HQ, consisted of 17th Armoured Division, 219th Infantry Division, Fourth Armoured Army HQ's shock regiment, and parts of 231st Security Division and 210th Assault Gun Brigade; Pz.AOK 4, Abt. Ia, Panzerarmeebefehl No. 70, 19 July 1944, BA-MA RH 21-4/245.

<sup>65</sup> KTB Pz.AOK 4, Abt. Ia, 1 July–15 Aug. 1944 (18 July 1944), BA-MA RH 21-4/237, fo. 117.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., fo. 124.

All the measures taken by the high command in Łanicut proved to be inadequate in view of the Soviet 3rd Guards Armoured Army's rapid advance. For example, XXXXII Corps was in danger of being cut off in the rear if sections of the enemy army moved north. The Meden Group was therefore instructed to engage in mobile combat to prevent possible enclosure.<sup>67</sup> However, it did not have sufficient forces to close the 50-kilometre-wide gap at Zhovkva, so the 1st Guards Armoured Army spearheads were able to reach the Rava Ruska area. Konev now sought to use his operational advantage to push on towards Zamość behind Fourth Armoured Army, cutting its rear communication lines. As the Germans saw it, the enemy's intentions were as follows: 'exploiting the open southern flank, [...] first, to follow First Armoured Army west to the Rava Ruska–Zamość road, and then to turn north, unhinge the Bug line, and press forward into the deep flank and rear of the armoured army'.<sup>68</sup> Harpe now had to improvise: he formed a blocking unit which protected the Army's threatened left flank south of Zamość;<sup>69</sup> he then moved his right flank back to the north, substantially widening the gap at Rava Ruska.

In addition to the attacking wedge north of Rava Ruska, the Soviet 4th Armoured Army was attacking the III Armoured Corps defensive block further south at Peremyshlyany. The Soviet spearheads pierced the German line at the interface between III and XXXVIII Armoured Corps, posing a serious threat to Lvov, the cornerstone of the German defence system. The situation escalated when parts of the Soviet 3rd Guards Armoured Army, which were located behind the German defensive lines north-west of Zhovkva, veered south-east. Even so, First Armoured Army managed to close the gap at Peremyshlyany by 27 July.<sup>70</sup>

Unlike the section at Lvov, the Soviet 1st Guards Armoured Army and 13th Army continued to advance almost unimpeded, reaching Rava Ruska by nightfall on 20 July. This increased the danger of the army group's northern area collapsing. The massive offensive mounted against Fourth Armoured Army meant that there was almost no hope of closing the gap in the front east of the San unless the army group received reinforcements. However, on the army group's southern front, First Armoured Army still had enough strength to hold the front line from Zhovkva to the upper course of the Dniester and protect the Drohobych oilfields. The army group had already deployed all its reserves, so it was scarcely possible to prevent two Soviet armies from getting through to the San. In its despair, the army group HQ transferred three reserve divisions to the San–Vistula section,<sup>71</sup> to establish a weak security line and halt 1st Ukrainian Front's advance.

The bulk of Fourth Armoured Army was in an exposed position far to the east of the two Soviet spearheads, and Nehring was therefore obliged to deploy his forces so that the enemy could not get round either of the army's two exposed flanks.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., fo. 127.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., fos. 130 ff.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., fo. 130.

<sup>70</sup> *Geschichte des zweiten Weltkrieges 1939–1945*, ix. 106 ff.; Glantz and Orenstein, *The Battle for the Ukraine*, 73–8.

<sup>71</sup> 154th Reserve Division was assigned to the Przemyśl–Nisko section of the front, 18th Artillery Division to the Nisko–Annopol section, and 174th Reserve Division to the area extending to the army group boundary at Puławy.

Fortunately for XXXXII Corps, the enemy attacks on its deep right flank became less intense after 21 July because the Soviet 1st Guards Armoured Army had advanced so quickly that it no longer had the substance required to mount a direct attack.

On 18 July, while the German First and Fourth Armoured Armies were still endeavouring to close the gap at Rava Ruska in the centre of the army group, Rokossovsky's troops launched an offensive at Kovel. Their first assault did serious damage to Fourth Armoured Army's left flank at the interface between Army Group Centre and Army Group North Ukraine. The superiority of 1st Belorussian Front was so overwhelming that the connection with VIII Corps was broken, and the possibility of encirclement could no longer be ruled out. In view of the delicate situation, Fourth Armoured Army HQ noted explicitly that 'with the situation in the front and the deep flank becoming more threatening by the hour, immediate withdrawal of the armoured army to the Vistula offers the only prospect of keeping the units fit to fight, and therefore fit to be assigned further tasks'.<sup>72</sup> Despite this dramatic situation, the army was obliged to remain in a line far to the east of the Vistula and the San, because Hitler rejected the suggestion of a withdrawal to the Vistula.

The enemy had the initiative, and the army group was completely at its mercy. The enemy breakthrough north of Lvov, in particular, must have given Harpe considerable cause for concern. He simply lacked the necessary force to delay or stop 1st Guards Armoured Army's advance to the San. Now, at the end of July, the opportunity presented itself for Konev to advance directly into the Polish industrial area of Cracow, if he concentrated all his forces in an attack on the San–Vistula section of the front. Army Group North Ukraine's only hope now was that 1st Ukrainian Front's attack would lose momentum. For the desperate position of the army group's neighbour on the left, and the tense situation in the southern and western European areas of operations,<sup>73</sup> precluded any possibility of the OKH despatching fresh units to establish more stable defensive positions in the San–Vistula section of the front.

#### (d) **The Breakthrough on the Army Group's Northern Wing**

When 1st Belorussian Front launched the Brest–Lublin operation against Army Group North Ukraine's left wing on 18 July, it found itself up against LVI Armoured Corps and VIII Corps, which were defending the section of the front to the west and north-west of Kovel with five German divisions and a Hungarian reserve unit. Both corps' forces consisted almost entirely of infantry, and they were seriously short of tanks, assault guns, and artillery. There were only about 100 tanks and assault guns, and 160 heavy anti-tank cannon to employ in the battle against almost 600 enemy armoured vehicles. Given the shortage of heavy weaponry and

<sup>72</sup> KTB Pz.AOK 4, Abt. Ia, 1 July–15 Aug. 1944 (22 July 1944), BA-MA RH 21-4/237, fo. 153.

<sup>73</sup> See in this connection *Germany and the Second World War*, vii (chapters by Vogel), and Gruchmann, *Der Zweite Weltkrieg*, 177, 222.

the numerical inferiority, there was little chance of successfully resisting a massive attack by 1st Belorussian Front, which, by the middle of July, was already deployed in the region of Kovel with 2nd Armoured Army, 8th Guards Army, and 47th, 69th, and 70th Armies.<sup>74</sup>

Rokossovsky used 1st Belorussian Front's immense force potential to achieve a breakthrough of almost 100 kilometres through the German defensive system at the first assault. For the purposes of the offensive, 1st Belorussian Front HQ had allocated a 1-kilometre-wide combat section to each rifle division. The infantry attack had strong artillery backing, with approximately 360 cannon per combat section. There was no doubt that Rokossovsky would get around the German defensive block in front of Brest-Litovsk in the south-west, and press forward in the general direction of Lublin and Warsaw.<sup>75</sup> Army Group North Ukraine was powerless in the face of this enormous fighting force.

The attack on VIII Corps on 17 July, in the section held by the Hungarian 12th Reserve Division, had caused the defensive front to waver. So when the Brest-Lublin operation was launched on the following day, the three Soviet armies encountered a Fourth Armoured Army left wing that was already weakened. Although Harpe decided, that same day, to move VIII Corps' defensive positions back to a shortened line, the corps still had insufficient forces to hold the section of the front for long.

On 18 July Rokossovsky launched 8th Guards Army and 47th and 69th Armies, with 15 rifle divisions, on a major offensive against Fourth Armoured Army's left wing.<sup>76</sup> The three armies advanced on either side of the Kovel–Lublin railway line, directing the main effort at the defensive positions of LVI Armoured Corps. The armoured corps put up a vigorous defence but the enemy forces were so much stronger that it was a lost cause. The German defence had to contend not only with stronger forces on the ground but also with enemy superiority in the air and massive deployment of ground-attack aircraft. As a result, the Soviet forces achieved deep breaches in the defensive front on the very first day of the operation.<sup>77</sup> 1st Belorussian Front's intention was thus already clear at this early stage, namely that its left wing should break through the defence system constructed to the east of the Bug and advance rapidly to the river.<sup>78</sup>

In view of the critical situation in the Kovel area, Harpe had already authorized Fourth Armoured Army HQ to move the army's left flank back to the Bug line.<sup>79</sup> However, the decision proved to be highly problematical for LVI Armoured Corps, because that section of the Bug line was only partly constructed. As a result of the

<sup>74</sup> See also Part III, Chapter II.5(c) of the present volume.

<sup>75</sup> 'Belorusskaja operacija v cifrach', 77; Lesnjak, 'Die Operation von Lublin–Brest', 434 ff.

<sup>76</sup> *Geschichte des zweiten Weltkrieges 1939–1945*, ix, 73.

<sup>77</sup> KTB Pz.AOK 4, Abt. Ia, 1 Jul–15 Aug.1944 (18 July1944), BA-MA RH 21-4/237, fo. 118; Rokossovsky, *A Soldier's Duty*, 248 ff.

<sup>78</sup> KTB Pz.AOK 4, Abt. Ia, 1 July–15 Aug. 1944 (18 July 1944), BA-MA RH 21-4/237, fos. 118 ff.; Lesnjak, 'Die Operation von Lublin–Brest', 433.

<sup>79</sup> Developments in the situation of Army Group Centre, which no longer precluded the possibility of moving the right wing back to the west bank of the Bug, prompted Army Group North Ukraine to make appropriate arrangements to deal with that eventuality.

armoured corps' heavy losses, the fighting strength on Fourth Armoured Army's left wing steadily declined, so there was little hope of halting the Soviet offensive at the Bug.<sup>80</sup> Fourth Armoured Army HQ had to assume that 1st Belorussian Front would push forward to the Vistula, as well as turn north and roll up Army Group Centre from its southern flank.<sup>81</sup>

LVI Armoured Corps was only partially able to withstand the Soviet assault. Three days after the operation was launched, the corps already found itself in a critical situation<sup>82</sup> when enemy spearheads crossed the Bug on its northern and southern flanks while it was still massively engaged in defending its position east of the river. The Fourth Armoured Army commander-in-chief was seriously concerned about the situation on the left flank, in particular, where there was a danger that the connection with VIII Army Corps might be cut. When the Soviet Brest-Lublin operation was launched, VIII Army Corps had only just managed to maintain the link with its neighbour on the right by dint of the most strenuous efforts.<sup>83</sup> It was to be feared that the enemy would 'endeavour to encircle Fourth Armoured Army operationally by the Russian 1st Armoured Army, advancing via Sokal and past the southern wing of Second Army north of Brest, cut its communication lines with the west, and, after reaching the immediate operational objective of Brest-Litovsk, create the necessary conditions for an operational advance on Warsaw'.<sup>84</sup> All Fourth Armoured Army could do was employ delaying tactics to slow the pace of the enemy attack, while withdrawing, section by section, to the San-Vistula line. Given its inferior strength, with only eleven infantry divisions with 15 to 20 operational tanks and about 160 assault guns at its disposal on 18 July,<sup>85</sup> Nehring had no alternative but to withdraw to the front line constructed on the left bank of the Bug.

Despite the critical situation, the OKH was determined that Fourth Armoured Army should remain in its positions on the west bank of the Bug. But, as at Rava Ruska, there were already signs on the Army's left wing that the Bug line would shortly be lost. The German troops were virtually helpless in the face of the attack by the Soviet 47th and 69th Armies, especially as 'LVI Armoured Corps was simply overrun by the massive enemy infantry forces'.<sup>86</sup> The two corps on the army group's left wing nevertheless managed, by calling on their last remaining reserves, to preserve the unity of the front north of the Kovel-Chełm railway line, even though VIII Army Corps too was under massive attack by 8th Guards Army.<sup>87</sup>

<sup>80</sup> KTB Pz.AOK 4, Abt. Ia, 1 July–15 Aug. 1944 (18 July 1944), BA-MA RH 21-4/237, fos. 118–21.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., fos. 121 ff.

<sup>82</sup> KTB Pz.AOK 4, Abt. Ia, 1 July–15 Aug. 1944 (19 July 1944), BA-MA RH 21-4/237, fos. 123, 125; *Die geheimen Tageberichte*, x. 359.

<sup>83</sup> KTB Pz.AOK 4, Abt. Ia, 1 July–15 Aug. 1944 (19 July 1944), BA-MA RH 21-4/237, fo. 123.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., fo. 129.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., fos. 128 ff. On 18 July 1944 1st Belorussian Front had 34 rifle divisions and 3 mobile corps, with more than 500 to 600 tanks, in the German Fourth Armoured Army's combat zone.

<sup>86</sup> KTB Pz.AOK 4, Abt. Ia, 1 July–15 Aug. 1944 (20 July 1944), BA-MA RH 21-4/237, fo. 136.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., fos. 139 ff.

On the fourth day of the Brest–Lublin operation, after the Soviet 47th and 69th Armies had received reinforcements to make up for their losses, the German defensive front west of the Bug collapsed. Only small combat groups, forming a security line, attempted to delay the enemy advance to the Sawin–Włodawa road. But the armoured corps was unable to reduce the momentum of the 69th Army attack. The army group had moved VIII Army Corps back to the Bug line, but this tactical measure did not suffice to stop 8th Guards Army. VIII Army Corps too was now obliged to move its right wing back to the west. 1st Belorussian Front was now able to complete the breakthrough at the interface between LVI Armoured Corps and VIII Corps. The Red Army took advantage of the gap at Sawin to push rapidly to the west, with the result that by 20 July the enemy stood in the deep flanks of both army corps.<sup>88</sup>

In view of the events at Sawin, the army group concluded that 1st Belorussian Front would ‘take advantage of the good roads to press westwards *en masse* towards Lublin while dispatching some units to try to take Chełm. It [the enemy] would also attempt, using more shock troops, to roll up the VIII Army Corps defence on the Bug northwards and take Włodawa’.<sup>89</sup> The Soviet 69th Army broke through the security line north-west of Chełm on 21 July. Lublin now lay open and virtually unprotected in the path of the advancing Soviet 2nd Armoured Army, as there was only a weak security line on the Wieprz guarding the eastern approach to the city.<sup>90</sup> The Soviet 69th Army threatened to penetrate LVI Armoured Corps’ northern flank, cutting off the retreat to the Vistula. Nehring now wanted to shorten the section defended by XXXXII Army Corps, so that he could take one of its divisions out of the front to secure the deep left flank. As the Soviet 69th Army was concentrating on taking Lublin, the armoured corps was able to stabilize its left flank temporarily. However, at this stage in the operation, the army commanders’ hands were tied, because ‘the enemy is taking advantage of the breakthrough, pushing its armoured and motorized forces relentlessly westwards, and pressing into the Lublin fortified place from the west in the afternoon’.<sup>91</sup> The almost 900-strong garrison, consisting mainly of local defence conscripts and anti-aircraft defence personnel, mustered all its forces to repel the attack. Lublin had been designated a ‘fortified place’ by Hitler, but it had no chance of successfully defending itself for long, nor was it strong enough to tie down major enemy troop concentrations in the long term.<sup>92</sup> Despite the acute threat, Harpe decided that Lublin, ‘as an important node, cannot be surrendered without a struggle, especially at a time when there are still some forces east of the fortified place’.<sup>93</sup> However, the army group was in favour of giving up Lublin because, ‘given its location and the forces allocated to it, it was unable to fulfil its mission of tying

<sup>88</sup> *Geschichte des zweiten Weltkrieges 1939–1945*, ix, 74 ff.

<sup>89</sup> KTB Pz.AOK 4, Abt. Ia, 1 July–15 Aug. 1944 (21 July 1944), BA-MA RH 21-4/237, 148.

<sup>90</sup> The section of the Wieprz east of Lublin was defended by a 150-strong combat group with a few infantry guns.

<sup>91</sup> KTB Pz.AOK 4, Abt. Ia, 1 July–15 Aug. 1944 (22 July 1944), BA-MA RH 21-4/237, fo. 150.

<sup>92</sup> Kdt Fester Platz Lublin, Abt. Ia, No. 337/44 g.Kdos., 16 July 1944, BA-MA RH 21-4/243.

<sup>93</sup> KTB Pz.AOK 4, Abt. Ia, 1 July–15 Aug. 1944 (22 July 1944), BA-MA RH 21-4/237, fo. 151.

down strong Russian forces'.<sup>94</sup> The commander-in-chief therefore repeatedly asked the OKH to cancel the designation of Lublin as a fortified place. Despite all those misgivings, Hitler stuck obstinately to his decision.<sup>95</sup> In view of the developments at Lublin, Fourth Armoured Army concluded, in its situation report, that 1st Belorussian Front intended to press forward to the bend in the Vistula east of Radom and cross the river at Puławy. This conclusion was in line with Rokossovsky's operational plan, which was that Lublin should be taken quickly and the Soviet 2nd Armoured Army and 69th Army should advance rapidly to the Vistula.<sup>96</sup> With 69th Army engaged in driving LVI Armoured Corps south, and 47th Army endeavouring to roll up VIII Corps from the south at Włodawa, the Soviet enemy had created the conditions for increasing the gap between the German corps and then pressing on to the Vistula without any appreciable impediment.<sup>97</sup>

In the area of operations between Lublin and the Bug, 1st Belorussian Front was taking advantage of the army group's weakness to put Rokossovsky's operational plan into effect, steadily extending the area of the breakthrough and also advancing north-east towards Warsaw. That would break up the army group's right flank and roll back, from the south, its remaining front east of the Vistula.<sup>98</sup> On 24 July, at this critical stage in the fighting, the high command in Cracow received Hitler's directive on the future conduct of operations on the eastern front. The directive took account of the current situation on the army group's left flank, in that the OKH was to place VIII Army Corps under the command of Army Group Centre. At the same time, Hitler assigned the army group the task of restoring the front's connection with its neighbour on the right.<sup>99</sup>

Although Army Group North Ukraine's section of the front had been reduced by the reassignment of VIII Army Corps, the situation on its northern flank remained tense. The Soviet 69th Army was not only attempting to take Lublin, which was encircled on 23 July, but was also threatening Fourth Armoured Army's deep flank. Only mobile combat by LVI Armoured Corps saved the left wing from penetration. Although the armoured corps' northern wing was holding its ground against the enemy pressure, Fourth Armoured Army HQ nevertheless had to secure the army's withdrawal to the west. It therefore gradually moved the armoured corps back to the Wieprz section of the front.

On 22 July, when it became clear that the Vistula section was in danger, the army group had already assigned to Fourth Armoured Army HQ responsibility for securing the stretch of river between Nisko and Dęblin. The army group placed two reserve divisions under its command for the purpose: 18th Artillery Division was

<sup>94</sup> Study P-114c, pt. 7, i. 37, BA-MA ZA 1/2077, fo. 89.

<sup>95</sup> ObKdo H.Gr. Nordukraine, Abt. Ia, No. 3370/44 geh., 22 July 1944, BA-MA RH 21-4/244.

<sup>96</sup> *Geschichte des zweiten Weltkrieges 1939–1945*, ix. 75 ff.

<sup>97</sup> KTB Pz.AOK 4, Abt. Ia, 1 July–15 Aug. 1944 (22 July 1944), BA-MA RH 21-4/237, fo. 152.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., fo. 154. *Geschichte des zweiten Weltkrieges 1939–1945*, ix. 75 ff.; Lesnjak, 'Die Operation von Lublin–Brest', 438 ff.

<sup>99</sup> OKH/GenStdH/OpAbt (I), No. 440398/44 g.Kdos. Chefs. V., 23 July 1944, BA-MA RH 19 VI/19, fos. 204–6. For more details of 1st Belorussian Front operations against Army Group Centre, see Part V, Chapter II.5(d) of the present volume.

deployed behind the point of concentration of the armoured army's defences in the San–Vistula triangle, and 174th Reserve Division was given the task of securing the west bank of the Vistula on both sides of the Chełm–Lublin–Puławy–Radom road.<sup>100</sup> However, the security line between Annopol and Dęblin was in very great danger, because the Soviet 69th Army was driving LVI Armoured Corps south. Given the lack of reserves, the army group could only hope that, after advancing more than 150 kilometres, the Soviet forces would no longer have the offensive strength to overcome the river line.

At the end of July, the Lublin fortified place was the last obstacle standing in the way of 1st Belorussian Front's advance from the Bug to the Vistula. The Soviet forces surrounded the city. By the second day of the siege, it was apparent that the weak garrison forces could not cope with the attacks. The army group commander-in-chief nevertheless decided to dispatch 17th Armoured Division to relieve the 'fortified place', because 'holding Lublin had proved to be thoroughly worthwhile'.<sup>101</sup> By 24 July it was clear that the city was about to be lost completely. A radio message from the commander read: 'A few houses still in our hands. Impossible to wait any longer. Request permission for immediate breakout'.<sup>102</sup> The armoured unit's attempts to relieve the city having failed, the OKH finally, after lengthy discussions, gave its consent.<sup>103</sup> So, on 25 July, some 300 to 400 men attempted to fight their way through to the German lines, which about 170 of them reached on the following day.<sup>104</sup>

After taking Lublin, the Soviet forces increased the pressure on LVI Armoured Corps' northern flank. The corps was now engaged in fierce defensive battles at Krasnystaw; once again, it had to withdraw to the west. Some of the Soviet 69th Army forces no longer required at Lublin pressed on to the Vistula at Annopol, posing a strong threat to the corps' rear communication lines. The first enemy units had already reached the Vistula, where they encountered 174th Reserve Division's weak security line at Puławy. At the same time, the situation on the San at Jarosław had become so acute that even the hard-pressed LVI Armoured Corps had to dispatch some units to endeavour to halt the advance of the Soviet 1st Guards Armoured Army and 13th Army. Fourth Armoured Army lost a substantial part of the forces securing its northern flank. Now, at last, it received permission from the OKH to 'move west as far as it considered possible and essential in order to avoid being outflanked'.<sup>105</sup> In the altered conditions, which made it impossible to hold out east of the Vistula, the only option was to withdraw immediately to the San–Vistula line. Rokossovsky redirected the offensive towards Warsaw and Siedlce.<sup>106</sup> So the

<sup>100</sup> ObKdo H.Gr. Nordukraine, Abt. Ia, No. 3391/44 geh., BA-MA RH 19 V/19, 216; KTB H. Gr. Nordukraine, Ia, No. 3354/44 g.Kdos., 20 July 1944, BA-MA RH 21-4/243; KTB Pz.AOK 4, Abt. Ia, 1 July–15 Aug. 1944 (22 July 1944), BA-MA RH 21-4/237, fo. 153.

<sup>101</sup> KTB Pz.AOK 4, Abt. Ia, 1 July–15 Aug. 1944 (24 July 1944), BA-MA RH 21-4/237, fo. 163.

<sup>102</sup> Kdt Fester Platz Lublin, radio message, 24 July 1944, BA-MA RH 21-4/245.

<sup>103</sup> KTB Pz.AOK 4, Abt. Ia, 1 July–15 Aug. 1944 (24 July 1944), BA-MA RH 21-4/237, fo. 164.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid. (25 July, 27 July 1944), BA-MA RH 21-4/237, fos. 171, 184; *Die geheimen Tagesberichte*, x. 380.

<sup>105</sup> KTB Pz.AOK 4, Abt. Ia, 1 July–15 Aug. 1944 (25 July 1944), BA-MA RH 21-4/237, fo. 172.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid. (27 July 1944), BA-MA RH, 21-4/237, fo. 188; Lesnjak, 'Die Operation von Lublin-Brest', 439 ff.

pressure on the armoured corps' left flank eased off at the end of July, and it was able to withdraw to the west bank of the Vistula, where it took over the defence of the area between Annopol and Janowiec. This successful withdrawal saved Fourth Armoured Army, at the last minute, from 'being outflanked on both sides east of the Vistula'<sup>107</sup> and destroyed. However, LVI Armoured Corps succeeded only partially in keeping the enemy forces on the eastern bank of the Vistula, and the Soviets were able to establish several bridgeheads.<sup>108</sup> Although efforts to drive the Red Army from the left bank of the Vistula were only partly successful,<sup>109</sup> Fourth Armoured Army established its left flank on the Vistula at the end of July, and the situation there improved after the OKH inserted Ninth Army in the section of the front north of Puławy, thus closing the gap between Fourth Armoured Army and Second Army.

The Wehrmacht's inferiority became clear on Army Group North Ukraine's left wing in the second half of July, when Rokossovsky's troops broke through 'the best possibly secured section of Germany's eastern front' at the first assault.<sup>110</sup> Harpe was able to palliate the crisis to some extent by employing mobile tactics, taking advantage of the Soviet high command's intention to roll up Army Group Centre's defensive positions from the south and weaken the central section of the eastern front so as to open up a direct route to the very centre of German power, Berlin.

#### (e) **Fourth Armoured Army's Withdrawal to the Vistula**

After 1st Belorussian Front had taken up position at Kovel and 1st Ukrainian Front had advanced to the San, the mass of Fourth Armoured Army had been compressed into the Chełm–Zamość area, west of the Bug. That was where it stood on 24 July, completely isolated, with enemy forces rapidly approaching its 120-kilometre-deep flank as they advanced westwards.<sup>111</sup> The army had to withdraw to the Vistula without delay if it was to avoid encirclement. Although Hitler had refused Fourth Armoured Army HQ permission to withdraw behind the Vistula section of the front, Harpe partly acceded to its request to move back to the Vistula section.<sup>112</sup> He insisted that 'the Zamość–Krasnystaw area must be held', but stressed how important it was for the purpose of future operations 'to maintain a continuous front and to avoid encirclement'.<sup>113</sup> Fourth Armoured Army was already outflanked on both sides by enemy forces. However, Konev did not order part of 3rd Guards Army to move north, nor did Rokossovsky order 69th Army units to press in to the south. So, until 25 July, Fourth Armoured Army still had a corridor south of Lublin, which it was to use for its withdrawal.

<sup>107</sup> ObKdo Pz.AOK 4, Abt. Ia, No. 5495/44 g.Kdos., 28 July 1944, Panzerarmeebefehl No. 74, 1, BA-MA RH 21-4/244.

<sup>108</sup> KTB Pz.AOK 4, Abt. Ia, 1 July–15 Aug. 1944 (29 July 1944), BA-MA RH 21-4/237, fo. 199.

<sup>109</sup> ObKdo Pz.AOK 4, Abt. Ia, No. 5547/44 geh., 30 July 1944, Panzerarmeebefehl No. 75, 2, BA-MA RH 21-4/246.

<sup>110</sup> On this, see Part III, Chapter II.5(d) of the present volume.

<sup>111</sup> *Die geheimen Tagesberichte*, x. 374.

<sup>112</sup> KTB Pz.AOK 4, Abt. Ia, 1 July–15 Aug. 1944 (22 July 1944), BA-MA RH 21-4/237, fo. 153.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid. (23 July 1944); RH 21-4/237, fo. 155.

Hitler wanted the front to be held at the Bug, but Fourth Armoured Army had been gradually withdrawing from the Chełm–Zamość area since 23 July and moving west, constantly fighting off the advancing 3rd Guards Army. When XXXXII Corps secured the withdrawal movement at Frampol, 70 kilometres south of Lublin, Konev ordered 3rd Guards Army to move in from the south and cut off the escape route. At the same time, 1st Belorussian Front attacked LVI Armoured Corps' left flank on 24 July, after Lublin had fallen.<sup>114</sup>

The OKH held firmly to its decision that Fourth Armoured Army was to defend on the Zamość–Krasnystaw line.<sup>115</sup> Only on 24 July, when the situation on LVI Armoured Corps' northern flank clearly deteriorated and it became virtually impossible to hold the security line at Krasnystaw, did the OKH authorize withdrawal to the Wieprz section of the front. The OKH's hesitation prompted Fourth Armoured Army HQ to note in its 24 July situation report that:

only rapid and comprehensive decisions [...] now [offer] any prospect of maintaining, at least to some extent, the fighting strength of the XXXXII Army Corps and LVI Armoured Corps divisions—which are succumbing to the speed and mobility of the enemy forces operating against their flanks—and enabling them to defend the San–Vistula line with the inadequate forces and means so far granted to the army in its section of the front.<sup>116</sup>

In spite of the deep breach in the area between the Bug and the San, which the Soviet 3rd Guards Army exploited in intensive attacks on Fourth Armoured Army's right flank, the German units managed to reach the Wieprz section at the last moment, some XXXXII Corps units having to fight their way through against considerable resistance from the enemy. However, despite the successful withdrawal, conditions in the army's area of operations were by no means calmer, as 1st Guards Armoured Army had broken through LIX Corps' defensive positions on the San between Jarosław and Przemyśl. At this stage, the armoured army urgently needed all its strong units if it was to reach the Vistula–San line without incurring substantial losses, but on 25 July the army group ordered Fourth Armoured Army HQ to relinquish certain units for transfer to the central section of the army group front. They were to carry out counter-attacks in the breakthrough area in order to close the gap in that section of the front and prevent the San–Vistula line from being rolled up. For that purpose, the army group took 88th Infantry Division and 17th Armoured Division from Fourth Armoured Army HQ's left wing, and transferred them to the seriously endangered central section. Harpe felt obliged to concede that Fourth Armoured Army should 'move west as far as it considered possible and essential in order to avoid being outflanked'.<sup>117</sup> Both units were to be deployed in LVI Armoured Corps' combat zone that very day.

<sup>114</sup> Glantz and Orenstein, *The Battle for the Ukraine*, 72.

<sup>115</sup> KTB Pz.AOK 4, Abt. Ia, 1 July–15 Aug. 1944 (24 July 1944), BA-MA RH 21-4/237, fo. 165.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., fo. 169.

<sup>117</sup> KTB Pz.AOK 4, Abt. Ia, 1 July–15 Aug. 1944 (25 July 1944), BA-MA. RH 21-4/237, fo. 177.

The army group HQ intended to establish a bridgehead in the Vistula–San triangle, in order to attack the 1st Guards Armoured Army spearheads already operating in the area, and drive them back to the east bank of the San. Despite the situation of XXXXII Corps, which was under constant attack from 3rd Guards Army forces and was engaged in a race with the enemy to reach the Vistula line, the OKH ordered the bridgehead to be established at Annopol. In addition, the army group requested the transfer of two infantry divisions behind the army's right wing at Sandomierz. As a result, the situation of XXXXII Corps deteriorated once again. This substantial crisis was overcome by the evening of 28 July, when the first units reached the San at Nisko, avoiding the danger of being outflanked.<sup>118</sup>

LVI Armoured Corps, on the other hand, was assigned the task of establishing a defensive line on the west bank of the Vistula, running north from Annopol to the junction with Army Group Centre at Janowiec. The gap between Army Group Centre and Army Group North Ukraine to the north of Puławy had been successfully closed by the insertion of Ninth Army, but the OKH still feared that enemy forces might be able to break through at the interface between the two army groups. This was to be prevented by Fourth Armoured Army conducting its defensive combat with the point of concentration on its left wing.<sup>119</sup> After the heavy losses in the withdrawal battles, Fourth Armoured Army HQ was forced to conclude that, 'with these scant and in most cases extremely weary forces, taking up what are only nominally prepared positions [...] in stretches of the front that are inevitably far overextended, neither the bridgehead nor the San–Vistula line can be held for long against a planned attack by strong enemy forces'.<sup>120</sup> Fourth Armoured Army HQ therefore requested permission not to establish the bridgehead and to employ its few forces to defend its section of the front effectively. The army group HQ agreed with this analysis of the situation, so Harpe endeavoured to persuade the OKH to amend the operations order.

While the bulk of Fourth Armoured Army was withdrawing according to plan, the 1st Guards Armoured Army spearhead was pressing ahead through the gap, which was more than 50 kilometres wide, and the first Soviet tanks crossed the Vistula at Baranów on 29 July. There was only a small defence force at this point, so the armoured army was unable to clear up the penetration. 1st Ukrainian Front established a bridgehead on the west bank of the Vistula at the first assault.<sup>121</sup> The Soviet 3rd Guards Army too succeeded in breaking through the defensive front on the San between Jarosław and Przemyśl in the last few days of July. By the end of the month it stood on the Sanok–Krosno–Rzeszów line, threatening Fourth Armoured Army's southern flank. Above all, 1st Guards Army, which was pushing northwest at Jarosław, was aiming to advance in the direction of Sokołów and confront the armoured army defending the Vistula.<sup>122</sup>

<sup>118</sup> Ibid. (25–28 July 1944), BA-MA RH 21-4/237, fos. 170–99.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid. (27 July 1944), BA-MA RH 21-4/237, fo. 183.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid. (28 July 1944), BA-MA RH 21-4/237, fos. 193 ff.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid. (29 July 1944), BA-MA RH 21-4/237, fos. 196 ff.

<sup>122</sup> Glantz and Orenstein, *The Battle for the Ukraine*, 87–92.

The conditions in the central section of Army Group North Ukraine forced Harpe to take incisive measures at the end of July to prevent the enemy forces advancing any further and to restore a continuous front. The army group accordingly assigned Fourth Armoured Army the task of 'defending the west bank of the San downstream from Nisko, and the Vistula, including the Annopol bridgehead. It forces shall be kept to a minimum in view of the planned offensive operation.'<sup>123</sup> The army group's order left Fourth Armoured Army HQ free to evacuate the Annopol bridgehead if operational considerations made it necessary to do so.<sup>124</sup> The situation led the OKH to decide 'that Fourth Armoured Army's task is to prevent the enemy from crossing the Vistula in any circumstances'.<sup>125</sup> The OKH also specified that the bridgehead was to be held only so long as the available forces were not needed for more important tasks. So, after a prolonged tug-of-war, the problem was now solved to the mutual advantage of the army group and Fourth Armoured Army.

The last units of Fourth Armoured Army reached the defensive positions in the San–Vistula triangle in the course of 28 July. Since, despite all the defensive efforts, advance units of 1st Guards Armoured Army had broken through the Nisko–Baranów security line and crossed the Vistula in the Baranów area, the Fourth Armoured Army commander-in-chief decided to evacuate the bridgehead and to use the forces that became available to clear the area south of Sandomierz and secure the armoured army's right flank against encirclement by enemy forces. The armoured army had only just escaped a threat of encirclement, but it now had to move its southern flank west again if it was to prevent an enemy thrust against its rear. By 30 July the whole of LVI Armoured Corps had moved to the left bank of the Vistula and taken up positions along the Vistula and on the San, which curved west towards Baranów south of Sandomierz. Fourth Armoured Army settled in on the river line, giving the advancing enemy forces no time to recover or to establish a stable defensive front.

Although considerable losses had been incurred during the withdrawal from the Bug to the Vistula, Army Group North Ukraine, with a great deal of luck, had nevertheless managed to save an entire army from destruction. The enemy had at least been thwarted in its rapid push west into central Poland. The insertion of Ninth Army had closed the gap between Army Group Centre and its neighbour to the south, and the enemy advance to the Vistula and the San north of Nisko had been brought to a standstill for the time being. The army group now had to devote all its attention to its central section in order to halt the enemy forces that had broken through there and—if at all possible—drive them back to the San.

#### (f) The Crisis on the Middle San

At the beginning of the last ten days of July, Army Group North Ukraine faced an existential crisis, having failed to close the gap between First and Fourth Armoured

<sup>123</sup> KTB Pz.AOK 4, Abt. Ia, 1 July–15 Aug. 1944 (28 July 1944), BA-MA RH 21-4/237, fos. 197 ff.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid. BA-MA RH 21-4/237, fo. 198.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

Armies in the Rava Ruska–Lvov area. Both armies were engaged in fierce defensive battles at this point, so the high command in Cracow could not take units away from the front to close the gap. Nor was there any hope of further forces being assigned to the army group. By 22 July Army Group South Ukraine alone had transferred five armoured divisions and two shock brigades to its neighbour on the left,<sup>126</sup> and it had no more reserves. The Soviet 1st Guards Armoured Army was able to advance towards the San through the 75-kilometre-wide gap at Rava Ruska, almost without impediment. How was the San line to be held now, and the collapse of the army group front in central Galicia prevented? There were only three reserve divisions west of the San, hardly a strong enough force to protect the San–Vistula line, which was more than 300 kilometres long. Given the rapid tempo of the 1st Guards Armoured Army attacks, the army group had to act quickly to prevent the central section of its front collapsing at the San itself. There was very little room for manoeuvre. The enemy advance forces would be on the east bank of the San by 22 July or thereabouts, and by 23 July 1st Guards Armoured Army had already reached the high ground at Jarosław on the east bank, while the Soviet 13th Army had advanced to Radymno, 20 kilometres south of Jarosław, with little resistance from the German forces. So Konev had very nearly achieved the operational objective set by the Stavka, namely to liberate Galicia and advance into the industrial area of southern Poland.<sup>127</sup>

The army group moved LIX Armoured Corps staff to the Rzeszów area where, with 24th Armoured Division and 208th Infantry Division, they were to set up improvised defences to prevent Soviet forces from crossing the river and establishing bridgeheads. In addition to the one reserve division, LIX Armoured Corps deployed the two strong fighting units in the front sections at Jarosław and Przemyśl. On 25 July the Soviet forces already broke through the improvised San defensive line—1st Guards Armoured Army north of Jarosław and 13th Army at Rudnik.<sup>128</sup> Thus, the ‘Directive on the Conduct of Operations on the Eastern Front’ was a dead letter after only two days. It had stipulated that the army group was to hold the area of Lvov and Stanislavov, and, with the forces arriving from Army Group South Ukraine, ‘[launch an attack] northwards between Lvov and the San, in order to destroy the enemy forces that had broken through and close the gap between First and Fourth Armoured Armies’. Above all, as Hitler had ordered, ‘enemy forces were to be prevented from crossing the river’.<sup>129</sup> In view of this situation, Harpe ordered LIX Army Corps to delay the enemy advance until reinforcements arrived. The German defensive efforts centred on the two traffic nodes of Jarosław and Przemyśl, which were the cornerstones of the German defence on the San and must therefore remain in German hands for as long as possible. At this point, the army group commander, Harpe, was still confident that

<sup>126</sup> KTB H.Gr. Südukraine, Abt. Ia, No. 3, x. 95 (22 July 1944), BA-MA RH 19 V/29, fo. 95.

<sup>127</sup> Glantz and Orenstein, *The Battle for the Ukraine*, 70–2; *Geschichte des zweiten Weltkrieges 1939–1945*, ix. 97, 106 ff.

<sup>128</sup> ‘Lvov–Peremyshl-Operation’, II. 630–2; ‘1st Ukrainian Front’, 198–252.

<sup>129</sup> OKH/GenStdH/OpAbt (I), No. 440398/44 g.Kdos. Chefs., 23 July 1944, BA-MA RH 19 VI/19, fos. 204–7.

'the enemy can be driven east in a series of concentric attacks, once our own reinforcements have arrived and a First Armoured Army group has been formed west of Sambor'.<sup>130</sup> The reinforcements would launch their counter-offensive at the beginning of August. This optimism was prompted, in particular, by Hitler's directive of 23 July, according to which the army group was to have an additional army HQ inserted in the gap between First and Fourth Armoured Armies. The OKH also announced that three infantry divisions would be brought in to overcome the operational crisis.<sup>131</sup>

Although the west bank of the San on both sides of Jarosław was secured by the strong 24th Armoured Division, the Soviet 13th Army crossed the river on 26 July and pressed on towards the Vistula, north of the German defensive block. LIX Armoured Corps delayed the Soviet 1st Guards Armoured Army advance west of Jarosław for a time, but it was unable to prevent strong sections of 3rd Guards Armoured Army from crossing the river between Jarosław and Przemyśl, and advancing rapidly to the Wisłoka river. On 27 July the corps withdrew to the west in order to avoid encirclement.<sup>132</sup>

Harpe decided to launch local counter-offensives in which separate groups would attack Sambor and Rzeszów respectively. The concentric attack on Przemyśl would then restore a continuous defensive front between Sambor and Przemyśl, and on the San.<sup>133</sup> As the deployment of the two groups could not be completed before the beginning of August,<sup>134</sup> 17th Army had to delay the enemy offensive east of the Sanok–Krosno–Rzeszów line by means of mobile combat. During its offensive preparations, the high command in Cracow also had to take measures to limit 1st Guards Armoured Army's advance to the Vistula. The Soviet spearheads crossed the San on 25 July. All attempts to bring the Soviet forces to a standstill were fruitless, and by 29 July they had reached the Vistula at Baranów and established a bridgehead on the west bank.

When, at the end of July, the German defence on the San collapsed in the face of the massive onslaught by 1st Ukrainian Front, the army group endeavoured to mount a defence against the Soviet offensive by establishing tactical strongpoints west of the river. Harpe had originally intended to attack 1st Guards Armoured Army from the flanks and in the centre of the breakthrough at Rzeszów, in order to cut the spearheads' rear communication lines. III Armoured Corps was standing in

<sup>130</sup> ObKdo H.Gr. Nordukraine, Abt. Ia, No. 3466/44 geh., 26 July 1944, BA-MA RH 19 VI/19, fo. 197.

<sup>131</sup> In addition to Seventeenth Army HQ, which had been refreshed at Königsberg after the Crimea evacuation, 78th, 544th, and 545th Infantry Divisions were also to be assigned to Army Group North Ukraine; OKH/GenStdH/OpAbt (I), No. 440398/44 g.Kdos. Chefs., 23 July 1944, 2, BA-MA RH 19 VI/19, fo. 205.

<sup>132</sup> Glantz and Orenstein, *The Battle for the Ukraine*, 76–8; Senger und Etterlin, *Die 24. Panzer-Division*, 252 ff.

<sup>133</sup> ObKdo H.Gr. Nordukraine, Abt. Ia, No. 0852/44 g.Kdos. Chefs., 29 July 1944, BA-MA RH 19 VI/19, fo. 182.

<sup>134</sup> The group that was to attack at Sambor, comprising III Armoured Corps with 1st and 16th Armoured Divisions, 20th Armoured Infantry Division, and 101st Light Infantry Division, could not be in place until 2 August 1944, and the group that was to attack at Rzeszów—LIX Army Corps with 17th, 23rd, and 24th Armoured Divisions—not until 5 August 1944; *ibid.*, fos. 182 ff.

the south ready for this counter-offensive, and the army group assembled another detachment south of Sandomierz, on the northern edge of the breakthrough. The army group could not expect to receive any reinforcements, so Fourth Armoured Army HQ was obliged to provide three divisions for the purpose, despite the risk of encirclement. While 72nd and 88th Infantry Divisions established a security line from the San at Rozwadów to the Vistula north of Baranów, 17th Armoured Division was moved to the Rzeszów area. With the forces deployed in these positions, the high command in Cracow hoped to re-establish the front between Sandomierz and Rzeszów by means of concentric attacks on 1st Guards Armoured Army's flanks. A similar operation was planned for III Armoured Corps, which was to launch an attack from the Chyrów–Sambor line and, in cooperation with 208th Infantry Division and 23rd Armoured Division, close the gap between Rzeszów–Przemyśl and Sambor.<sup>135</sup>

In view of developments, Harpe was obliged to launch the offensive at the end of July, because any further delay would have drastically reduced the chances of success.<sup>136</sup> The army group decided not to wait for the forces that were still on the way, but to launch an attack immediately on the flanks of the enemy forces advancing through the gap, in order to re-establish the San–Vistula front, cut their rear communication lines, and destroy them.<sup>137</sup> In spite of this plan, the offensive, both north of Rzeszów and from the Chyrów–Sambor line, had no decisive effect because 1st Ukrainian Front, with forces that were vastly superior in every respect and with massive air support, quickly repelled the German attacks. Konev now proceeded to launch a massive offensive according to plan, with three armies advancing in a north-westerly direction. The intention was to prevent the Germans from establishing a defensive front along the Vistula. For that purpose, Konev needed to establish large bridgeheads on the west bank of the Vistula.<sup>138</sup> Despite Soviet superiority, however, only 1st Guards Armoured Army managed to achieve the aim of the operation by establishing a bridgehead at Baranów. The German forces were defeated there, and Harpe could only minimize the crisis.

### (g) The Developments on the Army Group's Southern Wing

While 1st Ukrainian Front was advancing to the San through the gap in the front on both sides of Rava Ruska, First Armoured Army HQ received a directive setting out the basic principles for the conduct of operations in the area east of Lvov and in the Carpathian fringe. It stipulated that First Armoured Army was to 'hold the front on the Drohobych–Lvov protective position–Lvov–north-west Lvov [...] line,

<sup>135</sup> ObKdo H.Gr. Nordukraine, Abt. Ia, No. 0852/44, g.Kdos. Chefs., 29 July 1944, BA-MA RH 19 VI/19, fos. 182–4.

<sup>136</sup> ObKdo H.Gr. Nordukraine, Abt. Ia, No. 3567/44 g.Kdos., 30 July 1944, BA-MA RH 19 VI/19, fo. 177.

<sup>137</sup> KTB Pz.AOK 4, Abt. Ia, 1 July–15 Aug. 1944 (30 July 1944), BA-MA RH 21-4/237, fos. 203 ff.

<sup>138</sup> *Geschichte des zweiten Weltkrieges 1939–1945*, ix. 110–13; Glantz and Orenstein, *The Battle for the Ukraine*, 87 ff.

and ensure its continuity'.<sup>139</sup> Although the army HQ had already moved the point of concentration of the defence to the left wing as a result of enemy pressure, a crisis was developing in the section of the front before Lvov. The Soviet 4th Armoured Army had broken through the positions north-west of Peremyshlyany, so that III and XXXVIII Armoured Corps were again threatened with encirclement. If the front was to be held before Lvov, the armoured army would have to close the gap at Peremyshlyany and eliminate the enemy forces that had broken through. Harpe planned to block the Soviet breakthrough north of Lvov at the end of July, so the army group command ordered First Armoured Army HQ 'to assemble the bulk of the mobile units [...] with all speed in the area west of Lvov, so that they can intervene to prevent encirclement of the west wing and then advance north-west, depending on how the situation develops'.<sup>140</sup>

While First Armoured Army was striving to maintain the stability of its left wing, as well as to avoid any withdrawal in the Carpathian fringe and prevent the loss of Lvov, the situation in the army group's southern section appeared to be relatively quiet. The Hungarian 1st Army was maintaining contact with its neighbour on the right. Although it had been obliged to transfer its German units (68th Infantry Division and 101st Light Infantry Division) to First Armoured Army, it was nevertheless holding the positions in the Carpathian fringe. However, in view of the tense situation, this was not enough, and the Hungarian 1st Army was obliged to extend its section of the front further north after 23 July so that more forces would be available to strengthen First Armoured Army's left wing. In response to the situation north of Lvov, First Armoured Army also moved XXIV Armoured Corps back from the Styrya to Berezhany on the Zolota Lypa, a tributary of the Dniester. As a result, 75th, 208th, and 254th Infantry Divisions became available and were dispatched to strengthen XXXVIII Armoured Corps in the Peremyshlyany area. Although the corps was under massive attack by 38th Army in the right-hand part of its area, the threat to its left wing proved to be much more dangerous, because the Soviet 4th Armoured Army attacked the wide bend on the western flank in an attempt to roll up the corps from the north. Only when the armoured corps had been reinforced and First Armoured Army had withdrawn to the Zolota Lypa river, did the situation become less tense. However, there was still a risk that the Soviet forces might nevertheless still fulfil their mission to take Lvov from the south.<sup>141</sup>

As a result of Hitler's directive of 23 July, according to which Army Group North Ukraine was also required to hold both the Carpathian front and the Stanislavov–Lvov area,<sup>142</sup> First Armoured Army was forced to remain in the positions before Lvov despite the ever-increasing risk of encirclement. However, the section of the front extending north before Lvov effectively held up the Soviet 38th Army in its advance to the San.

<sup>139</sup> ObKdo H.Gr. Nordukraine, Abt. Ia, No. 3414/44 g.Kdos., 23 July 1944, BA-MA RH 19 VI/19, fo. 214.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

<sup>141</sup> 'Lvov–Peremyshl-Operation', II. 633.

<sup>142</sup> OKH/GenStdH/OpAbt (I) No. 440398/44 g.Kdos. Chefs., 23 July 1944, 1, BA-MA RH 19 VI/19, fo. 204.

Up to 25 July, First Armoured Army had managed to hold the strategically important section of the front at Lvov, which covered access to the industrial area of southern Poland, and also to repel limited local attacks against the southern section of the army's front, but the situation changed radically in the last few days of July. On 25 July the army group command formed Army Detachment Raus, thus ensuring unified conduct of operations on its right wing by placing the Hungarian 1st Army under the command of First Armoured Army. The detachment's main remit was to defend the Carpathian fringe, and General Raus was allowed a degree of latitude, in that the high command in Cracow simply ordered him to 'move the front salient north of the Dniester back gradually to the southern bank of the Dniester, abandoning Lvov'.<sup>143</sup> The detachment was to engage in defence only on the southern bank of the river between Sambor and Stanislavov in order, above all, to protect the Drohobych oilfields. The fact that Lvov had to be abandoned was attributable to errors in the conduct of operations by the high command in Cracow, and to the very small degree of operational latitude which the OKH allowed the army group.<sup>144</sup> In addition, on 24 July the Soviet 3rd Guards Armoured Army was already north of the city, having advanced to Przemyśl on the San. Konev now intended to implement the Stavka's operational plan to enclose the Galician metropolis with three armies and destroy III Armoured Corps, for which task the Soviet 4th Guards Armoured Army, 4th Armoured Army, and 60th Army were available.<sup>145</sup> First Armoured Army HQ therefore had no alternative but to abandon the Lvov region and withdraw both III and XXXXVI Armoured Corps to the Dniester by the end of July.<sup>146</sup> The army detachment moved its armoured units, as ordered, to the Chyrów–Sambor area, where they prepared for the counter-offensive. In view of the precarious situation west of the San, Army Group North Ukraine HQ planned to launch a concentric attack on Przemyśl, with III Armoured Corps from the Chyrów–Sambor line and LIX Corps from the Rzeszów area, in order to cut off and destroy the enemy forces that had broken through. Its stated aim was 'to restore a continuous front between Sambor and Przemyśl, and on the San'.<sup>147</sup>

The pressure which the Soviet 1st Guards Army brought to bear on First Armoured Army's left wing did indeed force Raus to move the defensive front back gradually to the Dniester at Rudki, but it was not strong enough to force the German troops to abandon the Drohobych–Stryi oilfields. The oilfields, which were important for the war economy, were threatened in July 1944 not only by the enemy forces assembled in the Lvov–Berezhany area, but also by the Soviet 18th Army from the front salient at Kolomyia. If 18th Army were to advance along the Stanislavov–Dolina axis, the Soviet forces would have a good prospect of pressing

<sup>143</sup> ObKdo H.Gr. Nordukraine, Abt. Ia, No. 3467/44 g.Kdos., 25 July 1944, BA-MA RH 19 VI/19, fo. 200.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., fos. 200 ff.

<sup>145</sup> Glantz and Orenstein, *The Battle for the Ukraine*, 73–8.

<sup>146</sup> Study P-114c, pt. 7, i. 39, BA-MA ZA 1/2077, fo. 93; Neidhardt, *Mit Tanne und Eichenlaub*, 326–32.

<sup>147</sup> ObKdo H.Gr. Nordukraine, Abt. Ia, No. 0852/44 g.Kdos. Chefs., 29 July 1944, 1, BA-MA RH 19 VI/19, fo. 182.

forward into the Drohobych region. On 14 July Konev instructed 18th Army and 1st Guards Army to plan an operation to take possession of the oilfields. After completing the preparations, the army launched the offensive east of Stanislavov on 21 July. At the same time, 18th Army launched an offensive at Delatyn against the Hungarian 1st Army,<sup>148</sup> which proved to be too weak to withstand the massive assault. The shortening of the front south of Kuty on 24 July had very little effect on the Hungarians' ability to resist.<sup>149</sup> While VI Corps essentially held its defensive positions at Delatyn in this phase of the battle, the Hungarian VII Corps collapsed completely, leaving access to the Carpathian passes in the neighbourhood of the Beskid and Toronya passes nearly open. So the army group's right front too was not free from crisis. Harpe now faced the prospect of losing the connection with Army Group South Ukraine. Within two days, 18th Army forced the Honved units back to the foot of the Carpathians. To avoid a disaster, Raus ordered XI Corps<sup>150</sup> to establish secure defences on the Bolechów-Dolina line, in order to prevent the enemy from advancing across the Carpathians. Although the situation on Army Group North Ukraine's right wing was stabilized, Army Group South Ukraine was seriously concerned, above all about the prospect of losing the connection with the Hungarian 1st Army. Fortunately, XI Corps was able to intercept the Soviet advance and move the front further to the south once more, and the Hungarian VI Corps also managed to hold a weak security line at the foot of the Carpathian forest. As a result, the Drohobych region remained in German hands, and the continuity of the front with Army Group South Ukraine was preserved. The Hungarian 1st Army came to a halt on the Kuty–Delatyn–west of Dolina line, securing the mountain passes to the Carpathian forest.<sup>151</sup>

By the time 1st Ukrainian Front's attack lost momentum at the end of July 1944, and 1st Belorussian Front moved its point of main effort to Army Group Centre's southern wing, Army Group North Ukraine had been driven back more than 200 kilometres to the west in the course of an eighteen-day defensive battle, and had lost almost 90,000 men.<sup>152</sup> Despite this painful defeat, the threat of destruction had been averted and the continuity of the army groups' sections of the front essentially preserved.

The guidelines laid down by Hitler and the OKH, which were sometimes extremely detailed, left Harpe with little chance of conducting defensive operations so as to reduce the momentum of the Soviet attacks by employing delaying tactics.

<sup>148</sup> *Geschichte des zweiten Weltkrieges 1939–1945*, ix. 117 ff.; Glantz and Orenstein, *The Battle for the Ukraine*, 81 ff.

<sup>149</sup> KTB H.Gr. Südukraine, Abt. Ia, No. 3, x. 67, 72 (17 July 1944), 112 (24 July 44), BA-MA RH 19 V/19, fo. 68.

<sup>150</sup> XI Army Corps had 96th Infantry Division, 100th Light Infantry Division, and 10th SS Armoured Infantry Division under its command.

<sup>151</sup> Study P-114c, pt. 7. i. 41 ff., BA-MA ZA 1/2077, fos. 93 ff.; Neidhardt, *Mit Tanne und Eichenlaub*, 333–7.

<sup>152</sup> Army Group North Ukraine lost 31,800 men between 11 and 31 July 1944. In addition, Army Detachment Raus recorded the loss of some 64,560 men between 11 July and 10 August 1944. BA-MA RW 6/v 559, fos. 24–6. During the same period, 1st Ukrainian Front recorded the loss of approximately 290,000 men, of whom 65,000 dead or severely wounded. *Grif sekretnosti sniat*, 204 ff.

Only if the principle of flexible combat were adopted could the limited manpower and materials be deployed in such a way as to leave sufficient forces available for the establishment of an effective defensive line on the San and the Vistula. But these were not the only factors that had a strong bearing on Army Group North Ukraine's conduct of operations in July 1944. The course of Army Group South Ukraine's front also had a considerable effect. The neighbouring army group's southern wing stood far to the east, on the Dniester, so Harpe had to leave Army Detachment Raus on the eastern edge of the Carpathians in order to preserve the continuity of the front. Given the developments in central and northern Galicia, the high command in Cracow was obliged to keep the front permanently overextended, with the result that the German forces, severely decimated in some cases, were hardly capable of fully occupying the defensive positions.

### 3. THE STRUGGLE TO ESTABLISH A DEFENSIVE FRONT FROM THE VISTULA TO THE NORTHERN CARPATHIANS

Army Group North Ukraine had not made the most of its opportunities. It now had to attempt, under far less favourable conditions, to bring the enemy offensive to a standstill. At the end of July, all the army group could do was endeavour to establish a new defensive front in western Galicia and on the eastern edge of the northern Carpathians.

After 1st Ukrainian Front took Lvov on 22 July,<sup>153</sup> the military leaders in Moscow were prompted to try out the plans for further operations in western Galicia. Above all, the Stavka wanted to prevent Army Group North Ukraine from re-establishing its front in the San–Vistula section. Konev and Rokossovsky were accordingly instructed that 1st Ukrainian Front and Rokossovsky's left wing must continue to pursue the retreating enemy forces and must establish bridgeheads on the left bank of the Vistula. Furthermore, 1st Ukrainian Front's southern wing was to attack across the Carpathians in the direction of Uzhgorod–Mukachevo. Konev was therefore obliged to conduct operations in two opposite directions, towards Sandomierz–Breslau and into the Carpathians. In view of the differing terrain conditions and enemy troop groupings, the Stavka also decided at the end of July to form 4th Ukrainian Front from the units in 1st Ukrainian Front's left wing and to place it under the overall command of Col.-Gen. Ivan E. Petrov. The new Soviet army group was assigned the task of attacking swiftly across the Carpathians in the direction of Mukachevo and pressing forward into the Hungarian lowland plain.<sup>154</sup> The Red Army had about 880,000 troops, 1,450 tanks and assault guns, and more than 5,000 artillery cannon at its disposal for the operations in Army Group North Ukraine's area—not including the reserves of about 165,000 troops, 980 tanks and assault guns, and 210 artillery cannons. Harpe could only muster about 550,000

<sup>153</sup> *Geschichte des zweiten Weltkrieges 1939–1945*, ix. 108.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid. 110 ff.

German and 250,000 allied troops. As to heavy weapons, the army group had 850 operational tanks and assault guns, and 980 artillery cannon.<sup>155</sup>

As a result of the Stavka's revised intentions, the enemy pressure eased off for a time, giving the high command in Cracow an opportunity to establish defensive positions on the San and the Vistula, and to bring the enemy offensive to a standstill. However, Harpe's plans were subject to substantial material constraints arising from the course of the front in the areas of the two neighbouring army groups. In particular, Army Group South Ukraine's right flank, which extended far to the east, might well collapse very quickly in the event of a massive enemy offensive. A solution had to be found that would secure the continuity of the eastern front by means of a favourable defensive line, and would also secure the connection with the neighbouring army group. It would necessarily involve defending the Carpathian passes; otherwise the supply lines for the whole of the southern section of the eastern front, running to the west of the mountain range, would be at risk. In particular, the army group would have constantly to increase the length of its defensive front as the Soviet forces pressed forward to the west.

### **(a) The Establishment of a New Defensive Front**

In view of the desperate conditions determining the course of the front between Kuty and Puławy at the beginning of August, the top priority was to close the 120-kilometre-wide gap between First and Fourth Armoured Armies. As the army group did not obtain any additional forces, it was obliged to try to reduce the length of the main battle line so that units would be available to establish a security line between Sanok and Baranów. Given the situation in the Galician area of operations, this could be done only in the southern section of the front.

Although Army Detachment Raus was still successfully defending the Drohobych–Stryi oilfields at the end of July, the army group decided only a few days later to withdraw from the salient in the area of First Armoured Army. On 2 August Harpe issued the following order: 'Army Detachment Raus is to withdraw First Armoured Army from the projecting Dniester salient and take over the Sanok–Krosno–Jasło area, with the ultimate aim of freeing up the strongest possible forces, especially all mobile units, for offensive deployment in the centre of the army group's front.'<sup>156</sup>

As a result of allied air raids starting in July 1944, the Drohobych oilfields were no longer of use to the war economy, so First Armoured Army took the opportunity to withdraw to the 'Hunyadi position' on the Kuty–west of Dolina–Sanok line. Army Detachment Raus thus fulfilled the main tasks assigned to it, on the one hand, by releasing forces for the threatened section of the front west of Baranów and, on the other, by securing the important Carpathian passes. While the army detachment was able to maintain the connection with Army Group South

<sup>155</sup> OKH, 'Kräftegegenüberstellung, Stand: 1.7./8.1944', BA-MA RH 2/2649, fo. 23.

<sup>156</sup> OB H.Gr. Nordukraine, Abt. Ia, No. 3615/44 g.Kdos., 2 Aug. 1944, BA-MA RH 19 VI/19, fo. 167.

Ukraine's northern wing at Kuty without any difficulty, the withdrawal movement to the 'Hunyadi position' gave rise to considerable friction as the Soviet 4th Armoured Army and 38th Army attempted to outflank XXIV Armoured Corps in the Sanok–Krosno area. The corps was able to prevent this, but the enemy moves made it difficult to transfer the mobile units to Seventeenth Army and Fourth Armoured Army. Konev's aim was to shield the flank of his main thrust against the Sandomierz–Baranów line, and to widen the gap in the German front so as to create the necessary conditions for a rapid advance on Cracow and the industrial region of Upper Silesia.<sup>157</sup> In particular, the Soviet forces were able to achieve their operational objective of tying down the enemy on the upper course of the San and the Wiślka. Since reinforcements for Seventeenth Army were slow in arriving, the army group's central section was left at the beginning of August virtually unprotected against the advance of 1st Ukrainian Front. While II and XXIV Armoured Army Corps repelled the Soviet attacks at Chyrów–Lesków on the edge of the northern Beskids and in the Jasło–Krosno area and established a defensive front, developments in the situation between Krosno and Sandomierz were causing concern. At this focal point, LIX Corps attempted to form a defensive block in the Łanicut area at the end of July to halt the advance of the Soviet 60th Army.<sup>158</sup> On 30 July Seventeenth Army HQ<sup>159</sup> took over responsibility for the section of the front between the Vistula in the Baranów area and the San south of Sanok. By the end of that month, Harpe's attempt to halt the 1st Ukrainian Front offensive at the San–Vistula line had failed. Seventeenth Army now had to try, with all means at its disposal, to close the 120-kilometre-wide gap between First and Fourth Armoured Armies. Together with XXXXII Corps, it would have to cut the rear communication lines of the enemy forces that had reached the west bank of the Vistula, and destroy them.<sup>160</sup> When Seventeenth Army HQ took over the conduct of operations east of the Wiślka on 31 July, LIX Corps had already been striving for some days to halt the advance of the Soviet 1st Guards Army and 3rd Guards Armoured Army by means of delaying combat. Given the scant forces available, Seventeenth Army HQ had no alternative but to resort to mobile combat in order to slow the momentum of the attack by no fewer than four Soviet armies,<sup>161</sup> which were advancing *en masse* towards the Wiślka and the Vistula south of Sandomierz. That was the only way to gain enough time to establish a security line. Together with the forces sent in by the OKH and the units of Army Detachment Raus, Seventeenth Army managed to delay the advance of the far superior enemy

<sup>157</sup> Glantz and Orenstein, *The Battle for the Ukraine*, 87, 92 ff.

<sup>158</sup> KTB GenKdo LIX. AK, Abt. Ia, No. 9, pt. 1, 25–30 July 1944, BA-MA RH 24-59/129, fos. 14–53.

<sup>159</sup> XXIV Armoured Corps and LIX Army Corps were under the command of Seventeenth Army, which had been led by Gen. Friedrich Schulz since 25 July 1944.

<sup>160</sup> KTB H.Gr. Nordukraine, Abt. Ia, No. 3567/44 g.Kdos., 30 July 1944, No. 3569/44 g.Kdos., 30 July 1944 and No. 3614/44 g.Kdos., 2 Aug. 1944, BA-MA RH 19 V/19, fos. 169 ff., 176–8.

<sup>161</sup> 1st and 3rd Guards Armies, and 13th and 60th Armies; Glantz and Orenstein, *The Battle for the Ukraine*, 206.

forces.<sup>162</sup> These counter-measures eased the crisis in the Sandomierz–Baranów–Mielec area (Mielec lies 25 kilometres south of Baranów).

Seventeenth Army succeeded in establishing a weak security line south of the Wiślka–Vistula triangle, which gave reason to hope that a solid front could be re-established between Mielec and Kuty. In the case of Fourth Armoured Army too, the enemy forces were halted at the new defensive line. The Soviet 69th Army and 3rd Guards Army nevertheless managed to establish four bridgeheads on the far bank of the Vistula, which Fourth Armoured Army could block off only provisionally<sup>163</sup> as it was not strong enough to ‘mount a successful counter-attack’.<sup>164</sup> The armoured army had obtained no replacement troops at this stage in the operations, and the shortage gave rise to a critical situation in the Sandomierz area. Konev launched the offensive at the beginning of August, and 13th Army succeeded in breaking into the San–Vistula triangle and forcing XXXXII Corps’ right wing northwards. As a result, despite intensive counter-attacks by 72nd and 88th Infantry Divisions, the army group was unable to achieve its aim of holding the section of the Vistula south-west of Sandomierz.

As Seventeenth Army had been unable to close the gap separating it from Fourth Armoured Army by the beginning of August, Konev took the opportunity to strengthen the bridgehead west of Baranów.<sup>165</sup> In this situation, Harpe thought the important thing was that ‘strong enemy forces continue to be tied down at Baranów, so that the enemy should not be able to advance further west of the Vistula before new forces now on their way could be deployed on the west bank of the river’.<sup>166</sup> However, the only force on the left bank of the Vistula was 213th Security Division, which was engaged in a well-nigh hopeless defensive battle against two enemy armies.

Army Group North Ukraine managed to contain the critical situation in the centre of the western Galician theatre at the end of July and the beginning of August, but it did not have the necessary human and material resources to prevent two Soviet armies from crossing to the west bank of the Vistula. Both wings of the army group’s front had been stabilized, but the gap between Frysztak, 20 kilometres east of Jasło, and Sandomierz had merely been narrowed. The operational attempt to cut off the enemy forces that had broken through in the section of the front at Baranów also created good conditions for establishing an effective defensive line and weakening 1st Ukrainian Front, but the course of the operations at the beginning of August made it painfully clear that the substantial shortage of men and materials precluded any possibility of a decisive success. Army Group North Ukraine had nevertheless managed to establish a new front against a far superior but exhausted enemy.

<sup>162</sup> Despite the tense situation with respect to human and material resources, the OKH assigned two infantry divisions (544th and 545th People’s Infantry Divisions) and two infantry brigades (1134th and 1136th Infantry Brigades) to Seventeenth Army HQ; Study P-114c, pt. 7, l. 50, BA-MA ZA 1/2077, fo. 102.

<sup>163</sup> *Die geheimen Tagesberichte*, x. 399, 402, 405, 408, 412, 415, 419, 422, 425.

<sup>164</sup> KTB Pz.AOK 4, Abt. Ia, 1 July–15 Aug. 1944 (4 Aug. 1944), BA-MA RH 21-4/237, fo. 235.

<sup>165</sup> *Geschichte des zweiten Weltkrieges 1939–1945*, ix. 112–16; Traktujew, ‘Die Zerschlagung’, 454 ff.

<sup>166</sup> KTB Pz.AOK 4, Abt. Ia, 1 July–15 Aug. 1944 (4 Aug. 1944), BA-MA RH 21-4/237, 238.

### (b) The Battles for the Baranów Bridgehead

Although both the army group's wings held their ground against the pressure from Soviet forces at the beginning of August, there were signs of disturbing developments in the centre of the western Galician theatre of operations. As the army group's efforts to resolve the situation had failed, the high command in Cracow decided on 5 August to prepare an offensive on the west bank of the Vistula.<sup>167</sup> All Army Detachment Raus armoured units and an OKH armoured division would be involved in the operation.<sup>168</sup> Seventeenth Army HQ was ordered to assemble a strong attack group on the left wing.<sup>169</sup> While the forces were regrouping, Army Detachment Raus moved to the 'Hunyadi position' to strengthen the army group's southern wing. Things were now quieter in First Armoured Army's section of the front, but Konev increased the pressure on Fourth Armoured Army's right flank, which formed a loop extending back to the west, with the aim of rolling up the German Vistula front from the south. Although XXXXII Corps initially lost some ground, it eventually succeeded in stopping the Soviet advance and restabilizing the army's southern flank.<sup>170</sup> Nevertheless, three Soviet armies crossed to the west bank of the Vistula at Baranów and extended the bridgehead, with the result that, on 10 August, 1st Ukrainian Front spearheads were about 40 kilometres west of the river.<sup>171</sup> In view of the ever-increasing threat to the unity of the front north-east of Cracow, the army group proposed to send two groups to attack the rear and flanks of the Soviet 1st Guards Armoured Army and 13th Army, which were pressing forward to the north, in order to destroy the enemy forces and regain the Vistula line. The main group,<sup>172</sup> led by Fourth Armoured Army, was to push eastwards from the Michów area, then turn north and, together with XXXXII Corps, enclose the Soviet 1st Guards Armoured Army west of Sandomierz and destroy it. III Armoured Corps was then to move south and, with the assistance of the Seventeenth Army attack group, enclose the Soviet 3rd Guards Armoured Army and 4th Armoured Army west of the Vistula and wipe them out.<sup>173</sup> The execution of the proposed operation was hampered by the fact that some of the armoured units were not available, because the critical situation at Sanok and on the lower Vistula precluded any reduction in the strength of Army Detachment Raus.

III Armoured Corps opened the offensive on 10 August according to plan. The enemy was taken by surprise, but the Soviet forces were stronger, and the attempt to

<sup>167</sup> KTB H.Gr. Nordukraine, Abt. Ia, No. 3673/44 geh., 5 Aug. 1944, BA-MA RH 19 VI/19, fos. 153 ff.

<sup>168</sup> Army Detachment Raus was to replace III Armoured Army Corps HQ as leader of the attack group.

<sup>169</sup> Operational command of this group was transferred to XXXXVI Armoured Army Corps HQ.

<sup>170</sup> Report by XXXXII Army Corps (Fourth Armoured Army) on the fighting from 30 July to 10 Aug. 1944; Study P-114c, pt. 8, ii. 66, BA-MA ZA 1/2078, fo. 69.

<sup>171</sup> *Geschichte des zweiten Weltkrieges 1939–1945*, ix. 111 ff.

<sup>172</sup> III Armoured Army Corps HQ with 3rd and 16th Armoured Divisions and 501st and 509th Tiger Battalions.

<sup>173</sup> KTB H.Gr. Nordukraine, Abt. Ia, No. 3707/44 geh., 7 Aug. 1944, BA-MA RH 19 V/19, fos. 148 ff.

Table V.v.2. Army Group North Ukraine: order of battle (status: 15 August 1944)

4th Mtn.Div. (parts)	Hun. 6th A.C.	Hun. 1st Army	
Hun. 1st Mtn.Brig.		Hun. 3rd A.	Army Group Raus
Hun. 2nd Mtn.Brig.		C. (remnants):	
Hun. 24th Inf.Div.		Hun. 2nd Armd.Div	
Hun. 25th Inf.Div.	Hun. 19th Res.Div.	Hun. 6th Inf.Div.	
Hun. 27th Lt.Div.		Hun. 10th Inf.Div. (First Armd.Army)	
Hun. 18th Res.Div. (remnants)		Hun. 13th Inf.Div.	
4th Mtn.Div. (parts)	Hun. 7th A.C.		
Hun. 7th Inf.Div. (remnants)	Hun. 20th Inf.Div.		
Hun. 16th Inf.Div. (remnants)	(remnants)		
100th Lt.Inf.Div.	XXXXVIII Armd.C.		XXXIX Mtn.A.C.
101th Lt.Inf.Div.			Slov. 1st Div.
359th Inf.Div. Cbt.Gr.			Slov. 2nd Div.
75th Inf.Div.			
168th Inf.Div.	XI A.C.		
254th Inf.Div.			
68th Inf.Div.			
208th Inf.Div.			
96th. Inf.Div. Cbt.Gr.			
18th. SS-Armd.Inf.Div. Cbt.Gr.	XXIV Armd.Corps		
357th Inf.Div. (remnants)			
544th P.Inf.Div.	XI SS A.C.		
545th P.Inf.Div.	8th Armd.Div.		
Col. Schmidt Gr. (1134th & 1136th Inf.Brig.)			Seventeenth Army
78th P.Aslt. Div. (parts)			
23rd Armd.Div.			
371st Inf.Div.			
78th P.Aslt.Div. (parts)	LIX A.C.		
1st Armd.Div.			
3rd Armd.Div.			Fourth Armoured Army
16th Armd.Div.	III Armd.Corps		
20th Armd.Div.			
24th. Armd.Div.			
72nd Inf.Div. Cbt.Gr.		17th Armd.Div.	
88th Inf.Div. Cbt.Gr.			
291st Inf.Div. Cbt.Gr.	XXXXII A.C.		
Col. Bechler Gr. (1133th & 1135th Inf.Brig.)			
213th Sec.Div. (remnants)			

take possession of the crossing points over the Vistula at Baranów failed. The attack did at least relieve Fourth Armoured Army's right flank and reduce the pressure from enemy forces. As a result of the ground gained by III Armoured Corps, the army group was obliged to launch an attack, in conjunction with the Edelsheim Group, to eliminate the enemy forces standing to the south of the corps.<sup>174</sup>

<sup>174</sup> OB H.Gr. Nordukraine, Panzerarmeebefehl No. 83, 12 Aug. 1944, No. 5803/44 geh., BA-MA RH 21-4/237, fos. 272 ff.—On 12 Aug. 1944 Army Group North Ukraine HQ ordered Seventeenth

This offensive was launched on 12 August, but it too was soon stopped, because Konev temporarily transferred units from the western bridgehead to the south-west section of the front. Despite all the friction, which made any possibility of achieving the operational objective very remote, the high command in Cracow remained determined until 18 August to compress the Baranów bridgehead. By the middle of August, Army Group North Ukraine had still not managed to drive the Soviet enemy from the west bank of the Vistula, as it lacked the necessary force. Fourth Armoured Army's counter-offensive was not a complete failure, however, in that the bridgehead was narrowed and the enemy's advance was halted. Clearly, the operational objective had been too ambitious, and the element of surprise alone had not sufficed to achieve the aims of the operation with the limited resources available.<sup>175</sup>

In mid-August the objectives had to be redefined. The high command in Cracow again concentrated on further reducing the width of the bridgehead by means of locally confined attacks, and on closing the gap between III and XXXXVIII Armoured Corps<sup>176</sup> in order to shorten the front and gain some forces. The first action in line with this concept was taken on 28 August south of the Opatów–Annopol line, where the army group had assembled four armoured divisions with about 100 tanks and assault guns.<sup>177</sup> Despite this concentration of mobile armoured units, the combat strength was not sufficient to capture the high ground north of the Opatówka river. The enterprise was cancelled on the third day of the attack, and Harpe ordered Fourth Armoured Army HQ to move the attack group west, in order to drive the Soviet 4th Armoured Army and 13th Army south of Opatów back to the line between Staszów (30 kilometres southwest of Opatów) and Sandomierz, and establish the connection with III Armoured Corps. Fourth Armoured Army HQ failed to achieve this, and the operation was accordingly wound up on 4 September after the gap in the front had been closed.<sup>178</sup> The counter-attacks had nevertheless helped to strengthen the front in Fourth Armoured Army's area, namely 'at the Baranów bridgehead in a line running in a northerly direction from the Vistula north of Szczucin to Łagów, then turning east and reaching the Vistula south of Zawichost',<sup>179</sup> with the armoured army benefiting from the new developments in the southern section of the eastern front.

Army to join 1st and 24th Armoured Divisions, 201st and 300th Assault Gun Brigades, and 6th Launcher Brigade to the Edelsheim Group, which was placed under Fourth Armoured Army command; KTB H.Gr. Nordukraine, Abt. Ia, No. 3781/44 geh., 12 Aug. 1944, BA-MA RH 19 VI/19, fo. 139.

<sup>175</sup> Study P-114c, pt. 7, i. 56–62, BA-MA ZA 1/2077, fos. 108–14; Traktujew, 'Die Zerschlagung', 455.

<sup>176</sup> KTB H.Gr. Nordukraine, Abt. Ia, No. 3939/44 geh., 23 Aug. 1944, BA-MA RH 19 VI/19, fo. 121.

<sup>177</sup> KTB Pz.AOK 4, Abt. Ia, Panzerarmeebefehl No. 88, 23 Aug. 1944, BA-MA RH 21-4/238, fos. 42–4.

<sup>178</sup> KTB Pz.AOK 4, Abt. Ia, 16 Aug.–31 Oct. 1944 (28 Aug., 3 Sept. 1944), BA-MA RH 21-4/238, fos. 65, 91.

<sup>179</sup> Study P-114c, pt. 7, i. 66, BA-MA ZA 1/2077, 118.

In parallel, Army Group North Ukraine attempted to clear the smaller front salients on its left wing. This action was successful to the north of Annopol but failed at Puławy, in particular,<sup>180</sup> because the German divisions were completely exhausted after weeks of uninterrupted defensive combat.

There was a marked reduction in military activity in southern Poland and the northern Carpathian forest after 20 August, when the Soviets moved the point of concentration of their offensive to the Romanian area of operations. With the decline in combat action, Army Group North Ukraine's operations settled at the beginning of September 1944 into a war of position. The fighting between Kuty and Puławy ceased at the end of August. While Army Group North Ukraine had not achieved its optimum objective, the continuity of the front had been restored. In this partial success, in the course of which 40,500 losses (15,000 of them irretrievable) were incurred,<sup>181</sup> the German units had benefited from the Soviet decision to move the point of concentration of their operations to the Romanian theatre. But the fact that the Soviet troops were exhausted after pushing more than 200 kilometres to the west since the beginning of July, had also enabled the German defence forces to halt the enemy advance. Army Group North Ukraine's operational options were severely restricted by the course of the front in the areas of the two neighbouring army groups. Merely to maintain the connection between the central and southern sections of the eastern front, the high command in Cracow needed such extensive human and material resources that there were no forces available to mount incisive counter-attacks or form the necessary reserves. Nor were the forces available in the summer of 1944 strong enough any longer to straighten the front in such a way as to make a durable defence against future Soviet offensives possible.

#### 4. THE AUTUMN BATTLES IN THE BESKID MOUNTAINS AND SLOVAKIA

In the middle of August, after a defensive battle lasting four weeks, in which Army Group North Ukraine was obliged to withdraw from its positions in eastern Galicia for almost 350 kilometres behind the Vistula and to the edge of the Carpathian forest, the German troops finally succeeded in reducing the momentum of the Soviet advance. The army group brought the enemy's Lvov–Sandomierz operation to a standstill, with the German forces benefiting primarily from the exhaustion of their Soviet opponents. Army Group North Ukraine now established a weak security line, and obtained the pause that was urgently needed to enable the battered units to recover.

<sup>180</sup> In the operation against the Puławy bridgehead, XXXXVI Armoured Corps (Army Group Centre) was temporarily placed under Fourth Armoured Army HQ; OB H.Gr. Nordukraine, No. 0875/44 g.Kdos. Chefs., 4 Sept. 1944, BA-MA RH 19 VI/19, fos. 94 ff.

<sup>181</sup> Figures for August 1944 BA-MA RW 6/v. 559, fos. 26–8.

The hope that the German troops would be refreshed by a break in the operations was short-lived. Not only had partisan activities in the rear of Army Detachment Heinrici increased during the summer of 1944, but political conditions within Slovakia had also changed. Impressed by the Allied successes, particularly the Red Army's superiority in its advance in Galicia, a partisan movement had developed which was under the strong political and military influence of the Soviet Union.<sup>182</sup> The problem of the partisans mainly affected First Armoured Army, because Army Detachment Heinrici had held executive powers in eastern Slovakia since 15 August 1944, when the region had been declared an operational zone.<sup>183</sup> The army now faced the units of 4th Ukrainian Front, but for operational purposes it also had to bear in mind the unstable political conditions in the country, over which the national authorities in the protectorate had no more control than they had over the problem of the partisans in the rear of the German front.

### (a) The Slovak National Uprising

In view of the military and political situation in the first half of 1944, the Slovak National Council<sup>184</sup> decided on 17 July to begin an open uprising against the Tiso government in Bratislava and the German protecting power.<sup>185</sup> Its decision was motivated decisively by the fact that the preparations for military resistance were relatively far advanced. Unnoticed by the German authorities in the country, the resistance group around Lt.-Col. Jan Golian had assembled units of the replacement army in central Slovakia, set up supply depots, and established a command centre in Banská Bystrica. The operational aim of the armed uprising by the resistance was 'to open and secure the Carpathian passes so as to enable the Soviet armies advancing in the Ukraine and Poland to liberate Slovakia quickly and press on towards Bohemia and into the Hungarian lowland plain'.<sup>186</sup> The central element in the plan of operations was the army corps stationed in eastern Slovakia. This relatively well-trained fighting force, comprising 24,000 men with modern military equipment at their disposal, was to occupy the Beskid mountain ridge in the rear of Army Detachment Heinrici and, in cooperation with Konev's troops, attack First Armoured Army. The resistance assigned the protection of central Slovakia and the command centres in the Banská Bystrica–Brezno–Zvolen area to the approximately 14,000-strong training and replacement units. Despite their relatively low combat strength, these units were to defend central Slovakia

<sup>182</sup> KTB GenKdo XXIV. Pz.Korps, Abt. Ia, No. 5/44, 169 (29 Aug. 1944), BA-MA RH 24-24/306, fo. 86; *Geschichte des zweiten Weltkrieges 1939–1945*, ix. 191 ff.; Lipták, 'Das politische System der slowakischen Republik', 320; Venohr, *Aufstand*, 92–104; Schönfeld, *Slowakei*, 141–7.

<sup>183</sup> ObKdo H.Gr. Nordukraine, Abt. Ia, No. 3825/44 geh., 15 Aug. 1944, 'Befehlsgliederung in der Slowakei', BA-MA RH 19 VI/19, fos. 131 ff.

<sup>184</sup> The Slovak National Council was composed of members of the conservative, Communist, and social-democratic opposition movements.

<sup>185</sup> Schönfeld, *Slowakei*, 141–7; Gruchmann, *Der Zweite Weltkrieg*, 339.

<sup>186</sup> Schönfeld, *Slowakei*, 146.

until the Soviet troops had established connections with the insurgents and liberated the country.<sup>187</sup>

The preparations for the uprising were able to pass almost unnoticed at first, but the increasing partisan activities interfered with the military preparations from the early summer of 1944 'because they drew the attention of the Slovakian and German agencies to the centre of the conspiracy'.<sup>188</sup> The guerilla groups, mostly under the influence of Soviet partisan leaders, posed an increasing threat to the Slovakian resistance group's plans because the partisan operations, which were directed against the armed German power and militarily important infrastructure as well as the Tiso regime, were making the German authorities more nervous and increasing their sensitivity to political changes within the country. First Armoured Army was obliged to take preventive measures in mid-August in order to be able to react without delay in the event of any major actions. As the East Slovakian Army Corps, to which Army Group North Ukraine had assigned security duties in the area of operations to the rear of Army Detachment Heinrici,<sup>189</sup> had not solved the problem to its satisfaction, XXIV Armoured Corps realized that particular difficulties with the Slovak army were to be expected in the near future. 'To deal with these rapidly and simultaneously, the corps orders each division to prepare the rapid assembly of one advance battalion as a precautionary measure.'<sup>190</sup> Similar measures were extended at the end of August to the whole area under the command of First Armoured Army, in order to be able to intervene immediately in the event of any action against the German armed forces.<sup>191</sup>

Although there had been many minor anti-government and anti-German incidents, a major occurrence in the town of Sv. Martin was the first to provoke German intervention. On 27 August Slovak mutineers arrested 22 German officers in the railway station at Sv. Martin, on their way from Romania to the territory of the Reich. The next morning, the group of officers were shot by the Slovaks. Given the unstable political situation in the country, this provocation was bound to meet with a strong response from the protecting power.<sup>192</sup>

The first improvised Wehrmacht units marched into the country just 24 hours after that incident. Army Group North Ukraine was responsible for conducting operations in the east, and the German General in Slovakia, SS-Obergruppenführer Gottlob Berger, took command in the other areas. In this critical situation, Army Detachment Heinrici's precautionary measures paid off: on 31 August, with two regimental-strength units,<sup>193</sup> it was able to disarm and intern almost all the Slovak Army Corps. Only 2,000 Slovak troops escaped capture and joined the uprising

<sup>187</sup> Venohr, *Aufstand*, 109–13; *Geschichte des zweiten Weltkrieges 1939–1945*, ix. 189–93.

<sup>188</sup> Schönenfeld, *Slowakei*, 146.

<sup>189</sup> ObKdo H.Gr. Nordukraine, Abt. Ia, No. 3747/44 geh., 10 Aug. 1944, BA-MA RH 19 VI/19, fo. 142.

<sup>190</sup> KTB GenKdo XXIV. Pz.K, Abt. Ia, 5/44 (24 Aug. 1944), 150, BA-MA RH 24-24/396, fo. 71.

<sup>191</sup> See also Schönenherr, 'Pripravy', 93–100. <sup>192</sup> Považský, *Koniec legendy*.

<sup>193</sup> (1) The Mathias Combat Group from XXIV Armoured Corps, consisting of one reinforced battalion each from 68th, 96th, and 208th Infantry Divisions; and (2) a regimental-strength combat group from First Armoured Army's 357th Infantry Division.

*en masse.*<sup>194</sup> The internment of almost 22,000 Slovak troops in the rear of Army Detachment Heinrici was to have fatal consequences for the national liberation movement. With the elimination of this military force, a major component of the resistance struggle was lost, a component that was absolutely essential if the uprising was to succeed.

In contrast to Army Detachment Heinrici's success in the east Slovakian area of operations, Berger faced considerable problems. Although an important element in the resistance struggle had been successfully removed with the elimination of the Slovak Army Corps, the military centre in Banská Bystrica still had more than 20,000 men at its disposal at the beginning of September. Given the geographical conditions in central Slovakia, this force had every chance of conducting a successful campaign against the protecting power, especially as the liberation movement managed to increase the strength of the insurgent army to 47,000 men by the middle of September.<sup>195</sup>

The insurgent army also benefited from the manner in which Berger conducted operations, since he believed the 'problem' could be solved in a few days by employing a few ad hoc combat groups<sup>196</sup> in a kind of 'expiatory exercise'. As he made no detailed assessment of the situation, the German commander in Slovakia did not know that his units were numerically inferior to the resistance fighters, although the German side had the advantage of better equipment and better weapons. To defeat the uprising, Berger initially had some 10,000 men at his disposal, divided into three combat groups. He deployed the three units in a concentric advance on the insurgent area, from the south, south-west, and north-west. Essentially, each combat group fought on its own, because the German operational command neglected to establish a continuous front.<sup>197</sup> This, with the added advantage of favourable terrain, gave the resistance fighters the opportunity to establish defensive points of concentration, with the result that the German combat groups were able to penetrate the insurgent area only partially. In those circumstances, it was hardly surprising that Berger had scarcely any successes to report in the first ten days of the campaign. Only the Schäfer SS unit succeeded in advancing to Ružomberok in the Váh valley and cordoning off the insurgent area to the north,<sup>198</sup> but the Schill Combat Group also managed to liberate the Nitra valley and establish a front to the west of the centre of resistance. Despite the ground it had lost, the Slovak insurgent army was extremely successful in resisting the German offensive at the beginning of September and in stabilizing the defensive front. The situation, nevertheless, remained highly critical for the insurgents.

<sup>194</sup> A.Gr. Heinrici, 'Meldungen an H.Gr. Nordukraine/A', 1–8 Sept. 1944, BA-MA RH 21-1/495.

<sup>195</sup> *Deutschland im zweiten Weltkrieg*, vi. 89.

<sup>196</sup> The Col. von Ohlen Combat Group from 178th Armoured Division, a training unit stationed at Čadca, the Schill Combat Group from the Waffen SS 'Kienschlag' Armoured Infantry school in the Nitra valley, and a reinforced battalion from 14th Waffen SS Infantry Division (Gal. No. 1) in the south at Zlaté Moravce were available for the operation at the beginning of September. As from 8 September, the Schäfer Combat Group was also placed under the command of 18th SS Armoured Infantry Division 'Horst Wessel' in the Váh valley at Ružomberok.

<sup>197</sup> Venohr, *Aufstand*, 179–81.

<sup>198</sup> A.Gr. Heinrici, Abt. Ia, daily report, 14 Sept. 1944, BA-MA RH 21-1/495.



Map V.v.3. The Slovak national uprising (29 August to 31 October 1944)

Source: Venohr, Aufstand

Since 1st Ukrainian Front's offensive was making scarcely any progress, there was not much prospect of the Soviet troops joining forces with the insurgent army in the near future.

The unsatisfactory course of the operation led Himmler to relieve Berger of his command on 14 September and appoint General Hermann Höfle in his stead. Prior to the change of command in the middle of September, the German troops had established a continuous front only to the north and west of the insurgent area, and there was still a gap in the area between Prievidza and Strečno. The SS battalion in the south had also been unable to break the Slovak resistance.<sup>199</sup> The situation was becoming much more critical in the east Slovakian area of operations, where Army Detachment Heinrici had been obliged to withdraw its combat group when 1st Ukrainian Front launched its offensive on 8 September to capture the Dukla Pass and the Beskid mountains. The army group now had only a few local defence units at Telgárt and the 154th Reserve Division in the Prešov area at its disposal to establish a security line on the eastern edge of the insurgent area. As a result of their scant combat strength, these units had been obliged to withdraw almost 40 kilometres to the east by the time the final German offensive was launched in the middle of October.<sup>200</sup>

Although the operational situation remained much the same after Höfle took command, the conduct of operations entered a new phase in that, for the first time, a plan was drawn up in which priority was given to the coordinated deployment of all the available forces. First of all, the gap between the northern and western fronts was to be closed, and connections were to be established with the combat group in the southern part of the resistance area. Once the 'Tatra' Division, the former 178th Armoured Division, at Strečno had taken over the task of the Colonel von Ohlen Combat Group, the defensive positions north of Sv. Martin were broken through, and the city was captured on 21 September. Two days later, the gap separating the Schill Combat Group in the Nitra valley was closed. In the south, however, there was no change in the situation until the end of September, when the Slovakian resistance forces finally yielded to German pressure and withdrew northwards, giving the SS battalion an opportunity to establish the connection with the Nitra valley. By the end of September, the German forces had compressed the liberation army in central Slovakia to such an extent that the centre of the uprising, Banská Bystrica–Brezno–Zvolen, was within striking distance of the attackers.<sup>201</sup> In order to relieve the units at the front from the burden of security duties, and to get a firm grip on the partisan problem, the commander of the replacement army transferred three divisions<sup>202</sup> to Slovakia in mid-September.

At the beginning of October, when the German lines were within 25 kilometres of the centre of the uprising in Banská Bystrica, Höfle decided to launch a frontal attack on the city and eliminate the command centre of the resistance. But, once

<sup>199</sup> Venohr, *Aufstand*, 213–18.

<sup>200</sup> Schönher, 'Die Niederschlagung', 48 ff., 52 ff.

<sup>201</sup> A.Gr. Heinrici, Abt. Ia, daily reports, 14–21 Sept. 1944, BA-MA RH 21-1/495.

<sup>202</sup> 153rd Field Training Division (Slovakian-Hungarian border at Balassagyarmat); 271st People's Infantry Division (Nitra valley); 708th People's Infantry Division (Váh valley at Nové Mesto).

again, the attempt was foiled by the Slovaks' resolute defence. Clearly, it would take a long time to overcome the insurgents with the forces that were available.<sup>203</sup> It was nevertheless essential to put an end to the uprising quickly in view of the precarious situation in the southern section of the eastern front. On the one hand, the permanent danger in the rear of Army Groups A and South would be eliminated and, on the other, the troops tied up in Slovakia would become available for deployment in the fight against the Red Army. However, this could be achieved only by greatly increasing the strength of the forces deployed in Slovakia. In mid-October Höfle, the commander of the replacement army, therefore made SS Brigade 'Dirlewanger', as well as a combat group from 14th Waffen SS Division, available in the north, and the 18th Waffen SS Division in the south, for the final offensive in the middle of October. That raised the strength of the German attacking forces to 22,000 men, more than twice as many as at the beginning of the operation. The final operation began on 18 October, with a concentric offensive in which Army Group A units in the east Slovakian area of operations also took part. Despite their superior strength, it took the German forces ten days to capture Banská Bystrica. The fall of the city spelled the end of the two-month-long anti-German uprising, and the protecting power was once again in full control of all Slovakian territory from 31 October.<sup>204</sup>

### **(b) The Battles for the Dukla Pass and the Beskid Mountains**

Although there were fewer Soviet attacks in August, there were more and more local skirmishes on the eastern edge of the Beskid mountains. The German forces were generally able to hold their positions, despite the superior strength of the enemy forces, because the nature of the terrain facilitated defence against enemy attacks. In view of the political and military changes in Slovakia, the Soviet forces revised their operational plans at the end of August. They continued their successful campaign in Romania but they launched their offensive on the Beskid front earlier than originally intended. Only a short time after the Soviet units had gone over to the defensive, 1st Ukrainian Front in the Krosno–Sanok section of the front received the order to prepare an offensive with its point of concentration in the Dukla Pass–Prešov area and to launch it on 8 September.

The plan of operations was for two spearheads to break through the German defensive positions and, within three days, press forward with superior forces through the Dukla Pass into the Poprad–Prešov area some 100 kilometres further on. The dual aim of the offensive was to connect with the insurgents and, with the assistance of 2nd Ukrainian Front, to encircle First Armoured Army and parts of Army Group South to the west of the Beskids and the Carpathian forest.<sup>205</sup>

<sup>203</sup> Schönherr, 'Die Niederschlagung', 53.

<sup>204</sup> Venohr, *Aufstand*, 280–301; Dress, 'Der slowakische Nationalaufstand', 543 ff.; *Deutschland im zweiten Weltkrieg*, vi. 89; Schönherr, 'Die Niederschlagung', 53 ff.; Schönherr, 'Potlacenie SNP 1944', 118–30.

<sup>205</sup> *Geschichte des zweiten Weltkrieges 1939–1945*, ix. 200–4; Vasurin, 'Brosok v Karpaty', 80 ff.; Moskalenko, 'Karpatsko–Duklinskaya Operaciya', 97 ff.

Army Detachment Heinrici had taken over defence of the Frysztak–Krosno–Sanok section of the front. For this purpose, the army HQ had XXIV Armoured Corps in the northern section and XI Army Corps on the right wing at its disposal. Both corps had been engaged since the beginning of August in defending the Krosno–Sanok line, where fighting broke out again on 7 September to the east of Sanok. Two days later, 1st Ukrainian Front launched its offensive against the German defensive positions. The defenders were unable to withstand the massive assault, with the result that the enemy forces succeeded in breaching XXIV Armoured Corps' defensive line south of Krosno on 9 September,<sup>206</sup> and the city had to be abandoned on the following day. In spite of this, the two corps had at least made effective use of the favourable terrain to reduce the momentum of the enemy attack. The First Armoured Army units, facing superior enemy forces, were obliged to withdraw gradually over the next few days.<sup>207</sup>

Within days it became clear that First Armoured Army was not strong enough to repel the constant attacks successfully, so Harpe decided to strengthen Army Detachment Heinrici.<sup>208</sup> First Armoured Army HQ now deployed two armoured units to cordon off the breakthrough area south of Jasło.<sup>209</sup> Despite the extra strength, XXIV Armoured Corps was unable to defend its positions for long, and was obliged to withdraw slowly to the south. On 12 September, during fierce battles in the Dukla area, 1st Ukrainian Front succeeded in opening up an 8-kilometre-wide gap in the German front, enabling two regiments to get through and reach the top of the pass.<sup>210</sup> With Konev about to achieve the main objective of the operation, Col.-Gen. Gotthard Heinrici deployed two divisions in a counter-attack to block off the breach.<sup>211</sup> At the same time, 357th Infantry Division attacked the enemy units that had broken through, to destroy them before they reached the top of the pass.<sup>212</sup> Even so, it took the German units almost two weeks to overpower the enemy forces that had advanced into Slovakian territory.<sup>213</sup>

In response to the stubborn German resistance, the Soviet forces south of Krosno were reinforced, with the result that, by the end of September, XXXXIX Mountain Corps was forced to move back towards the Dukla Pass. From mid-September 4th

<sup>206</sup> A.Gr. Heinrici, Abt. Ia, daily reports 8, 9 Sept. 1944, BA-MA RH 21-1/495.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid. 9–15 Sept. 1944, BA-MA RH 21-1/495; *Die geheimen Tagesberichte*, xi. 21–38.

<sup>208</sup> Seventeenth Army had to give up 1st and 8th Armoured Divisions and 154th Reserve Division for the purpose, and they were assigned to First Armoured Army as from 10 September 1944; ObKdo H.Gr. Nordukraine, Abt. Ia, No. 4152/44 geh., 8 Sept. 1944, No. 4165/44 geh., 9 Sept. 1944, No. 4172/44 geh., 10 Sept. 1944, No. 4192/44 geh., 11 Sept. 1944, and No. 4213/44 geh., 12 Sept. 1944, BA-MA RH 19 VI/19, fos. 75, 78, 80, 83, and 84; Stoves, *Die 1. Panzer-Division*, 646–8; Haupt, 8. *Panzer-Division*, 360 ff.

<sup>209</sup> A.Gr. Heinrici, Abt. Ia, daily reports 14–21 Sept. 1944, BA-MA RH 21-1/495; Stoves, 1. *Panzer-Division*, 646–54; *Die geheimen Tagesberichte*, xi. 35–53.

<sup>210</sup> A.Gr. Heinrici, Abt. Ia, daily reports 9–15 Sept. 1944, BA-MA RH 21-1/495; *Die geheimen Tagesberichte*, xi. 21–38.

<sup>211</sup> Order from A.Gr. Heinrici, Abt. Ia, No. 2797/44 geh., 11 Sept. 1944, BA-MA RH 24-11/111, fo. 139.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid.

<sup>213</sup> A.Gr. Heinrici, Abt. Ia, daily reports 14–27 Sept. 1944, RH 21-1/495; *Die geheimen Tagesberichte*, xi. 23–73.

Ukrainian Front also took part in the offensive, opening hostilities with an attack on First Armoured Army's right wing south-east of Krosno. But the German forces repeatedly established new interception and defence positions east of the Dukla Pass–Czirokatal Pass–Uzsok Pass line, blocking off the enemy breakthroughs.<sup>214</sup> When 4th Ukrainian Front too attacked the German defensive positions in the Beskid mountains, Army Group North Ukraine saw that it would have to reorganize the command structure on the southern wing. To tighten up the conduct of operations on the Beskid front, Harpe removed XXXXIX Mountain Corps from Hungarian 1st Army command on 19 September, and placed it under the command of First Armoured Army.<sup>215</sup>

After three weeks of defensive battles, Army Group North Ukraine suffered the first decisive setback on 20 September, when Soviet units penetrated XI Corps' defence system and opened up a breach in the German front east of the Łupków Pass. The armoured army was unable to close the gap, and 1st Ukrainian Front units occupied the pass. As a result, by the end of the month, the Soviet forces were over the ridge and pressing forward into Slovakian territory.<sup>216</sup>

With the loss of the Łupków Pass, the adjoining sections of the front were also thrown into disarray. While XXIV Armoured Corps managed to slow the massive momentum of the enemy attack on Army Detachment Heinrici's left flank by means of delaying combat, there were extremely dramatic developments in the situation of XI Army Corps in the Habura area. Only with great difficulty was the corps able to stabilize this greatly endangered section of the front by the end of the month.<sup>217</sup> On 24 September, during the heavy defensive battles in the Beskid mountains, Army Group North Ukraine was renamed Army Group A, but this did not entail any organizational changes.

It was nevertheless clear that the exhausted German troops would not be able to keep the front stable for long. At the end of September XXIV Armoured Corps was forced to abandon the area north of the Dukla Pass, under massive pressure from the Soviet 1st Guards and 38th Armies. Although the armoured corps endeavoured to establish a continuous front line in this area, its combat strength was no longer sufficient for the task. The spearheads of the two Soviet armies gradually drove its left wing backwards, occupied the Dukla Pass on 6 October, and advanced into Slovakian territory.<sup>218</sup> First Armoured Army's defensive front on the Beskid ridge was now in disarray, and by the middle of October the Czirokatal Pass also had to

<sup>214</sup> A.Gr. Heinrici, Abt. Ia, daily reports 15 Sept.–8 Oct. 1944, BA-MA RH 21-1/495; *Die geheimen Tagesberichte*, xi. 38–101.

<sup>215</sup> A.Gr. Heinrici, Abt. Ia, No. 2883/44 geh., 19 Sept. 1944, BA-MA RH 24-11/111, 191.

<sup>216</sup> A.Gr. Heinrici, Abt. Ia, daily reports 20–8 Sept. 1944, BA-MA RH 21-1/495; KTB GenKdo XI. AK, Abt. Ia, 1 Sept.–20 Oct. 1944 (20–28 Sept. 1944), BA-MA RH 24-11/110, 98–140; *Geschichte der 96. Infanterie-Division*, 338–43; *Die geheimen Tagesberichte*, xi. 53–67.

<sup>217</sup> A.Gr. Heinrici, Abt. Ia, daily reports 18–29 Sept. 1944, BA-MA RH 21-1/495; KTB GenKdo XI. AK, Abt. Ia, 1 Sept.–20 Oct. 1944 (18–29 Sept. 1944), BA-MA RH 24-11/110, 89–145; *Die geheimen Tagesberichte*, xi. 47–79.

<sup>218</sup> A.Gr. Heinrici, Abt. Ia, daily reports 28 Sept.–6 Oct. 1944, BA-MA RH 21-1/495; *Die geheimen Tagesberichte*, xi. 76–99; *Geschichte des zweiten Weltkrieges 1939–1945*, ix. 207 ff.; Gunter, *Die deutschen Skijäger*, 162–71; Stoves, *Die 1. Panzer-Division*, 645.

be abandoned.<sup>219</sup> Thus, by the beginning of October, 1st and 4th Ukrainian Fronts had managed, in the face of bitter German resistance, to cross the Beskid ridge on a broad front and press forward into the border regions of eastern Slovakia and Hungary. It became clear in the middle of October 1944 that the defensive front on the western edge of the Beskid range—especially in the area covered by XXXIX Mountain Corps—threatened to collapse. Harpe therefore decided to deploy parts of 1st Armoured Division briefly in the Nagyberezna area, 30 kilometres southwest of the Uzsok Pass, in order to stabilize the front.<sup>220</sup>

After Army Group A had bitterly resisted the Soviet forces for a month, the offensive eased off temporarily in the second week of October.<sup>221</sup> As a result, First Armoured Army was able to establish a shortened defensive front on a line to the west of the Beskid ridge, a front that was attacked by the exhausted 1st and 4th Ukrainian Front units at only a few points and forced back slightly to the west.

With the marked let-up in the enemy offensive in the first half of October, Heinrici hoped that the Red Army would close the Beskid operation altogether. So the army group command was extremely surprised when 1st Ukrainian Front once again intensified its hostilities on the whole of the Beskid front. The Stavka had recognized the advantages of continuing the operation in the eastern Carpathians with the aim of enclosing sections of Army Detachment Heinrici. Although the arrival of fresh units improved the situation of the exhausted 1st and 4th Ukrainian Fronts, the Soviet forces—especially Konev's troops—were no longer strong enough to restore the momentum of the offensive and break through the German defensive lines.<sup>222</sup> Once again, Army Detachment Heinrici defended its front so skilfully that the 1st Ukrainian Front attacks eased off again after 15 October.<sup>223</sup> It was only in the area of XXIV Armoured Corps south of the Dukla Pass that hostilities flared up again five days later, when the Soviet 1st Guards Army attempted, after all, to reach the Prešov area, the operational objective set at the beginning of September. XXIV Armoured Corps was once again able to fend off the attack, and Konev closed the operation on 28 October.<sup>224</sup> The action

<sup>219</sup> KTB GenKdo XI. AK, Abt. Ia, 1 Sept.–24 Oct. 1944 (4–9 Oct. 1944), BA-MA RH 24-11/110, 163–83; KTB GenKdo XXXIX. (Geb.)AK, Abt. Ia, No. 10, 4–9 Oct. 1944, BA-MA RH 24-49, fos. 92–109.

<sup>220</sup> KTB GenKdo XXXIX. (Geb.)AK, Abt. Ia, Corps Order No. 14, 30 Sept. 1944, BA-MA RH 24-49/151.

<sup>221</sup> A.Gr. Heinrici, Abt. Ia, morning and daily reports 10–12 Oct. 1944, BA-MA RH 21-1/495; *Die geheimen Tagesberichte*, xi. 112–18.

<sup>222</sup> *Geschichte des zweiten Weltkrieges 1939–1945*, ix. 208 ff.

<sup>223</sup> ObKdo H.Gr. A, Abt. Ia, No. 4607/44 g.Kdos., 11 Oct. 1944, BA-MA RH 19 VI/19, fo. 9; A.Gr. Heinrici, Abt. Ia, morning and daily reports 10–15 Oct. 1944, BA-MA RH 21-1/495; KTB GenKdo XI. AK, Abt. Ia, 1 Sept.–20 Oct. 1944, (10–15 Oct. 1944), BA-MA RH 24-11/110, fos. 184–208; KTB GenKdo XXXIX. (Geb.)AK, Abt. Ia, No. 10, 217–61 (10–15 Oct. 1944), BA-MA RH 24-49/150, fos. 109–31.

<sup>224</sup> KTB Pz.AOK 1, Abt. Ia, morning and daily reports 24–7 Oct. 1944, BA-MA RH 21-1/495; *Die geheimen Tagesberichte*, xi. 142–63; *Geschichte des zweiten Weltkrieges 1939–1945*, ix. 210; Moskalenko, 'Karpatsko-Duklinskaya Operatsiya', 16–23.

now became a war of positions on Army Group A's right wing too, and First Armoured Army's situation stabilized.<sup>225</sup>

Since the beginning of September, 1st Ukrainian Front, and later 4th Ukrainian Front too, had been trying to break through the Beskid front, advance rapidly, and capture eastern Slovakia, so as to cut off Army Group South Ukraine (South), which was fighting in Transylvania. In addition to this ambitious operational objective, the aim was also to connect with the insurgents in central Slovakia and liberate the country from German control. Only the skilful conduct of operations by Army Group North Ukraine (A), which made the best possible use of the geographical conditions, prevented the rapid realization of these Soviet objectives. The units of First Armoured Army were absolutely determined to resist and, by means of delaying combat, they quickly reduced the momentum of the enemy attacks. The army group had to give ground, but it benefited from operational errors on the Soviet side, which, first and foremost, underestimated the difficulties of mountain warfare. The premature launch of the Beskid operation, for which Konev's exhausted troops were insufficiently prepared, also contributed to First Armoured Army's successful defence. However, Army Group A paid a heavy price in human losses for this highly successful defensive battle for the Beskids and in eastern Slovakia. In September and October 1944 Army Group A lost approximately 60,000 men, of whom 47,000 wounded, 8,500 dead, and 4,400 missing. Army Detachment Heinrici bore the brunt of the losses, with almost 37,000 casualties.<sup>226</sup> The price paid by 1st and 4th Ukrainian Fronts for the successful operation in the eastern Carpathians—almost 125,000 human losses, of whom 27,000 dead or seriously wounded—also bears witness to the intensity of the fighting.<sup>227</sup>

### (c) The Situation of Army Group A in the Autumn of 1944

While fighting in connection with the Slovakian national uprising broke out again on the northern edge of the Beskid mountains at the beginning of September, and Army Detachment Heinrici was caught up in the major Soviet offensive in Romania and Transylvania at the end of the month, operations on the army group's left wing settled into a war of position. However, although hostilities had virtually ceased in the area of Fourth Armoured Army, the armoured army was nevertheless in a precarious situation. It was defending the large Vistula salient which protruded far to the east between the Baranów and Magnuszew bridgeheads. The Soviet forces could launch flank attacks from the bridgeheads, cutting off the bulk of the army in the rear and encircling it. This fact led Harpe to seek permission, when he was in Rastenburg on 8 September, to move Fourth Armoured Army back to the '3rd position'—a shortened defensive line running north from the mouth of the Nida past Busk and Chmielnik, and joining the existing front line at the south-west corner of the Magnuszew bridgehead. His request was not heeded, 'because the

<sup>225</sup> Schönherr, 'Obranné operácie armádnej skupiny Heinrici', 85–93.

<sup>226</sup> BA-MA RW 6/v. 559, fos. 29–34. <sup>227</sup> *Grif sekretnosti sniat*, 206 ff.

OKH did not regard such a measure, which also meant giving up valuable territory, as a matter of urgency'.<sup>228</sup> Despite the problematic course of the front in the Vistula section and the heavy fighting in the eastern Beskid mountains, the high command in Cracow was obliged to transfer not only a corps HQ but also four armoured divisions to other sections of the front at the beginning of September.<sup>229</sup>

The army group HQ followed with deep concern the military developments in Transylvania, where Army Group South was driven back to the Tisza river in the course of October. As a result of this development, Army Detachment Heinrici had great difficulty in holding the 'Hungarian position'. At the end of October, after the 4th Ukrainian Front attacks in the Krosno–Jasło section of the front had failed to achieve the desired success, Petrov extended the offensive to the south. 4th Ukrainian Front, in collaboration with Marshal Rodion Yakovlevich Malinovsky's troops, now stepped up the pressure on First Armoured Army. In the course of the month, Heinrici pulled his army back to the western edge of the Beskid mountains, and 4th Ukrainian Front advanced *en masse* in the Uzhhorod area. Since 2nd Ukrainian Front launched its major offensive at the same time, heading north from Debrecen towards Nyiregyháza, the OKH placed the Hungarian 1st Army under the command of Eighth Army, and formed Army Detachment Wöhler to ensure coordinated conduct of operations in the Debrecen–Nyiregyháza–Uzhhorod area. The aim of the Soviet operations in this area was to roll up the Beskid defences from the south, and to encircle and destroy the German units on the western edge of the mountain range. The fighting increased in intensity from the beginning of November and came to a head in the period from 21 November to 26 December 1944. Army Group South was forced to abandon the *Alfold*, the Hungarian lowland plain to the south of Budapest, but the army group's right wing was essentially able to hold its ground. First Armoured Army, which had been transferred to Army Detachment Heinrici on 12 December along with the Hungarian 1st Army again under its command, was obliged to give ground, but it managed to bring the enemy offensive to a standstill on the Slovakian–Hungarian border south of the Rimavská Sobota–Košice line, and so preserve the continuity of the front. The closing weeks of 1944 saw substantial changes in Army Group A. In the last few days of November, the OKH transferred Ninth Army from Army Group Centre, where it had been responsible for securing the section of the Vistula from the Puławy bridgehead to Serock north of Warsaw, and placed it under the high command in Cracow. As a result of this measure, Army Group A's border was moved north and it was now responsible for securing one of the most critical sections of the front. Just three weeks later, the OKH decided to place the Hungarian 1st army under the command of First Armoured Army again, thereby extending the right flank almost 150 kilometres to the west. The effect of these OKH decisions was to increase the length of this section of the front from approximately 450 kilometres to almost 750 kilometres, thereby putting the Vistula section in particular, and also the right flank at Košice, under threat.

<sup>228</sup> Study P-114c, pt. 7, i. 226, BA-MA ZA 1/2077, fo. 278.

<sup>229</sup> XXXXVIII Armoured Corps HQ, 1st, 3rd, 23rd, and 24th Armoured Divisions.

At the end of 1944, Army Group A faced the vastly superior forces of 1st Belorussian Front and 1st and 4th Ukrainian Fronts, which were preparing for the winter offensive to be launched in the direction of the Reich border.

The massive 2nd and 3rd Ukrainian Front attacks in Hungary affected Army Group A only to a limited extent, so the high command in Cracow took the opportunity offered by the pause to refresh its units and establish a defence system. By taking these measures, Harpe hoped to be able to hold out against a major Soviet offensive, at least for some time. The Soviet forces also took advantage of the pause in the fighting to prepare for the resumption of hostilities. According to the army group's information, the Red Army was stepping up its advance between the Beskid mountains and the mouth of the Pilica river, and the Vistula bridgeheads were consequently of crucial importance. In anticipation of the 'forthcoming defensive battle', the high command in Cracow drew up an operational plan that paid particular attention to the enemy's armoured forces and to front breakthrough by mobile units. The army group pulled all its armoured and armoured infantry divisions back from the main battle line and stationed them in the rear of the operational area as army group reserves.<sup>230</sup> Harpe intended 'to strike any enemy troops that broke through on the backhand, in free combat, using mobile forces from the reserve'.<sup>231</sup> But all forward planning inevitably faced the dilemma that defence of the large Vistula salient was an illusion from the start. The problem could have been solved only if the OKH had granted Harpe's requests to move Fourth Armoured Army back to a shortened defensive line. Despite all the difficulties, in the autumn of 1944 Army Group A managed to establish a stable front from the northern edge of the Beskid mountains to Warsaw, although it was doubtful whether the available forces would suffice for successful resistance against an enemy that was vastly superior in every respect.

<sup>230</sup> Study P-114c, pt. 7, ii. 328 ff., annex 154, BA-MA ZA 1/2078, fos. 331 ff.

<sup>231</sup> Study P-114c, pt. 7, i. 237, BA-MA ZA 1/2077, fo. 287.

# VI. The Withdrawal Battles in Romania and Transylvania in the Summer and Autumn of 1944

*Klaus Schönherr*

The Red Army launched its winter offensive against the southern wing of the German eastern front, which was defended by Army Groups A and South, in December 1943. The two army groups, battle-worn and short of reserves, had almost nothing to pit against the massive Red Army attacks, and they were consequently driven up to 300 kilometres west within two months. Further withdrawal was briefly prevented by the onset of the thaw in February 1944, until the Red Army resumed hostilities at the beginning of March. The Soviets then shifted the point of concentration of their attacks to the central section of Army Group South's front. The German defence front collapsed altogether in the closing phase of the Soviet winter offensive. Only when the Soviet units were completely exhausted and the attack lost momentum were their German adversaries able to re-establish a continuous defensive line in the southern section of the front. The kingdom of Romania was particularly hard hit by the Red Army winter offensive. It lost occupied Transnistria, and the old Romanian territories in Bessarabia and Moldavia north of the Chișinău–Iași line were conquered. When the Soviet offensive closed at the end of March, the German–Romanian forces were standing on the Brody–Kolomyia line east of Iași, and on a line extending eastwards from there beyond the Prut to the Tiligut, which formed the front line up to the Black Sea. In April 1944, however, this line together with its southern wing had to be moved west again, because Army Detachment Dumitrescu (Col.-Gen. Petre Dumitrescu), comprising the German Sixth Army and the Romanian 3rd Army, was unable to stop 3rd Ukrainian Front in its advance on Odessa. The defensive positions were therefore moved back to the west bank of the Dniester.<sup>1</sup> Army Group South Ukraine's front, which had extended from the edge of the Carpathians at Kolomyia to the Dniester and the Black Sea since April 1944, remained essentially unchanged until the second half of August.

<sup>1</sup> See Part IV, Chapter III of the present volume.

## 1. ARMY GROUP SOUTH UKRAINE ON THE ROMANIAN DEFENCE FRONT (SUMMER 1944)

While Army Group A was engaged in heavy defence battles on its northern wing at the end of March 1944, in the area covered by Army Detachment Wöhler (Gen. Otto Wöhler), which comprised the German Eighth Army and the Romanian 4th Army, Hitler dismissed the commander-in-chief, Field Marshal Ewald von Kleist, on 30 March<sup>2</sup> and transferred command to Col.-Gen. Ferdinand Schörner. When Kleist carried out the transfer of Army Group A command by telephone on 3 April,<sup>3</sup> Schörner took over a battle-worn, decimated force that was only just holding out with its last remaining strength against the Soviet attacks.

On 2 April 1944, almost at the same time as the change of command, Hitler issued Operational Order No. 7 on the conduct of operations on the southern wing of the eastern front in the coming months. In issuing this order, the commander-in-chief of the Wehrmacht was proceeding on the correct assumption that the units of 3rd and 4th Ukrainian Front were battle-worn and exhausted, and that the enemy offensive in the southern Ukraine had accordingly passed its peak. 'The Crimea must therefore be held fast, and the Dniester line north-west of Chișinău–Iași–Târgu Neamț–east Carpathian exit routes between Târgu Neamț and Kolomyia–Tarnopol–Brody–Kovel must be held or recovered at all costs.'<sup>4</sup> With regard to the Crimean peninsula, which had been cut off from the main German battle line since October 1943, Hitler's directive stipulated that it too must remain in German hands at all costs. For Army Group A, Operational Order No. 7 stated explicitly that the line from the Tiligul estuary to the Dniester at Dubossary was to be held in all circumstances, at least until the German and Romanian units making up Seventeenth Army in the Crimea could be fully supplied from Romania and the port of Odessa was no longer needed for transporting supplies. Hitler nevertheless authorized preparations to move the front back to the Dniester in an emergency. In the further course of hostilities it was absolutely essential to close the yawning gap between Eighth Army and the east Carpathian exit routes in order to prevent a Soviet breakthrough in the German front. The commander-in-chief of the Wehrmacht no longer had much confidence in the fighting strength of the Romanian army, and he accordingly ordered that Romanian divisions be deployed only in such a way that front sections liable to attack by enemy armour were defended exclusively by German units.<sup>5</sup> To carry out these plans, Hitler was counting on the uncompromising executive ability of the new commander-in-chief of Army Group A, which was renamed Army Group South Ukraine on 5 April without any change in its organizational structure.

Even Schörner could not put Hitler's intentions into practice. While operations in the northern part of the army group's area were wound up at the end of March, the Red Army launched massive attacks on Sixth Army's defensive positions, with

<sup>2</sup> KTB H.Gr. A, Abt. Ia, No. 3, vi (1–31 Mar. 1944), 253 ff., BA-MA RH 19 V/25, fos. 255 ff.

<sup>3</sup> KTB H.Gr. A, Abt. Ia, No. 3, vii (1–30 Apr. 1944), 18, BA-MA RH 19 V/26, fo. 19.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., fo.14.      <sup>5</sup> *Hitlers Weisungen*, 250 ff.

the result that the defensive line on the Tiligul had to be abandoned. Army Group South Ukraine was obliged to withdraw to the Dniester in the course of April, so Odessa too was lost. On 8 April 1944, almost at the same time as the offensive on the mainland, the Red Army launched its large-scale attack on the Crimea in order to liberate the peninsula from the occupying forces. Seventeenth Army could not hold out against the massive Soviet attacks, and the Axis powers were obliged to abandon the peninsula on 13 May, after battles involving enormous losses and a dramatic rescue operation in which some 35,000 men were carried over the Black Sea to Constanța.<sup>6</sup>

Army Group South Ukraine had succeeded in bringing the Russian offensive in Bessarabia and northern Moldavia to a standstill by the middle of April. Schörner, with the Romanian Army Detachment Dumitrescu and the German Army Detachment Wöhler under his command, now had time to refresh his battle-worn units, whose human and material resources had been decimated. At the same time, he consolidated the defences on the new front line, which ran along the Dniester to the north of Chișinău and then turned west to the eastern edge of the Carpathians in the Târgu Neamț area.<sup>7</sup> When the Red Army ended its operations in northern Bessarabia in March and on the Dniester in April, the army group had 17 severely depleted German divisions and 23 equally depleted Romanian divisions under its command, plus 26 Wehrmacht division groups. The first task of their new commander-in-chief, at the end of the Russian winter offensive, was therefore to replenish the battle-worn units as quickly as possible, secure the supply lines, and consolidate the front line for defence purposes.

#### (a) The Situation in the Romanian Theatre of War

Three months after the Soviet offensive on the Dniester and in north-eastern Romania had come to a standstill, Schörner was able to draw up a balance-sheet that was essentially positive from the military point of view.<sup>8</sup> By the second half of June, the army group had succeeded in replenishing and training the German divisions so that they were again at full operational strength. The southern section of the eastern front had been stabilized, so even heavy locally circumscribed enemy attacks no longer had adverse effects. The army group was able to reduce the length of exposed sections of its main battle line on its own initiative—particularly in the area north of Iași—to give itself more favourable defensive lines. Similar progress had been made in consolidating defensive positions in Moldavia and Bessarabia. The army group had also achieved the central aim of its operational plan: the

<sup>6</sup> KTB H.Gr. Südkraine, Abt. Ia, No. 3, vii (1–30 Apr. 1944), and viii (1–31 May 1944), BA-MA RH 19 V/26, fos. 56–284, and RH 19 V/88, fos. 3–123; Hillgruber, *Die Räumung*. On this, see Part IV, Chapter IV of the present volume.

<sup>7</sup> Duțu, 'A Difficult Situation'.

<sup>8</sup> This does not apply to Schörner's style of leadership, in which he did not shrink from employing means and methods that were disproportionate and sometimes beyond the limits of the law, as Gen. Ulrich de Maizière very benignly pointed out after the war (Kaltenegger, *Schörner*, 242). See also Schönher, 'Ferdinand Schörner'.

constitution of ample reserves of mobile armoured units in the rear area. By the end of June, the defensive measures in the north-east of the kingdom of Romania appeared so far advanced that there was a good chance of successfully repelling Soviet attacks. In addition to all the defensive efforts on the Dniester, in northern Moldavia, and in Bessarabia, the Carpathian–Danube line<sup>9</sup> was also being intensively consolidated, and an in-depth interception line was established to prevent an enemy offensive from spilling over into the Balkans.

On 22 June 1944 the Red Army launched its long-planned operation between Lake Peipus and the upper reaches of the Prut with seven army fronts. According to Army Group South Ukraine's chief of staff, Lt.-Gen. Walter Wenck, the army group was in excellent shape; if necessary, it could even let the OKH have armoured units to deploy in endangered sections of the eastern front.<sup>10</sup> This assessment was in some respects inconsistent with Schörner's directive on the conduct of future operations, issued on 14 June. According to that directive:

attention is drawn, [...] in the case of Army Detachment Dumitrescu, to the enemy bridgehead at Rascati and the salient at Chișinău and, in the case of Army Detachment Wöhler, to the area on both sides of the Prut and on both sides of the Seret valley, as future sources of danger. In the next few weeks [...] Army Detachment Dumitrescu is to further consolidate the Dniester front with a deeply staggered defensive system, and Army Detachment Wöhler is to consolidate the [...] positions north of Iași and prepare limited attacks to eliminate the front salient in the Prut valley [...]. Armies are also informed that the army group intends to establish an operational reserve in the Huși area, consisting of Armd. Inf. Div 'G.D.', 14th Armd. Div., and subsequently 10th Armd. Inf. Div., under the command of XXXX Armd. Corps.<sup>11</sup>

On 22 June, just a few days after the Russian summer offensive was launched, there were signs of an impending disaster facing Army Group Centre, which forced the OKH to assemble 'anything and everything that can move' in the central section of the eastern front.<sup>12</sup>

The crisis in Army Group Centre naturally affected Army Group South Ukraine too, especially as the hostilities spread to the Baltic countries and Galicia, with the result that only the southern wing of the eastern front remained quiet. On 1 July the OKH transferred 17th Armoured Division to Army Group North Ukraine. The high command in the Carpathian spa town of Slănic, to which the staff of Army Group South Ukraine had moved on 30 May, made no objection to this decision, indicating that the army group could cope with the withdrawal of an armoured division. On this occasion Wenck expressed the view that the army

<sup>9</sup> Carpathian–Danube line: a Romanian system of lines extending from the Carpathians at Adjud along the Seret to the Danube at Galați–Brăila.

<sup>10</sup> Inquiry from the chief of the Army General Staff (Zeitzler), 21 June 1944, KTB H.Gr. Südukraine, Abt. Ia, No. 3, ix. 139 (21 June 1944), BA-MA RH 19 V/28, fo. 142.

<sup>11</sup> KTB H.Gr. Südukraine, Abt. Ia, No. 3, ix. 103 ff. (14 June 1944), BA-MA RH 19 V/28, fos. 106 ff.

<sup>12</sup> Telephone call from the chief of the Army General Staff to commander-in-chief Army Group South Ukraine, 29 June 1944, 21.30, KTB H.Gr. Südukraine, Abt. Ia, No. 3, ix. 175 ff. (29 June 1944), BA-MA RH 19 V/28, fos. 178 ff.

group could ‘even part with further forces if the overall situation so required’,<sup>13</sup> since there was no sign of an enemy attack. With this offer to the OKH, the chief of staff laid the foundation for the failure of the operational concept for the Romanian theatre of war. The military situation between the Baltic and Galicia in July 1944 required a constant supply of fresh forces, including forces from the Romanian theatre. If the army group initially believed it was entitled to be consulted when its units were handed over, it was obliged to recognize just three weeks later that the OKH paid no attention to objections from Slănic. By the end of July the forces available to the German–Romanian command had been substantially reduced as a result of the military disasters between the Baltic and Galicia. It now had scant chances of holding out against a major Soviet offensive. Within three weeks, the army group had been obliged to transfer five armoured divisions, one infantry division, two assault-gun brigades, and XXXX Armoured Corps HQ to its neighbour on the left.<sup>14</sup> Wenck now considered that the limit had been reached and no more forces could be transferred. Even the additional deployment of 18 Romanian divisions, below standard in respect of training and equipment, could only partly make up for the substantial loss of strength.<sup>15</sup> But the military situation in the summer of 1944—not only on the eastern front—was so desperate that no attention was paid to protests from Slănic.

The situation of Army Group North, where the connection between its southern wing and Army Group Centre had been severed and it was consequently in danger of being enclosed in the Baltic States, had led in July to serious differences between the commander-in-chief, Gen. Johannes Friessner, and Hitler. In this precarious situation, Hitler once again believed that the tough and uncompromising Col.-Gen. Schörner would be able to resolve the almost hopeless situation on the northern wing of the eastern front, so he decided that the commanders-in-chief of the two army groups should change places.<sup>16</sup> On 23 July 1944 Hitler accordingly appointed General Friessner as the new commander-in-chief of Army Group South Ukraine, promoting him at the same time to the rank of colonel-general. During Hitler’s introductory briefing on the situation in the Romanian theatre, Friessner identified a weak point in the army group’s front. The new commander-in-chief was convinced that the open north flank between the Carpathians and the Dniester was a direct invitation to the enemy to launch an attack to the south along the Prut and Seret valleys, which would enable the Soviet forces to advance rapidly, block the Prut river crossings behind Army Detachment Dumitrescu, and enclose it in Bessarabia. The German Sixth Army was extremely at risk because, in the event of a simultaneous attack by 3rd Ukrainian Front, probably westwards from the Tiraspol bridgehead, it would be enclosed in the area between Chișinău and Bender and would then have little chance of escaping destruction. Hitler did

<sup>13</sup> KTB H.Gr. Südukraine, Abt. Ia, No. 3, x. 1 ff. (1 July 1944), BA-MA RH 19 V/29, fo. 3 ff.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. 95 (22 July 1944), BA-MA RH 19 V/29, fo. 95.

<sup>15</sup> Telephone call from Army Group South Ukraine chief of staff to head of Army General Staff operations section, 15 July 1944, 09.50, and telex from Army Group South Ukraine, Abt. Ia, No. 2706/44, g.Kdos., 15 July 1944, BA-MA RH 19 V/29, fo. 58.

<sup>16</sup> Kaltenegger, *Schörner*, 243–5; Friessner, *Verratene Schlachten*, 26–30.

not accept Friessner's arguments and categorically rejected the requests to rectify the army group's exposed front.<sup>17</sup> Even when Friessner 'then asked for authorization at least to move the army group's far protruding front back to the other side of the Prut *in good time*, should there be signs of a north–south Russian attack, Hitler refused, telling him [...] first to look into the situation on the spot. He could then always—if necessary—submit appropriate operational requests.'<sup>18</sup>

In addition to the change of commander-in-chief, the chief of staff, Lt.-Gen. Wenck, was removed from his post at the same time—a most unusual procedure in the armed forces—and replaced by Maj.-Gen. Helmuth von Grolman.<sup>19</sup> Even before the new commander-in-chief arrived at headquarters in Slănic, Friessner's objections had led the OKH to issue a further directive on the 'conduct of operations on the eastern front'. The order issued by the operations division confirmed once again Hitler's determination to keep the army group in its current positions. The army group HQ was also instructed to exploit weaknesses in the enemy position by carrying out limited local attacks aimed at tying down enemy forces and preventing units of 2nd and 3rd Ukrainian Front from being withdrawn for deployment in the northern section of the eastern front. Apart from the operational instructions, the OKH also requested the army group to see 'what other divisions could be prepared for transfer, in addition to those whose transfer had already been ordered (six armoured divisions, including Armoured Infantry Division "Grossdeutschland", 1st Infantry Division, and 1st Mountain Division)'.<sup>20</sup> Despite the problematic course of the front, the Army General Staff was not prompted by Friessner's proposals and suggestions to organize the defence of Romania more effectively, but fell in once again with Hitler's arguments. As a result of the OKH's ideas and demands, which were geared to the situation on the eastern front as a whole, Army Group South Ukraine's defence concept was deprived of important elements that were essential to the conduct of a successful defensive battle.

The new commander-in-chief arrived at headquarters in Slănic on 25 July 1944. The colonel-general's staff presented an assessment of the situation on the same day, providing him with a direct insight into the army group's operational problems. Section Ia concluded that the reserves still at the army group's disposal at this point, namely two armoured divisions and two infantry divisions, an armoured infantry division and a Romanian armoured division, after it had been obliged to part with eight divisions and two brigades, were just sufficient to withstand an offensive, given the enemy's current situation. However, the forces would no longer suffice to defend the German–Romanian front in the event of a large-scale enemy attack. Lastly, the army group HQ asked the OKH to grant it operational freedom to withdraw independently to rearward positions if, in the course of a Soviet

<sup>17</sup> Friessner, *Verratene Schlachten*, 33.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. 37.

<sup>19</sup> KTB H.Gr. Südukraine, Abt. Ia, No. 3, x. 95 (22 July 1944), BA-MA RH 19 V/29, fo. 95. Maj.-Gen. Helmuth von Grolman was chief of staff of Army Group South Ukraine/South from 20 July 1944 to 23 March 1945.

<sup>20</sup> KTB H.Gr. Südukraine, Abt. Ia, No. 3, x. 110 ff. (24 July 1944), BA-MA RH 19 V/29, fos. 110 ff.

offensive, it became apparent that the enemy forces would break through the defensive lines. The army group's strength should not be further reduced; otherwise it would no longer be able to fulfil its task of defending the territory of north-eastern Romania. The army group HQ also asked for more armoured vehicles. It was prompted to submit this request after having been obliged to part with more than 60 per cent of its operational tanks and a third of its assault guns since mid-July 1944.<sup>21</sup> Even this alarming assessment of the situation, which the commander-in-chief did not pass on to the Army General Staff but which nevertheless served as the basis for reports, reviews, and requests to the OKH, did the army group no good, in view of the disastrous situation in the central and northern sections of the eastern front.<sup>22</sup>

Friessner had noted the army group's difficult situation when he was receiving his introductory briefing in Rastenburg. He wanted to form his own picture of the state it was in without delay. During his tours of inspection, Friessner was confronted with the political mood in Romania. Just a few days earlier, Hitler had asserted that conditions in the kingdom were completely stable: 'The marshal [Ion Antonescu] is loyal to me. And the Romanian people and the Romanian army are behind him to a man.'<sup>23</sup> However, Friessner was obliged to recognize, during his visits to the front at the end of July, that Hitler's conviction was a complete delusion. During his travels he frequently came across rumours that the political reliability of the Romanian officer corps was highly doubtful. This impression became even stronger when, in the summer of 1944, numerous high-ranking officers, commanding generals, and divisional commanders were relieved of their posts and replaced without the army group leadership being informed.<sup>24</sup> The commander-in-chief also learned of a number of meetings in Alba Iulia attended by generals and members of the political opposition who were suspected of dealings with enemy powers and of plotting to overthrow the Conducător. According to Friessner, his findings on political conditions in the kingdom and in the Romanian army were repeatedly passed on to the OKH.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>21</sup> On 11 July 1944 Army Group South Ukraine's operational inventory comprised 424 tanks, 390 assault guns, and 40 assault howitzers. By 1 August 1944 it had been reduced to 155 tanks, 294 assault guns, and 30 assault howitzers; KTB H.Gr. Südukraine, Abt. Ia, No. 3, ix. 38 (11 July 1944), and x. 3 (1 Aug. 1944), BA-MA RH 19 V/29, fo. 39, and RH 19 V/30, fo. 3.

<sup>22</sup> KTB H.Gr. Südukraine, Abt. Ia, No. 3, ix. 115 ff. (25 July 1944), BA-MA RH 19 V/29, fos. 115 ff.

<sup>23</sup> Friessner, *Verratene Schlachten*, 33. Hitler's assertions are to some extent at odds with statements on the situation in Romania made by [Carl August] Clodius, head of department in the foreign ministry, on 12 July 1944; ADAP, Series E, viii. doc. 110, 199 ff.

<sup>24</sup> In the summer of 1944 such personnel policy was not confined to the Romanian Axis partner but was also common practice on the German side. Thus, on 30 March 1944 Hitler relieved Field Marshal Ewald von Kleist of his command and appointed Col.-Gen. Schörner in his stead without informing Marshal Antonescu of his intentions. The Conducător was extremely annoyed by Hitler's action, as the head of the German military mission, General Erik Hansen, informed the army group; KTB H.Gr. Südukraine, Abt. Ia, No. 3, vii. 14 (2 Apr. 1944), BA-MA RH 19 V/26, fo. 15.

<sup>25</sup> Friessner, *Verratene Schlachten*, 51 ff. There is nothing in Army Group South Ukraine's records to support these claims made by Friessner after the war.

Friessner was particularly surprised by the change in the Romanian 4th Army high command. Although the situation in the Romanian 4th Army section of the front was becoming increasingly acute, the commander-in-chief, General Mihai Racoviță, left the army on 31 July, officially to go on leave, and never returned to his post.<sup>26</sup> Marshal Ion Antonescu then placed the Romanian 4th Army under the overall command of General Gheorghe Avramescu, who was already acting head of the army HQ. During his visits to the front, Friessner observed the workings of the covert 'Cosma' operation, by which the Romanian Great General Staff (Marele Stat Major Român) sought to record the number and location of all German troops in the kingdom. 'Cosma' was to have extremely adverse consequences for Army Group South Ukraine and the German forces in the kingdom.<sup>27</sup>

The political changes in south-eastern Europe, which in July 1944 were particularly apparent in Turkey's distancing itself from the German Reich and culminated in its breaking off diplomatic relations on 2 August, and the military situation on the invasion front and the eastern front, which was disastrous for the Axis powers, both had a considerable impact on the political situation in Romania. The growing war-weariness of large sections of the Romanian population in the summer of 1944 also made the new commander-in-chief doubt whether the Romanian forces would continue to fight on the German side. During his tours of the front, Friessner had already noticed the waning readiness to continue the war, and his observations were confirmed by his staff.<sup>28</sup> To round off his impressions, Friessner contacted the German ambassador in Bucharest, Baron Manfred von Killinger, on 1 August, together with the two highest-ranking German officers in the city, General Erik Hansen, head of the German military mission, and Lt.-Gen. Alfred Gerstenberg, commander of the German air force in Romania. During his talks in the capital, Friessner discovered that the representatives of the German authorities took a completely different view of the political situation in the country. The prevailing opinion in German diplomatic circles was summed up by Killinger in the following words: 'Marshal Antonescu has the people and the government behind him.'<sup>29</sup> These views did not dispel Friessner's scepticism. That same day, he ordered the German Sixth and Eighth Armies to set up undercover emergency units, so that the army group would be in a position to intervene immediately in the event of a coup or political unrest.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Report from the head of the German 2nd liaison staff, 9 Aug. 1944, KTB H.Gr. Südukraine, Abt. Ia, No. 3, xi. 47 (9 Aug. 1944), BA-MA RH 19 V/30, fo. 49.—Mihai Racoviță took over as minister for national defence in the Sănătescu government after the *coup d'état* on 23 August 1944, and held that post until June 1945.

<sup>27</sup> The Great General Staff did not issue a written order for 'Cosma', for reasons of secrecy; Arh.M. Ap.N., fond 948 M.St.M., Sec. 2, dosar 354, fos. 57 ff.; fond M.St.M., Sec. Operațiuni. dosar 2758, fos. 25–7; Tinică, 'Military Preparations', 191–2.

<sup>28</sup> KTB H.Gr. Südukraine, Abt. Ia, No. 3, xi. 2 ff. (1 Aug. 1944), BA-MA RH 19 V/30, fos. 4 ff.

<sup>29</sup> Friessner, *Verratenen Schlachten*, 54.

<sup>30</sup> KTB H.Gr. Südukraine, Abt. Ia, No. 2923, g.Kdos, 1 Aug. 1944, BA-MA RH 19 V/30, fo. 5. Each army HQ was required to have a reinforced regimental group ready for action by 2 August, as well as a regiment of two battalions in reserve.

Table V.vi.1. Army Group South Ukraine: order of battle (status: 15 August 1944)

Division	Corps	Army	Army Detachment	Army Group
Rom. 2nd Inf.Div.				
Rom. 15th Inf.Div.	Rom. III A.C.			
Rom. 110th Inf.Brig.				
9th Inf.Div.		Rom. 3rd Army		
Rom. 21st Inf.Div.	XXIX A.C.			
Rom. 9th Mtn.Div.				
15th Inf.Div.			A.Det.	
202nd Inf.Div.	XXX A.C.		Dumitrescu	
257th Inf.Div.			available for duty:	
306th Inf.Div.			Rom. II A.C.	
161st Inf.Div.			LXXII A.C.	
294th Inf.Div.			for special duties:	
320th Inf.Div.	LII A.C.	Sixth Army	Rom. 8th Inf.Div.	Army Group
384th Inf.Div.		with 13th Armd.Div.	Rom. 9th Inf.Div.	South Ukraine
62nd Inf.Div.			304th Inf.Div.	
258th Inf.Div.	XXXXIV A.C.			153rd Fld.Tr.Div.
282nd Inf.Div.				available for duty:
385th Inf.div.				10th Armd.Inf.Div.
Rom. 14th Inf.Div.				Slov.1st Tech.Div.
106th Inf.Div.	VII A.C.			97th Lt.Inf.Div.
370th Inf.Div.				(undergoing transfer)
Rom. 11th Inf.Div.	Mieth Group (IV A.C.)		A.Det. Wöhler	
79th Inf.Div.				
376th Inf.Div.				
Rom. 5th Cav.Div.		Eighth Army		
Rom. 9th Mtn.Div.	Rom. 4th A.C.			
Rom. 21st Inf.Div.				
Rom. 1st Inf.Div.	Kirchner Group (LVII Armd.A.C.)			
Rom. 13th Inf.Div.				
46th Inf.Div.				
Rom. 5th Inf.Div.	Rom. VI A.C.		available for duty :	
76th Inf.Div.			20th Armd.Div.	
Rom.101st Mtn.Brig.			Rom.1st Armd.	
Rom. 1st Gds.Div.	Rom. V A.C.	Rom.4th Army	Div.	
Rom. 4th Inf.Div.			'Romania Mare'	
Rom. 6th Inf.Div.	Rom. I A.C.		Rom. 8th Inf.Div.	
Rom. 20th Inf.Div.				
Rom.103rd Mtn.Brig	Rom. VII A.C.			
Rom.104th Mtn.Brig				
3rd Mtn.Div.				
8th Lt.Inf.Div.	XVII A.C.			
Rom. Frtr.Gds.Unit				

Source: KTB H.Gr. Südukraine, Abt. Ia, No. 3, x. 69–83 (15–17 Aug. 1944), BA-MA RH 19 V/30, fos. 71–85; Rom. 4th Army Situation Reports, 7–18.Aug. 1944, Arh.M.Ap.N. (Pitești), fond Armata 4, dosar 221, fos. 38–108.

His reservations about the opinion held by the higher German authorities in Bucharest prompted Friessner to write a personal letter to Hitler in which he first analysed the military situation on the southern wing of the eastern front and the question of the reliability of the Romanian troops, and then described his own extremely disturbing impression of the political position in Romania. With regard to the army group's situation, Friessner said in his letter, which was to be handed to Hitler by his 1st general staff officer, Col. Ivo Thilo von Trotha, that 'there is no cause for concern at present, and the army group's front can be held if it is allowed to keep the few reserves that are still available (two medium-strength German armoured divisions, one German armoured infantry division, and one Romanian armoured division)'.<sup>31</sup> On the basis of his assessment of the internal situation in Romania, he considered it essential 'to take all the necessary measures in advance, in order to be able to cope with any eventuality that might arise in this connection'. He emphasized, in particular, that 'these measures include the establishment of *unified* command authority in the Romanian area. The commander-in-chief therefore requests the Führer to transfer to him the authority to issue orders to the armed forces'.<sup>32</sup> At the same time, Army Detachment Wöhler submitted to the army group HQ a study of how much Romanian territory Eighth Army would still be able to defend if the Romanians withdrew from the war. The conclusion was that with the forces available it would only be able to occupy defensive positions on the eastern edge of the Carpathians along the Seret river as far as the Adjud area.<sup>33</sup> So, if Romania withdrew from the alliance, the whole area east of the Seret and north of the Danube would have to be given up.

Despite the serious military and political problems which had prompted him to approach Hitler in person, Friessner's state of health prevented him from intervening in his 1st general staff officer's negotiations on the army group's behalf. So, in the end, the commander-in-chief had to be content with the results Trotha managed to obtain. During his stay at Führer headquarters in the 'Wolf's Lair', Trotha had talks with Field Marshal Wilhelm Keitel, Col.-Gen. Alfred Jodl, Col.-Gen. Heinz Guderian, and Wenck. As Trotha informed his commander-in-chief on his return from Rastenburg, he had discussed the situation in the Romanian theatre of war with the chief of the Army General Staff, and had pointed out that it would no longer be possible to hold the front in the event of a major Soviet attack if the OKH continued to withdraw troops as it had been doing, and if the Romanian troops became increasingly unreliable. That being so, the Army General Staff should come to terms with the fact that the army group would have to withdraw to the Danube-Carpathian Fringe position. Although Guderian essentially agreed with the army group's reservations, he said nothing specific about plans for troop withdrawals, so the army group had no firm basis for planning in the immediate future. After consulting Hitler, the chief of the Army General Staff could only say: 'if the situation should develop in this way, he hopes that he will be

<sup>31</sup> KTB H.Gr. Südkraine, Abt. Ia, No. 3, xi. 12 (3 Aug. 1944), BA-MA RH 19 V/30, fo. 14.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid. 13 (3 Aug. 1944), BA-MA RH 19 V/30, fo. 15; Kissel, *Die Katastrophe in Rumänien*, 23 ff.

<sup>33</sup> KTB H.Gr. Südkraine, Abt. Ia, No. 3, xi. 13 (3 Aug. 1944), BA-MA RH 19 V/30, fo. 15.

able to give the necessary orders to the army group *in good time*.<sup>34</sup> Trotha's talks with the chief of the OKW also yielded no successful results for the army group. Keitel neither changed the German command structure in Romania by transferring authority over the Wehrmacht to the army group's commander-in-chief nor authorized precautionary measures to be taken in case Romania ceased fighting alongside the Germans. Keitel's response to Friessner's request at their first meeting on 4 August had been very favourable. At that point, Keitel had also shared the commander-in-chief's scepticism about Romania's continued support for the alliance.

The attitude of the chief of the OKW changed radically on 5 August, after Hitler had spent several hours in conference with the Romanian head of state. This change of mind is all the more surprising since, when Hitler asked whether Romania under the marshal's leadership would remain firmly committed to the alliance with the Third Reich to the very end, the Conducător's answer had been highly evasive.<sup>35</sup> Antonescu had emphasized, in his conversation with Hitler, that 'should it become impossible for the German troops to hold this section of the front [Army Group South Ukraine's main battle line] on the present line, Romania would not be in a position to stand at Germany's side to the point of complete destruction'.<sup>36</sup> Even the Conducător's closing remark, that Romania 'cannot maintain the present position indefinitely if Germany does not create the possibility for our defence [...] ',<sup>37</sup> did not alter Hitler's and Keitel's conviction that the kingdom remained committed to the alliance with the Third Reich. The chief of the OKW continued to maintain that 'Romania is with us, for good or ill.' Consequently, 'he did not think anything would happen in the near future'.<sup>38</sup> Once again, Keitel had avoided taking a decision that could be of considerable importance for the future conduct of Army Group South Ukraine's operations, and had adopted Hitler's preconceived idea in order to avoid a confrontation with the Führer. On his return, Trotha informed his commander-in-chief of the course which the talks in Rastenburg had taken. Friessner was forced to draw the sobering conclusion that his letter had prompted neither Hitler nor Keitel to change the army group's unfavourable situation with regard to a Soviet offensive. All the chief of the OKW had done was reluctantly promise to bear in mind 'the question of transferring authority over the Wehrmacht in the Romanian area to the commander-in-chief'.<sup>39</sup> So conditions in the Romanian theatre of war remained unchanged, and the army group had to go on handing over forces, even though 2nd Ukrainian Front's activities in the area facing the army group's front had increased considerably since 7 August.

On 9 August, while the army group staff were receiving the first reports of substantial enemy troop movements in the area to the north-east of Iași, the chief of

<sup>34</sup> Friessner, *Verratene Schlachten*, 56. Also KTB H.Gr. Südukraine, Abt. Ia, No. 3, x. 38 (8 Aug. 1944), BA-MA RH 19 V/30, fo. 40.

<sup>35</sup> ADAP, Series E, viii. doc. 150, 294–308; Hillgruber, *Hitler*, 209 ff.

<sup>36</sup> Memorandum from Marshal Ion Antonescu, 6–7 Aug. 1944, on his talk with Hitler on 5 August 1944 at Führer headquarters in the 'Wolf's Lair', Arh.M.A.E., fond Germania, vol. 94/1944, fo. 434.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., fo. 436.

<sup>38</sup> KTB H.Gr. Südukraine, Abt. Ia, No. 3, x. 39 (8 Aug. 1944), BA-MA RH 19 V/30, fo. 41.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

the Romanian Great General Staff, General Ilie Șteflea, arrived in Slănic for operational talks with Grolman. Apart from a report on the Conducător's visit to Hitler from the Romanian perspective, the main topic of the exchange of views was consolidation of the Danube–Carpathian Fringe position. On behalf of the army group, Grolman emphasized the demanding nature of this defensive rear position, but he also made it very clear that, in view of the serious consequences for the kingdom, withdrawal to the Carpathian–Focșani–Galați–Danube estuary line would be considered only if it became absolutely necessary. Șteflea, for his part, explained that intensive work was being done on the Romanian side to consolidate the position, and many of the installations had already been completed. In this connection, the chief of the Romanian Great General Staff pointed to the need to make preparations for a possible withdrawal of the front. The two generals also agreed on the conduct of operations in the immediate future. In view of the critical enemy position in the area facing Army Detachment Wöhler's right wing, they agreed on preparatory measures for defence against a possible Red Army offensive.<sup>40</sup>

Although Friessner had considerable reservations about the reliability of the Romanian Axis partner and was extremely concerned about political developments in the kingdom, the situation on the German–Romanian defence front appeared to be extremely quiet and stable in the first days after he took command. So, until 6 August, the army group thought that, as the Red Army was engaged in a major offensive against the central and northern sections of the eastern front, it no longer had the necessary forces to seek a decision in the Romanian theatre by means of a decisive large-scale operation. The picture changed slowly but fundamentally after 7 August, when Army Detachment Wöhler first observed substantial enemy troop movements opposite its right wing, east of the Prut. This area to the east of Iași was a weak point in the army group's defence system, lying as it did on the border between the areas under the command of Army Detachment Wöhler and Army Detachment Dumitrescu respectively. Although, at this early stage, the staff in Slănic did not expect a Soviet offensive in the next few weeks, it took the purely precautionary measure of placing 10th Armoured Infantry Division as a reserve force behind the left-hand section of Sixth Army.<sup>41</sup> In addition to the troop movements in northern Bessarabia, Air Fleet 4 observed during reconnaissance flights that there were now 'many more ships in the harbour of Odessa than there had been earlier'.<sup>42</sup> The first signs that enemy troops were being mustered opposite the Târgu Frumos and Iași bridgeheads became more marked in the next few days, as the troop movements from the eastern bank of the Prut shifted further to the west. Despite the events in the area of 2nd Ukrainian Front, Army Detachment Wöhler and the staff in Slănic were still not sure whether the troop movements were simply a regrouping of forces, or preparations for a possible attack. At this

<sup>40</sup> Ibid. 43 ff. (9 Aug. 1944), BA-MA RH 19 V/30, fos. 45 ff.; Kissel, *Die Katastrophe in Rumänien*, 24.

<sup>41</sup> KTB H.Gr. Südukraine, Abt. Ia, No. 3, x. 29–32 (7 Aug. 1944), BA-MA RH 19 V/30, fos. 31–4.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid. 31, BA-MA RH 19 V/30, fo. 33.

early stage, Sixth Army HQ still considered the troop movements in the area facing the Dniester front to be perfectly normal.<sup>43</sup> The army group HQ still had no clear idea of the enemy's intentions a week later, even though 2nd Ukrainian Front's activities between the Prut and the Seret continued unabated. However, Grolman and his 1st general staff officer now no longer ruled out the possibility that the Soviet forces were preparing a limited local attack.<sup>44</sup> While the enemy situation in the area facing the Romanian 4th Army's defensive positions was changing constantly,<sup>45</sup> the situation on the Dniester front appeared to change very little until the middle of the month. The commander-in-chief nevertheless concluded in his situation assessments that a Russian offensive, probably directed exclusively against the Moldavian section of the front between the Seret and the Prut, was to be expected in the near future. Presumably, the enemy's intention was to cut off the two bridgeheads at Târgu Frumos and Iași. Although German aerial reconnaissance observed a huge increase in Soviet artillery, which was a further indication of an imminent offensive, Eighth Army HQ nevertheless believed that its own forces would suffice to repel an enemy attack.<sup>46</sup>

In the area under Army Detachment Dumitrescu's command, there was no change in the situation until 15 August, when strong troop movements were observed in the Tiraspol bridgehead and on the left wing of the German XXIX Army Corps, at the interface between the German Sixth Army and the Romanian 3rd Army. Sixth Army HQ's situation assessment stated that 'the general impression is that the Russians are conducting relief operations in the area facing XXX Army Corps'.<sup>47</sup> Only two days later, when 3rd Ukrainian Front had strengthened not only its forces in the Tiraspol bridgehead but also its artillery in the area opposite the German XXIX Army Corps, the situation was deemed to be far more dangerous. Despite all the changes in the areas of Army Detachment Wöhler and Army Detachment Dumitrescu, Sixth Army HQ still did not think there would be a large-scale Soviet offensive. It judged the enemy measures to be preparations for a secondary attack designed to keep the German troops tied down on the Dniester front and prevent any move to the northern section of the front between the Dniester and the Seret. The operations division of the Army General Staff agreed with this assessment.<sup>48</sup>

But at the point when the Army General Staff and Foreign Armies East both thought there would only be a limited local attack in the Târgu Frumos–Iași area, Army Detachment Wöhler revised its assessment of Soviet operational intentions, even though the army HQ considered that the enemy forces facing this section of the front were not strong enough to conduct 'an attack on an operational scale with

<sup>43</sup> Ibid. 36–40 (7/8 Aug. 1944), BA-MA RH 19 V/30, fos. 38–42.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid. 71 (15 Aug. 1944), BA-MA RH 19 V/30, fo. 73.

<sup>45</sup> See Romanian 4th Army situation reports, 7–18 Aug. 1944, Arh.M.Ap.N., fond Armata 4, dosar 221, 38–108.

<sup>46</sup> KTB H.Gr. Südukraine, Abt. Ia, No. 3, x. 69–83 (15–17 Aug. 1944), BA-MA RH 19 V/30, fos. 71–85.

<sup>47</sup> KTB H.Gr. Südukraine, Abt. Ia, No. 3, xi. 75 (16 Aug. 1944), BA-MA RH 19 V/30, fo. 77.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid. 88 (18 Aug. 1944), BA-MA RH 19 V/30, fo. 90.

far-reaching objectives'.<sup>49</sup> Worried by the constant intensification of enemy troop movements in the area facing the army detachment's right wing, Wöhler and his chief of staff, Maj.-Gen. Hellmuth Reinhardt, became convinced, given the exceptionally large troop build-up, that 2nd Ukrainian Front was preparing a large-scale attack aimed at achieving a breakthrough.<sup>50</sup> Despite Eighth Army HQ's alarming assessment of the enemy situation, neither the OKH nor the staff in Slănic believed that the Soviet forces in northern Moldavia and at Tiraspol were assembling for an operation designed to destroy Army Group South Ukraine and conquer Romania.<sup>51</sup>

### (b) The Soviet Enemy on the Dniester and in Northern Romania

At the beginning of May 1944, after the Red Army's plan to break through the German–Romanian front in both the Iași area and the Bender–Tiraspol section had failed, the high command in Moscow brought the operation in north-eastern Romania to an end. 2nd and 3rd Ukrainian Fronts went over to the defensive, as the other Soviet combat forces between the Baltic States and Galicia had already done. The Soviet military leadership was obliged to take this measure because, as a result of the high losses, exhaustion, and supply difficulties caused by the heavy fighting in the spring, the front-line troops were in no condition to break the enemy's resistance. In the early summer of 1944, after the units had been refreshed, the Soviet high command decided to discontinue operations on the Dniester and in north-eastern Romania; some of the troops deployed there were needed to strengthen the Baltic and Belorussian fronts, in order to exploit the collapse of the German forces in the centre of the eastern front and finally destroy Army Groups Centre and South Ukraine. Since priority was given to the transfer of operational armoured forces, the combat strength of both army fronts was reduced substantially. Army Group South Ukraine was aware of the enemy troop reductions, despite all attempts to conceal them, and the transfers of 5th Guards Armoured Army and 8th Guards Army were recorded explicitly.<sup>52</sup> Altogether, by the beginning of August, 2nd and 3rd Ukrainian Fronts' troop strength had been reduced by around two armoured armies, three infantry armies, eight to ten mobile corps, and 28 rifle divisions.<sup>53</sup> It was surprising that, despite this reduction in their own strength, the two Soviet HQs barely reacted to the transfer of German forces from the southern wing of the eastern front to the Galician combat area. This situation changed radically in the first few days of August.

<sup>49</sup> Enemy situation assessment by OKH, Foreign Armies East, 17 Aug. 1944, quoted in Kissel, *Die Katastrophe in Rumänien*, 180.

<sup>50</sup> KTB H.Gr. Südukraine, Abt. Ia, No. 3, xi. 85 ff. (18 Aug. 1944), BA-MA RH 19 V/30, fos. 87 ff.

<sup>51</sup> KTB H.Gr. Südukraine, Abt. Ia, No. 3, x. 96–8 (19 Aug. 1944), BA-MA RH 19 V/30, fos. 98–100; Duțu, 'A Command Crisis', 196; Germany and the Second World War, vi. 76; Kissel, *Die Katastrophe in Rumänien*, 25, 180; Philippi and Heim, *Der Feldzug gegen Sowjetrußland*, 258 ff.

<sup>52</sup> KTB H.Gr. Südukraine, Abt. Ia, No. 3, ix. 181 (30 June 1944); x. 39 (11 July 1944), 84 (20 July 1944), BA-MA RH 19 V/28, fo. 184, and RH 19 V/29 fos. 40 and 85.

<sup>53</sup> Study T-8, xix, annex E, 7, BA-MA ZA 1/2335, fo. 208; Kissel, *Die Katastrophe in Rumänien*, 179.

On 2 August Stalin issued his directive on the Iași–Chișinău operation, ordering 2nd and 3rd Ukrainian Fronts to prepare and conduct an offensive in the Moldavia–northern Bessarabia area. The directive specified that 2nd Ukrainian Front, under the command of General Rodion Yakovlevich Malinovsky, was to break through the enemy positions in the area west of Iași and push south, while 3rd Ukrainian Front, under General Fedor Ivanovich Tolbukhin, was to launch an attack to the west from the Tiraspol bridgehead and, in cooperation with Malinovsky's troops, enclose and destroy the enemy forces in the Chișinău area. The mobile units played a special part in the operational plan, as they were to break through to the Prut river crossings south of Iași as quickly as possible after the enemy defence lines had been opened up, and take possession of the city.<sup>54</sup>

The two command headquarters used the period from 2 to 19 August to reorganize their units so that they were able to open decisive gaps in the German–Romanian front at the first assault. According to the plans, the attacks in the Iași–Chișinău area were to be supported by a Black Sea fleet landing at Akkerman and action by the Danube flotilla, whose main task was to carry 2nd Ukrainian Front infantry forces across the Dniester estuary to attack the Romanian 3rd Army. The aim of the Black Sea operation was to enclose and eliminate the Romanian 3rd Army in southern Bessarabia.<sup>55</sup> For the Soviet operational plan to be executed as efficiently as possible, both 2nd and 3rd Ukrainian Fronts had to be reorganized so that the focal points of the attack lay in the Iași area and the section of the front at the Tiraspol bridgehead. Thus, the main effort of the offensive was directed at what was assumed to be the weak points in the German–Romanian defence front, since the two sections in question were manned primarily by Romanian units, whose combat strength was considered inferior to that of German troops.

It was only on 2 August that the Soviet supreme military authority decided to reopen the offensive in the Romanian theatre of operations. On that day the Stavka accordingly instructed 2nd and 3rd Ukrainian Fronts to prepare and conduct an offensive operation aimed at destroying the German–Romanian Army Group South Ukraine and conquering the kingdoms of Romania and Bulgaria. In the first two weeks of August, the human and material resources of both army fronts were increased considerably for the Iași–Chișinău operation. 2nd Ukrainian Front was standing in northern Moldavia and northern Bessarabia with six armies, an armoured army, and an independent armoured corps. Altogether, Malinovsky had 56 divisions, five mobile corps, an armoured brigade, and a self-propelled-gun (SPG) brigade at his disposal for the attack on the German–Romanian defensive front between Târgu Frumos and Chișinău. On the Dniester front, where 3rd Ukrainian Front was preparing its attack, four armies and two independent mobile corps were ready for a thrust into the rear of German Sixth Army. Tolbukhin had 35 divisions, a mechanized corps, and a mobile brigade at his disposal for the advance to the Prut. The two army fronts had a combined strength of around

<sup>54</sup> Krikunov, 'Razgrom gruppy armii Yuznaya Ukraina', 14 ff.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid. 7 ff.; Mazulenko, *Die Zerschlagung der Heeresgruppe Südukraine*, 23–30.

930,000 men. Such manpower and the number of heavy weapons—around 1,400 tanks and assault guns, approximately 16,000 artillery cannon and grenade launchers, and almost 1,800 aircraft—testified to a marked superiority of the Soviet enemy in the southern section of the eastern front.<sup>56</sup>

The German–Romanian adversary was not unaware of activities in the area covered by 2nd and 3rd Ukrainian Fronts, and realized that they did not preclude the possibility of a new offensive. However, the two Soviet army front HQs managed to disguise their intentions so effectively that, a few days before the Soviet attack was launched, Army Group South Ukraine, and even the OKH, still did not realize that the Moldavian–Bessarabian theatre of operations was under any exceptional threat.<sup>57</sup>

After more than three relatively quiet months in the Romanian theatre of war, there were signs in the middle of August that the pause was about to end. From April to the end of June 1944, the hard-hit Army Group South Ukraine had had an opportunity to consolidate its human and material resources, so that by the summer of 1944 its combat strength was again at a reasonable level and there was reason to hope that it would be able to hold its ground successfully against a Soviet offensive. However, this period was marked by friction and differences with the Romanian Axis partner. In particular, a great deal of energy was wasted in constant disputes over food supplies and the provision of local currency to the German military agencies. The army group was also deeply concerned about the dwindling reliability of the Romanian troops and about political developments in the kingdom, which seemed to be coming to a head. With the opening of the Soviet summer offensive in the central section of the eastern front, the German forces in Romania also lost a substantial proportion of their combat strength, since they were obliged to part with large numbers of troops. By the time the Soviet forces began preparing for their operation at the beginning of August, the German–Romanian Army Group was already so depleted that its military capability was hardly sufficient to hold the entire southern section of the eastern front.

## 2. THE FIGHTING IN ROMANIA AND TRANSYLVANIA (LATE SUMMER TO AUTUMN 1944)

Since the beginning of April, Army Group South Ukraine had managed to perform its task of holding Romania and covering access to the strategically important Ploieşti oilfields and the Danube plain. The German Reich had, so far, fulfilled its obligations to protect Romania's borders—apart from the loss of northern Moldavia. However, the situation changed seriously after the Allied invasion of France and, above all, with the launch of the Soviet summer offensive against Army Group Centre at the end of June and the extension of enemy operations to the neighbouring sections of the front covered by Army Groups North and North Ukraine. The situation in the German–Romanian section of the front had even

<sup>56</sup> *Grif sekretnosti sniat*, 205 ff.; Kissel, *Die Katastrophe in Rumänien*, 49, 60 ff., 65 ff.

<sup>57</sup> Kissel, *Die Katastrophe in Rumänien*, 180.

become much worse. Unlike Hitler and the OKH, who described the military situation to their Romanian ally in extremely optimistic terms, the Conducător regarded the Soviet troop movements, which pointed to a large-scale massing of forces in the Romanian theatre, as a very serious threat.

Although Hitler stressed, in his conversation with Antonescu on 5 August, that he was intent on holding the section of the front on the Dniester and in Moldavia, the Romanian head of state took a much more realistic view of the military situation. In his response, he said he had 'absolutely no doubt that the Führer still had every intention of holding the present course of the front in Moldavia and Bessarabia. However, as an experienced military man, I added that we should not only see what we want to do. Everything also depends on the possibilities and, in particular, on the enemy's intentions.'<sup>58</sup> And it was precisely 2nd and 3rd Ukrainian Fronts' intentions that were to determine what happened to Army Group South Ukraine in the coming days and weeks. In this situation, the decisive factor was whether a major Soviet attack would be repelled and the Moldavian–Bessarabian defence line successfully held, because, otherwise, there was a danger that Romania would leave the alliance, as the Conducător had explained in his conversation with Hitler at the beginning of August.<sup>59</sup>

### (a) The Fighting in Moldavia and Bessarabia (20 to 23 August 1944)

'It appears certain, from his behaviour in the past few days and the attacks this afternoon, that the enemy is preparing to launch the expected major attack west of the Prut tomorrow, with the point of concentration between Rediu Metropoliei<sup>60</sup> and Belceşti.<sup>61</sup> There may also be holding attacks on other sections of the front.'<sup>62</sup> Friessner came to this conclusion on the evening of 19 August 1944, after discussing the situation in the morning with the chiefs of staff of Army Group South Ukraine, the German Sixth and Eighth Armies, and Air Fleet 4, and studying the latest reports from the areas under his command. It now remained to be seen whether the 650-kilometre-long front, which had been built up since April into a defence zone with deeply staggered defensive lines, would withstand a major Soviet offensive or collapse in the opening phase of the Soviet operation, as had been happening for the last two months in the central and northern sections of the eastern front. The chances of mounting an effective defence had decreased steadily since the end of June, mainly as a result of the transfer of eleven divisions,<sup>63</sup>

<sup>58</sup> Arh.M.A.E., fond Germania, vol. 94/1944, fo. 435, 10.

<sup>59</sup> At Führer headquarters on 5 August, Marshal Antonescu had stressed that 'should it become impossible for the German troops to hold this section of the front, Romania would not be in a position to stand at Germany's side to the point of complete destruction'; Arh.M.A.E., fond Germania, vol. 94/1944, fo. 434, 9.

<sup>60</sup> On the Jijia river, about 17 km north of Iaşi.

<sup>61</sup> In the Bahlui valley, about 11 km north of Târgu Frumos.

<sup>62</sup> KTB H.Gr. Südukraine, Abt. Ia, No. 3, xi (1–19 Aug. 1944), 92, BA-MA RH 19 V/30, fo. 94; similar entry in Rom. 4th Army war diary, 3. Abt., 1–31 Aug. 1944, on 19 Aug. 1944, 2, Arh.M.Ap. N., fond Armata 4, dosar 221, fo. 110.

<sup>63</sup> KTB H.Gr. Südukraine, Abt. Ia, No. 3, xi. 62, BA-MA RH 19 V/30, 64. Between 29 June and 19 August 1944, Army Group South Ukraine had to transfer the following units to Army Group

including almost all the mobile armoured units that were essential to the successful defence of the section of the front between the Carpathians and the Dniester. But, quite apart from the reduction in German combat strength, the ambivalent attitude of the Romanian Axis partner also constituted a considerable risk. Even so, Friessner, his operations division, and the OKH were still convinced on 17 August that there were sufficient forces deployed on the Romanian front to halt the expected 2nd and 3rd Ukrainian Front offensive.<sup>64</sup>

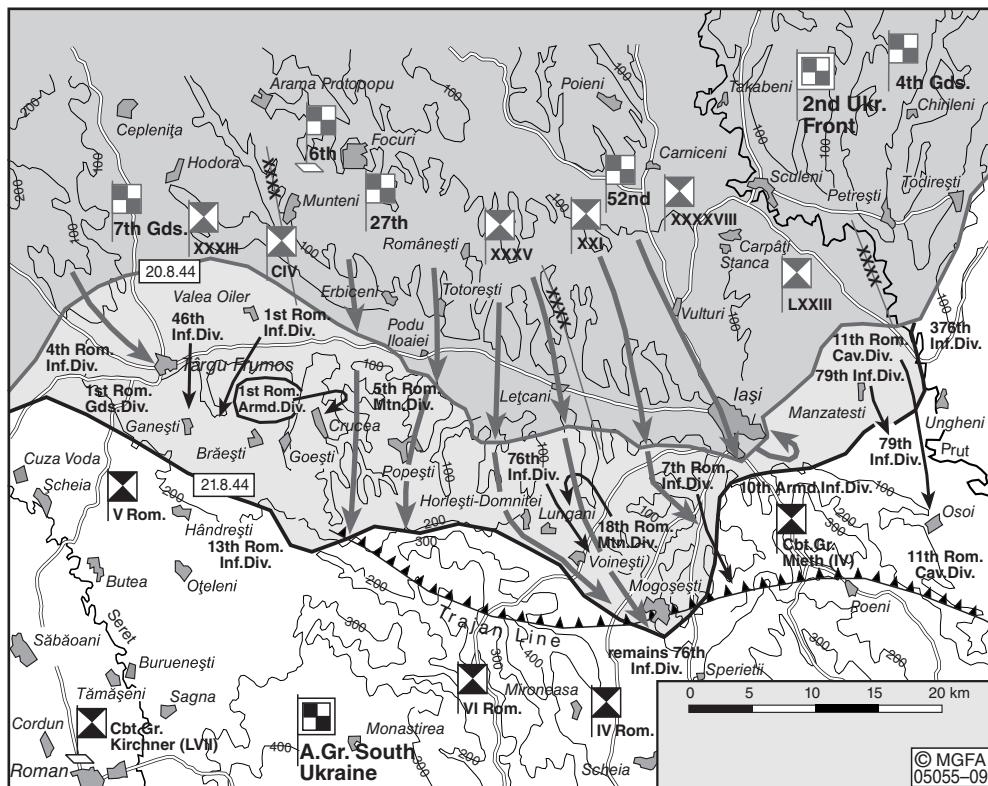
The enemy's intensive preparations for the Iași–Chișinău operation were completed towards the end of the third week of August, and 2nd Ukrainian Front under Malinovsky launched its offensive against the German–Romanian defensive positions north-west of Iași in the early hours of 20 August. At almost the same time hostilities began to the south of Tiraspol, where the Soviet 37th Army, belonging to 3rd Ukrainian Front, attacked the southern wing of the German Sixth Army in the central section of the bridgehead west of Slobodseja. Simultaneously, the Soviet 46th Army broke into the Romanian 3rd Army's nearby defensive system. The major offensive on the southern wing of the eastern front was now under way, an offensive which had been feared for days and turned out to be far more intense than the Germans had anticipated. The point of concentration of the attack in the German–Romanian theatre of operations was in the section of the front, only 35 kilometres wide, between Munteni, 15 kilometres north-east of Târgu Frumos, and Carpați, some 10 kilometres north of Iași, where two Soviet armies attacked with six army corps. This made it clear that the enemy's intention was to break as quickly as possible through the Dealu Mare section of the front, which was favourable for defensive purposes, advance southwards along the conveniently placed Iași–Vaslui railway line into the Bârlad valley, and take possession of the Prut river crossings south-east of Iași. If 2nd Ukrainian Front managed to achieve its aims, it would have a chance to cut the German Sixth Army off in the rear, making it impossible for it to withdraw westwards to the edge of the Carpathians.

After one-and-a-half to two hours of heavy artillery fire, starting at about 05.15 and supported by ground-attack aircraft, 2nd Ukrainian Front launched its attack, aimed primarily against the Romanian units' positions in the area of the Romanian VI and IV Army Corps. The Soviet artillery barrage caught the Romanian VI Corps at the worst possible time, because it had just embarked on a counter-attack at 04.30, having spent the whole night under heavy fire.<sup>65</sup> With no communications equipment, and with telephone lines damaged in the Soviet artillery bombardment,

Centre and Army Group North: Gen.Cmnd. XXXX Armd.A.C. with the corps troops; 3rd, 14th, 17th, 23rd, 24th Armd.Divs; Armd.Inf.Div. Grossdeutschland; 17th, 304th Inf.Divs; 97th Lt.Inf. Div.; 4th Mtn.Div.; 3rd SS Div. 'T'; 3rd Rocket Launcher Brig.; 236th Aslt.Brig.

<sup>64</sup> KTB H.Gr. Südkraine, Abt. Ia, No. 3, xi. 82 ff., BA-MA RH 19 V/30, fos. 84 ff.

<sup>65</sup> Rom. 4th Army war diary, August 1944, 10 (20 Aug. 1944), Arh.M.Ap.N., fond Armata 4, dosar 221, fo. 131. It was claimed in the Army Group South Ukraine war diary, and in the accounts by Kissel (*Die Katastrophe in Rumänien*), Friessner (*Verratene Schlachten*), and Hinze (*Mit dem Mut der Verzweiflung*), that the Romanian 5th Inf.Div., which was deployed in the centre of the section covered by the corps, had already withdrawn during the Soviet artillery bombardment, abandoning its positions without a fight. According to the entries in the Rom. 4th Army war diary, the event relates to the Romanian 5th Inf.Div. section of the defence front.



Map V.vi.1. The Soviet breakthrough between Târgu Frumos and Iași (20 to 21 August 1944)

Sources: OKH situation maps, 20 and 21 Aug. 1944, BA-MA, Kart RH2, Ost/1126 and 1127; Kissel, *Die Katastrophe in Rumänien*.

Army Detachment Wöhler was not able to form a picture of the situation in the area under its command until early in the morning. By then, it was clear that two Soviet 52nd Army attacking wedges had broken through the Romanian VI Army Corps line, and that the eastern spearhead had reached the north-western outskirts of Iași, while the other already occupied the south bank of the Bahlui river on the far side of the Târgu Frumos–Iași road. On the Romanian VI Army Corps' left flank, the Soviet 27th Army had broken through the defensive positions on either side of Erbiceni and was advancing rapidly southwards. And there were already indications that the Romanian 5th Infantry Division, which was deployed in the centre of the corps and had suffered badly in the early-morning counter-attack, would scarcely be able to withstand the enemy pressure. In 2nd Ukrainian Front's area of operations between Munteni and Carpați, only the two German infantry divisions managed to hold their security line, as their part of the front was hardly attacked at all. The German units had lost contact with their Romanian neighbours

during the Soviet artillery barrage, so, on the morning of the first day, the Germans had no indication of how dangerous the situation had become.

Despite the precarious situation, the army group's commander-in-chief did not deviate from the task set by the OKH, namely to hold the main battle line at all costs, and he accordingly decided to deploy the available reserves at once. Friessner's intention in taking this measure was to intercept the advancing enemy forces before they reached the Bahlui valley, and to close the gaps in the front. While the Romanian IV and German IV Army Corps reserves, attached to Combat Group (Gen. Friedrich) Mieth, managed to secure the right flank of the German IV Army Corps west of its interface with the neighbouring Romanian IV Army Corps, it was now impossible to close the gap caused by the breakthrough in the centre of the area south of Totoeşti, which was defended by the Romanian VI Army Corps. Regardless of the desperate situation between Erbiceni and Carpaţi, the army group firmly maintained its intention to recapture and hold the Bahlui section of the front. So, in the course of the same morning, the high command in Slănic deployed the Romanian 3rd Infantry Division, which was occupying a section of the Trajan line, and the Romanian 18th Mountain Division, which had been held in reserve, in a counter-attack. In addition, the army group launched an eastward attack by armoured units on the enemy flank, after the commander-in-chief of the Romanian 4th Army, General Avramescu, had released Armoured Division 'Greater Romania' for the purpose. The aim of the attack, carried out by the Romanian armoured division together with the Kessel blocking unit (the 20th Armoured Division combat group named after its commander, Lt.-Gen. Mortimer von Kessel) and an assault-gun brigade, was to recapture the Bahlui valley from the west.<sup>66</sup> In addition to the counter-attacks in the west and south of the breakthrough area, the army group HQ also attempted to clear up the situation north of Iaşi by moving 10th Armoured Infantry Division from its preparation zone to the area south-west of the city. It was hoped, in this way, to prevent the Soviet 52nd Army from capturing Iaşi.

Marshal Antonescu, his chief of staff řteflea, Wöhler, and Avramescu were already discussing the possible step of moving the German–Romanian units in the Soviet breakthrough area back to the Trajan line, in order to intercept 2nd Ukrainian Front in this favourable defensive position and bring it to a standstill.<sup>67</sup> It was only now—when the German and, above all, the Romanian military leaders responsible for the conduct of operations in Moldavia were already considering moving the front back to the Trajan line—that the army group HQ informed the OKH operations division about the start of the Soviet offensive and the situation in the Romanian area of operations. It was clear from the routine situation report, submitted early in the morning of 20 August, that the army group HQ considered that the military situation in the German–Romanian area of operations was not

<sup>66</sup> See 'Befehl Nr. 304922 des rum. AOK 4, 20 Aug. 1944, 10.50 Uhr', Rom. 4th Army war diary, August 1944, 5 (20 Aug. 1944), Arh.M.Ap.N., fond Armata 4, dosar 221, fo. 126.

<sup>67</sup> Rom. 4th Army war diary, August 1944, 5 ff., 8 (20 Aug. 1944), Arh.M.Ap.N., fond Armata 4, dosar 221, fos. 126 ff. and 129.

particularly dangerous, and therefore assumed that the available forces would suffice to withstand the Soviet attack.<sup>68</sup>

While the high command in Slănic at least took the military situation in Moldavia fairly seriously, it regarded the hostilities in the area of Army Detachment Dumitrescu as holding attacks, to which no particular operational importance was to be attached. The 3rd Ukrainian Front offensive in the Dniester section was deliberately aimed at the interface between the German Sixth Army and the Romanian 3rd Army. The Soviet forces broke fairly easily through the positions on the German XXIX Corps' northern wing, which were defended by the Romanian 4th Mountain Division<sup>69</sup> and the Romanian 21st Infantry Division. Both those units had suffered heavy losses during the preliminary artillery barrage and targeted bombardment, and were thus unable to put up any effective resistance against the Soviet 46th Army's massive attack with armoured support.<sup>70</sup> The events on the German XXX Army Corps' right wing, in particular, must have given the commander-in-chief of the German Sixth Army, General Maximilian Fretter-Pico, considerable cause for concern. 306th Infantry Division's defensive positions in that section of the front were under attack from six Soviet rifle divisions with massive armoured support. And, in the area west of Slobodseja and the neighbouring area covered by the German 15th Infantry Division, the German–Romanian positions south of Bender were under attack from the Soviet 57th Army with two rifle corps. The two divisions were unable to hold out against the superior strength of the Soviet forces, resulting primarily from the deployment of more than 50 tanks, and were obliged to withdraw south-west to the Bender–Căușani road in the course of the day. Sixth Army HQ deployed 13th Armoured Division in a relief attack on the enemy forces that had broken through the front on the left wing of its area. The armoured unit's counter-thrust was successful up to a point in partially halting the Soviet advance. In order to unify the command structure in the contested section of the front west of the Bender–Tiraspol bridgehead, the army group proposed to transfer the German XXIX Corps from the command of Romanian 3rd Army and place it under Sixth Army HQ. Dumitrescu finally acquiesced, under considerable pressure from the high command in Slănic, and agreed to issue an order to that effect.<sup>71</sup> Despite all the efforts of 13th Armoured Division and other specialized anti-tank units, it proved impossible to repel the units of the Soviet 37th Army and IV Mechanized Guards Corps and regain the former positions in the course of the day. The Soviet advance was nevertheless slowed down and, by the evening, a weak security line had been established from

<sup>68</sup> KTB H.Gr. Südukraine, Abt. Ia, No. 4, i. 5 ff., BA-MA RH 19 V/36, fos. 7 ff.; Kissel, *Die Katastrophe in Rumänien*, 68–76, 82.

<sup>69</sup> Contrary to Kissel, who described the unit on the left wing of the German XXIX Army Corps as the 4th Romanian Mountain Brigade, the unit in question was actually only a division. See 4th Mtn. Div. report for the period 20 to 24 August 1944, Arh.M.Ap.N., fond Armata 3, dosar 2903, fos. 192–4.

<sup>70</sup> 4th Mtn. Div. report for the period 20 to 24 August 1944, 1; 4th Mtn. Div. activities, 20–24 Aug. 1944; 21st Inf. Div. in Bessarabia, report for the period 19 to 24 August 1944, 1 ff., Arh.M.Ap.N., fond Armata 3, dosar 2903, fos. 185 ff., 189, 192.

<sup>71</sup> KTB H.Gr. Südukraine, Abt. Ia, No. 4, i. 6, BA-MA RH 19 V/36, fo. 8.

Rascati on the Dniester, along the road running west from Căușani, to Olănești, some 50 km south of Tiraspol on the Dniester, and turning off there east of the Căușani–Bender road to Hagimus.<sup>72</sup> The commander-in-chief of the German Sixth Army therefore hoped to be able to halt the Soviet attack for the time being with the means at his disposal. Although the situation in the central section of the Dniester was developing less favourably than Sixth Army HQ had been led to expect, Fretter-Pico did not think Sixth Army was heading for a military disaster.

In Army Detachment Wöhler's area, the Mieth Combat Group was obliged to accept the fact that, by the early afternoon, the first Soviet units were already entering Iași from the north-west. Parts of the Soviet XXI Guards Rifle Corps had reached the Bahlui river crossings, thereby trapping the German military commander in the north of the city.<sup>73</sup> A drama had been unfolding to the north-west of the Moldavian metropolis since early in the morning. When the two enemy spearheads west and east of 76th Infantry Division's section of the defence line pushed southwards, the division was obliged to stay where it was, because the army group at first absolutely refused to allow any withdrawal. The Romanian 18th Mountain Division's attempt to establish a link with 76th Infantry Division,<sup>74</sup> in order to block the breakthrough area at least between Iași and Lețcani, failed even before it reached the south bank of the Bahlui.<sup>75</sup> Once Army Detachment Wöhler had formed a complete picture of the scale of the Soviet attack during the morning, and it was clear that it would now be virtually impossible to recapture the original positions, the army HQ in Bârlad allowed 76th Infantry Division to withdraw to the south bank of the Bahlui. The unit reached the Bahlui section of the front at 18.30, and went over to the defensive on both sides of Lețcani. While the Army Detachment Wöhler troops in the Soviet breakthrough area were obliged to withdraw steadily in the face of the superior enemy forces, the situation in Iași made it necessary for 10th Armoured Infantry Division to mount a counter-attack in order to liberate the military commander in the north of the city. The high command in Bârlad hoped that this would close the gap separating 76th Infantry Division.<sup>76</sup>

Whereas Friessner and the army group HQ considered the situation on the evening of 20 August to be serious—at least at Iași in the northern section of the front—but not extremely dangerous, Antonescu judged the situation in the areas covered by the Romanian 4th Army and Army Detachment Wöhler to be far more critical. That same day, he and his chief of staff made their way to the Romanian army headquarters in Bacău, and shortly after his arrival at about 19.00 he held a situation conference attended by the commander-in-chief of the Romanian 4th

<sup>72</sup> Ibid. 1, 3, 10 ff., BA-MA RH 19 V/36, 3, 5, 12 ff.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid. 7 ff., BA-MA RH 19 V/36, fos. 9 ff.

<sup>74</sup> The Romanian 18th Mtn.Div. had already received the Romanian 4th Army HQ's deployment order (No. 304901) at 08.00; Rom. 4th Army war diary, August 1944, 2, Arh.M.Ap.N., fond Armata 4, dosar 221, fo. 123.

<sup>75</sup> Situation report No. 305007, 21 Aug. 1944, 10.00, Rom. 4th Army war diary, August 1944, 11 (21 Aug. 1944), Arh.M.Ap.N., fond Armata 4, dosar 221, fo. 149.

<sup>76</sup> Schmidt, *Geschichte der 10. Division*, 232–4; Löser, *Bittere Pflicht*, 372–82.

Army, General Avramescu, and also by Wöhler.<sup>77</sup> The military leadership in Slănic apparently paid no attention to the presence, in the German–Romanian theatre of operations, of the Romanian prime minister and commander-in-chief of the armed forces. But it can nevertheless be assumed that the army group HQ was aware of the Conducător's visit to 4th Romanian Army headquarters, especially as the commander-in-chief of Army Detachment Wöhler, who was at the meeting, had a long telephone conversation with Friessner at about 19.20.<sup>78</sup> In the course of this conversation, General Wöhler said that 'the impression the Romanian troops made was catastrophic'. In his view, it was impossible to retake Iași or to win back the former defensive line. He therefore proposed that the front in the breakthrough area—especially in the Iași area—be moved back to the south bank of the Bahlui, and that the German 79th and Romanian 11th Infantry Divisions be deployed to stabilize the flank east of the city, so as not to lose the connection with the German Sixth Army east of the Prut. The army group commander accepted Wöhler's proposals but insisted that 'this line must then be held, come what may'. The commander-in-chief of the German Eighth Army then explained that he intended to replace 10th Armoured Infantry Division with 258th Infantry Division, which was already in the process of moving to the west bank of the Prut. The mobile unit was to be moved further west in a tactical measure designed to halt the Soviet spearheads before they reached the Trajan line. The efforts of the German–Romanian forces to hold out against the attacks by the superior forces of 2nd and 3rd Ukrainian Fronts were seriously hampered, above all, by the Soviet superiority in the air.<sup>79</sup>

In contrast to the operational assessments and measures which Wöhler had put to his Army Group commander in the above-mentioned telephone conversation, his position in the talks with Antonescu, which lasted more than four hours, was that Soviet pressure must be fiercely resisted and counter-attacks launched against the enemy forces on all sides. Although the Conducător and Șteflea both shared the German commander's view, the other Romanian commanders thought it would be better for the troops to withdraw from northern Moldavia.<sup>80</sup>

Contrary to all expectations at the army group HQ, the situation in the section of the front between Târgu Frumos and Iași did not become less tense, even though all the available reserves had been deployed. By late evening there were signs that

<sup>77</sup> In addition to the above-mentioned, the meeting was also attended, as far as can be ascertained, by the following: the chief of staff of the Romanian 4th Army HQ, Colonel Dragomir; the air minister, General Ionescu; the 4th Army HQ Ic, Colonel Tomescu; and the quartermaster-general of the Romanian 4th Army HQ, Colonel Munteanu. Rom. 4th Army war diary, August 1944, 8 (21 Aug. 1944), Arh.M.Ap.N., fond Armata 4, dosar 221, fo. 129.

<sup>78</sup> It is claimed in Hillgruber, *Hitler*, 213, that the marshal was in the Moldavian theatre of operations on 20/1 August 1944. This assertion of Hillgruber's is based on a statement made by Friessner in 1953 (p. 345, n. 30). However, there is nothing either in the Army Group South Ukraine war diary or in Friessner, *Verratene Schlachten* about the Romanian head of state visiting the front in Moldavia on that day.

<sup>79</sup> Rom. 4th Army war diary, August 1944, 8 (20 Aug. 1944), Arh.M.Ap.N., fond Armata 4, dosar 221, fo. 129.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

the Romanian armoured attack was about to collapse. The Romanian division had been attacked in the rear by Soviet forces as it advanced in the Bahlui valley and cut to pieces. The Mieth Group was equally unsuccessful in its attempt to close the gap north-west of Iași and connect with 76th Infantry Division. The army group HQ categorically refused to allow the unit to withdraw to the area between Bahlui and the Trajan line, as it was feared in Slănic that this would give 2nd Ukrainian Front the opportunity to advance to the Trajan line with virtually no resistance. The situation only appeared to ease up a little in Iași, when it became possible to free the local commander's forces in the northern part of the city.<sup>81</sup>

The army group's plan for the following day was to hold the Bahlui section of the front and strengthen the German VI Army Corps' left wing so as to preserve the connection with Sixth Army HQ east of the Prut. The first day of the major Soviet offensive had clearly shown that the Romanian units were unable to cope with strong enemy pressure, and the front in northern Moldavia and at Tiraspol on the Dniester was looking shaky. Friessner and his staff nevertheless still believed at this point that the army group was capable of meeting the Soviet offensive with the means available and, if necessary, withdrawing to the west bank of the Prut while fighting delaying engagements. Only if the worst came to the worst were the authorities in Slănic prepared to give up north-eastern Romania altogether and move to the Danube–Carpathian Fringe position. On the basis of the army group commander's optimistic assessment of the situation, the OKH too saw no need to intervene on the southern wing of the eastern front, especially as, despite the critical situation, the high command in Slănic did not keep the Army General Staff fully informed. Although the operational situation changed radically on 20 August, and all the available forces were needed to stabilize the front in Moldavia and on the Dniester, the army group did not think this was a reason to halt the departure of 97th Light Infantry Division, which had started two days before.

Regardless of the massive and extremely successful attacks launched by both Soviet army groups on 20 August, all the high command in Slănic did that day was hold the positions, employing all the available reserves. In this critical situation, Army Group South Ukraine calmly continued to perform its task, allowing the defence line to be moved back only when the situation was such that there was no longer any alternative. 'But the situation could not be mastered by means of these purely tactical measures.'<sup>82</sup>

During the night, Grolman, together with Reinhardt and Col. Fritz Estor from Army Detachment Wöhler, the Ia in Eighth Army HQ, examined the operational situation in the breakthrough area in Moldavia. The army group chief of staff declared his intention of continuing the attack on the Soviet offensive forces in the Bahlui section of the front on 21 August. In this, Grolman was at odds with the army detachment, which doubted whether the Bahlui section of the front could

<sup>81</sup> KTB H.Gr. Südkraine, Abt. Ia, No. 4, i. 9 ff., BA-MA RH 19 V/36, fos. 10 ff.; *Die geheimen Tagesberichte*, x. 458; Study P-114c, pt. 7, i. 91–4, BA-MA ZA 1/2077, fos. 143–6; Kissel, *Die Katastrophe in Rumänien*, 68–83.

<sup>82</sup> Study P-114c, i. 93, BA-MA ZA 1/2077, fo. 145.

continue to be held. Grolman still believed, at this point, that the combined forces of the Romanian armoured division and the Kessel blocking unit would suffice to clear up and stabilize the situation in the breakthrough area. Apart from these operational intentions on the part of the army group, the two chiefs of staff also discussed the problem of the course of the front in the Târgu Frumos area, where there were two options. Either the army group HQ could maintain the existing defensive line, or it could shorten the front and establish the connection with the Trajan line by means of a salient west or east of the city. If it was decided to shorten the front, urgently needed forces could be freed up, either to strengthen the counter-attacks north of the prepared rear position or to take over the task of securing the Prut river crossings. Although it was already clear, in the early hours of the morning, that the army group HQ's intention to hold the Bahlui section of the front was no longer feasible, at this point no decision had yet been taken in Slănic as to what operational measures were to be adopted in the Târgu Frumos area. The situation in Iași too had deteriorated considerably by the morning of 21 August, because the counter-attack by the German 10th Armoured Infantry Division in the west of the city had been brought to a standstill by strong Soviet armoured forces. At the same time, the army group received news of Armoured Division 'Greater Romania', which had been almost completely wiped out and had lost the bulk of its armoured vehicles.<sup>83</sup>

When Antonescu arrived in Slănic for a two-hour discussion with Friessner on the morning of 21 August, there were already signs that the Soviet offensive, like the offensive a few weeks earlier in the central and northern sections of the eastern front, could turn into a military disaster for the Axis powers. During this exchange of views, the army group commander-in-chief nevertheless presented a highly positive picture of conditions in the German–Romanian theatre of operations, which in his opinion gave little reason to dramatize the situation. He explained that he considered the situation on Army Detachment Wöhler's left wing, adjoining the Carpathians, to be quiet and normal. In the combat area of the Kirchner Group (Gen. Friedrich Kirchner), he intended to move the salient north of Târgu Frumos back to an intermediate position during the evening, in order to 'gain time for a sufficiently well-organized occupation of the Trajan line'.<sup>84</sup> By taking this measure, the commander-in-chief hoped to save forces at Târgu Frumos, which would then be deployed in the extremely vulnerable section of the interception line at Voinești. Friessner also intended to withdraw more Wehrmacht units from the Dniester front and use them to strengthen the Trajan line. Despite the failure of the previous day, the commander-in-chief believed that the defensive front on the Iași ridge in the Dealu Mare region, over 400 metres high, could be strengthened by regrouping, so as at least to delay the Soviet advance. He told the marshal that, in his view, the planned actions would succeed only if all troops withstood the enemy attacks. Friessner therefore called on the Conducător to insist that the Romanian units conduct the defensive battle resolutely. This was the only way to prevent the

<sup>83</sup> KTB H.Gr. Südukraine, Abt. Ia, No. 4, i. 18 ff., BA-MA RH 19 V/36, fos. 20 ff.

<sup>84</sup> Kissel, *Die Katastrophe in Rumänien*, 240.

German–Romanian troops east of the Prut from being cut off. In summarizing the course of the Soviet offensive so far, he concluded ‘that the Russians had not planned to conduct an operation on a grand scale. Otherwise, they would have brought up their reserve divisions at once. They had clearly been concerned with an ostentatious success at Iaşi. That being so, it was to be assumed that they would first need to regroup before advancing any further.’<sup>85</sup>

During his discussion with Antonescu, the army group commander-in-chief also spoke about developments in the situation in Bessarabia. He drew particular attention to Dumitrescu’s helpful response to the enemy attack on the German XXIX and XXX Army Corps south-west of Tiraspol. By agreeing to transfer XXIX Army Corps immediately from the command of Romanian 3rd Army to that of Sixth Army HQ, and to release 13th Armoured Division for the counter-attack, he had helped to ensure that Sixth Army HQ was better able to respond to 3rd Ukrainian Front’s offensive. Friessner was consequently convinced ‘that all possible reserves would be brought in to guard against the breakthrough which the Russians had been aiming at yesterday. He had pointed out to Col.-Gen. Dumitrescu that the greatest danger was that the enemy would continue to advance southwards.’<sup>86</sup> In order to prevent this, the army group ordered the Romanian 3rd Army to secure the southern flank of the breakthrough area and deploy strong defensive forces on the line. In addition to these operational measures, Friessner had instructed the army detachment HQ in Bolgrad to close the breakthrough point in the Căuşani–Feştelei–Cioburciu area, so that a new defence line could be established to the east of the Căuşani–Olăneşti road. Convinced that the main effort of the Soviet attack lay in the Moldavian section of the front, Friessner stressed the importance of establishing ‘stable conditions in the area of Army Detachment Dumitrescu, so that Army Detachment Wöhler could be strengthened’.<sup>87</sup> Finally, he returned to the subject of withdrawing the German–Romanian troops from the Dniester to the Prut if the defensive positions could no longer be held in view of Soviet superiority. In discussing this item, however, the army group commander-in-chief gave the impression that the relevant plans had already been made.<sup>88</sup> In his talk with the Conducător, Friessner also mentioned that the army group would have to withdraw to the Danube–Carpathian Fringe position if Soviet pressure became too strong. On the basis of his positive assessment of the situation, he stressed that any such action should certainly not be taken in haste. Above all, strong leadership would be needed in order to ensure that the withdrawal took place according to plan and without friction.

After Friessner had made these points, Antonescu stressed Romania’s demand that, for political reasons, Bessarabia, and in particular Moldavia and Iaşi, must not be lost. For, if the German–Romanian front were to collapse, not only the kingdom

<sup>85</sup> Ibid. 241.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid. 242.

<sup>88</sup> All that existed was the army group’s preliminary reflections on this eventuality. On 19 August 1944 the plans for withdrawal from the positions in Moldavia and Bessarabia—the ‘Bär study’—existed only in the form of a sketch of operations. Apart from a map drawn by the army group, there were no other documents, drafts, etc. See KTB H.Gr. Südukraine, Abt. Ia, No. 3, xi. 95, BA-MA RH 19 V/30, fo. 97; Kissel, *Die Katastrophe in Rumänien*, 45; Friessner, *Verratene Schlachten*, 65.

but the whole of the Balkan peninsula would be open to military occupation by the Soviet forces. To ensure effective cooperation between the Romanian and German command authorities, and the least possible conflict in the conduct of operations, the marshal decreed that Șteflea was to remain in the theatre of operations, principally at Romanian 4th Army HQ, in order to coordinate these tasks. The Conducător was critical of the army group's commander-in-chief Friessner's contention that 'a troop previously beaten in the Dniester position would be able to hold the next line, which was in open country with no natural obstacles'.<sup>89</sup> He accordingly argued for rapid withdrawal of the front directly to the well-consolidated Danube–Carpathian Fringe position.<sup>90</sup>

The picture painted by Friessner in his discussion with Antonescu in no way reflected the real situation in the Romanian theatre of operations, which was more than critical. Friessner's statements tied in seamlessly with the analysis of the Red Army's operational intentions made by the army group and by the OKH, in both cases before the start of the Iași–Chișinău operation. As a result, he did not even mention in his analysis the possibility that the enemy might be planning a pincer movement to encircle the German Sixth Army in the balcony position at Chișinău. Friessner's observations on the military situation in Moldavia and Bessarabia show that the high command in Slănic seriously underestimated the danger looming in the southern section of the eastern front. This impression is confirmed by the fact that the army group hardly contacted the OKH at all during the first two days of the operation. The colonel-general appeared to be convinced that he could resolve the critical situation with his few reserves, by dint of regrouping. Furthermore, he based his planning for any withdrawal movements that might prove necessary on amounts of time that were no longer available. By the morning of 21 August, there was no longer any connection between the commander-in-chief's wishful thinking and the actual facts. Romanian 4th Army HQ had a much more realistic grasp of the military situation in northern Moldavia than its German Axis partner. On the previous evening, it had already stated its view that Moldavia could no longer be defended, and that the front should therefore be moved back.<sup>91</sup>

But the military situation in Bessarabia and Moldavia, and Army Group South Ukraine's operational plans, were not the only subjects discussed in Slănic. The discussion of the military situation was followed by confidential talks on political matters. Friessner drew attention to the politically unstable conditions in Romania, which were causing some concern on the German side, especially as the Romanian General Staff had recalled a number of high-ranking commanders from their posts on the German–Romanian front in the past few weeks, without the army group's knowledge or consent.<sup>92</sup> This, Friessner believed, was the reason for 'the failure of the Romanian units'.<sup>93</sup> The Conducător responded with a lengthy summary of

<sup>89</sup> Kissel, *Die Katastrophe in Rumänien*, 243.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid. 240–3; Study P-114c, pt. 7, ch. 2 annexes, annex 75, BA-MA ZA 1/2078, 147–51.

<sup>91</sup> Rom. 4th Army war diary, August 1944, 8 (21 Aug. 1944), 6–8 (22 Aug. 1944), Arh.M.Ap.N., fond Armata 4, dosar 221, fos. 129, 144–7.

<sup>92</sup> Duțu, Dobre, and Loghin, *Armata Română*, 35, 42 ff., 342 ff.; Friessner, *Verratene Schlachten*, 51.

<sup>93</sup> Friessner, *Verratene Schlachten*, 75.

German–Romanian political relations. He repeated that the kingdom had always been a reliable ally, even though the German Reich had played a decisive part in the territorial dismemberment of Romania. In this respect, he blamed the German foreign minister, in particular, for tearing Transylvania, ‘the cradle of the Romanian people’, from the country and handing it over to Hungary, ‘which had absolutely no legal claim to it’.<sup>94</sup> The Conducător stressed that Romania had stood firmly by its ally throughout the war, despite Germany’s mistaken policy.<sup>95</sup> Antonescu’s statement to Friessner corresponded in every respect to the political position taken by the government in Bucharest since the middle of 1943.<sup>96</sup>

Even as the discussion was taking place in Slănic, the Soviet units resumed their offensive, mainly in the area of the Iași ridge. General Malinovsky had assembled the bulk of his armoured forces there, with massive support on the flanks, in order to force a breakthrough through the Trajan line towards the Danube plain. The plan of the high command in Slănic to smash the Soviet 53rd Army and 6th Armoured Army in the south of the Bahlui section proved an illusion. In the early hours of 21 August, the army group HQ was obliged to recognize that five Romanian divisions, namely 3rd, 5th, and 7th Infantry Divisions, 5th Cavalry Division, and 18th Mountain Division, had suffered such heavy human and material losses that they could take no further part in the action, and that the two counter-attacks by the armoured reserves had failed. On 21 August it also proved impossible to carry out the army group’s plan to reinforce the defensive front south-west of Iași with German units transferred from the quiet section of Sixth Army HQ’s front at Răut and others released by shortening the defensive line at Târgu Frumos. In those circumstances, it was hardly possible to close the gap in the front south of the Bahlui valley at Iași with the few forces still fighting in the area. Friessner’s hopes of bringing the Soviet offensive to a standstill at the Trajan line at the latest were dashed at midday when what was left of the Romanian VI Army Corps was crushed at Lungani by some 30 Soviet tanks with infantry on board. The first enemy forces, with the Soviet XXXV Guards Rifle Corps, had now taken hold on the Trajan line, depriving it of much of its value for the defenders.

The army group now paid the price for its conduct of operations the previous day, when it had put off moving 76th Infantry Division back for so long that the unit was finally forced to withdraw under enemy pressure in order to avoid being encircled and destroyed. As a result of that decision, the division’s regiments had been reduced to company strength, and it had lost practically all its combat strength.<sup>97</sup> Since the Romanian VI Army Corps could no longer put up any effective resistance against the massive Soviet attack, it had to let the enemy take

<sup>94</sup> Ibid. 77.      <sup>95</sup> Ibid. 74–81.

<sup>96</sup> Although Antonescu’s policy statements in Slănic on 21 August 1944 were made to Friessner only because, as a result of the political coup, the marshal had had no opportunity to prepare notes for the discussion, his statements can be accepted as authentic since they conform to a number of Romanian government memoranda on foreign policy. See Arh.M.A.E., fond Germania, dosar 92/1943, fos. 249–55; dosar 93/1943, fos. 181–200; dosar 94/1944, fos. 426–30; dosar 103/1943–4, fos. 158–63.

<sup>97</sup> Löser, *Bittere Pflicht*, 383.

advantage of this weakness to widen the gap in the defensive system on the Iași ridge and pour as many troops as possible through the opening to speed up the attack to the south. This precarious situation became even more acute a few hours later, when a second Soviet 6th Armoured Army attacking wedge also succeeded in breaching the Trajan line at Voinești. Here too, the enemy forces proceeded to widen the breach, and the German–Romanian defenders were unable to prevent them from doing so. Army Detachment Wöhler had already deployed all its reserves the previous day, and the expected reinforcements had not yet arrived, so it had no way of halting the advance. Only in the course of the day had the remnants of 76th Infantry Division, which were among the few German fighting forces in the breakthrough area, fought their way back to Ciurbești, south-west of Iași, where they were placed under the command of 10th Armoured Infantry Division.<sup>98</sup> Here, the two units attempted to establish a defensive line on the Iași–Vaslui road, where they faced some 100 to 150 tanks of the Soviet 52nd Army. By midday on 21 August it was clear that Malinovsky had shifted the point of concentration of his offensive to the eastern flank of the breakthrough area. This raised the danger that the enemy would not only break through to the south, but might also occupy the west bank of the Prut between Ungheni and Huși. The remnants of the Romanian VI and IV Army Corps fighting to the east of Iași were forced to withdraw towards the Prut several times in the course of the day.<sup>99</sup>

While there was heavy fighting throughout the day in the eastern part of the breakthrough area, things remained relatively quiet on the front at Târgu Frumos. After the counter-attack by Armoured Division ‘Greater Romania’ failed in the face of enemy resistance, there were no more military operations to speak of until the afternoon of 21 August, when the Soviet CIV Rifle Corps tried to attack westwards along the Iași–Târgu Frumos road. The attack was beaten off by the reinforced Kessel combat group, and the Soviet 7th Guards Army’s efforts to penetrate the area defended by the Romanian V and I Army Corps were also unsuccessful on that day.<sup>100</sup>

Although the 2nd Ukrainian Front offensive was successful from the Red Army’s point of view, enabling the bridgehead in Moldavia to be extended very quickly, the population now began to flee from the fought-over areas *en masse*. The military operations caused an enormous amount of damage in Iași and, above all, in the intensively farmed Bahlui valley, where the harvest was almost completely ruined and the cattle were either killed in the fields during the fighting or requisitioned by the Soviet troops. In order to protect the population from the effects of the heavy fighting, the prefectures received orders at about 15.00 to evacuate the area north of the Piatra Neamț–Roman–Băcești–Vaslui–Huși line immediately.<sup>101</sup> Although this

<sup>98</sup> Ibid. 384.

<sup>99</sup> KTB H.Gr. Südukraine, Abt. Ia, No. 4, i. 13 ff., BA-MA RH 19 V/36, fos. 15 ff.; Kissel, *Die Katastrophe in Rumänien*, 86–9; Rehm, *Jassy*, 47–51.

<sup>100</sup> KTB H.Gr. Südukraine, Abt. Ia, No. 4, i. 14 ff., BA-MA RH 19 V/36, fo. 17 ff.; Hinze, *Hitz*, 307 ff.

<sup>101</sup> Rom. 4th Army war diary, August 1944, 9 (21 Aug. 1944), Arh.M.Ap.N., fond Armata 4, dosar 221, fo. 147. The evacuation was completed in accordance with orders from Section I of the Romanian Great General Staff, based on special directives from Section IV. The ‘General Mosiu Organization’

measure seriously changed the situation in Moldavia, neither the Great General Staff in Bucharest nor Antonescu or his chief of staff, Șteflea, felt moved to inform the army group leadership or the German general in the Romanian armed forces high command that this step was to be taken. While the political authorities in Bucharest were extremely realistic in their assessment of the situation on the basis of the Romanian 4th Army's situation reports, and accordingly decided to evacuate the civilian population from the rear theatre of operations, this decision came altogether too late. From the optimistic impression which its German Axis partner had given of the military situation in the southern section of the eastern front,<sup>102</sup> the Romanian government was not bound to conclude that the front in Moldavia would collapse so quickly and end in debacle.

At about the same time as the evacuation order was issued and after his talks in Slănic, Antonescu arrived at Romanian 4th Army HQ in Bacău, where he discussed the operational situation with General Wöhler, General Șteflea, General Avramescu, and Colonel Nicolae Dragomir. They concluded that 'the enemy forces were making significant progress, and were beginning to pose a serious threat to the troops stationed in northern Moldavia'.<sup>103</sup> In the discussion, the marshal took a different position from that of the commander of the army detachment, who was against moving the defensive front in Moldavia back until an armoured unit<sup>104</sup> was deployed in the Bârlad area. With the planned deployment of armoured forces, the commander-in-chief of the German Eighth Army believed that the operational situation south-west of Iași could be restabilized. Despite the German plan to bring an armoured unit in to strengthen the defence, both Avramescu and the chief of the Great General Staff took the view that it would be better for the troops to begin disengaging from the enemy and withdrawing southwards immediately.<sup>105</sup>

From all appearances, it seems that Eighth Army HQ did not inform the army group HQ in Slănic about this almost four-hour-long discussion in Bacău, in which it became clear that the German and Romanian commanders-in-chief had very different operational intentions. It would have been important for the army group HQ to know that the operational views and intentions of the commander-in-chief of the Romanian 4th Army and the chief of the Romanian Great General Staff were completely different from the objectives of the German army group and army detachment. Friessner in particular needed any information that would enable him to assess the

was responsible for coordinating and conducting the evacuation, which went under the name 'Operation 1111'. The Great General Staff's order was binding both on military agencies and on civilian authorities. See M.St.M., sect. I. Akte 4352, 2. I am indebted to Elena Matei. Pitești Military Archives, for this information.

<sup>102</sup> Attention is drawn here, in particular, to Marshal Antonescu's talks with Hitler on 5/6 August 1944, and in Army Group South HQ on the morning of 21 August 1944.

<sup>103</sup> Rom. 4th Army war diary, August 1944, 8 (21 Aug. 1944), Arh.M.Ap.N., fond Armata 4, dosar 221, fo. 146.

<sup>104</sup> This armoured unit was to consist of 905th Assault Gun Brigade, parts of 20th Armoured Division, Eighth Army HQ Army Weapons School (AOK 8 Aslt.Btl.), and 30 tanks from the Romanian 2nd Armoured Division that was being assembled in Tecuci. Kissel, *Die Katastrophe in Rumänien*, 97.

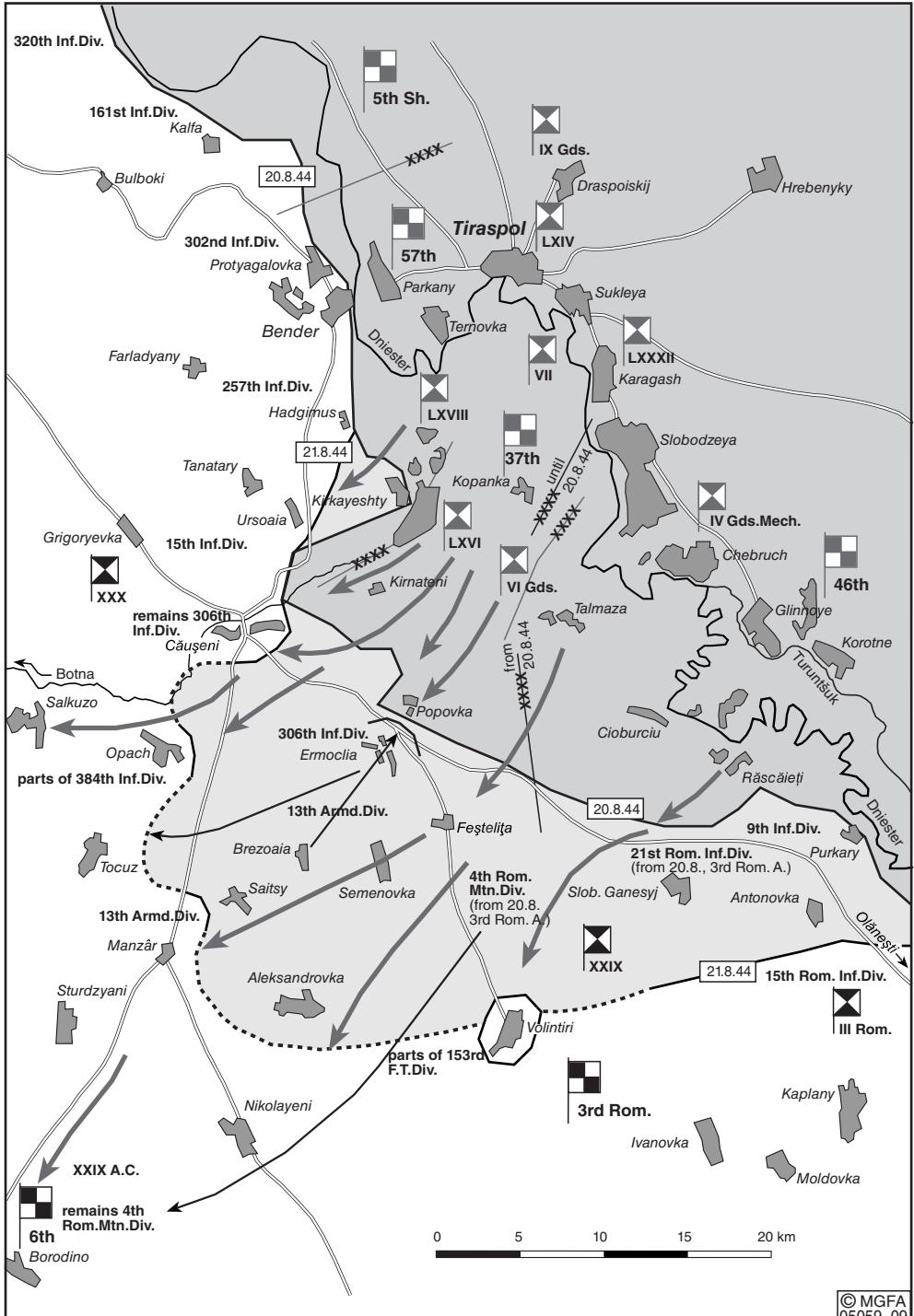
<sup>105</sup> Arh.M.Ap.N., fond Armata 4, dosar 221, fos. 146 ff.

fighting capability of the Romanian units. In forming their operational views, Avramescu and Șteflea had been reacting to the condition and motivation of the Romanian forces, which were affected by the general war-weariness and showed little readiness to resist the Soviet attacks. Since the Romanian ally had also lost confidence in the fighting strength of the German forces, some Romanian commanders now had operational aims which, in their view, were more appropriate to the military situation in the southern section of the eastern front, and were therefore necessary.

Unlike the situation in the area south-west of Iași, where the fighting continued as fiercely as ever on the second day of the attack, things were extremely quiet in the Tiraspol bridgehead, at least on the morning of 21 August. This appeared to confirm the army group's prediction that the Soviet forces would launch only a weak local attack on the Dniester front, as a diversion. In the course of the night, 3rd Ukrainian Front again reduced its military activities, which it had resumed with greater intensity only at around midday on 21 August. The Soviet 46th Army, with strong air support and armoured forces, now launched a massive attack on the weak German security line west of the Căușani–Olănești road. 13th Armoured Division, with reinforcements from what was left of 306th Infantry Division, was unable to stop the enemy advance. It had lost too much of its combat strength in the defensive battles on the previous day, with the result that it now had only 20 operational tanks, not enough to hold the security line for long.<sup>106</sup> Although the German unit destroyed almost 100 Soviet tanks, it was unable to prevent a breakthrough at Feștelîța, which opened up a considerable gap between the German XXX Army Corps' right wing and XXIX Army Corps. This unfavourable situation resulted not only from the insufficient strength of the German defence forces at Feștelîța, but also from the scant readiness of the neighbouring Romanian units to put up any resistance. Faced with superior Soviet forces, Army Detachment Dumitrescu was obliged to deploy its most important reserve, 13th Armoured Division, on the very first day of the attack. In the disturbing situation on the afternoon of 21 August, the only reserve at the German Sixth Army's disposal was the weak 153rd Field Training Division. In order to prevent a debacle to the west of Feștelîța, Sixth Army HQ attempted to halt the Soviet breakthrough with parts of this training unit. Despite all its efforts, the unit was not strong enough to close the gap in the front and destroy the enemy forces. Army Group South Ukraine had deployed all its reserves in the Dniester section of the front, so it was now impossible to protect southern Bessarabia against the Soviet offensive. As a result, units of the Soviet 46th Army were able to advance almost unimpeded south-westwards towards Tarutino. By the evening, the Soviet spearheads were already in the Nicolaeni–Volontiri–Menzăr area, only 20 kilometres from the German Sixth Army HQ in Tarutino. While fierce defensive battles were taking place south-west of the Tiraspol bridgehead, the situation on Sixth Army's left wing remained extremely quiet.<sup>107</sup>

<sup>106</sup> Kissel, *Die Katastrophe in Rumänien*, 91.

<sup>107</sup> KTB H.Gr. Südukraine, Abt. Ia, No. 4, i. 13 and 17 ff., BA-MA RH 19 V/36, fos. 15, 19 ff.; Romanian 21st Inf.Div., activity report 19–24 Aug. 1944, Arh.M.Ap.N., fond Armata 3, dosar 2903, fos. 186 ff.; *Die geheimen Tagesberichte*, x. 461; Kissel, *Die Katastrophe in Rumänien*, 90–3; Hake, *Das waren wir!*, 192–4; Mazulenko, *Die Zerschlagung der Heeresgruppe Südukraine*, 60–2.



Map V.vi.2. The Soviet breakout from the Tiraspol bridgehead (20 to 21 August 1944)

Sources: OKH situation maps, 20 and 21 Aug. 1944, BA-MA, Kart RH2, Ost/1126 and 1127; Kissel, *Die Katastrophe in Rumänenien*.

On only the second day of the Soviet offensive, the army group HQ was obliged to conclude that, despite having deployed its few reserves, it no longer had any operational room for manoeuvre. The German–Romanian units now had hardly any chance of holding the front in Moldavia and on the Dniester. It was only in this critical situation that the high command in Slănic began to think about a staged withdrawal of the defence front. The army group HQ's idea was that the units in Moldavia should withdraw to the Trajan line, and that Army Detachment Dumitrescu should establish a new defensive line on the west bank of the Prut. The commander-in-chief and his chief of staff were nevertheless aware that, in this situation, the proposed measures could only provide an interim solution. Their long-term intention was therefore to move the southern section of the eastern front back to the Danube–Carpathian Fringe position.<sup>108</sup> Although the Soviet offensive had proved from the start to be stronger than the army group HQ had expected, the high command in Slănic began intensive contacts with the OKH only at the point when, given the disastrous state of affairs in the German–Romanian theatre of operations, withdrawal to the Prut and to the Trajan line was no longer avoidable.

Early in the evening, Grolman informed the head of the OKH operations division, Lt.-Gen. Wenck, of the tense situation in the Iași–Târgu Frumos area and in the Tiraspol bridgehead on the Dniester. In response to the army group chief of staff's request for permission to move the defensive positions back, Wenck proposed that the army group withdraw directly to the Danube–Carpathian Fringe position in a single operation. Grolman agreed with this proposal in principle, but insisted on the interim solution for reasons to do with clearance and evacuation. At the end of the discussion, Wenck took the view that Hitler would most probably grant the army group's request.<sup>109</sup> Friessner discussed the same problem a few hours later with Col.-Gen. Guderian. In this discussion, the commander-in-chief argued that the failure of the Romanian troops was primarily responsible for the critical situation in the army group's theatre of operations. Friessner, like his chief of staff, explained that it was necessary to move Army Detachment Dumitrescu back to the Prut. He also asked for immediate evacuation of the salient occupied by Sixth Army at the confluence of the Răut and the Dniester north-east of Chișinău. He was able to assure Guderian, in the course of the telephone conversation, that Antonescu had already approved withdrawal to the Prut. At the same time, Friessner asked the OKH for permission to move Army Detachment Wöhler to the Trajan line. Guderian, like Wenck, was convinced that Hitler would grant the operational requests submitted by the high command in Slănic, especially as the Conducător had given his consent. Hitler approved the army group's requests, without undue objections, the very same night. The OKH's approval of the withdrawal was accompanied with the demand that both the Trajan line and the defensive line on the Prut be held definitively. However, as a result of inadequate information, the OKH was unaware of the situation in Moldavia, where spearheads of the Soviet 6th Armoured Army and 52nd Army had already succeeded in

<sup>108</sup> Kissel, *Die Katastrophe in Rumänien*, 93.

<sup>109</sup> KTB H.Gr. Südkraine, Abt. Ia, No. 4, i. 22, BA-MA RH 19 V/36, fo. 24.

breaking through the defensive system in the Dealu Mare at Voineşti and were advancing southwards into the Bârlad valley.<sup>110</sup>

In the early morning, after Hitler had agreed to the withdrawal, Army Detachment Dumitrescu received detailed orders from Slănic for the withdrawal to the Prut. The instructions specified that the army detachment, 'when moving its units to this position, must at all costs avoid weakening the units to the east of the position and ensure that their combat strength is maintained. It must prevent rapid enemy pursuit and take all necessary measures to ensure that withdrawal proceeds according to plan. Withdrawal is scheduled to begin this evening.'<sup>111</sup> In addition to withdrawal from Bessarabia, the army group's order also specified that Army Detachment Wöhler was to transfer its defence to the Trajan line as soon as the operation east of the Prut had been completed. In this connection, the army group HQ attached particular importance to the deployment of mobile reserves on the eastern wing of the Romanian 4th Army, in order to prevent enemy forces from breaking through to Roman.<sup>112</sup>

The army group's idea was that 376th Infantry Division should fold back at Ungheni so as to maintain the connection between Army Detachment Wöhler and Sixth Army HQ. The VII, XXXIX, and LII Army Corps units were to prepare for the withdrawal on 21 August so as to be able to move back quickly to the prepared positions on both sides of Chişinău in the course of the night. The army group's order came as something of a surprise, especially to the units in the Răut–Dniester salient, as they were hardly affected at all by the enemy offensive and, with no communication links, they knew very little about the critical developments in the German–Romanian theatre of operations. Despite all the proposed measures, the army group's operational plans could succeed only if Army Detachment Wöhler managed to halt the 2nd Ukrainian Front offensive at the Trajan line. And Army Detachment Dumitrescu would also have to bring the enemy breakthrough at Feşteşti–Volintiri to a standstill before it reached the Cogîlnic valley.

As the Iaşi–Chişinău operation had gone extremely well for the Red Army in the first two days, Marshal Semyon Konstantinovich Timoshenko decided at Soviet high command that the 2nd and 3rd Ukrainian Front spearheads should join up in the Huşi area, on 22 August if possible, in a pincer movement designed to encircle and destroy the enemy units fighting in the Răut–Dniester salient.<sup>113</sup> This Soviet operational plan posed an enormous threat to the defence front in Bessarabia and Moldavia. For, if the Soviet plan were to succeed, the German–Romanian front might well collapse, leaving the eastern part of the Balkan peninsula exposed, with almost no protection against the advancing Red Army.

Until the evening of 21 August, the army group HQ had been confident that the combat strength of the units under its command, together with the few reserves,

<sup>110</sup> Ibid. 22 ff., BA-MA RH 19 V/36, fos. 24 ff.; Study P-114c, pt. 7, i. 94 ff., BA-MA ZA 1/2077, fos. 146 ff.; Friessner, *Verratene Schlachten*, 81–3; Kissel, *Die Katastrophe in Rumänien*, 93 ff.

<sup>111</sup> KTB H.Gr. Südukraine, Abt. Ia, No. 4, i. 28 ff., BA-MA RH 19 V/36, fos. 30 ff.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid. 29, BA-MA RH 19 V/36, fo. 31; Kissel, *Die Katastrophe in Rumänien*, 95.

<sup>113</sup> Mazulenko, *Die Zerschlagung der Heeresgruppe Südukraine*, 63; *Geschichte des zweiten Weltkrieges 1939–1945*, ix. 131 ff.

would suffice to withstand the major Soviet offensive, and it had consequently made no preparations in case it proved to be mistaken. The high command in Slănic hoped to resolve the crisis at Iași by purely tactical moves, such as withdrawing 282nd Infantry Division from the quiet section of the front on the lower Răut to support the counter-attack by 10th Armoured Infantry Division. But while the German–Romanian defence in the area south-west of Iași, and especially west of the Tiraspol bridgehead, very soon collapsed under the heavy and rapid Soviet attacks, the units of three German army corps were left almost idle on the front to the north of Chișinău. By the time Friessner realized the danger, especially the threat to the German Sixth Army, it was—as subsequent events showed—already too late to take effective counter-measures to prevent a debacle in the southern section of the eastern front. In the first two days of the offensive, both Malinovsky's troops in Moldavia and Tolbukhin's units on the Dniester had fought their way into excellent positions for executing the planned operation. By this time, Army Group South Ukraine had almost no means of warding off the danger to the German Sixth Army. For months, the high command in Slănic had pushed ahead on the consolidation of its section of the front by building a deeply staggered defensive system, in the conviction that these military measures would suffice. But while Army Group South Ukraine was busy consolidating its position in respect of manpower and materials, it missed the opportunity to plan and prepare for the eventuality that the main battle line might have to be withdrawn to the Prut, or even to the Danube–Carpathian Fringe position.<sup>114</sup> And the price for this serious omission was paid on only the third day of the enemy operation.

Tolbukhin's 3rd Ukrainian Front used the almost 40-kilometre-wide gap in the front between the German Sixth Army and the Romanian 3rd Army on the Dniester south of Bender to press forward with three armies into the heart of the Bessarabian area. The Russian 46th Army west of Feștelita turned south-west towards Tarutino–Bolgrad, where the German Sixth Army and Army Detachment Dumitrescu HQs were located, while 57th and 37th Armies endeavoured to reach and block the Prut river crossings at Mingir and Leușeni. The aim was to stop the German–Romanian troops withdrawing from the balcony position on the Răut and the Dniester to the west bank of the Prut and joining up with Army Detachment Wöhler. 2nd Ukrainian Front's advance during the first two days of the operation had concentrated primarily on capturing Iași and breaking through the Trajan line south of the city, but Malinovsky changed his modus operandi on 22 August, intensifying the offensive and widening the attack sector. He deployed 4th Guards Army at Ungheni on the east bank of the Prut, with instructions to take the bridges at Ungheni and especially at Costuleni, 15 kilometres south of Ungheni, on the Prut. 52nd Army, which had overcome the territorial obstacle of the Iași ridge, changed its direction of attack at Scânteia, 30 kilometres south of Iași, advancing south-east towards Solești, 20 kilometres north of Vaslui, to join up with XVIII

<sup>114</sup> Not until August did the high command in Slănic adopt plans to move the army group back to the Danube–Carpathian Fringe line, under the cover name 'Bär study', the line having by then been more or less completely established by the Romanian army. Kissel, *Die Katastrophe in Rumänien*, 45.

Armoured Corps, which had pressed forward through the Vaslui valley in the second wave. The purpose of this attacking wedge was to prevent the German–Romanian units at Huşi from moving south, and to establish a link with the 3rd Ukrainian Front spearheads. 27th Army, which had been fighting on the left wing in the first phase of the operation, continued to advance south towards the Roman–Bârlad road with the intention of cutting this important north–south connection. 7th Guards Army took no part in the action until 22 August, when it broke through the Romanian V Army Corps' defensive positions on both sides of Târgu Frumos—occupied at this point mainly by the remnants of the Kessel combat group—and advanced on the major traffic node of Roman.<sup>115</sup>

On 22 August, as Sixth Army under Fretter-Pico prepared to move its units north of Chişinău back while attempting to ward off and contain the enemy breakthrough on its right wing, the army group held firmly to its plan to conduct the defensive battle mainly from the Trajan line in the Iaşi ridge area, in order to prevent an enemy breakthrough in southern Moldavia and the loss of the Prut river crossings north-east of Huşi. Although the army group had suffered substantial material losses in the first two days' fighting, it still had 45 tanks and 78 assault guns at its disposal<sup>116</sup> for the heavy defensive battles between Târgu Frumos and the west bank of the Prut at Costuleni and Zbroiaia, 20 kilometres north-east of Leuşeni on the Prut. That gave it the possibility of engaging in mobile combat, but this glimmer of hope vanished unexpectedly soon, because the Soviet 27th Army spearheads, with about 30 tanks, managed to advance during the night to Negreşti, 30 kilometres south of Iaşi, in the Bârlad valley. This advance might still have been stopped by the armoured unit brought in from Tecuci, and the gap in the Trajan line defence system might also have been closed, if the vanguards of 7th Guards Army and 52nd Army had not also broken through the German–Romanian defensive positions on the Iaşi ridge at Topoliţa, west of Târgu Frumos, and between Voineşti and Schită-Duca, south of Iaşi. In these circumstances, Army Detachment Wöhler lacked the necessary strength to clear up the situation in the Trajan line area, so, by the morning of 22 August, the tactical plans of the high command in Slănic were no more than scrap paper. In view of these developments, Grolman ordered Army Detachment Wöhler to deploy all available forces to forestall an enemy advance south-eastwards to the Prut and prevent the loss of the river crossings. He also instructed his troops to hold as many sections of the Trajan line as possible, in order to preserve the chance of closing the gaps by means of counter-attacks.

At the very moment when the army group high command and Army Detachment Wöhler HQ were striving to control the precarious situation so as to prevent the few

<sup>115</sup> KTB H.Gr. Südukraine, Abt. Ia, No. 4, i. 25 ff., 30 ff., BA-MA RH 19 V/36, fos. 27 ff., 32 ff.; Rom. 4th Army war diary, August 1944, 14–18 (22 Aug. 1944), Arh.M.Ap.N., fond Armata 4, dosar 221, fos. 170–4; Mazulenko, *Die Zerschlagung der Heeresgruppe Südukraine*, 63–6; Krikunov, 'Razgrom gruppy armii "Yuznaya Ukraina"', 10 ff.

<sup>116</sup> This figure includes 30 tanks and 21 assault guns which were intended for the newly assembled Romanian 2nd Armoured Division, and which were to be taken from Army Detachment Wöhler and moved from Tecuci to Vaslui. KTB H.Gr. Südukraine, Abt. Ia, No. 4, i. 31, BA-MA RH 19 V/36, 33.

Prut river crossings from falling into Soviet hands, a decision was taken at Romanian 4th Army HQ that was fraught with consequences and catered solely to the needs of the Romanian units. On the morning of 22 August, when parts of 2nd Ukrainian Front had overcome the territorial obstacle of the Iași ridge and the vanguard was approaching the Bârlad valley, Antonescu decided, before leaving for Bucharest, to withdraw the Romanian 4th Army from northern Moldavia to the Adjud–Oancea–Cahul–Bolgrad line.<sup>117</sup> Half an hour later, Col. Dragomir had already drafted the necessary operational order and issued it to the units under his command.<sup>118</sup> The Conducător's decision was based exclusively on the demands and needs of the Romanian forces. Since the start of the major Soviet offensive there had been a serious increase in the latent war-weariness already affecting the Romanian troops as a result of the superior strength of the Soviet forces and the conspicuous weakness of their German ally. Their motivation, always poor, was now almost non-existent. In taking his decision, the marshal seemingly no longer had any regard for the joint conduct of operations. By going it alone, Antonescu clearly indicated his wish to release the kingdom from the tie with its German partner-in-arms. With this step, he drew the final line under a process that had begun with the military debacle at Stalingrad.<sup>119</sup> The decision, which radically changed the basis for planning and conducting operations, especially in Moldavia, was not communicated to Romania's Axis partner either by Avramescu and his chief of staff or by Antonescu, who spent the afternoon at Army Group South Ukraine HQ. On the contrary, as the German commander-in-chief reported, both sides agreed to establish 'a common defence front on the Galați–Focșani line, using the fortifications which the Romanians had already prepared there some time ago'. 'The marshal also assured me, in this connection, that all the Romanian reserves still available in Bucharest would be assigned to the army group immediately, to support the front.'<sup>120</sup>

Meanwhile, Army Detachment Wöhler was unable to prevent the Soviet 27th Army from pushing forward into the Vaslui area in the course of the day. The new armoured unit, the first parts of which arrived in Bârlad in the evening, was to be deployed against this attacking wedge. While the Soviet forces had advanced into central Moldavia in the middle of the breakthrough area, there were still some battleworthy sections of the German IV Army Corps in the area to the south and south-east of Iași endeavouring to keep the Prut river crossings in the north open for the units of the German VII Army Corps and to prevent the connection with the German Sixth Army's left wing from being severed. In this, 376th Infantry Division had a particularly important part to play: it had to protect the threatened army's west flank against Soviet flanking attacks during the withdrawal movement from the balcony position on the Răut and the Dniester that was planned to take place that evening. To strengthen the defence forces on the west bank of the Prut

<sup>117</sup> The Romanian 4th Army war diary gives 09.00 as the time when this decision was taken; Rom. 4th Army war diary, August 1944, 2 (22 Aug. 1944), Arh.M.Ap.N., fond Armata 4, dosar 221, fo. 158.

<sup>118</sup> Rom. 4th Army war diary, August 1944, 2–4 (22 Aug. 1944), Arh.M.Ap.N., fond Armata 4, dosar 221, fos. 158–60.

<sup>119</sup> For more details of the German–Romanian differences after Stalingrad, see Förster, *Stalingrad*.

<sup>120</sup> Friessner, *Verratene Schlachten*, 80.

south of Iași, which were to keep the river crossings open for the German Sixth Army, Army Detachment Wöhler moved armoured units of the Mieth Group into the area between Iași and Huși. In the Târgu Frumos area, on the western edge of the Soviet breakthrough area, the Kirchner Group carried out its task by recapturing the salient north of the city and establishing the link between the former main battle line and the Trajan line. In order to minimize the danger of the Soviet 7th Guards Army breaking through to Roman, 46th Infantry Division was assigned to the Kirchner Group as a mobile reserve force. With these measures, the army detachment HQ hoped to restabilize the situation in northern Moldavia and fulfil the task assigned to it by the army group.

General Wöhler and his staff must therefore have been all the more dismayed to learn late that night from the German liaison officer attached to the Romanian 4th Army that, in the course of the afternoon, 'the Romanian 4th Army had received a direct order from the marshal to withdraw the front immediately to a position behind the Moldova'.<sup>121</sup> The army group responded at once with a counter-order, permitting the Romanian 4th Army HQ to move the front back only to the other side of the Seret. Faced with this dilemma, the chief of staff, Col. Dragomir, applied to the Great General Staff in Bucharest for a decision as to which of the two orders the 4th Army was required to obey. Even before the response of the military leadership in Bucharest arrived, Avramescu resigned from his post as the army's commander-in-chief.<sup>122</sup> The former chief of staff, General Șteflea, took over command of the Romanian 4th Army as from 23 August.<sup>123</sup>

While Army Detachment Wöhler endeavoured to hold up 2nd Ukrainian Front's advance in order to prevent the entire southern section of the eastern front from collapsing, Army Detachment Dumitrescu began the withdrawal to the Prut. In this tense situation, the position on the Dniester front took an extremely unfavourable turn. On 22 August Tolbukhin's armies succeeded in cutting all connection between the German Sixth Army and the Romanian 3rd Army. Army Detachment Dumitrescu had lost contact with Sixth Army HQ in the morning, so Dumitrescu asked the army group to take over command of Sixth Army.<sup>124</sup>

The Romanian 3rd Army, with the remnants of the German XXIX Army Corps and the weak forces of the Romanian III Corps, now had to defend southern Bessarabia on its own. This objective could hardly be achieved, as the Soviet 46th Army had already extended its offensive to the south in the night of 21 to 22 August, attacking the Romanian defensive positions in the Dniester estuary. The Romanian units could not withstand the pressure, so parts of the Soviet XXXX

<sup>121</sup> KTB H.Gr. Südukraine, Abt. Ia, No. 4, i. 37, BA-MA RH 19 V/36, fo. 39.

<sup>122</sup> Avramescu resigned because he could not reconcile it with his conscience to withdraw the Romanian troops from the Iași–Chișinău area and abandon it to the Soviet forces without a fight; Buzatu, *România și Războiul*, 284 ff.

<sup>123</sup> Rom. 4th Army war diary, August 1944, 10 ff. (22 Aug. 1944), Arh.M.Ap.N., fond Armata 4, dosar 221, fos. 166 ff. The confused situation in the Romanian 4th Army high command on 22 August 1944 is also covered in Duțu, 'A Command Crisis'; Duțu, *Între Wehrmacht și Armata Roșie*, 167.

<sup>124</sup> KTB H.Gr. Südukraine, Abt. Ia, No. 4, i. 27 and 30, BA-MA RH 19 V/36, fos. 29 and 32.

Guards Corps were able to break through the defence front at Burgas in the mouth of the Dniester estuary and on both sides of Cetatea Albă.<sup>125</sup> Soon afterwards, the left wing of the Romanian III Corps was also obliged to abandon the west bank of the Dniester. As a result of the operational situation on the Dniester front south of Tiraspol, the German 9th Infantry Division had lost the connection with XXIX Army Corps. The army group therefore decided to place the only German unit in the area of Romanian 3rd Army under the command of the Romanian III Corps. In accordance with an order from Hitler, the Romanian III Corps was to withdraw westwards within the army's ambit that same day, pulling back in a series of stages from the Dniester to the Danube delta–Prut line at Cahul.<sup>126</sup> In support, the army group deployed LXXII Army Corps, stationed in Ismail, on a special mission to occupy the prepared rear positions in the Sărata and Cogîlnic valley, together with the German 153rd Field Training Division and the Romanian 1st Cavalry Division, in order to receive the retreating units of the Romanian III Corps. However, the army group's plan was already at risk late that evening, when Soviet units attacked the LXXII Corps defence forces at Cogîlnic. In these circumstances, the high command in Slănic decided in the night of 22 to 23 August to change the task assigned to the Romanian 3rd Army, which was now to take over the defence of the Danube from the mouth of the river to Brăila, with bridgeheads at Chilian, Ismail, and Cartal.<sup>127</sup>

There were particularly dramatic developments in the right-hand section of the area defended by the German Sixth Army, where the 3rd Ukrainian Front spearheads had pressed forward to Taraclia, 25 kilometres north of Bolgrad, and Tarutino, forcing the army to move its command post to Bereşti, 20 kilometres south of Bârlad. And in the left-hand section of the army's defence area, the Soviet 4th Guards Army was exerting pressure with tanks and infantry on the front northeast of Ungheni, where 376th Infantry Division was unable to prevent the Soviet forces from breaking through the defence system by the evening and taking the city, together with the important Prut river crossing. In the eastern section of the German VII Army Corps' front, however, and in the whole of the area defended by XXXXIV Corps and LII Corps, things remained extremely quiet, so that the units deployed in the area were able to prepare for withdrawal to the Prut without being disturbed.<sup>128</sup> Nevertheless, in view of the time factor and the inadequate infrastructure in Bessarabia, such a large withdrawal movement could be successfully completed only if there was no serious friction to contend with. In those circumstances, the army group's insistence that Sixth Army HQ move back to the Prut without delay was questionable, even at the preparatory stage, since the various

<sup>125</sup> Kissel, *Die Katastrophe in Rumänien*, 104; Mazulenko, *Die Zerschlagung der Heeresgruppe Südukraine*, 65–7.

<sup>126</sup> Rom. 3rd Army war diary, Operational Order No. 35, 22 Aug. 1944, 10.00. It read, *inter alia*, as follows: '1. By order of the Führer, the defence is to move from the Dniester and the coast to the southern Danube delta–Lake Jaluş–Bolgrad–Cahul line, and then to the Prut. 2. The withdrawal is to start on 22 August in the evening.' Arh.M.Ap.N., fond Corpul 3 Armata, dosar 111, fos. 191 ff.

<sup>127</sup> KTB H.Gr. Südukraine, Abt. Ia, No. 4, i. 29, 33 ff., BA-MA RH 19 V/36, fos. 31, 35 ff.; Rom. 3rd Army war diary, April to September 1944 (22 Aug. 1944), Arh.M.Ap.N., fond Corpul 3 Armata, dosar 111, fos. 183–200.

<sup>128</sup> Kissel, *Die Katastrophe in Rumänien*, 98; *Die geheimen Tagesberichte*, x. 465.

units and formations lacked the haulage resources and transport space necessary for a rapid withdrawal.<sup>129</sup>

As the army HQ was unable to assign a specific road to each individual unit because the infrastructure was lacking, it contented itself with allocating a 'corridor' to each army corps.<sup>130</sup> In addition to this problem, the five Prut river crossings at Sixth Army HQ's were a critical factor in the operation, since the withdrawal of the four corps would be concentrated in just a few places, leading inevitably to huge congestion on the east bank of the river. The departure from the positions on the Răut and the Dniester began in the evening, according to plan, and proceeded without any major complications at first. Considerable difficulties began to arise only in the course of the night, when the units on the right wing, in particular, departed from their assigned corridors. The reason was that the Soviet 37th Army, shortly before reaching the Cogîlnic at Cimişlia in the course of its advance westwards, had turned north-west to the Prut river crossings at Leuşeni and Zberoiaia, thereby cutting off the retreat of the remnants of XXX Corps and LII Army Corps. At the same time, the Soviet 57th Army, operating to the north of 37th Army, attacked the flank of XXX Army Corps, forcing it to leave its assigned corridor and move into the sector of LII Army Corps. Since the German Sixth Army was unable to stop the Soviet 37th Army's advance, the withdrawal plan had already failed to all intents and purposes by the morning of 23 August. At this point, the withdrawal movement in the area south of Chişinău and on the upper reaches of the Cogîlnic had descended into chaos. There were also numerous attacks by enemy forces, which considerably increased the general confusion and contributed to the failure to reach the appointed destinations. These attacks forced the various German units to depart from their planned withdrawal routes, with the result that different troop components were mixed up and the few roads became overloaded. On the morning of 23 August, 257th Infantry Division found itself '[squeezed] between dense columns, four or five abreast, hopelessly blocking the roads',<sup>131</sup> with the result that this unit, like the bulk of Sixth Army, was able to move westwards at only a slow pace. In this chaotic situation, there was no firm command capable of restoring order in the withdrawal movement. In the circumstances, many units and formations took independent action and, left to their own devices, attempted to reach the 'safe bank' of the Prut.<sup>132</sup> Neither the army leadership, which was obliged to move its command post to Moldavia on Friessner's orders,<sup>133</sup> nor the army group HQ in Slănic was fully informed of the Sixth Army fiasco: communications between the units and the command authorities in northern Bessarabia were cut on the morning of 23 August.<sup>134</sup>

<sup>129</sup> KTB H.Gr. Südukraine, Abt. Ia, No. 4, i. 28, BA-MA RH 19 V/36, fo. 30.

<sup>130</sup> Kissel, *Die Katastrophe in Rumänien*, 101.

<sup>131</sup> Benary, *Die Berliner Bären-Division*, 181.

<sup>132</sup> Kissel, *Die Katastrophe in Rumänien*, 100 ff.; Benary, *Die Berliner Bären-Division*, 181; Kaufmann, *Die vergessene Pilz-Division*, ii. 635, iii. 1069 ff.; *Die 62. Infanterie-Division*, 429.

<sup>133</sup> Fretter-Pico, ... verlassen von des Sieges Göttern, 154.

<sup>134</sup> KTB H.Gr. Südukraine, Abt. Ia, No. 4, i. 39, BA-MA RH 19 V/36, fo. 41.

After it became clear, at the outset, that the army group was unable to cope with the Soviet Iași–Chișinău operation, the military situation in the southern section of the eastern front deteriorated once again on 23 August. In Bessarabia, the northern wing of the Soviet 46th Army reached Comrat, and the southern vanguard managed to capture most of the important Tarutino–Bolgrad road. The military developments on the right of the area defended by the Romanian 3rd Army were even more ominous. Here, the task of halting the 46th Army spearheads, which had pushed through to the south, proved too much for the Romanian III Corps. By midday the Soviet troops had taken Tatar Bucar and Furmanca, thereby enclosing the corps between the Dniester and Lake Cunduc.<sup>135</sup> The defence in the southern section of the German–Romanian theatre of operations had now collapsed almost entirely, and 3rd Ukrainian Front was able to continue its advance into the Dobrogea region unimpeded. In order to lessen the impact of the military catastrophe in southern Bessarabia to some extent, the army group HQ endeavoured to defend the neck of land at Bolgrad with weak German–Romanian forces under the command of LXXII Army Corps, and keep it open for its own stragglers. Although Dumitrescu had received orders that the Romanian 3rd Army was to establish a defensive front on the Danube, from the mouth of the delta to Brăila, starting on 23 August,<sup>136</sup> Romanian 3rd Army HQ was unable to perform this task as it now had almost no combat-fit troops at its disposal.

In northern Bessarabia, on the German Sixth Army's left wing, the Soviet 37th Army was able to continue its advance and block the Prut river crossing at Leușeni in the course of the day, but it failed to achieve the day's objective of completing the encirclement of Sixth Army. Both LII Corps in the south and the German VII Army Corps north-west of Chișinău put up such effective resistance that the Soviet forces were unable to fulfil their task. However, neither VII nor LII Army Corps could prevent the almost total loss of the Prut river crossings, which were so important for the withdrawal movement. In view of the developments, with the Soviet 6th Armoured Army in Moldavia reaching the northern outskirts of Bârlad on 23 August, the army group HQ found itself obliged to transfer the Mieth Group, which was still fighting north of Huși, from Army Detachment Wöhler and place it under the command of Sixth Army HQ. The Mieth Group, which had the remnants of four German divisions under its command, was securing the west bank of the Prut between Costuleni and Leușeni, and endeavouring to keep open the road along the Prut between Huși and Fălcu, 40 kilometres south of Huși, so that Sixth Army would still have a chance to escape encirclement by the enemy. There was little hope of this, however, since, for the withdrawal of the four German corps, with 13 divisions in all, the Prut river crossing at Zbroaia was now the only one left in German hands. At this precise juncture it became clear that the telecommunication lines had been cut. But another major reason for the chaotic state of affairs

<sup>135</sup> Rom. 3rd Army war diary, April to September 1944, 23 Aug. 1944, Arh.M.Ap.N., fond Corpul 3 Armata, dosar 111, 103; KTB H.Gr. Südukraine, Abt. Ia, No. 4, i. 39 and 43, BA-MA RH 19 V/36, 41 and 45.

<sup>136</sup> KTB H.Gr. Südukraine, Abt. Ia, No. 4, i. 41, BA-MA RH 19 V/36, fo. 43.

east of the Prut was the fact that Sixth Army HQ was located far away in Moldavia, and was therefore barely able to influence the course of the operation.<sup>137</sup>

On 23 August the army group had hardly any operational forces left at its disposal in northern Moldavia, since the Romanian 4th Army had already begun its withdrawal to the Adjud–Tecuci–Bolgrad line. Germany's ally could not be dissuaded from this measure, despite a counter-order from the commander-in-chief of Army Detachment Wöhler.<sup>138</sup> While the weak LVII Armoured Corps attempted both to hold the Seret line at Roman and to prevent the enemy forces from pressing forward to the Carpathian passes, the Mieth Group was engaged in desperate battles north of Huși against the overwhelming power of the advancing Soviet 4th Guards Army and 52nd Army. There was a yawning gap, almost 100 kilometres wide, between LVI Armoured Corps and the Mieth Group, the German IV Army Corps, through which 2nd Ukrainian Front was able to advance southwards unimpeded.<sup>139</sup> In view of this precarious situation, Friessner had no alternative but to move the defence front to the Brăila–Focșani line, which, in Guderian's view, had to be held at all costs.<sup>140</sup> With regard to the Romanian Axis partner, the high command in Slănic considered that 'the Romanians were effectively unfit for further combat'.<sup>141</sup> In the early evening Grolman still thought that the German troops would have to be pulled back to the passes in order to establish a connection there with the Hungarians.

On the evening of 23 August the army group HQ came to the realization that—as the four days of fighting had shown<sup>142</sup>—Army Group South Ukraine did not have the necessary resources to oppose the superior Soviet forces effectively. That being so, it could only attempt to reduce the length of the defence front and bring the Russian attack to a standstill at the defensive line between the Danube delta and the Carpathians. Friessner was too late in taking tactical measures to address the implications of the military situation, so that the operations begun on 22 and 23 August could no longer be effective. One thing is particularly striking in this connection: neither the commander-in-chief of Army Group South Ukraine nor his staff had recognized the threat to the German Sixth Army in its balcony position on the Răut and the Dniester resulting from the points of concentration of the Soviet attacks. Although Friessner claims to have identified this weak point in the German–Romanian front and to have drawn Hitler's attention to it,<sup>143</sup> no forward

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., fo. 46.

<sup>138</sup> The Romanian 4th Army chief of staff had applied to the Romanian Great General Staff on the evening of 22 August for a decision as to what the army should do in this situation, but no such decision had yet been taken by the morning of 23 August. At 04.45 on 23 August 1944, Romanian 4th Army HQ issued Operational Order No. 305069, the order for withdrawal to the Tîrgu Ocna–Adjud–Ghigheni line; Rom. 4th Army war diary, August 1944, 1–3 (23 Aug. 1944), Arh.M.Ap.N., fond Armata 4, dosar 221, fos. 175–8.

<sup>139</sup> *Die geheimen Tagesberichte*, x. 468.

<sup>140</sup> KTB H.Gr. Südkraine, Abt. Ia, No. 4, i. 47, BA-MA RH 19 V/36, 49.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> Study P-114c, pt. 7, ch. 1, 91–8, BA-MA ZA 1/2077, 143–50; Philippi and Heim, *Der Feldzug gegen Sowjetrußland*, 258–60; Kissel, *Die Katastrophe in Rumänien*, 68–106; *Geschichte des zweiten Weltkrieges 1939–1945*, ix. 130–3; Hinze, *Mit dem Mut der Verzweiflung*, 207–13.

<sup>143</sup> Friessner makes this claim in his memoirs, published after the war, but provides no evidence to support it; Friessner, *Verratene Schlachten*, 33–5.

planning was made, after Friessner took over as commander-in-chief at the end of July, to withdraw Sixth Army from this endangered position if necessary, nor were appropriate measures taken after the enemy attack was launched, when the point of concentration of the enemy operation became clear. Moreover, Friessner did not broach this eventuality in his contacts with the OKH or in the memorandum he addressed to Hitler on 2 August.<sup>144</sup>

In addition to the problems in the southern section of the eastern front, Schörner's concept for the defence of the German–Romanian theatre of operations had already proved a failure by the beginning of July, after the army group had been obliged to transfer its mobile and armoured reserves in a series of moves to other critical points. Neither Schörner nor his successor amended the concept to enable operations to be conducted successfully under the new framework conditions. Their failure to do so, as well as the war-weariness of the Romanian forces and their lack of determination to resist, contributed to the fact that the Russian offensive led to a debacle for Army Group South Ukraine. The military disaster cannot be blamed solely on Germany's south-east European ally: it was also the result of wrong situation assessments by the army group HQ and the OKH.

### (b) The Events in Bucharest on 23 August 1944

If the army group leadership had believed that the tactical measures taken on 22 and 23 August would suffice to avert a catastrophe in the southern section of the eastern front, events occurred in Bucharest on 23 August that were to change the military situation completely and hasten the collapse of the front in Romania to an extraordinary extent. Before these events, there had long been rumours that the kingdom of Romania wanted to end the war. Those rumours, which gathered momentum at the beginning of August, had begun early in 1944, when the fighting moved to historic Romanian territory. Since then, a process had been under way aimed at breaking with the German ally without major political, economic, or territorial damage and withdrawing from the war.<sup>145</sup>

The change in the political mood in the kingdom, which was increasingly against continuing to fight on the German side, was no secret to the German embassy or to the military command in the southern section of the eastern front, although powerful political forces in Bucharest endeavoured to keep German officials in the dark about internal Romanian developments. Friessner was aware of the political mood in the country, and had drawn it to the attention of the OKH and Hitler, but the army group HQ, the OKH, Hitler, and the representatives of the German Reich in Romania were nevertheless surprised when the German military mission informed them, early in the evening of 23 August, 'that there was something wrong with Marshal Antonescu and the deputy prime minister'.<sup>146</sup>

<sup>144</sup> Ibid. 55–8. KTB H.Gr. Südukraine, Abt. Ia, No. 3, xi. 12 ff., BA-MA RH 19 V/30, fos. 14 ff.

<sup>145</sup> Schönher, 'Die Auswirkungen', 163 ff. and 174 ff.

<sup>146</sup> KTB H.Gr. Südukraine, Abt. Ia, No. 4, i. 49, BA-MA RH 19 V/36, fo. 51.

The political leaders in Bucharest had been endeavouring to conclude an armistice with the anti-Hitler coalition since the summer of 1943 but, as a result of the Romanian plan to conclude a separate peace with the Anglo-American Allies and of political pressure from the government in Berlin, that had not come about. The political and military situation in the spring of 1944 had also prompted opposition groups to contact the western Allies. However, by the summer of 1944 all diplomatic efforts had failed, because the kingdom did not accept the Allies' conditions.<sup>147</sup> Bucharest's freedom of action was also restricted by the fact that almost 750,000 German troops had been stationed in the Moldavian-Bessarabian theatre of operations and Wallachia since March 1944.<sup>148</sup> The Romanians' reservations about an armistice with the Soviet Union were essentially the result of their experience in the summer of 1940,<sup>149</sup> when the Soviet Union had issued an ultimatum (on 26 June) demanding the cession of Bessarabia.

The Romanian government's attitude had testified to a certain lack of realism, at least since the spring of 1944. In view of the circumstances and the outcome of Allied conferences, the authorities in Bucharest could hardly suppose that the western Allies would be willing to conclude a unilateral armistice with the kingdom without coming to an agreement with the USSR.<sup>150</sup> In April 1944, however, the anti-Hitler coalition submitted terms for an armistice to the kingdom through the Soviet partner.<sup>151</sup> Those terms were rejected by the Antonescu government, 'on the grounds that there were too many German divisions in Romania, which could prevent Romania withdrawing from the Axis and place the country under military occupation'.<sup>152</sup> The negotiations continued during the summer, but no agreements were reached. The Romanian leadership harboured the illusion that it could negotiate more favourable terms despite the bad military situation.<sup>153</sup>

From June onwards, with the Conducător hesitating to take the decisive step of signing an armistice, the opposition gathered around Iuliu Maniu and Constantin

<sup>147</sup> Hillgruber, *Hitler*, 173 ff., 180 and 194–8; Beer, 'Vorbereitung und Durchführung des Umsturzes', 107–9.

<sup>148</sup> Note from the head of section 7 of the Great General Staff, 24 June 1944. Arh.M.Ap.N., fond M.St.M., dosar 380, fo. 6. See also 'Operation Cosma', Arh.M.Ap.N., fond 948, dosar 354.

<sup>149</sup> On this, see Brügel, 'Das sowjetische Ultimatum'; Förster, 'Rumäniens Weg', 55; *Germany and the Second World War*, iv, 390–3.

<sup>150</sup> Rhode, 'Rumänien', 1158.

<sup>151</sup> On 12 April 1944 the Soviet representative in Cairo, Nikolai V. Novikov, delivered to the Romanian negotiator, Barbu Şirbey, the minimum terms for an armistice approved by all the Allies: 'To break with the Germans, and Romanian troops to fight side by side with the Allied forces, including the Red Army, with the aim of restoring Romania's sovereignty and independence; restoration of the Soviet Russian border pursuant to the treaty of 28 June 1940; Romania to pay compensation to the Soviet Union for damage resulting from the military action and the occupation of Soviet territory by Romanian troops, and all goods removed or purloined from Soviet territory to be returned to the Soviet Union; all Soviet prisoners of war held in Romanian custody to be returned immediately after the armistice is signed; complete freedom for all Soviet and Allied troops to move in any direction within the Romanian state, should the military situation so require.' Quoted in Beer, 'Vorbereitung und Durchführung des Umsturzes', 121.

<sup>152</sup> Beer, 'Vorbereitung und Durchführung des Umsturzes', 121.

<sup>153</sup> Hillgruber, *Hitler*, 194 ff.; Constantiniu, 'Cairo and Stockholm'; Constantiniu, 'The Last Days'; Coposu, 'Preludii politico-diplomatice ale loviturii de stat de la 23 august 1944' [Political-diplomatic prelude to the *coup d'état* of 23 August 1944], in Buzatu, *România cu și fără Antonescu*, 202–9.

Brătianu began to take matters into its own hands. In August, in view of the desperate military situation, the opposition, namely the National Democratic Bloc (Blocul Național Democratic), formed on 20 June 1944 and comprising all the opposition parties, including the Romanian Communist Party (Partidul Comunist Român), the Military Committee (a band of officers loyal to the king, formed in June with the approval of Michael I), and the king's confidential advisers, was finally ready to accept the Allied terms for an armistice, as agreed, and to overthrow the Antonescu government. It was the Military Committee that succeeded in persuading leading officers to support its plans in the summer of 1944, and to prepare to suspend all military operations when the king instructed them to do so. As things were relatively quiet on the front in Moldavia and Bessarabia, the actions of the royalist military leaders had very little impact on conditions in that theatre of operations. The opposition leaders and commanders were also at pains to conceal their preparations from the German ally. Once the opposition had established the basis for assuming political and military responsibility, and the arrangements for halting all military operations were in place, the party leaders, the Military Committee, and the king's representatives agreed, at a secret meeting on 21 August, to overthrow the marshal and his government five days later.<sup>154</sup>

The plan to carry out the '*coup d'état*'<sup>155</sup> on 26 August had to be changed, for two reasons. First, it was overtaken by military developments in eastern Romania, where Tolbukhin's and Malinovsky's forces pressed forward into the centre of the kingdom faster than expected, and second, Antonescu had decided in the meantime to conclude an armistice with the Soviet enemy. When the Conducător and his foreign minister sought an audience with the king on the morning of 23 August, the opposition groups found themselves in a quandary, because the situation in the theatre of operations and the political developments in the country both called for swift action. The monarch was also prompted to act, because the previous day the foreign minister, Mihai Antonescu, on behalf of the marshal, had urgently demanded the conclusion of an armistice with the Allies. The opposition now feared that the government would act faster than they did, and thereby remove the basis for a *coup d'état*.<sup>156</sup> At the audience on the afternoon of 23 August, Ion Antonescu proposed to the king that the country should unilaterally lay down its arms, insisting, however, that Hitler's approval of this action should be obtained first. The monarch categorically rejected Antonescu's proposal, because he was wholeheartedly in favour of the opposition group's plan. He had the Conducător and the foreign minister, Mihai Antonescu, arrested immediately after the meeting.

<sup>154</sup> Beer, 'Vorbereitung und Durchführung des Umsturzes', 123.

<sup>155</sup> The dismissal of Marshal Ion Antonescu and his government by King Michael I on 23 August 1944 was not a *coup d'état* in the legal sense of the term, because the monarch was entitled under the law of 6 September 1940 to dismiss the government in office and appoint a new one. This applies at least to the formal act of dismissing the Antonescu government. The monarch exceeded his powers in arresting the marshal and the members of the cabinet. The term '*coup d'état*' is nevertheless used by German historians to describe these events in Romania, on the one hand because the circumstances surrounding the change of government suggested that that was what it was, and on the other because the term was widely used in contemporary statements and in the German post-war literature.

<sup>156</sup> Beer, 'Vorbereitung und Durchführung des Umsturzes', 122–5.

After almost all the members of the Antonescu government had also been arrested, King Michael I appointed his chamberlain, Col.-Gen. Constantin Sănătescu, as the new prime minister, who then formed an all-party government in accordance with the agreements reached on 21 August. The *coup d'état* went smoothly, both because it had been well prepared and because the army and the largely royalist officer corps approved the action taken by the king.<sup>157</sup>

Rumours of the events in the royal palace reached the German embassy late in the afternoon of 23 August, as the marshal's and the foreign minister's audience with the king lasted an unusually long time. At around 17.00, with increasing rumours that the head of government had been arrested, the highest-ranking German diplomat in Bucharest, Dr Hans Stelzer, called General Erik Hansen and the head of the German agencies in the Romanian capital to the embassy for urgent talks. In the course of the meeting, which was also attended on the military side by the commander of the German Luftwaffe mission in Romania, Lt.-Gen. Alfred Gerstenberg, the head of the German naval mission, Admiral Werner Tillessen, and the military attaché, Maj.-Gen. Karl Spalcke, it was decided to inform the German government of the rumours and to recall the German ambassador, who was then in Snagov,<sup>158</sup> to the capital. Killinger reached the embassy at about 19.00. The officers attending the meeting asked him to go to the palace immediately in order to obtain reliable information on the political situation in Romania. However, the Romanian monarch did not grant him an audience there until 21.00, with the new head of government, Sănătescu, and his foreign minister, Grigore Niculescu-Buzeşti, also present.<sup>159</sup> During the audience, the king informed the German ambassador that Antonescu and his government had been deposed and arrested. He also stated that the new government intended to suspend hostilities against the Red Army immediately, and to conclude an armistice with the Allies. In conclusion, King Michael requested that 'the Reich government arrange for the German troops to withdraw from Romania without delay'.<sup>160</sup> That evening, Stelzer was received by the new foreign minister, who informed him officially that the kingdom of Romania had broken off diplomatic relations with the German Reich. Niculescu-Buzeşti volunteered, in this connection, that the new Romanian

<sup>157</sup> 278th 'Wochenbericht Südosteuropa' (hereinafter WoBSOE), 20–7 Aug. 1944, Vienna office of the Foreign Ministry, 37–42, BA R 63/349, fos. 135–7; Hillgruber, 'Die letzten Monate', 389–92; Constantiniu, 'Marshal's Arresting'; Constantiniu, 'August 23'; Buzatu, *România și Războiul*, 145–54; Roman, *Rumänien im Spannungsfeld der Großmächte*, 166; Bulei, *Kurze Geschichte Rumäniens*, 130–2; Völk, *Rumänien*, 157–60; Schönher, 'Relații româno-germane', 14. Sănătescu was prime minister of Romania from 23 August to 2 December 1944, and chief of staff from 11 December 1944 to 20 June 1945.

<sup>158</sup> Most Romanian ministers had left Bucharest and moved to the Snagov area when the Allies started bombing the city in the late summer of 1943. As a result, part of the German embassy, including the German radio station, was also located in Snagov, where Baron von Killinger had a country house. However, it is not altogether clear whether Killinger was in Snagov on 23 August, as stated in Hillgruber, *Hitler*, 216 ff., and Kissel, *Die Katastrophe in Rumänien*, 108, or at the spa in Sfaticia (Beer, 'Vorbereitung und Durchführung des Umssturzes', 131).

<sup>159</sup> Notes from the record of audiences at the royal palace in connection with the arrest of Marshal Antonescu and his staff, 23 August 1944, in *Procesul Mareșalului Antonescu*, i, doc. 1, 47.

<sup>160</sup> Hillgruber, *Hitler*, 217.

government was prepared to guarantee the Wehrmacht units a safe passage if they refrained from engaging in any hostilities.<sup>161</sup>

In spite of everything, the efforts of the government in Bucharest to resolve the problematic situation by mutual agreement were already obsolete by the late evening of 23 August. After Stelzer returned from his audience at the foreign ministry, the German ambassador and Gerstenberg had both managed to contact Berlin, even though the Romanians had cut the telephone and telegraph connections of the embassy and all German agencies in the capital earlier in the evening.<sup>162</sup> Gerstenberg had been able to get through to the Luftwaffe high command (OKL) on a Wehrmacht line and inform it of the events in Bucharest. Not knowing how matters actually stood, he proposed that the putsch be suppressed with the help of the German troops currently in the Bucharest and Ploiești area. Gerstenberg had not discussed this proposal, which the OKL passed on to Führer headquarters in Rastenburg, either with Killinger or with the head of the German Wehrmacht mission, or with the commander-in-chief of Army Group South Ukraine. At about 22.00 on 23 August the king addressed the Romanian people on the radio, informing them of the political and military changes and of the new government's intention to halt military operations and conclude an armistice.<sup>163</sup>

### (c) The Battles in the Bucharest–Ploiești Area

The question now was: how would Germany react to such serious changes in the political and military situation in Romania? The subject was also taken up by the *Nationalzeitung*, published in Basel. It concluded that Hitler now faced a serious dilemma:

If he attempts to turn Romania into another Italy, this new front will swallow up yet more of the already alarmingly scarce German divisions, and they too could easily be caught up and wiped out in a general Romanian pandemonium between the invading troops and Tito's forces. If Germany lets things run their course, not only will it lose its oil suppliers; it will also make it easier for Bulgaria to get out, and it will have to be

<sup>161</sup> Ibid.

<sup>162</sup> Contrary to Kissel, *Die Katastrophe in Rumänien*, 109, who claims that Gerstenberg passed the news of Marshal Antonescu's dismissal and arrest to the Luftwaffe high command's chief of staff at about 20.00, the conversation in question can only have taken place after 21.00, because the German ambassador was received by the king and informed of the events only at 21.00. Army Group South Ukraine too did not receive the first indications from Bucharest that there was 'something wrong with Marshal Antonescu and the deputy prime minister' until 20.30. This information was not available at 19.45, when the Army Group South Ukraine chief of staff spoke to the head of the OKH operations department. Not until 22.25 was the army group HQ in Slănic informed by the ambassador himself that the Conducător had been arrested and that Romania would cease military operations. At that point, the army group had not yet received any information or instructions from Berlin; KTB H.Gr. Südukraine, Abt. Ia, No. 4, i. 48–51, BA-MA RH 19 V/36, fos. 50–3.

<sup>163</sup> A comprehensive and detailed account of the events in Bucharest on 23 August 1944, from the Romanian point of view, is contained in Buzatu's work, *România și războiul mondial*, with extensive additional information on pp. 155–71. For the text of King Michael I's radio address, see Arh.M.Ap. N., fond 5418, dosar 2845, fo. 2.

prepared for Hungary too to acquire a new government overnight, with further surprises in store.<sup>164</sup>

Given the change of power in Romania, which threw the south-eastern flank of the area under German rule into military and political disarray, Gerstenberg's optimistic assessment of the situation must have struck Hitler as 'glad tidings'. It gave the impression that the *coup d'état* had been carried out, with King Michael's approval, only by a small clique of senior officers and opposition politicians. According to Gerstenberg, the new rulers had no support among the Romanian people, and the German troops stationed in the Bucharest area would therefore suffice to take possession of the capital, depose the monarch, and remove the government now in office. Gerstenberg also recommended that the political and military command centres in the Romanian capital should be bombed and eliminated. On the basis of Gerstenberg's military analysis, the OKW believed that the forces of 5th Anti-Aircraft Division would suffice to secure Germany's dominance of the strategically important Ploieşti oilfields.<sup>165</sup>

In the light of this situation assessment, Hitler decided to take military action against the new government and have King Michael I arrested. Thereupon, Gerstenberg was ordered by the OKW to suppress the 'putsch' with the German forces stationed in the Bucharest–Ploieşti area, so as to reinstate Antonescu or, alternatively, charge a pro-German general with the formation of a new government. While the most important political objective for the Third Reich was undoubtedly to establish a pro-German government in the kingdom in view of the threat to its dominant position in south-eastern Europe, it was also essential to the conduct of the war that Germany use all the means at its disposal to retain control of the Ploieşti oilfields. The OKW accordingly ordered all German armed forces to give priority to guaranteeing and protecting oil production and transportation.<sup>166</sup> To achieve this objective set by Hitler, the Wehrmacht operations staff, without regard to the actual balance of forces, proposed to withdraw Army Group South Ukraine to the Danube–Carpathian Fringe position in order to stop the Soviet advance before it reached Wallachia, and to dispatch 5th Anti-Aircraft Division to disarm the Romanian forces in the Bucharest–Ploieşti–Prahova valley area<sup>167</sup> and occupy central Romania.<sup>168</sup>

For Gerstenberg, the OKW's orders, which he received early on the morning of 24 August, meant that, if he was to take central Wallachia, he would have to assemble all the German troops, some of which were stationed in widely scattered locations in the Bucharest area and as far north as the Prahova valley, for the battle against the territorial units of the Romanian army. At the beginning of August there

<sup>164</sup> *Nationalzeitung*, 26 August 1944, quoted in 278th WoBSOE (20–7 Aug. 1944), 41 ff., BA R 63/349, fo. 137.

<sup>165</sup> Hillgruber, 'Die letzten Monate', 390; Kissel, *Die Katastrophe in Rumänien*, 109; Beer, 'Vorbereitung und Durchführung des Umsturzes', 132 ff.

<sup>166</sup> KTB Skl, pt. A, lx/II. 608.

<sup>167</sup> The Prahova valley, to the north of Ploieşti, is the most important traffic route from Bucharest to Braşov and Transylvania.

<sup>168</sup> KTB OKW, iv/1, 805.

were about 35,000 members of the armed forces and the police in the two districts of Prahova and Ilfov, where German interests were primarily concentrated,<sup>169</sup> but on account of their military training, their age, and their official duties, only a fraction of them could be deployed in the 'liberation operation'. Consequently, of the 11,000 or so members of the armed forces in Bucharest and the Ilfov district, only 2,000 to 3,000 were available to Gerstenberg for the operation against the Romanian capital.<sup>170</sup> The arms-bearers, most of whom were billeted near the Otopeni and Băneasa airports in the north of the capital, had had very little infantry training and almost no combat experience. In addition to these shortcomings, the almost total lack of heavy weaponry posed a serious problem, implying that the whole project was doomed to failure from the outset. Despite the scant combat strength, and in a situation where there was still a chance that a great many German troops would be able to leave Romanian territory unmolested, the Luftwaffe general proved absolutely determined to take military action against the new state authorities. It is not at all clear what moved the initiator of the action to take this enormous risk. If the operation were to fail, the kingdom would undoubtedly open hostilities immediately against its former ally.

Despite Gerstenberg's favourable situation assessment, the OKW still doubted that there were enough forces in the Bucharest–Ploieşti area to conduct the proposed counter-strike successfully. On 23 August the Wehrmacht operations staff instructed C-in-C South-East to make preparations to muster the strongest possible forces in the Niš area for deployment in Romania. Only a few hours later the OKW gave specific instructions to assemble a combat group in the Belgrade–Niš area for intervention, if necessary, in the fighting in the Bucharest–Ploieşti area.<sup>171</sup>

At this point in time, when the Wehrmacht operations staff were issuing the order to suppress the 'putsch' and working on detailed plans for military action, Stelzer, Hansen, and Gerstenberg were endeavouring, at a meeting with the prime minister, Sănătescu, and the foreign minister, Niculescu-Buzău, to define and negotiate arrangements for a free passage out for the German forces. The Romanian government allowed the German delegation to use the blocked telephone lines at the embassy again for a short time in order to inform the relevant political and military authorities in the Reich of the results of the talks. As well as the outcome of the negotiations, Hansen tried to communicate to Führer headquarters what he

<sup>169</sup> The Great General Staff had fairly accurate data on the human and material strength of the German forces in Romania on 23 August 1944, having ordered all military and civilian agencies to record and report all German troop units in Romanian territory, with the exact names of the units and accurate information as to their location and strength ('Operation Cosma'). On the basis of that survey, the Great General Staff was in a position to form a precise picture of the combat strength of the German troops in Romania. See *inter alia* Arh.M.Ap.N., fond M.St.M.—sect. 7, dosar 380, fos. 28, 30; dosar 381, 19–25, fos. 33–41.

<sup>170</sup> The German agencies and barracks in Bucharest were already surrounded by Romanian units and the Revolutionary Guard on the evening of 24 August 1944. The process of disarming German troops, officials, and citizens, and taking them into custody, started in the course of the night. *România în Războiul Antihitlerist*, 61–70.

<sup>171</sup> KTB OB Südost/H.Gr. F, Abt. Ia, No. 3, 225, 227–9, BA-MA RH 19 XI/14, fos. 223, 225–7. C-in-C South-East placed 4th Regiment 'Brandenburg', an armoured reconnaissance company, and a battalion of 201st Assault Gun Brigade at the combat group's disposal.

knew about the actual situation in the kingdom. At the same time, Gerstenberg, in a deceptive manoeuvre, managed to evade Romanian surveillance and join the German troops in the Băneasa–Otopeni area. While he was in Otopeni, making the final preparations for action against the Romanian capital, which he decided to start at 06.30 without waiting for reinforcements, the head of the German military mission got through to the OKW and Army Group South Ukraine HQ. At about 03.30 Hansen managed to inform Col.-Gen. Jodl at Führer headquarters of the actual situation in the kingdom and in Bucharest. He explained to the head of the Wehrmacht operations staff that the events in Bucharest were ‘not a putsch by a court cabal, but a well-prepared *coup d'état* from the top, with the full agreement of the army and the nation as a whole’. The message continued:

People and troops informed by radio. Step has widespread support. Not a single general to be found to lead a counter-government against the king and the new government, since they are all, to the last man, loyal to the king. Comprehensive preventive measures taken against all German agencies and troops in Bucharest. No longer possible to transmit orders. Current balance of forces allows no prospect of military and political success.<sup>172</sup>

In subsequent talks with Friessner, the head of the German military mission again expressly emphasized that, in his view, ‘our forces are wholly insufficient to take possession of Bucharest and remove the new government, and the operation is certain to fail. He therefore strongly advises against taking the measures that have been ordered.’<sup>173</sup> Despite the serious reservations expressed by Hansen, who probably knew more than anyone else about the political and military conditions in Romania and in Bucharest, Hitler stuck to his decision, and the OKW accordingly ordered Gerstenberg to begin the attack on Bucharest immediately with his forces. As the Luftwaffe general too still thought at this point ‘that the Romanian government was just a little clique that was “shit-scared”, and that there was only a very thin screen of troops round Bucharest’,<sup>174</sup> he ordered the available troops on the Bucharest–Ploieşti road in the vicinity of the Otopeni airport and on the northern outskirts of the capital on the Pipera–Băneasa–Giuleşti line to take up initial positions.

To achieve Hitler’s objective, Gerstenberg’s main task was to conquer the greater Bucharest area and take over political power there. At the same time, Germany’s domination of the Ploieşti oilfields and the Prahova valley had to be secured, to ensure German control of the oil needed for the war effort and the indispensable route over the Carpathians, which for transport purposes was the only effective way of getting from the Greater Bucharest–Ploieşti area to the territory of the Reich. It was therefore incumbent upon Gerstenberg, before embarking on the armed operation, to assess the situation by means of a precise comparison of the human and material strength of the opposing forces, in order to determine the prospects of

<sup>172</sup> KTB Skl, pt. A., lx/II. 610.

<sup>173</sup> KTB H.Gr. Südukraine, Abt. Ia, No. 4, i. 56, BA-MA RH 19 V/36, fo.58.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid. 57, BA-MA RH 19 V/36, fo. 59.

success. That being so, the general must have realized at a very early stage that six divisions of the Romanian Territorial and Replacement Army, with 45,000 to 50,000 men, were stationed in the Giurgiu/Danube–Bucharest–Ploieşti–Braşov sector alone.<sup>175</sup> Even if the Germans were not necessarily aware that this territorial and replacement army was a highly trained and well-equipped fighting force,<sup>176</sup> which had been formed in view of the possibility of armed conflict with neighbouring Hungary and the recapture of central and northern Transylvania,<sup>177</sup> the massive concentration of troops in the Greater Bucharest–Braşov area, of which the German military authorities must have been informed, ought to have stopped the Germans from embarking on an armed operation in Wallachia.

The Wehrmacht operations staff confirmed Hitler's order at about 05.00, and Gerstenberg launched the attack on the Romanian capital at 08.30. The operation began in a highly amateurish fashion, without methodical assembly of all the available forces, and it met with substantial resistance from the outset. The combat group nevertheless managed to gain some ground, because on the morning of 24 August the Romanians had not yet sufficiently reinforced their troops in the northern section of the capital. The disarmament and internment of German agencies in Bucharest had not yet been completed, so substantial sections of the forces were not available to the military authorities in the capital (Comandamentul al Capitale) and their commander, General Iosif Teodorescu, for defence against the German attack. The Romanian units nevertheless succeeded in bringing the German advance to a standstill quite quickly. So Gerstenberg was already obliged, in the initial phase, to report that his mission had failed. He had to admit that the forces at his disposal were not sufficient to achieve the desired objective. At 11.30 the chief of staff at Army Group South Ukraine received news that 'the resistance is very strong and it is impossible to get into the city'.<sup>178</sup> The information prompted the army group to ask the OKW for more infantry. Grolman suggested bringing 'infantry reinforcements to Bucharest by air, particularly from the area of C-in-C South-East'.<sup>179</sup> Despite its own disastrous situation, the army group also endeavoured to strengthen Combat Group Gerstenberg by flying in two companies of local defence conscripts from Focşani to the area of operations on the northern outskirts of Bucharest. To support the battle on the ground, the Luftwaffe carried out massive air strikes on the morning of 24 August, designed primarily to destroy

<sup>175</sup> Data compiled from contributions in Duțu, Dobre, and Loghin, *Armata Română*, 147, 150 ff., 158, 166, 179, and 192 ff.

<sup>176</sup> On 15 August 1944 the Territorial and Replacement Army stationed in the 'Regiunea Interioară' numbered around 410,000 men (army alone). *Ibid.* 96.

<sup>177</sup> The demands for revision addressed to Romania by Bulgaria, Hungary, and the USSR led to considerable differences between Bucharest and Budapest regarding settlement of the territorial question. In the Axis arbitration proceedings brought by both sides, Hitler compelled the south-east European kingdom to cede large parts of Transylvania to Hungary. This decision was enshrined in an agreement signed in Vienna on 30 August 1940. The Second Vienna Award, as it was called, was regarded in Bucharest from the outset as a *diktat* that must be reversed by all possible means. See *Germany and the Second World War*, iv. 386–408.

<sup>178</sup> KTB H.Gr. Südukraine, Abt. Ia, No. 4, i. 57, BA-MA RH 19 V/36, fo. 59.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.* 58, BA-MA RH 19 V/36, fo. 60.

the political and military power centres in the Romanian capital. The bombing caused considerable damage but failed to bring the relief for which Gerstenberg had hoped. Nor did infantry reinforcements and a relief attack in the south of the city<sup>180</sup> improve the situation in the Otopeni–Băneasa area by the evening of the first day of the operation.<sup>181</sup> In addition, the personnel of the German military agencies were unable to support the efforts to occupy Romania's political and military power centres. The areas in which the German institutions were located had already been surrounded and cut off by military units under Teodorescu's command on the evening of 23 August. Teodorescu had all the personnel of the German military authorities and the embassy disarmed and interned in the course of the next two days, with the result that some 5,450 soldiers, more than 1,000 Luftwaffe female auxiliary staff, and almost 200 civilian employees ended up in Romanian prisoner-of-war camps.<sup>182</sup>

By the early evening Gerstenberg found himself facing a serious deterioration in the operational situation. Owing to inadequate reconnaissance, the combat group was unaware that an armoured battalion under the command of General Gheorghe Rozin, with some 50 tanks and a strong infantry component, had been on the way from Târgovişte to the area of operations north of the capital since the night of 23 to 24 August. By the morning of 24 August the battalion already had spearheads threatening the left flank of Combat Group Gerstenberg at Crevedia and Buftea, about 20 kilometres west of Otopeni. And by the evening the Romanian armoured battalion had taken up positions at Mogoşoaia with a view to cutting the important transport connections from Bucharest to Ploieşti and separating the German forces at Otopeni from the combat troops in the Ploieşti–Prahova valley area.<sup>183</sup> Although the armoured unit had not yet taken an active part in the operations, Gerstenberg realized that 'an attack to recapture the city and carry out the Führer order [...] is not feasible at present'. He was now obliged to admit that the operation could not be carried out successfully without bringing in heavy weapons and experienced fighting troops.<sup>184</sup>

It had become clear on the first day of the operation that Combat Group Gerstenberg's forces were not strong enough to break through the defensive positions on the outskirts of Bucharest, but the general nevertheless gave orders

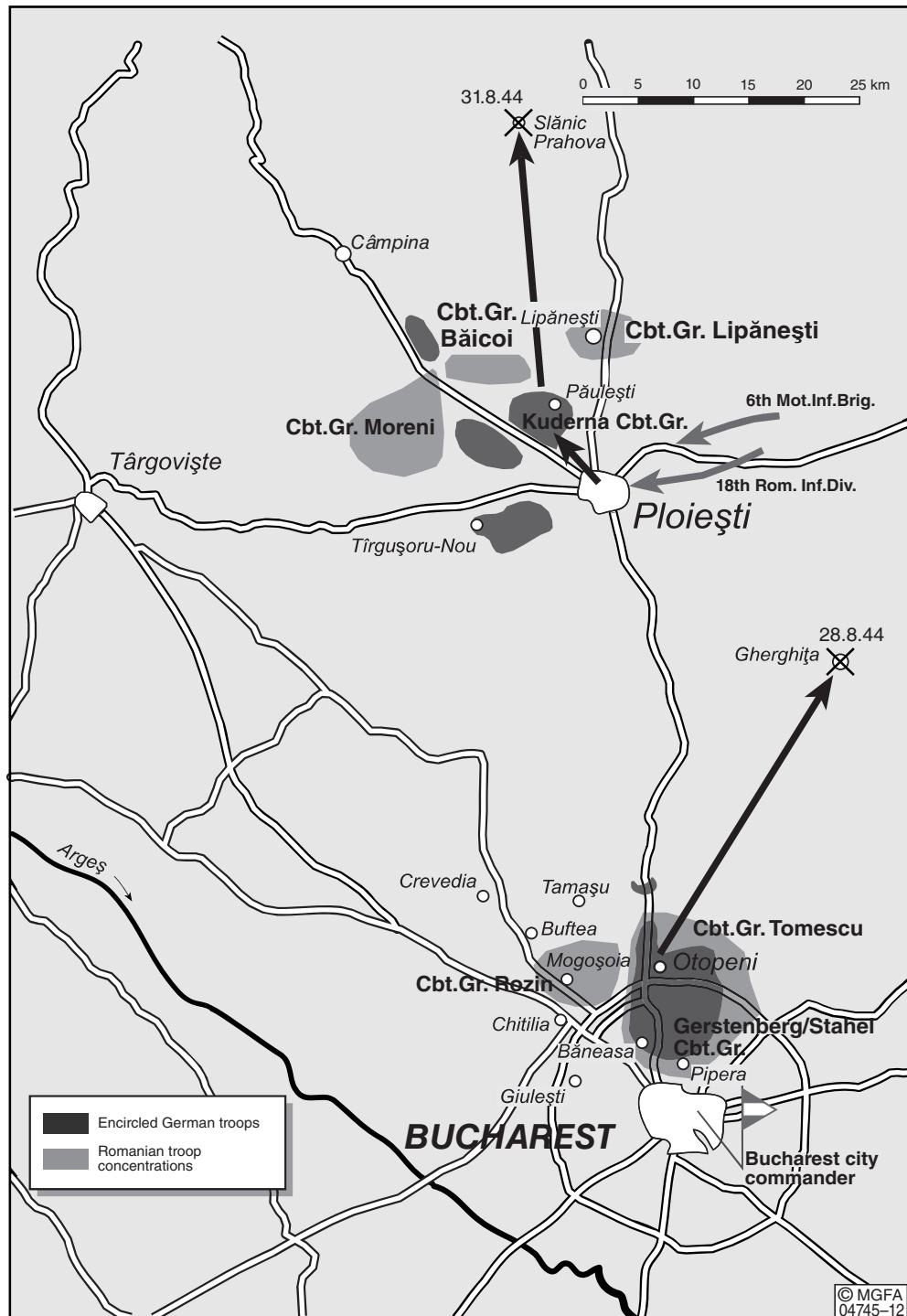
<sup>180</sup> Two German anti-aircraft batteries stationed at Măgurele and Progresu on the southern edge of Bucharest attempted to press forward into the city centre on 24 August 1944. The attack was stopped at the city limits just as it was getting under way. *România în Războiul Antihitlerist*, 73.

<sup>181</sup> KTB H.Gr. Südukraine, Abt. Ia, No. 4, i. 57–60, BA-MA RH 19 V/36, fos. 59–61; Kissel, *Die Katastrophe in Rumänien*, 120 ff.; *România în Războiul Antihitlerist*, 68–83.

<sup>182</sup> Report by the military command in the capital (Comandamentul al Capitalei), Section 2, 15 Oct. 1944, Arh.M.Ap.N., fond 1676, dosar 165, fos. 106 ff., 113 ff.; Duțu, Dobre, and Loghin, *Armata Română*, 94; *România în Războiul Antihitlerist*, 69–75.

<sup>183</sup> These operational plans had also been discussed with the foreign minister, Niculescu-Buzesti, on the evening of 24 August 1944; Mechanized Troop Command operational report, 23 to 29 Aug. 1944, Mech. Troop Cmd., Cdr, n.d., 1–15, 19, Arh.M.Ap.N., fond 1715, dosar 110, fos. 1–15, 19.

<sup>184</sup> Radio message from commander of the Luftwaffe in Romania, 25 Aug. 1944, 02.35, OB Südost, Abt. Ic/L, 25 Aug. 1944, OB Südost/H.Gr. F, ann. 12 to KTB No. 3, app. 193, BA-MA RH 19 XI/16, fo. 112.



Map V.vi.3. The battles in Ploiești and Bucharest (end of August 1944)

Source: H.Gr.Südukraine, Abt.1a, KTB No. 3, 24–31 Aug.1944, BA-MA, RH 19 X/16 Arh.M.Ap.N., Fond 1676, dosar 165: 1715, dosar 110: Corpul 5 Teritorial.

for the offensive to be resumed the following day, although he could not expect to have received any reinforcements by then. Even so, the German attackers gained some ground in the first assault on 25 August, because this time the thrust was more effective and better planned. Parts of Combat Group Gerstenberg managed to break into the Romanian defence lines in the course of the morning, before the offensive was brought to a halt north of the triumphal arch by strong enemy resistance. While Gerstenberg concentrated the main effort of the attack in the southern part of the area of operations, the Romanians opened hostilities at Chitilia. Towards midday General Rozin shifted the point of concentration of his operation to the north, as planned.<sup>185</sup> As the fighting on the northern outskirts of the Romanian capital intensified, C-in-C South-East HQ made supreme efforts to muster 1st Parachute Battalion, in order to get the urgently needed reinforcements to Romania as quickly as possible. By the following morning two companies had been successfully assembled at Kovin airport near Belgrade, but the flight to Otopeni was delayed by technical problems. However, even these experienced troop units, the first of which reached the combat zone in the early afternoon,<sup>186</sup> were unable to prevent the failure of the German operation.<sup>187</sup>

Towards noon, when the Bucharest military commander's units went over to the counter-attack and Rozin's armoured units launched an eastward attack from the Mogoșoaia–Tamașu line at almost the same time, Combat Group Gerstenberg was forced to abandon the positions it had won only a few hours earlier. The airports at Băneasa and Pipera were also lost during the withdrawal, leaving Otopeni as the only place where supplies for the combat group could be landed. In the early evening, when Rozin's units succeeded in cutting the crucial road link between the capital and the oilfields, the connection between the German forces in the Bucharest–Ploiești–Prahova valley area of operations was lost.<sup>188</sup> It was impossible for Gerstenberg to penetrate into the Romanian capital again, nor was there any chance of re-establishing contact with the units in Ploiești. The reinforcements of 400 paratroops urgently awaited for the past two days did not reach Otopeni until the morning of 26 August. They were in any case insufficient to avert the debacle. At almost the same time, Lt.-Gen. Rainer Stahel landed in Otopeni to take over from the Luftwaffe general unsuccessfully commanding operations in the north Bucharest area. However, given the human and material inferiority of the combat group, the army general too had no chance of performing his task and achieving Hitler's objective. The situation in the Otopeni area of operations became much worse in the second half of the day, when British and American bombers massively attacked Otopeni and Băneasa airports and the Stahel Group's positions in the

<sup>185</sup> Mechanized Troop Command operational report, 23 to 29 Aug. 1944, Mech. Troop Cmd., Cdr., n.d., 18–24, Arh.M.Ap.N., fond 1715, dosar 110, fos. 17–20, 22–5.

<sup>186</sup> It was possible to get only about 60 paratroops to the Bucharest combat area on 25 August 1944; Kissel, *Die Katastrophe in Rumänien*, 143.

<sup>187</sup> KTB OB Südost/H.Gr. F, Abt. Ia, No. 3, 242, BA-MA RH 19 XI/14, fo. 243.

<sup>188</sup> Mechanized Troop Command operational report, 23 to 29 Aug. 1944, Mech. Troop Cmd., Cdr., n.d., 21–4, 27–31, Arh.M.Ap.N., fond 1715, dosar 110, fos. 22–5, 27–31.

Băneasa forest.<sup>189</sup> The last contingents from 4th Regiment ‘Brandenburg’ and the close-combat school at Niš, which were being flown to Romania from Zemun and Niš, had to land at the airfield in Mizil, 35 kilometres east of Ploieşti, and could therefore not be deployed as reinforcements for the Stahel Group.

After Teodorescu’s and Rozin’s units had closed the ring round the German units on the afternoon of 26 August, they proceeded to attack the encircled combat group on all sides. The largely inexperienced German troops had the greatest difficulty in repelling the massive attacks by the Romanian forces, and the incipient shortage of ammunition made the situation even worse. Responsibility for Combat Group Stahel had been transferred while the heavy fighting was still going on at Otopeni, and the group was now under the command of Army Group South Ukraine because the chief of the OKW, in response to the Romanian declaration of war, had declared that the whole of Romania was now within the army group’s area of operations, with Friessner in charge.<sup>190</sup>

Stahel continued the battle on 27 August, regardless of the enemy’s superiority and the lack of any prospect of achieving the original operational objective. It was only late in the afternoon, when a great many more men had been lost and the ammunition situation had deteriorated dramatically, that the general decided to break out of the encirclement during the night in the direction of Mizil–Buzău, where it was thought the German lines were located. Stahel took this decision only after he had asked the army group whether the combat group could count on any reinforcements, and had failed to receive a positive reply.<sup>191</sup> The army group responded to Stahel’s radio message of the afternoon shortly before midnight, after consulting the OKH, and gave its approval for the general’s intention to break out of the encirclement. However, it ordered him to withdraw to Ploieşti, where he was to take over command and reinforce the combat action of 5th Anti-Aircraft Division. At the same time, the army group demanded that ‘the Ploieşti area be held at all costs’.<sup>192</sup> This stipulation, which was certainly necessary with regard to the overall military situation of the Third Reich on account of the oil deposits in the area, nevertheless showed how unrealistic both the OKH and—and this is particularly hard to understand—the army group itself were in their assessment of the situation in the Romanian theatre of operations. Combat Group Stahel probably did not receive the order from the high command in Slănic. The breakout into the Buzău area to the north-east took place in the evening and was highly

<sup>189</sup> According to Kissel, (*Die Katastrophe in Rumänien*, 144) Gerstenberg claimed after the war that ‘the success of the Romanian uprising was due not least to the heavy bombing of German bases by powerful American air-force units’. That claim, however, distorts the facts. The ‘Romanian uprising’ was approved and supported by the majority of the Romanian people and the Romanian army, and defended in the face of massive German intervention. So the attacks by British and American bombers, which only took part in the operations in the Bucharest–Otopeni area on 26 August 1944, had very little effect on the outcome of the German military intervention. The Stahel Group was defeated primarily because the Romanian forces were superior, and the Allied air raids merely hastened the process to some extent.

<sup>190</sup> Kissel, *Die Katastrophe in Rumänien*, 144.

<sup>191</sup> KTB H.Gr. Südukraine, Abt. Ia, No. 4, i. 81, BA-MA RH 19 V/36, fo. 83.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid.

successful at first, thanks to the element of surprise,<sup>193</sup> but it was brought to a standstill on the following day at Gherghita, about 20 kilometres south-east of Ploieşti, by the superior forces of the Romanian VI Army Corps.<sup>194</sup> And so, after four days of fighting, that was the end of the military adventure to capture Bucharest.<sup>195</sup> The operation initiated by Gerstenberg, ill-prepared and poorly executed, led to a further great sacrifice of men and material—a sacrifice that was pointless, if only because the operation did almost nothing to relieve the situation of Army Group South Ukraine.

The Ploieşti area was of the utmost importance for German conduct of the war, above all because of its oil production and processing installations,<sup>196</sup> but also as the gateway to the two northern passes over the Carpathians at Predeal and the Ciuc Massif crossing. The leadership in Berlin had consequently paid particular attention to this region of Romania since the beginning of the war. Even before the kingdom joined the Tripartite Pact, the Wehrmacht command had taken precautionary measures to preserve the possibility of intervening militarily in crisis situations to secure German access to the Ploieşti oilfields.<sup>197</sup> Whereas, especially at the beginning of the war, German interests were subject to possible Soviet claims to the oilfields, the situation changed radically from the summer of 1943, when British and American bombers succeeded in attacking and destroying production and processing plants, as well as storage tanks. This threat was an increasingly decisive factor in the deployment of troops in the Greater Ploieşti–Prahova valley area. In addition to a substantial anti-aircraft component, comprising about one-and-a-half anti-aircraft divisions, there was also an air-raid brigade and a range of construction, maintenance, transport, and special units in the area of the industrial city.

The OKW had transferred military responsibility for protecting and securing the oil-producing region to Lt.-Gen. Gerstenberg, as ‘oil-region commander’. In this capacity, he had some 26,000 German troops, stationed in the Romanian administrative district of Prahova, under his command at the beginning of August 1944. The largest force in terms of numbers was the anti-aircraft contingent, which alone comprised eight anti-aircraft battalions with a total of 45 gun batteries, plus support units.<sup>198</sup> Despite this relatively strong contingent, Gerstenberg had only a limited combat force at his disposal to execute his operational plans, although the 45 gun batteries were an important combat asset that could also be put to effective use in ground operations. However, most of the anti-aircraft guns were firmly embedded, so they could not be used for mobile ground combat. Furthermore, because of the Wehrmacht’s large manpower requirements, about half of the guns were manned

<sup>193</sup> In the night of 27 August 1944, the 2,000-strong Combat Group Stahel got as far as Balta Doamnei, about 30 km from Otopeni, where it encountered strong Romanian resistance; Duțu, Dobre, and Loghin, *Armata Română*, 46.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid. 227.

<sup>195</sup> Hillgruber, ‘Die letzten Monate’, 394–6; *România în anii celui de-al Doilea Război Mondial*, ii. 131–80.

<sup>196</sup> *Germany and the Second World War*, v/II. 569–73.

<sup>197</sup> *Germany and the Second World War*, iv. 393; Förster, ‘Rumäniens Weg’, 47–77; Schönherr, ‘Înfluenta Wehrmacht-ului’, 53, n. 23.

<sup>198</sup> Arh.M.Ap.N., fond M.St.M., dosar 380, 10–20; dosar 381, fos. 33–41.

by Romanians, which further reduced the combat value of the anti-aircraft artillery units. The precarious military situation in Ploieşti was aggravated by the fact that the Romanian anti-aircraft gun emplacements were located within the German firing positions, so they cancelled each other out. Some of the German anti-aircraft batteries would therefore be of no use in the battle for the oilfields. Gerstenberg nevertheless hoped to make up for this deficiency with infantry units composed of stragglers from Sixth and Eighth Armies. However, those makeshift units lacked cohesion, and their combat strength was consequently limited.<sup>199</sup>

With regard to 'Oil Fortress Ploieşti', as Kissel calls it,<sup>200</sup> it should be pointed out that the German military authorities were frighteningly ill-informed about the relative strength of the Romanian forces in this region. Neither the oil-region commander nor the commander of 5th Anti-Aircraft Division had reliable information about the disposition and strength of the Romanian Territorial Army in the administrative district of Prahova. They did not know that the Romanian V Territorial Army Corps, with two replacement infantry divisions and a battalion of frontier troops, was in command there. This meant that, together with the anti-aircraft units, there were 23,000 members of the Romanian armed forces facing the 26,000 German troops deployed in the area. Despite their marginally smaller numbers, the Romanian forces' greater infantry combat strength gave them a considerable advantage. Gerstenberg conducted the operations in the north of Bucharest, and the commander of 5th Anti-Aircraft Division, Maj.-Gen. Julius Kuderna, took over the local command of 'Fortress Ploieşti'. The forces available were not strong enough to gain and exercise military control of the oilfield area, so in the night of 23 to 24 August Kuderna assembled most of his units north-west of the city to take part in the offensive. In addition to this mustering area, defended on all sides, there were several smaller strongpoints in the centre of the city and on the outskirts, mostly consisting of anti-aircraft batteries.<sup>201</sup>

Although the Romanian V Territorial Army Corps had already been alerted and dispatched to operationally important positions on 23 August, the Great General Staff ordered the corps to avoid all conflict with the German troops so long as they left the country without armed resistance. It was only when, following the Romanian radio declaration of war on 25 August, orders were issued to fight the German troops,<sup>202</sup> that V Territorial Army Corps too went into action against the Wehrmacht units.<sup>203</sup> As the German forces were not concentrated in an enclosed occupied district but were deployed at various points in the greater Ploieşti area, the Romanians had surrounded those bases during the two days before the fighting began. They were now well placed to attack the new enemy concentrically.<sup>204</sup>

<sup>199</sup> Kissel, *Die Katastrophe in Rumänien*, 145 ff.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid. 146.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid. 145 ff.

<sup>202</sup> OB Südost/H.Gr. F, Abt. Ic/AO, No. 6410/44 geh., 26 Aug. 1944, 'Orientierung Rumänien'. OB Südost, Abt. Ia, annex vol. 4 to KTB No. 3, app. 208/VIII. BA-MA RH 19 XI/18, fo.143.

<sup>203</sup> Report by the commander of V Territorial Army Corps on operations from 23 Aug. to 1 Sept. 1944, 2, Arh.M.Ap.N., fond Corpul 5 Teritorial, dosar 246, fo. 8.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid. 1 ff., Arh.M.Ap.N., fond Corpul 5 Teritorial, dosar 246, fos. 7 ff.; Duțu, Dobre, and Loghin, *Armata Română*, 128.

As well as ground troops, a number of flying units were also stationed in the Bucharest–Ploieşti area. On 24 August they had already assembled at the Tîrguşoru-Nou airbase on the orders of Air Fleet 4 HQ, in view of the growing tension. The next day, Romanian units opened fire on the airfield with tanks and artillery, and the air commodore in charge, after consulting the air fleet HQ, ordered the breakout. Without informing 5th Anti-Aircraft Division, which had been in command of the flying units since the previous day, about 2,000 soldiers and 300 Luftwaffe female support staff left Tîrguşoru in the evening in the direction of Mizil-Buzău, in an attempt to reach the German front on the edge of the Carpathians. The group managed to break through the surrounding circle of Romanian forces and, under constant enemy attack, crossed the Carpathian ridge in the area of the Buzău pass and reached the German–Hungarian area of operations in south-eastern Transylvania.<sup>205</sup>

The commander of 5th Anti-Aircraft Division, who had holed up with about 6,000 men in a wooded area at Păuleşti, northwest of Ploieşti, had avoided any confrontation with the Romanian units until 25 August. As the authorities on the German side still thought they could once again change the military and political situation in the kingdom, Kuderna was preparing his troops to take possession of the oilfields and provide military support for a new ‘national government’.<sup>206</sup> Two days after the Romanians ceased hostilities against the Allies, the attack on the German positions was launched, with German and Romanian guns in the areas of the anti-aircraft batteries firing directly at each other. The small bases on the outskirts of the city were unable to hold out for long, but the Kuderna Group initially stood its ground against the assault at Păuleşti. Nevertheless, by midday on 27 August the town centre and all the refineries had been lost.<sup>207</sup> 5th Anti-Aircraft Division’s position had deteriorated steadily up to 27 August, and the unit was no longer in touch with Combat Group Stahel. In this critical situation, Kuderna applied to the air fleet HQ for instructions on the further conduct of operations. The air fleet responded by passing on the information it had received from the army group, namely that further forces were on the way to relieve the division, but referred insistently to the Führer’s order ‘to hold out to the last man’.<sup>208</sup>

The reinforcements announced by the army group consisted of the weak and decimated Combat Group Stahel, which was to break out of the encirclement north of Bucharest and make for Ploieşti. The army group’s order to continue to perform the allotted task gave Kuderna no room for manoeuvre, so 5th Anti-Aircraft Division was unable to leave the Ploieşti area and fight its way through to the safety of the German lines. The motley division therefore remained in Păuleşti, hoping

<sup>205</sup> Kissel, *Die Katastrophe in Rumänien*, 146 ff.

<sup>206</sup> On learning of the political events in Bucharest, the commander of 5th Anti-Aircraft Division contacted Gerstenberg on the evening of 23 August 1944, and asked the German oil-region commander for instructions. Gerstenberg told General Kuderna that ‘a national government was in the process of being formed and any conflict with Romanians was to be avoided’. See *ibid.* 145, 199 ff.

<sup>207</sup> KTB H.Gr. Südukraine, Abt. Ia, No. 4, i. 80, BA-MA RH 19 V/36, fo. 82; Duțu, Dobre, and Loghin, *Armata Română*, 317, 322.

<sup>208</sup> Kissel, *Die Katastrophe in Rumänien*, 146.



**Map V.vi.4.** The battles in the central section of the front of Army Group North Ukraine (July 1944)

Sources: OKH situation maps, 12, 18, and 23 July 1944, BA-MA, Kart RH2, Ost/1090, 1095, and 1097.



Map V.vi.5. The loss of a continuous front (19 to 31 July 1944)

Sources: OKH situation maps, 19, 23, 27, and 31 July 1944, BA-MA, Kart RH2, Ost/1091, 1099, and 1104.



**Map V.vi.6.** The establishment of a defensive front on the Vistula and in the Beskids (August/September 1944)

Sources: OKH situation maps, 2 Aug., 18 Aug., and 4 Sept. 1944, BA-MA, Kart RH2, Ost/1106, 1123, and 1146.



Map V.vi.7. The autumn battles in the Beskids and Slovakia (September/October 1944)

Sources: OKH situation maps, 4 Sept., 5 Oct., and 29 Oct. 1944, BA-MA, Kart RH2, Ost/1146, 1177, and 1212.



Map V.vi.8. The front in Romania (spring/summer 1944)

Sources: OKH situation map, 20 Aug. 1944, BA-MA, Kart RH2, Ost/1126; Kissel, *Katastrophe in Rumänien*.



Map V.vi.9. The course of operations in Bessarabia and Moldavia (20 to 23 August 1944)

Sources: OKH situation maps, 20, 21, 22, and 23 Aug. 1944, BA-MA, Kart RH2, Ost/1126, 1127, 1128, and 1129; Kissel, *Die Katastrophe in Rumänien*.

I Terr.A.C. 1 = 2nd Inf.T.Div.  
2 = 11th Inf.T.Div.  
3 = 3rd Inf.T.Div.  
4 = 6th Inf.T.Div.

II Terr.A.C. 1 = 4th Inf.T.Div.  
2 = 1st Gds.T.Div.  
3 = 9th Inf.T.Div.  
4 = 9th Inf.Div.

III Terr.A.C. 1 = 21st Inf.T.Div.  
2 = 15th Inf.T.Div.

IV Terr.A.C. 1 = 14th Inf.T.Div.  
2 = 8th Inf.T.Div.  
3 = 7th Inf.T.Div.

V Terr.A.C. 1 = 1st Mtn.Div.  
2 = 8th Cav.Div.  
3 = 13th Inf.T.Div.  
4 = 18th Sec.Btln.  
5 = 1st Armd.T.Div.  
6 = 5th Inf.Mtn.Div.

VI Terr.A.C. 1 = 2nd Mtn.Div.  
2 = 20th Inf.T.Div.  
3 = 18th Inf.T.Div.

VII Terr.A.C. 1 = 1st Cav.T.Div.  
2 = 1st Inf.T.Div.  
3 = 9th Cav.Div.  
4 = 19th Inf.Mtn.Div.

dark blue area = German positions in the area of the Rom. Territorial Army



Map V.vi.10. The disposition of the Romanian Territorial Army (20 August 1944)

Source: Arh.M.Ap.N.Bucharest. Fond M.St.M., Sec.7, dosar 383.



**Map V.vi.11.** The advance by 2nd and 3rd Ukrainian Fronts into Romania (20 to 31 August 1944)

Sources: OKH situation maps, 20, 24, and 31 Aug. 1944, BA-MA, Kart RH2, Ost/1126, 1131, and 1142.



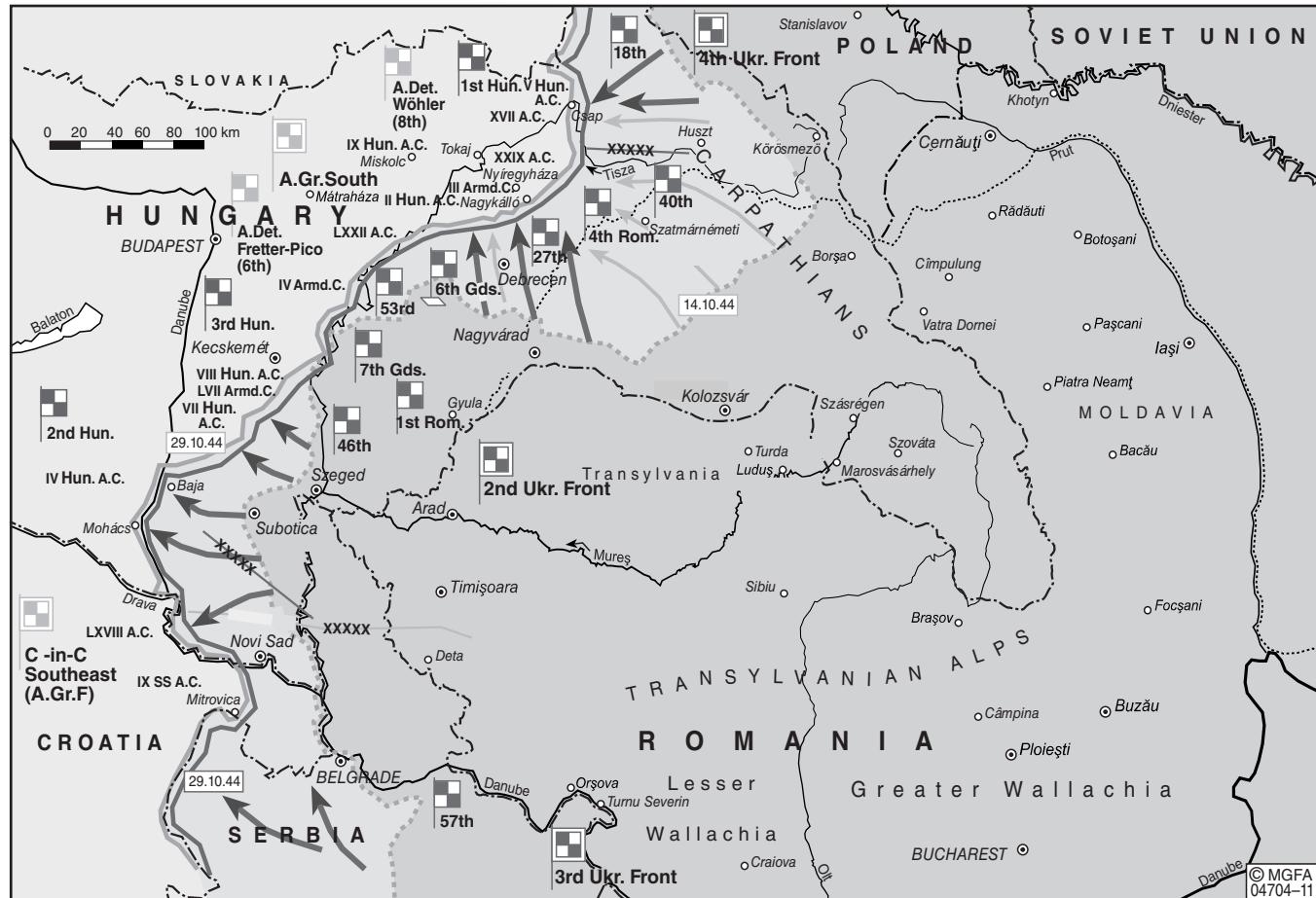
**Map V.vi.12.** The course of the Carpathian front (beginning of September 1944)

Sources: OKH situation map, 5 Sept. 1944, BA-MA, Kart RH2, Ost/1147; Kissel, *Katastrophe in Rumänien*.



Map V.vi.13. The military operations in Transylvania (mid-September to beginning of October 1944)

Sources: OKH situation maps, 21 Sept. and 1 Oct. 1944, BA-MA, Kart RH2, Ost/1168 and 1178.



that the urgently needed reinforcements would soon arrive. On 29 August, a Red Army armoured unit launched an attack on the oilfields from Buzău.<sup>209</sup>

The situation of Combat Group Kuderna, which was also short of mobile anti-tank weapons and, above all, of food, was deteriorating to an alarming extent. That same evening the division received the army group's order to hold its present positions until Combat Group Stahel arrived in the defence zone at Păuleşti, when overall command would be transferred to Stahel. He, in turn, was ordered to 'fight through to the north after destroying all vital installations and weapons'. The order contained the statement by General von Grolman—downright absurd in the circumstances—that 'it is important not to incur unnecessary human and material losses by holding on too long'.<sup>210</sup>

On 30 August, as Combat Group Stahel had still not yet reached the area defended by 5th Anti-Aircraft Division and Kuderna's troops could now barely hold their own against the Soviet and Romanian attacks, the commander of the division decided to break out of the enemy encirclement that night and move north through the Teleajen valley to the Buzău pass. On the following day Combat Group Kuderna was surrounded once again at Slănic Prahova and summoned to surrender. Kuderna refused, and heavy fighting ensued, in the course of which the combat group broke up. While some 2,000 of the men managed to make their way through the passes south-east of Braşov to Army Group South Ukraine's front in Transylvania, large parts of the combat group—including Kuderna himself and Maj.-Gen. Georg Teschner—were taken prisoner by the Romanians at Slănic Prahova.<sup>211</sup> In addition to members of Combat Group Kuderna, the Romanian V Territorial Corps took more than 9,000 Wehrmacht troops prisoner in the area under its command.<sup>212</sup> Stahel had already been obliged to give up the struggle at Gherghiţa three days earlier. The Third Reich's plan to restore a pro-German government in Romania, and gain control of the strategically vital oil, had finally failed.<sup>213</sup>

The wrong assessment of the situation by the German commanders in Romania, and also by the top German political and military authorities, following the Romanian change of front, led to illusions about the actual political and military conditions in the kingdom. The measures ordered and executed on that basis, such as the bombardment of Bucharest and the armed attempt to take over the capital

<sup>209</sup> On 28 August 1944 Russian armoured forces broke through the German defence lines on the Focşani–Buzău road, in the south-eastern approaches to the Carpathians, and pressed forward into the Buzău area. A motorized infantry brigade managed to reach Ploieşti and join in the operations on the following day. KTB H.Gr. Südukraine, Abt. Ia, No. 4, i. 86, 88, 93, BA-MA RH 19 V/36, fos. 88, 90, 95.

<sup>210</sup> KTB H.Gr. Südukraine, Abt. Ia, No. 4, i. 97, BA-MA RH 19 V/36, fo. 99. Given the course operations had taken since 20 August, Army Group South Ukraine HQ was extremely slow to reach this conclusion.

<sup>211</sup> See Kissel, *Die Katastrophe in Rumänien*, 148.

<sup>212</sup> V Territorial Army Corps report, 7, Arh.M.Ap.N., fond Corpul 5 Teritorial, dosar 246, fo. 13; Duşa, Dobre, and Loghin, *Armata Română*, 368. It has been impossible to determine how many Germans were captured by Soviet units in the battles in the oil region.

<sup>213</sup> *România în Războiul Antihitlerist*, 90–101; Kissel, *Die Katastrophe in Rumänien*, 143–8; Hillgruber, 'Die letzten Monate', 396 ff.

and the strategically important oilfields, gave the Sănătescu government reason to declare war on the Third Reich and open hostilities against its former ally. Instead of availing themselves of what was at least a verbal promise of free passage out of the country, the Germans embarked on a military adventure that had no prospect of success and was of no operational use. The men and materials sacrificed in this all-or-nothing game were sorely missed when it came to establishing a reception and defensive line on the other side of the Carpathian ridge in Transylvania.

#### (d) The Army Group's Reaction to the Political Changes in Romania

The high command in Slănic did not receive, either from the German agencies in Bucharest or from the Reich government in Berlin, any information in connection with the major Soviet offensive indicating that there was a serious threat to the political position of the Conducător. Above all, Friessner's talks with Antonescu about the military situation in the Romanian theatre of operations, and the joint intention to move the forces of the two Axis partners back in stages to the Danube–Carpathian Fringe position, gave the army group the impression that the military alliance would hold for the foreseeable future. The army group HQ accordingly planned its military measures for the coming days on that basis.

In the course of 23 August it became clear that the Romanian 4th Army was going it alone and withdrawing from northern Moldavia, and around 20.30 the first rumours reached Slănic from Budapest that the political situation in Romania was now far from transparent. About half an hour after the high command in Slănic received this unconfirmed news from the German military mission, General von Grolman endeavoured to get an accurate picture of the situation in Bucharest. All that Gerstenberg could tell him, on the telephone, was that Antonescu 'has gone to see the king in the afternoon, and has not yet returned'.<sup>214</sup> In the course of the conversation, Gerstenberg said he hoped to know more about the political circumstances in Bucharest in about half an hour.<sup>215</sup> It was not until 22.15 that the army group HQ learned of this from Air Fleet 4. Apparently, King Michael had also received Baron von Killinger. In the course of this audience, the Romanian monarch had reportedly explained that he intended to make peace as soon as possible, and that he did not wish to wage war against the Germans. On the basis of these unconfirmed items of information, Grolman tried to get into direct touch with the German ambassador, and managed to do so around 22.25. In the course of the telephone call, Killinger said that:

he [had] heard during the afternoon that Antonescu had been arrested. He had immediately gone to see the king. The king had explained that the marshal had

<sup>214</sup> KTB H.Gr. Südukraine, Abt. Ia, No. 4, i. 49, BA-MA RH 19 V/36, fo. 51.

<sup>215</sup> The entries in the Army Group South Ukraine war diary contradict Kissel's claim (*Die Katastrophe in Rumänien*, 109) that Gerstenberg had already spoken to the chief of staff in the OKL, Gen. Werner Kreipe, at 20.00, and informed him of the *coup d'état* in Bucharest. Nor is it true that King Michael I made his proclamation on the political and military changes in Romania at 20.00. The radio address did not take place until 22.30. See *Procesul Mareșalului Antonescu*, i. 47.

resigned, and he had then formed a new government. The new government intended to seek an armistice. There was no question of military action against the German army. Any Russian demand to that effect would be rejected. The king had delivered a radio address that evening, announcing that Romania had accepted the Allies' terms for an armistice and was laying down its arms.<sup>216</sup>

Once the high command in Slănic had reliable information at its disposal, Friessner ordered the army group to take overall command of all Wehrmacht units and agencies in Romania with immediate effect. In issuing this order, Friessner was reacting spontaneously to the political changes and, in view of the catastrophic situation in the southern section of the eastern front, took a decision that had been approved neither by Hitler nor by the OKH or OKW. Only at about 23.00 did the army group inform the subordinate military authorities of the events in the kingdom, which radically altered the political and military situation in the southern section of the eastern front. The commander-in-chief ordered all military agencies in Romania to prepare fully to defend themselves, albeit with express instructions that no active measures were to be taken against the former Axis partner.<sup>217</sup>

The two Romanian armies had already been informed of the new situation at about 22.30. General Șteflea's successor as chief of the Great General Staff, General Gheorghe Mihail,<sup>218</sup> notified both army HQs that Antonescu had been deposed by the king, and that a new government had been appointed, headed by Sănătescu. In his telephone call, Mihail informed the army HQs that Romanian units were no longer under the orders of the German high command, and ordered the immediate cessation of all military action against the Soviet forces.<sup>219</sup>

It was only when there was unambiguous information confirming the new situation that Friessner personally notified Hitler of the events and of 'the assumption of overall command of all German military agencies in Romania'.<sup>220</sup> He also explained to Hitler that all German units must be moved back to the Carpathian fringe as quickly as possible in order to exploit the geographical advantage of the mountain barrier for the establishment of a defence line. Hitler said he agreed unreservedly with the army group's proposals and measures, and would confirm those measures in a written directive.<sup>221</sup>

At this point, the bulk of Sixth Army was engaged in a desperate defensive battle south-west of Chișinău to prevent its virtually inevitable encirclement by Soviet troops. The high command in Slănic had very little information about this, as the lines of communication with units east of the Prut had broken down. However, it

<sup>216</sup> KTB H.Gr. Südukraine, Abt. Ia, No. 4, i. 49, BA-MA RH 19 V/36, fo. 51.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid. 50, BA-MA RH 19 V/36, fo. 52.

<sup>218</sup> General Gheorghe Mihail was chief of the Romanian Great General Staff from 23 August to 12 October 1944. See Ardeleanu, *Sefii*, 175–82.

<sup>219</sup> General Mihail's verbal instructions were confirmed in writing by Order No. 678563 of the Great General Staff, which reached the Romanian 3rd and 4th Armies HQs at about 24.00 on 23 August; Rom. 4th Army war diary, August 1944, 6 (23 Aug. 1944), Arh.M.Ap.N., fond Armata 4, dosar 221, 180.

<sup>220</sup> KTB H.Gr. Südukraine, Abt. Ia, No. 4, i. 50 ff., BA-MA RH 19 V/36, fos. 52 ff.

<sup>221</sup> Friessner, *Verratene Schlachten*, 87 ff.

soon became clear to the army group that the three German army corps fighting in the area between the Dniester and the Prut had very little chance of making their way to the German lines in western Moldavia. The Mieth Group too was in danger of being encircled and destroyed in the Huși area. In these new circumstances, the army group ought to have taken immediate steps to establish an interception and defence line for the few remaining units in southern Moldavia, between the Danube delta and the Carpathians or on the Carpathian fringe. The high command in Slănic could not be sure that the battle-worn Wehrmacht units in the army group rear area (*zona de etape*) and in the area west of the demarcation line (*regiunea interioară*) would manage to withdraw to the Carpathian region and thereby avoid capture by Soviet and even possibly by Romanian forces. There was likewise no question of disarming and neutralizing the Romanian units in the army group's area of command, because the necessary forces were lacking. The only forces available to the army group for the establishment of an interception and security line at the foot of the Carpathians were the few units of Eighth Army HQ fighting a defensive battle west of the Seret. In these disastrous circumstances, it was essential to occupy all the approaches to the Carpathian passes as quickly as possible so as to avoid losing the link with the territory of the Reich.

In the hope that not all Romanian commanders would accept King Michael's action, Friessner contacted the commanders-in-chief of the Romanian 3rd and 4th Armies during the night of 23 to 24 August, asking them, in view of the changed circumstances, where they stood on the political issue in Romania. Dumitrescu replied that he had only heard about the radical events in Bucharest on the radio, and the armies had not received any new orders so far. He himself would continue to perform his present task until he received new instructions from the Great General Staff. Dumitrescu also stressed that he personally regretted the political changes but was not in a position to oppose his king.<sup>222</sup> Șteflea said much the same, although at this stage both commanders-in-chief were aware of the orders issued by the new chief of staff, General Mihail. The two army commanders were probably playing for time, because they could not rule out the possibility that the Wehrmacht intended to disarm the Romanian forces and occupy the country. Their concern was not unfounded: the army group was engaged in serious discussions with the OKH operations division about disarming the Romanian units. In the end, the idea was abandoned because there were evidently not enough troops available to perform the task.<sup>223</sup> From these conversations, it was clear to the Germans in Slănic that none of the Romanian commanders was prepared to take a stand against the king.

In view of the changes in the configuration of forces on the southern wing of the eastern front, all that the army group could do was try to organize a stable line of resistance with the few units remaining at its disposal. In order to do so, Friessner

<sup>222</sup> Report from Col.-Gen. Dumitrescu to the Romanian war minister, 10 September 1944, Arh. M.Ap.N., fond Armata 3, dosar 3065, fos. 284 ff.; KTB H.Gr. Südukraine, Abt. Ia, No. 4, i. 59 ff., BA-MA RH 19 V/36, fos. 61 ff.

<sup>223</sup> KTB H.Gr. Südukraine, Abt. Ia, No. 4, i. 60 ff., BA-MA RH 19 V/36, fos. 62 ff.

had to restrain Hitler and the Wehrmacht operations staff from taking armed action against the kingdom. Only if the Romanian forces remained neutral was there a small chance of rescuing substantial sections of the encircled Sixth Army, which could then be employed in establishing a new and stable defence front. Conversely, Hitler's plan to reverse the political situation in Romania by force would make armed conflict with the former Axis partner inevitable. Hitler nevertheless gave orders to take Bucharest, imprison the Romanian monarch and the members of the new government, and install a pro-German regime. On the German side, it was believed in all seriousness that this heavy-handed intervention in Romania's internal affairs—despite the royalist attitude of the officer corps—would not affect relations with the Romanian armed forces,<sup>224</sup> even though both Germany's leading diplomatic representatives in Bucharest, Killinger and Clodius, and the head of the German military mission, General Hansen, urgently warned against taking any such military steps and advised against armed intervention.<sup>225</sup> In these circumstances, important operational measures needed in order to stabilize the southern section of the eastern front were neglected. The commander-in-chief of the army group and his operations department were mainly to blame for these omissions because, although they were perfectly well aware of all the relevant political, military, geographical, and infrastructural factors, they were unwilling, and apparently also unable, to take the operational and tactical decisions that would have minimized the catastrophe in the Romanian theatre of operations.

### (e) The Withdrawal to the Carpathian Ridge

From an operational point of view, Army Group South Ukraine's only remaining option was to establish a new resistance and interception line at the foot of the eastern Carpathians and, if possible, on the eastern border of Wallachia. The high command in Slănic therefore had to endeavour, first and foremost, to protect the approaches to the Carpathian passes. Only if that was done would the beleaguered army group still have some prospect of bringing the front to a halt. However, this called for rapid and innovative action as the situation in western Moldavia and Wallachia was constantly changing. Visibly surprised by the news that the kingdom of Romania had ceased combat operations and broken off bilateral relations with the German Reich, Hitler had agreed unreservedly to Friessner's proposal 'to withdraw the German troops to the Carpathian Fringe position immediately, by the fastest route'.<sup>226</sup> Although, as already mentioned, Hitler had spontaneously announced that he would issue a directive fulfilling all the army

<sup>224</sup> In a telex from Abt. Ia, No. 3240/44, g.Kdos, sent at 01.00 on 24 August 1944, C-in-C Army Group South Ukraine instructed Sixth and Eighth Armies, the German general at the Romanian high command, the admiral of the Black Sea fleet, Air Fleet 4, and other German military agencies that the action against the Romanian king and the new Romanian government was not to affect their relations with the Romanian armed forces; KTB H.Gr. Südukraine, Abt. Ia, No. 4, i. 58, BA-MA RH 19 V/36, fo. 60.

<sup>225</sup> KTB H.Gr. Südukraine, Abt. Ia, No. 4, i. 56, BA-MA RH 19 V/36, fo. 58.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid. 51, BA-MA RH 19 V/36, fo. 53.

group's demands, he did not do so. Consequently, the army group did not know what operational objectives Hitler was pursuing with regard to the precarious situation in the southern section of the eastern front. As a result of the hesitant attitude adopted by both Hitler and the OKH, Friessner's proposals were soon overtaken by events. The army group nevertheless stuck to its operational plan, regardless of the overwhelming events. At the height of the military crisis, the high command in Slănic firmly maintained its position, despite the fact that the changed constellation of forces in the Moldavian–Bessarabian theatre called for further directives. Even when Wenck asked the army group for information on 24 and 25 August, Friessner's operations command was not prompted to take any new initiatives.

At this point, General Wöhler's Eighth Army was the only force that could be called upon for defensive tasks in the Carpathian foothills west of the Seret. This weak army, which had had only the Mieth Group under its command when the Iași–Chișinău operation began,<sup>227</sup> had been obliged to withdraw to the south of the Iași area at a very early stage under pressure from superior Soviet forces. Thus, on 23 August Wöhler still intended to withdraw the army detachment's northern wing to the other side of the Moldova and to hold the positions on the Seret with a bridgehead at Bacău. The commander-in-chief proposed to protect southern Moldavia on an Adjud–Bârlad defensive line, while the Mieth Group, fighting in the Huși area, continued to defend the area between the Bârlad valley and the Prut.<sup>228</sup>

The Romanian 4th Army's withdrawal from the operational command of Army Detachment Wöhler in the night of 23 to 24 August meant that Eighth Army now had to establish a resistance and interception line between Kuty and Adjud with its remaining resources. For this task, the army had at its disposal XVII Army Corps, which was occupying a front line on the left wing in an area outside the Soviet area of operations, the severely depleted LVII Armoured Corps west of Bacău,<sup>229</sup> and the remnants of various troop units operating as the Abraham Group (Lt.-Gen. Erich Abraham), which was defending the section between Bacău and Adjud. Sixth Army, with the remnants of XXIX Army Corps, deployed in the Greater Tecuci–Focșani–Galați area south of Adjud, was attempting to prevent Soviet forces from advancing into Wallachia. Given the relatively small forces at its disposal, Eighth Army HQ could only establish a defensive front in the form of a series of strongpoints on the Moldova and west of the Seret between Fălticeni (on the Moldova, 35 kilometres north of Târgu Neamț) and Adjud, taking advantage of the hilly terrain in the Carpathian foothills.

When the Romanian 4th Army ceased joint operations, Eighth Army was obliged to regroup itself from the remnants of Army Detachment Wöhler in order to establish a stable and, as far as possible, gap-free front with the remaining

<sup>227</sup> On 20 August 1944 Eighth Army had three Romanian and two German divisions in the main battle line, and three divisions of the Romanian army on the Trajan line. The total strength was approximately 70,000, of which about 17,000 members of the Wehrmacht.

<sup>228</sup> Kissel, *Die Katastrophe in Rumänien*, 103.

<sup>229</sup> On 24 August 1944, LVII Armd.A.C. had under its command the remnants of 46th Inf.Div. and the 20th Armd.Div.Cbt.Gr.

forces. While this task caused very few problems on the left wing between Kuty and Târgu Neamț, LVII Armoured Corps had no alternative but to withdraw to the heights west of the Moldova and the Bistrița on 24 August, abandoning the strategically important traffic node of Bacău. Next to LVII Corps, the Abraham Group, with newly formed units made up of stragglers and rear support personnel, endeavoured to prevent the Soviet 7th Guards Army from penetrating into the eastern Carpathians in the Bacău–Adjud area. The battles for the important Carpathian crossings, especially in the southern area of command area, determined Eighth Army's conduct of operations in the last days of August. The Abraham Group now bore the greatest burden, attempting to hold the Trotus valley at Adjud to prevent the loss of the Oituz, Uz, and Ghimeș passes, which were of vital importance for the German forces' withdrawal from Romania. The Abraham Group was holding the advancing Soviet forces back only with great difficulty. The Soviet 7th Guards Army, in particular, was trying to get through the passes to the Brașov area, so as to block the Kuderna and Stahel Combat Groups' withdrawal to Transylvania and bring about the collapse of the Carpathian front. Although the strategically important town of Onești near Târgu Ocna had already fallen into enemy hands on 25 August, the German units initially managed to prevent the Soviet forces from advancing into the Carpathian valleys.<sup>230</sup>

The Abraham Group was in a critical situation from 25 August, when the German units were also attacked by sections of the Romanian 4th Army redeployed in the Greater Bucharest–Ploiești area. In response to the German assault on the Romanian capital, the Greater General Staff had ordered that all German troops, who were now to be regarded as enemies, were to be disarmed and 'driven' out of the kingdom.<sup>231</sup>

In its withdrawal battles in western Moldavia, Eighth Army profited mainly from the fact that the terrain in the eastern Carpathians was favourable to defence. Nevertheless, LVII Armoured Corps and the Abraham Group had no alternative but to withdraw gradually to the mountain ridge by the end of August. XVII Army Corps, on the other hand, essentially succeeded in holding its section of the front in Bukovina. It was only obliged to withdraw to the west at Târgu Neamț, in the southern section of its combat area, in order to avoid losing contact with the neighbouring corps. In the last few days of August the first Hungarian units joined in the hostilities, supporting the army's left wing. In view of the desperate situation on the whole of the eastern front, the OKH could let Army Group South Ukraine have only one more division, which Eighth Army deployed at several crucial defence points.<sup>232</sup>

<sup>230</sup> KTB H.Gr. Südukraine, Abt. Ia, No. 4, i. 52–54, 63–6, 68, BA-MA RH 19 V/36, fos. 54–6, 65–8, 70.

<sup>231</sup> Romanian Greater General Staff, Order Nos. 648603, 678586, 678601, 25 August 1944, Rom. 4th Army war diary, August 1944, 2–5 (25 Aug. 1944), Arh.M.Ap.N., fond Armata 4, dosar 221, fos. 237–40.

<sup>232</sup> KTB H.Gr. Südukraine, Abt. Ia, No. 4, i. 69 ff., 72 ff., 75–7, 81–4, 86–91, 93–5, 97 ff., 100 ff., BA-MA RH 19 V/36, fos. 71 ff., 74 ff., 77–9, 83–6, 88–93, 95–7, 99 ff., 102 ff.; *Die geheimen Tagesberichte*, x. 472, 475, 478, 482, 485, 488, 491, 493.

Even the serious changes in Romania did not appear to the OKH to constitute grounds for intervening in the army group's conduct of operations. It only changed its mind three days after the coup in Bucharest, when it sent the high command in Slănic a directive on the future conduct of operations on the southern wing of the eastern front. The army group was instructed 'to establish a new defence front on the Galați–Focșani–Carpathian Fringe line, and to win back the Danube line between the mouth of the river and Galați'.<sup>233</sup> To carry out this task, the only force left in the area between the Danube and Focșani, apart from remnants of Eighth Army, was XXIX Army Corps, which was withdrawing to the Seret at the time. Since there were no strong Wehrmacht troop units either in northern Dobrogea or in the Galați–Brăila area, the directive was wholly illusory: the OKH completely ignored the military realities in the Romanian theatre of operations. By the following day, XXIX Army Corps had already abandoned the positions on the Seret and was struggling to escape encirclement by the enemy. Only a few units managed to get through to Transylvania, where Army Group South Ukraine HQ intended to establish a new front in the Carpathians to protect Transylvania, using the remnants of Sixth and Eighth Armies, as well as the 4th Mountain Division and Hungarian forces which had been brought in.

Despite all the difficulties, Army Group South Ukraine established a defence front in the eastern Carpathians at the end of August with the few units that managed to escape from the inferno in the Moldavian–Bessarabian area of operations. In this, the army group mainly profited from the fact that the terrain was favourable to defence, an essential requirement if the depleted German troops were to withstand the attacks by Soviet and Romanian forces. In particular, the fact that the main effort of the Red Army operations was directed at capturing the Ploiești oil region and taking possession of the Romanian capital and the Wallachian lowland plain proved to be a stroke of luck for Army Group South Ukraine. It was only owing to these factors that Eighth Army had the opportunity to consolidate its forces and continue the defensive battle.

#### (f) **The Destruction of Sixth Army**

At the time of the political and military rupture in Romania, the German Sixth Army had very little chance left of preventing disaster in the Bessarabian–Moldavian theatre of war. Large German units appeared to be on the brink of destruction, not only in the Chișinău area, where the remnants of four corps comprising 13 divisions in all were desperately trying to reach the Prut, but also in the region to the north and west of Huși, where IV Army Corps—the Mieth Group—was engaged in a desperate defensive battle against the far superior forces of 2nd Ukrainian Front. The Mieth Group, which had been placed under Sixth Army HQ on the afternoon of 23 August, was struggling to halt the Soviet attack north of Huși, between the Bârlad valley and the Prut, so as to enable the four corps

<sup>233</sup> KTB H.Gr. Südukraine, Abt. Ia, No. 4, i. 71, BA-MA RH 19 V/36, fo. 73.

in Bessarabia to cross the river and give them a chance to reach the Danube–Carpathian Fringe defence line. In case the Soviet 52nd Army and 6th Armoured Army succeeded in getting past the Mieth Group and pushing southwards, Sixth Army HQ had deployed the remnants of XXIX Corps on the Bârlad–Falciu line to shield southern Moldavia. To protect the eastern flank, LXXII Army Corps had been specially deployed on the lower Prut between Cahul and Galați, together with the remnants of 13th Armoured Division and weak units from Galați, Brăila, and Focșani.<sup>234</sup>

The German Sixth Army, which still had the remains of seven army corps at its disposal, was affected only indirectly by Romania's withdrawal from the joint conduct of operations. The only Romanian unit under its command since the start of the Soviet Iași–Chișinău operation was the Romanian 14th Infantry Division, which was deployed with VII Corps and, on the evening of 23 August, was withdrawing with that corps from the Răut to the Prut. So, from 24 August on, Sixth Army HQ could rely exclusively on Wehrmacht units for the conduct of operations. Nevertheless, the lack of resistance of the Romanian units, which were hopelessly inferior to the attacking Soviet forces in every respect, had contributed significantly to the inferno in the area of Sixth Army. On the fifth day of the major Soviet offensive, VII, XXXXIV, LII, and XXX Corps were engaged in a defensive battle against four full-strength Soviet armies in the region west of Chișinău. Not only in Bessarabia but in Moldavia too, the Mieth Group was attempting north of Huși to prevent three Soviet armies from advancing into southern Moldavia. Altogether, Sixth Army faced six Soviet armies of 2nd and 3rd Ukrainian Front, whose task on 24 August was to continue the offensive with all speed, complete the encirclement of the German forces, take the section of the German defence line on the Seret, and press on without delay to Galați, Ismail, and the lower reaches of the Prut in southern Bessarabia.<sup>235</sup>

In the face of this onslaught, the commander-in-chief, General Fretter-Pico, had no alternative but to withdraw the units under his command from Bessarabia to the west bank of the Prut as quickly as possible. An attempt had to be made to keep a corridor open between Bârlad and the Prut, to enable any encircled forces to get back to the Danube–Carpathian Fringe position. For these tasks, Sixth Army HQ had only three weak, battle-worn corps at its disposal in central and southern Moldavia. Of the four army corps in Bessarabia that were withdrawing to the Prut, VII Army Corps, deployed on the left wing, had the best prospect of reaching Moldavia, as its four divisions were already close to the two bridges over the Prut at Scopoșeni and Leușeni on the evening of 23 August. 370th Infantry Division, fighting on the left flank, managed to cross the river that same night. On entering Moldavia, the unit came under the command of the Mieth Group, which assigned it the task of clearing the enemy forces out of Huși to reopen the way for the corps to withdraw to the Danube–Carpathian Fringe position. In the course of 24 August, 376th Infantry Division also managed to pass through the eye of the

<sup>234</sup> Kissel, *Die Katastrophe in Rumänien*, 117–19.

<sup>235</sup> Mazulenko, *Die Zerschlagung der Heeresgruppe Südukraine*, 72.

needle at Scopoşeni. This division, now also under the command of the German IV Corps, was ordered to establish a defence line north of Huşi in order to halt the enemy advance and prevent the loss of the Prut river crossings at Scopoşeni and Leuşeni.<sup>236</sup> The Romanian 14th Infantry Division, whose spearheads had reached the eastern bank of the river border between Moldavia and Bessarabia at the time of Romania's withdrawal from the Axis Pact, crossed the river in two groups the following day. In Moldavia the division remained divided. The eastern group was taken in by Soviet forces north-east of Huşi, while the western group, after crossing the Prut, made for Arsura–Huşi, disarming German units at Duda, north of Huşi, on the way.<sup>237</sup> Only the corps staff and 106th Infantry Division, which were supposed to cross the river at Leuşeni, failed to make it, because the Soviet VII Motorized Corps had captured the bridge in the meantime. The unit's attempt to withdraw northwards to the emergency bridge at Scopoşeni also came to nothing. So this division too was exposed to the inferno in Bessarabia.<sup>238</sup>

While VII Army Corps' situation on Sixth Army's left wing was still, to all appearances, relatively favourable on 23 and 24 August, XXX Corps, which had managed to fight its way back to the Ciberna area on the right wing of the area of operations and had been under constant attack by the Soviet 57th Army, was already in a disastrous situation at this point. The constant attacks of the advancing enemy forces, combined with the Soviet 37th Army's ongoing attacks on the corps' southern flank, delayed XXX Army Corps' westward retreat and forced its northwards, causing it to encroach increasingly on the neighbouring LII Corps' withdrawal sector.<sup>239</sup> The pace of 37th Army's advance had even more serious consequences for the situation in the Bessarabian theatre of war as a whole. This large Soviet formation was able to push west unimpeded into central Bessarabia, and not only outflank the retreating Sixth Army but also veer north-west into the Taraclia–Satu Nou area, 20 kilometres east of Cimişlia. It then stood facing XXX, LII, and XXXXIV Corps, reducing their room for manoeuvre and cutting off the way to the river border between Moldavia and Bessarabia.<sup>240</sup> Although 2nd and 3rd Ukrainian Fronts were unable to close the circle round Sixth Army on the eastern bank of the Prut on 24 August, the bulk of the army was nevertheless hemmed in. This success was attributable partly to the Soviet 52nd Army south of Huşi, which had broken through to the Prut and cut the Mieth Group's narrow corridor on the west bank of the river. As a result, on the evening of 24 August there were five army corps with 17 divisions enclosed in the Huşi–Gura Galbenă–Nisporeni area.

At the time when the ordered withdrawal from the Răut and the Dniester to the Prut was descending into chaos, neither the Sixth Army commander-in-chief,

<sup>236</sup> KTB H.Gr. Südukraine, Abt. Ia, No. 4, i. 52 ff., 61–3, BA-MA RH 19 V/36, fos. 54 ff., 63–5.

<sup>237</sup> Duțu, Dobre, and Loghin, *Armata Română*, 180.

<sup>238</sup> Kissel, *Die Katastrophe in Rumänien*, 118 ff.

<sup>239</sup> Ibid. 119 ff.; Benary, *Die Berliner Bären-Division*, 178–83; Willemer, *Die 15. Infanterie-Division*, 202–6.

<sup>240</sup> KTB H.Gr. Südukraine, Abt. Ia, No. 4, i. 52 ff., 61 ff., BA-MA RH 19 V/36, fos. 52 ff., 63 ff.; Kissel, *Die Katastrophe in Rumänien*, 119 ff.; Willemer, *Die 15. Infanterie-Division*, 202; Lang, *Die Geschichte der 384. Infanterie-Division*, 25–7.

General Fretter-Pico, nor his chief of staff was with the hard-pressed troops in the Bessarabian theatre of operations. As the Sixth Army HQ command post had been moved to the area south of Tecuci, the army command was now outside the enclosed area, some 300 kilometres away from the action,<sup>241</sup> and had very little information about the dramatic events east of the Prut. The radio and telephone connections in the area of operations had almost all broken down. What is more, those in charge at Sixth Army HQ had neglected to assign one of the commanding generals to take charge of the encircled forces if developments made it impossible to lead operations from the command post in Moldavia.<sup>242</sup> As a result of Sixth Army HQ's behaviour in this critical situation, the command authorities and the various units were left to their own devices. So each unit endeavoured, without any coordination or control, to reach the Prut as quickly as possible in order to escape destruction by the enemy forces. Instead of seeking a solution to the situation that could rescue the eastern section of Sixth Army from the chaos, the lack of action on the part of Sixth Army HQ suggests that the encircled units were simply left to their fated destruction without any clear leadership or any specific combat instructions.

After 3rd Ukrainian Front had failed to completely encircle the four Wehrmacht corps in Bessarabia on 24 August, the armies under its command were ordered to split the German forces and destroy them. The infantry units were to attack the enclosed German troops concentrically from the south-east, east, and north in the Sărata Galbenă–Gura Galbenă area, while the armoured units, in conjunction with the Soviet 52nd Army and 2nd Ukrainian Front's XVIII Armoured Corps, prevented an enemy breakthrough in the Dranceni–Leova section. Although the enclosed German forces proved to be in no state to take effective action against the superior enemy forces, the four corps nevertheless attempted to beat off the strong Soviet attacks and break through the enclosing ring southwards to the Prut river crossings, believing that the west bank of the river was still in German hands.

On 25 August, while the German troops in the Bessarabian area of operations were engaged in a hopeless battle for survival, Army Group South Ukraine simply recorded that 'the position of Sixth Army, which was virtually encircled', was serious.<sup>243</sup> In his evening briefing with Guderian, the army group's commander-in-chief, wholly misjudging the real situation, expressed the hope that parts of the

<sup>241</sup> Fretter-Pico claims in his memoirs (*... verlassen von des Sieges Göttern*, 154) that he 'received an explicit order not to allow himself to be caught in the encirclement forming around the main body of Sixth Army'. Kissel gives a similar version, based on a statement by Fretter-Pico: 'The army group's Ia [...] arrived in Comrat [...] in the morning [of 22 August 1944]. He passed on the "Führer order" that the army staff must not allow themselves to be encircled'; Kissel, *Die Katastrophe in Rumänien*, 100 and 166, n. 100. Nothing was found in Army Group South Ukraine's records to indicate that the army group HQ received such a 'Führer order' or that Sixth Army HQ was given any such instructions.

<sup>242</sup> Mazulenko (*Die Zerschlagung der Heeresgruppe Südukraine*, 77) claims that the general commanding XXX A.C., Lt.-Gen. Georg Postel, 'had assumed overall command of the breakout attempt'. That is also Kissel's version (*Die Katastrophe in Rumänien*, 125). While no evidence has been found that another of the four commanding generals (Gen. Ernst-Eberhard Hell, VII A.C.; Gen. Ludwig Müller, XXXXIV A.C.; or Gen. Erich Buschenhagen, LII A.C.) took command of the forces encircled in Bessarabia, it is highly unlikely that Postel was chosen for the job, since he was the lowest of the four in respect of rank, age, and military seniority.

<sup>243</sup> KTB H.Gr. Südukraine, Abt. Ia, No. 4, i. 68, BA-MA RH 19 V/36, fo. 70.

enclosed Sixth Army would make their way through to the German lines.<sup>244</sup> But this withdrawal too was chaotic. Of the four corps comprising Sixth Army's eastern group, only a few remnants withstood the enemy attacks until 28 August. All communication lines between the army HQ and the eastern group had been cut since 26 August. Air reconnaissance provided the army group with the last information it was to receive from the Bessarabian theatre of operations, where 'the remnants of XXX, LII, and XXXIV A.C.' were 'crammed together in an extremely small area on the east bank of the Prut, 20 km east of Huşi, under attack on all sides by enemy armoured forces', and engaged 'in extremely heavy combat'.<sup>245</sup> It was only in the course of the day that the army group HQ also understood that it was unlikely, 'in view of the increasingly strong encircling front and the growing supply problems [ . . . ], that battle-worthy sections of these divisions will be extricated'.<sup>246</sup> Only a few groups eventually managed to cross the Prut, where some of them came upon troops of IV Corps, who were also enclosed.<sup>247</sup>

On the other hand, the fate of the only German division fighting in southern Bessarabia under the command of the Romanian 3rd Army was already sealed. The German 9th Infantry Division, placed under the command of the Romanian III Corps on 22 August as a result of developments south of the Tiraspol bridgehead, was driven south-west in the course of the Soviet 46th Army offensive and encircled on 23/4 August in the Sărata area. Attempts to break through the encircling ring failed. On the evening of 24 August the remnants of the division decided to lay down their arms and surrender. From that time on, there were no German troops left in central and southern Bessarabia.<sup>248</sup>

The bulk of IV Army Corps was engaged in operations to the north and west of Huşi, with the task of keeping the Prut river crossings in that region open for Sixth Army's eastern group. The Mieth Group was obliged to hold firm on the defence front north of Huşi on account of the dramatic developments on the other side of the Prut. As a result of the Soviet 37th and 57th Armies' operation south-west of Carbuna, situated 25 kilometres north-east of Cimişlia, which had blocked XXXXIV, LII, and XXX Army Corps' way back to the river crossings at Leuşeni, Stanileşti, and Leova, the only available bridge for the German troops withdrawing westwards was now the bridge at Scobeşeni. IV Army Corps' operations kept substantial forces tied down in the northern section of its combat area, so those forces were lacking for defence against the Soviet attacks south and south-west of the town of Huşi. That was the main reason why the Soviet 18th Armoured Corps was able to capture that important traffic node at the entrance to the lower Prut valley on 24 August. At this decisive juncture XXIX Army Corps was not strong enough to establish a defensive line in the northern Bârlad valley and strengthen the connection with the Mieth Group, so IV Corps was also encircled from then on.<sup>249</sup>

<sup>244</sup> Ibid. <sup>245</sup> *Die geheimen Tagesberichte*, x. 478.

<sup>246</sup> KTB H.Gr. Südukraine, Abt. Ia, No. 4, i. 69, BA-MA RH 19 V/36, fo. 71.

<sup>247</sup> Kissel, *Die Katastrophe in Rumänien*, 125–8.

<sup>248</sup> Rom. III Army Corps war diary, April–August 1944, 22 and 23 Aug. 1944, Arh.M.Ap.N., fond Corpul III Armata, dosar 111, fos. 190 ff., 195; Kissel, *Die Katastrophe in Rumänien*, 120.

<sup>249</sup> Kissel, *Die Katastrophe in Rumänien*, 118, 128 ff.; Rehm, *Jassy*, 78–85.

In the worrying situation in which the Mieth Group now found itself, there were three possibilities for the further course of operations. The most obvious was to recapture Huşi and open up the Prut valley to the south without delay. Alternatively, it might have been feasible for the corps, with its five hard-hit divisions, to break through westwards to the Carpathians. The commanding general finally decided to stick to the task in hand. The area north of Huşi was held accordingly, at least until 25 August, and an attempt was made to retake the town and the river valley at Stanileşti and Leova, in order to enable Sixth Army's eastern group to cross to the west bank. The Mieth Group had no accurate information about the operational situation in the Bessarabian theatre of war, so it was also unaware that the river crossings at Stanileşti and Leova were already blocked on the east bank by units of the Soviet 37th Army. Since the bridges at Stanileşti and Leova had to be reopened, IV Corps had to liberate both Huşi and the Prut valley south of the town. The commanding general decided on this option. On 25 August he gave orders for the town to be taken, but the units deployed were not strong enough. The corps HQ was obliged to move the attack to the west, in order to bypass the town, and to press on southwards to Urlaţi and Hoceni. The breakthrough west of the city was completed successfully on 26 August, but the limited local offensive came to a standstill in the Urlaţi–Hoceni area, because the Soviet 52nd Army had established a strong defence line west of the Stanileşti and Leova bridges.

On 27 August, after the battle-worn IV Corps units had spent two days endeavouring in vain to break through the Soviet lines, Mieth decided to break out of the encirclement in a westerly direction with what was left of the corps. Although the commanding general of IV Corps had changed his operational intentions in view of the developments and because his troops were completely exhausted, and had abandoned the battle for the Prut river crossings, the army group still thought that at least some units of the eastern group would be able to get out of Bessarabia and reach the German lines. For that reason, Sixth Army HQ now put IV Army Corps in command of all enclosed units on both sides of the Prut.<sup>250</sup> This would have been a sensible move at an earlier point but, as matters now stood in the greater Huşi area, it came too late. It is probable that neither the Mieth Group nor the corps and divisions in Bessarabia received the Sixth Army directive, as there were no telecommunication connections. This assumption is supported, in particular, by the fact that Mieth stopped the attack on Hoceni and ordered the breakout from the encirclement. By his decision to place the remnants of the four corps on the east bank of the Prut under the command of IV Army Corps, the Sixth Army commander-in-chief, Fretter-Pico, avoided direct responsibility for the fate of the troops fighting for their lives in Bessarabia.

Friessner still nurtured the groundless hope that some battle-worthy units could be rescued from the inferno in Bessarabia. During his visit to the Sixth Army command post on 27 August, he ordered 'the divisions east of the Prut to turn back, cross the Prut further to the north, and then attempt to break through westwards to the Carpathians with the divisions that were already located further

<sup>250</sup> KTB H.Gr. Südukraine, Abt. Ia, No. 4, i. 75, BA-MA RH 19 V/36, fo. 77.

to the west'.<sup>251</sup> The army group's directive was sent blind the same evening, by radio, to the encircled command and units of Sixth Army.

In the first phase of its attempted breakout on the morning of 28 August, the Mieth Group concentrated on taking Vutcani and the Bârlad section to the west. In the next phase, it planned to cross the Bârlad in close order, then split up and press forward to the Carpathian passes in separate combat groups. The plan was essentially successful up to the capture of the high ground west of Vutcani. After that, the attack collapsed in the course of 29 August, not only because the enemy forces were superior but also because the German troops were completely exhausted. A few small groups fought their way through to the German lines in Transylvania in the course of the next few weeks, but the rest of the Mieth Group was destroyed by the end of August in the area round Vutcani.<sup>252</sup>

By 25 August XXIX Corps, which had been assigned the task of protecting the section of the line between the Bârlad and the Prut south of Huşi against Soviet assaults, and keeping the bridgeheads at Leova and Falcu open, was already unable to hold its own any longer against the superior strength of the Soviet 52nd Army. The northward counter-attack with the remnants of the armoured and mobile units, aimed at restoring the connection with the Mieth Group and retaking the Leova bridgehead, also had to be abandoned on 26 August as a result of enemy superiority. The attack, which was extremely important for the conduct of the forthcoming operation in the Buzău–Galaţi area, failed largely because of a lack of coordination between IV and XXIX Corps. Mieth, who had not been informed of the proposed counter-offensive south of Huşi, stuck to his task of taking the area north of the city. So the chance of breaking through the encircling ring with a coordinated attack from north and south, and opening it up at least to some extent, was lost. When XXIX Corps' operation failed in the course of 26 August, it was ordered by Sixth Army HQ to withdraw to the south bank of the Seret between Galaţi and Naneşti.<sup>253</sup> In the course of that withdrawal, it managed to retake the Seret river crossing at Naneşti, which was already in Soviet hands, and hold it until all the units of the corps that were still engaged in defensive battles against the pursuing enemy forces north of the river had crossed the Seret. While XXIX Army Corps was establishing a temporary defensive line between Naneşti and Galaţi, 2nd Ukrainian Front, with the Soviet 27th and 6th Armoured Armies, was able to move south along the Adjud–Focşani–Rîmnicul Sărat–Buzău road without impediment, outflank XXIX Corps to the west in the course of 27 August, and cut off the way back to the Carpathian passes. As a result, the defensive line on the Seret lost its operational significance, especially since, as the army group had already realized on the morning of 27 August, it could no longer be held with the forces available.<sup>254</sup>

<sup>251</sup> Ibid. 78, BA-MA RH 19 V/36, fo. 80.

<sup>252</sup> Kissel, *Die Katastrophe in Rumänien*, 129–32; Rehm, Jassy, 115–31; Sänger, *Die 79. Infanterie-Division*, 234–9.

<sup>253</sup> KTB H.Gr. Südukraine, Abt. Ia, No. 4, i. 71, BA-MA RH 19 V/36, fo. 73.

<sup>254</sup> Report by Major General von Grolmann to Lt.-Col. von dem Knesebeck, 1st General Staff Officer, OKH Operations Division, in a telephone conversation at 12.45 on 27 August 1944, KTB H. Gr. Südukraine, Abt. Ia, No. 4, i. 79, BA-MA RH 19 V/36, fo. 81.

As 2nd Ukrainian Front intended, after its breakthrough at Focşani, to roll up the Seret line from the rear, Friessner instructed XXIX Corps to withdraw towards Buzău and block the Carpathian spurs between Ploieşti and Focşani.<sup>255</sup> This decision by the commander-in-chief also came too late for XXIX Army Corps to act on it, as the spearheads of two Soviet armies had already advanced past Buzău to Ploieşti. When the corps reached the area south of Buzău on the following day, it was obliged to recognize that it no longer had the necessary combat strength to break through the massive Soviet defence block on the edge of the Carpathians. In the circumstances, the commanding general gave the armoured units permission to withdraw southwards to Bulgaria. Some units attempted to do so, while others, led by the commanding general, tried to break through the enemy lines and reach the Carpathian passes. In the case of XXIX Corps too, only small groups were able to avoid capture by the Red Army or internment in Bulgaria.<sup>256</sup>

The battles in Bessarabia and Moldavia, which resulted in the almost complete destruction of six corps and 20 divisions, and the loss of some 150,000 German troops,<sup>257</sup> show the extent of the errors committed in the command of Sixth Army. During the months when the army was in the Romanian theatre of operations, both the army itself and the army group failed to plan or prepare for a possible withdrawal to the Prut line or the Danube–Carpathian Fringe position. Moreover, the army group stuck firmly to an operational concept based on the deployment of mobile and armoured reserves at a time when the armoured units had already been moved to other sections of the front. The army command was also too late in recognizing how dangerous its situation was in the defensive positions north and east of Chişinău. It is therefore no surprise that the withdrawal to the Prut, necessitated by the operational situation, ended in chaos. For this, and for Sixth Army's downfall in Romania, several factors were decisive. In the first place, Sixth Army HQ wholly underestimated the impact of the Soviet offensive on 20 August, and it accordingly made no preparations to react immediately and effectively to an encirclement by the enemy. The high command in Tarutino failed to pass on information about the start of the large-scale enemy offensive or to take emergency measures, so the command authorities and units subordinate to it were unaware of the serious changes on the southern wing of the eastern front. As a result, the troops on the Răut–Dniester front were unable to adjust to the new situation. In addition, the army command post was a long way from the area of operations, and the available means of communication were extremely limited, so when it became clear that there was a danger of encirclement, Sixth Army HQ had almost no means of

<sup>255</sup> Telephone conversation between C-in-C Army Group South Ukraine and the chief of the Army General Staff at 23.15 on 27 August 1944; KTB H.Gr. Südukraine, Abt. Ia, KTB No. 4, i. 80, BA-MA RH 19 V/36, fo. 82.

<sup>256</sup> Kissel, *Die Katastrophe in Rumänien*, 133–9; Fretter-Pico, ... verlassen von des Sieges Göttern, 154–9; *Die geheimen Tagesberichte*, x. 475, 478, 482, 485, 488, and 490; *Geschichte des zweiten Weltkrieg 1939–1945*, ix. 132 ff.; *Deutschland im zweiten Weltkrieg*, vi. 68.

<sup>257</sup> KTB H.Gr. Südukraine, Abt. Ia, No. 4, i. 150 ff. (5 Sept. 1944), BA-MA RH 19 V/36, fos. 152 ff.; Study P-114c, pt. 7, ch. 1, 103 ff., BA-MA ZA 1/2077, fos. 155 ff.; Kissel, *Die Katastrophe in Rumänien*, 132 ff.

exercising effective central control over the course of operations in the Chişinău–Huşi area as a whole. When things had reached the stage where the hostilities in Bessarabia and on the west bank of the Prut were coming to an end, and the almost complete destruction of Sixth Army could no longer be prevented, the Sixth Army commander-in-chief, Fretter-Pico, abandoned the encircled units to their fate. This tragic outcome finally dispelled the illusion that the Soviet offensive in northern Bessarabia could be halted with the resources of a single army.

### (g) The Withdrawal to Bulgaria

While most German troops in the Romanian theatre of operations tried to reach the Carpathians, the only way out for the units deployed in Dobrogea was to withdraw to Bulgarian territory. The units in question comprised some 50,000 German troops, mainly belonging to the navy, stationed in the Constanţa area under the command of Admiral Black Sea. They were taken by surprise both by the political developments in Romania and by the Soviet 57th Army's rapid advance in southern Bessarabia. As a result, the German units east of the Danube were soon left to fend for themselves.

When the Romanian 3rd Army ceased hostilities on 24 August and withdrew to the area south of the Danube, 3rd Ukrainian Front was able to advance westwards into the Bessarabian coastal region unimpeded. On 25 August, spearheads of the Soviet 57th Army aiming to take control of the Dobrogea region had already reached the Danube estuary and were crossing the river at Ismail and Tulcea. Only a short time before, the remnants of the Romanian 3rd Army had left Bessarabia at Chilia and were moving into rearward positions in the Bucharest–Ploieşti area.<sup>258</sup> Col.-Gen. Petre Dumitrescu's army had also moved out of northern Dobrogea, so as not to get in the way of the Soviet 57th Army's offensive operations. By the evening of 25 August the Soviet spearheads had already reached Babadag in their advance to the Bulgarian border. So the Soviet forces were now within 50 kilometres of Constanţa, where the naval units were still busy making defensive preparations and evacuating the port and the city.<sup>259</sup> In so doing, the Admiral Black Sea, Vice-Admiral Helmuth Brinkmann, was endeavouring to comply to some extent with Hitler's order of the previous day that the port at Constanţa and the surrounding area were to be occupied immediately.<sup>260</sup> However, there were not enough troops with ground combat experience to perform this task, and by 24 August it was far too late for such measures. The German naval units were unable to overcome the resistance of the numerically superior Romanian troops, especially as they had no support from Luftwaffe or army units, which had already been withdrawn by that time. In these circumstances, Brinkmann decided on the afternoon of 25 August to conduct the ground operations from the Tirpitz battery under Naval Commander Romania, and

<sup>258</sup> Rom. III Army Corps war diary, April–September 1944, 25–9 Aug. 1944, Arh.M.Ap.N., fond Corpul 3 Armata, dosar 111, fos. 209–22; Duşa, Dobre, and Loghin, *Armata Română*, 35, 112, 162, 182; KTB Skl, pt. A, lx/II. 641.

<sup>259</sup> Kissel, *Die Katastrophe in Rumänien*, 139 ff.

<sup>260</sup> KTB Skl, pt. A, lx/II. 611.

ordered the seaborne units to leave the port of Constanța and move to Mangalia. All troops unfit for combat were to be taken to Bulgaria. This measure was contrary to an order issued by Naval Group South in Sofia early in the afternoon, forbidding any encroachment on Bulgarian territory because of the potentially unfavourable repercussions on Bulgaria's political position.<sup>261</sup>

That order from Naval Group South was prompted by the huge shift in political opinion in Bulgaria against Germany in the last few days of August, as a result of the disastrous situation in the Romanian theatre of operations and the *coup d'état* in the neighbouring country. A political development aimed at withdrawing from the war with as little friction as possible was reaching its climax. That process, which had started in the summer of 1943 as a result of German military failures, gathered strength as the Axis powers suffered increasing setbacks in all theatres of war. As to making peace, Bulgaria's foreign-policy arrangements had the clear advantage that all the government needed to do was to approach the western powers through diplomatic channels to agree on the necessary terms. According to the state authorities in Sofia, there was no need to conduct negotiations with the Soviet government since the country was not at war with the USSR and had always taken care not to be drawn into the armed conflict between the USSR and Germany. Although Bulgaria had taken a number of steps since the middle of 1943 to loosen its economic ties with Germany, to improve bilateral relations with the Soviet Union, and to close the Black Sea ports to German warships, all attempts to make peace with the western powers had failed. Sofia's efforts came to nothing primarily because of the western Allies' dilatory response, but also because Great Britain and the United States insisted on unconditional surrender without at the same time guaranteeing to protect the kingdom against military attacks by the Third Reich.

After the Soviet Iași–Chișinău operation had led to the collapse of the German-Romanian front, the Romanian forces had ceased military operations, and the kingdom had broken off diplomatic relations with National Socialist Germany, the Bulgarian leadership fell into turmoil under the pressure of German and Soviet demands. At the last moment, they strove to avoid becoming a victim of the armed conflict.<sup>262</sup> Bulgaria withdrew its armed forces from the occupied territories in Thrace and Macedonia, and demanded of Germany that the Wehrmacht units leave the country immediately. On 6 September the Bulgarian government broke off diplomatic relations with Germany, but even a cabinet reshuffle on 1–2 September was ultimately to no avail. The foreign-policy concept of the Bulgarian leadership fell to pieces on 5 September, when the USSR broke off bilateral contacts and declared war on the kingdom. Three days later, Soviet armed forces marched into Bulgaria unopposed.<sup>263</sup>

The consequences of the political volte-face in Bulgaria were felt particularly sharply by the Wehrmacht units fleeing from Romania to the neighbouring country. The government in Sofia was naturally afraid that an over-accommodating

<sup>261</sup> Ibid. 649. <sup>262</sup> KTB OKW, iv/1, 809.

<sup>263</sup> Hoppe, *Bulgarien*, 148–85; Gosztony, 'Der Krieg zwischen Bulgarien und Deutschland', 23–8; Rhode, 'Bulgarien', 1256.

treatment of German troops could be ‘interpreted as an attitude of hostility to the Allies’.<sup>264</sup> On 25 August it changed its policy and began disarming all members of German units who fled into Bulgaria from the neighbouring country. At the same time, the Bulgarian minister of war, General Rusi Rusev, asked the German military mission to instruct Wehrmacht troops entering the country from Romania to deposit their weapons at collection points set up by the Bulgarian 3rd Army. The German military attaché, General Heinrich Gädé, objected to this request as contrary to the principles of the Tripartite Pact, but Rusev issued the order to disarm despite the German objection.<sup>265</sup> The Bulgarians did refrain from interning Wehrmacht troops but, after the Soviet government expressed its displeasure, a start was eventually made on this too.<sup>266</sup> Hitler categorically refused to accept it,<sup>267</sup> but agreed to the honourable disarmament of members of the Wehrmacht on condition that officers were allowed to keep all their weapons, and NCOs and other ranks their bayonets.<sup>268</sup> A further condition was that ‘the rest of the weapons that are confiscated [...] are to be transported in a special railway carriage with our troops, under Bulgarian guard, and returned after the Wehrmacht units in question have crossed through Bulgaria’.<sup>269</sup> The measures taken by the Bulgarian army after 24 August caused a considerable amount of tension, leading to local armed clashes in some cases.<sup>270</sup>

Despite the changed political relations, the government in Sofia applied the above measures only to German troops fleeing from the Romanian theatre of war. Wehrmacht units stationed in Bulgaria, as well as Wehrmacht agencies in the country, were not affected, and the state authorities endeavoured to have the German forces leave the country immediately.<sup>271</sup> Nevertheless, by the beginning of September almost 20,000 members of the Wehrmacht, most of them from the area under the command of Admiral Black Sea, had been disarmed and detained. As well as naval units, a few units from Army Group South Ukraine and the German military mission in Romania managed to withdraw to the territory of the Bulgarian Axis partner. Some local command posts were very lax in implementing the internment measures, so a good many German troops had escaped Bulgarian custody by the time diplomatic relations were broken off on 6 September.<sup>272</sup> Internment was also lifted in many cases following negotiations with Naval Group South, and several hundred marines were able to leave the country as

<sup>264</sup> Hoppe, *Bulgarien*, 168. After the Bulgarian prime minister, Ivan Bagryanov, had declared in the Sobranie (Bulgarian parliament) on 17 August 1944 that the country was returning to a policy of neutrality, had confirmed that intention on 23 August, and had announced the kingdom’s withdrawal from the war, Bulgaria was obliged under international law to disarm and intern all combatants then on Bulgarian soil who had taken part in the hostilities between the Axis powers and the Allies.

<sup>265</sup> OB Südost/H.Gr. F, Abt. Ia, annex 4 to KTB No. 3, BA-MA RH 19 XI/18, fo. 127.

<sup>266</sup> Ibid., fo. 132.

<sup>267</sup> KTB OB Südost/H.Gr. F, Abt. Ia, No. 3, 256, BA-MA RH 19 XI/14, fo. 255.

<sup>268</sup> KTB Skl. pt. A, Ix/II. 738.

<sup>269</sup> OB Südost/H.Gr. F, Abt. Ia, annex 4 to KTB No. 3, BA-MA RH 19 XI/18, fo. 133.

<sup>270</sup> Hillgruber, *Hitler*, 224.

<sup>271</sup> Nikolov, *Balgarsko-germanskie voyneno-ikonomicheskiye otnoshenia*, 117–20.

<sup>272</sup> Schmidt, *Die Geschichte der 10. Division*, 246; Hinze, *Mit dem Mut der Verzweiflung*, 227 ff., 230 ff.

a result.<sup>273</sup> For many, however, the hope that in reaching Bulgarian territory they had escaped being taken prisoner of war by the Soviets proved a delusion, because after 8 September the former Axis partner handed over to the Red Army all the German troops it had in custody.

In less than two weeks the southern section of the eastern front had collapsed and the vitally important Ploieşti oil region had been lost. In the Romanian theatre of war Germany had lost 286,000 men, dead or captured. In addition to the human losses, the material damage was huge: almost all the heavy weaponry and telecommunications equipment, most of the motor vehicles, and large quantities of supplies and munitions had fallen into enemy hands.<sup>274</sup> With the *coup d'état* in Bucharest and the kingdom of Romania's withdrawal from the Tripartite Pact, German hegemony in south-east Europe collapsed in very short order, like a house of cards.

### 3. THE BATTLES IN TRANSYLVANIA (AUTUMN 1944)

In the last few days of August, the remnants of Eighth Army and a great many straggler units were engaged in massive battles for the road passes in the eastern Carpathians. On the one hand, the barrier of the Carpathian mountains was a lucky advantage for the shattered army group, because the terrain gave it the chance to establish a new interception and defensive line with the few units that had escaped the inferno in eastern Romania. On the other hand, the central and southern sections of the eastern Carpathians posed a risk to the weak and decimated German units, because the region's numerous mountain passes enabled 2nd Ukrainian Front, whose troops were superior in all respects, to overcome the territorial obstacle with all speed and push into central Transylvania. For, in spite of the advantages afforded by the terrain, the few German units, with little experience of infantry operations, had great difficulty in covering access to all the passes, and in blocking them effectively and durably against the advancing enemy forces.

#### (a) The Establishment of a Defensive Front in the Carpathians

As 2nd Ukrainian Front's advance was initially confined to the Wallachian lowland plain, the situation on Army Group South Ukraine's left wing was slightly less tense. The Axis powers were nevertheless facing an extremely critical situation in the Danube–Carpathian area since, on the one hand, there was now an enormous gap in the front in the Transylvanian Alps as a result of the collapse of Army Group South Ukraine, and, on the other, there were no battle-worthy troops available in Serbia east of the Morava river to stop the westward advance of the Soviet troops. If 2nd Ukrainian Front reached central Serbia, Malinovsky's troops would threaten Army Group E's rear communications in Greece. A further possibility that could not be ruled out was that the enemy forces might turn north and advance unimpeded

<sup>273</sup> KTB Skl, pt. A, Ix/II, 805, 838.

<sup>274</sup> Kissel, *Die Katastrophe in Rumänien*, 153.

to the Tisza plain in Hungary. If that happened, the German–Hungarian troops on the southern tip of Székely Land, in particular, would be threatened.

In view of the possibilities open to the enemy, the first concern of the army group HQ in Szováta had to be to use all available units which could be taken from the eastern and south-western sections of the army group front despite the tense situation, and those sent in by the OKH, to establish at least a security line in the form of a series of strongpoints between Marosvásárhely and the Danube at Orşova. In addition to securing western Transylvania, the army group was forced to consolidate the central and northern part of its almost 1,000-kilometre-long defence line. The army group did not have much trouble in carrying out this task on its northern wing, since XVII Corps, which was deployed south of Kuty, had been relatively untouched by the Soviet Iaşi–Chişinău operation. Adjoining XVII Army Corps, which had been reinforced by two Hungarian divisions, Eighth Army HQ had been obliged to move the front back over the east Carpathian ridge, where, between the Ghimeş and Oituz passes, Combat Group Kirchner (LVII Armoured Corps command), with the lightly hit 46th Infantry Division, 4th Mountain Division, which had been brought back again,<sup>275</sup> emergency units made up of stragglers, and weak Hungarian frontier troops, was endeavouring to prevent Soviet units from penetrating into central Transylvania. The southern section of the front in the Braşov area, adjoining the Romanian–Hungarian border established by the Second Vienna Award, was to be defended by Sixth Army. The only forces available for this task were emergency units, consisting mainly of Sixth Army stragglers<sup>276</sup> who had managed to escape from the inferno in Bessarabia. Adjoining the German units, the Baraolt–Marosvásárhely line was held by parts of the Hungarian 9th Replacement Division. At Marosvásárhely the front turned west to the area of Kolozsvár, where the Hungarian 2nd Army<sup>277</sup> was deployed<sup>278</sup> to prevent the Romanian 4th Army<sup>279</sup> from gaining access to the crossing over the

<sup>275</sup> 4th Mtn.Div. had been moved out of the area of command of Army Group South Ukraine only at the beginning of August. KTB H.Gr. Südukraine, Abt. Ia, No. 3, x. 115, 120, 126, 131, 136, 142, 146; xi. 1, 7, 11, 15, 20, BA-MA RH 19 V/29, fos. 115, 120, 126, 131, 136, 142, 146, and RH 19 V/30, fos. 3, 9, 13, 17, 22.

<sup>276</sup> On 31 August 1944, Sixth Army HQ had under its command LXXII A.C. HQ, on special duties without troops, and XXIX A.C. with the remnants of 13th Armd.Div., 10th Armd.Inf.Div., 306th Inf.Div., and 153rd F.T.D; Order of Battle, status at 31 Aug. 1944, from *Die geheimen Tagesberichte*, xi. 337.

<sup>277</sup> The Hungarian 2nd Army consisted of the Hungarian 25th Inf.Div., the Hungarian 2nd Armd.Div., and the Hungarian 7th and 9th Replacement Divisions. This gave it only limited combat strength, which was further reduced by the deployment of parts of the Hungarian 9th Replacement Division to secure the border north of Baraolt; Ravasz, 'Az Erdély hadniveletek 1944', 395–406.

<sup>278</sup> In response to the events in Romania, Hungary mobilized its replacement army on 26 August 1944 in order to strengthen the protection of the border in Transylvania. This developed into the plan to occupy the Romanian part of Transylvania. The mustering of troops for that purpose began on 28 August, after Hitler had given his approval the previous day; KTB OKW, iv/1, 835 ff.

<sup>279</sup> After the cessation of hostilities in eastern Romania, most of the Romanian forces were assembled in the Greater Bucharest–Ploieşti area and in southern Transylvania. In southern Transylvania, the Romanian 1st and 4th Armies, now under Romanian command, were engaged at the end of August in preparations to recapture Transylvania. As from 7 September 1944, both armies were placed under the command of 2nd Ukrainian Front.

Table V.vi.2. Army Group South Ukraine: order of battle (status: 31 August 1944)

Division	Corps	Army	Army Group
13th Armd.Div. (remnants)			
10th Armd.Inf.Div. (remnants)		Sixth Army	
153rd F.T.D. (remnants)	XXIX A.C.	at disposal LXXII	
301st Inf.Div. (remnants)		A.C. on sp.msn.	
76th Inf.Div. (remnants)			Army Group
20th Armd.Div. (remnts C.Gr.)	LVII Armd.A.C.		South Ukraine
46th Inf.Div. (remnants)		Eighth Army	
4th Mtn.Div.			
3rd Mtn.Div.	XVII A.C.		
8th Lt.Inf.Div.			

The following Sixth and Eighth Army units were still fighting in Bessarabia and Moldavia: IV A.C.: 79th, 258th Inf. Div.; VII A.C.: 106th, 370th, 376th Inf.Div.; XXX A.C.: 15th, 257th, 302nd, 320th, 384th Inf.Div.; XXXXIV Armd.C.: 62nd, 282nd, 335th Inf.Div.; LII A.C.: 161st, 294th, Inf.Div.

Mureş. The barely 400-kilometre-long section between Aiud and the Danube at Orşova could not be secured because neither C-in-C South-East nor Army Group South Ukraine had the forces to establish a defensive line in southwest Transylvania.

At this point, when the army group command was looking to rebuild and consolidate its forces after the catastrophe in eastern Romania, Hitler issued a directive on 29 August on the future conduct of operations in the Hungarian–Romanian theatre. In accordance with the directive, the OKH assigned the high command in Szováta the task of ‘gaining and holding a continuous defensive line from the Bulgarian–Romanian border on the Carpathian ridge to the point of connection with the right wing of XVII A.C.’.<sup>280</sup> To enable it to perform this task, the OKH reinforced the army group with 4th Mountain Division and indicated that 75th Infantry Division might be brought in. The additional forces were to take possession of Braşov and the Predeal pass. At the same time, ‘Hungarian 2nd Army, currently being reformed, and Cdr. Operational Zone Hungary East’<sup>281</sup> were placed under the command of the army group HQ. As well as the Wehrmacht, Reich Leader SS Heinrich Himmler also intervened in the defensive measures taken in Transylvania in this precarious military situation. On Hitler’s orders, he sent SS Obergruppenführer and Waffen SS General Artur Phleps to Transylvania with a twofold task: on the one hand, as senior SS and police leader, to expedite the recruitment of Romanian ethnic Germans into the Waffen SS and, on the other, to organize military defence in the greater Marosvásárhely area.<sup>282</sup>

The army group command acted on the OKH’s instructions only two days later, in an order addressed to the subordinate command authorities. Its assessment of the situation was based on the assumption that, after a short initial operation in

<sup>280</sup> KTB H.Gr. Südukraine, Abt. Ia, No. 4, i. 99, BA-MA RH 19 V/36, fo. 101.

<sup>281</sup> Ibid.

<sup>282</sup> Ibid. 91, 99, 105, BA-MA RH 19 V/36, fos. 93, 101, 107.

the Bucharest area, the Soviet forces intended to take possession of the Carpathians and, by conquering Romanian Transylvania, advance deep into the army group's southern flank. On that assumption, the army group stuck to its mission to defend south-eastern Europe, exploiting the strong natural barrier of the Carpathians, so as to maintain the connection with C-in-C South-East (Army Group F) at the Iron Gate. To that end, the army group proposed to advance southwards through Romanian Transylvania, and to take and block the high pass in the southern Carpathians (the Red Tower pass).<sup>283</sup> Under the operational plan, Eighth Army was to continue to defend the army group's eastern front with the help of reinforcements on its southern wing, and to maintain the connection with Army Group North Ukraine. Sixth Army, in close conjunction with Eighth Army, was to take over the task of protecting the army group's southern flank, so as to prevent the Soviet–Romanian forces from crossing the Carpathians and continuing their offensive in a northerly direction. The central task assigned to Sixth Army by the high command in Szováta was 'in the course of reorganization [ . . . ], to extend steadily westwards along the frontier to the point of connection with the Hungarian 2nd Army and, on completion of the Hungarian 2nd Army and Transylvania Group offensive operation,<sup>284</sup> to proceed with its west wing to take possession of the wooded heights north-west of Braşov and block the passes there'.<sup>285</sup>

In order to close the gap between Aiud and the Iron Gate and establish a defensive line on the northern edge of the Transylvanian Alps, the army group now had no alternative but to advance the front southwards from Mureş to the Red Tower pass, and to take and block the mountain crossing. As the army group did not have the necessary troops of its own, the proposed offensive had to be conducted by the Hungarian 2nd Army, which had assembled in the Kolozsvár area at the beginning of September. The attack was to be supported from the Marosvásárhely area by the Transylvania Group. Although the German–Hungarian forces assembled at Kolozsvár were not yet at full combat strength at this point, the OKH's operational objectives had some prospect of success because the Romanian 4th Army, which was still in the process of refreshment, was only just preparing to attack on the Târnăvelor plateau (between the Mureş and the Făgăraş mountains). Friessner did not want to carry out the OKH's more extensive order to take Braşov and the Predeal pass until the attack on the Red Tower pass had been successfully concluded. That task was to be undertaken by the Transylvania Group.

In addition to taking the Red Tower pass, Army Group South Ukraine and Army Group F also had to strive to occupy and block the Vulcan pass further to the

<sup>283</sup> H.Gr. Südukraine, Abt. Ia, No. 3361/44 g.Kdos, 2 Sept. 1944, quoted in Study P-114c, pt. 7, annexes, 162, app. 86, BA-MA ZA 1/2078, fo. 165; KTB H.Gr. Südukraine, Abt. Ia, No. 4, i. 120 ff., BA-MA RH 19 V/36, fos. 122 ff.

<sup>284</sup> SS Obergruppenführer Phleps had been given the task of organizing the 'Transylvania' Group, with 8th SS Cav.Div. and 75th Inf.Div., in the Marosvásárhely area. LXXII A.C. was to be placed at his disposal as operations staff on special mission. KTB H.Gr. Südukraine, Abt. Ia, No. 4, i. 91, BA-MA RH 19 V/36, fos. 93, 123.

<sup>285</sup> H.Gr. Südukraine, Abt. Ia, No. 3361/44 g.Kdos, 2 Sept. 1944, quoted in Study P-114c, pt. 7, annexes, 162, app. 86, BA-MA ZA 1/2078, fo. 165.

west, which 2nd Ukrainian Front would aim for if it advanced into the Hungarian lowland plain. This was essential if the gap between the area of command of C-in-C South-East and Army Group South Ukraine's area of operations in Romanian territory was to be closed. After a short halt in the Greater Bucharest–Ploieşti area to make preparations for its next push forward, 2nd Ukrainian Front resumed its advance with two armies side by side, with the point of concentration in western Wallachia, and reached Craiova on 4 September. The spearheads of 6th Armoured Guards Army were now only a day's march from the Danube gorge at Turnu Severin. The high command in Szováta also had to assume that some units of the armoured army might turn north on reaching the greater Craiova area and make for the Vulcan pass. The Soviet 27th Army, operating in the north, covered the offensive in that quarter and, after taking Ploieşti, advanced on the Predeal and Red Tower passes, with a view to bypassing the Făgărăş mountains and attacking the German–Hungarian defensive front in Székely Land from the rear.<sup>286</sup>

Despite the fact that the army group was now in an extremely critical situation north of the Tîrnavelor plateau and in the western Mureş valley, Friessner decided to launch the attack to the south without waiting for reinforcements. The commander-in-chief proceeded on the principle that he could risk a counter-attack with the weak German–Hungarian forces at his disposal so long as the only enemy force operating in the area between the Mureş valley west of Marosvásárhely and the Făgărăş mountains was the Romanian 4th Army, which was re-forming after its withdrawal from Moldavia. Rapid action against a weak adversary offered the only chance of taking the mountain ridge and the Red Tower pass before Malinovsky's troops arrived, and so gaining a favourable starting position for the further hostilities in Transylvania.

In early September, while 2nd Ukrainian Front continued to advance towards central Transylvania and Serbia, the Romanian 4th Army was mustered under Avramescu's command at Făgărăş on the upper reaches of the Olt. Its task was to defend the pass against a German–Hungarian offensive and prepare the operation to recapture northern Transylvania. Avramescu's formations adopted a defensive stance during this refreshment period, but Romanian units were nevertheless feeling their way towards the border fortifications in the Baraolt area.<sup>287</sup> It was not until 2 September that the Romanian troops advanced against the weak security line on the Olt at Sepsiszentgyörgy, after expiry of the deadline for the evacuation of northern Transylvania set in a Romanian ultimatum to the Hungarian government.<sup>288</sup> Hungary's defence forces were unable to withstand the Romanian attack,

<sup>286</sup> Boltin, 'Die Zerschlagung', 474 ff.

<sup>287</sup> Ottu, 'The Defensive Operation of 4th Romanian Army'; Duțu, Dobre, and Loghin, *Armata Română*, 36.

<sup>288</sup> King Michael I had already announced, in his proclamation on 23 August 1944, that 'Romania would mobilize all its forces to cross the borders established in the unjust Vienna agreement [the Second Vienna Award], and liberate Transylvania from foreign rule'. Arh.N.R., fond Ministerul Propagandiei Nationale, dosar 245/1944, fo. 213. On this basis, the Sănătescu government broke off diplomatic relations with Hungary on 30 August 1944 and issued an ultimatum demanding that Hungary evacuate northern Transylvania within 48 hours. Should Budapest fail to comply with the ultimatum, Bucharest threatened to declare war on its neighbour; Gosztony, *Hitlers Fremde Heere*, 426.

with the result that enemy units managed to break through the border fortifications at some points and were soon established on the east bank of the river.<sup>289</sup> Although Friessner had intended to launch the attack to the south, with the Hungarian 2nd Army, as quickly as possible, in order to take the Red Tower pass and the southern Carpathians, the Romanian 4th Army was nevertheless able to refresh its forces and prepare for the forthcoming offensive without any impediment, because owing to delays in mustering the Hungarian forces, the attack had to be postponed for two days, until 5 September. The Transylvania Group had not completed its preparations by 3 September either, especially as the 75th Infantry Division had not been transferred to it as promised.<sup>290</sup>

In view of these factors, and the unstable situation in Transylvania and the Carpathians as a whole, the OKH took a shortening of the front into consideration in its further reflections on the conduct of operations in Transylvania. On 2 September it instructed the high command in Szováta to make provisional preparations to evacuate Székely Land and, in close contact with Army Group North Ukraine, to make plans for a defensive front between Kolozsvár and the mountain ridge south-west of Kuty (the Mackensen pass<sup>291</sup>). In so doing, the OKH took the view that withdrawal to the line in question should be considered only if the forces were no longer strong enough to hold the defensive positions in the eastern Carpathians in the long term. Withdrawal to the shortened front was also foreseen if the offensive to capture the southern Carpathians was unsuccessful. The army high command emphasized that ‘it is essential, in the conduct of any such evacuation, to avoid substantial human and material losses’.<sup>292</sup> The army operations staff also asked the commanding general in Hungary to set about establishing an interception line on the Tisza. With this catalogue of requests, Guderian took on board the consequences of the delays and lack of foresight two weeks earlier in the planning and conduct of operations in the German–Romanian theatre of war.

There had been very little change in the situation in Transylvania by 5 September, so the events on that day had considerable repercussions on future military developments in the area between Orşova and Kuty. On 5 September the Hungarian 2nd Army launched its offensive at Kolozsvár and drove the Romanian 4th Army back to Luduş in the Mureş section of the front. In this action it benefited from support by the Transylvania Group, which made a very promising start in its advance to the south-west. In its southward attacks, however, the Transylvania Group encountered bitter resistance by the Romanian units and only got as far as the north bank of the Mureş.<sup>293</sup> By the end of the first day’s operations Romanian resistance had already

<sup>289</sup> KTB H.Gr. Südukraine, Abt. Ia, No. 4, i. 121–3, BA-MA RH 19 V/36, fos. 123–5.

<sup>290</sup> Contrary to the original intention, the OKH left 75th Inf.Div. with Army Group North Ukraine, where it was deployed as an army group reserve at the Beskids pass; KTB H.Gr. Südukraine, Abt. Ia, No. 4, i. 124, BA-MA RH 19 V/36, fo. 126.

<sup>291</sup> This name dates from the First World War. It is a mountain pass from the Ruscova valley to the upper reaches of the Ceremus on the southern slopes of Mt. Stogu, some 60 km south-west of Kuty. The road through the pass was also named the Mackensen Road.

<sup>292</sup> KTB H.Gr. Südukraine, Abt. Ia, No. 4, i. 124, BA-MA RH 19 V/36, fo. 126.

<sup>293</sup> Ibid. 144, BA-MA RH 19 V/36, fo. 146.

solidified, so the aim of the operation—to capture the southern Carpathians—was not achieved. That same day, Soviet 27th Army spearheads penetrated both into the Sibiu area and into the area round Brașov, having taken the two important Carpathian crossings, the Predeal pass and the Red Tower pass. The vanguard of 6th Guards Army, advancing into the southern Carpathian salient, reached the Danube at Turnu Severin.<sup>294</sup> The strength of the German troops in the Brașov area and south of Kolozsvár would have sufficed to stop a Soviet–Romanian offensive, at least for a time. But there were no troops on the Danube at Turnu Severin–Orșova able to prevent 2nd Ukrainian Front from pushing into Serbia. Although C-in-C South-East had already dispatched 92nd Motorized Infantry Brigade to the Belgrade area on 31 August,<sup>295</sup> after Romanian frontier troops had attacked German units three days earlier on the banks of the Danube in the area between Orșova and the Iron Gate,<sup>296</sup> the brigade's foremost units reached the threatened section of the Danube only on 6 September. So C-in-C South-East had little chance of holding up the Red Army's advance by occupying the Serbian section of the riverbank between Gradište and the tripoint east of Negotin before the Soviet spearheads got there.<sup>297</sup>

### (b) The Battles in Central Transylvania

In the central section of the front held by Army Group South Ukraine, where the Hungarian 2nd Army was successfully taking possession of the area south of the Mureş as far as the Transylvanian Alps, the high command in Szováta had to include in its calculations the possibility that the attack would fail as a result of enemy resistance before achieving its aim. For that eventuality, a plan was needed that would secure the line at the position it had reached without requiring any additional troops. The right wing posed the greatest problem, because it was necessary to make the connection with Army Group F (C-in-C South-East) there as quickly as possible and at least establish a provisional security line. The army group HQ was intent on closing the almost 400-kilometre-wide gap before Malinovsky's troops advanced into the Danube–Tisza plain, which was virtually unprotected.

The army group was in an extremely critical situation, especially on its two wings. At the beginning of September, the situation in the eastern area of command still appeared relatively stable, and the security line between Kuty and Marosvásárhely, close to the Hungarian–Romanian border, was probably not particularly threatened either. For Friessner, the question was how this front could be held in the face of increasing enemy pressure with the means available to him. The salient on the left wing of Székely Land, in particular, required a level of deployment of human and material resources which the commander-in-chief of the army group

<sup>294</sup> *Geschichte des zweiten Weltkrieges*, ix. 144; KTB H.Gr. Südukraine, Abt. Ia, No. 4, i. 149 ff., BA-MA RH 19 V/36, fos. 151 ff.

<sup>295</sup> KTB OB Südost/H.Gr. F, Abt. Ia, No. 3, 277, BA-MA RH 19 XI/14.

<sup>296</sup> Ibid. 259.

<sup>297</sup> KTB H.Gr. Südukraine, Abt. Ia, No. 4, i. 138 ff., 150, BA-MA RH 19 V/36, 140 ff., 152.

could simply not afford. There the weak Sixth Army was in danger of enclosure by Soviet troops on both sides if 27th Army succeeded in advancing into the greater Brașov area. The army group would therefore need to have this section of the front at its disposal at the very latest by the time that the troops fighting in the Carpathian salient were threatened with encirclement. Consequently, the high command in Szováta included the evacuation of Székely Land in its operational options at an early stage, in order to avoid another disaster like the one in Bessarabia.

As early as 1 September, the former commander of Operational Zone Hungary East, Lt.-Gen. Emil Zellner, was assigned the task of seeking and establishing an interception position on the Mureş along the Marosvásárhely–Kelemen mountains (Munții Călimani) line.<sup>298</sup> The OKH adopted the army group's plan in its directive on the conduct of future operations, which contained the order that 'preparations were to be made to evacuate Székely Land and establish a defensive front on the general line from the Hungarian–Romanian border east of Cluj to the Mackensen pass'.<sup>299</sup> The army group had started to take the relevant measures some time ago, so it was only on 4 September that it ordered the two armies under its command to ensure that they were able to 'withdraw with the bulk of their units to the Maros line in a single movement at short notice and in the shortest possible time'.<sup>300</sup> The authorities in Szováta were prompted to issue this order after Soviet 27th Army spearheads crossed the Carpathian ridge south-east of Brașov, with the result that the pressure on Sixth Army's left wing increased substantially. Two days later, contrary to the assumption that the makeshift Sixth Army units at Brașov would very soon be forced to give way before the Soviet assault, LVII Armoured Corps HQ, which was responsible for the section of the front at the Oituz pass, requested permission to withdraw, because the situation in its area of command had deteriorated seriously. The Soviet operational thrust made it clear that Malinovsky was intending to cut off and destroy the German troops fighting in Székely Land.<sup>301</sup> Despite the critical situation in the south-eastern Carpathian salient, the army group, under the impression that the Hungarian 2nd Army attack at Luduș on the Mureş was proceeding very successfully, rejected LVII Armoured Corps' withdrawal request on Axis policy grounds. Friessner was unable to maintain this position for long, however, because the Soviet 7th Guards Army and 27th Army were stepping up their offensives. The withdrawal which the army group eventually authorized, while specifying that it was to take place only if enemy pressure increased to a substantial extent, was to be a three-stage operation.<sup>302</sup> As the Soviet forces were continuously being strengthened, especially in the Brașov area, Sixth Army HQ pressed for the withdrawal operation to be started immediately because the

<sup>298</sup> Ibid. 117, BA-MA RH 19 V/36, fo. 119.

<sup>299</sup> Ibid. 124, BA-MA RH 19 V/36, fo. 126.

<sup>300</sup> Ibid. 139, BA-MA RH 19 V/36, fo. 141.

<sup>301</sup> Mazulenko, *Die Zerschlagung der Heeresgruppe Südukraine*, 96.

<sup>302</sup> KTB H.Gr. Südukraine, Abt. Ia, No. 4, ii. 6–8, BA-MA RH 19 V/37, fos. 8–10.

troops under its command were barely able to hold out against the ever-increasing enemy pressure.

The army group HQ gave the order for withdrawal to the Maros line on 7 September, but without specifying when the operation was to start. With 2nd Ukrainian Front mustering more and more troops in the Brașov area, and also at the Oituz pass, Sixth Army pressed for permission to withdraw to the Maros line. In view of the deteriorating situation, intermediate lines favourable to defence were laid down for a withdrawal in stages. In the night of 7 to 8 September, Friessner gave Sixth Army HQ permission to withdraw to the A Line. Despite the operational necessities, Hitler forbade withdrawal from Székely Land but, in the event, Sixth Army left its positions in the southern section of the salient and withdrew to the A line because Hitler's decision came too late to prevent it from doing so. Faced with the facts, the dictator was of necessity obliged to accept the move, but he forbade any further withdrawal without his personal permission. Friessner objected to this condition, arguing 'that the withdrawal must proceed continuously and not be halted at one of the intermediate lines',<sup>303</sup> since those lines were not suitable for successful defence against massive attacks. Despite Hitler's unambiguous order, the army group stood firm on the matter of Sixth Army's withdrawal, and on 8 September it authorized Sixth Army HQ to withdraw to the B line during the coming night. The army group was compelled to take this step not only because it feared enclosure in Székely Land, but also because it was absolutely essential to shorten the front in order to release forces for deployment elsewhere. Those forces were urgently needed on the southern front at Luduș–Marosvásárhely, where a Soviet–Romanian counter-attack was in the offing. Once again, lengthy negotiations were needed before Hitler agreed to the army group's tactics. Here too, he was obliged to yield to operational necessities because, by now, it would have been extremely difficult to stop the withdrawal. The Soviet XXXIII Corps had meanwhile succeeded in breaking through the A line south of Sepsiszentgyörgy, so this intermediate line had necessarily to be evacuated.<sup>304</sup> In an extremely clever propaganda move, the Soviets had deployed in that operation Infantry Division 'Tudor Vladimirescu', made up of Romanian prisoners of war, which thus became the first Romanian unit to capture territory which the kingdom had been obliged, under strong political and military pressure from Germany, Italy, and Hungary, to cede to its neighbour in 1940 under the terms of the Second Vienna Award.<sup>305</sup>

Hitler made the army group's conduct of operations in the precarious situation north-east of Brașov more difficult by insisting that the Hungarian government's

<sup>303</sup> Ibid. 18, BA-MA RH 19 V/37, fo. 20.

<sup>304</sup> Ibid. 25–9, BA-MA RH 19 V/37, fos. 27–31.

<sup>305</sup> Duțu, Dobre, and Loghin, *Armata Română*, 198 ff. After the Antonescu government, despite its almost unreserved commitment to the war against the Soviet Union, and its extensive economic and political efforts on behalf of National Socialist Germany, had failed to achieve the nation's most important aim, i.e. the recovery of northern Transylvania, a Romanian unit established under USSR rule laid the first foundations for the achievement of this Romanian objective. See Ancel, 'Stalingrad und Rumänien', 189–200; Rhode, 'Rumänen', 1156–18; Schönher, 'Die Auswirkungen', 157 ff., 176 ff.; Schönher, 'The Relations', 235–8; Memorandum (from the Royal Romanian Ministry for Foreign Affairs), 12 Apr. 1943, Arh.M.A.E., fond Germania, dosar 92/1943, fos. 249–54.

written consent be obtained before permission was given to withdraw to the Maros line. He also demanded that the manganese-ore fields in the Vatra Dornei area be held at all costs, although the ore, which was important for German arms production, had not been extracted or exported for some weeks.<sup>306</sup> This measure upset the army group's plans, because establishing a bridgehead at Vatra Dornei meant that it could not now save any of the urgently needed forces, so the benefit of withdrawing to a shorter defensive front was largely lost. Despite the personal intervention of the commander-in-chief, who was at Führer headquarters from 11 to 13 September, Hitler stuck to his decision. Friessner was nevertheless able to get permission to withdraw to the Maros line, the Hungarian government having given its consent to the measure. After Hitler had given conditional permission to withdraw from the Székely Land salient on 10 September, and confirmed it in a written directive three days later, the army group was able to leave south-eastern Transylvania according to plan.<sup>307</sup> The army group HQ was obliged to establish more intermediate lines because the battle-worn makeshift units could not keep up the rapid pace, owing to constant enemy pressure and the bad autumn weather. The withdrawal operation was effectively completed on 16 September, when the last units reached the Maros line. Hitler then made another unrealistic demand, namely that Eighth Army must hold the defensive line that had been reached as its winter position. However, it soon became clear that the XVII Army Corps forces at Vatra Dornei would not suffice to defend the manganese-ore fields successfully against the Soviet 40th Army's massive attacks.<sup>308</sup> The corps held out for some time but eventually abandoned the bridgehead on 26 September.<sup>309</sup> Thus, the evacuation of Székely Land was completed by the end of September, and the army group's eastern wing was able to take up favourable defensive positions in a salient in the eastern Carpathians extending from the Mackensen pass, over the Radna pass on the eastern edge of the Kelemen mountains, to the upper reaches of the Mureş east of Reghin.<sup>310</sup>

Although the operation by the Hungarian 2nd Army and the Transylvania Group got off to an excellent start on 5 September, it became clear only a day later that the opposing Romanian forces were putting up increasingly strong resistance. The German–Hungarian attack had taken the Romanian 4th Army by

<sup>306</sup> KTB H.Gr. Südukraine, Abt. Ia, No. 4, ii. 70, BA-MA RH 19 V/37, fo. 72; Friessner, *Verratene Schlachten*, 122. Approximately 950 more tonnes of manganese ore were shipped out by 19 September 1944, after the situation in the Vatra Dornei bridgehead had been stabilized; BA-MA RH 19 V/37, fo. 127.

<sup>307</sup> Friessner informed the Army Group South Ukraine chief of staff on 11 September 1944, in a telephone call from Führer headquarters, that 'it was extremely difficult to get the Führer to agree to withdrawal, but he is now suddenly [pressing] for withdrawal as quickly as possible'. KTB H.Gr. Südukraine, Abt. Ia, No. 4, ii. 55, BA-MA RH 19 V/37, fo. 57.

<sup>308</sup> Even though the Vatra Dornei area is not part of Székely Land, Friessner and the army group HQ nevertheless regarded evacuation of the Vatra Dornei area as part of the 'overall operation' of evacuating Székely Land. Friessner, *Verratene Schlachten*, 113–19.

<sup>309</sup> Die Geschichte der 8. (oberlausisch-sudetendeutschen) Infanterie/Jäger-Division, 267–70.

<sup>310</sup> KTB H.Gr. Südukraine, Abt. Ia, No. 4, ii. 1–95, BA-MA RH 19 V/37, fos. 3–97; Friessner, *Verratene Schlachten*, 114–19; România în Războiul Antihitlerist, 210–22; Duțu, Între Wehrmacht și Armata Roșie, 280–4.

surprise, and it had needed a few days to regroup for a counter-offensive, because it had only recently arrived at Sibiu in the area north of the Olt after its withdrawal from Moldavia and was still in the process of refreshment when the Hungarians attacked.<sup>311</sup> In the circumstances, the attack by the Hungarian and German troops might have been very successful if the Soviet 6th Armoured Guards Army and 27th Army had not managed to get through the Predeal and Red Tower passes on 5 and 6 September, thereby providing the Romanian army with massive reinforcements on both flanks. After the spearheads of Malinovsky's 2nd Ukrainian Front reached central Transylvania on 5 September, the front took overall command in the Romanian–Transylvanian theatre of operations, in keeping with the actual balance of forces.<sup>312</sup> The Romanian 1st and 4th Armies were thus integrated in Soviet-controlled operations, and were henceforth only nominally under Romanian national command. When, on orders from Soviet headquarters, 2nd Ukrainian Front turned north and north-west on 5 September and crossed the Transylvanian Alps, Malinovsky had two options, with regard to the point of concentration, for continuing the operation in central Transylvania. One possibility was to move the attack to the extreme left wing, where 53rd Army and the Romanian 1st Army could advance through the Timișoara–Arad area into the Hungarian Danube–Tisza plain and then on to Budapest.<sup>313</sup> However, the more obvious course of action appeared to be for 6th Armoured Army and 27th Army to support the Romanian 4th Army and advance from the Brașov–Sibiu line in the rear of the German Carpathian front to the upper reaches of the Tisza and into eastern Slovakia. An offensive west of the eastern Carpathians and the Wooded Carpathians would give 2nd Ukrainian Front a unique opportunity to connect with the Slovakian rebels and with 1st Ukrainian Front, which had been engaged since 7 September in the Krosno–Sanok area in an offensive on the Dukla pass and the Beskids. Both Army Group South Ukraine and Army Detachment Heinrici (Lt.-Gen. Gotthard Heinrici) would then be threatened with enclosure in the eastern Carpathians.<sup>314</sup>

The Hungarian 2nd Army offensive reached the Mureș within two days, but it was only strong enough to overcome the river barrier in a few places. By the second day of the attack it was clear that the Hungarian operation would not achieve its intended aim of blocking the Red Tower pass. In view of the threat to the salient, Army Group South Ukraine proposed to have the Hungarian 2nd Army go over to the defensive, in a favourable position, as from 8 September. The army group HQ in Szatmárnémeti, to which it had withdrawn in the meantime, was obliged to take this step also because the Soviet 6th Armoured Guards Army had turned

<sup>311</sup> At the beginning of September 1944 the Romanian 4th Army comprised one infantry division, two mountain divisions, two cavalry divisions, and seven infantry replacement divisions, the bulk of which had of necessity been assembled in the marshalling area only at the end of August/beginning of September. *România în Războiul Antihitlerist*, 621–9.

<sup>312</sup> The Romanian 1st and 4th Armies were placed under the command of 2nd Ukrainian Front on 7 September 1944; Arh.M.Ap.N., fond M.St.M., Sectia Operațiilor, dosar 2756, fo. 14; Duțu, Dobre, and Loghin, *Armata Română*, 29.

<sup>313</sup> *Geschichte des zweiten Weltkrieges 1939–1945*, ix. 144–6.

<sup>314</sup> Schönherr, 'Die Niederschlagung'; Schönherr, 'Obranné operácie armádnej skupiny Heinrici'; see Part V, Chapter V of the present volume.

northwards and taken the Red Tower pass.<sup>315</sup> In order to avoid the loss of the important stretch of the Mureş at Luduş, the army group put together a group of sapper units and anti-tank forces, the Kessel Blocking Unit, to support the Hungarian security line.

The growing Romanian resistance and 2nd Ukrainian Front's advance to southern Transylvania generated political activities in Budapest which led to considerable friction with the Reich government. On 8 September, in view of the military situation, the Crown Council in Budapest demanded that the German Reich dispatch five armoured divisions to the Transylvanian zone of operations within 24 hours. Should the German Axis partner fail to comply with the ultimatum, the Crown Council threatened to enter into armistice negotiations with the Allies.<sup>316</sup> Before the deadline expired, the Plenipotentiary General for the Wehrmacht in Hungary informed the government in Budapest that the OKH had dispatched four divisions for deployment in the Transylvanian theatre of war. However, he failed to mention that only one high command, III Armoured Army Corps, and one armoured division were to be deployed immediately with Army Group South Ukraine, whereas three infantry divisions were to be posted in the Budapest area on the OKH's orders, in order to prevent—as Hitler put it—‘a repetition of what happened in Romania’.<sup>317</sup> In the end, apart from the high command, the OKH moved only two extra divisions to the front in Hungary, while the two armoured brigades that were being formed in the Budapest area remained close to the Hungarian capital.<sup>318</sup> In addition to the reinforcements approved by the OKH on Axis policy grounds, the high command in Szováta ordered rear defensive positions to be sought on the Varazdin–Lake Balaton–Budapest–Dobšiná (Slovakia) line east of Kežmarok, connecting with Army Group North Ukraine's A line,<sup>319</sup> since in mid-September there was still a danger that the Soviet operations at the Dukla pass and in south-eastern Transylvania, as well as the national uprising in Slovakia, might achieve their aims.

After the Hungarian 2nd Army and the Transylvania Group went over to the defensive between Marosvásárhely and Turda on 8 September, the fighting in the Luduş area abated for a while, because the newly formed Romanian 4th Army had not yet finished mustering its forces for a counter-offensive.<sup>320</sup> Hostilities resumed only when the Soviet 6th Armoured Guards Army and 27th Army crossed the southern Carpathians and formed up for the attack. The point of concentration of the Soviet–Romanian operation was south of Kolozsvár, where General A.G. Kravchenko's armoured army, in particular, opened its offensive on both sides

<sup>315</sup> KTB H.Gr. Südkraine, Abt. Ia, No. 4, ii. 13, BA-MA RH 19 V/37, fo. 15.

<sup>316</sup> KTB H.Gr. Südkraine, Abt. Ia, No. 4, ii. 23, BA-MA RH 19 V/37, fo. 25; Hillgruber, ‘Das deutsch-ungarische Verhältnis’, 90; Gosztony, *Hitlers Fremde Heere*, 427 ff.; Gosztony, ‘Das private Kriegstagebuch’, 719 ff. On this, see Part V, Chapter VII of the present volume.

<sup>317</sup> Gosztony, *Hitlers Fremde Heere*, 428.

<sup>318</sup> KTB H.Gr. Südkraine, Abt. Ia, No. 4, ii. 23–69, BA-MA RH 19 V/37, fos. 25–71.

<sup>319</sup> Ibid. 94, BA-MA RH 19 V/37, fo. 96.

<sup>320</sup> Romanian General Staff, *Der operative Beitrag der rumänischen Armee im Krieg gegen Deutschland und Ungarn 1944 bis 1945*, ii. 10, Arh.M.Ap.N., fond M.St.M, Sectia Operațiilor, dosar 2756, 15.

of Turda in the Hungarian defence sector. But defence against the Soviet 27th Army, which attacked together with the Romanian army at the interface between the Hungarian 2nd Army and the Transylvania Group west of Marosvásárhely, also made demands in respect of combat strength that the Hungarian units, given their training and equipment, could not fully meet. In particular, the enemy thrusts at Luduş in the Mureş section of the front led to several breaches in the defensive positions which even the 8th SS Cavalry Division was unable to repair, and by 14 September the Luduş bridgehead was already lost.<sup>321</sup>

In this situation, with the Hungarian units able to withstand the Soviet–Romanian pressure only to a limited extent and often being forced to abandon their positions, the army group HQ asked, as a matter of urgency, to be given greater control of the Axis partner's operations. Friessner therefore considered placing the Hungarian 2nd Army under Sixth Army HQ and combining the two armies as Army Detachment Fretter-Pico. For Friessner, the decisive factor was the inferior quality of the Hungarian replacement divisions. The army detachment was formed by 15 September, and was assigned the task of 'defending the positions that had been reached and driving the enemy forces that had advanced from the south back to the passes'.<sup>322</sup> In the following days, that assignment proved wholly unrealistic, as the Soviet forces constantly stepped up their attacks on the Mureş front. By 20 September the Hungarian 2nd Army's situation had deteriorated to such an extent that there were signs of an impending disaster in the Turda area. The enemy breakthroughs in several sections of the front, and the almost complete enclosure of the strategically important city of Turda, were contained only by the rapid deployment of German armoured forces. From mid-September on, Army Group South Ukraine managed to repel most of the Soviet–Romanian assaults, so that 'the enemy's attempt to break into Hungarian territory in a rapid advance over the Carpathians'<sup>323</sup> failed for the time being. As the fighting abated, the front in the area of Army Detachment Fretter-Pico stabilized in the second half of the month and the battered units were granted a short respite.<sup>324</sup> At this stage, the deployment of 23rd Armoured Division, which took part in the heavy fighting at Turda on 23 September, and the shortening of the front resulting from the evacuation of Székely Land had a very positive effect on the situation in the central section of the army group's front. The command structure also became simpler after 20 September 1944 as, the previous day, SS Obergruppenführer Phleps had asked to be released from the command of Transylvania Group HQ, and the army group had accordingly withdrawn its command headquarters from deployment. 8th SS Cavalry Division was placed under the command of Army Detachment Fretter-Pico.<sup>325</sup>

<sup>321</sup> KTB H.Gr. Südukraine, Abt. Ia, No. 4, ii. 80 ff., BA-MA RH 19 V/37, fos. 82 ff.; Romanescu, 'The 4th Romanian Army'; Duțu, *Între Wehrmacht și Armata Roșie*, 280–4; România în Războiul Antihitlerist, 210–25.

<sup>322</sup> KTB H.Gr. Südukraine, Abt. Ia, No. 4, ii. 88, BA-MA RH 19 V/37, fo. 90.

<sup>323</sup> Ibid.

<sup>324</sup> Friessner, *Verratene Schlachten*, 115–18; Fretter-Pico, ... verlassen von des Sieges Göttern, 160 ff.; Philippi and Heim, *Der Feldzug gegen Sovjetrußland*, 260 ff.

<sup>325</sup> KTB H.Gr. Südukraine, Abt. Ia, No. 4, ii. 116, BA-MA RH 19 V/37, fo. 118.

2nd Ukrainian Front itself was instrumental in decreasing the tension on the front south of Kolozsvár: from mid-September it shifted its operational main effort to the west and consequently withdrew substantial forces from the Mureş section. While the unsatisfactory results of the offensive on the Mureş must have been a factor in Malinovsky's decision to move the point of concentration, the failure to achieve the Soviet operational aims in the Beskids and the Carpathians must also have played a considerable part. It became apparent, in the second half of September, that the 1st Ukrainian Front offensive at the Dukla pass and in the Beskid mountains could well fail as a result of the strong resistance put up by Army Detachment Heinrici. This reduced 1st and 2nd Ukrainian Fronts' chances of enclosing the German-Hungarian troops west of the Beskids and the Wooded Carpathians.<sup>326</sup> For Army Group South, as Army Group South Ukraine was to be called after 24 September, it became necessary to move the point of concentration of its defence westwards so as to be able to halt the offensives launched by the Soviet 46th and 53rd Armies and the Romanian 1st Army into the Banat and the Crişana region in the area between Arad and Nagyvárad.

It proved extremely difficult to establish a continuous front in the Hungarian-Romanian border area, especially in western Transylvania, as neither the OKH and Army Group South Ukraine nor the OKW and C-in-C South-East (Army Group F) were in a position to release forces in the short term so as to close the gap between the army group border at Bela Crkva and the greater Aiud-Turda area, where the Hungarian 2nd Army was assembling. At this point, the only forces along the 1940 frontier with the kingdom of Romania were weak Hungarian frontier troops on the Szeged-Nagyvárad line. The general staff in Budapest intended to dispatch additional units to strengthen the military presence in western Transylvania and the Banat, in order to establish an autonomous command authority, the Hungarian 3rd Army, in the border area. Meanwhile, C-in-C South-East was endeavouring to move 4th SS Police Armoured Infantry Division into the seriously threatened Timișoara-Arad region as quickly as possible. However, the military situation in western Transylvania and the Banat at the beginning of September did not appear to pose a major threat to the Axis powers, as 2nd Ukrainian Front had not advanced across the Transylvanian Alps, and the two Romanian armies stationed in southern Transylvania were still regrouping and had not yet formed up for an offensive against the opposing Hungarian forces. Even so, the army group HQ in Szatmárnémeti had to assume that this was only a brief respite until Malinovsky's troops opened operations north of the southern Carpathians.

For the time being, the only forces standing between Szeged and Nagyvárad were the Hungarian IV Army Corps, which was under the direct command of the general staff in Budapest, and the Hungarian VII Corps, which belonged to the Hungarian 2nd Army. With the human and material resources at their disposal, those formations could do no more than secure the country's border. After the

<sup>326</sup> Philippi and Heim, *Der Feldzug gegen Sowjetrussland*, 260 ff.

Hungarian IV Army Corps, in particular, was replenished and reinforced in the first half of September, the chief of staff, General János Vörös, planned to launch an offensive in the direction of Arad in order to establish a defensive line on the Mureş between Szeged and Lipova, 35 kilometres east of Arad on the Mureş, extending to the foothills of the Zarunda mountains. The operation, which would have strengthened Army Group South Ukraine's west wing and protected C-in-C South-East's eastern flank, which at this point still stretched from Szeged to the Danube at Bela Crkva, was due to start on 8 September according to the plans of the Hungarian high command.<sup>327</sup> Although time was of the essence in these operational circumstances, it proved impossible to meet the mustering deadline and, to the army group's displeasure, the start of the attack was delayed considerably. When the offensive was finally launched on 13 September, the Hungarian IV Army Corps established a bridgehead south of Arad at the first assault. At the same time, the Hungarian VII Army Corps also crossed the Hungarian–Romanian border and advanced to the western edge of the Bihor mountains, south of Nagyvárad.<sup>328</sup>

While the Hungarian forces were advancing, the first parts of the SS division reached the Serbian border area in the Banat and proceeded cautiously towards Timișoara. The unit encountered only little resistance and was able to establish a weak security line east of the Hungarian–Romanian border.<sup>329</sup> The encouraging developments in western Transylvania prompted Hitler, on 13 September, to order 4th SS Police Armoured Infantry Division and the Hungarian IV Army Corps to take Timișoara and Arad at once, and then to press on to Caransebeş and Deva with a view to blocking the mountain exits in the southern Transylvanian Alps and preventing the Soviet forces from advancing any further into Transylvania.<sup>330</sup>

Only a day after the promising start of the offensive, the question of who was to be responsible for conducting operations in Hungary's south-western border area led to serious differences of opinion between the two Axis partners. While Vörös wished to establish his own army high command in the Szeged–Arad area with sole responsibility, within the framework of Army Group South Ukraine, for the conduct of operations in north-western Romania,<sup>331</sup> the OKH and the army group HQ categorically rejected the chief of the Hungarian general staff's proposals. All the same, in mid-September the German side too had no clear idea of what the command structure on the army group's right wing should look like.<sup>332</sup> Friessner was convinced that firm and unified German command was needed in north-western Romania, and he was initially unwilling to give way on this contentious issue. He nevertheless changed his mind a few days later on Axis policy grounds, and proposed that the Hungarian 2nd Army be put in command on the west wing. Although Hitler agreed with this solution, the Hungarian Axis partner

<sup>327</sup> KTB H.Gr. Südukraine, Abt. Ia, No. 4, ii. 25, BA-MA RH 19 V/37, fo. 27.

<sup>328</sup> Ibid. 67, BA-MA RH 19 V/37, fo. 69.

<sup>329</sup> KTB OB Südost/H.Gr. F, Abt. Ia, No. 3, 328, BA-MA RH 19 XI/14, fo. 329; *Die geheimen Tagesberichte*, xi. 36.

<sup>330</sup> KTB H.Gr. Südukraine, Abt. Ia, No. 4, ii. 70, BA-MA RH 19 V/37, fo. 72.

<sup>331</sup> Gosztony, 'Das private Kriegstagebuch', 725.

<sup>332</sup> KTB H.Gr. Südukraine, Abt. Ia, No. 4, ii. 79 ff., BA-MA RH 19 V/37, fos. 81 ff.

was not prepared to accept the German proposals, so the painful problem remained unsolved.<sup>333</sup> When the chief of the Hungarian general staff had not submitted any new proposals by 20 September, Hitler put pressure on Hungary by threatening that ‘further refusal to address this question would force a review of the terms of the Axis alliance’.<sup>334</sup>

Until 20 September the Hungarian general staff had been in a relatively strong bargaining position on the question of command structure, because the offensive in the Szeged–Arad region had been going very well. This changed abruptly when the Soviet spearheads arrived and the units of the Hungarian IV Army Corps, offering some weak resistance in places, withdrew from the territory they had taken and evacuated the city of Arad once again. The German Axis partner saw this as an opportunity to dictate the conditions for the command structure in the area of Army Group South Ukraine. During talks with Vörös in Budapest on 20 September, Wenck and Grolman agreed that an additional Hungarian army should be formed on the army group’s west wing. The new Hungarian 3rd Army was to conduct operations in the Arad–Timișoara area within the framework of Army Group South Ukraine.<sup>335</sup> The Hungarian 2nd Army, remaining under the command of Army Detachment Fretter-Pico, would continue to defend the section of the front south of Kolozsvár.<sup>336</sup> The German participants in the talks nevertheless categorically refused the chief of the Hungarian general staff’s demand to form an army group of his own.<sup>337</sup> On the basis of the new organizational structure, the high command in Szatmárnémeti assigned the Hungarian 3rd Army the task of ‘halting and defeating the enemy forces advancing westwards from western Romania’.<sup>338</sup> Thus, after more than a week of disputes over remits, the command issue was finally settled.

While 2nd Ukrainian Front’s westward move relieved the pressure on the eastern and central sections of the army group’s front, it made the situation on its vulnerable western flank more acute. The army group was obliged to move the point of concentration of its defensive efforts away from the area south of Kolozsvár, where it had been until 25 September. The army group HQ’s task, and its initial intention, was to advance southwards over the section of the Mureş at Turda and Luduş to the northern edge of the Transylvanian Alps, in order to prevent the enemy from penetrating into central Transylvania. However, by the end of the

<sup>333</sup> Ibid. 106 ff., BA-MA RH 19 V/37, fos. 108 ff.

<sup>334</sup> Ibid. 121, BA-MA RH 19 V/37, fo. 123. See also Friessner, *Verratene Schlachten*, 127, and Hillgruber, ‘Das deutsch-ungarische Verhältnis’, 91.

<sup>335</sup> KTB H.Gr. Südukraine, Abt. Ia, No. 4, ii. 120–2, 126, 129, BA-MA RH 19 V/37, fos. 122–4, 128, 131; Friessner, *Verratene Schlachten*, 127 ff.; Hillgruber, ‘Das deutsch-ungarische Verhältnis’, 91; Gosztony, ‘Das private Kriegstagebuch’, 725 ff.

<sup>336</sup> In mid-September the army group HQ had toyed with the idea that the Hungarian 2nd Army might extend its conduct of operations further to the west, and that the combat sector covered by the Hungarian military authorities might be moved accordingly; KTB H.Gr. Südukraine, Abt. Ia, No. 4, i. 124, and ii. 99, 107, BA-MA RH 19 V/36, fo. 126, and RH 19 V/37, fos. 101, 109.

<sup>337</sup> KTB H.Gr. Südukraine, Abt. Ia, No. 4, ii. 129, BA-MA RH 19 V/37, fo. 131; Friessner, *Verratene Schlachten*, 127.

<sup>338</sup> Ibid.

month it was forced to conclude that this objective was no longer achievable.<sup>339</sup> The German–Hungarian forces nevertheless still appeared capable of establishing an effective defensive front in the central section of the Mureş, so as to hold back the Soviet–Romanian offensive aimed at penetrating deep into eastern Hungary.

In the Crişana region and the Romanian Banat, where the Soviet 46th and 53rd Armies were preparing to attack at the end of September, the newly formed Hungarian 3rd Army had successfully occupied Romanian territory in the middle of the month and established a new front on the Timișoara–Arad–Nagyvárad line. The army group HQ and the OKH had intended to block the mountain exits in the north-western part of the southern Carpathians, but the forces of the Axis partner were overstretched. As the Soviet 46th and 53rd Armies crossed the Transylvanian Alps and moved into north-western Romania practically unimpeded, the Hungarian 3rd Army found itself in an increasingly tricky situation. Arad was lost again on 21 September. The vanguard of the Soviet 6th Armoured Guards Army penetrated into Nagyvárad together with the Romanian Division ‘Tudor Vladimirescu’, so the army group had to take measures to preclude an enemy breakthrough into the Pannonian Plain. Army Detachment Fretter-Pico was able to relieve the tense situation in Nagyvárad the following day, when 23rd Armoured Division began a thrust towards the city centre.<sup>340</sup>

The new configuration in the combat zone prompted the high command in Zajta, where it had now moved, to draw up a situation assessment analysing the Soviet operational plans. In a telex to Hitler on 27 September, Friessner informed him that ‘the objective which the Russian leadership has set itself is to take possession of the Hungarian Carpathians and the surrounding area and thereby put the German and Hungarian forces in eastern Hungary out of commission’.<sup>341</sup> According to the army group’s intelligence, the Hungarian 3rd Army faced two Soviet mobile corps and ten or eleven divisions, while four mobile corps and 46th Army, with eleven rifle divisions, were on their way. ‘The intention is either a thrust on Budapest, aimed at crushing Hungary’s powers of resistance at a single blow or’, Friessner argued, ‘a northward thrust along the Tisza with the objective, in conjunction with the operation against the Beskid front, of cutting off and destroying all the forces of Army Group South and Army Group A stationed in eastern Hungary’.<sup>342</sup> Since the Hungarian 3rd Army and Army Detachment Fretter-Pico had at their disposal only three armoured divisions, one armoured infantry division, two Hungarian infantry divisions, seven Hungarian reserve and replacement divisions, two Hungarian replacement brigades, and a cavalry division combat group, and were facing overwhelming enemy superiority, the commander-in-chief requested manpower and material replacements amounting to approximately one armoured corps. Friessner’s assessment of the situation was at odds with Hitler’s, as the latter still believed on

<sup>339</sup> Fretter-Pico, *... verlassen von des Sieges Göttern*, 160 ff.

<sup>340</sup> *Die geheimen Tagesberichte*, 70–9; *România în Războiul Antihitlerist*, 233 ff.; Friessner, *Verratene Schlachten*, 129.

<sup>341</sup> KTB H.Gr. Süd, Abt. Ia, No. 4, ii. 190 ff., BA-MA RH 19 V/37, fos. 193 ff.

<sup>342</sup> Ibid. 192 ff., BA-MA RH 19 V/37, fos. 194 ff.

Table V.vi.3. Army Group South: order of battle (status: 28 August 1944)

Division	Corps	Army	Army Group
4th SS Pol.Armd.Inf.Div.			
Hun. 1st Armd.Div. and 22nd SS-Cav.Div. Cbt.Gr.	LVII Armd.C.		
Hun. 23rd Res.Div.		Hun. 3rd Army	
Hun. 8th Repl.Div.	Hun. II Res.A.C.		
Hun. 20th Inf.Div.			
Hun. 6th Repl.Div.			
23rd. Armd.Div.	Breith Gr. (III		
Hun. 27th Lt.Div.	Armd.C.)		
Hun. 4th Repl.Div.	Hun. VII A.C.	Army	Army Group
Hun. 12th Repl.Div.		Detachment	South LXXII A.C.
Hun. 2nd Armd.Div.		Fretter-Pico	(special duties)
Hun. 25th Inf.Div.		(Sixth Army	'Transylvania' Group
Hun. 9th Repl.Div.		HQ)	76th Inf.Div. (in rehab.)
Kessel Blocking Unit (Hun. 1st Repl.Brig.	Hun. II A.C.	Hun. 2nd	
Hun. 2nd Mtn.Repl.Brig.		Army	
Hun. 7th Repl.Div.)			
8th SS Cav.Div. 'Florian Geyer'	XXIX A.C.		
Winkler Gr.			
4th Mtn.Div.			
46th Inf.Div.	Schopper Gr.	Eighth Army	
Hun. 2nd Repl.Div.		available for duty:	
3rd Mtn.Div.		Hun IX A.C.	
Rath Gr.			
8th Lt.Inf.Div.	XVII A.C.		
Hun. 9th Frtr.Brig.			

24 September that 'the Russians will not deploy the bulk of their forces against the army group but against the Balkans, to solve the Balkan problem to their taste'.<sup>343</sup> This idea of Hitler's was probably the reason why the army group had not received any reinforcements in recent weeks and had, on the contrary, been obliged to part with three armoured combat group units.<sup>344</sup>

The OKH finally accepted Friessner's situation assessment on 28 September and ordered an attack group to be assembled in the Debrecen area. The group was to consist of four armoured divisions and an armoured infantry division.<sup>345</sup> On 30 September, before the corps unit was even deployable, the OKH assigned

<sup>343</sup> Ibid. 162, BA-MA RH 19 V/37, fo. 164.

<sup>344</sup> Ibid. 158, BA-MA RH 19 V/37, fo. 160; Study P-114c, pt. 7, ch. 1, 125, BA-MA ZA 1/2077, fo. 177.

<sup>345</sup> The plan was to assemble an attack group consisting of 1st, 13th, 23rd, and 24th Armoured Divisions, plus Armoured Infantry Division 'Feldherrnhalle'. Of these, two armoured divisions and the armoured infantry division had yet to be brought in. KTB H.Gr. Süd, Abt. Ia, No. 4, ii. 158, BA-MA RH 19 V/37, fo. 160.

the following task to the attack group: ‘to conduct an operation from the Debrecen area, aimed at striking the enemy west of the Carpathian exits and then turning sharply south-east into the Carpathian valleys.’<sup>346</sup> This part of the OKH’s operational plans must be seen in the context of the operational concept for Transylvania as a whole, according to which the army group was to hold the Carpathian salient on the line that had been reached and prepare an offensive against the southern Carpathians to halt and drive back the enemy forces which had advanced to the west and north-west.<sup>347</sup> The OKH order prompted the high command in Zajta to prepare a plan for the forthcoming operation and reorganize the areas under its command. The army group’s first concern was to assemble the armoured attack group as quickly as possible in the Debrecen area, in order to launch the offensive. At the same time, the Hungarian 2nd Army was released from its ties with the German Sixth Army and placed under the command of the German Eighth Army (Army Detachment Wöhler). Its main task was to defend and hold the eastern section of the army group’s area. The German Sixth Army, to which the new attack group was assigned, remained in the section of the front south of Nagyvárad. On 1 October 1944 it received a special order to prepare to launch the planned attack (Operation GYPSY BARON) by 10 October at the latest.<sup>348</sup> The Hungarian 3rd Army was responsible for the section of the army group’s front extending back to the west, and its task was to hold that section with all the means at its disposal.<sup>349</sup>

### (c) The Final Loss of Transylvania (October 1944)

The threatening situation in the Kolozsvár area eased towards the end of September, when 2nd Ukrainian Front moved its point of concentration to the west in order to launch a new attack aimed at breaking through the German–Hungarian front at Nagyvárad. The offensive planned by Malinovsky, who had been appointed marshal of the Soviet Union on 13 September, was directed primarily against the Hungarian 3rd Army, which was defending both the section of the front south of Nagyvárad and the army group’s southernmost wing. The Hungarian 3rd Army, which the general staff in Budapest had assembled from reserve and replacement units only in the last ten days of September, had the task of defending a 300-kilometre-long section of the front west of Nagyvárad, reaching as far as the army group’s border at Deta-Petrovgrad. However, the Hungarian army did not connect with Army Group F, since C-in-C South-East’s troops in the northern area under his command were insufficient to extend his coverage to the section of the front in the area west of the Iron Gate. The existing gap was an enormous security risk, as there was nothing to

<sup>346</sup> KTB H.Gr. Süd, Abt. Ia, No. 4, ii. 220, BA-MA RH 19 V/37, fo. 222.

<sup>347</sup> Ibid. 219, BA-MA RH 19 V/37, fo. 221.

<sup>348</sup> FS H.Gr. Süd, Abt. Ia, No. 153/44 g.K.Chefs., 1 Oct. 1944, KTB H.Gr. Süd, Abt. Ia, No. 4, iii a, 5, BA-MA RH 19 V/38, fo. 6.

<sup>349</sup> KTB H.Gr. Süd, Abt. Ia, No. 4, iii a, 4–9, BA-MA RH 19 V/38, 5–10; Friessner, *Verratene Schlachten*, 129 ff.; Mazulenko, *Die Zerschlagung der Heeresgruppe Südukraine*, 98–101; Anescu, Bantea, and Cupșa, *Die Teilnahme*, 45–62.

stop enemy forces pouring into the northern part of the Balkan peninsula. However, neither Malinovsky nor the 3rd Ukrainian Front forces still fighting in the south recognized this favourable opportunity.

At the end of September the Hungarian 3rd Army, then occupying defensive positions east of the 1940 Hungarian–Romanian border, was facing the Soviet 46th and 53rd Armies. By the end of the month the enemy had driven the Hungarian divisions at Mako-Szalonta back to the state border at the first assault and had entered the city of Nagyvárad. Despite this success, the fighting in this section of the defensive front abated considerably after 27 September, while 2nd Ukrainian Front was engaged in bringing up four armoured corps southeast of Békéscsaba to protect the front line which it had reached. The large-scale Soviet offensive was launched on 6 October north of Arad along the Hungarian–Romanian border between Kikinda and Nagyvárad and destabilized the Hungarian 3rd Army front. The critical situation in the southern section of the Hungarian area of operations prompted the army group HQ to tighten up the command structure on its right wing so as to ensure unified conduct of operations throughout the breakthrough area. On 6 October it placed the Hungarian 3rd Army under Sixth Army HQ and formed Army Detachment Fretter-Pico, which was thus made fully responsible for the defensive battle between Nagyvárad and the army group's right-hand border.<sup>350</sup> However, owing to inadequate telecommunication links, Sixth Army HQ was unable to coordinate operations on the right wing, so the high command in Gyöngyös had to continue conducting operations between Kikinda and Gyula. As a result, the army group rescinded its order two days later, and the Hungarian 3rd Army came once again under the army group's direct command.<sup>351</sup> At this stage, the Hungarian high command could only attempt to bring some order into the military chaos in the area under its command. Its first task, if it was to prevent the collapse of its front, was to stop its divisions retreating. By 10 October the Hungarian Axis partner had managed, with the greatest difficulty, to establish a security line on the west bank of the Tisza between Szeged and Szolnok.<sup>352</sup> Now the Hungarian 3rd Army was already fighting deep in its own home territory, while the neighbouring German Sixth Army was still involved in a fierce armoured battle with the Soviet 6th Armoured Guards Army in the Hungarian–Romanian border area.

While Sixth Army was still preparing for Operation GYPSY BARON, the large-scale Soviet offensive was launched along the Hungarian–Romanian border between Kikinda and Nagyvárad. Since the main effort of the attack was directed against the Hungarian defensive positions in the Kevermes–Gyula area, Army Detachment Fretter-Pico HQ thought the Soviet high command was out to capture the Tisza river crossings at Szolnok. However, the aim of the operation was not entirely clear because, in addition to the advance at Gyula, a second point of concentration could be detected south-west of Nagyvárad, where the Soviet 6th Armoured Guards

<sup>350</sup> KTB H.Gr. Süd, Abt. Ia, No. 4, iii a, 52, BA-MA RH 19 V/38, fo. 53.

<sup>351</sup> Ibid. 74 and 87, BA-MA RH 19 V/38, fos. 75 and 88.

<sup>352</sup> Kissel, *Die Panzerschlacht in der Pusztai*, 38–43.

Army, with four mobile corps, was attacking northwards on both sides of Nagyszalonta. The Hungarian 7th Corps divisions deployed there could not hold out against the massive assault on the German Sixth Army's west wing, so the Soviet forces achieved their aim of penetrating into Hungarian territory west of the Nagyvárad–Debrecen line. Sixth Army HQ's only chance of stopping the enemy invasion was to launch a counter-attack by Armoured Group Breith.<sup>353</sup> Since III Armoured Corps was still engaged in preparations for Operation GYPSY BARON, it did not yet have the necessary forces to stop the Soviet attack and close the gap in the front, but German units nevertheless managed to delay the advance of the Soviet 6th Armoured Guards Army. The offensive at Nagyvárad–Debrecen suggested that the Soviets planned to capture the river crossings in the central section of the Tisza as quickly as possible and then, in conjunction with 1st and 4th Ukrainian Fronts, which were currently engaged in a heavy attack on Army Group A's positions in the Dukla pass and Beskids area,<sup>354</sup> encircle the bulk of Army Group South and Army Detachment Heinrici in the Beskid mountains and the northern Wooded Carpathians.<sup>355</sup>

The army had, of course, anticipated massive 2nd Ukrainian Front attacks west of Kolozsvár at the beginning of October, but the intensity of the offensive on Sixth Army's west wing was even greater than it had expected. The Soviet advance reached Armoured Group Breith when it was in the middle of preparations for Operation GYPSY BARON, making it impossible for the armoured group to carry out the action as planned. Since III Armoured Corps had only limited forces at its disposal at this point, because parts of the divisions assigned to it were still on their way to the mustering areas, the army group HQ was obliged to try to secure the Nagyvárad–Debrecen line against an enemy thrust to the east with the units available. This tactically decisive task was undertaken by 23rd Armoured Division, which was protecting Nagyvárad and the section west of the city, and by 1st Armoured Division, which was then south-west of Debrecen, fighting the flanks of the enemy spearheads that were advancing northwards. By that means, Sixth Army was able to limit the advance of the Soviet VI Guards Cavalry Corps and IX Mechanized Corps, and prevent a thrust to the east.

Despite the critical situation at Nagyvárad–Debrecen, it was almost four days before the units of Armoured Group Breith had taken up their positions sufficiently to create the possibility of enclosing the Soviet corps. Although 1st and 23rd Armoured Divisions had fewer armoured vehicles at their disposal,<sup>356</sup> on 10 October

<sup>353</sup> Armoured Group (Corps Group) Breith, named after General Hermann Breith, consisted of the German III Armd.A.C. and the Hungarian VII A.C. It existed from September to December 1944. The German III Armd.A.C. is often referred to as Armoured Group Breith in the records and in the secondary literature.

<sup>354</sup> Schönherr, 'Obranné operacie armádnej skupiny Heinrici'.

<sup>355</sup> FS H.Gr. Süd, Abt. Ia, No. 3723/44 g.Kdos to Hitler, 27 Sept. 1944, KTB H.Gr. Süd, Abt. Ia, No. 4, ii. 193, BA-MA RH 19 V/37, fo. 195.

<sup>356</sup> On 10 October 1944 Sixth Army HQ had 59 tanks and 66 assault guns in the area of operations south-west of Debrecen. They faced approximately 130 tanks belonging to the three enclosed Soviet corps. The Soviet 6th Armoured Guards Army also had about 280 tanks available for deployment outside the enclosure. Study P-114c, pt. 7, ch. 2, annex, 375, Tab. XXVI. BA-MA ZA 1/2078, fo. 376.

they managed to join up behind the two corps and another Soviet unit, IV Guards Cavalry Corps, and cut their rear communication lines.<sup>357</sup> In order to exploit this operational success and destroy the encircled enemy units completely, Friessner transferred as many forces from the army group's left wing as was feasible in view of the enemy threat. In taking this step, the high command in Györgyös consciously accepted the risk that Army Detachment Wöhler might now scarcely be able to withstand massive enemy attacks. As well as concentrating all the forces that the army group could spare in the Nagyvárad–Debrecen area, Friessner also applied to have the SS units that were in Hungary at the beginning of October released for this important battle.<sup>358</sup> Although this was the only chance there had been for a long time to achieve a notable success against Soviet troops once again, the Reich Leader SS categorically rejected Friessner's request.<sup>359</sup>

Between 10 and 14 October, the configuration at Nagyvárad developed into the first phase of a remorseless tank battle in which Sixth Army deployed all available forces from every possible source in the attempt to prevent a break in the encirclement. Although Eighth Army HQ sent in further infantry reinforcements, there were still not enough forces to achieve complete success. By 12 October the Soviet 6th Armoured Guards Army had already re-established a connection with the enclosed corps by means of combined attacks from the south and the north, which achieved a deep and wide breakthrough on both sides of Nagyvárad and opened the pocket.<sup>360</sup> It became clear that, despite the support from 76th Infantry Division, the two armoured divisions were not strong enough to withstand the enemy assault.<sup>361</sup> Sixth Army was now in a precarious situation, unable to determine whether the Soviet army would move its armoured units out of the pocket or increase the concentration of troops south of Debrecen. Despite their temporary setback, the Soviet forces continued the offensive against Army Group South as before. The breakthrough by 13th Armoured Division west of Debrecen, in particular, allowed the Soviet 6th Armoured Guards Army to restore the supply routes to the encircled troop units and thus enable the Soviet army corps to maintain their freedom of movement. The Soviet armoured army took the opportunity to attack 23rd and 1st Armoured Divisions and 76th Infantry Division in the rear, shattering Sixth Army HQ's right wing at Nagyvárad. This opened up a large gap between III Armoured Corps and LXXII Corps, into which strong enemy forces continued to pour.<sup>362</sup> No longer capable of closing the gap, the army group reported on 14 October that 'unless the situation in the Szolnok–Debrecen area and between the Danube and the Tisza can be thoroughly cleared up, a decision on

<sup>357</sup> Rebentisch, *Zum Kaukasus*, 411–16.

<sup>358</sup> KTB OKW, iv/1, 842 ff.

<sup>359</sup> Himmler motivated his refusal by invoking the politically unstable situation in Budapest. FS RFSS to OB H.Gr. Süd, 11 October 1944 g.Kdos, Study P-114c, pt. 7, ch. 2, annex 97, 196, BA-MA ZA 1/2078, fo. 199; Friessner, *Verratene Schlachten*, 136.

<sup>360</sup> KTB H.Gr. Süd, Abt. Ia, No. 4, iii a, 12 Oct. 1944, 1, BA-MA RH 19 V/39, fo. 116; KTB OKW, iv/1, 843.

<sup>361</sup> Löser, *Bittere Pflicht*, 407–10.

<sup>362</sup> Kissel, *Die Panzerschlacht in der Pussta*, 95; Rebentisch, *Zum Kaukasus*, 418–24; Hake, *Das waren wir!*, 201; *Die geheimen Tagesberichte*, xi. 106, 109, 112, 115, 118, 121, 124.

a large-scale withdrawal, initially to the other side of the Tisza, will probably be needed very shortly'.<sup>363</sup> The call for an improvement in the military situation on Army Group South's west wing appeared wholly unrealistic, since the Soviet pressure on the German–Hungarian defensive front showed no sign of letting up. On the contrary, the Red Army command firmly maintained its intention to deliver a destructive blow to the bulk of the army group forces by means of concentric attacks from the south and south-west and across the ridge of the Wooded Carpathians.<sup>364</sup>

When it became clear that the fighting would soon spread into Hungarian territory, the regent of Hungary, Miklós Horthy de Nagybánya, approached the Allies through diplomatic channels. The western Allies refused to negotiate an armistice with the Hungarian government, having passed responsibility for this to their Soviet ally, so a Hungarian delegation embarked on the relevant negotiations with the government in Moscow in early October. On 9 October the Soviet foreign minister, Vyacheslav Molotov, submitted preliminary terms for an armistice to the Hungarian delegation. Horthy accepted them, and his plenipotentiaries signed the treaty the following day. Although the critical situation in the Transylvanian area of operations called for rapid action by the government in Budapest, the regent thought he himself could decide when the agreement was to enter into force, after all the necessary preparations had been completed. Horthy had been intending to extricate Hungary from the armed conflict for some time, but measures to disarm the German agencies and troops in Budapest by surprise had not been taken in time, nor had the commander-in-chief of the Honvéd been instructed to make the necessary preparations for such action. The German authorities in Budapest were fully informed of the internal political developments affecting their Hungarian Axis partner, so the German agencies had prepared counter-measures at an early stage. As Horthy did not ratify and announce the armistice agreement immediately, the Soviet government issued an ultimatum requiring Hungary to cease hostilities and withdraw from the Tripartite Pact by 15 October. The regent then informed the German ambassador in Hungary, SS Brigadeführer Edmund Veesenmayer, of the action which the Hungarian government was taking, and news of the armistice was officially announced in a radio address. This came as no surprise to the German side, and the representatives of the National Socialist regime in Budapest reacted immediately by helping Ferenc Szálasi and his fascist Arrow Cross party (Nyilaskeresztes Párt) to take power. The 'Leader of the Nation' then issued a counter-proclamation, calling on the Hungarian people to continue the war on the side of the Axis powers. Horthy, isolated in the castle at Budapest by the SS and the Security Service (SD), was forced, under German pressure, to withdraw his appeal and transfer governmental power to Szálasi. Hitler had now lost all confidence in the regent, and he accordingly forced Horthy to resign as head of state. But that was

<sup>363</sup> FS H.Gr. Süd, Abt. Ia, No. 4009/44, g.Kdos, 14 Oct. 1944, to Op.Abt./GenStdH, KTB No. 4, iii a, 14 October 1944, 7, BA-MA RH 19 V/39, fo. 143.

<sup>364</sup> Friessner, *Verratene Schlachten*, 135 ff.; Amitrow, 'Die Zerschlagung des Südfügels', 502 ff.; Gosztony, *Endkampf*, 38 ff.

not enough for the German dictator, and he had Horthy and his family taken into custody and interned in Germany. The regent's attempt to get his country out of the war and save it from disaster failed from the outset.<sup>365</sup>

Unlike the Romanian theatre of war, where King Michael's political decision a few weeks earlier had led to military disaster, the events in Hungary did not have an equally lasting effect on the situation in the Transylvanian area of operations. Whereas the pro-German commander of the Hungarian 3rd Army, Lt. Field Marshal József Vitéz Heszlényi, who had not been informed of Horthy's action in advance, had no hesitation in continuing hostilities on Germany's side, the commander of the Hungarian 1st Army, General Béla Miklós Dálnoki, went over to the Soviets. Col.-Gen. Lajos Veress Dálnoki, the commander of the Hungarian 2nd Army, was extremely ambivalent. Following the regent's proclamation, he did not make it clear whether he intended to respond to Horthy's appeal or to continue executing the operational orders of Army Group South. When rumours began to circulate that Veress 'had only declared his loyalty under pressure',<sup>366</sup> and that he intended to order the Hungarian 2nd Army units to withdraw to the Tisza line, Wöhler had the Hungarian commander arrested.<sup>367</sup>

Although some units of the Honvéd responded to Horthy's appeal and ceased operations, the bulk of the Hungarian forces remained in position, so there was no fiasco on Army Group South's defensive front.<sup>368</sup> In the course of the political overthrow, the new rulers also had the chief of the general staff, General Vörös, arrested, leaving the Honvéd command authorities temporarily without any leadership by their own general staff. As, in his opinion, instructions on the subject were unlikely to be issued in the near future, the Plenipotentiary General for the Wehrmacht in Hungary, Gen. Hans von Greiffenberg, took on this task himself.<sup>369</sup>

While the German agencies in the Hungarian capital and the newly appointed Szálasi government were endeavouring to calm the political situation in the country, Hitler issued an order on the future conduct of operations in the area of Army Group South. The army's primary task was to 'thwart the enemy's intention to destroy the army group by means of a concentric attack from the south, the south-east, and through the Wooded Carpathians; to that end, it [the army] must strain all its forces to prosecute the battle in the area south of Debrecen'.<sup>370</sup> The Führer order gave Army Detachment Wöhler permission to withdraw to the Marghita–Szatmárnémeti–Huszt line, while Eighth Army HQ was to prepare for

<sup>365</sup> KTB OKW, iv/1, 842–50; Hillgruber, 'Das deutsch-ungarische Verhältnis', 94–9; Silagi, 'Ungarn seit 1918', 898 ff.; Friessner, *Verratene Schlachten*, 139–48; Gosztony, *Endkampf*, 42–56; Adonyi-Náredy, *Ungarns Armee im Zweiten Weltkrieg*, 150–62.

<sup>366</sup> KTB H.Gr. Süd, Abt. Ia, No. 4, iii a, 15 Oct. 1944, 7, BA-MA RH 19 V/39, fo. 154.

<sup>367</sup> See also Friessner's letter to 'Herr Verres', 16 Oct. 1944, H.Gr. Südukraine/Süd, Handakte OB H.Gr. Südukraine/Süd, 07.-12.1944, BA-MA RH 19 V/1, fo. 53.

<sup>368</sup> KTB H.Gr. Süd, Abt. Ia, No. 4, iii a, 15 Oct. 1944, 5–9, 16 Oct. 1944, BA-MA RH 19 V/39, fos. 152–6, 167; KTB OKW, iv/1, 849; Friessner, *Verratene Schlachten*, 146; *Die geheimen Tagesberichte*, xi. 130.

<sup>369</sup> KTB H.Gr. Süd, Abt. Ia, No. 4, iii a, 16 Oct. 1944, BA-MA RH 19 V/39, fo. 166.

<sup>370</sup> Ibid., fo. 169.

withdrawal to the Tisza–Bodrog line. And, as its most important task, Hitler ordered Army Group South to use all its resources to prevent enemy thrusts against Budapest.<sup>371</sup>

Even Sixth Army's brief and locally limited success did not noticeably reduce the tension on the defence front in the Hungarian–Romanian border area. After a short period of regrouping, Malinovsky used his 'newly recovered operational freedom of action for a strong combined assault by mobile forces'.<sup>372</sup> On 18 October he launched the newly assembled 7th Armoured Guards Army on an attack to the north of Nagyvárad, in the direction of Nyíregyháza. Sixth Army HQ only had weak forces of its own to meet this attack, so Sixth Army's situation deteriorated once again. It had no alternative but to withdraw to the north, where it became involved at Debrecen in heavy defensive fighting against much stronger enemy forces attacking on all sides. In the attempt to hold the strategically important city of Debrecen, Fretter-Pico mustered the units of III Armoured Corps south of the city, but this tactical measure could not prevent parts of 4th and 5th Guards Cavalry Corps from availing themselves of the existing gaps in the front to thrust forward on both sides of Debrecen. The aim of Malinovsky's operation, of which 7th Armoured Guards Army bore the main effort, was to take possession of the Tisza river crossings in the Tokaj region so as to block the retreat of Army Detachment Wöhler and the Hungarian 1st Army. At this point the army group was still in the process of withdrawing to the Marghita–Szatmárnémeti–Huszt line, and the main effect of the attack by the Soviet armoured army was to threaten its supply lines. This unfavourable development meant that Army Group South had to make organizational changes on its left wing. As the attack by the Soviet 7th Armoured Guards Army threatened not only Army Detachment Wöhler but also the Hungarian 1st Army, which, as part of Army Group Heinrici, belonged to Army Group A, the OKH dissolved the Hungarian army's link with General Heinrici's First Armoured Army on 21 October and placed it under the command of Army Detachment Wöhler. This was the only way for Army Group South to conduct a coordinated campaign in its eastern area of command and prevent a military disaster south-east of the Tokaj–Huszt line.<sup>373</sup>

The concentration of Soviet troops between Nagyvárad and Debrecen at the beginning of the third week in October, by means of which Malinovsky hoped to force a decision in eastern Hungary, developed into another tank battle in the Debrecen–Nyíregyháza area. While 6th Armoured Guards Army outside Debrecen turned west to attack the German–Hungarian positions at Szolnok, 53rd Army south of the Tisza advanced towards the Polgár–Debrecen line so as to move along the river from the west and get to the rear of Army Detachment Wöhler. A far more dangerous development for the German–Hungarian defenders was the offensive by

<sup>371</sup> Ibid., fos. 169 ff.; Friessner, *Verratene Schlachten*, 146 ff.

<sup>372</sup> OKH enemy situation assessment, 20 Oct. 1944, quoted in Study P-114c, pt. 7, ch. 2, annex 99, BA-MA ZA 1/2078, fo. 202.

<sup>373</sup> *Die geheimen Tagesberichte*, xi. 11, 130, 136, 142, 145; Kissel, *Die Panzerschlacht in der Puszt*, 96–126.

three Soviet mobile corps—XXIII Armoured Corps and IV and V Guards Corps—under the command of Lt.-Gen. I. A. Pliyev. This strong 7th Guards Army formation pressed forward to the east of the city with the intention of seizing the river crossings between Tokaj and Csap. The attack was clearly aimed Kassa, where Malinovsky's troops were to join up with the forces of 1st Ukrainian Front. In case the offensive stalled, the Russian commander-in-chief had 27th Army ready in reserve north of Nagyvárad.

The strong pressure from 2nd Ukrainian Front took its toll of the German Sixth Army, which was forced to evacuate Debrecen on 19 October. The area was defended by III Armoured Corps, which persisted in its task for another two days, struggling to stop the enemy advancing northwards. But the forces available to Sixth Army HQ were simply not enough to withstand the assault of the Pliyev Group. On 21 October the enemy spearheads reached the area of Nyíregyháza, earlier than expected, and were steadily approaching the Tisza river crossings at Tokaj.

With the Soviet 7th Guards Army's breakthrough in the German defence lines north of Debrecen, the enemy now stood far to the rear of Army Detachment Wöhler, exposing it to the risk of enclosure in the area of Szatmárnémeti and in the Maramureş region on the Ukrainian border to the east of Szatmárnémeti. In this precarious situation, Friessner decided that Army Detachment Wöhler should launch an attack to the west, with its right wing, instead of withdrawing far to the north behind the Tisza. III Armoured Corps' strongest units were to move north at the same time to support Wöhler's attack and, if the army group's operational objectives were achieved, cut the rear communication lines of the strong Soviet group of forces north of Debrecen, and encircle them in the Nyíregyháza area. If the operation were to fail, the entire section of the front between the southern Beskids and Szolnok would be threatened with collapse. Friessner nevertheless saw coordinated attacks by the two German armies as the only chance to bring 2nd Ukrainian Front's offensive to a standstill and to prevent it from joining up with 1st Ukrainian Front in the Kassa area.<sup>374</sup>

So, on 21 October, 23rd and 1st Armoured Divisions launched an attack to the north-east from the area north of Debrecen, to close the gap in the front separating them from the Hungarian 2nd Army. While III Armoured Corps' offensive was highly successful at first and the important township of Nagykálló was captured the very next day, Army Detachment Wöhler made much slower progress, as it had only infantry forces available for this relief attack. Sixth Army Group HQ's offensive was highly successful right from the start, when 23rd Armoured Division succeeded in cutting, in the Nagykálló area, the main supply lines of the three Soviet mobile corps whose spearheads had reached the Tisza at Tokaj and Csap. However, the situation in that area remained extremely tense because—despite III Armoured Corps' strenuous efforts—the connection with Army Detachment Wöhler had not yet been achieved. It took another two days for the vanguard of

<sup>374</sup> Friessner, *Verratene Schlachten*, 151 ff.; Kissel, *Die Panzerschlacht in der Pusta*, 128 ff.

3rd Mountain Division to reach the foremost positions of 23rd Armoured Division. Once that was done, three mobile corps of 2nd Ukrainian Front were not only cut off from their rear communications but were now encircled at Nyíregyháza. Army Group South owed this success primarily to 1st and 23rd Armoured Divisions, which had withstood the heavy attacks of the almost entirely encircled enemy units, thereby tying down strong forces and facilitating the offensive operations on Army Detachment Wöhler's southern wing.

Once the ring had closed round the Soviet XXIII Armoured Corps and IV and V Guards Corps, Army Group South's main task was to ensure that the units deployed to the south of the ring withstood the assaults both by the surrounded enemy troops and by the Soviet 27th Army. The besieging German–Hungarian forces also had to be strong and steadfast enough to prevent a breakout and effectively combat the enclosed enemy troops. Nyíregyháza was retaken on 26 October, and a day later the battle was almost over. Despite all their efforts, Malinovsky's units did not manage to break out of the German–Hungarian enclosure, and mere remnants of the three corps were obliged to fight their way south, leaving all their equipment behind.<sup>375</sup>

On 26 October, under the impact of the imminent success, Guderian issued a directive on the future conduct of operations in the area of Army Group South. That same day, the OKH withdrew the Hungarian 2nd Army from the command of Army Detachment Wöhler and assigned it to new defensive tasks on the banks of the Danube at Mohács. In accordance with Guderian's directive, Army Group South had to move its defensive positions to the Tisza line and make sure that front could be held, even against strong enemy attacks. Despite the success at Debrecen–Nyíregyháza, Guderian also intended to move the main battle line in the Tokaj–Csap area to the north bank of the river in the medium term, above all in order to release armoured forces for deployment at other OKH critical points. At the end of October 1944, with this in mind, he already gave the order for III Armoured Corps to be transferred from Sixth Army to the Hungarian 3rd Army as soon as possible, 'in order to strike the enemy between the Danube and the Tisza and establish a firm connection with Army Group F'.<sup>376</sup> With the end of the battle at Nyíregyháza, most of the fighting moved west to the Pannonian Plain, posing a massive threat to the Hungarian capital. The Soviet breakthrough to the Tisza north of Debrecen, which had occasioned the rapid withdrawal of Army Detachment Wöhler, was also the reason why the last German units had left Transylvania by the end of October 1944, in the course of Eighth Army HQ's withdrawal.

After the fighting moved to Transylvania in September 1944, 2nd Ukrainian Front had two possibilities at the end of the month: either to advance north-west

<sup>375</sup> Study P-114c, pt. 7, ch. 1, 125–34, BA-MA ZA 1/2077, fos. 177–86; *Die geheimen Tagesberichte*, xi. 139, 142, 145, 148, 151, 154, 157, 160, 163, 166; *Deutschland im zweiten Weltkrieg*, vi. 100 ff.; Philippi and Heim, *Der Feldzug gegen Sowjetrussland*, 262–4; Kissel, *Die Panzerschlacht in der Pusztai*, 130–40; Amitrow, 'Die Zerschlagung des Südfügels', 502–6; Hinze, *Mit dem Mut der Verzweiflung*, 328–42; Klatt, *Die 3. Gebirgs-Division*, 305 ff.; Rebentisch, *Zum Kaukasus*, 425–33.

<sup>376</sup> KTB H.Gr. Süd, No. 4, iii b, 27 Oct. 1944, 6 ff., BA-MA RH 19 V/40, fos. 39 ff.

from the Timișoara–Arad–Nagyvárad line to take the Hungarian capital, or to attack northwards in order, in coordination with 4th Ukrainian Front, to enclose and destroy the bulk of Army Group South and parts of Army Detachment Heinrici east of the Nagyvárad–Kassa–Prešov–Dukla pass line and the edge of the Beskids and the Wooded Carpathians. The military authorities in Moscow finally decided in favour of what was thought to be the simpler option, that is, an offensive in the direction of Kassa. Malinovsky accordingly massed his armoured units at Nagyvárad and launched the attack from there, in a northerly direction.<sup>377</sup> Since Army Detachment Wöhler, in particular, was threatened with encirclement, Friessner moved all the forces he could muster from whatever source to ward off the danger in the Nagyvárad–Debrecen area. Army Group South's response, and the course of the battle in the Nagyvárad–Debrecen–Nyíregyháza area, showed that, despite all the setbacks in recent weeks and months, the Axis powers still had the necessary combat strength to repel massive locally circumscribed attacks by the Soviet enemy. The army group managed not only to rescue Army Detachment Wöhler from impending encirclement, but also to stabilize the situation on its left wing for a time. The conclusion that must be drawn from the military events in central Transylvania is that, in the fighting in the Nagyvárad–Debrecen–Nyíregyháza area, Army Group South achieved an operational success that completely upset the plans of the Soviet enemy. Despite this partial success, the Wehrmacht and its Hungarian partner were obliged to withdraw the last of their troops from the area south and east of the Tisza, so that, by the end of October, the Axis powers had finally lost Transylvania.

#### 4. THE SITUATION OF ARMY GROUP SOUTH AFTER THE LOSS OF TRANSYLVANIA (END OF OCTOBER 1944)

Since the beginning of September 1944, three Soviet army fronts had been attempting to execute the Stavka's plan to encircle the Axis army groups deployed in the southern section of the eastern front by means of a pincer movement extending from the Beskids to the Transylvanian Alps, and destroy them on the western edge of the mountains. However, despite the serious defeat which Army Group North Ukraine (Army Group A) had suffered in Galicia in July, and the military disasters sustained by Army Group South Ukraine (Army Group South) in Bessarabia and Moldavia at the end of August, and despite the succession

<sup>377</sup> According to the Stavka's operational planning in September/October 1944, 1st and 2nd Ukrainian Fronts were to enclose Army Detachment Heinrici and the bulk of Army Group South in an encircling operation east of the Dukla pass–Prešov–Košice–Nagyvárad line and the western edge of the Beskids and the Wooded Carpathians. The operational plan was based on three factors: 1. an offensive by 1st Ukrainian Front from the Sanok–Krásno line through the Dukla pass into the Prešov area, where it would connect with the Slovakian rebels; 2. the success of the Slovakian national uprising; 3. an offensive by 2nd Ukrainian Front from the Hungarian–Romanian border in Transylvania into the Kassa area, where it would connect with the Slovakian rebels. See Part V, Chapter V of the present volume; Schönherr, 'Die Niederschlagung', 54–60; Schönherr, 'Obranné operácie armádnej skupiny Heinrici'.

of territorial losses they had incurred, both army groups still proved to have enough combat strength, and above all the necessary morale, to hold the Soviet offensives up for a long period and so prevent the enemy forces, superior in human and material resources, from achieving their overall operational objective in the north-east of the Balkan peninsula. As the Soviet concept of a pincer operation had come to nothing despite numerous attempts, and since the failure of the Slovakian national uprising had removed another factor which had, from time to time, offered the possibility of successful support in the rear of the German–Hungarian front for the Soviet large-scale offensives, the Soviet military authorities were obliged to launch another attack on a different section of the front. That was the only way Malinovsky could see to speed up his troops' advance, which had been extremely slow in recent weeks as a result of the fierce resistance by the German–Hungarian forces, and thereby achieve the operational objective of conquering Hungary as quickly as possible.

After the fighting in the Debrecen–Nyíregyháza area had come to an end, and Army Detachment Wöhler had withdrawn to the north bank of the Tisza, Army Group South had to defend a front that was 600 kilometres long. The defensive line, with a left wing starting north-west of Ungvár, ran from Csap to the east of Kecskemét on the north bank of the Tisza, then departed from the Tisza section near Kecskemét to run south-west across the Danube–Tisza plain and reach the Danube at Baja. From that position the army group carried out its defensive tasks in the area on the western river-bank, up to the point on the Danube–Drava estuary where the front came within the area of C-in-C South-East. To ward off enemy offensives, the high command in Mátraháza had only eleven Wehrmacht and Waffen SS divisions,<sup>378</sup> and thirteen divisions and four brigades of the Hungarian army, all of which bore the marks of the past few weeks' heavy fighting and were only partially fit for deployment. The German Axis partner alone had lost more than 19,000 men in the fighting in Transylvania since the beginning of September, and the OKH had allocated only 8,500 to the army group in replacement.<sup>379</sup> In the light of the heavy losses, Army Group South urgently requested the OKH to refresh both the human and the material resources of the hard-hit German divisions and to strengthen the infantry component, failing which successful combat against an enemy attacking *en masse* would be virtually impossible. Guderian rejected this request, pointing out that 'refreshment was impossible at present, since all available resources were going in a different direction'.<sup>380</sup>

Combat strength, greatly undermined in recent weeks, was not the only thing that presented the army group with a very difficult problem at the end of October. The defensive line ran across the completely flat plains of southern and eastern Hungary, which afforded no cover whatsoever, and would be very difficult to

<sup>378</sup> Five of the eleven German divisions in the area of Army Group South were armoured divisions; Study P-114c, pt. 7, ch. 1, 137, BA-MA ZA 1/2077, fo. 189.

<sup>379</sup> KTB H.Gr. Süd, Abt. Ia, No. 4, iii b, 28 Oct. 1944, 5, BA-MA RH 19 V/40, fo. 52.

<sup>380</sup> KTB H.Gr. Süd, Abt. Ia, No. 4, iii b, 27 Oct. 1944, 9, fo. BA-MA RH 19 V/40, 41. The 'different direction' in question was preparation for the Ardennes offensive. For details, see *Germany and the Second World War*, vii. 678–97.

defend with the existing human and material resources against attacks by armoured units. The meandering and highly erratic course of the Tisza between Csap and the Kecskemét region also required the deployment of considerable human and material resources which the army group did not have at its disposal. In these circumstances, Friessner was obliged to improvise to a large extent, occupying the front with only a series of strongpoints and endeavouring to repel enemy offensives successfully by means of mobile combat. The commander-in-chief was particularly concerned about 'the condition and morale of all the Hungarian units',<sup>381</sup> which in his opinion were virtually useless for any serious fighting. In this situation, the army group HQ again resorted to a concept that essentially failed a few weeks earlier in the battles in eastern Romania. Once again, Friessner thought he could increase the steadfastness of the Axis partner's units by integrating the Hungarian forces in German units or assigning Wehrmacht units to the Hungarian partner's sections of the front. Not content with these measures, the high command in Mátraháza placed the Hungarian 3rd Army under the command of Sixth Army HQ on 29 October and included both formations in Army Detachment Fretter-Pico.<sup>382</sup> By means of all these preparations, arrangements, and restructuring, Friessner hoped to be able to hold the Tisza–Danube front, at least for a time. In response to the shift of 2nd Ukrainian Front's point of concentration to the section of the German–Hungarian defensive line between Kecskemét and Baja, the high command in Mátraháza formed an armoured combat group under the command of the German IV Armoured Corps, which was stationed east of Budapest as a reserve force to deal with any Russian breakthroughs. The army group also intended to withdraw strong armoured forces of Eighth Army HQ from the Nyíregyháza area and transfer them to Army Detachment Fretter-Pico, which was to 'assemble all suitable forces for the attack, strike the enemy between the Danube and the Tisza, and establish a firm connection with C-in-C South-East'.<sup>383</sup> In the circumstances, Army Group South could only hope that the resumption of 2nd Ukrainian Front's offensive would be confined to a limited area, giving the army group a chance to strengthen the forces on the relevant section of the front with armoured units capable of opposing Malinovsky's troops. Despite the successful combat operations in the central reaches of the Tisza in the second half of October, the precarious situation in south-eastern Hungary had scarcely improved by the end of the month.

<sup>381</sup> Friessner, *Verratene Schlachten*, 160.

<sup>382</sup> KTB H.Gr. Süd, Abt. Ia, No. 4, iii b, 26–31 Oct. 1944, BA-MA RH 19 V/40, fos. 21–85; Friessner, *Verratene Schlachten*, 159–65.

<sup>383</sup> Study P-114c, pt. 7, ch. 1, 141, BA-MA ZA 1/2077, fo. 193.

# VII. The Hungarian Theatre of War

*Krisztián Ungváry*

## 1. THE HUNGARIAN GOVERNMENT'S FOREIGN POLICY AFTER THE GERMAN DEFEAT AT STALINGRAD

After the 2nd Hungarian Army's lack of success in the Don salient, the Kállay government, with the support of the regent, Miklós Horthy, endeavoured to keep Hungary's contribution to the hostilities to a minimum. Horthy had been convinced, ever since the United States' entry into the war in December 1941, that the German side could not win. He considered that the Bárdossy government's declaration of war on the Allies, a decision taken under pressure from the Reich, was a mistake, and it led to a loss of confidence in Lázlo von Bárdossy, who was obliged to step down in the spring of 1942. The first attempts to negotiate a separate peace with the western Allies were initiated by the new Kállay government in the same year. Its efforts in this connection were encouraged by events in 1943. The Hungarian government had been putting out feelers to the western powers again since the spring. And on 9 September 1943 it reached an agreement with the western Allies on the reduction of its military commitment. The Hungarian air force was to make no further attacks on Allied aircraft from now on, and the occupying troops were ordered to avoid any action against regular troops. Even fighter pilots retrained by the Luftwaffe in France were forbidden to take part in the hostilities. The Hungarian government was not prepared to hand over to Germany Allied prisoners of war who had fled to Hungary. Polish military internees and their relatives were allowed to attend schools and to have newspapers. The government even encouraged members of the Polish forces to leave the country, as long as it was possible to do so, thus contributing to the formation of an Allied army. The German authorities were particularly incensed by the fact that the Hungarian minister of the interior, Ferenc Keresztes-Fischer, had German press reports censored and banned the showing of the film *Jud Süß* in Hungary.<sup>1</sup> A speech by Winston Churchill, on the other hand, was printed in a number of newspapers in the autumn of 1943. One reason for Hungary's disengagement was the balance of trade between Germany and Hungary, which had been deteriorating since 1942, with Hungary increasingly having to grant credits for

<sup>1</sup> Czettler, *A mi kis élethalál-kérdéseink*, 203–24, 319–72; Gosztony, *A magyar honvédség*, 110–13.

unpaid goods. These credits accounted for 60 per cent of the national debt. The deficit amounted to 1 billion pengő in 1943, 1.5 billion in 1944, and a record 4.8 billion at the end of the war.<sup>2</sup> The Hungarian state was not prepared to put itself on a 'total war' footing. German economic experts, on the contrary, saw considerable untapped resources in Hungarian industry and agriculture, particularly with respect to mobilization of the labour force.<sup>3</sup>

Prime Minister Miklós Kállay's government refused to introduce any radical social redistribution of assets at the expense of the Jews in 1944, even though the political elite and large sections of the population were prepared to do so. Even the anti-Semite Miklós Horthy and his close advisers had doubts about the 'Final Solution', on ethical grounds and for reasons of conservative policy. Nevertheless, dozens of anti-Semitic laws had been passed and hundreds of orders issued between 1938 and 1941, with the aim of establishing a social 'balance' by discriminating against those who could be shown to be of Jewish descent:<sup>4</sup> Jews made up 5 per cent of the Hungarian population, but they owned 25 per cent of the national assets.<sup>5</sup> A law on the expropriation of Jewish land and lease hold property was passed in 1942, in an attempt to solve the 'burning land issue'—a problem child in Hungarian politics.<sup>6</sup> This law contributed significantly to the fact that dealing with inquiries about the distribution of Jewish property became a daily routine for tens of thousands of civil servants. Moral scruples concerning Jewish property had already disappeared before 1944.

During Horthy's visit to Klessheim on 16 April 1943, Hitler had already complained that his Axis partner was too soft, and had insisted that Hungary be completely committed to the war. Horthy must have found Hitler's explicit praise of Marshal Ion Antonescu and the 'fantastic' performance of some Romanian divisions particularly unpalatable. Hitler complained about the failure to solve the Jewish question, about Hungary's 'incomprehensible' attitude in this connection, and, in particular, about the fact that two 'racial Jews' had recently taken seats in the upper house. He must have been particularly irritated by Horthy's objection that it would have been impossible, on constitutional grounds, for him to prevent this, and that there were, after all, some 'valuable' baptized Jews.<sup>7</sup> In order to show that he knew all about Hungary's duplicitous foreign policy, Hitler got Joachim von Ribbentrop to list a whole series of secret Hungarian activities of which the Germans were aware. Clearly, Hitler lost confidence in the Kállay government from the spring of 1943. Horthy was unable to placate the German complaints. On the

<sup>2</sup> *Magyarország története*, 1139.

<sup>3</sup> Aly and Gerlach, *Das letzte Kapitel*, 149–85.

<sup>4</sup> For a general account of the persecution of the Jews in Hungary, see von Braham's monograph, *The Politics of Genocide*; Aly and Gerlach, *Das letzte Kapitel*; Ungváry, 'Der Getriebene und der Treiber', 41–54; id., 'Robbing the Dead', 231–62.

<sup>5</sup> See Ungváry, 'The Hungarian Contribution', 234; Aly and Gerlach, *Das letzte Kapitel*, 50–61.

<sup>6</sup> About 340,000 hectares of land had been distributed by the end of 1944. *Magyar Országos Levéltár (MOL)* (*National Archives of Hungary, Budapest*), Z12, 104/522.

<sup>7</sup> Horthy, a selective anti-Semite, had indeed supported the choice of the two new members of the upper house, even though the step was not uncontested in domestic political circles.

contrary, his statements about Kállay and about the Jewish question ('after all, he couldn't just strike the Jews dead') only increased Hitler's distrust.<sup>8</sup>

### (a) Equipment and Organization of the Honvéd Army between 1944 and 1945

After the battle for Stalingrad was lost in January 1943, Horthy and Kállay were increasingly taken up with the idea of making peace with the Allies. The regent and his prime minister were willing to lay down arms against the British and American forces, but they could not yet imagine capitulating to the Soviet army. They pinned their hopes on an Allied landing in Dalmatia and on the Stavka deciding not to attempt the difficult breakthrough in the Carpathians, but to continue its westward advance further north, across the Polish plains. In order to prevent a Soviet breakthrough in the Carpathian basin before the western Allies reached Hungarian territory, they set about rearming the battered Hungarian army.

At the beginning of 1944 the reorganization of the Hungarian army had not yet been completed. According to the 'Szabolcs Plan', adopted in August 1943 and scheduled to be fully implemented by October 1944, eight triangular divisions were to be formed, each with 12 artillery battalions. Although the firepower and target strength of the new divisions were 30 per cent higher than those of the previous formations, they were still inferior to the equivalent Soviet and German divisions.

The gap was particularly wide with regard to light sub-machine guns and heavy machine guns. The German divisions had more weapons—even in absolute terms—than the corresponding Hungarian units, which were 60 per cent stronger in respect of manpower. Following the catastrophic defeat of the Hungarian 2nd Army in January–February 1943, the Hungarian authorities were not even able to provide the armed forces with a minimum of equipment. The Hungarian 2nd Army itself was an improvisation in terms of weaponry, since it was allocated 50 per cent of the total stock of weapons, resulting in partial disarmament of the homeland troops. Hungarian industry was fully occupied in making these losses good until the end of 1943.<sup>9</sup>

As a result of the 'Szabolcs Plan', there was a significant increase in the number of army units. After the end of 1943 the Hungarian armed forces (the Honvéd) comprised eight infantry divisions (each with four artillery battalions), eight reserve divisions (each with three artillery battalions), two armoured divisions, one cavalry division, one river patrol brigade, two mountain brigades, three anti-aircraft brigades, and two division-strength infantry units. The Hungarian air force comprised three brigades. Given the poor figures for Hungarian arms production, these units could not count on having the necessary weapons until the autumn of 1944 at the earliest. Germany delivered only minimal amounts of military equipment to Hungary, even though Hungarian industry had been dealing with more German

<sup>8</sup> On the regent's first visit to Klessheim, see *Staatsmänner und Diplomaten*, ii. 245 ff., and Aly and Gerlach, *Das letzte Kapitel*, 85 ff.

<sup>9</sup> MGFA, M2/1-2, study by Pál Darnóy, 'Organisation und Gliederung der kgl. ungarischen Honvéd-Armee', pt. E, 1.

than Hungarian arms orders since 1942. Orders placed in Hungary were worth 412 million Reichsmarks in June 1943, and 825 million Reichsmarks in March 1944.<sup>10</sup> The decision to move aircraft production worth 500 million Reichsmarks to Hungary in the framework of the so-called Fighter Programme was particularly important. The German orders took up production capacity and raw materials, making it even more difficult to supply the Honvéd army with adequate armaments. To provide the Hungarian 1st Army with the necessary mobility, transport columns had to be commandeered from other units. The 2nd Armoured Division could be brought up to full target strength only by the 1st Armoured Division handing over all its vehicles. And three reserve divisions had to be removed from the order of battle owing to shortage of equipment.

The 15th US Air Fleet raids, which started on 2 April 1944, seriously damaged the Hungarian arms industry, which was in no way prepared for such attacks, and from July 1944 the declining production capacity and the escalating losses of weapons and equipment among the fighting troops put an abrupt end to normal supplies. The shortage of equipment could be made good only by disbanding battered units. Another major problem was that the weaponry itself was out of date. The Hungarian infantry was still using machine guns dating from the First World War, and the anti-tank weapons were 37-mm and 50-mm guns. There were almost no heavy grenade launchers or sub-machine guns. The Hungarian 'heavy' Turán 40 and 41 tanks had practically no chance against the T-34s.<sup>11</sup> In any case, ammunition for the heavy weapons was strictly rationed. These circumstances contributed greatly to the fact that the men serving in the Honvéd had less confidence in their commanders and were less steadfast than the German troops.

Of the 2 million or so men eligible for military service, only 500,000 had been called up by the spring of 1944, and even those could not be properly equipped.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, the number of officers and NCOs was not nearly sufficient to form the proposed units.<sup>13</sup>

In view of the fact that 50 to 60 per cent of the production capacity of Hungarian industry was taken up by the Wehrmacht under several arms programmes, the Hungarian political and military leadership expected, not without reason, to receive something in return.<sup>14</sup> However, the German authorities did not really trust the Hungarians, and they delivered only small amounts of military material, although the German clearing debt was very high and the Hungarian government was pressing for arms deliveries. Even Bulgaria had received more military material than the Hungarian army up to the summer of 1944. This is yet further evidence of Hitler's distrust of Hungary.

<sup>10</sup> On equipment, see Darnóy's study and Dombrády, *A magyar gazdaság és hadfelszerelés*, also BA-MA RW29/14.

<sup>11</sup> On the armament of the Hungarian Honvéd, see MGFA, M2/1-2, study by Pál Darnóy, 'Organisation und Gliederung der kgl. ungarischen Honvéd-Armee', pt. D with annexes.

<sup>12</sup> Telex, 22 Mar. 1944, BA-MA RH2/721, 39.

<sup>13</sup> See study by Pál Darnóy, pt. E, 36.

<sup>14</sup> For the Wehrmacht, Hungarian industry produced aircraft engines and parts, 40-mm light anti-aircraft guns, and infantry and artillery munitions.

### (b) The Hungarian Occupation Force

After the collapse of the Hungarian 2nd Army, Hungary's contribution over the next year was confined to providing the occupation force, which was stationed in two groups, round the Bryansk forest and west of Kiev. And it was precisely the Hungarian occupation force that was deployed at the key points in the fight against the partisans.

The total strength of the nine Hungarian divisions deployed as Occupation Groups 'East' and 'West' was 90,000 men. They operated in the rearward areas of Army Group B and Army Group Centre.<sup>15</sup> At the same time, less than a quarter of a million Wehrmacht and SS troops were stationed as security forces in the hinterland on the whole of the eastern front.<sup>16</sup> Hungarian Occupation Group East covered the 300 square kilometres of the Kiev–Gomel–Seredina Buda–Priluki area, while Hungarian Occupation Group West was primarily responsible for protecting the Brest–Litovsk–Kolomyia–Berdichev–Gomel railway lines. They were constantly reinforced. The four original divisions were joined by four motorized divisions between 5 January and 15 May 1943, partly to 'replace' 2nd Army, which had been moved back to Hungary because of its losses.

The first Hungarian troops were deployed on the eastern front as early as November 1941. Their task was to control the area round the Bryansk forest, which was already a focal point in the war against the partisans. Remnants of encircled Soviet armies were putting up bitter resistance in the impenetrable forest, and constantly received reinforcements by air from the winter of 1941 on. The Hungarian occupation force operated under the command of various German HQs, but the Hungarian commanders were free to decide on tactics and on the punitive measures to be taken. Since the Hungarians were very short of equipment, had very little training, and possessed no heavy weapons, their commanders saw the creation of 'dead zones' and the use of brutal reprisals as the only way to fight the partisans. The German commanders often had to restrain the Hungarian occupation force. The ratio of own losses to the number of partisans killed or captured varied from 1 to 7 to 1 to 18, whereas the ratio in the area covered by German occupation troops in the zones of Army Group B or Army Group Centre, and in the area covered by the Wehrmacht commander in Ukraine, was much lower. It was higher (1 to 24) only in the area of the senior SS and police leader in Russia.<sup>17</sup> The Hungarian force was second only to the SS in its harsh treatment of civilians.<sup>18</sup> More partisans were killed by three Hungarian divisions in the spring of 1942 than in the whole area covered by Army Group Centre. The occupation forces could not

<sup>15</sup> On the Hungarian figures, see BA-MA WIIF2/17, and on the strength of the German occupation troops in the area of Army Group Centre, see Gerlach, *Kalkulierte Morde*, 859–959.

<sup>16</sup> See Germany and the Second World War, vi. 1020; Cooper, *The Phantom War*, 146.

<sup>17</sup> See Ungváry, 'Die ungarische Besatzungstruppe', 125–63, and id., 'Das Beispiel der ungarischen Armee', 98–106. Cf. Anderson, 'A Hungarian Vernichtungskrieg?', 339–66.

<sup>18</sup> This somewhat qualifies the claims made in publications that appeared in the wake of the 1995–2000 Wehrmacht exhibition (Bartov, *Hitlers Wehrmacht*, may be cited as representative), according to which the main reason for the inhuman conduct of the war was the ideological blindness of the troops.

do much in the actual fighting against the partisans. At the end of 1941 the partisans already had their own airfields, and even a tank-repair workshop, in the Bryansk forest. They were equipped with grenade launchers and cannon, whereas the divisions of the Hungarian occupation force had no anti-tank guns or artillery. An entire division had only 42 machine guns at its disposal. Despite repeated requests from the Hungarian side, the OKW and the OKH had not assigned the Hungarians a specific area in which to deploy their troops. Units were snatched from the command of the Hungarian occupation force and placed under various German command staffs.

As to collaboration, the Hungarian occupation forces were organized on the same pattern as the Wehrmacht units in the German occupation apparatus. Each Hungarian division had a GFP (Secret Field Police) group attached to it, and the Hungarians were instructed to cooperate with the stationary *Einsatzgruppen*. This arrangement disciplined the Hungarian troops to some extent, but their conduct was far from unobjectionable. The complaints made against them by the supervisory German command authorities included high-handedness, mass reprisals, unauthorized participation in executions, or even random shooting of Jews and 'suspects'. Significantly, Hungarian commanders were not prepared to discuss excesses on the part of their troops.<sup>19</sup> General Erich Schneider, the commander of 4th Armoured Division, who occasionally came into contact with Hungarian troops during the 1942/3 winter battles, was so appalled by the excesses committed against the civilian population that he sent a top secret report to Second Armoured Army, in which he referred to his own experiences, to reports from Ic, and to observations by his troop commanders, and called for immediate action to end the abuses.<sup>20</sup>

The Hungarians had felt from the start that the war they were engaged in was not 'their war'. Hungary had no territorial claims against the Soviet Union, and the idea of a crusade against Bolshevism appealed to the very few. The divisions of the occupation force were used by Hungarian diplomacy to satisfy the German demands for armed assistance. Every man in those units must have felt from the outset that the occupation force was an economy measure designed to save human and material resources, especially as 60 per cent of the men were Slavic- and Romanian-speaking conscripts to whom the Holy Crown of St Stephen meant nothing. Only the officer corps consisted entirely of Hungarians. But here too, most of them were reservists.<sup>21</sup> The Hungarians did not need to consider the economic consequences of their excesses, as they themselves would derive no benefit from a properly functioning agricultural sector. This simply added to the feeling of being a 'guest' in a theatre of war. Another decisive reason for the increasingly radical conduct of the occupation

<sup>19</sup> 'Bericht des Verbindungsoffiziers zum kgl. Ung. I.R. 46', 268 (7Apr.1942), BA-MA RH23/173.

<sup>20</sup> '4.Panzerdivision an das Panzerkommando 2, 28.3.1943', BA-MA RH21-2/v.562.

<sup>21</sup> This fact too contradicts the repeatedly advanced 'ideologically motivated perpetrators' thesis, whose most representative advocates are Omer Bartov, Walter Manoschek, and Hannes Heer. In comparison, see Gerlach, *Kalkulierte Morde*, 618, 777, 882, 889, 916 ff., 968, 1146, 1154 ff.; Hartmann, 'Massensterben', 97–158; Lieb, 'Täter aus Überzeugung?', 523–53; Ungváry, 'Das Beispiel der ungarischen Armee', and id., 'Die ungarische Besatzungstruppe'.

**Table V.vii.1.** Subordination of Royal Hungarian Occupation forces as at 26 December 1943

1st Lt.Div.			
5th Lt.Div.	Royal Hun. I A.C.	Wehrmacht Commander	
9th Lt.Div.		Ostland	<b>Army Group Centre</b>
12th Lt.Div.			
23rd Lt.Div.			
18th Lt.Div.		Second Army	
19th Lt.Div.	Royal Hun. VII A.C.	Wehrmacht Commander	<b>Army Group South</b>
21st Lt.Div.			
201st Lt.Div.		Ukraine	

*Note:* The subordination arrangements changed several times between 1942 and 1944. For details, see MGFA, M2/1-2, ed. Pál Darnóy, 'Organisation und Gliederung der kgl. ungarischen Honvéd-Armee', Part D VII. The 201st Division was an improvised unit. The 1st, 18th, 19th, and 201st Divisions were disbanded in May and summer 1944.

force was the fact that, in the given situation, the fight against the partisans could be conducted only by brutal methods.

From 1943 the fight against the partisans entered a new phase. The behaviour of the Hungarian occupying forces changed, and the methods employed by the German side in dealing with the partisans were also increasingly transformed. The steadily rising losses and the lack of modern equipment forced the Hungarian units to remain passive, and the Germans contented themselves with deploying them only in the defence of fixed installations. As those units were poorly armed, the Germans mostly refrained from deploying them in active operations against the partisans. In March 1943 two Hungarian divisions in the area of Army Group Centre were deployed against Soviet units which had broken through around Seredina Buda, and within a few days they had lost 40 per cent of their weapons and men.<sup>22</sup> Some Hungarian units also took part in German large-scale operations, though without any conspicuous success. The troops of Occupation Group West also encountered a Polish population in the Pripet marshes and in Galicia, against whom they were unwilling to take reprisals on account of the historical friendship between Poland and Hungary. The commander of the occupation force concluded local armistice agreements with the Ukrainian anti-Communist partisans of the UPA (*Ukrainska Povstanska Armiya*, Ukrainian Insurgent Army), and Hungarian officers often made private contact with Polish landowners.<sup>23</sup> In the late summer of 1943 the Hungarian VIII Army Corps, formed out of Occupation Group East, was regrouped further to the west, and its connection with the Hungarian VII Army Corps (previously Occupation Group West) was lost.

<sup>22</sup> These losses were by no means due to errors of command: the Hungarian units were so poorly armed and trained that they were always bound to lose. For details, see *Magyarország a második világháborúban*, 283.

<sup>23</sup> The signs of Polish–Hungarian friendship were regarded with deep suspicion by the local German command authorities; 'Meldung des deutschen Verbindungsoffiziers bei der 1. Kavalleriedivision, 9.8.1944', BA-MA RH 19II/229, 36.

In parallel with the armistice negotiations, the Hungarian General Staff endeavoured, from the summer of 1943, to keep the divisions of its occupation force out of the fighting, or at least to obtain their withdrawal to the forefield of the Carpathians. In return, the chief of staff, Col.-Gen. Ferenc Szombathelyi, without prior agreement with his head of government, offered three divisions as an occupation force in the Balkans. The idea of a Hungarian occupation force in Serbia or Bosnia had already been put forward by the German side in 1941, but the Hungarian government had not been prepared to accept the idea, for political reasons, and it consistently rejected the German proposals presented on three occasions in the course of 1943. The fact that the Hungarian General Staff would willingly take on an occupation task in Serbia caused serious tension between the politicians and the military. Hungarian participation in the fighting in Yugoslavia would have been against the interests of the Yugoslav government-in-exile and of Britain, and thus completely at odds with Prime Minister Kállay's peace initiative. The German authorities therefore used the Hungarian occupation forces as a bargaining counter to put pressure on Kállay, and were not prepared to give them up. Given the shortage of German troops, the Hungarians were indispensable, despite constant complaints about their lack of discipline and unwillingness to fight. A telegram from the military attaché in Budapest, Friedrich Carl Rabe von Pappenheim, in which he bluntly referred to the divisions of the Hungarian occupation force as a 'bargaining counter', went astray, causing a diplomatic scandal which ultimately led to his dismissal. Hitler and the OKH were not even prepared to comply with the Hungarians' repeated requests for the occupation force to be moved back, at least to eastern Galicia.<sup>24</sup>

The Soviet winter offensive in January 1944 drove Occupation Groups East and West even further apart. VII Army Corps withdrew to Galicia to take over defence of the Dniester line, where it was destroyed at the end of March. VIII Army Corps (renamed II Reserve Corps on 1 May 1944) was split into a number of parts, all of which were forced to withdraw westwards. Parts of the corps ended up being posted to the front, although the whole corps possessed only eight artillery batteries and the OKH had agreed with the Hungarian General Staff that it should not be deployed against front-line forces. The Hungarian side therefore issued an order that divisions too were to be kept out of battles with regular troops. This order was repealed under pressure from the OKH.<sup>25</sup>

The Hungarian security divisions are mentioned only in passing, both in the German military records and in the specialist literature. And when they are, their performance is always described in negative terms: the Hungarian units 'stream back', 'lack combat strength', 'collapse', 'put up hardly any resistance'.<sup>26</sup> Of course,

<sup>24</sup> MGFA, M2/1-2, study by Pál Darnóy, 'Organisation und Gliederung der kgl. ungarischen Honvéd-Armee', pt. D/VII, 9.

<sup>25</sup> On the occupation group, see *ibid.* and BA-MA RW4/84, 6 ff., as well as the German liaison officer's reports BA-MA RH 19II/228, and the corps reports BA-MA RH 20-2/905.

<sup>26</sup> For examples, see 'Stimmungsbericht, Deutscher Verbindungsstab beim Oberkommando der Kgl. Ung. Besatzungskräfte'. Telex, ObKdo H.Gr. Mitte to OKH, BA-MA RH2/721, 28 Mar. 1944, BA-MA RH19II/229, 20; see also Niepold, *Mittlere Ostfront*.

these accusations also served to shift their own responsibility onto the shoulders of their Axis partner. However, an analysis of the losses gives a different picture. Thus, 38th Infantry Regiment lost 80 per cent of its officers and half its men in the fighting between 17 and 26 July 1944. The regiment carried out a number of counter-attacks during that period, when not even food could be given out for days on end. ‘The men were so tired that they hardly responded to infantry fire any longer; only shellfire prompted them to summon up their strength and fight as best they could.’<sup>27</sup> Despite this, XXII Army Corps HQ threatened to have the regiment’s commander court-martialled for cowardice, even though he had constantly been in the main battle line.

From the summer of 1944 some Hungarian divisions were also deployed in securing Warsaw. In view of their strikingly friendly contacts with the Polish population, the OKH planned to disarm the Hungarian occupation divisions after the Warsaw uprising, but that was not done, because the Hungarians troops remained passive and were sent back to Hungary.

## 2. THE OCCUPATION OF HUNGARY AND THE IMPACT ON ARMAMENTS

At the beginning of 1944 the military situation on Hungary’s eastern borders was becoming increasingly acute. The Soviet winter offensive was going well. By the end of February there was already a gap of 150 to 200 kilometres in the front before Lvov. Hitler could no longer accept Hungary’s ambivalent attitude, and on 28 February he gave orders for preparations to occupy the country. Hungary was important, and indeed indispensable, to Hitler’s strategy. From his viewpoint, the wavering Axis partner and the critical situation at the front represented an intolerable risk.

Hungary’s lack of determination on the one hand, and the secret negotiations discovered by German counter-intelligence on the other, were the motives for preparing to occupy the country. The fact that there was a parliamentary system in Hungary, that the Social Democrats were relatively free to go about their business, and that war and peace could be openly discussed in the parliament’s foreign affairs committee, appeared intolerable. In this connection, there is a telling entry in Joseph Goebbels’ diary in which Kállay is described as ‘an absolute swine’.<sup>28</sup> Significantly, Hitler ordered the occupation of Hungary only when the Soviet troops had already reached the Carpathians. The decision on the occupation was thus determined by economic and military considerations. The ‘unresolved Jewish question’, on the contrary, was seen not as an end in itself but as a means to achieve those economic and military objectives.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>27</sup> HL, 38th Infantry Regiment combat report, 5.

<sup>28</sup> Goebbels, *Die Tagebücher*, pt. 2, ix. 602.

<sup>29</sup> On the reasons for the occupation, see Aly and Gerlach, *Das letzte Kapitel*, 107.

After the shock caused by the overthrow of Mussolini in Italy in the summer of 1943, Hitler decided in September 1943 to have plans drawn up for the occupation of Hungary (Operation MARGARETHE I). The OKW produced the plans on 30 September and, in the original version, it was still expected that the Romanian and Slovakian armies would take part in the operation. However, the plan was changed several times. The idea of Slovakian and Romanian participation was dropped in February 1944, because the arguments of Walter Schellenberg<sup>30</sup> and Wilhelm Höttl<sup>31</sup> about the Hungarian resistance to be expected in that event had caused Hitler to change his mind. Accordingly, Hitler also gave orders in January 1944 for plans to be made for the occupation of Romania (Operation MARGARETHE II). Since the Soviet army was approaching the Hungarian border at an alarming rate in February 1944, the occupation was now a matter of the greatest urgency for Hitler. On 11 March he gave the order to proceed with Operation MARGARETHE I. Although the German planners assumed that the Hungarian army would remain loyal to the Wehrmacht during the occupation operation, an order was issued to 'crush any resistance ruthlessly'. Everything indicates that the Wehrmacht would have dealt with any resistance in the same way as it had with the Italian army. Orders were given that officers who defended themselves when being disarmed were to be shot 'in action'.<sup>32</sup> The plans also included a propaganda flight to drop leaflets on Budapest and a special mission, code-named 'Trojan Horse', against important targets in the capital.<sup>33</sup>

The German special envoy, Edmund Veesenmayer, visited Budapest in the spring and autumn of 1943, ostensibly in a private capacity. He engaged in numerous negotiations with the right-wing opposition, in the course of which he gained the impression that most leading politicians were probably prepared to collaborate or cooperate with the Reich. A change of political leadership (which he referred to disparagingly as the 'Burg clique') would, in his view, suffice. Veesenmayer therefore proposed an 'evolution' scenario rather than an 'exclusively German takeover'. The occupation operation should be 'cooperative', Horthy should remain in place, and a coalition government of the ruling party and the right-wing opposition should be formed.<sup>34</sup> Veesenmayer's viewpoint was shared by senior military figures such as Field Marshal Maximilian von Weichs, the German envoy in Budapest, Dietrich von Jagow, and the head of the foreign security service, Walter Schellenberg.<sup>35</sup> All in all, most of the German decision-makers were convinced that the Hungarians were prepared to collaborate.

<sup>30</sup> Walther Schellenberg (1910–52), SS Gruppenführer and Lt.-Gen. in the Waffen SS; in 1944 head of Section VI (Intelligence) of the RSHA.

<sup>31</sup> Wilhelm Höttl (1915–2002), Sturmbannführer in the Waffen SS; in 1944 specialist on Hungary in Section VI of the RSHA, active in Budapest after the German occupation.

<sup>32</sup> Fenyő, *Hitler, Horthy and Hungary*, 160. On the occupation, see Ránki, *Unternehmen Margarethe*.

<sup>33</sup> On the planning and execution, see BA-MA RW 4/v. 585 and RW 4/84 ('Fall Margarethe'), KTB OKW, iv/1, section 3, 179–246, and Ránki, *Unternehmen Margarethe*.

<sup>34</sup> See Veesenmayer's reports in Braham, *Destruction*, 229–42 and 254–95.

<sup>35</sup> Aly and Gerlach, *Das letzte Kapitel*, 110.

For the ‘evolution’ approach to work, Horthy would first have to be persuaded to accept it. On 15 March 1944 he received the Führer’s invitation to visit Klessheim on 18 March. Although Horthy had already been faced with the German demands a year earlier, he was not expecting the country to be occupied, and he hoped to save it from worse inroads by making further material concessions.<sup>36</sup> Although Hungarian intelligence was constantly receiving reports of preparations for occupation, the military and political leadership did not want to believe them. Resistance was hardly thinkable, for military reasons. The following sentence in a radio message from the commander of the West Hungarian III Corps, Lt.-Gen. Szilárd Bakay, perfectly describes the predicament of the few officers loyal to Horthy: ‘Russians in front of us, Germans behind us, English overhead, I request orders.’<sup>37</sup>

The regent was not prepared for Hitler’s reproaches at Klessheim, and they came as a shock. After the first discussion session, in which the occupation was presented as a fait accompli, Horthy threatened to break off the negotiations immediately. However, following mediation by the chief of the general staff, Ferenc Szombathelyi, he abandoned his resistance.<sup>38</sup> Two further discussion sessions took place. In the end, Horthy gave his agreement to the occupation of the country and the dismissal of the Kállay government. There was no written agreement. On the train back to Budapest, Horthy was introduced to ‘envoy and Reich plenipotentiary’ Veesenmayer, who endeavoured to persuade him to reinstate the former prime minister, Béla Imrédy, who had been forced to resign in 1939 because he was 12.5 per cent ‘Jew-related’. However, Horthy was not prepared to appoint either Imrédy or the other German favourite, Col.-Gen. Jenő Ruszkay. On 20 March he proposed a compromise candidate, Döme Sztójay, who had been in the diplomatic service since 1925, most recently as ambassador in Berlin. This was agreed, as Veesenmayer also found Sztójay acceptable.

The occupation of the country proceeded without any problems. Only in a few cases was there any resistance. The propaganda flight over Budapest was stopped, and it was decided not to disarm the Hungarians. The Honvéd units were to remain in their barracks. Several divisions originally designated as occupation forces were not called upon, so only eight divisions took part in the occupation operation.<sup>39</sup> *Einsatzgruppe G*, and the *Sonderkommando Eichmann* (Eichman’s special unit) under its command, also moved into Hungary with these divisions.

<sup>36</sup> Hitler had already reproached Horthy on 17 April 1943 for the Kállay government’s contact with the western Allies, and had called for measures to be taken against the Jews and, indirectly, for Kállay to be dismissed because he no longer had any ‘confidence’ in him.

<sup>37</sup> Dombrády and Tóth, *A magyach király honvédség*, 310–13, and Kádár, *A ludovikától Sopronköbidág*, ii. 656.

<sup>38</sup> Minutes of the Crown Council meeting of 19 Mar. 1944, in *Allianz Hitler—Horthy—Mussolini*, 372.

<sup>39</sup> From the south (Serbia): XXII Mtn.A.C. with 92nd Armd.Inf.Rgt. (mot.), Rgt. ‘Brandenburg’, 5th SS Pol.Rgt., 202nd Armd.Btln., 201st SS Armd.Inf.Brig., 42nd Lt.Inf.Div., 8th SS Cav.Div. From the south-west (Burgenland): LXIX A.C. on special mission, with 1st Mtn.Div., 367th Inf.Div., 18th SS Armd.Inf.Div. (parts only). From the north-west (Slovakia): LXVIII Armd.C. with Armd.Instr. Div., 16th SS Armd.Inf.Div., Panther Btln. of 5th SS Armd.Div., 997th Hvy.Art.Btln. From the north (Slovakia): a regiment from Division ‘Grossdeutschland’, an emergency regiment from the Division ‘Brandenburg’, and 21st Armd.Div.

The *Einsatzgruppe* was not to encroach on the powers of the Hungarian police and gendarmerie—on the contrary, the intention was for them to work together. Since the whole *Sonderkommando* consisted of 60 to 80 people in all, including specialist staff, secretaries, and drivers, cooperation was considered essential if their mission was to succeed. Working side by side, the German and Hungarian security forces arrested several thousand political opponents and Jews in the first hours of the occupation.

Only with the direct military occupation of Hungary by the Wehrmacht on 19 March 1944 could the redistribution measures that had been propagated for years be implemented in full. It is noteworthy that those measures in no way damaged the reputation of the German occupation in Hungarian domestic politics. On the contrary, they appeared to be a stabilizing factor.<sup>40</sup> For many Hungarians, the deportations of Jews which now began helped to make it tolerable or even meaningful to stay on the German side. The Jewish assets that were acquired made it possible to balance the state budget for a time and meet Germany's economic demands.<sup>41</sup>

Despite many dismissals at high level (including two-thirds of all mayors), many civil servants were prepared to exclude their fellow citizens and make inventories of their possessions. Others were also prepared to appropriate for themselves property whose owners had been deported.

On 22 March 1944 a coalition government was formed, consisting of the ruling party, Imrédy's radical right-wing party, and Hungarian National Socialists. Several ministers who had served in the Kállay government, including the finance minister, Lajos Reményi-Schneller, and the minister of agriculture, Béla Jurcsék, were co-opted. Szálasi's Arrow Cross party kept its distance from the government, which it denounced as 'sham National Socialists'. Szálasi repeatedly ordered party members not to cooperate in any way in the Aryanization of Jewish assets for their own benefit.<sup>42</sup> In his view, the deportation of this 'valuable workforce' was simply 'giving valuable man-hours away' to the Germans, and it would be better for the Jews to 'work or die' in Hungary.<sup>43</sup> Thus, the most radical political forces actually played no part in the deportation and plunder of the Jews.

Most German historians hold that the deportation of the Hungarian Jews was ideologically motivated. Less frequently, they attribute a supplementary economic motivation to it, but it is always seen exclusively from the German perspective. They blot out the fact that the German occupying forces actually had no other option. Since Hungarian involvement was considered an essential condition for the occupation from the outset, measures had to be taken that would strengthen the

<sup>40</sup> Although this fact is clear from the monthly police reports already published, which have been accessible to researchers for decades, it has been overlooked by Hungarian and western historians (with the exception of Aly and Gerlach). See Schmidt, 'Provincial Police Reports', 233–67.

<sup>41</sup> On this, see Ungváry, 'Nagy jelentőségű szociálpolitikai akció'; Aly and Gerlach, *Das letzte Kapitel*, 212–39.

<sup>42</sup> Report, 24 Apr. 1944, IfZ, MA1541/1, 417 and IfZ Fb.102/1-2, 'Szálasi-Tagebuch', 33–5, BA, NS19/2063.

<sup>43</sup> Report, 24 Apr. 1944, IfZ, MA1541/1, 419.

readiness of the Hungarian elites and the Hungarian population to collaborate. All the political parties that were prepared to collaborate had been calling for the total 'solution of the Jewish question' since 1939. In this respect, there was very little difference between the Arrow Cross, the National Socialists, Imrédy's party, and most of the governing parties. Of the major political figures, only a small circle round Horthy, Bethlen, and Kállay opposed these trends. Until March 1944, Kállay had been able to forestall such demands only by adjourning parliament. The distribution of Jewish property to the Hungarians thus served both to ensure the population's readiness to collaborate and to stabilize a state budget undermined by war expenditure. The financial circumstances of many ordinary men and women improved after the country was occupied, and acceptance of the alliance with the Third Reich was strengthened as a result.<sup>44</sup>

The government authorities were worried about the side effects of the state robbery. They were afraid that people might feel some 'misplaced sympathy' for the Jews. On 10 June 1944 Prime Minister Sztójay expressed his concern in the council of ministers: 'Cruelty can unfortunately lead to philo-Semitism. The deportation must therefore be conducted "humanely".'<sup>45</sup>

There were no public protests in Hungary like the Rosenstrasse protest in Berlin. By the beginning of July more than 437,000 men and women had been deported, at a horrifying speed, to Auschwitz, where those fit for work were selected and the rest (some 70 to 75 per cent of all deportees) immediately put to death. The harshness and self-initiative of the Hungarian authorities is typified, *inter alia*, by the fact that even Jewish partners in mixed marriages were often deported and stripped of all their possessions. In many cases, the non-Jewish spouse's shoes and wedding ring were also removed, 'for safety's sake' (since Hungarian property was not supposed to fall into German hands).<sup>46</sup>

Moreover, the conscription of Hungarian Jews for labour service increased after the country was occupied by the Wehrmacht. The purpose of this measure was not so much to save human lives as to secure the Jews' economically valuable labour for the Hungarian state.

After the country was occupied, the Wehrmacht authorities were able to make extensive use of Hungary's economic resources and reserves of raw materials. Up to 60 per cent of Hungarian crude-oil production was delivered to Germany in the summer, and as much as 80 per cent in October. 85,000 tonnes of mineral oil were already shipped out of Hungary in May.<sup>47</sup> In return for the Hungarian output, the 'Buhle agreement' of June 1944 guaranteed monthly deliveries of military equipment. However, these deliveries (the 'Elch programme') were not maintained by the German side, or were subject to long delays. The Wehrmacht was not prepared to grant licences for modern weapons on favourable terms: for example, 120 million Reichsmarks were demanded for a licence to build Panthers for Hungarian

<sup>44</sup> Ungváry, 'Robbing the Dead', 212–29.

<sup>45</sup> Lévai, *Zsidósors Magyarországon*, 214.

<sup>46</sup> *Magyar Országos Levéltár Óbuda (MOL-Ó)* (*National Archives of Hungary Óbuda*), microfilm I-72, contains several letters of protest from such non-Jewish spouses.

<sup>47</sup> MOLK69, 1944–2, fos. 122–6. For October 1944, see BA-MA RH31/v.7.

use.<sup>48</sup> As in all occupied countries, heavy burdens were imposed on the Hungarian budget. Hungary was initially obliged to pay Germany 200 million pengő in ‘occupation costs’, and 300 million from October 1944 on. These sums bore no relation to the actual costs of the occupation and were used to replenish the German war budget. Even after the first nine weeks, the real costs of the occupation amounted to only 136 million pengő, and they fell further as a result of the Wehrmacht troop withdrawals.<sup>49</sup> The fact that the Hungarian budget was able to bear these burdens without immediate inflationary pressure, although they were more or less equivalent to the state’s total current expenditure, can be explained only by the influx of Jewish assets.<sup>50</sup>

One of the most important consequences of the occupation was the integration of the Hungarian army in Germany’s military operations. The chief of the Hungarian General Staff, Col.-Gen. Szombathelyi, was dismissed and replaced by Lt.-Gen. János Vörös, whom the military attaché in Budapest described as pro-German but ‘no luminary’.<sup>51</sup> The key positions on the general staff had to be reallocated in only a few cases, since most senior officers were convinced supporters of the German–Hungarian alliance. The OKH judged the Hungarian officer corps to be ‘not very pleased with the way we have treated Hungary, but still, as ever, prepared to cooperate loyally, being convinced that Hungary and Germany stand or fall together. Almost oriental in their fatalism’.<sup>52</sup>

The mobilization of the Hungarian 1st Army was speeded up, and it took over the front east of the Carpathians. On 24 April the OKH also demanded the mobilization of 1st Cavalry Division. By Hungarian standards, this unit was expensively equipped with modern weaponry. It was, so to speak, the regent’s ‘favourite child’, and only after a prolonged diplomatic tug-of-war did he finally agree on 9 June to allow it to be transferred to the Pripet marshes.<sup>53</sup> By the middle of August all active Hungarian divisions had been mobilized and deployed at the front.

Under German pressure, a number of staffs which the Wehrmacht considered superfluous (those of I Armd.C., I, III, IV, V, and VIII A.C., 2nd and 3rd Armies) were temporarily disbanded or assigned to administrative duties. On 14 April 1944 the OKW ‘requested’, through the German military attaché, that the Honvéd ministry and the general staff be ‘reduced to the absolutely essential minimum strength’—clearly, the Hungarian military command authorities were to be put out of action as far as possible.<sup>54</sup> Owing to resistance on the part of the Hungarian

<sup>48</sup> ‘Aufzeichnung über die deutsch-ungarischen militärischen Besprechungen am 17.4.1944’, BA-MA RH31/v.5.

<sup>49</sup> Aly and Gerlach, *Das letzte Kapitel*, 153.

<sup>50</sup> On this, see Ungváry, ‘Nagy jelentőségű szociálpolitikai akció’; also Aly and Gerlach, *Das letzte Kapitel*, 212–39.

<sup>51</sup> BA-MA RH2/723, 62. Vörös went underground after 15 October, and on 22 December he became Honvéd minister in the ‘democratic’ government of Hungary formed in Debrecen under Soviet auspices.

<sup>52</sup> ‘Generalstab des Heeres, zur Lage in Ungarn, 16.4.1944’, BA-MA RH2/721, 35.

<sup>53</sup> Gosztony, ‘Das private Kriegstagebuch’, 638–50, and *KTB OKW*, iv/1, 828–52.

<sup>54</sup> MGFA, study by Pál Darnóy, ‘Organisation und Gliederung der kgl. ungarischen Honvéd-Armee’, pt. E, 29.

authorities, however, these measures were not fully implemented until October 1944. It was also some time before the Wehrmacht was able to make direct use of the country's manpower. In May 1944 there were 34,000 workers in German labour squads.<sup>55</sup> However, the removal and robbery of the Jewish labour force, and the direct deployment of an entire Hungarian army, were much more significant. The Sztójay government was able to oppose the demand for Hungarian labour successfully on the grounds that hundreds of thousands of Jewish 'workers' had already been handed over.<sup>56</sup>

On 30 April 1944 Germany forced Hungary to enter into a bilateral agreement on the compulsory recruitment of all male Hungarian citizens aged 17 to 55 who described themselves as Germans or who 'could be so described by reason of their way of life and ethnic characteristics'.<sup>57</sup> This deliberately vague wording enabled the SS recruiting squads, supported by the Hungarian gendarmerie, to carry out what was tantamount to a kidnapping operation in the Hungarian German villages. The 'voluntary' nature of the exercise had already been called into question in earlier recruitment operations. A total of 122,860 Hungarian Germans served in the Waffen SS, of whom 80,000 were forcibly recruited under the above-mentioned agreement.<sup>58</sup> Those unfit for military service served in SS police regiments. Such men, as well as men from other units who were recovering after being wounded in action, even had to reckon with the possibility that they might be employed as concentration-camp guards. Since Horthy and many sections of the Hungarian leadership would have greatly preferred to be rid of all of Hungary's ethnic Germans, the Hungarian government by no means opposed the German demand for Hungarian German conscripts.<sup>59</sup>

After Romania's withdrawal, a further eight replacement divisions, two replacement mountain brigades, and two replacement armoured divisions were to be formed from the replacement army. According to the plans, these units were to have only 60 per cent of the personnel and arms of a normal division: only two regiments instead of three, with each regiment comprising two battalions, and each battalion only two companies. Artillery, anti-tank units, and other units under direct divisional command were reduced even more severely.

Three of the divisions in question could not be formed at all because of the lack of equipment, and the rest had at most the combat capability of the German home guard. The German and Hungarian authorities were well aware of the fact. The OKW had already observed, when a similarly equipped German division was crushed in the spring of 1944, that 'such experiments in forming units are

<sup>55</sup> The Hungarian state had provided the workforce in the copper mines in Bor (Yugoslavia) since the middle of 1943, under a bilateral agreement. Jewish military labour service battalions were used for the purpose. In return, Germany handed over part of the copper that was produced. See Braham, *The Wartime System of Labor Service*.

<sup>56</sup> Braham, *The Politics of Genocide*, 874.

<sup>57</sup> Payer, *Armati Hungarorum*, 444.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid. 448. On Waffen SS recruitment and the Volksbund in Hungary, see Spannenberger, *Der Volksbund der Deutschen in Ungarn*.

<sup>59</sup> On the question of the expulsion of Hungarian Germans, see Weidlein, *Geschichte der Ungarndeutschen*, and Ungváry, 'Antiszemitizmus és németellenesség'.

irresponsible'.<sup>60</sup> However, this observation did not prevent the authorities in Hungary or Germany from deploying units of this kind against Soviet armoured armies. As a result, the Wehrmacht's and the Hungarian Honvéd's bloody losses in the final year of the war exceeded all the worst fears. By mid-October all the Hungarian replacement units, with the exception of one division, had been crushed and destroyed.

On the basis of developments on the eastern front, Lajos Nádas, head of the operations division of the Hungarian General Staff, calculated, in his situation assessment of 10 January 1944, that the Red Army could reach the Hungarian border within weeks.

However, he was less worried about the progress of the Red Army in itself than about the fact that a Soviet advance might cause Romania to change sides. He accordingly suggest that the Hungarian forces be concentrated in the Debrecen–Nagyvárad area, so that they could advance equally well in two directions (against Romania in southern Transylvania or to defensive positions in the Carpathians). The Árpád line had been established on the Carpathian ridge since 1939/40, and the Hungarian authorities hoped to be able to halt the Soviet offensive in that area, which was particularly favourable to defence.

During his visit to Führer headquarters from 23 to 27 January 1944, Szombathelyi tried to persuade Hitler to leave the defence of the Carpathians to the Hungarian army alone. Hitler rejected this request, observing that 'there is no question of a Carpathian front'.

Army Group South Ukraine and Army Group A suffered heavy defeats between January and March. In this strategic situation, it was essential that the Hungarian 1st Army be deployed in the forefield of the Carpathians. Even the OKW war diary admitted in retrospect that the situation could not have been saved without the aid of the Hungarians.<sup>61</sup> Géza Lakatos had approximately 136,000 men at his disposal at the time. On 12 April 1944 his army was placed under the command of Army Group North Ukraine, of which Field Marshal Walter Model had been appointed commander-in-chief on 30 March. On 2 April Hitler issued Operational Order No. 7, stipulating, *inter alia*, that the access routes to the Carpathian passes were to be secured and the Kolomyia–Tarnopol–Kovel line was to be held or recaptured. The army was still being mustered on 17 April when the German high command gave the order for the counter-offensive. To strengthen the Hungarian troops, the German XI Army Corps was placed under their command. However, only the corps staff were available when the attack was launched. Its three divisions did not arrive in full until the beginning of May.

Between 17 and 30 April the Hungarian 1st Army managed to straighten the front line and move it forward 25 to 30 kilometres. The lost connection between Army Group North Ukraine and Army Group South Ukraine was restored. Nadvornaya was recaptured, but the front came to a standstill 12 kilometres before Kolomyia. The Hungarian 2nd Armoured Division lost all its outdated tanks in the course of the offensive,<sup>62</sup> and the Hungarian losses amounted to 15,571 killed,

<sup>60</sup> KTB OKW WFst, study of 'Bewährung von Verbänden', BA-MA RW 4/v.79.

<sup>61</sup> KTB OKW, iv/1, 210.

<sup>62</sup> Report, 5 May 1944, BA-MA RH24-11/101.

wounded, or missing.<sup>63</sup> Lakatos was awarded the Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross. The Hungarian success was also attributable to the fact that 1st and 2nd Ukrainian Fronts had lost about half their complement in the previous offensive and were consequently much weaker.<sup>64</sup>

The Hungarian 1st Army received regular reinforcements from Hungary and was responsible for defending a 150-kilometre front line. At the beginning of May 1944 the ration strength of the Hungarian troops under German command on the eastern front was 210,000, and by July 297,000, including the occupation force.<sup>65</sup>

A double pincer attack on Kolomyia, in conjunction with First Armoured Army, was planned for May, under the code-name Operation SHIELD AND SWORD. In fact, the situation on the front at this point was particularly favourable for the proposed offensive, but it had to be cancelled because the necessary attacking forces were not available.<sup>66</sup> 20th Infantry Division was placed under the command of First Armoured Army in May, and 1st Cavalry Division under Army Group Centre in June. Shortly afterwards, on 22 June, the Soviets launched their summer offensive, Operation BAGRATION. Exactly a month later, on 22 July, the Hungarian army front was attacked. The defence collapsed in two days. The army was able to regroup its forces in the Hunyadi position, established in the forefield of the Carpathians, but it lost important strongpoints round the Tatar pass. It was fortunate for the Hungarians that the main thrust of the Soviet offensive was directed west to the oilfields around Borislav and Drohobych, rather than south-west.

The issue of withdrawal was a source of serious conflict between the Hungarian army high command and the German high command. The former wanted to start withdrawing southwards to the Carpathian positions in accordance with the regent's instructions, but the OKH and the army group insisted on a westward withdrawal towards Drohobych.<sup>67</sup> The Hungarian 1st Army had already lost some 30,000 men, killed, wounded, or missing, in the course of a few weeks.<sup>68</sup> The Soviet units took up the pursuit between 27 July and 10 August, launching four major attacks with a view to taking the Carpathian passes.<sup>69</sup> The defence was strengthened at the beginning of August with the allocation of four Hungarian divisions and one German division. This meant that all active Hungarian units were now at the front. In addition, XLIX Mountain Corps arrived with two more German divisions at the end of the month. By 10 August the Hungarian units, together with 4th Mountain Division, had managed to recapture the lost strongpoints in the Hunyadi position in the forefront of the mountain ridge.<sup>70</sup>

<sup>63</sup> Ölvedi, *Az I. magyar hadsereg törtérete*, 112.

<sup>64</sup> *Grif sekretnosti sniat*, 198.

<sup>65</sup> 'Erechnung des ungarischen Verpflegungsstandes', BA-MA W11F2/17.

<sup>66</sup> 'Plan Schild und Schwert, 17.5.1944', BA-MA RH21-1/125.

<sup>67</sup> Dobrády and Tóth, *A magyar király honvédség*, 350 ff.

<sup>68</sup> Ölvedi, *Az I. magyar hadsereg törtérete*, 112, puts the losses at 80,000, although without citing any sources. Almost all the original documents from this period have disappeared. According to a Honvéd ministry review, 22,925 men were killed, missing, or wounded between 1 July and 31 August. However, this figure is incomplete.

<sup>69</sup> *Hadiörténeti Levélkártyák* (HL) '1.hds. 1.f. VI. hadt. harctudósítása', 18 ff.

<sup>70</sup> Bene and Szabó, *Huszonnégys honvédek a Kárpátokban*, 77. See, in German, Lengyel, 'Die ungarische Verteidigung der Karpaten'.

On 5 August 1944 the Stavka formed 4th Ukrainian Front, comprising 23 divisions, with the task of forcing a breakthrough through the Carpathians. However, the attacks remained stuck in the staggered defences, which were 50 kilometres deep and geographically favoured. The Red Army could not even reach the Carpathian ridge and the most important passes.

After Romania withdrew from the coalition on 23 August 1944, the Hungarian 1st Army was obliged to transfer four divisions to the Hungarian 2nd Army formed in Transylvania. Petrov's army front resumed its attacks on 8 September. The aim of the operation was to break through the Dukla pass, which was defended by the German First Armoured Army, and through the positions held by the Hungarian 1st Army. The Stavka hoped, in this way, to prepare a second 'Cannae' for the whole of Army Group South, and to come to the assistance of the uprising that had broken out in Slovakia on 29 August. Although Petrov had 38 divisions/brigades and an armoured corps at his disposal, with a total of 378,000 troops, the breakthrough failed, and he lost 131,000 men. The forces deployed in the attack on the Dukla pass lost as much as 70 per cent of their equipment.<sup>71</sup> The Hungarian 1st Army was obliged to shorten its front on 23 September because of the developments in Transylvania and First Armoured Army's withdrawal before the Dukla pass. As part of a movement code-named 'Winter Sports', the Hungarian divisions moved back to the Árpád line, some 30 kilometres south-west of the Hunyadi position. The Hungarian 1st Army managed to hold its positions there until 15 October, when the 2nd Ukrainian Front troops reached Debrecen and threatened to encircle it.

### 3. THE HUNGARIAN THEATRE OF OPERATIONS

After Romania's withdrawal from the coalition, Hitler concentrated his attention on the operations of Army Group South.<sup>72</sup> With Romania gone, Germany depended entirely on the Zala and Zistersdorf oilfields for fuel. In these circumstances, and in view of the imperative need to defend the Vienna area, the Hungarian theatre of war became much more important. Hitler made every effort to regain the initiative in Hungary. To that end, the OKH planned a whole series of new offensives (GYPSY BARON, LATE VINTAGE, KONRAD I-II-III, SPRING AWAKENING) from September 1944 to March 1945. Those offensives failed, however, or in some cases could not even be launched because they were pre-empted by Soviet offensives. General Walter Wenck was temporarily attached to the army group from the end of December 1944 as 'OKH special plenipotentiary', and Heinz Guderian also went to Hungary

<sup>71</sup> *Grif sekretnosti sniat*, 207.

<sup>72</sup> Most of the Hungarian units' war diaries were destroyed, so I have had to rely largely on secondary sources and the recollections of participants. The Soviet Russian publications are of only limited use with respect to the German-Hungarian side. And, unfortunately, the third volume of *Velikaya Otechestvennaya Voina 1941–1945*, published in 1999, also contains no new information.

to keep an eye on the situation. In March 1945 events in Hungary were usually the first entries in Joseph Goebbels' diary.

The German command moved a large part of its mobile reserves to Hungary in this phase of the war. By February 1945 almost half of all the German armoured divisions deployed on the eastern front were located in the Hungarian section of the front. No fewer than 15 armoured divisions, four armoured infantry divisions, four cavalry divisions, and six infantry divisions were dispatched to Hungary during this period, and only burnt-out units were brought back. With more Wehrmacht reinforcements in Hungary than in any other eastern theatre of war, it became a matter of prestige for Hitler to show at least some success in the area where most of his armoured divisions were operating.

Hitler had never had any particular feelings for Hungary, but he became almost obsessed with the idea of a victory on Hungarian territory. When Guderian warned him on 24 December that he expected a Soviet offensive to be launched from the Baranów bridgehead on 12 January, Hitler retorted: 'This is the biggest bluff since Genghis Khan. Who came up with this nonsense?' And he was seconded by Himmler, who was 'firmly convinced that there's nothing going on in the east'.<sup>73</sup>

As a result, IV SS Armoured Corps, the only reserve force on the Vistula front, was transferred to Hungary. The Soviet offensive was duly launched from the Baranów bridgehead on 12 January. Army Group Vistula, commandeered by Himmler, was torn to shreds in a matter of few days, and the first Soviet tanks reached the Oder two weeks later. Hitler had decided to 'go for broke' and place the point of concentration in Hungary. Holding western Hungary had become an *idée fixe*, whereas losing Upper Silesia in the east and the Saarland, with their vitally important coalfields, seemed of no particular interest to him, because he could hope to continue waging war offensively only if he had the Hungarian oil wells.

The Stavka too was well aware of the importance of the Hungarian theatre of war. As well as numerous units under direct army command, it dispatched five mobile corps and 27 rifle divisions to Hungary. And in addition to these reinforcements, the losses incurred by the units already deployed there were regularly replaced. According to German intelligence, eight of the Red Army's 38 armoured and mechanized corps and three of its seven cavalry corps were deployed in Hungary at the turn of 1944/5.<sup>74</sup> Given that the Hungarian section of the front was relatively short, this clearly indicated the formation of a Red Army point of concentration in Hungary. On a front with a total length of approximately 1,500 kilometres, no less than 27 per cent of all mobile troops were located in the 250-kilometre-long Hungarian section, where there would have been only 16 per cent if the troops had been evenly distributed.

<sup>73</sup> Guderian, *Erinnerungen eines Soldaten*, 347.

<sup>74</sup> 'Abt. FHO, Übersicht über die sowjetrussische Wehrkraft', 132, BA-MA RH2/2051.

### (a) The General Situation in the Carpathian Basin in the Autumn of 1944

Army Group South Ukraine was almost completely destroyed after Romania changed sides on 23 August 1944. The Soviet troops met with practically no resistance as they advanced through Romania, and they reached the Hungarian border in northern Transylvania on 25 August.

The Hungarian General Staff had been anticipating a possible Soviet–Romanian attack in Transylvania since the beginning of the year. Several divisions were made ready to defend it or take possession of the Carpathian ridge. However, the collapse of the Hungarian 1st Army in June 1944 and the subsequent reconstitution of the defence forces in the Carpathians required the deployment of the whole Hungarian army. The German command did not allow any divisions or military equipment to be kept back in the hinterland. As a result, when the Romanian coup took place, there was not a single Hungarian army unit available in reserve. A Hungarian 2nd Army was cobbled together on 28 August by taking troops from 1st Army and mobilizing the Hungarian replacement army. Consisting of three replacement and frontier brigades, two infantry divisions, one reserve division, one motorized division, two armoured divisions, and six replacement divisions, it secured the front line along the Romanian–Hungarian border in Transylvania and the Puszta region, as far as Szeged. These forces totalled approximately 190,000 men on a front 350 kilometres long.<sup>75</sup> In the Marosvásárhely area, Sixth Army, which at first consisted only of returning stragglers from organized German combat groups, took over the front line as far as the eastern Carpathians, to which Eighth Army had withdrawn.<sup>76</sup> The Sixth Army combat groups had only a few thousand men and few heavy weapons.<sup>77</sup>

The German command had very little confidence in the Hungarian armies, and its repeated attempts to have Hungarian units placed under the command of German corps and armies led to constant friction between the OKH and the Hungarian General Staff.<sup>78</sup> The OKH had a predilection for making corps commands available as ‘reinforcements’, but without any troops of their own. LVII Armoured Corps and LXXII Army Corps, which had no divisions of their own at the time, were used in this way to incapacitate Hungarian corps and army commands, and so keep all tactical decisions in German hands. On 19 September, in order to forestall further German moves of this kind, the Hungarian General Staff transformed the Hungarian IV Army Corps, which was fighting between

<sup>75</sup> Reszneki Zákó, *Őszi harcok*, 28–30; Ravasz, *Erdély mint hadszíntér*, 32–48.

<sup>76</sup> Troops from the rearguard of the Sixth Army units destroyed in Moldavia were still reaching the German lines at the beginning of October!

<sup>77</sup> The Winkler Group was 2,800 strong on 16 September 1944, the Pfeil Group had 239 men, the Kessel Blocking Unit had 1,650, and the Transylvania Group (8th SS Cavalry Division) had 3,660; BA-MA RH20-6/410. At the end of August the army group was also reinforced by 8th SS Cavalry Division, 4th Mountain Division, and parts of Division ‘Brandenburg’.

<sup>78</sup> On this, see the correspondence between the Hungarian chief of staff, János Vörös, and Guderian in HL, 304. ‘doboz (Schachtel), Honvéd Vezérkar 1. osztály napi intézkedései’, partly documented in Ravasz, *Erdély mint hadszíntér*, 42–8.

Nagyvárad and Szeged, into the Hungarian 3rd Army, and placed the Hungarian VII Army Corps under its command. The new army had only one active infantry division, two replacement divisions, one armoured division, and two reserve divisions at its disposal. With such forces, the idea of defending a section of the front approximately 200 kilometres long against Soviet armoured units was an illusion, especially as that section was particularly favourable to armoured breakthroughs.<sup>79</sup> The Hungarian government was aware of this, and on 7 September Horthy convened the Crown Council and informed it that he would shortly be obliged to seek an armistice. The Honvéd minister, Lajos Csatay, suggested as a compromise that Hitler be informed in an ultimatum that the Hungarian government would be ‘forced’ to seek an armistice with the Soviet army ‘unless five German armoured divisions are dispatched to southern Transylvania within 24 hours’.<sup>80</sup> This unrealistic and politically completely inept demand proved to be an ‘own goal’: Hitler promised to provide the five divisions, but they arrived late and were given the task of keeping the Hungarian government in check.

Despite the weakness of the Hungarian units, the main concern of the Hungarian command was to remain on the offensive. There was no chance of successful defence against the Soviet army along the Hungarian border, given the nature of the terrain. The only possible hope of relief was to move the defence lines forward to the Carpathian ridge, or at least to the Maros line. While Vörös and Csatay considered that their troops were not adequately equipped to capture southern Transylvania, Horthy and his circle still hoped to avoid capitulation to the Soviet Union. With the German assistance that had been promised, it might also be possible to hold on until the eagerly awaited Allied troops reached the Hungarian border from the Mediterranean.

The Hungarian demand that the Hungarian occupation troops, last deployed around Warsaw, be returned to Hungary was granted at the end of August. Three divisions were back in Hungary by 10 October. Only 5th Reserve Division remained with Army Group Centre or the German 1st Armoured Army until the end of the war.

Fighting in Transylvania started just two days after 23 August. King Michael and his new government declared the Second Vienna Award invalid and demanded the immediate evacuation of northern Transylvania. Romanian units of company and battalion strength attacked the Hungarian border but were successfully repelled. The first Soviet tanks reached the eastern Carpathians on 25 August, but a further offensive was successfully halted at the fortified Árpád line.<sup>81</sup>

On 5 September the reorganized Hungarian 2nd Army, under the command of Col.-Gen. Lajos Dálnoki Veress, launched an attack with the aim of moving the defensive positions forward to the Maros line. The Romanian 4th Army, which had been brought in from Moldavia, was 113,759 strong,<sup>82</sup> outnumbering the

<sup>79</sup> Jakus, *A magyar királyi honvédség IV. önálló hadteste*, 80–3.

<sup>80</sup> On the Crown Council meeting, see Vigh, *Ugrás*, 72.

<sup>81</sup> Ravasz, *Erdély mint hadszíntér*, 73–85.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid. 53; *România în Războiul Antihitlerist*, 621.

attackers, who only had 90,000 men at their disposal.<sup>83</sup> The offensive nevertheless started well for the Hungarians, and by 8 September the army had penetrated some 50 kilometres into Transylvania south of Kolozsvár, and had even crossed the Maros in part. The attack was helped by the fact that the Romanian command was no longer expecting a Hungarian offensive. Moreover, the Romanian divisions were very short of artillery and anti-tank weapons. And, on the Hungarian side, motivation and readiness to fight the ‘arch-enemy’, Romania,<sup>84</sup> were still particularly strong.

When these Hungarian successes were taking place, the mechanized units of 2nd Ukrainian Front were dangerously near, only 80 to 90 kilometres away. The Hungarian General Staff therefore decided to halt further offensives and prepare for defence on the line already reached. For political reasons,<sup>85</sup> the attack by the Hungarian IV Army Corps<sup>86</sup> (the future 3rd Army) was not launched until 13 September. Arad was taken, but the advance came to a standstill before the Bihar mountains,<sup>87</sup> so possession was taken of only part of the Maros line, and the Hungarians failed to block access to the Transylvanian ore mountains south of the Bihar range.<sup>88</sup> On 21 September the Soviet XVIII Armoured Corps and 53rd Army attack rapidly forced the Hungarian units back to the Hungarian border.<sup>89</sup> The Hungarians held out there for two weeks, although with great difficulty, and even launched a few counter-attacks, until the arrival of 2nd Ukrainian Front’s main forces.<sup>90</sup>

One threat to the army group, which was not noticed at the time but subsequently proved fatal, was the absence of a connection from the Hungarian 3rd Army to 4th SS Police Division, fighting in isolation in the south-west, or to Army Group F. Thus, the weak point in the front was in the Banat area, where Soviet units were able to cross the lower Tisza unobtrusively at the beginning of October, after 4th SS Police Division had withdrawn to Debrecen, and the lower Danube two weeks later, completely disrupting the defence of the Carpathian basin. The army group’s commander-in-chief, Johannes Friessner, asked for 92nd Motorized Infantry Brigade to be transferred from Army Group F, but his request was turned

<sup>83</sup> Col.-Gen. Veress could not deploy all his troops against the Romanian 4th Army. The only forces at his disposal were II and IX Army Corps, a few small combat groups, and 8th SS Cavalry Division.

<sup>84</sup> The Second Vienna Award on the partition of Transylvania, concluded by Germany and Italy in September 1940, was regarded by both Romania and Hungary as a transitional arrangement.

<sup>85</sup> Having regard to the Allies, and since negotiations were already under way, the political leadership wanted to avoid a further offensive against Romania. On this, see Lakatos, *Ahogyan én láttam*, 136 ff.

<sup>86</sup> 1st Armd.Div. with about 120 old Hungarian tanks, 6th and 8th Replacement Training Divisions, 20th Inf.Div., a hussars regiment, and a few unattached units were placed under the command of IV Army Corps. They contained about 50,000 men in all. For further details and references, see Számvéber, *Páncélosok a Tiszántúlon*, 28–31.

<sup>87</sup> Dálnoki Veress, *Magyarország honvédelme*, iii. 177–80.

<sup>88</sup> For the Romanian side, see Ciobanu, ‘The Defensive Operation’.

<sup>89</sup> Reszneki, *Őszi harcok*, 23.

<sup>90</sup> According to Hungarian sources, the Red Army had lost 128 tanks and assault guns in these battles by the beginning of October. Számvéber, *Páncélosok*, 65.

down because there was also a shortage of German troops south-west of Belgrade. In any case, a single brigade would hardly have sufficed to block the gap in the front, which was more than 80 kilometres wide. Owing to the shortage of reserves, the Hungarian border south of Szeged was defended only by frontier guards. 4th SS Police Division, deployed there from the beginning of September, could not even keep the Banat entirely under control. The German and Hungarian command, who could deploy their troops only sporadically and at certain points, closed their eyes to this danger.

At first, however, the Hungarian 2nd Army's situation in Transylvania proved more dangerous, because the Soviet 6th Guards Armoured Army had already reached that section of the front on 14 September. In its directive of 5 September, the Stavka had ordered the troops that had reached southern Transylvania to turn northwards. On 12 September 6th Guards Armoured Army had 344 tanks and assault guns at its disposal<sup>91</sup> and, together with 27th Army, it was assigned the task of taking Kolozsvár by 15 September. The second objective laid down in the directive was that 2nd Ukrainian Front and 4th Ukrainian Front should join up at Nyíregyháza,<sup>92</sup> and the shortest way to Nyíregyháza and Kolozsvár was through Turda. Between 13 September and 4 October strong Soviet and Romanian units attacked the front at this point, with the Hungarian divisions (25th Infantry Division and 2nd Armoured Division<sup>93</sup>) bearing the main burden of the fighting. The terrain round Turda was favourable to defence, so the Hungarian 2nd Army was able to operate successfully, despite its numerical inferiority. The fighting was hard, and the Hungarian 25th Infantry Division deployed in the area lost 1,000 men (including wounded) in a single day.<sup>94</sup> A Soviet breakthrough would have put the Hungarian 2nd Army and the German Eighth Army, which was fighting further to the east, in a catastrophic situation. Despite repeated counter-attacks by 2nd Army, the fierce armour-supported Soviet attacks increasingly constricted the front round Turda. The city was almost completely encircled when the German 23rd Armoured Division, deployed for one day only, prevented the impending breakthrough and stabilized the situation. At all events, the battle for Turda was the last to be conducted independently and successfully by a Hungarian army HQ. The German command was increasingly shutting out the Hungarian command authorities.

By this time it was clear to the Hungarian command that the available forces would not even suffice to protect the capital. On 25 September Vörös, the Hungarian chief of staff, sent the following telegram to Guderian: 'If the Hungarian 3rd Army does not receive substantial reinforcements as a matter of urgency, it will soon be completely worn down. The way will then be open for the enemy to advance into the heart of the country, to Budapest.'<sup>95</sup> The Hungarian replacement

<sup>91</sup> Ibid. 23.

<sup>92</sup> Ravasz, *Erdély mint hadszíntér*, 64.

<sup>93</sup> The division had 75 light, 45 medium, and 8 heavy tanks at its disposal when the fighting began. Számvéber, *Páncélosok*, 21.

<sup>94</sup> KTB 25 Inf.Div., HL, II.1478, 9/a., 4.

<sup>95</sup> KTB H.Gr. Süd, BA-MA RH19V/51a, No. 6660.

**Table V.vii.2.** Breakdown of German–Hungarian units in the Carpathian Basin on 5 October 1944

Divisions	Corps	Armies	A.Gr.
Hun. 6th Inf.Div.	Hun. III		
Hun. 2nd Mtn.Brig.			
Hun. 13th Inf.Div.	Hun. V		
Hun. 16th Inf.Div.			
Hun. 24th Inf.Div. and remnants of Hun. 7th Inf.Div.		Hun. 1st	A
Hun. 10th Inf.Div.	Hun. VI		
Hun. 63rd Frontier Rgt.			
Hun. 66th Frontier Rgt.			
1st Armd.Div.			
<i>13th Armd.Div. (under rehabilitation)</i>			
<i>Armd.Inf.Div. Feldherrnhalle (en route)</i>			
<i>109th and 110th Armd.Brig. (en route)</i>			
<i>Hun. 1st Cav.Div. (en route)</i>	directly subordinate		
<i>18th SS Armd.Inf.Div. (under formation)</i>			
<i>22nd SS Cav.Div. (under formation)</i>			
<i>277th P.Inf.Div. (under formation)</i>			
<i>336th P.Inf.Div. (under formation)</i>			
Hun. 7th Repl.Div.	directly subordinate		
Hun. 2nd Mtn.Repl.Brig.			
Hun. 9th Frontier Guard Brig.			
8th Inf.Div.			
Hun. 27th Lt.Div.	XVII		
3rd Mtn.Div.			
Col. Schulcz Gr.			
Hun. 2nd Repl.Div.	Hun. IX (and 20 Btl.		
46th Inf.Div.	‘Székler Frontier Guard’)	Eighth and	
4th Mtn.Div.		Hun. 2nd	
8th SS Cav.Div.	XXIX	(Wöhler)	South
15th Inf.Div.			
Hun. 1st Mtn.Repl.Brig	directly subordinate		
Hun. 7th Repl.Div. (bulk)			
Ludwig Blocking Unit (3 Ger., 1 Hun.Btln.)			
Hun. 9th Res.Div.			
Hun. 25th Inf.Div.	Hun. II		
Hun. 2nd Armd.Div.			
<i>76th Inf.Div. (bulk) (under rehabilitation)</i>	directly subordinate		
(without units)	LXXII		
Hun. 12th Res.Div.			
Hun. 4th Repl.Div.	Hun. VII		
23rd Armd.Div.	Breith Gr. (III Armd.)	Sixth and	
Ameiser Gr. (parts of 22nd SS Cav.Div.)		Hun. 3rd	
Hun. 1st Armd.Div.	LVII Armd.	(Fretter-	
4th SS Pol.Armd.Inf.Div.		Pico)	
Tappe Cbt.Gr.			
Hun. 20th Inf.Div. (bulk) and remnants of			
Hun. 6th Repl.Div.			
Hun. 8th Repl.Div. and Hun. 1st Repl.Cav.Rgt.	Hun. VIII		
Hun. 23rd Res.Div.			

*Note:* As from 12.00 hrs. on 3 October 1944, Eighth Army, as A.Gr. Wöhler, took over the Hungarian 2nd Army's section from A.Gr. Fretter-Pico. It was renamed Sixth Army from this point on. At the same time, the Hungarian 2nd Army was subordinated to A.Gr. Wöhler.

*Sources:* Map RH 2 Ost/5060 (H.Gr. Süd, 5 Oct. 1944, Annex Situation map 1:300 000); Map RH 2 Ost/1182 (Situation map OKW 5 Oct. 1944).

divisions were still holding their ground at this point. However, 23rd Armoured Division had to be transferred at once from Turda to Nagyvárad, in order to 'put the fire out' and secure the front by means of a counter-attack. Heavy fighting for Nagyvárad broke out after 25 September, with Soviet and Romanian troops penetrating into the city at times, but the counter-attack launched by 23rd Armoured Division on 28 September stabilized the situation.<sup>96</sup> Army Group South moved numerous reserves to Nagyvárad to strengthen the defence of this important city, the loss of which would seriously endanger Army Detachment Wöhler.<sup>97</sup>

### *The Tank Battle at Debrecen–Nyíregyháza*

The resistance at Turda, which the Soviets had not expected, forced the commander of 2nd Ukrainian Front, Marshal Rodion Y. Malinovsky, to abandon his original plan. He withdrew 6th Guards Armoured Army and Col.-Gen. Issa Pliyev's mechanized cavalry group from Turda after 24 September, and regrouped them at Arad-Nagyvárad, where there was more prospect of a successful breakthrough, if only because the terrain—open country with no major river obstacles—was highly favourable. However, the resistance at Turda delayed the mustering of Malinovsky's motorized forces for at least a week, and by 5 October 6th Guards Armoured Army had lost a great many tanks at Turda and Nagyvárad, so its striking power was already reduced.<sup>98</sup> The main forces deployed in the attack were the Pliyev Group (IV and VI Guards Cavalry Corps and VII Mechanized Corps, with a total of 389 tanks and assault guns) and Lt.-Gen. Sergei I. Gorskov's mechanized cavalry group (V Guards Cavalry Corps and XXIII Armoured Corps, with 146 tanks and assault guns).<sup>99</sup> In addition, 3rd Ukrainian Front, under Fedor I. Tolbukhin, had to let Malinovsky have the 46th Army and an artillery division for this highly promising operation.

Guderian took advantage of the Soviet weakness to launch a counter-offensive to recapture the Carpathian passes. From 30 September 1944 strong armoured forces were massed in eastern Hungary under the code-name GYPSY BARON. The reconstituted III Armoured Corps was to have launched its attack on 12 October, with the initial task of destroying the Soviet forces in the Arad–Timișoara area. But only some of the units had arrived, and they could not be deployed in an offensive while the political situation in Hungary remained unclear. The OKH kept two powerful armoured brigades near Budapest as a precaution, on the pretext that they were

<sup>96</sup> Rebentisch, *Zum Kaukasus*, 404 ff.

<sup>97</sup> KTB H.Gr. Süd, 'Zuführung von Artillerie und panzerbrechenden Waffen aus dem Raum Klausenburg in den Raum Grosswardein, 28.9.1944', HL microfilm 631.

<sup>98</sup> On 6th Guards Armoured Army, see Varakin, '6-va gvardiiskaya tankovaya armia'. At the end of September the army, already weakened in the fighting round Turda, had 494 men, 188 tanks and assault guns, 982 cannon, and 1,832 vehicles. By 6 October it had lost another 50 or so tanks and assault guns.

<sup>99</sup> The Pliyev Group was formed at the beginning of September from Stavka reserves. Zakharov, *Délkelet—és Közép-Európa felszabadítása*, 414.

simply undergoing ‘rehabilitation’, but further reinforcements, such as 503rd Heavy Armoured Battalion, were on their way to Hungary.

The Soviets soon put an end to these plans. The mustering of the Soviet armies at the south-western foot of the Bihar mountains and along the lower reaches of the Maros was completed at the beginning of October. On 6 October two armoured corps and five mechanized corps positioned along the 160-kilometre-long front between Makó and Nagyvárad, comprising 627 tanks and 22 cavalry and infantry divisions, moved northwards against the Hungarian 3rd Army, with its 70 tanks and eight divisions. Within 24 hours the Hungarian front, with no anti-tank weapons to defend it, had been torn to shreds, and a breakthrough 40 kilometres deep and 100 kilometres wide had been achieved. By 8 October the Soviet VI Guards Cavalry Corps was standing on the south-western outskirts of Debrecen. Malinovsky’s tanks had broken through the Debrecen–Szolnok road at a number of points. Only the attack by 6th Guards Armoured Army at Nagyvárad failed to gain much ground at first. That same day Malinovsky decided to continue the attack in the direction of Debrecen–Nyíregyháza.

The plan was to exploit the operational breakthrough by having the Soviet XVIII Armoured Corps cross the Tisza at Szentes and continue the attack in the direction of Budapest–Kecskemét. 7th Guards Army, moving up from Transylvania, would attack Nagyvárad from the south, while the Pliyev Group continued its attack to the north. However, the Stavka amended the plan by ordering Pliyev first to attack Nagyvárad from the north with two army corps, so as to help 6th Guards Armoured Army break through. That left only IV Guards Cavalry Corps to attack in the direction of Debrecen–Nyíregyháza.<sup>100</sup> The loss of Debrecen alone would have made it extraordinarily difficult for the Hungarian 1st and 8th Armies to withdraw from Transylvania, but the loss of Nyíregyháza would have been a death blow. On that day the Hungarian 27th Motorized Division was still at the Borgó pass, 240 kilometres east of Debrecen! Friessner gave orders to speed up the withdrawal from Transylvania. The rapid Soviet advance and the concentration of German troops in the great plain gave rise to the tank battle of Debrecen, in which the forces of both parties were engaged from 9 to 20 October.<sup>101</sup> The German–Hungarian forces took up their positions with 11 divisions or brigades and 227 tanks and assault guns, against the mechanized Pliyev and Gorskov Groups and the Soviet 53rd Army and 6th Guards Armoured Army, which were markedly superior, with a total of 39 divisions or brigades and 773 tanks and assault guns.<sup>102</sup> Malinovsky’s units were vulnerable, however, in that they were split into a number of groups attacking in different directions.

Friessner attempted to take the offensive with his modest forces, and there ensued one of the most versatile tank battles of the Second World War.<sup>103</sup> On

<sup>100</sup> Ölvedi, *A Budai Vár és a debreceni csata*, 140.

<sup>101</sup> The tank battle at Debrecen–Nyíregyháza is referred to retrospectively in German memoirs, and to some extent also in the war diaries, as ‘the tank battle in the Puszta’ (Hun. *puszta* = bare, treeless plain). This is misleading, however, because other areas in Hungary are also called ‘puszta’.

<sup>102</sup> Ölvedi, *A Budai Vár és a debreceni csata*, 121–4.

<sup>103</sup> For the German point of view, see Kissel, *Die Panzerschlacht in der Pussta*. A study of the Soviet documents is to be found in Ölvedi, *A Budai Vár és a debreceni csata*.

Table V.vii.3. Relative strength of forces in Hungary at the beginning of October 1944

	Divisions/ Brigades	Tanks and assault guns	Cannon and grenade launchers*	Aircraft*	Ration strength
Army Group South	31	293	approx. 3,500	741	430,000
2nd Ukrainian Front (with Rom. 1st and 4th Armies under its command)	84	825	10,238	1,216	860,000

\* According to Számvéber, *Páncélosok*, 31.

Sources: On the forces of Army Group South, see BA-MA RH 19 V/51b Annexes, 'Iststärke Heeresgruppe Süd am 2.10.1944', which, however, gives only the number of German troops, namely 240,952 men. On the 2nd Ukrainian Front ration strength (698,200 men), see: *Grif sekretnosti sniat*, 227, which however does not give the strength of the Romanian units under its command. According to *România în Războiul Antihitlerist*, 635,648, a total of 167,306 Romanian troops took part in the battles in Hungary.

10 October the German 1st, 13th, and 23rd Armoured Divisions managed to split the Pliyev Group in two and encircle it. This tactical success could not be exploited, however, owing to the lack of infantry. The Soviet VI Guards Cavalry Corps was now isolated south of Debrecen, but the IV Guards Cavalry Corps and the VII Mechanized Corps continued the attack, advancing in a kind of 'mobile pocket' towards Nagyvárad. On 12 October they even managed to take that strategically important city, but by then Pliyev had lost more than 200 of his 389 tanks.<sup>104</sup>

Malinovsky was obliged to order some units of 46th Army and XVIII Armoured Corps, which had already crossed the Tisza, to turn back and go to Pliyev's assistance. These units had already reached Kecskemét on 10 October, and were only 70 kilometres away from Budapest. Had the attack continued in the same direction, the consequences for the whole army group would have been catastrophic. However, Malinovsky was unable to take advantage of these favourable developments because his armoured forces were so dispersed. On 11 October the German 133rd Anti-Aircraft Regiment and the Hungarian 1st Hussars Division even managed to destroy the Soviet spearhead that had reached Kecskemét, and to advance to the Tisza.<sup>105</sup> The Soviet 7th Army nevertheless continued to hold several bridgeheads on the left bank, and so threaten Budapest.

Although the Soviet troops had taken Debrecen on 20 October, they had failed to achieve their aim of encircling the German Eighth Army and the Hungarian 1st and 2nd Armies deployed in Transylvania and in the Carpathians. Moreover, Petrov's 4th Ukrainian Front, which was attacking through the Carpathians (the northern arm of the pincer movement), had made very little progress, thus leaving the defenders with a considerable positional advantage. On 15 October, after the attempt to conclude an armistice had failed, the front was further strengthened by

<sup>104</sup> Ölvedi, *A Budai Vár és a debreceni csata*, 152.

<sup>105</sup> Reszneki, *Őszi harrok*, 39.

the arrival of the German armoured units that had previously been tied up in the Budapest area. The Pliyev Group was making very slow progress in its attempt to break through from Nagyvárad and resume its advance to the north-west. It did however manage, on 16 October, to establish a connection with the Soviet VI Guards Cavalry Corps, which for several days had been supplied only by air. A number of German-Hungarian units were encircled in the process, but the necessary infantry were not available to destroy them and, like the Soviet divisions that were encircled earlier, they were able to reconnect with their own lines. On 19 October the German IV Armoured Corps, which had just been brought in with reinforcements from the Budapest area, launched a counter-attack from the Szolnok bridgehead in the direction of Debrecen. The Romanian 1st Army was hit by the full force of the attack, and its defences collapsed immediately. The Romanian 4th Infantry Division was almost completely destroyed, losing 4,680 men that same day.<sup>106</sup> The breakthrough was extended by a further 40 kilometres on the following day and, at the same time, the Pliyev Group managed to take Debrecen. Overestimating his possibilities, Malinovsky gave orders on 19 October to continue the offensive immediately northwards from Debrecen in order to complete the encirclement, and to launch a counter-attack towards Szolnok in order to drive the German IV Armoured Corps back and establish bridgeheads on the other side of the Tisza. By that time, however, the Soviet forces were exhausted. By 16 October Army Group South had lost only 115 tanks and assault guns, whereas 2nd Ukrainian Front had lost 400 tanks and assault guns, amounting to more than 60 per cent of its target strength.<sup>107</sup>

On 21 October the Pliyev Group succeeded in taking Nyíregyháza. All Army Group Wöhler's efficient escape routes were now blocked. Defeat loomed. The only remaining way out via Csap would have involved a considerable delay for Wöhler. There was also the danger that 4th Ukrainian Front, which was attacking at the same time, would get there first. Disaster was averted only by means of a simultaneous attack by IV Armoured Corps, reinforced by 24th Armoured Division, and Wöhler's retreating forces. This operation was facilitated by the inability of the Soviet infantry in the Pliyev Group to keep up with the German forces, so that a 20-to-30-kilometre gap was opened in the front between Debrecen and Nyíregyháza.

The German spearheads met to the south of Nyíregyháza on 23 October, cutting off three mechanized (cavalry) corps of 2nd Ukrainian Front. The relief attack launched by the Soviet 27th Army from the Debrecen area failed to get through. Pliyev was obliged to break out from Nyíregyháza with his decimated troops on 26 October. They lost almost all their heavy weapons and transport in the process. And Malinovsky lost his most important spearheads, with serious repercussions for the offensive against the Hungarian capital that began two days later.

<sup>106</sup> Duțu, 'Szolnok', 261.

<sup>107</sup> The losses on the Soviet side were calculated on the basis of the following works: Ölvedi, *A Budai Vár és a debreceni csata*, 196; KTB H.Gr. Süd, daily reports 6 to 17 Dec. 1944, HL microfilm 876/b.

Table V.vii.4. Losses in the tank battle for Debrecen–Nyíregyháza

	Men (dead, wounded, missing)	Men captured	Tanks	Cannon
German and Hungarian	15,000 + 20,000	approx. 18,000	approx. 200	490
Soviet and Romanian	117,360*	5,073	approx. 500	1,656

\* *Grif sekretnosti sniat*, 227, gives only the Soviet losses, namely 84,010.

Source: On the figures cited, see Ungváry, *A magyar honvédség*, 336–7.

As a result of the tank battle for Debrecen, the bulk of the German–Hungarian forces were able to withdraw in good order. However, the very armoured divisions that were most battle-worthy moved away from the forefield of Budapest. Between Baja and Szolnok, there were only exhausted and depleted divisions of the Hungarian 3rd Army, and no more than 20 tanks belonging to the German 24th Armoured Division, holding the line against the Soviet 46th Army. The Soviet lines were now only 100 kilometres from Budapest. The offensive nevertheless represented a considerable risk for Malinovsky, especially as the German divisions were able to regroup for the defence of Budapest without difficulty, whereas the Soviet forces did not have enough motorized troops available to pursue the offensive successfully.

#### *The Horthy Government's Attempts to Negotiate an Armistice, and the Arrow Cross Putsch*

Horthy had withdrawn to his residence in the Budapest Castle after the German occupation. He avoided standing up for the Sztójay government but, on the other hand, he was long unwilling to take action against it. His passivity was shaken on several occasions in June by the alarming reports of successive deportations of Jews. Horthy had been informed at an early stage of the fate that awaited the deported Jews. Hitler and Ribbentrop had told him bluntly, during his first visit to Klessheim in the spring of 1943, that the Jews were to be treated as ‘bacilli’: they had to work or be destroyed. And there are other indications that Horthy understood exactly what those words meant.<sup>108</sup>

The Allied landings in Normandy and the protests of various neutral states finally persuaded Horthy to act. The regent had long been convinced that Germany could no longer win the war. But he was anxious, at all costs, to avoid negotiations with the Soviet Union, which he thoroughly detested. On 28 August he attempted to contact the western Allies through the former emissary in Berne and take advantage of the favourable foreign-policy situation (Germany was tied up with Romania’s change of sides). The next day he dismissed Sztójay and appointed his own close associate, Géza Lakatos, as prime minister. But, on 5 September, he

<sup>108</sup> See Horthy’s letter to Hitler in Szinai and Szűcs, *Horthy Miklós titkos iratai*, 398.

received the unequivocal answer that all negotiations must be conducted together with the Soviet Union. Horthy therefore summoned the Crown Council (which was identical with the Council of Ministers) on 7 September and announced that he had decided to conclude an armistice with the Allies. On the following day, however, the ministers distanced themselves from Horthy's decision and declared in favour of remaining loyal to the Axis coalition. The regent was obliged to recognize that he could not trust his own government.

It is indicative of Horthy's naivety that he apparently hoped in all seriousness to negotiate a similar solution to the one that had been reached in Finland a few months earlier. The organization of the negotiations was predictably chaotic. On 18 September Horthy asked the Swedish ambassador to inform the Allied governments that he wished to negotiate an armistice. On 22 September he sent his personal representative, Col.-Gen. István Náday, to Italy with a British colonel who had escaped from a German prisoner-of-war camp—but unfortunately forgot to give Náday written confirmation of his powers. And the radio code he had been given could not be deciphered in Budapest.

The realities of the situation finally forced Horthy to contact the Soviet authorities directly, and on 24 September he sent a delegation to Moscow. It arrived there on 26 September and returned on 3 October. Another delegation was dispatched on 28 September, this time containing notable politicians (a special envoy, a colonel-general, and a relative of former prime minister Pál Teleki). Horthy also gave the delegation a personal letter to Stalin, asking that his country be treated leniently. He also succeeded in making radio contact with this delegation. On 11 October Horthy agreed to the Soviet demand for an immediate declaration of war on Germany. Horthy took this to mean that he would still have time to negotiate with the Reich, but the Soviet authorities intended the agreement to be taken literally.

The Germans knew all the details of the negotiations.<sup>109</sup> Col.-Gen. Friessner had flown to Berlin on 10 September and briefed Hitler on the impressions he had formed in Budapest. The Waffen SS units currently being established in Hungary, as well as 109th and 110th Armoured Brigades, were put on alert around Budapest. A team led by Otto Skorzeny drew up plans for a pre-emptive strike code-named Operation ARMoured FIST, and the proclamation on the takeover of power was agreed with Szálasi.<sup>110</sup> Szálasi, the leader of the Arrow Cross party, had been seen by Veesenmayer since 13 September as the only 'person of consequence'. As a first step, Lt.-Gen. Szilárd Bakay, who was reputed to be absolutely loyal to Horthy and had therefore recently been put in command of I (Budapest) Army Corps, was abducted on 8 October. Bakay had got wind of Operation ARMoured FIST and had arrested some of the officers involved, so he had to be got out of the way quickly. On 15 October the regent's son was lured into a trap and kidnapped. That finally prompted Horthy to act: around noon the same day, he announced that an armistice was being sought—an announcement which he had originally intended

<sup>109</sup> The facts that the OKH had discovered are summarized in file BA-MA RH 2/2599.

<sup>110</sup> For the German perspective, see Lehmann, 'Unternehmen Panzerfaust', 215–31.

to make on 20 October. But the announcement was badly worded. Instead of giving instructions and orders, Horthy simply said that the war was lost and that he would ask the Soviet authorities for an armistice. Lakatos had changed the tense of the verb in the sentence from the past to the future. The military authorities must therefore have thought that there were more negotiations to come, so they awaited further orders. In the meantime, Skorzeny and the Hungarian conspirators had managed to cut the Budapest Castle off from the outside world. The 'king's man', Lajos Veress (2nd Army), was betrayed by his own adjutant. Béla Miklós Dálnoki (1st Army) went over to the Soviet side with his chief of staff, leaving his army in the lurch. Josef Vitez Heszényi (3rd Army) was reputed to be an Arrow Cross supporter, so nothing could be expected of him from the outset. Some 20,000 to 30,000 Hungarian troops surrendered to the Soviet army over the next few days, but the collapse of the Hungarian army was prevented. Most of the commanders were not prepared to turn their weapons against their former coalition partner. Bakay's successor, Lt.-Gen. Béla Agteleki, and a few other officers who tried to act upon Horthy's announcement were arrested by their own officers. In the early hours of 16 October Skorzeny launched an attack on the castle. Horthy realized that his attempt at capitulation had failed, and he was anxious to avoid bloodshed, so he ordered his bodyguard almost at once to cease resistance. After a short exchange of fire, Skorzeny's men took the castle. The regent at first refused to appoint Szálasi prime minister. He also refused to step down or retract his announcement. He finally agreed to resign only after Veesenmayer, in a third attempt to persuade him to change his mind, gave him to understand that his son's life depended on it.<sup>111</sup> On the afternoon of 16 October, waiting in his bathroom while the bare necessities were being packed for him, he signed his letter of resignation and the announcement of Szálasi's appointment as prime minister. So ended not only the Horthy era, but also the very much longer period of bourgeois-feudal rule in Hungary. A party now came to power that was in no way less radical than the Bolsheviks in 1917 or the social revolutionaries in the Strasser wing of the NSDAP.<sup>112</sup>

### *The Hungarian Army under Arrow Cross Rule*

The Arrow Cross government proclaimed total mobilization of the country. Theoretically, there were still a million men fit to bear arms, but mostly untrained, available in Hungary at the time and eligible for military service. The German government was also determined to exploit these reserves of manpower, and on 23 October 1944 the two governments agreed to form four Hungarian 'Hungarist' divisions and four Hungarian Waffen SS divisions. However, the material resources needed to carry out these plans were scarcely forthcoming, and only a few small

<sup>111</sup> For a detailed account of the Arrow Cross putsch, see Macartney, *October Fifteenth*, ii. 319. A good summary, with references, is provided in Szöllösi-Janze, *Die Pfeilkreuzerbewegung in Ungarn*, 311–20.

<sup>112</sup> On the Arrow Cross in general, see Szöllösi-Janze, *Die Pfeilkreuzerbewegung in Ungarn*.

Table V.vii.5. Proportion of German and Hungarian troops in Army Group South

Date	German/Hungarian infantry battalions	German/Hungarian tanks (operational)	German/Hungarian heavy anti-tank cannon	German/Hungarian artillery batteries
4.9.1944	53	221	66	231
18.9.1944	55	230	101	187
11.10.1944	72	188	231	62
11.11.1944	90	140	142	52
30.12.1944	134	85	475	53
30.1.1945	143	65	338	60
24.2.1945	185	77	554	37
15.3.1945	200	77	742	48
				518
				45
				302
				117

Source: See Ungváry, *A magyar honvédség*, 352–3 and 559–60.

emergency and anti-tank units, one SS ski brigade, one SS infantry assault regiment, and Combat Group Ney were eventually deployed. Of the four SS divisions that had been planned, only two armed infantry divisions (25th ‘Hunyadi’ and 26th ‘Hungária’) were formed in Neuhammer and Schieratz and partly equipped.

The combat value of the Hungarian army declined more and more after 15 October. While only a few complete units deserted, desertion by small groups and individuals increased to an extent that the Wehrmacht command found appalling. Col.-Gen. Wöhler complained in his diary about ‘the bad influence of the rural population, and especially the Calvinist clergy, on Hungarian soldiers recuperating or regrouping in the countryside’, adding that it was ‘impossible, even now, to ascertain the number shot for cowardice, etc.’.<sup>113</sup> Wöhler was also obliged to recognize that only ‘about 5 per cent’ of the officers could be described as supporters of the new government, although the attitude of the officer corps was 70 to 80 per cent ‘pro-German’.<sup>114</sup> As a counter-measure, the commanders of Hungarian divisions were relieved of their units, which were then incorporated in mixed German–Hungarian ‘regimental groups’. The 2nd Army staff was dissolved and the 1st Army staff downgraded to administrative duties. Only the 3rd Army remained intact as a command body within the framework of Army Detachment Balck. A special role was played by the Hungarian artillery, which had not seen much action during the withdrawal movements, and whose troops had fewer opportunities to change sides. In mid-November 1944 six Hungarian artillery battalions were still deployed as divisional artillery, and five as GHQ artillery, in the area of Sixth Army alone.<sup>115</sup> Given the absence of source material, it is impossible to determine exactly how many Hungarian artillerymen served in the German forces, but they were of considerable importance. The ration strength of the Hungarian field forces was 318,000 on 14 December 1944, and 283,000 on

<sup>113</sup> Entry for 29 Nov. 1944, BA-MA RH 19 V/59, fos. 41 ff.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., fo. 44.

<sup>115</sup> BA-MA RH 19 V/63, 96. The number of artillery battalions so deployed probably continued to grow. Hungarian artillery battalions are mentioned repeatedly in weekly status reports until April 1945.

15 January 1945. There were also about 500,000 men deployed in rearward areas.<sup>116</sup> However, these figures bore no relation to the combat strength of the Hungarian divisions.

Hungary was indispensable for Hitler on account of its raw materials (bauxite, manganese, oil) and its strategic position. He paid even less heed to the Szálasi government than he had to previous governments. Hitler and Guderian ordered the destruction of industrial plant, transport facilities, and electricity and water works. Guderian added that, ‘unfortunately’, Hungarian interests could not be taken into account and, if the Hungarian government did not find that ‘acceptable’, he could only recommend that it contribute more to the common cause.<sup>117</sup> At the same time, the German command did not hesitate to throw to the front Hungarian units that were already bled dry. Things went so far that, on 30 December 1944, the commander of the ‘Szent László’ Division, Zoltán Szügyi, ‘vetoed’ [sic] an order from LXXII Army Corps in a sharply worded letter, stating that he could not accept ‘sending untrained Hungarian troops to be slaughtered *en masse*’. Szügyi also asked to be relieved of his post and brought before a Hungarian court-martial—a cry of despair that saved the remnants of his division.<sup>118</sup> Although his determined protest had no adverse consequences for him, no other Hungarian generals followed his example.

In the final months the Hungarian army formed eight more volunteer assault battalions, eight fortress machine-gun battalions, nine bicycle anti-tank battalions, two infantry regiments, and several ‘Hungarist’ assault battalions.<sup>119</sup> On the German side, only minimum consignments of weapons were supplied: 2,707 carbines, 300 assault rifles, 33 cannon, 29 Panzer IVs, 75 Hetzer anti-tank guns, 64 grenade launchers, and some light weapons.<sup>120</sup> The remaining Hungarian army institutions and the eleven Honvéd training regiments (some 200,000 men in all) were moved to various locations in the Reich and Denmark. Sixteen thousand youngsters between 15 and 21 years of age were sent to man German anti-aircraft artillery.<sup>121</sup> A few Hungarian battalions and companies fought in the strongholds at Breslau, Kolberg, Toruń, and Poznań, or at Stettin, Schwerin, and finally in Berlin. About 110,000 Hungarian troops were still to be found in various areas of the front at the end of the war, the vast majority deployed with Army Group South.

For their part, the Germans tried to make as much use as possible of the Hungarian economy and Hungarian conscripts for their own conduct of the war.<sup>122</sup> Some 10,000 recruits and anti-aircraft auxiliaries were extracted in three ‘Hungary operations’. Although Col.-Gen. Károly Beregfy, the Honvéd minister in

<sup>116</sup> BA-MA RH 19 V58, 166 (15 Jan. 1944) and 172 (14 Dec. 1944).

<sup>117</sup> Telex from Guderian to Army Group South and the Plenipotentiary General for the Wehrmacht in Hungary, 27 Nov. 1944, BA-MA RH 2/316, 49.

<sup>118</sup> ‘Nr. 1343, Kdo. Kgl. Ung. Div. “Szent László” an Generalkommando LXXII. A.K.’, 29 Dec. 1944, BA-MA RH 24-72/47.

<sup>119</sup> BA-MA WF-10/13761, 1, n.d., and RH 2/1426 (‘Neuaufstellungen allgemein’).

<sup>120</sup> BA-MA RH 2/1426, 42 ff. (18 Mar. 1945), and HL, Föv.megh. tbk, app., 31 Dec. 1944.

<sup>121</sup> Herzog, *Besatzungsverwaltung in den besetzten Ostgebieten*, 109.

<sup>122</sup> On the Hungarian war industry and economy, see ‘Kriegstagebuch Wirtschaftsoffizier in Ungarn mit Anlagen’, BA-MA WF-01/2857.

the Arrow Cross government, promised to let the Wehrmacht have 190,000 auxiliaries, by March 1945, only 5,000 had been handed over.<sup>123</sup> Even more important was the incorporation of existing Hungarian units in German divisions. The significance of these dispersed combat groups should not be underestimated. In November 1944 they still made up more than 50 per cent of the artillery and 30 per cent of the heavy anti-tank units of Army Group South. This is all the more significant since, for Hitler, Hungary was now the most important theatre of war and was receiving regular reinforcements. The region could not have been held without the participation of the Hungarian army.

The German measures were extremely unpopular. During a discussion between the Hungarian Honvéd minister and the German plenipotentiary general in Hungary, Hans von Greiffenberg, it was noted that:

the subordinate authorities, and above all the Hungarian people [...] [are] extremely angry about the drastic step of ‘selling Hungarians to serve as paramilitary auxiliaries’ for the Germans, and it is doubtful whether the Hungarian state authorities, who are not yet firmly established, will be able to implement it in the face of this popular opposition [...]. Lastly, it must be said that the general impression in Hungary is that people think they could not be worse off under the Bolsheviks than in Germany.<sup>124</sup>

The military events allowed the Szálasi government hardly any possibility of actively shaping its own domestic and foreign policy. After Christmas 1944 Hungarian officials were able to function properly only in the country’s three western counties. Szálasi himself was also restricted by German ‘recommendations’ which forced him to form a coalition government with members of the previous ruling party, the Imrédy party, and the Hungarian National Socialists, whom he had disparagingly described as ‘sham National Socialists’. He aimed to take sole power with the Arrow Cross party after the war ended. As an interim measure, the Arrow Cross party appointed representatives empowered to issue instructions in all state agencies. A ‘National Development Planning Office’ worked until April 1945 on all kinds of unrealistic plans for the transformation of the country after the war, and parts of the party’s revolutionary social programme were actually implemented in this short space of time. The revolutionary nature of the Arrow Cross party was also shown by that fact that, shortly after taking power, Szálasi sent a congratulatory and conciliatory telegram to the head of the Romanian government-in-exile, as a sign that old differences had been overcome. No other Hungarian politician could have made such a gesture.

The governmental measures were not seen as effective, either by the general population or by the army. Even those who were pro-German experienced life under Arrow Cross rule as organized chaos. The party militia was busy stealing and selling Jewish property, and the party organizations prevented the administration

<sup>123</sup> ‘Besprechungspunkte für den Besuch des Honvédministers bei OKW/OKH’, BA-MA RH 2/1426, 77 ff. (17 Mar. 1945).

<sup>124</sup> ‘Besprechung beim Bev.Gen. der Dt. Wehrmacht am 16.11.1944’, BA-MA WF10/13700, 25 ff.

from getting on with its work. Arrow Cross prestige in the army fell to a very low level because the few military formations composed of party militiamen hardly proved their worth at the front. Szálasi himself withdrew in December and devoted himself to his ideological writings on 'Hungarism'.

The Szálasi government's policy on the Jews was even more radical than that of its predecessors.<sup>125</sup> Szálasi openly announced that, pending their planned expulsion after the war, the Jews must 'work or die'. When he took over in October 1944, the only Jews not yet deported to Germany were the 200,000 or so in Budapest and those in military labour service companies. The Szálasi government concluded an agreement with Adolf Eichmann under which 50,000 Jews were to be sent to the German border to build the 'Reich Defence Line' (South-East Wall). The Jews in question were forced to make their way west on foot, in a series of deadly marches under Hungarian guard. Even SS officers were shocked by the scenes played out on the Vienna–Budapest highway. Waffen SS General Hans Jüttner, who witnessed these death marches during a tour of inspection, protested to the senior SS and police leader in Hungary, SS Obergruppenführer and Police General Otto Winkelmann.<sup>126</sup> Many Nazi officials considered the Hungarian measures counter-productive, and the Jews arriving at the Reich border, the vast majority of whom were unfit for work as a result of the long march, were seen as an 'extremely heavy burden' even by Rudolf Höss, the former Auschwitz camp commandant now in charge of the deployment of Jews in the Lower Danube region. The marches on foot were therefore stopped at the end of November, and the deportations continued by rail. Most of the Budapest Jews remained in the city, where Europe's last ghetto was established for them.<sup>127</sup>

Szálasi's lack of realism is shown by the fact that he regarded himself as Germany's equal partner. He repeatedly protested against the Waffen SS enlisting Hungarian recruits. When he saw that his wishes were ignored by the Wehrmacht command, he discharged Honvéd officers who had accepted command posts in Hungarian Waffen SS units, and deprived them of their rank and citizenship. On 9 February he even sent Hitler a letter demanding the symbolic transfer of supreme command of the German (!) and Hungarian troops in the Carpathian region.

The Hungarian army disintegrated. By February 1945, 18 out of a total of 27 army units (divisions and brigades) had already been disbanded. The commanders of the remaining units simply administered their troops but had no influence on the conduct of operations. The only remaining independent divisions with their own troops under their command were 2nd Armoured Division, the Hussars Division, and the 'Szent László' Division. Morale was correspondingly low. While defection to the Soviet side slowed to some extent after November 1944, it nevertheless remained a constant problem for the Hungarian army. Six officers and 924 men in

<sup>125</sup> On the Szálasi government's policy on the Jews, see the above-mentioned works by Szöllösi-Janze (*Die Pfeilkreuzerbewegung in Ungarn*), Aly and Gerlach (*Das letzte Kapitel*), and Braham (*The Politics of Genocide*).

<sup>126</sup> Braham, *The Politics of Genocide*, 838.

<sup>127</sup> There are a number of works on the Budapest ghetto. For a summary, see Ungváry, *Die Schlacht*, 344–69, and Aly and Gerlach, *Das letzte Kapitel*, 367–75.

the area of Army Group South went over to the enemy between 1 and 17 January 1945 alone.<sup>128</sup> Thousands of deserters hid in the rearward area. The majority of 24th Infantry Division capitulated on 3 April 1945, and more than 45,000 men (including the reconstituted 1st Mountain Division) surrendered in western Transdanubia between 28 and 30 March.<sup>129</sup>

Economically too, the country was being bled white. Direct and systematic plunder by the Wehrmacht began after the Arrow Cross party took power, particularly during the withdrawals in March 1945. Many arbitrary actions were taken in the process.<sup>130</sup> Seventy per cent of the rolling stock of the Hungarian railways and large quantities of industrial stock and machinery were transported to the Reich. The Soviet army paid even less regard to the Hungarian owners than did the Wehrmacht. From the statistics, it is almost impossible to distinguish between the destructive measures taken by the German and Soviet troops. It is clear, however, that Hungary lost 44 per cent of its cattle, 56 per cent of its horses, and 80 per cent of its sheep in the last six months of the war. And 40 per cent of its entire national assets were destroyed.<sup>131</sup> Altogether more than 100,000 people, German and Hungarian, were deported to forced labour from the area of the Trianon state.<sup>132</sup>

The Red Army's behaviour in Hungary contributed in no small measure to the fact that, in some circles, readiness to collaborate with the Wehrmacht rose despite the hopeless situation and the unpopularity of the Arrow Cross. Many of the Nazi propaganda horror stories proved to be true: mass executions of prisoners of war, plunder, and mass rape were the order of the day. The town of Székesfehérvár, a focal point in the fighting, is a prime example. It was occupied by 2nd Ukrainian Front on 22 December, then retaken for two months on 22 January 1945. After the brief Soviet occupation, more than 1,500 women, out of a total population of 40,000, sought medical treatment for rape. Although the Soviet authorities took many steps, from December 1944 onwards, to curb their troops' excesses, the measures they introduced were insufficient. The situation was alleviated to some extent after 20 December, when a Hungarian opposition government was formed. Hungarian officials and Hungarian police appeared on the scene soon afterwards, which helped considerably to restore normality. As a result, conditions like those in areas of Germany occupied by the Red Army were imposed in Hungary only for a short time. Nevertheless, suspected political opponents, such as Communists disloyal to Moscow and diplomats from neutral states—including Raoul Wallenberg, who rescued Hungarian Jews—immediately became victims of a new form of persecution and disappeared in Soviet prisons.<sup>133</sup>

<sup>128</sup> BA-MA RH19V/64, 59 (22 Jan.1945).

<sup>129</sup> Dombrády and Tóth, *A magyar királyi honvédség*, 437.

<sup>130</sup> Complaints are also recorded in HL, I. 96. ‘Fővezérsgég meghatalmazott táborkának hadinaplója és melléklete’ [War diary and annexes of the general of the Hungarian high command on special duties].

<sup>131</sup> Dombrády and Tóth, *A magyar királyi honvédség*, 443.

<sup>132</sup> The deportation of 94,788 people is registered in the Hungarian archives but tens of thousands more were abducted without any registration.

<sup>133</sup> On this, see Ungváry, ‘Magyarország szovjetizálásának kérdései’.

## (b) The Soviet Offensives against Budapest

### *Plans and Abortive Attacks*

Once the tank battle in the Debrecen area was over, Stalin immediately gave the order for a further advance. 2nd Ukrainian Front units were to take Budapest on their way and press on towards Vienna. In the autumn of 1944 Stalin was already thinking about the forthcoming division of territory with the western Allies, and wanted to secure his supremacy in central Europe. In the course of negotiations in Moscow from 8 to 18 October, Churchill had invoked his plan for British and American forces to push through Ljubljana into the Carpathian basin. This made Stalin distrustful and prompted him to act quickly. At Churchill's suggestion, the two leaders signed a cynical pro forma agreement on the division of spheres of interest between the Soviet Union and 'the Others' (Churchill's words). A note was drawn up, dividing the states of south-eastern Europe, including Hungary and Yugoslavia, between the two parties.<sup>134</sup> Although he had had a great deal to drink, the British prime minister had some reservations about this, and he asked Stalin whether it might not be better to burn the note, since it was, after all, a rather frivolous way of settling the fate of millions of people. Stalin answered in his usual relaxed fashion: 'Just hang on to it.' His self-assurance was a mask concealing a deep, almost pathological distrust. In his opinion, Churchill was 'the kind of man who will pick your pocket of a kopeck if you don't watch him'.<sup>135</sup> That probably explains why the Soviet delegation began to haggle energetically the very next day. Specifically, Stalin did not want British troops to appear on the scene in south-eastern Europe. He hoped to forestall this by mounting an offensive in Hungary that would present the British with a fait accompli. His decision was influenced to a large extent by reports from Col.-Gen. Lev Z. Mekhlis on the battle-weariness of the Hungarian troops.<sup>136</sup> Stalin ordered an immediate attack, disregarding the reservations expressed by the Red Army's chief of staff, General Aleksei I. Antonov, who argued that Mekhlis' comments applied not to the situation as a whole but only to conditions in the Hungarian 1st Army.<sup>137</sup> Stalin phoned the commander of 2nd Ukrainian Front at 22.00 on 28 October and, despite Malinovsky's reluctance, ordered him to begin the offensive in 24 hours, 'for political reasons'. Paying no attention to Malinovsky's objections, he hung up immediately.<sup>138</sup>

The reinforcements that had been promised, IV Guards Mechanized Corps and XXIII Rifle Corps, had not yet arrived when the order to attack was given. And II

<sup>134</sup> On the negotiations in Moscow in October 1944, see Kogelfranz, *Das Erbe von Jalta*. The respective spheres of interest of the Soviet Union and the other Allies, expressed in percentage terms, amounted to 10% and 90% in Greece, 90% and 10% in Romania, and 75% and 25% in Bulgaria.

<sup>135</sup> Djilas, *Conversations with Stalin*, 61.

<sup>136</sup> Stemenko, *A vezérkar a háború éveiben*, 280 ff.

<sup>137</sup> Although the Hungarian 1st Army suffered substantial losses after 15 October and some 15,000 men laid down their arms, events showed that not only did the army not collapse, but it was even able to delay the advance of Petrov's 4th Ukrainian Front by means of counter-attacks. In December 1944 Petrov's troops were still stuck in the north-eastern Carpathians, owing in no small measure to resistance by 1st Army.

<sup>138</sup> Zakharov, *Délkelet- és Közép-Európa felszabadítása*, 217.

Guards Mechanized Corps was also reached by Malinovsky only the following day. The other 2nd Ukrainian Front units were so exhausted by previous battles that they could not take part in the offensive at first. Thus, the Pliyev and Gorskov Groups had to be assigned to the high command's reserves on account of the heavy losses they had suffered.

For its part, the German command was aware of the danger of an attack on Budapest and had already started to reposition its troops accordingly on 26 October.<sup>139</sup> By 1 November, 23rd and 24th Armoured Divisions had been moved to the Kecskemét region, while 13th Armoured Division, Armoured Infantry Division 'Feldherrnhalle', and 8th SS Cavalry Division 'Florian Geyer' began to move back at the same time. Friessner's plan was to retake the Hungarian lowland plain with these forces and establish a durable defensive position along the Tisza line.

According to Malinovsky's operational plan, IV Guards Mechanized Corps and 46th Army, reinforced by XXIII Rifle Corps, were to take Budapest by 3 November and advance to the Isaszeg–Újpest–Budakeszi–Érd section of the front.<sup>140</sup> These aims were unrealistic, however, since IV Guards Mechanized Corps did not arrive until 1 November. While the Soviet forces outnumbered the Hungarian 3rd Army by about 3 to 1, that was not enough for them to take Budapest quickly, because the city was partly fortified and the hilly terrain on the other side of the Danube made its western half particularly favourable to defence. German reinforcements were arriving continuously, so Malinovsky's situation would not have been any better even if Stalin had given him the five days to regroup which he had requested, since the Germans would also have used the time to bring in their armoured divisions to strengthen Budapest's defences.

After brief preparations, the Soviet offensive began with an artillery bombardment at 14.00 on 29 October. The point of concentration lay south of Kecskemét, where XXXVII Rifle Corps and II Guards Mechanized Corps were attacking. The attack continued through the night, clashing with the counter-attack by 24th Armoured Division that was developing south of Kecskemét. 7th Guards Army started to cross the Tisza on 30 October, but made only slow progress. One day later, the Soviet troops took the city.

Friessner had already started building up the rearward defensive lines in Hungarian territory on 21 September, in accordance with a forward-looking order from the OKH.<sup>141</sup> The German defensive system now consisted of three main battle lines: the Margit Line, running from Lake Balaton past Lake Velence to Budapest, the 'Attila Line', flanking Budapest on the east, and the contiguous Karola Line, running between the Cserhát, Mátra, and Zemplén hills. The Hungarian General Staff had started to build up the Pest bridgehead in September,<sup>142</sup> and the work continued even as the Soviet troops approached. On 11 November, for example,

<sup>139</sup> Dombrády and Tóth, *A magyar királyi honvédség*, 378–80.

<sup>140</sup> Tóth, *Budapest felszabadítása*, 30.

<sup>141</sup> Dombrády and Tóth, *A magyar királyi honvédség*, 382.

<sup>142</sup> HL manuscript archives, memoirs of Maj.-Gen. Géza Vidos, TGY535-89.

28,000 people were employed on the earthworks (including a large number of Budapest Jews on forced labour duty).<sup>143</sup> The fortifications consisted of anti-tank ditches, dug-outs, occasional barbed-wire obstacles, and minefields.

The Hungarian General Staff had already drawn attention in September to the fact that Budapest could become a front-line city within a few days, because the Hungarian 3rd Army was not a strong enough defence force and the first major attack would sweep it aside.<sup>144</sup> The Germans, however, wanted to keep Hungarian troops out of the capital: too many of them could be dangerous in the event of a putsch. Hungarian troop transports to Budapest were allowed only after the Arrow Cross party took power on 15 October 1944.

According to the Army Group South war diary, on 25 October there were approximately 25,000 German and Hungarian troops and 146 heavy anti-aircraft guns available in the capital to defend the city. Although more units arrived in Budapest by way of reinforcements, they were so small, and so poorly trained and equipped, that they did not provide any real relief. It was clear to Friessner that Budapest was the next target of the Soviet offensive, and he wrote a letter to Guderian explaining the problem. In view of the disastrous situation, he repeated his request several times in the following weeks, but Guderian was unable to send him any troops.<sup>145</sup>

On 2 November the tanks of the Soviet II Guards Mechanized Corps were already within 15 kilometres of Budapest. IV Guards Mechanized Corps had broken through the 22nd SS Cavalry Division defences from the east and was only 6 kilometres from Soroksár. And on 3 November II Guards Mechanized Corps took the suburbs of Monor, Üllő, Vecsés, Gyál, and Pestszentimre.<sup>146</sup> The first circle of defences round the capital had now been pierced, but the attacking troops lacked accompanying infantry. The Soviet army had no armoured infantry units at its disposal, so the armoured spearheads could be only weakly secured by infantry. The mechanized troops' transport capacities had been severely depleted by their losses in the tank battle at Debrecen, so most of the men of IV Guards Mechanized Corps had to be carried on requisitioned vehicles.

The German army units that had been spared in the Debrecen tank battle also came in useful at this point. The OKH was able to prepare three armoured corps to block access to the Budapest area at the beginning of November. III Armoured Corps, commanded by General Hermann Breith, was assigned to defend the capital, while IV Armoured Corps and LVII Armoured Corps prepared to launch counter-attacks in the Jászberény region and the Cegléd-Szolnok area respectively.

Malinovsky's attack came to a standstill on 5 November. Many of his tanks had been destroyed,<sup>147</sup> and the increasingly serious shortage of munitions and fuel was

<sup>143</sup> KTB H.Gr. Süd, entry for 14 Nov. 1944, HL microfilm 897/a.

<sup>144</sup> KTB H.Gr. Süd, BA-MA 19V/51, Doc. No. 6660.

<sup>145</sup> Friessner, *Verratene Schlachten*, 159 ff.

<sup>146</sup> KTB H.Gr. Süd, annexes 3 Nov. 1944, HL microfilm 896/b.

<sup>147</sup> According to Hungarian sources, 71 tanks and assault guns were reported destroyed by 3 November; HL VKF1944 I.o. KTB, annex to Doc. No. 402.

also taking its toll.<sup>148</sup> At the same time, the impact of the German troop concentration in the Cegléd area east of Budapest was beginning to be felt, where a German counter-attack was threatening the flank of the Soviet spearheads.<sup>149</sup> By 8 November, with the aid of constant reinforcements, the defenders of Budapest had retaken the whole of the Attila line.

### *The Beginning of the Encirclement of Budapest from the West*

It is clear from the memoirs of the first deputy chief of the Red Army general staff, Col.-Gen. Sergei M. Shtemenko, how embarrassing it was for the general staff that the 46th Army offensive had come to a standstill. No one had dared to postpone or alter Stalin's plan. 'Nevertheless, the situation had to be saved,' as Shtemenko aptly put it.<sup>150</sup> The only solution was to extend the line of attack. Rather than by a frontal assault, the capture of Budapest had to be attempted by encircling it from the north and south. 6th Guards Armoured Army and 7th Guards Army were given the task of breaking through the defences in the area of Hatvan and advancing to the Danube at Vác, while 46th Army was to cross to the right arm of the Danube and, after taking Csepel Island, to the Old Danube, and encircle the capital from the south-west.

Stalin finally realized that the forces available to 2nd Ukrainian Front were not strong enough to take Budapest, and on 14 November he issued a directive placing at its disposal 200 tanks and 40,000 men from the high command reserves and from the 4th Ukrainian Front troops stuck in the Carpathians.<sup>151</sup> Malinovsky used the incoming tanks (which outnumbered the opposing German tanks from the outset) to strengthen 6th Guards Armoured Army so that, together with 7th Guards Army, it could encircle Budapest from the north as he had originally proposed. However, the Soviet forces made only slow progress and failed to achieve a deep operational breakthrough from that direction too.

The Soviet 46th Army fighting south of the city had more success. On 21 November it managed to cross to Csepel Island, between Taksony and Dömsöd. The battle-worn German and Hungarian units were able to hold their ground only in the northern part of the island, south of Csepel town.

Both Stalin and the Stavka were annoyed by 2nd Ukrainian Front's lack of success, because Malinovsky's was one of the strongest of all the Soviet army fronts and, even so, it was only advancing slowly.<sup>152</sup> Further to the north, the troops of 4th Ukrainian Front were doing even worse. They had advanced only 200 kilometres since August 1944 and lagged well behind on the Csap–Nagymihály–Humenné–Carpathian line. In mid-November the Soviet high command sent Marshal Semyon K. Timoshenko as a special envoy to the army fronts in question,

<sup>148</sup> This is confirmed not only by Soviet sources but also by contemporary radio messages decoded by Army Group South; daily report 5 Nov. 1944, HL microfilm 896/b.

<sup>149</sup> KTB H.Gr. Süd, situation reports for 25 Oct. and 3 Nov. 1944, BA-MA RH19V/54. The data relating to 503rd Heavy Armoured Battalion is our own estimates.

<sup>150</sup> Stemenko, *A vezérkar a háború éveiben*, 282.

<sup>151</sup> Tóth, *Budapest felszabadítása*, 53. <sup>152</sup> Ibid. 62.

to investigate the reasons for their poor performance. Tolbukhin, the commander-in-chief of 3rd Ukrainian Front, was also brought into the proceedings. Up till then, his troops had been deployed in Serbia, Slovenia, and the Bachka region, and had not been involved in the plans for the attack on Budapest. Now 2nd Ukrainian Front's failure boosted Tolbukhin's importance. Given that a breakthrough offensive was impossible in Serbia and Croatia, if only because of the nature of the terrain, his forces could be deployed to good effect only in the Carpathian basin. This suited Stalin, whose policy was to make his subordinates compete with one another.

Timoshenko's findings did not do Malinovsky any favours. His report opened with the statement that the lack of success was remarkable, since 2nd Ukrainian Front was one of the strongest army fronts. His diagnosis read as follows:

Efforts to attack the enemy from all directions are splintering our forces, making it impossible for our troops to bring the necessary superiority to bear [...] Pliyev's group and the mechanized corps are exhausted after long-drawn-out battles against superior forces [...] The commanders of the higher-ranking units and their staffs are somewhat spoilt as a result of events in Romania and Transylvania, so they are not taking the necessary care in organizing cooperation between the various arms of the service.<sup>153</sup>

On the basis of these findings, Timoshenko recommended that an attack be organized in the direction of Hatvan–Balassagyarmat, supported by an accompanying advance on Miskolc.

Following this, Tolbukhin too was assigned a role in the fighting on Hungarian soil. In mid-October the high command had already instructed him not to advance any further west after Belgrade had been taken, but to proceed north-west at full speed. 3rd Ukrainian Front was to join in the operations on Hungarian soil with attacks to the north or north-west. These offensives were to aim at the Transdanubian aluminium industry and oilfields, and might also be directed against Vienna and, if necessary, against Budapest at a later point. On 18 October 3rd Ukrainian Front was further strengthened by 4th Guards Army, which had previously been stationed in Galicia. On 9 November Tolbukhin's troops took possession of an important bridgehead position, which they proceeded to consolidate, at Kiskőszeg in the hills above the city of Pécs in southern Transdanubia. So Soviet troops were now also approaching Budapest from the south-west. Tolbukhin's successes continued, and Malinovsky was consequently obliged to let him have XXXI Guards Rifle Corps on 12 November, as well as V Cavalry Corps and XXIII Armoured Corps on 27 November.

The high command adopted Timoshenko's proposals concerning Malinovsky, and ordered 6th Guards Armoured Army, 7th Guards Army, two mechanized corps, one armoured corps, and two cavalry corps (the Pliyev Group), as well as two newly formed artillery divisions to be moved to the Hatvan–Kartal sector. An attack was launched on a breakthrough section 8 kilometres wide, with six divisions in the

<sup>153</sup> Portugalskii, Domanik, and Kovalenko, *Marshal Timoshenko*, 311 ff.

Table V.vii.6. The 2nd Ukrainian Front and the German–Hungarian forces of Army Group South at the beginning of December 1944

Manpower and equipment	Soviet troops	German-Hungarian troops	Proportion
Manpower	528,000	127,000	4 : 1
Guns (including automatic guns and rocket launchers)	10,867	2,800	3 : 1
Mortars	3,974	880	4.5 : 1
Tanks and assault guns	565	approx. 140	4 : 1

Source: *Hazánk felszabadulása*, 70. The data had to be amended in the light of information contained in the Army Group South war diary, but only with respect to the number of German tanks and guns.

first wave, and two divisions, two artillery divisions, and 6th Guards Armoured Army in the second wave, deploying a total of 510 tanks and 2,074 cannon and grenade launchers.<sup>154</sup> The reinforcements that had been sent largely compensated for 6th Guards Armoured Army's earlier losses.<sup>155</sup> 53rd Army brought up four divisions next to 7th Army, with 700 guns and mortars, on a 7-kilometre section of the front, and strong forces took up positions in the direction of Miskolc. Malinovsky had every reason to hope that, this time, he would be able to press forward within three or four days into the Ipoly valley or to Vác, and from there it would be possible to take Budapest and advance into the Little Hungarian Plain.

By the end of November it was already clear that Tolbukhin's troops were in a position to conquer the south-eastern part of Transdanubia from their bridgeheads within a few weeks or even days and thus threaten Budapest from the south. But Malinovsky, who was attacking the city from the east, did not want to share the laurels for the conquest of Budapest with anyone else. That is the only possible explanation for the fact that he ordered II Guards Mechanized Corps and 46th Army to cross the Danube—a move that was extremely risky in itself and militarily impossible in the given situation—so that his units would be able to encircle Budapest from the south and west before Tolbukhin got there. At the end of November the German–Hungarian defences to the south of the point where the perilous crossing to the other bank was to be made had already collapsed. On 4 December Malinovsky nevertheless gave the order for 46th Army to proceed with the operation immediately south of Budapest. The German–Hungarian units in the Százhalombatta–Ercsi area had been preparing for some days to repel the crossing, which began at 23.00 without any preparatory artillery fire, and they had extended their defence system accordingly. The first wave of Soviet assault troops suffered heavy losses. Most of them survived only by turning back in the middle of the river, which was partly frozen over. It is significant that 43 per cent of the 'Hero of the Soviet Union' medals awarded in connection with battles on Hungarian soil were awarded for this completely senseless river crossing in the

<sup>154</sup> Ungváry, *Die Schlacht*, 36.

<sup>155</sup> Zavzion and Kornjusin, *I na Tihom okeane*, 141. 6th Guards Armoured Army's two mobile corps had more than 350 tanks and assault guns at their disposal on 5 December.

Ercsi area.<sup>156</sup> Malinovsky obviously hoped, by means of these awards, to conceal the fact that he had needlessly sacrificed his men. According to his battle plan, the troops that had landed were supposed to reach the area to the west of Budapest by the end of the following day. That would have meant marching 20 to 30 kilometres a day, a distance that infantry units can cover only if they meet no resistance. However, there was no chance of that, because after landing they had then to break through the Margit Line. The idea of taking that line on their way through was an illusion, as later events were to show. Malinovsky was probably well aware of this, but he presumably hoped that objective would make the whole undertaking more meaningful.

The plan was also contradicted by the fact that the situation of 46th Army, after it had reached the other bank, only began to stabilize on 8 December, and then only because the troops of 3rd Ukrainian Front, commanded by Malinovsky's rival Tolbukhin, had advanced northwards on the west bank of the Danube and had arrived downstream of Ercsi. The overwhelmingly superior Soviet forces,<sup>157</sup> namely six rifle divisions and II Guards Mechanized Corps, finally wore down the three opposing divisions, which had already been bled white. However, it proved to be a pyrrhic victory, since 2nd Ukrainian Front came to a standstill at the Margit Line, 10 to 20 kilometres west of the landing site. Malinovsky was then obliged to hand his units over to 3rd Ukrainian Front, which had also reached that position.

Malinovsky's attack in the north went much better, because Tolbukhin's successes forced the German command to withdraw 1st and 23rd Armoured Divisions from the Hatvan area and move them to Transdanubia, thus further weakening Army Group South's defence in this critical section of the front. Soviet superiority in the breakthrough sector was 9 to 1 in infantry and 10 to 1 in artillery. At 10.15 on 5 December, after a heavy artillery barrage lasting three-quarters of an hour, eight Soviet divisions stormed the battle line north-east of Budapest. Within two hours they had achieved a 12-kilometre-wide and 3-kilometre-deep breakthrough in Army Group South's defences in the direction of Vác. By 13.30 6th Guards Armoured Army was already deployed at the breakthrough point.

The situation had become increasingly critical for the German command, because the army group had no reserves at all in the north, and it was doubtful whether Tolbukhin's troops could be successfully halted in Transdanubia. General Friessner asked Guderian for immediate reinforcements. The crucial task was to block the Ipoly valley, because from there the Soviet tanks could get into the Little Hungarian Plain and threaten not only Budapest but also Bratislava. Parts of 24th Armoured Division withdrawn from the Eger area, and an SS brigade under the command of SS Brigadeführer Oskar Dirlewanger, were the only forces that could be dispatched to the Ipoly valley by way of immediate assistance. The army group was unable to halt the Soviet advance north of the Danube, and 2nd Ukrainian Front mobile troops continued to advance westwards in this area until 12 January 1945. Balassagyarmat fell on 9 December, and 6th Guards Armoured Army's left

<sup>156</sup> *Hősök*, 203–310.

<sup>157</sup> About 40,000 Soviet troops faced about 8,000 Hungarian and German troops.

flank reached the Danube at Vác. Budapest was now threatened with encirclement from the north as well. For days the capital remained almost unprotected against attack from that quarter, but Malinovsky failed to seize the opportunity, and turned his units south after a reasonably effective German defence had been established on the Attila line. Instead, he continued the westward attack by 6th Guards Armoured Army and the Pliyev Group, presumably because there was little resistance in that direction until the end of December. The wish to ensure encirclement from the north also played a part in this. Malinovsky was probably unwilling to risk a direct attack on Budapest after his experiences in November.

*The Soviet and German Strategic Plans and Preparations  
and the Breakthrough in December 1944*

In its strategic directive issued on 12 December, which was based on Timoshenko's recommendations, the Soviet general staff ordered preparations to be made for a new attack with the aim of taking Budapest. As the attempts made so far had been unsuccessful, it now planned an offensive by four armies on two fronts. Under this plan, two army corps of 3rd Ukrainian Front were to attack from the south towards Székesfehérvár, while XVIII Armoured Corps advanced northwards to the Danube. II Guards Mechanized Corps was to turn east and close in on Buda, while 2nd Ukrainian Front advanced on Esztergom to close the circle north of the Danube. Once the capital had been encircled in this way, its conquest would be undertaken jointly by the two army fronts.<sup>158</sup> It was expected to take five or six days to close the outer ring, by means of the attack by the troops on 3rd Ukrainian Front's left wing. The right wing was to take Buda on the eighth and ninth days, while 2nd Ukrainian Front conquered Pest. To simplify the conduct of operations, all Malinovsky's units in Transdanubia had already been placed under Tolbukhin's command. The Soviet general staff had chosen the right place for the attack, since there were now only a few battle-worn units defending the Margit Line south-west of Budapest.<sup>159</sup>

The German authorities had learned of the Soviet intentions in time. Foreign Armies East was examining the Soviet plan for the offensive on the same day, 12 December. Two days later, General Maximilian Fretter-Pico pointed out to the army group that there were only 2,250 German and Hungarian troops (combat strength) defending the 36-kilometre-long section of the front between Lake Velence and Budapest, and that section would collapse in the event of a major Soviet offensive.<sup>160</sup>

The OKH had already sent substantial reinforcements to Transdanubia in the first half of December with a view to recapturing the areas that had been lost there. A strong battle line was to be established along the Danube, such as could be held

<sup>158</sup> 2nd Ukrainian Front could, if necessary, have attacked Army Detachment Fretter-Pico in the rear by crossing the river at Esztergom, if 3rd Ukrainian Front had failed to close the circle.

<sup>159</sup> KTB H.Gr. Süd, 1 Dec. 1944, annexes, HL microfilm 897/a.

<sup>160</sup> KTB H.Gr. Süd, daily report 14 Dec. 1944, HL microfilm 897/a.

even with fairly small forces. (Guderian was trying to save troops because, in his overall perspective, Hungary was only a secondary theatre of war.) In theory, there was some chance that it could be done, especially as the Soviet mechanized troops' exposed thrust at Hatvan and in southern Transdanubia called for such a response. Three complete armoured battalions, 3rd and 4th Cavalry Brigades, and 3rd, 6th, and 8th Armoured Divisions, with some 400 tanks and 40,000 men in all, were moved to Transdanubia. The 'Szent László' Division was also to be deployed in this area. Several different plans of attack were discussed but, in accordance with Hitler's instructions, the OKH decided on the version code-named Operation LATE VINTAGE, between Lake Balaton and Lake Velence. The alternative, namely an attack towards the north-east, was dropped in view of the situation of the Pest bridgehead, which was already regarded as uncertain. However, the attack had to be postponed more than once, first to 20 December and then to 22 December, owing to the shortage of fuel and munitions and the very bad weather.

The gains by 2nd Ukrainian Front in the Ipoly-ság area reduced the chances of a successful attack. They prompted Guderian to send the following forces north on 18 December: 8th Armoured Division, those parts of the 'Szent László' Division that had already arrived, and the armoured infantry of the remaining armoured divisions. It is strange that Guderian, of all people, ordered the armoured divisions to be split up. In addition, 4th Cavalry Brigade had to act as a 'fire brigade' on the battle line, which stretched to the south-western tip of Lake Balaton. The result of all this was that, in mid-December, the formation for the planned attack contained no infantry at all.

Guderian's measures were frequently condemned in the subsequent memoir literature.<sup>161</sup> Their effect was disastrous for both the infantry and the tank crews, since both were uprooted from their usual environment and obliged to fight under unfamiliar commanders in circumstances that were favourable neither to armoured infantry nor to armour. The advantages of both types of forces lay in movement and attack, and Guderian's measures left no scope for either. The only explanation for Guderian's decisions is that he was faced with an impossible task. With the inadequate forces at his disposal, he had to hold Budapest and, at the same time, halt the 2nd and 3rd Ukrainian Front breakthrough towards Vienna, that is, hold the Ipoly river and the Margit Line. The OKH must have been well aware that this was a hopeless task, because the reports from Army Group South accurately predicted the forthcoming Soviet offensive and the effects it would have. Guderian could only hope for a miracle, or hope to gain time and go over to the offensive himself.

The Soviet generals left him no time to do so. Exploiting the greater cross-country mobility of the T-34s as compared with the German tanks, they got under way on 20 December, despite the bad weather. Malinovsky's attack north of the Danube went very well at first. 6th Guards Armoured Army, under Col.-Gen. Andrei G. Kravchenko, advanced 32 kilometres and took Léva that same day. He

<sup>161</sup> See, e.g., Friessner, *Verratene Schlachten*, 198.

even managed to cross the Garam with some of his troops and establish a bridgehead. The Soviet thrust was all the more dangerous since there was now a direct military threat to Bratislava and Vienna.

Kravchenko's operation also resulted in the loss of the link between Sixth and Eighth Armies. To the south of 6th Guards Armoured Army, 7th Guards Army opened up the way to the Ipoly. The group comprising 3rd, 6th, and 8th Armoured Divisions, which had been brought in from Transdanubia, was nevertheless able to press forward from Ipolyszakálas to Ipolyság on 22 December, almost cutting off 6th Armoured Guards Army's rear communication lines. Malinovsky planned to encircle the opposing forces, and he accordingly ordered Kravchenko to turn south with his main forces in order to enclose the German and Hungarian troops between the Garam and the Ipoly. On 21 December the tanks moving south on the Ipoly were only 15 kilometres from the Danube when they had to be ordered back as a result of the German counter-attack at Ipolyság. After the German advance to the bend in the Ipoly had been halted, Kravchenko resumed his southward attack on 25 December and reached the Danube at Párkány on 27 December. LVII Armoured Corps managed to avoid enclosure, but the Hungarian 'Szent László' Division, which had been holding the front on the Ipoly towards the east, was almost completely wiped out.<sup>162</sup> However, Kravchenko's bold thrust proved a failure for the Soviets too. 6th Guards Armoured Army, already severely decimated, lost half its remaining tanks in a few days in the changing fortunes of its fight with LVII Armoured Corps. This blood-letting put a stop to the offensive north of the Danube. In the course of four weeks the army had lost 85 per cent of its armoured vehicles. As a result, it had to be withdrawn from the front for six weeks.

South of the Danube, Tolbukhin's offensive against the Margit Line opened on 20 December after a preparatory 40-minute artillery barrage. In the main direction of thrust, Soviet superiority was 5 to 1 in troops and artillery, and 3.5 to 1 in tanks and assault guns.<sup>163</sup> Although the offensive did not take Army Detachment Fretter-Pico by surprise, the lack of infantry left very limited possibilities of preparing for it.

Every kilometre of the line under attack came under fire from 99 to 160 cannon and grenade launchers. Contrary to plans, the Soviet infantry achieved 'only' a 5-to-6-kilometre-wide breakthrough, as counter-thrusts by German tanks held up the Soviet advance. In the end, the assault by Soviet rifle corps swept away the armoured defence, because without any infantry the German tanks were unable to hold the territory they had taken. On 23 December Tolbukhin deployed his mobile troops as well, to speed up the breakthrough. The following day, the 310 tanks of II Guards Mechanized Corps and XVIII Armoured Corps achieved a breakthrough 60 kilometres wide and 30 kilometres deep in the front between

<sup>162</sup> The Hungarian 2nd Armoured Division suffered the same fate. On the fighting, see Martin and Ugron, *Fejezetek*; also BA-MA RH24-72/47.

<sup>163</sup> The figures given by Sándor Tóth in *Budapest felszabadítása*, 131 are inaccurate, since he could not have known the actual strength of the German and Hungarian divisions. For details, see Ungváry, *Die Schlacht*, 96–103.

Érd and Lake Velence.<sup>164</sup> An equally critical situation had arisen at Székesfehérvár, which was attacked by 4th Guards Army's XX and XXXI Guards Corps and VII Mechanized Corps. The Germans brought in various commando units which had originally been intended for use in their own offensive and were equipped with Soviet uniforms and T-34 tanks. But even that move held up the enemy advance for only a few hours.<sup>165</sup>

Although the breakthrough was slower than planned because of the lack of reserves and infantry, Army Detachment Fretter-Pico was unable to take advantage of the fact. The Soviet breakthrough was stopped, with difficulty, only in the Székesfehérvár area. From the course of events on 21 December, Tolbukhin concluded that it would be worth pursuing the offensive on the right wing. He accordingly ordered II Guards Mechanized Corps to withdraw from its present position and move north at full speed, so as to be 10 to 15 kilometres west of the Budapest city limits by the evening of 22 December.

### *The Dilemma of the German and Hungarian Command regarding Budapest*

On 30 October the defence of Budapest was taken over by the German III Armoured Corps, commanded by General Breith. The Hungarian divisions that had moved back into the city were also placed under his command. Corps Group Budapest, comprising the staff of the Hungarian VI Army Corps<sup>166</sup> and the German police forces and emergency units stationed in Budapest, was formed on the same day and placed under the command of Obergruppenführer and Waffen SS and Police General Karl Pfeffer-Wildenbruch.<sup>167</sup>

To prepare for all eventualities, the German 153rd Field Training Division was also moved to Buda in the western part of the city on 4 November. This division could not have been deployed against regular Soviet troops, but it seemed suitable for dealing with a possible uprising. In addition, IX SS Mountain Corps HQ was transferred from Zagreb to Budapest on 10 November, to further reduce Hungarian participation in command functions (almost all the command staff of Corps Group Budapest were Hungarian).

Unlike the general staffs, neither the German nor the Hungarian political authorities had prepared for the possibility that Budapest might become a front-line city. Szálasi's considered view, shortly after he took power, was: 'It is necessary to hold Budapest only if offensives are to be launched from that area. If that is not intended, it is essential to evacuate Budapest and withdraw to the Transdanubian hills, which are still militarily advantageous.'<sup>168</sup> Army Group South took the same

<sup>164</sup> Veress, *A Dunántúl felszabadítása*, 86.

<sup>165</sup> Report, 30 Dec. 1944, BA-MA RW49/145.

<sup>166</sup> The army corps' troops remained in the Carpathians and, with the exception of 10th Infantry Division, they never reached Budapest.

<sup>167</sup> BA-MA N370/1, Pfeffer-Wildenbruch's details are regularly given inaccurately in encyclopedias and other publications; on personal details, see Ungváry, *Die Schlacht*, 113 ff.

<sup>168</sup> Teleki, *Nyilas uralom Magyarországon*, 173.

view and, on 26 November, it asked the OKH what was to be done in the event of public unrest. The answer was that the ‘metropolitan mob’ should either be evacuated in good time or kept under control by force. Friessner thought nothing of this idea, because he did not have enough troops to do the job. He asked for an SS general to be appointed instead of Otto Winkelmann, who was an SS officer but had never commanded combat troops in the Second World War. Significantly, he also asked for ‘combat engineer battalions, like in Warsaw’,<sup>169</sup> which suggests plans for house-to-house fighting and the associated demolition of residential districts. Should the inner circle be breached, Friessner planned to withdraw to the west bank. He also asked the OKH for permission to do so, but it was refused.

The Hungarian military command agreed that the capital could be defended only on the inner and outer defence ring of the Attila line, and it ruled out street fighting. Hitler alone insisted on the defence of Budapest itself. He issued his first directive on 23 November, ordering that the city was to be defended even in house-to-house fighting, regardless of civilian losses and the damage caused.<sup>170</sup> Hitler’s Order No. 11, in which he declared Budapest a ‘fortified place’, arrived on 1 December. It put Winkelmann in charge and placed Pfeffer-Wildenbruch’s IX Mountain Corps under his command. The group was under Sixth Army HQ for tactical purposes only, which effectively meant that—after consultation—it could operate with its forces independently. Its task was to prepare the defence of the city’s squares and buildings, and to repel any break-ins. To prevent unrest, it was to keep the German and Hungarian gendarmerie and police forces on the alert and establish a communication system. The order also mentioned the future dispatch of special units to the city.<sup>171</sup> Szálasi accepted Hitler’s decision during his visit to Berlin on 4 December, although Guderian was still saying he wanted to keep the enemy out of the city. On this occasion, Szálasi was also told that the bridges and public utilities must be destroyed in any districts about to be abandoned. The comment that the Soviet forces would do the same if the city was retaken was cold comfort for the population of Budapest.<sup>172</sup> German diplomacy rejected the idea of declaring Budapest an open city, on the grounds that in Germany too every town would be defended to the last brick.<sup>173</sup> Veesemayer, the special envoy and Reich plenipotentiary in Hungary, had made it perfectly clear that it would not matter if Budapest was destroyed twice over, if it meant that Vienna could be defended.<sup>174</sup>

Army Group South had no illusions about the chances of holding Budapest. Friessner had already given orders on 1 December for all German military and civilian agencies to be evacuated, so that ‘in any battle for the city, there would be no unfortunate instances of German agencies fleeing that would damage the reputation of Germany and the German armed forces’.<sup>175</sup> On 6 December, fearing

<sup>169</sup> KTB H.Gr. Süd, daily report 26 Nov. 1944, HL microfilm 897/a.

<sup>170</sup> KTB H.Gr. Süd, daily report 23 Nov. 1944, HL microfilm 897/b.

<sup>171</sup> KTB H.Gr. Süd, annexes, 1 Dec. 1944, HL microfilm 897/a.

<sup>172</sup> Hitler hatvannyolc tárgyalása, 410 ff.

<sup>173</sup> Teleki, *Nyilas uralom Magyarországon*, 173.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid.

<sup>175</sup> Maier, *Drama zwischen Budapest und Wien*, 493; also KTB H.Gr. Süd, annexes, 1 Dec. 1944, HL microfilm 897/a.

a Soviet breakthrough, Fretter-Pico requested permission to withdraw to the inner defensive ring of the Attila line. Hitler refused, on the grounds that the defence would no longer have any strategic depth. The situation became still worse with the breakthrough at Hatvan, north-west of Budapest, because the defenders now had to cover a battle line 20 kilometres wide in the northern part of the capital, which stretched their forces even further. On 9 December the Soviet heavy artillery opened fire on the north-eastern section of the city. The first sign of the death throes was the formation, that same day, of emergency companies composed of cooks, clerks, and mechanics.

### *The Encirclement*

Neither the German nor the Hungarian command authorities made any preparations to defend Budapest against attack from the west. This is all the more interesting given that Army Group South discovered for certain in mid-December that the Soviet military command was planning an encirclement from the west. Following the Soviet breakthrough in the Lake Velence area on 20 December, Army Group South asked Guderian for permission to withdraw 8th SS Cavalry Division from Pest and deploy it south-west of Buda. Guderian refused to allow such an operation, explaining that it would weaken the city's defences in the east. The army group's command staff attempted to withdraw Armoured Infantry Division 'Feldherrnhalle' from the city on 21 December, but the general staff continued to refuse any reduction of the defence forces. Meanwhile, 3rd Ukrainian Front troops were pushing northwards through the gaps opened up between Lake Velence and Martonvásár. By the evening of 22 December they were already threatening Bicske and Bia.

Friessner again requested the withdrawal of 8th SS Cavalry Division and the abandonment of the Pest bridgehead, but Guderian refused, invoking Hitler's orders. When Friessner told him that Budapest would be encircled within the next few days, he retorted angrily that he could not understand 'how an armada of tanks, the like of which has not been assembled anywhere on the eastern front, can fail to stop the enemy'.<sup>176</sup> Guderian was right, in that the German concentration of armoured vehicles certainly was a powerful force, but he forgot the lack of infantry units with which to successfully oppose the Soviet forces.

That same morning, the Soviet troops took Székesfehérvár and reached the main rail connection between Vienna and Budapest, so that supplies for the capital could now be brought in only on the Esztergom–Budapest line. The Soviet armoured spearheads were advancing at a speed of 20 to 40 kilometres a day, leaving the troops following them to deal with any places still putting up resistance.

On 23 December too, Army Group South and Pfeffer-Wildenbruch were only able to decide on a half-hearted counter-measure. According to an entry in the army group's war diary, the plan was for an armoured regiment from Armoured

<sup>176</sup> Friessner, *Verratene Schlachten*, 205.

Infantry Division 'Feldherrnhalle' to conduct mobile combat in the Bia area to prevent the enemy from advancing to the east and north.<sup>177</sup> It is instructive that, even at this point, the German command did not dare to withdraw a full division from the Pest front line, preferring to take the risk that the capital might be encircled. And Hitler still refused IX SS Mountain Corps' request to withdraw 8th SS Cavalry Division from the Pest bridgehead.

Hitler had no substantial combat forces at his disposal, so all he could do was change his commanders. He was, in any case, on edge, as there was every indication that the Ardennes offensive was about to fail. On 23 December he dismissed Friessner and Fretter-Pico, and appointed General Otto Wöhler (Eighth Army) and General Hermann Balck (Army Group G) in their place. The replacement of the generals naturally had absolutely no effect on the situation. They had done everything that was humanly possible, even predicting the course of events, in the hope that it would give the dictator a better insight and persuade him to send more troops to the region. But Hitler was clearly looking for scapegoats to blame for the succession of defeats. When it was already too late, he decided to send IV SS Armoured Corps and numerous other units to Budapest, but it would take them a week to get to Hungary.

At 13.10 on 24 December, the army group's chief of staff, Lt.-Gen. Helmuth von Grolman, telephoned Guderian and pressed for an immediate decision with regard to Budapest. Guderian thereupon decided, on his own responsibility, to regroup and move 8th SS Cavalry Division to Buda. He was under heavy pressure at the time. The German attack in the Ardennes had been launched only a few days earlier but it seemed to have already come to a standstill. It was also to be assumed that the Soviet troops in their bridgeheads on the Vistula were preparing to advance on Berlin. Guderian therefore wanted to stop the western offensive at all costs, so as to release combat forces for transfer to the eastern front—but not to the Carpathian basin. He presumed that a Soviet attack on Berlin would take place shortly and, as it soon turned out, he was not mistaken. But Hitler was convinced that the defence of Budapest must take priority.

At 16.50 on 24 December, when the Soviet tanks were already 5 kilometres from the castle, Hitler finally gave permission for 8th SS Cavalry Division to withdraw. However, according to the Führer's order, this did not mean that the Pest bridgehead was to be abandoned, even though both Guderian and Balck considered that to be the most sensible step.<sup>178</sup> For both Hitler and Stalin, Budapest was a political issue that went far beyond 'central European concerns'. For the Soviet dictator, it was a matter of securing and extending his spheres of interest. Taking possession of Budapest was essential for the attack on Vienna, and it could also be expected to have a positive political impact. For Hitler, it was a downfall scenario,

<sup>177</sup> KTB H.Gr. Süd, daily reports 23 Dec. 1944, HL microfilm 897/b.

<sup>178</sup> On the back and forth over the question of withdrawal, see KTB H.Gr. Süd, BA-MA RH19V/43 and 44, excerpts reproduced in Bayer, *Kavalleriedivisionen der Waffen-SS*, 329–32. In fact, Balck considered even defence of the capital superfluous, because the forces withdrawn from it could alone have sufficed to stabilize the situation in Transdanubia. There would then have been no need to deploy IV SS Armoured Corps in Hungary.

because he was well aware that the war could not be waged without Hungarian oil. That was why he transferred two infantry divisions to Hungary and promised to relieve Budapest.<sup>179</sup>

The German military command in Budapest did nothing to prevent the impending catastrophe.<sup>180</sup> The situation could have been saved only through self-initiative, but Pfeffer-Wildenbruch, whom the generals in Army Group South referred to scornfully as a ‘civilian’ or ‘political general’, lacked the necessary leadership qualities for such action.

It was thoroughly typical of the situation that no agreement was made between the two command authorities—the general staffs of Pfeffer-Wildenbruch and Iván Hindy—on measures to counteract the coming encirclement. This was not because there were no deployable units available yet. The reasons are to be found, rather, in bureaucratic mindsets, mutual distrust, and Hindy’s growing apathy since the end of October. Pfeffer-Wildenbruch did not provide his Hungarian partner with the most necessary information, and even treated him with open contempt.

### *Besiegers and Besieged*

The dispute as to the exact numbers defending Budapest became a political issue after 1945. According to an internal report by Corps Group Budapest, based on Soviet intelligence reports dated 31 December 1944, the combined combat strength of the German–Hungarian forces in the Pest bridgehead was 37,300. But Malinovsky, in a report written a few weeks later, referred to 188,000 defenders (in Pest and Buda), and gave the total number of prisoners as 138,000. His figure was taken over without checking in subsequent works by Soviet and Hungarian historians.<sup>181</sup> In its report of 31 December, Army Group South gave the numbers of encircled forces as 50,000 Hungarians and 45,000 Germans.<sup>182</sup> The Hungarian corps HQ made several attempts to calculate the number of its troops, but in the prevailing chaotic conditions it could obtain only incomplete figures. Even the chief of staff of I Army Corps, Sándor Horváth, admitted that he was at a loss: ‘During the seven weeks of the siege, I was never able to establish reliable figures for the strength, weapons, and munitions of the troops deployed and included, or not, in the official combat plans. The general staff Ic, Captain Dezső Németh, was able to determine, after repeated attempts, that the ration strength wavered around 40,000.’<sup>183</sup>

<sup>179</sup> Thus Guderian on the grounds for Hitler’s decision; see Maier, *Drama zwischen Budapest und Wien*, 330.

<sup>180</sup> Ungváry, *Die Schlacht*, 71 ff.

<sup>181</sup> Zalkarov, *Délkelet- és Közép-Európa felszabadítása*, 262.

<sup>182</sup> KTB H.Gr. Süd, report, 31 Dec. 1944, HL microfilm 897/b. Péter Gosztony, in his works, gives the figures according to Pfeffer-Wildenbruch, i.e. 33,000 Germans and 37,000 Hungarians; Gosztony, *Légiveszély Budapest*, 157.

<sup>183</sup> Letter from Sándor Horváth to Péter Gosztony, 8 Nov. 1961, HL TGY3070, Darnóy collection.

**Table V.vii.7.** Strength of the German and Hungarian forces defending Budapest (24 December 1944 to 11 February 1945)

Date	Ration strength (excl. wounded)	Fighting strength
24.12.1944	79,000	approx. 35,000
24.1.1945	approx. 40,000	approx. 15,000*
11.2.1945	approx. 32,000**	approx. 11,000

\*HL, German 13th Armoured Division report, 24 January; \*\*Pfeffer-Wildenbruch reported 43,000 men before the breakout, including 11,600 wounded.

Source: Ungváry, *Die Schlacht*, 109.

**Table V.vii.8.** Relative strength of the German and Hungarian forces defending Budapest (status: 24 December 1944)

	Men	Cannon	Tanks and assault guns	Heavy anti-tank cannon
Defenders	approx. 79,000	approx. 489	approx. 125	approx. 117
of which Hungarian troops	46%	53%	30%	47%
of which German troops	54%	47%	70%	53%

Source: Ungváry, *Die Schlacht*, 103.

The reports ought to have been checked. In the case of the reported combat strengths it is also necessary to consider what percentage of the Hungarian fighting forces played any part at all in the defence of Budapest. This is a perfectly reasonable question, in that a significant number of the encircled Hungarians were not originally in any of the combat units. The combat strength of 10th Infantry Division and 12th Reserve Division on 14 January 1945 was 300 men.<sup>184</sup> As to ration strength, only indirect information remains, but we know that there were at least 3,500 men of 10th Infantry Division in uniform inside the besieging ring.<sup>185</sup>

The fact that the combat strength of the divisions was less than that of some battalions is very telling. The fighting spirit in the independent battalions was considerably stronger than in the regular infantry, because they were under German command during the fighting and were not supplied separately.

If we deduct from the number of defenders those who existed only on paper, we are left with a ration strength of 38,000, of which the combat strength was 14,000 men. The Hungarian troops thus constituted about 30 per cent of the defenders in terms of combat strength. The proportional contribution of Hungarian units to the

<sup>184</sup> HL, 13th Armoured Division documents, report of 14 Jan. 1945.

<sup>185</sup> See 'The Defenders of Budapest' in HL TGY3251, Biró collection, as well as the records of 10th Division, from which it is clear that almost 1,000 combatants remained on Rose Hill or were taken prisoner between 28 January and 1 February. Since it is reckoned that several thousand more were taken prisoner on 11 February, this figure is obviously not unreasonable.

artillery was considerably greater. Over 60 per cent of the cannon belonged to Hungarian units.

It follows from these figures that the main burden of the fighting was borne by the Wehrmacht and the Waffen SS. Together, they had 41,000 troops (ration strength). The ratio of defenders to attackers is even more to the latter's advantage if account is taken only of combat strength, which is the decisive factor in the actual balance of forces. On that criterion, according to the author's calculations, 35,000 men faced approximately 95,000 Soviet troops. Budapest was attacked by 15 Soviet divisions and three Romanian divisions, plus two artillery divisions and a naval infantry brigade. Apart from these units, many others under direct corps or divisional command also played a part in the siege of Budapest, so the besieging forces can be estimated at 150,000 in all. The defenders' performance is all the more remarkable in view of the fact that 79,000 men managed to hold Budapest for 52 days against forces that were not only twice as strong, but much better equipped and better supplied.

The German and Hungarian commanders in the capital also had great difficulty in supplying their troops. The city was a fortified place only on paper. Not even a start had been made on laying in the prescribed food supplies, which would have had to last for several months. Much of the existing stock was stored in outlying districts of Buda and taken as booty by the Soviet troops between 24 and 26 December. At the point when the city was encircled, there were 450 tonnes of munitions, 120 cubic metres of fuel, and 300,000 food rations in store—enough for about five days of fighting.<sup>186</sup>

Stocks were so low that the German–Hungarian command could not think of supplying the civilian population. Minimum supplies of 80 tonnes a day were prescribed for the troops after the city was encircled. Of these, 20 tonnes were to be dropped by parachute because there were not enough airfields, and the remainder was to be flown in by Ju 52 transport aircraft or gliders. Two emergency landing-strips and four dropping points were designated in Budapest, but the city's usable airfields were lost in the first few days of the encirclement, so the supplies came to a halt.

The first air transport took place on 29 December 1944. The 'Budapest air supply group' flew 61 sorties a day on average, though only 49 were successful. The air-supply system worked quite well until the racecourse, which the Ju 52s had also been able to use, was lost. There were even some days, at the beginning of January, when 93 planes managed to land. The gliders suffered the worst losses. Of the 73 DFS 230s that were used, 32 did not even reach Budapest, and the rest either crashed (they were designed for crash-landing) or landed in the wrong place. The pilots were 16- to 18-year-old volunteers in the NSFK (National Socialist Flying Corps), full of naive enthusiasm, who had taken on the task without any idea of what awaited them.<sup>187</sup>

<sup>186</sup> KTB H.Gr. Süd, report from General Balck, 30 Jan. 1945, HL microfilm 629, No. 7213339.

<sup>187</sup> Ungváry, *Die Schlacht*, 105.

In the end, 1,975 tonnes in all were flown into the capital, of which 417 tonnes were carried on Hungarian planes. Several thousand air drops were made to Budapest in the closing stages of the siege, although the supplies rarely reached those for whom they were intended. And the supplies that were actually collected could not be distributed because there was not enough fuel and the constant artillery fire made the streets impassable.

However, the attackers too had their problems. The Soviet and Romanian troops deployed in the siege of Budapest were a mixed bunch. The recruits assigned to the armoured corps, guards cavalry corps, and guards mechanized corps were well-trained men of excellent morale, whereas the other units included children and old men who had been recruited without any medical examination. The male inhabitants in the parts of the Soviet Union that had already been liberated were called up immediately, as were the men released *en masse* from German prisoner-of-war camps in Romania, who were promptly deployed without having any time to recover. According to German counter-intelligence, there were 15 divisions of this kind among the forces deployed against Army Group South, and 40 to 70 per cent of the men in those divisions came from the liberated areas.<sup>188</sup> In some units it was the practice to shoot men accused of cowardice in front of the assembled troops before an attack. Even minor offences were punishable by ten years' forced labour in the Gulag, but the sentence could be served by doing three months in a penal company. In those circumstances, the chances of survival in such units are all too clear.<sup>189</sup> It is characteristic of the Soviet authorities' ruthlessness that 214th Guards Cavalry Regiment with all its men was classified as a penal unit, and its commander demoted, because it lost its flag in the tank battle at Debrecen.<sup>190</sup>

Two artillery divisions, a complete flying corps, and numerous special units were brought in to strengthen the attacking forces, while several Soviet divisions had to be withdrawn after 3 January on account of the relief attacks. The nominal superiority in artillery, with 70 light batteries, 32 heavy batteries, and 10 heavy batteries on self-propelled carriages, was not overwhelming, since the defenders had 45 light batteries and 15 heavy batteries. But the defenders ran out of ammunition for heavy grenade launchers in the first few weeks, and many of their cannon rapidly became unusable, whereas the Soviet forces were always able to repair their weapons quickly.

In parallel with the military siege, another siege was conducted inside Budapest itself—against the ‘enemy within’. On 21 November the Jews in the city were ordered to move, within three days, into the ghetto to be established in District 6—the last ghetto in Europe at the time. The Budapest Jews had already been forced to move into buildings designated as ‘Jew houses’ when the Germans occupied the city, although those buildings were located in various parts of the city. Jews who were in possession of a *Schutzbrief* (letter of protection) or were

<sup>188</sup> Report, Nov. 1944, BA-MA RH2/2468.

<sup>189</sup> On this, see BA-MA RH2/2458.

<sup>190</sup> Report, 18 Jan. 1945, BA-MA RH 2/1996.

foreign nationals had to move into the ‘international ghetto’. At this time there were still about 120,000 Jews in the Hungarian capital.

The organizers and driving force in the persecution of the Jews were the Hungarian Arrow Cross. Wehrmacht and SS troops took part in these operations only on a few isolated occasions.<sup>191</sup> From the beginning of December 1944 more than 60,000 people were tightly crammed together in the District 6 ghetto. Hunger reigned from the outset: the daily ration was only 790 calories a head.

The papal nuncio, Raoul Wallenberg, and the diplomatic representations of neutral countries performed numerous acts of rescue. Their activities saved thousands of lives. The commanders of the besieged city, Pfeffer-Wildenbruch and Iván Hindy, took no interest whatever in this ‘problem’.<sup>192</sup> When it became clear that the Pest bridgehead would be evacuated in a few days’ time, the Arrow Cross party and some SD officials from Eichmann’s staff who had remained in the Hungarian capital tried to organize a pogrom to destroy the ghetto. Wallenberg got to hear of the plan and informed the commander of the Pest bridgehead, Maj.-Gen. Gerhard Schmidhuber, pointing out that world opinion would hold the Wehrmacht responsible for the pogrom if it were to take place. Schmidhuber immediately ordered German troops to guard all access points to the ghetto, thus foiling the Hungarian Arrow Cross plan for mass murder.<sup>193</sup> There were other occasions too when Arrow Cross mass executions were stopped by the SS or the Wehrmacht.<sup>194</sup> This suggests that military professionalism was sometimes a mitigating factor in German policy on the Jews, especially as there is no evidence of anti-Semitic activities on the part of Schmidhuber or Pfeffer-Wildenbruch.

### (c) The Fighting in Budapest

Army Group South and Pfeffer-Wildenbruch agreed from the start that it was impossible to hold the bridgehead in Budapest. Almost half their forces had to be regrouped in any case, on account of the new defence system that was to be established on the Buda side, so it was absolutely necessary to move the front back. The withdrawal could reasonably be expected to stabilize the situation, especially as fewer forces would be needed to hold the shorter concentric line. The defenders on the Pest side accordingly withdrew to the third defensive line by 28 December.

Although Hitler’s order of 24 December had forbidden even a reduction in the perimeter of the Pest bridgehead, let alone complete abandonment or breakout, IX SS Mountain Corps nevertheless began to make the necessary preparations. There

<sup>191</sup> This is confirmed by the numerous accounts of surviving victims. On this, see Ronén, *Harc az életért*.

<sup>192</sup> On the Jewish ghetto, see Ungváry, *Die Schlacht*, 344–69.

<sup>193</sup> Lévai, *Zsidósors Magyarországon*, 135; partly inaccurate account in Aly and Gerlach, *Das letzte Kapitel*, 368.

<sup>194</sup> Ungváry, *Die Schlacht*, 346. See also testimony of Emil Kovarcz to the Budapest People’s Court, BFL V-56031, and statements of survivors from the ghetto in the possession of János F. Varga, whom the author takes this opportunity to thank for his kind assistance.

was no other choice. Hitler's order that both Buda and Pest were to be held at all costs until relief arrived was impossible to carry out: only one or the other could be defended. By his own account, Pfeffer-Wildenbruch decided on 27 December to disobey the Führer's order, but according to his recollections, another order from Hitler categorically forbidding a breakout arrived the next day.<sup>195</sup>

The question remains as to why the commander of IX SS Mountain Corps began preparations for a breakout at all, since Hitler had already given specific orders on three occasions—on 23 November and again on 1 and 24 December—that Budapest was to be defended house by house. The likely explanation is that IX SS Mountain Corps command hoped that, in view of the dramatically deteriorating situation, Hitler would approve the breakout retroactively or at the last minute. In the end, however, given the repeated categorical prohibition and their trust in the promised relief, IX SS Mountain Corps command did not dare disobey the Führer's order.

For the Soviet authorities, capturing the city as quickly as possible was of vital importance for all future operations. Malinovsky and Tolbukhin both knew from their experience in the battle for Stalingrad that the siege would last a long time and that house-to-house fighting entailed extremely heavy losses. Moreover, it was the first time that the Red Army had laid siege to a European city with a million inhabitants. The main problem for the Soviet forces was that most of the buildings were of stone, which made artillery and ground-attack aircraft less effective. On 29 December the Soviet command, with Stalin's permission, sent negotiators under a flag of truce to call on the German–Hungarian garrison to surrender. However, the attempt ended in fiasco. One of the negotiators did not even reach the German positions, the other died on the way back from shots fired in error by unknown soldiers.<sup>196</sup>

The Soviet offensive began the following day. Almost a thousand cannon fired on the city, seven to ten hours a day, for three days. In the intervals, ground-attack aircraft dropped their bombs. A million people had to get used to living in overcrowded cellars. The main attack, directed at the centre of the Pest front in the Romanian VII Army Corps' combat zone, was immediately successful, and the last good airfield—the one on the racecourse—was captured under fire from grenade launchers on 2 January. There was more to follow. After three days the defenders had run out of certain kinds of ammunition, and the wounded could no longer be flown out. On 8 January the Soviet troops were only 4 kilometres from the Danube, while the bridgehead still measured 15 kilometres, north to south. On the Buda side, large-scale attacks had to be temporarily suspended on 3 January 1945 because of the increasingly threatening relief operations. II Guards Mechanized Corps and two rifle divisions were pulled out and assigned to defence.

The Soviet commanders took various special measures for street fighting. Their experience of battles of encirclement had shown that the best course was to split up

<sup>195</sup> Gosztony, *A magyar honvédség*, 230.

<sup>196</sup> This event was exploited by Soviet and Hungarian propaganda for 45 years as evidence of the criminal nature of German conduct of the war. For details, see Ungváry, *Die Schlacht*, 153–63.

the pocket and destroy the small sections one by one, as had been done at Stalingrad. On the basis of the experience gained there, each division organized specific assault groups to attack the enemy targets.<sup>197</sup>

The operations were hampered by the fact that the attackers did not coordinate their actions. While the Soviet XXX Army Corps and the Romanian VII Army Corps took their orders from 7th Guards Army, the independent XVIII Rifle Corps attacking in the south was under the direct command of Malinovsky. At the recommendation of the Soviet general staff, Malinovsky combined the attacking forces on 11 January under the title 'Group Budapest', and placed them under the command of the independent XVIII Rifle Corps.

The defenders also had communication difficulties. The telephones were still working at the beginning of January, but most means of communication had been destroyed by the middle of the month. Contact with the forces at the front could be maintained only by means of messengers. News of Soviet advances took some time to get through in the vast sea of houses. As a result, the conduct of operations was increasingly left to the combat groups, which often recaptured the most important buildings and streets in counter-attacks. There was no longer a recognizable battle line among the tightly packed buildings, and there were attacks by scattered Soviet troops in the rear areas.

IX SS Mountain Corps asked Army Group South for permission to break out. Pfeffer-Wildenbruch had already reported on 14 January that the situation of the wounded was 'catastrophic'. The fighting had moved to the city sewers, and the incessant air raids made it impossible to put out the fires or retrieve supplies. On 15 January 1945, with the army group's support and against Hitler's orders, IX SS Mountain Corps started to evacuate the Pest bridgehead. It was little short of a miracle that most of the German vehicles managed—through burning streets and across two bridges under heavy artillery fire—to get over to the Buda side, where they established the new centre of defence.

#### (d) The Relief Attempts

In the specialist literature, the Battle of the Bulge is often described as the 'last' German offensive, or even as 'the final attempt [...] to turn the tide'.<sup>198</sup> Many works do not even mention the fact that the Wehrmacht was still able to plan and to some extent carry out offensives in March 1945.<sup>199</sup> In fact, the Wehrmacht launched at least five offensives in Hungary in the spring of 1945. The forces deployed, the territorial gains, and the losses sustained by the Allies were certainly comparable to, or even greater than, those in the Ardennes offensive.<sup>200</sup>

<sup>197</sup> Tóth, *Budapest felszabadítása*, 227 ff.

<sup>198</sup> Germany and the Second World War, vii. 697; Weinberg, *A World at Arms*, 769; Jung, *Die Ardennen-Offensive*, 196.

<sup>199</sup> See, e.g., Magenheimer, *Die Militärstrategie Deutschlands*.

<sup>200</sup> The attacking forces had 600 armoured vehicles at their disposal in the battle for the Ardennes; cf. Germany and the Second World War, vii. 681, compared with 494 tanks and assault guns, and almost as many armoured personnel carriers, made available for the KONRAD operations. A total of 1,796

And as far intentions are concerned, the offensives in Hungary must also be regarded as Germany's last attempts to exert a positive influence on the outcome of the war.

After Budapest was encircled, three offensives were undertaken under the code-name KONRAD, aimed at relieving the capital and retaking the eastern section of the Margit Line. The German authorities transported all their mobile reserves to Hungary for the purpose, with the result that in February 1945 almost half of all German armoured divisions deployed on the eastern front were to be found in Hungary. Contrary to the widely held view, the purpose of the relief attacks was not to get the forces defending Budapest out through the gaps thus created, but to get more forces into the capital.<sup>201</sup>

Since the destruction of its hydrogenation plants in May and June 1944, the Third Reich's only source of fuel had been the oilfields at Zala and at Zistersdorf on the German–Slovakian border. Hence the concern with the Hungarian theatre of war, and the increasing importance attached to it.

The German operations had serious consequences for the Soviet side. Under the Stavka plans drawn up in the autumn of 1944, the Soviet forces were to have reached Budapest by the middle of November, and the Graz–Vienna–Brno–Olomouc line by the middle of December.<sup>202</sup> The purpose of this advance was to secure the attack on Berlin from the south, and safeguard the Soviet 'sphere of interest' in south-eastern Europe. However, Malinovsky failed to take Budapest in November, and the attack by his 6th Guards Armoured Army at the end of December, aimed at capturing Komárom and Bratislava, also failed. These setbacks, and the losses they involved, meant that the major operations that had been planned to defend Vienna, Olomouc, or even southern Germany for a few weeks were now impossible. The German relief attacks forced the Red Army onto the defensive and prevented the Stavka from carrying out any offensive of its own for a further ten weeks.<sup>203</sup>

Hitler had been adamant from the start that Budapest must be held, so he forbade any attempt to break out. On 24 December 1944, before the city was completely encircled, he had already ordered IV SS Armoured Corps, 96th and 711th Infantry Divisions, and a large number of army units (403rd People's Artillery Corps,<sup>204</sup> 17th People's Rocket Launcher Brigade, 219th Assault Tank Battalion) to Hungary—a total force of some 260 tanks and 70,000 men. Army Group South had 1,102 tanks in all (total complement, including those under

armoured vehicles (not including APCs) were deployed in Operation SPRING AWAKENING. For details, see the descriptions of the operations.

<sup>201</sup> Ungváry, *Die Schlacht*, 238; BA-MA N647, Balck papers, 'Bericht Helmut Wolff über den Ausbruch 15.2.1945'.

<sup>202</sup> Shtemenko, 'Kak planirovalas poslednaya kampaniya', 56–72, particularly the map on 66–7.

<sup>203</sup> Soviet historiography admitted this failure only between the lines, as it were. The *Geschichte des Grossen Vaterländischen Krieges*, v. 211, merely states laconically, in this connection, that 'a complicated military and political situation had arisen' in Hungary.

<sup>204</sup> The people's artillery corps had 87 barrelled weapons, i.e. the artillery strength of two divisions, at its disposal. KTB H.Gr. Süd, Jan. 1945 (second half), annexes, HL microfilm 629, No. 7212231.

repair). So about 18 per cent of all German armoured forces were deployed in Hungary.<sup>205</sup> The proportion of modern weapons employed in the Hungarian theatre of war was even higher. The use of Tiger I and II (King Tiger) tanks was typical of this development. On 1 January the Wehrmacht had 471 tanks of this type, and 44 of them were deployed in Hungary. On 15 January there were 199 Tiger tanks on the eastern front, 78 of them in Hungary, and on 15 March, out of a total complement of 276, 102 were in Hungary.<sup>206</sup> At the end of the war, almost half of these most costly German weapons were to be found in Hungary.<sup>207</sup>

Hitler entrusted command to SS Obergruppenführer Herbert Otto Gille, who had been awarded the Knight's Cross with Oak Leaves and Swords for the breakout from the Cherkassy pocket in the spring of 1944. Himmler sent Gille a telegram informing him that the Führer had chosen him and his army corps to lead the relief expedition to Budapest because he already had experience of battles of encirclement and had the greatest understanding for the fate of the encircled troops, and because his corps had the best record on the eastern front.<sup>208</sup> On the same day, Guderian called on Hitler to persuade him not to continue the Ardennes offensive, but the Führer remained adamant. He wanted to keep two irons in the fire. However, he soon had to pay the price for the Budapest relief attempts: there were hardly any reserves left to replace IV SS Armoured Corps when it moved to Transdanubia from its position south of Warsaw, and two weeks later the Soviet offensive swept away the front on the Vistula. The enemy tanks were only brought to a stop at the Oder.

Guderian, fearing the threat to Berlin,<sup>209</sup> thought Hitler's decision to regroup the German forces was wrong, and in January and February he made numerous attempts to dissuade Hitler from undertaking the Hungarian offensives. Hitler's decision was nevertheless correct from the overall perspective of the conduct of the war. IV SS Armoured Corps could not have stopped the superior forces of the Soviet armoured armies at the Vistula in any case, but if the corps had not been moved to Hungary, the Red Army might well have taken the last Hungarian oilfields and oil refineries within a few weeks, thereby preventing Germany from carrying out any further military offensives.<sup>210</sup> The relief operations must therefore have contributed significantly to enabling the hopeless war to be waged for a few more months. To that extent, Hitler's decision was, paradoxically, in accordance with both his and Guderian's aims.

<sup>205</sup> The army had 6,053 tanks and assault guns on 15 Jan. 1945. See Jentz, *Die deutsche Panzertruppe*, ii.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid. 230, 247 ff., 275 ff. According to other sources, the Wehrmacht had 404 Tigers in all on 1 March. Hahn, *Waffen und Geheimwaffen des deutschen Heeres*, ii. 298 ff.

<sup>207</sup> Even on 15 April, Army Group South had 37 Tigers, while all other army groups together had 121. On the deployment of Tiger tanks, see Schneider, *Tiger im Kampf*, and Jentz, *Die deutsche Panzertruppe*.

<sup>208</sup> See *Magyarország felszabadítása*, 224.

<sup>209</sup> Guderian, *Erinnerungen eines Soldaten*, 349.

<sup>210</sup> On the oil issue, see this chapter, 3 (f), section on Operation SPRING AWAKENING.

Army Group South and Guderian were in dispute from the outset about the right way to deploy the regrouped units. But everyone except Hitler agreed at least that Budapest must be surrendered as soon as possible and that a breakout must be approved. Hitler's permission was requested almost every day, but he would not even agree to surrender Pest. Army Group South accordingly defined the purpose of the operation—after the attack was launched—as the capture of the Margit Line between Lake Balaton and the Danube, and also envisaged elimination of the Soviet bridgehead over the Garam, north of the Danube.<sup>211</sup> A serious dilemma arose as to which of the two solutions proposed for the relief of Budapest should be chosen: Operation KONRAD (in the north) or Operation PAULA (in the south). In the case of the southern offensive, to be launched from the Székesfehérvár area, 900 cubic metres more fuel would be needed because of the greater distance involved, and it would also take five days longer to assemble the troops.<sup>212</sup> The alternative offensive in the north would require less fuel, the regrouping could get under way more quickly, and the distance was shorter, but the nature of the terrain posed a significantly higher risk. The success of the offensive depended primarily on the element of surprise, and that was a good reason to opt for the northern offensive, which could be conducted faster. Guderian would have preferred an offensive from the south, but his representative, General Wenck, was won over by the army group's arguments at the conference held in Eszterháza at the end of December. In view of the threatening situation in Budapest, the German military authorities finally decided to attack from the north.<sup>213</sup> They gave the order for the attack before all their troops were assembled, in the hope that the Soviet forces had not yet built up strong defensive positions. At the start of the offensive only 32 per cent of 5th SS Armoured Division 'Viking', 66 per cent of 3rd SS Armoured Division 'Totenkopf', and 43 per cent of 96th Infantry Division were ready, and none of 711th Infantry Division had arrived yet.<sup>214</sup> Assembly of the units was not completed until 8 January 1945. Guderian, who had been in Hungary for the previous two days, arrived in Tata on 7 January to oversee the conduct of the operation in person. The minister of defence in the Szálasi government, Col.-Gen. Károly Beregfy, was also keen to contribute to the success of the operation, and suggested that Hungarian troops take part. However, the forces he offered were so battle-worn that there could be no question of using them. Some of the Hungarian authorities got carried away with various plans. The inspector of the Honvéd, Lt.-Gen. Gyula Kovács, for example, felt it was more important at this point to discuss the marching-in parade with General Balck, but he left the meeting disappointed—the German general had no time to consider the matter.

<sup>211</sup> 'Befehl H.Gr. Süd: Endziel der Operation Konrad (2.1.1945)', BA-MA RH19V/58, annex.

<sup>212</sup> KTB H.Gr. Süd, Dec. 1944 (second half) annexes, 'Beurteilung der Angriffsmöglichkeiten der Armeegruppe Balck, 30.12.1945', HL microfilm 637, No. 7211601; Maier, *Drama zwischen Budapest und Wien*, 24.

<sup>213</sup> Maier, *Drama zwischen Budapest und Wien*, 26.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid. 494.

**Table V.VII.9.** Army Group South and 2nd and 3rd Ukrainian Front tanks and assault guns on 1 January 1945

Army Group South	494	Plus 554 under repair; on 20 January 398 tanks and assault guns were operational.
2nd and 3rd Ukrainian Front	approx. 1156	It is not known how many tanks and assault guns were under repair.

Sources: Svirin, *Boi u Ozera Balaton*, 77; id., *Budapeszt–Balaton*, 20; Minasian, *Osvobozhdenie narodov Yugo-vostochnoi Evropy*, 357.

### *Operation KONRAD I*

On the evening of 1 January the German IV SS Armoured Corps, only half of which had reached the Komárom area, launched a surprise offensive in the Tata-Almásfüzitő region, while 96th Infantry Division crossed the Danube from the north in assault boats and established two bridgeheads in the rear of the Soviet troops. The two battalions of the Hungarian SS Combat Group Ney (later Brigade Ney) were deployed for the first time in this operation, as infantry accompanying SS Armoured Divisions 'Viking' and 'Totenkopf'.<sup>215</sup> The attacking troops captured the Gerecse mountain range, but by 6 January the Soviet troops had brought them to a halt in the Bicske and Zsámbék area. Two factors had had an adverse effect on the offensive:

- The terrain was extremely unfavourable for armoured vehicles. In the Gerecse and Pilis mountains the Soviet troops had established anti-tank defensive lines which were very difficult to overcome. And even where the Germans managed to break through, the Soviet troops were easily able to cut off the long and narrow corridor forming along the Danube.
- Tolbukhin and Malinovsky had taken the precaution of placing their most important units in reserve between 26 and 31 December. So the commanders at the front had one armoured corps, four mechanized corps, and three cavalry corps at their disposal to ward off the German relief attempts.<sup>216</sup> Those forces alone possessed at least 500 to 600 tanks.

Tolbukhin had overestimated the strength of the German forces, so he kept a substantial proportion of his troops in reserve and only deployed them later, when the situation became critical. By so doing, he split up the group of attacking forces at his disposal, which suffered heavy losses as a result. On the other hand, thanks to

<sup>215</sup> Hungarian 1st Lt. and SS-Obersturmbannführer Károly Ney recruited his combat group, which numbered 5,000 by the end of the war, from members of an association of veterans who had served together on the eastern front. Ferenc Szálasi had demoted him and discharged him from the Honvéd for disobeying his, Szálasi's, orders. After the war, Károly Ney operated as a CIA agent in charge of organizing secret Austrian arms depots and sabotage groups.

<sup>216</sup> I, II, IV, IX Guards Mech. Corps, VII Mech. Corps, V, XVIII, XXIII Armoured Corps, IV, VI Guards Cavalry Corps, V Cavalry Corps.

his numerical superiority, Tolbukhin retained the advantage of manoeuvrability right to the end—unlike the Germans, who had no reserves at their disposal. On 2 January the Soviet XVIII Armoured Corps joined in the fighting, and on 3 January it was followed by three more fast-moving units.<sup>217</sup> That same day in the Bicske region, which was the main target of the German offensive, the 'Viking' Division was already faced by one heavy armoured regiment, four assault-gun regiments, three rifle divisions, one mechanized brigade, and six sapper battalions.<sup>218</sup> These forces prevented any further German advance. The same thing happened across the entire line of attack. By the next day the Soviet I Guards Mechanized Corps had also arrived from the Adony region. So no fewer than five mechanized, armoured, and cavalry corps and four rifle corps were now assembled in the main direction of attack, preventing the Germans from getting any closer to the capital. From 3 January 1945, the Soviet 46th Army moved II Guards Mechanized Corps and X Guards Rifle Corps from the inner ring surrounding Budapest, employing these units to strengthen the outer ring, which had originally been manned, north of Mór, by 4th Guards Army.

The enemy superiority placed the German troops, who already had difficulty in holding the ground they had won, in a critical situation. Only the group operating in the north achieved any success, capturing Esztergom on 6 January and Pilisszentlélek on 8 January. The attacking units suffered heavy losses: a total of 3,500 killed, wounded, or missing (almost 10 per cent of the complement of IV SS Armoured Corps) from 1 to 7 January. They also lost 39 tanks and assault guns in the same period.<sup>219</sup> The losses incurred by the Soviet 4th Guards Army are not known, but 46th Army lost 4,865 men, 87 anti-tank guns, and 38 cannon at that time.<sup>220</sup>

The attack by III Armoured Corps (the southern offensive in Operation KONRAD I) lost momentum on 9 January. The Soviet resistance was so great that the Germans were obliged to mount twelve attacks on a few reinforced positions on the very first day of the offensive.<sup>221</sup> On 9 January the Soviet II Mechanized Corps launched a counter-attack to prevent the threatening breakthrough, but 57 of its 80 tanks were put out of action that same day.<sup>222</sup> After three days of fighting, the fields of Zámoly had become a veritable tank graveyard, and the Soviet forces had been unable to prevent III Armoured Corps from gaining ground. However, Breith had been prevented from extending his attack.

Marshal Tolbukhin nevertheless considered the situation critical, and accordingly made preparations to prevent a breakout from the city. He ordered the army operating against the relief forces to consolidate its rearward defences too and establish defensive lines reinforced with anti-tank cannon. On 3 January he also gave orders to end the attack on Buda, thereby releasing further forces for

<sup>217</sup> VII Mech.Corps, V Cavalry Corps, and II Guards Mech.Corps.

<sup>218</sup> Tóth, *Budapest felszabadítása*, 157.

<sup>219</sup> KTB H.Gr. Süd, Jan. (first half), 'Anlagen, personelle und materielle Verluste des IV. SS-Pz. K. in der Zeit vom 1. bis 7.1.1945', HL microfilm 629, No. 7212278.

<sup>220</sup> HL collection of Soviet documents, 'KTB 46. Armee 1945', 314.

<sup>221</sup> Veress, *A Dundántil felszabadítása*, 129.

<sup>222</sup> KTB H.Gr. Süd, Jan. (first half), daily report 9 Jan. 1945, HL microfilm 629, No. 7212942.

defence.<sup>223</sup> As a result of these measures, on 6 January there was a force equivalent to seven divisions standing ready north-west of Budapest to prevent a possible breakout, approximately as much again as the entire force defending the city.

On the German side, a number of tactical options were considered. In the case of a breakout, the defenders would first have to break through the circle surrounding the city and then, after a long march, join up with the other group of German forces, whose numbers were at least as great as those which could be deployed in the breakout itself. That being so, there was some doubt as to the success of an organized breakout, unless it were to be directed northwards rather than north-west and the attacks by the relief troops did not come to a standstill in the Pilis mountains.

Guderian was so unaware of the actual situation that he wanted to involve the defenders of Budapest in the stalled offensive. In addition to 'holding the bridge-head', they were to support the operations of the relief army by launching an attack to the north-west.<sup>224</sup> The army group, for its part, had a much more realistic grasp of the situation, and it recommended that the defenders abandon the eastern bridgehead on the following day, break out to the north-west on 9 January, and, should this attempt fail, split up and fight their way out of the pocket separately in small combat groups. However, this solution was rejected by Hitler.<sup>225</sup>

### *Operation KONRAD II*

The relief plan now had to be changed. As the attack had slowed down, the German army command was obliged to fall back on the alternative plan for an attack from the south. It decided to break through the front between Székesfehérvár and Mór with new forces (Breith's III Armoured Corps), in the hope that IV SS Armoured Corps would not finally come to a halt. The Army Group South general staff hoped not only to recapture the Margit Line but, together with IV SS Armoured Corps, to encircle the Soviet troops defending the western slopes of the Vértes mountains. Tolbukhin got wind of the preparations and was able to reinforce XX Guards Rifle Corps, which was positioned in the area. The defending forces were also exceptionally favoured by the fact that on 6 January, the day before the German offensive began, Malinovsky's 7th Guards Army and 6th Guards Armoured Army launched a general attack along the Garam, north of the Danube. It is a curious fact of military history that two opposing armoured units were now advancing in opposite directions, with only the Danube between them, in a move akin to 'castling' in chess. By 8 January the Soviet forces were already within a kilometre of Komárom, raising the threat of another large-scale entrapment of forces between 2nd and 3rd Ukrainian Fronts. On 6 January Army Group South HQ had toyed with the idea of halting or reducing the offensive south of the Danube, but it finally decided to take the risk, in the hope that the newly arrived 20th Armoured Division would be able to hold the front.

<sup>223</sup> Tóth, *Budapest felszabadítása*, 156. The forces in question were 49th and 109th Guards Rifle Divisions, and parts of II Guards Mech.Corps.

<sup>224</sup> Maier, *Drama zwischen Budapest und Wien*, 45.

<sup>225</sup> The army group's deliberations on the proposed breakout, and on the abandonment of the bridgehead, are documented *ibid.* 42–9.

**Table V.vii.10.** Relative strength of forces at the time of Operation KONRAD II in the southern section of the front (between 7 and 11 January 1945)

Troops	Tanks and assault guns	Cannon	Infantry (combat strength)
4th Cav.Brig.	14	28	1,800
1st Armd.Div.	17	36	1,100
3rd Armd.Div.	55	28	900
23rd Armd.Div.	24	24	1,900
503rd Heavy Armd.Btl.	25	0	0
Total German forces:	135	116	5,700
XX Guards Rfl.C. and 6th Art.Reg.	0	approx. 140	approx. 6,000
VII Mech.C.	approx. 70	80	approx. 2,000
93rd Rfl.Div.	0	approx. 20	approx. 1,500
63rd Cav.Div.	0	approx. 20	approx. 1,000
Total Soviet forces:	approx. 70	approx. 260	approx. 10,500

*Source:* KTB H.Gr. Süd, January (first half), annexes, report of 9 Jan. 1945, HL, microfilm 628, No. 7212268. The figures for Soviet units are the author's own estimates.

By 15 January IV SS Armoured Corps had been obliged to move to the region north-west of Lake Balaton after the attempt to break through between Bicske and Esztergom had failed. The army group command and Gille himself, hoping that the relief operation could be conducted without any major regrouping, still planned to break through the Soviet defences in the Esztergom area. The increasingly desperate reports from Budapest also continued to favour the northern option. After the failed breakthrough attempt by III Armoured Corps, IV SS Armoured Corps endeavoured to relieve Budapest by means of an attack from the north across the Pilis mountains.

The new offensive was launched from Esztergom on 9 January.<sup>226</sup> Two hundred tonnes of supplies had been assembled there, to be transported to Budapest if the operation was successful. General Balck also ordered Major Ernst Philipp's battalion to conduct an additional attack, code-named HUSARENSTREICH, to break through the Soviet spearheads near the riverbank between Dömös and Szentendre and take Szentendre, so that the defenders could be rescued once the connection had been established. This shows that, at this point, the military command already considered it no longer possible to obey Hitler's order that the capital must be held. As the 1st general staff officer of the 'Viking' Division put it: Gille 'and Philipp himself consider task impossible. Russians hardly likely to open riverside road to leisure traffic.'<sup>227</sup> It is impossible to see how Balck expected the army of defenders to withdraw along the road between Esztergom und Szentendre, which was completely under fire. In practice, however, the question did not arise, because the group advancing along the Danube soon came to a standstill, while 711th

<sup>226</sup> KTB H.Gr. Süd, Jan. (first half), daily report 9 Jan. 1945, HL microfilm 629, No. 7212940.

<sup>227</sup> Quoted in Maier, *Drama zwischen Budapest und Wien*, 53.

Infantry Division, attacking in the south-east, managed to capture Dobogókő. The next day, 5th SS Armoured Division 'Viking' was also deployed in the gap. And the above-mentioned general staff officer noted: 'Enemy weak, completely surprised. Difficult hilly terrain. Like Alp foothills. Midnight first reports of success, prisoners mainly retinue of divisions encircling Budapest. Fire from anti-tank cannon and rocket launchers. No own losses. Westland making good progress.'<sup>228</sup> At this point, Balck too still thought the attack could be continued with some prospect of success. However, it was already clear that the defenders of Budapest would not be able to move out and connect with the attacking forces. To do so, the Pest bridgehead would have had to be evacuated and the units regrouped, and that would have taken several days. The commander of the encircled anti-aircraft artillery, Colonel Janza, therefore informed Balck by radio that it was impossible for the defenders to break out, both on logistic grounds and out of consideration for their Hungarian ally.<sup>229</sup>

By 11 January Armoured Regiment 'Westland' of the 'Viking' Division had fought its way over the Pilis saddle and entered the village of Pilisszentkereszt, so it was now only 21 kilometres from Budapest. There had been many German vehicles and wounded in the village for two weeks, but it had been the scene of brutal excesses, with prisoners and wounded on both sides put to death.<sup>230</sup> Despite the fire and smoke, the troops could already make out the church steeples of the encircled capital.<sup>231</sup> The army group again requested permission for a breakout, because it hoped to capture the Pomáz airfield and thus be able to transport the non-walking wounded and supply the troops who broke out.<sup>232</sup>

The advance battalions of SS Division 'Viking' had already reached the branch road to Pomáz when, on the evening of 12 January, they were ordered to withdraw. At that point they were only 17 kilometres from the capital. For Gille, the fact that there were Soviet forces at Dorog, in the rear of the forces advancing in the Pilis mountains, was a risk worth taking, because the terrain precluded any possibility of a major armoured attack. The 'only' problem was that the Soviet V Cavalry Corps, which had been ordered to launch a counter-attack between Szentendre and Pilisvörösvár, 15 kilometres from Budapest, might prevent any further advance. However, even in that case a coordinated breakout by the defenders might succeed, especially as the Soviet forces' scope for defence was severely limited, given the short distance to be covered and the nature of the terrain. The offensive was nevertheless broken off, despite the prospects of success.

The Soviets themselves hoped that the defenders would break out. Malinovsky was now extremely nervous, because the siege had lasted so long. He wanted the defending German army to leave the capital as soon as possible, so he did everything he could to enable the expected breakout to run smoothly, even opening up a kilometre-wide corridor in the front line of the Buda pocket.<sup>233</sup> The Soviet general's

<sup>228</sup> Quoted ibid., and in Bayer, *Kavalleriedivisionen der Waffen-SS*, 350.

<sup>229</sup> KTB H.Gr. Süd, Jan. (first half) annexes, HL microfilm 629, Nos. 7212291 ff.

<sup>230</sup> For details, see Ungváry, *Die Schlacht*, 427.

<sup>231</sup> Strassner, *Europäische Freiwillige*, 329.

<sup>232</sup> 'Beurteilung der Lage bei Armeegruppe Balck am 10.1.1945', BA-MA RH 19 V/45.

<sup>233</sup> See Ungváry, *Die Schlacht*, 248.

overriding concern was to take Budapest; everything else was secondary. With the long-drawn-out fighting he risked incurring Stalin's wrath, which is probably why he abandoned the aim of destroying the defenders. Strangely enough, it was Pfeffer-Wildenbruch's order to halt that actually prevented a successful breakout.

Hitler and Guderian had thought from the start that Operation KONRAD II had no chance, and had given priority to the offensive to be launched in the Székesférhévár region. Army Group South had received further reinforcements accordingly.<sup>234</sup> The army group had already been informed on 10 January that, unless there was a radical change in the next few hours, Gille's troops were to be regrouped. On 11 January, at the army group's request, Wenck spent two hours trying to persuade Hitler to approve a breakout. 'All he achieved was the award of the Knight's Cross to SS Obergruppenführer Pfeffer-Wildenbruch,'<sup>235</sup> as if that made even the slightest difference to the defenders' situation. The general staff doubted whether there would be anyone or anything left to relieve at the end of what would be an extremely time-consuming operation, but the Führer stuck stubbornly to his original plan. On 11 January, even before the offensive by the forces newly deployed in the Pilis mountains had time to develop, Hitler's order for immediate regrouping arrived. There ensued a 24-hour tug of war between Gille and the OKH about continuation of the offensive. Another order to regroup immediately was issued at 20.20 on the same day. Instead of carrying out the order for the offensive, Gille explained in a telegram that the difficult terrain was a major obstacle.<sup>236</sup> Lacking the courage to endorse Gille's action, his superiors passed the telegram on to Hitler without comment. Gille tried, through Himmler, to get the order changed, but in vain. With his troops' failure to achieve any spectacular success in the Pilisszentkereszt area, he lost his last trump card. At 20.00 on 12 January he had no alternative but to issue the order to withdraw. And in the evening of 14 January the Soviet forces retook possession of Pilisszentkereszt and Dobogókő.

The decision to halt the offensive was the subject of heated debate in the post-war memoir and specialist literature.<sup>237</sup> In the unanimous opinion of those who took part in the fighting, the order to withdraw robbed them of the fruits of assured success. The widely differing interpretations of Hitler's aims were a particular source of contention. Gille and his officers were convinced that the purpose of the relief attempts was to rescue the defenders. The sole aim of the offensive was to open up a corridor for the defenders (with the assistance of the Soviets, for once), but not to maintain the link for a longer period. Hitler and many of his generals hoped, with these limited forces, to restore the pre-Christmas status quo. So for them, there was never any question of abandoning Budapest.

<sup>234</sup> 'Zusätze der Heeresgruppe Süd zum Führerbefehl für den Neuansatz der Operation am 12.1.1945', BA-MA RH 19 V/58. The reinforcements consisted of three armoured battalions or brigades, each with about 30 tanks or assault guns, one rocket-launcher brigade with 108 barrelled weapons, and some other smaller units.

<sup>235</sup> Maier, *Drama zwischen Budapest und Wien*, 55.

<sup>236</sup> Strassner, *Europäische Freiwillige*, 329; Bayer, *Kavalleriedivisionen der Waffen-SS*, 352.

<sup>237</sup> Maier, *Drama zwischen Budapest und Wien*, 56–60, 432.

In 1944 to 1945 there were fewer and fewer people in the command structure of the Third Reich who could have persuaded Hitler to face reality, so the military objectives that were set became increasingly absurd. This is reflected in the fighting in Hungary, where fresh armoured divisions were constantly deployed in the offensives between January and March 1945, while the military objective remained unchanged.

The Soviet forces clearly had time on their side. On 8 January their tanks had reached the edge of the Little Hungarian Plain and were already threatening Bratislava and Vienna. Army Group South would therefore have preferred to stop the relief attempts at that point and regroup its forces in areas north of the Danube. In that case, however, a breakout would have had to be approved. The absence of any such permission meant that the defenders were being left to their fate. Hitler nevertheless chose the all-or-nothing option, in the hope that the Soviet attack launched on the northern bank of the Danube would come to a standstill at some point before it reached Komárom. Strangely enough, events were to prove him right: 20th Armoured Division stopped the Soviet attack, and even drove the 6th Guards Armoured Army back some 50 kilometres. It was able to achieve this success because the Soviet attack did not have enough infantry support. The Soviet forces had also suffered substantial losses between 6 and 10 January, as a result of the resistance put up by LVII Armoured Corps and the Hungarian 'Szent László' Division. In a short space of time, the Soviet 6th Guards Armoured Army again lost more than half its tanks.<sup>238</sup>

The situation in Hungary was stable, but the situation in Poland was much more serious for the Germans. On 12 January the Soviet divisions launched an offensive with several army groups north of Cracow, and opened a breach in the front several hundred kilometres wide. There were no forces worth mentioning between these armoured armies and Berlin. Hitler nevertheless stubbornly insisted on continuing the relief attempts, even though the Army General Staff advised him that the only possible way of avoiding the impending catastrophe was to halt the offensive and regroup immediately. Instead of which, only 20th Armoured Division was recalled.

**Table V.VII.11.** Relative strength in respect of tanks and assault guns during Operation KONRAD III (18 and 27 January 1945)

	18 January	27 January
Soviet*	approx. 250	343
German**	approx. 376	108

\*Based on data contained in Veress, *A Dunántúl felszabadítása*, 169–73; also *Ot volzkyh stepi do austriih alp*, 175–6; \*\*KTB H.Gr. Süd, status reports, BA-MA, RH19V/59, map RH2Ost5287, and RH10/140, 60. Our figures contain only the data relating to III and IV SS Armoured Corps.

<sup>238</sup> On 6th Guards Armoured Army, see the account in Martin-Ugron, *Fejezetek II.*, 56–84, and KTB H.Gr. Süd, daily report 7 Jan. 1945, HL microfilm 627, No. 7212042.

### *Operation KONRAD III*

In Hitler's view, the aim of the operation at this point was not only to relieve Budapest but to recapture the whole of Transdanubia.<sup>239</sup> By 17 January the units of IV SS Armoured Corps had been moved, in the utmost secrecy, to the area between Lake Balaton and Székesfehérvár, and they were deployed in battle on the following day. 44th Infantry Division (the 'Hoch- und Deutschmeister' Division) and 356th Infantry Division were promised as reinforcements, but the operations were over before they arrived.

Although 2nd and 3rd Ukrainian Fronts discovered that IV SS Armoured Corps had been moved, they assumed that it was leaving the Hungarian theatre of war altogether. The Soviet 4th Guards Army even supposed that Army Detachment Balck was withdrawing to western Hungary—an option that was indeed considered in Berlin on 14 and 15 January but subsequently dropped. The only units assigned to Army Group A were 8th and 20th Armoured Divisions, which were fighting north of the Danube. In return, however, 44th Infantry Division was removed from the list of forces to be deployed in KONRAD III. It was intended as a replacement for troops north of the Danube, which had been moved away, so the group of forces assembled for the attack, already short of infantry, was weakened substantially. A further cause for concern was the disastrous fuel situation, as a result of which even the group assembled for the attack was subjected to severe restrictions.

According to Soviet authors, '4th Guards Army's intelligence section was not up to the situation.'<sup>240</sup> In their view, the Soviet generals were wholly unprepared for the German offensive. That day, Gille's tanks swept away the counter-attack by the Soviet VII Mechanized Corps, and the rear communication lines of CXXXIII Rifle Corps and XVIII Armoured Corps lines were cut.<sup>241</sup> IV SS Armoured Corps broke through the Soviet front on the first day of the offensive, creating a breach 60 kilometres deep and 30 kilometres wide. The encircled Soviet units were able to break out only because of the lack of German infantry. A few units attempting to escape in the Dunapentele area were scattered by the German tanks, which reached the Danube on 19 January, thereby cutting the Transdanubian battle line in two. The ground that had been gained, some 400 square kilometres in less than four days, marked a major success for the German side, wholly comparable to the initial results of the Ardennes offensive.

The balance-sheet on the Soviet side was very negative. The situation at the Danube crossing points was chaotic. In the course of a few days the Soviets moved more than 40,000 men and large quantities of equipment to the east bank, although they were under constant bombardment by the Luftwaffe.<sup>242</sup> Székesfehérvár fell on 22 January, after heavy street fighting. The Hungarian SS Combat

<sup>239</sup> KTB H.Gr. Süd, daily report 22 Jan. 1945, HL microfilm 628, Nos. 7212454–61.

<sup>240</sup> Zakharov, *Délkelet- és Közép-Európa felszabadítása*, 245.

<sup>241</sup> Malakhov, *Ot Balatona do Veny*, 47.

<sup>242</sup> Magyarország felszabadítása, 242; Markin, *Na beregah Dunaja*, 465.

Group Ney, which had grown to regimental strength, was the first unit to enter the town, but it lost a quarter of its complement in the process. The capture of Székesfehérvár, with its 40,000 inhabitants, was essential for the purposes of any further operations, because almost every supply route passed through it. If the town had remained in Soviet hands, IV SS Armoured Corps, which had pushed forward to the Danube, would have been in constant danger of encirclement.

3rd Ukrainian Front now seemed under very serious threat, as there were no Soviet troops between the advancing German tanks and Budapest on 19 and 20 January. V Cavalry Corps was therefore moved quickly from the Pilis mountains to a position north of Adony, and was reinforced by three anti-tank regiments and six assorted artillery regiments. The corps now had some 360 cannon and 100 tanks at its disposal. As a result of this move, a defence front was established on the evening of 20 January on the Váli-viz river between Lake Velence and the Danube. If the SS armoured divisions had reached this line before the Cossacks, the Soviet V Cavalry Corps would have had no chance of stopping them before Budapest, because there was no time to establish another defensive line. However, after a 60-kilometre march along the Váli-viz river, the cavalry corps reached the defence zone on the evening of 20 January without contact with the enemy. It was only able to do so because IV SS Armoured Corps encountered a number of problems during its advance. For one thing, it had taken a great many troops to overpower the Soviet strongpoints. For another, after two days most of the tanks were almost out of fuel and munitions. And, as the Soviet forces still held Székesfehérvár, the German supplies had to be brought in by circuitous routes.

The tide turned on 21 January, when the German spearheads reached the Váli-viz river and the brigades of the Soviet I Mechanized Corps appeared in the area. The balance of forces was now tipped very much against IV SS Armoured Corps. As an emergency solution, Balck sought to attack towards the north-east rather than the north-west and, instead of relieving Budapest, to at least cut off the Soviet 4th Guards Army's line of retreat and encircle it between Székesfehérvár–Lake Velence and the Vértes mountains. By 26 January this change of plan had resulted in a breach about 10 kilometres long in the Soviet defences at the northern end of Lake Velence, causing serious supply problems for 4th Guards Army. For the time being, fortune seemed to be favouring the Germans.

The attack towards the north-east also had some minor successes. On 24 January SS Division 'Totenkopf' captured the southern part of the village of Baracska. It was now only 30 kilometres from Budapest, but the German tanks had difficulty in getting over the steep and icy banks of the Váli-viz. By 26 January the offensive was within 25 kilometres of the Budapest pocket. Surprisingly, the 1st Armoured Division attack group succeeded in establishing a bridgehead over the Váli-viz north of Kajászószentpéter. It also managed to advance 5 kilometres west of the bridgehead, where it was even able to make radio contact with the forces defending Budapest.<sup>243</sup> At this point, however, it received an order from Army Detachment

<sup>243</sup> Stoves, *1. Panzerdivision*, 730.

Balck requiring it to turn back immediately and abandon the bridgehead. The commander of the attack group, Gille, and his officers were aghast at this decision, because they felt they were being robbed of their success. The tension already existing between Balck and Gille became increasingly strong. Wöhler too was not pleased with IV SS Armoured Corps' performance, repeatedly criticizing the SS divisions for 'poor' reporting. Gille, he said, was not fit to command a corps, but he called only for the dismissal of his chief of staff.

The shortage of infantry was a serious general problem for the Germans. It meant that combat groups with real striking power could be deployed only in the main thrust of an offensive. 3rd Armoured Division's security line south-east of Lake Balaton was 45 kilometres long, and it was clear that these forces would not be sufficient to secure the attack group in the longer term.

The fact that it did not originally involve Second Armoured Army in the offensive proved to have been a fatal mistake on the part of Army Group South. A more ambitious Second Armoured Army operation was envisaged only when it became clear that Tolbukhin was withdrawing his troops facing the army's front in order to strengthen his lines between Lake Balaton and Lake Velence. Had the new plan, codenamed Operation ICEBREAKER, been implemented at the right time and combined with a simultaneous Army Group F attack across the Drava, it would have been fatally damaging for Tolbukhin, because his troops would have lost all their supply lines. However, there were not enough forces available to carry it out. Second Armoured Army would not have been ready until 25 January, and Army Group F had not yet completed its preparations. Hitler had stood firm despite all the objections, refusing to allow the operation because he preferred to 'let sleeping dogs lie' in the vicinity of the Nagykanizsa oilfields.<sup>244</sup> In fact, a Soviet thrust could have taken the oilfields quickly, as they were only 30 kilometres behind the front, but Tolbukhin had no troops available at that point. The Soviet command was more concerned about how a German offensive in this area could be repelled.<sup>245</sup>

The Stavka had not been prepared for the German successes. Towards the end of the war Stalin was no longer inclined to take risks. In a matter of months his troops would be face-to-face with the British and American forces. At the beginning of the war the Soviet dictator's obstinate orders to hold on had condemned millions of his own men to capture or destruction. Now, in this critical situation, he even considered evacuating southern Transdanubia entirely, and he gave Tolbukhin a free hand.<sup>246</sup> Evacuation would have meant losing the weapons, material, and equipment of two armies, since time was so short that it could only be a question of getting the men out. It is a mark of how nervous the Soviet command had become that, on 21 January, it ordered its own pontoon bridges at Dunapenele and Dunaföldvár to be blown up, cutting the supply lines of the Soviet troops that were still in action.<sup>247</sup>

<sup>244</sup> Maier, *Drama zwischen Budapest und Wien*, 95.

<sup>245</sup> Ibid.

<sup>246</sup> Veress, *A Dunántúl felszabadítása*, 169.

<sup>247</sup> See Gosztony, *Légivésszély Budapest*, 55.

The Stavka now took important measures concerning the command hierarchy. On 21 January Timoshenko was again entrusted with coordinating the operations of the two army fronts. Parts of 5th Air Army, which had previously been deployed with 2nd Ukrainian Front, were transferred to the hard-pressed 3rd Ukrainian Front. XVIII Armoured Corps was re-equipped, and sections of 27th Army were assembled south-west of Budapest.

Tolbukhin chose the riskier option, taking it upon himself to hold the bridge-head in southern Transdanubia. In his opinion, it made no sense to abandon the areas that had been captured and hope to cross the Danube again without problems. On 27 January, having assembled his forces, he launched a counter-attack. The German attacking wedge that reached the Danube was extremely vulnerable, especially as the Soviet divisions advancing from Lake Velence and the Simontornya area could cut its rear communication lines at any time. Tolbukhin had recognized this favourable opportunity and was preparing a counter-offensive from both north and south. Two rifle corps and one armoured corps were placed under his command.<sup>248</sup> Tolbukhin saw the first aim of the offensive as the destruction of IV SS Armoured Corps' northern attack group at Lake Velence, which formed a wedge some 6 kilometres wide and 10 kilometres long in the Soviet defences. It was to be attacked by three Soviet mechanized corps and one rifle corps. The second aim was to take Székesfehérvár, which would have created serious supply problems for the whole army corps. And to complete the encirclement, a parallel attack was to be launched from southern Transdanubia.

In relation to the forces deployed, 2nd Ukrainian Front had scant success. The situation of the German front called for a major encirclement operation, but that operation failed, even though, on 25 January, IV SS Armoured Corps reported that only 16 per cent of its tanks (50 out of 306) were still operational and the rest under repair following the heavy fighting. The Soviet failure was due to operational errors. Malinovsky sent XXIII Armoured Corps into the heart of the battle on his own initiative and without prior agreement with the Stavka, believing it was the only way to prevent a breakthrough to Budapest. However, the German attacking forces were so small and so worn-out that a breakthrough was more likely to have disastrous consequences for the attackers, so Malinovsky's hasty action was not justified. The armoured corps was thrown into the battle without reconnaissance or air support, and was almost completely destroyed as a result of this wrong-headed deployment.<sup>249</sup> On the first day of the Soviet counter-offensive, the defending German forces, with very few losses on their side, shot down 122 Soviet tanks, about 100 of them belonging to the XXIII Armoured Corps.<sup>250</sup> However, that was not enough to halt the Soviet counter-attack, as the CIV Rifle Corps offensive was launched at the same time against the flank of the German front, and the Soviet

<sup>248</sup> Veress, *A Dunántúl felszabadítása*, 169. The units in question were XXX and CIV Rifle Corps, and XXIII Armoured Corps.

<sup>249</sup> Tarasov, *Boi u uzera Balaton*, 74.

<sup>250</sup> KTB H.Gr. Süd, Feb. (first half), 'Anlagen, Aufschlüsselung der am 27.1.45 vom IV. SS-Pz. Korps abgeschossenen Panzer vom 1.2.1945', HL microfilm 628, No. 7213104.

57th Army also attacked from the south. XXVIII Rifle Corps and other units from the Soviet high command reserve were assigned to 3rd Ukrainian Front, and they too took part in the counter-offensive.<sup>251</sup>

The situation was now favourable, but the Germans were unable to take advantage of it. The plan to revive the stalled offensive by regrouping III Armoured Corps and advancing southwards had to be dropped because there were not even enough German troops to defend the section that had been captured. Since the III Armoured Corps attack could not be carried out, Operation ICEBREAKER, the planned thrust by Second Armoured Army to threaten the Soviet 57th Army's rear communication lines, did not materialize either.<sup>252</sup> As a result, all the areas that had been taken had to be abandoned, with the exception of Székesfehérvár, and 3rd Armoured Division was encircled at Dunapentele for a time.<sup>253</sup> The intensity of the fighting is shown by the fact that 70 destroyed tanks and 35 wrecked cannon remained on the edge of the village of Vereb alone, as a memorial to the battles that were fought there. The attack conducted south of Lake Velence, in an attempt to encircle the whole of IV SS Armoured Corps, proved particularly dangerous,<sup>254</sup> and the constantly counter-attacking Soviet units also penetrated into the northern part of Székesfehérvár.

On 22 January Hitler, the all-or-nothing gambler, doubled his stakes and ordered his last reserves—Sixth Armoured Army,<sup>255</sup> which was in the process of replenishment following the Ardennes offensive—to move to Hungary. By this time, however, it was already clear that these forces would not be able to save Budapest. Hitler's decision to send Sixth Armoured Army to Hungary, at a time when the IV SS Armoured Corps attack was still making very good progress, shows that the aims he was pursuing in the Hungarian theatre of war went far beyond the liberation of Budapest. As already mentioned (and as will be discussed in detail later on), it is his determination to continue the war for as long as possible that explains the great importance he attached to the Hungarian theatre.

### (e) The Final Battle in Budapest and the Breakout

As a result of the relief attacks, there was a pause in the fighting on the Buda from 18 to 25 January. The defenders hoped, in vain, that Hitler would allow a breakout.

<sup>251</sup> Zakharov, *Délkelet- és Közép-Európa felszabadítása*, 417.

<sup>252</sup> KTB H.Gr. Süd, Feb. (first half), daily reports, HL microfilm 628, Nos. 7212559–68.

<sup>253</sup> KTB H.Gr. Süd, Feb. (first half), daily reports, HL microfilm 628, Nos. 7213127, 7213134; Stoves, *1. Panzerdivision*, 735 ff.

<sup>254</sup> *Ot volzkyh stepej do austriih alp*, 174–5.

<sup>255</sup> The term 'Sixth SS Armoured Army' is frequently encountered in the historical literature, although that army was never designated as an 'SS' army in official documents, despite the fact that all its divisions and corps staff belonged to the Waffen SS. In *KTB OKW*, iv/1, 438, it is described as an 'SS' army, with the comment, 'as from January 1945', and this description also crops up occasionally in the records of Army Group South. Hitler himself spoke only of Sixth Armoured Army. Another reason why it should not be referred to as Sixth SS Armoured Army is that doing so implies the existence of five other SS armoured armies. (All major Waffen SS units were numbered in sequence.) For details, see Maier, *Drama zwischen Budapest und Wien*, 13 ff., 425. (Maier was Sixth Armoured Army's 1st general staff officer.)

Pfeffer-Wildenbruch used the last reserves to form a mobile combat group, but it soon had to be deployed to support the shaky defence force. The brief respite ended on 25 January, when the Soviets launched a new offensive with substantial forces in the central section of the Buda defence line. The bridgehead was only 3 kilometres deep at this point, and the Soviet attack almost directly threatened the last emergency landing strip on Blood Meadow and the command authorities' headquarters on Castle Hill. This is all the more remarkable (and is an indication of the massive Soviet reserves) since, as a result of Operation KONRAD III, the troops engaged in the attack were still cut off from the southern and south-western half of Transdanubia, and Tolbukhin was just beginning a counter-attack on the German wedge that had pressed forward to the Danube.

The attack by the besieging forces steadily gained ground between 26 and 28 January. Rose Hill, the northern cornerstone of the defence, was threatened with encirclement and had to be abandoned, and the main battle line was fast approaching Castle Hill. Pfeffer-Wildenbruch, who had not left his secure position in the castle tunnel once in all these weeks, reported by radio: 'Supply situation appalling. Fate of wounded dreadful.'<sup>256</sup> On 27 January Hitler nevertheless gave orders that Budapest was to be held until the relief attacks got through, although he was on the point of having to stop them. Army Group South command had already given the Budapest 'fortified place' up for lost and considered that a breakout no longer had any chance of success.<sup>257</sup>

On 30 January the Soviet spearheads reached the northern edge of Blood Meadow at the western foot of Castle Hill, and the landing strip for gliders came directly under fire. Even so, gliders went on attempting to land. Special Soviet flamethrower units captured the streets round Eagle Hill and the 8th SS Cavalry Division positions in the Farkasréti cemetery about a kilometre to the west, in fierce house-to-house fighting. By 6 February the front was heavily constricted and Eagle Hill was surrounded.

The food situation was catastrophic: each soldier received only a slice of bread and a small portion of horsemeat per day. In any case, most of the troops had been living on the local population's food stocks for weeks. There was absolutely no question of sharing the supplies, which were anyway inadequate. There was very little fuel, and it was only possible to go out at night, and only on foot, because the streets were full of rubble and shell craters, making them impassable for motor vehicles. The starving population attempted to loot supplies dropped by air, at the risk of incurring the death penalty if they were caught. Hungarian and German troops and Arrow Cross members fought each other over the air drops. In the hospitals, dressings taken off the dead were used to bandage subsequent casualties. And in this situation, the defenders repeatedly launched desperate counter-attacks.

However, the Soviet 'Group Budapest' too had lost so many men that, from the end of January, it began to enlist Hungarian prisoners of war, promising them that they would not be sent to Siberia. By 13 February, 20 independent companies had

<sup>256</sup> Maier, *Drama zwischen Budapest und Wien*, 89.

<sup>257</sup> Ibid. 90.

been formed from more than 3,100 Hungarian volunteers, most of them during the last three days of the siege. The losses among these volunteers were appallingly high, the survival rate of those who had joined 'too soon' being less than 30 per cent. 600 of them were killed in action.<sup>258</sup>

Between 6 and 9 February a battle raged for the southern railway station on the edge of Blood Meadow. An unmistakable sign that everything was about to end was that the Germans started handing out medals. The Soviet attacks collapsed only in the southern section of the defences, where the 3-kilometre-long railway embankment between the Danube and Eagle Hill remained in the defenders' hands until the very last day.

During the siege, the German command in the Budapest pocket frequently considered plans to break out and abandon the city. That would still have been possible at the beginning of January, or in parallel with the subsequent relief attempts. The best chance would have been during the second relief operation, when Gille almost succeeded in crossing the Pilis mountains. After 13 January, however, an organized breakout was no longer feasible. Several thousand combatants might still have managed to filter through before the end of January. Yet Hitler continued to refuse permission. After the eastern bridgehead was abandoned on 18 January, the Buda 'fortified place' was, at best, significant only in tying down Soviet forces, but Hitler nevertheless insisted that it must be defended. Pfeffer-Wildenbruch pursued that policy up to the last minute, rejecting all Soviet attempts to negotiate, and conducted the defence for seven long weeks, until 11 February 1945. He decided on a breakout when it was already clear that the rest of Buda (the Castle and Gellért Hill) would fall very shortly.

Pfeffer-Wildenbruch informed Army Group South of his intention by radio only at the very last minute, at 17.50 on 11 February, when a breakout was no longer militarily feasible. With that, the fate of more than 40,000 men was sealed. 'Food all gone, nearly out of cartridges. Surrender or be massacred without a fight, that is the choice for the garrison in Budapest. I shall therefore take the offensive, with the last German, Honvéd, and Arrow Cross units fit for action (to win through to a new battle and supply base).'<sup>259</sup>

Of the heavy weapons, only some 27 tanks and assault guns, 10 to 15 armoured personnel carriers, and perhaps 50 to 60 cannon were operational on 11 February 1945, but almost all of them were systematically blown up in the hours before the breakout started.<sup>260</sup>

On the morning of 11 February Pfeffer-Wildenbruch held a situation conference at which it was eventually decided to attempt the breakout, in small groups without heavy weapons, through the wooded area. Most of the tanks were not positioned at the breakout point, since there was no fuel and the streets were for the most part

<sup>258</sup> On the question of the Hungarian volunteers, see Ungváry, *Die Schlacht*, 389–95.

<sup>259</sup> BA-MA RH 10 V/60, quoted in Maier, *Drama zwischen Budapest und Wien*, 518. It is characteristic that, even at the last minute, Pfeffer-Wildenbruch sought to avoid any argument with Hitler's 'stand firm' order. For that reason, he did not use the word 'breakout', although it must have been clear from the start that this operation would involve heavy losses.

<sup>260</sup> See Ungváry, *Die Schlacht*, 258 ff.

impassable, largely on account of the anti-tank obstacles which the defenders themselves had put in place.

The breakout was planned to start at about 20.00 that same day.<sup>261</sup> Several groups were to overrun the northern main battle line over a width of about a kilometre, along the Margit ring-road to the Margit bridge, and roll back the Soviet positions. The bulk of the breakout forces formed the point of concentration in Széna Square. The first wave consisted of the combat troops of 13th Armoured Division (on the left) and 8th SS Cavalry Division (on the right). They were to be followed by a second wave comprising Armoured Infantry Division 'Feldherrnhalle', 22nd SS Cavalry Division, and the Hungarian troops. The third wave was to consist of the walking wounded and the baggage train. Some 10,000 civilians were also expected to join the breakout. Pfeffer-Wildenbruch and his staff were to get round the main battle line through an underground passage and reach the rear of the Soviet positions.

The critical point was the stretch, about 10 kilometres wide, between the western edge of the woods (some 15 to 18 kilometres from the breakout point) and the German main battle line in the east (about 25 kilometres from the breakout point). Most of this area was flat, open, arable land, with meadows and with vineyards round the edge. To conquer this difficult stretch, another force was to be assembled in the forest to the east of Tinnye (18 kilometres from the breakout point). From this vantage point, it was supposed to overrun the enemy's main battle line in an attack from the rear. This breakthrough was supposed to take place at noon the following day, just 18 hours after the breakout began! It was an impossible task, given that the German main battle line was at least 25 kilometres away and the troops would have to conquer this stretch with only small arms and minimal stocks of ammunition.

It was probably hoped that Army Group South would launch a relief attack to get the 'returning stragglers' out. But the Army Group South troops had not been briefed in time, so they did nothing. Although the divisional commanders had been informed on the evening of 10 February that a breakout was planned for the following day, the information was confined to the fact that the operation was to take place. The details were to be released later, and in the meantime the whole thing was to be kept secret. Generally speaking, the orders to keep the operation secret do not seem to have been very effective, as some well-informed people already knew about it on the morning of 11 February, and some even on 10 February.<sup>262</sup> This was hardly surprising, as the breakout had been in the air for weeks, and it was unlikely that the Germans would simply give themselves up.

The wildest rumours about the breakout itself were circulating among the troops. Many expected to reach their own lines after a short 'stroll', just a few

<sup>261</sup> On the planning and course of the breakout, see *ibid.* 255–315, and Ungváry, 'Der Ausbruch der deutsch-ungarischen Verteidiger'. Partly incorrect account in Gosztony, *Der Kampf um Budapest*, 68–70.

<sup>262</sup> Werner Hübner (staff medical officer in Division 'Feldherrnhalle'), BA-MA, Msg 2/238; Ludwig Mückl (private), BA-MA, Msg 2/5407; Róbert Garád, 'Aufzeichnungen', 5.

kilometres. Some insisted they would only have to cover 15 to 20 kilometres, because the only thing in the way of the breakout was the Soviet rearward area, and the vanguard of the liberating forces was already at Pilisszentkereszt. What can possibly have prompted the garrison to undertake this desperate and irresponsible step? Such a thing would hardly have been possible on the western front.

The siege and the consequent idea of a breakout can be understood only in the light of the psychosis of total war. The hopeless breakout did not seem to most of the German troops so very hopeless, given their dread of captivity. The German military command in Budapest was incapable of taking the right decision; their whole way of thinking was dominated by fear of the Soviets and of Soviet captivity. Instead of surrendering *en bloc*, even at the last minute, they led their men to their ruin like lemmings. It was already clear, when the operation began, that the Soviet command had made the necessary preparations. The first breakout wave was greeted by murderous fire, which rapidly gave rise to panic and chaos. Unexpectedly, the Soviet troops evacuated their positions in the inner city and left the way free for the breakout troops after midnight, when those still fit for combat were able to reach the Buda woods. However, only a few managed to get across the 15-kilometre-wide stretch of land between the woods and the main battle line, where they encountered the Soviet II Guards Mechanized Corps, undergoing rehabilitation, and V Cavalry Corps. Of the 43,900 or so men, not even 700 reached their own lines. Almost half of the breakout troops fell in action, many of them within the first six hours in the confined space of the city centre. The main roads out of the city were covered with mountains of corpses and bodies crushed by the Red Army tanks—a truly apocalyptic scene. Thousands more died later, from physical exhaustion and ill-treatment by the Soviet guards, while marching on foot to the prisoner-of-war assembly points. Most of these sacrifices would have been avoided by timely and orderly capitulation.

For too long, Pfeffer-Wildenbruch refused to permit either capitulation or a breakout. He kept referring to the ‘Führer order’. Only after all relief attempts had already failed and the chances of an organized breakout succeeding were down to almost zero did he risk a breakout, even though Hitler still strictly forbade it. In so doing, he disobeyed the order to fight to the last bullet. Like many of his men, he considered—probably from his experience of the ideological war waged on the eastern front—that prisoners of war were in mortal danger. He hoped to break out through a rearward area where the Soviet forces were thin on the ground, because that seemed to offer the only possibility of survival. He was also careful to consider his own safety, choosing a safe underground passage which he hoped would enable him to avoid the fighting. His conduct was irresponsible, because as soon as it became clear that his assessment of the situation was completely unrealistic and that the failure of the breakout was imminent, he was prepared to capitulate at once in order to save his own life. Earlier, he had hardly hesitated to lead 43,000 men to their ruin and leave them to their fate.

The German command endorsed Pfeffer-Wildenbruch’s conduct. Despite the fact that Hitler had forbidden the breakout, the German war reports nevertheless spoke of ‘breakout by the defenders according to orders’. The tributes and

obituaries in the press took the same line.<sup>263</sup> Once again, German propaganda lied to its own troops.

### *The Battles for Budapest: A Tentative Evaluation*

The siege of Budapest has gone down in history as one of the bloodiest city sieges in the European theatre of war. The Red Army's losses in the course of the siege and connected operations (including losses incurred during the German relief attempts) amounted to some 240,056 wounded and 80,026 dead.<sup>264</sup> These figures represent half of all Soviet losses in Hungarian territory.<sup>265</sup> Thus, one of every two Soviet soldiers who fell in Hungary lost his life at Budapest. The material losses were of a similar order of magnitude. In the 108 days of the Budapest operations (Soviet records of the siege of Budapest count the number of days starting with 29 October 1944), Malinovsky's 2nd Ukrainian Front and Tolbukhin's 3rd Ukrainian Front lost altogether 135,100 small arms, 1,766 tanks and assault guns, 4,127 cannon, and 293 aircraft.<sup>266</sup> It is difficult to compare the losses on the two sides, as the Soviet statistics on losses in Hungary are based on different criteria and include losses incurred in the region in the course of the encirclement and the relief attempts, and especially as only approximate figures are known for the losses incurred on the German–Hungarian side during the defence of Budapest and the relief attempts.<sup>267</sup> It is assumed that about 26,000 of the German and Hungarian troops were wounded, 48,000 killed, and 51,000 taken prisoner.<sup>268</sup>

Senseless as the sacrifice of so many men was, the political objective was nevertheless clear. The battles raging round the capital enabled the German command to hold its shaky positions in the rest of the country. In this respect, the operations conducted before the city was encircled must be regarded as successful. Budapest tied down significant Soviet forces, which the German command, in the absence of reinforcements, could not have countered by any other means. Once German reinforcements arrived, however, Budapest became much less important. The forces deployed there were lost entirely, ultimately weakening the German position at the end of a murderous war.

From the Soviet point of view, the siege of Budapest was a series of defeats. Despite repeated orders from the Stavka, Malinovsky's troops failed to take Budapest on 7 November, in the third week of November, or in the first and fourth weeks of

<sup>263</sup> BA-MA N 370, Pfeffer-Wildenbruch's papers contain many similar extracts from newspapers at the time, e.g. an article published in *Das Reich* on 20 Feb. 1945. See also *Die Wehrmachtberichte*, iii. 446.

<sup>264</sup> *Grif sekretnosti sniat*, 211 ff.

<sup>265</sup> The Soviet figures for losses incurred in Hungary do not include those incurred in areas reincorporated in the Soviet Union between 1938 and 1941. They refer to Hungarian territory within the 1947 state borders.

<sup>266</sup> *Grif sekretnosti sniat*, 372.

<sup>267</sup> The figures for losses in the Budapest operation include all 2nd Ukrainian Front losses between 29 December 1944 and 13 February 1945, and all 3rd Ukrainian Front losses between 12 December 1944 and 13 February 1945.

<sup>268</sup> Ungváry, *Die Schlacht*, 467 ff.

Table V.vii.12. Soviet military losses in major offensive operations

Operations (duration)	Human losses incl. wounded	per day	Tanks per day	Cannon and grenade launchers	per day	Aircraft per day		
Budapest (108 days)	320,082	2,964	1,766	16	4,127	38	293	2–3
Vienna (31 days)	167,940	5,417	603	19	1,005	19	614	20
Berlin (23 days)	352,475	15,325	1,997	87	2,108	92	917	40
Defence of Stalingrad (125 days)	643,842	5,150	1,426	11	12,137	97	2,063	16–17
Offensive ops. at Stalingrad (76 days)	485,777	6,392	2,915	38	3,591	47	706	9
Offensive ops. at Moscow (34 days)	370,955	10,910	429	13	13,350	393	140	4

Source: *Grif sekretnosti sniat*, 174, 182, 212, 217, 219, 224–7, 368–73.

December. Malinovsky, as he himself admitted, was furious because the fighting had lasted so long. When Pfeffer-Wildenbruch was brought to him for interrogation, Malinovsky shouted at him: ‘If I didn’t have to answer for your head in Moscow, I’d have you hanged in the main square in Buda’<sup>269</sup> It took so long to capture the capital that the forces which eventually became available there were of no further use against the Germans. Shtemenko, chief of the Red Army’s general staff in 1945, admitted in his memoirs that the resistance of Budapest had upset the Soviet war plans: ‘The plans of our general staff, according to which our forces were to reach Vienna at the end of December and southern Germany in March, were completely upset, mainly by the long siege of the Hungarian capital.’<sup>270</sup> It is clear from this, too, that the Soviet Union was pursuing more ambitious aims and was keen to extend its sphere of power even further.

Battles for cities and settlements differ from traditional battles in a number of ways. In many cases there is no longer any central command, and the battles disintegrate into dozens of small-scale actions. Heavy weapons become much less effective, and the enemy generally has to be defeated in close combat, eye to eye. This means that the fighting lasts much longer in a siege. The insurgents in the Warsaw ghetto uprising held out for more than 30 days, even though they only had small arms at their disposal while the attackers were equipped with flamethrowers, bombers, and tanks. Another factor that contributes to the intensity of these battles is that the relative strength of the defenders increases as they withdraw and the besieging forces advance. In the Budapest pocket, the length of the front to be defended decreased by 94 per cent in seven weeks. The rate at which it decreased became steadily slower between December 1944 and the breakout: the front was still 87 kilometres long on 24 December, 21 kilometres on 15 January 1945, and only 5 kilometres on 11 February. On the other hand, the number of defenders

<sup>269</sup> Gosztony, *A magyar honvédség*, 239.

<sup>270</sup> Gosztony, ‘Ungarns militärische Rolle’, 160.

decreased much more slowly, so the resistance became steadily stronger. Bloody collapse comes relatively quickly in open battles, but the death throes may last for weeks or months in battles for cities. Another factor is that the civilized amenities typical of cities are slow to collapse, and the sufferings of the inhabitants and the troops last longer as a result. In Leningrad, for example, hundreds of thousands died of starvation or froze to death in the course of the siege, but this had no effect on the military strategy of the defenders.

The numerous battles for cities fought on the eastern front during the last year of the war (Poznań, Piła, Grudziądz, Elbing, Küstrin, Kolberg, Heiligenbeil, Königsberg, Glogau, Danzig, Toruń) did not compare with the siege of Budapest, in that they were relatively short and the garrisons were much smaller. Only in Breslau did the defence last for a comparable length of time. But Breslau, too, did not compare with Budapest in respect of strategic importance, and there, too, the number of defenders was very much smaller.

Almost 30 per cent of the battles in the Second World War were fought in urban areas. A substantial proportion of them were city sieges, and they proved to be the bloodiest confrontations of all.

The Germans lost 400 men a week on average between 1943 and 1945 on the whole of the Italian front, and no more than 1,000 a week on average on the entire western front. But the suppression of the Warsaw uprising alone cost the German military command 1,250 men a week.<sup>271</sup> And in Budapest the combat strength of the German defenders fell from 45,000 to 24,000, that is, losses of almost 3,000 a week, and that does not even include the Hungarian losses. For the Soviet side too, this city siege was one of the costliest operations of the Second World War in terms of losses.

From the Soviet point of view, only the defence of Stalingrad (125 days) and the Caucasus (160 days), and the liberation of the Ukraine, lasted longer than the siege of Budapest (116 days). In the case of Stalingrad, the actual siege did not last as long as the siege of Budapest, and there were not nearly as many civilian casualties. It is clear from the incredible scale of the losses that, for the Soviet supreme command, no sacrifice was too high a price to pay to achieve its objectives.

### (f) The Last Offensives

At the beginning of January Hitler was already thinking of withdrawing Sixth Armoured Army from the Ardennes and moving it to the eastern front after brief refreshment. The defeat of the Ardennes offensive had not yet been officially conceded, but it must have been clear to everyone that the operation had failed. It was therefore felt to be imperative to concentrate the remaining forces for further action so as not to lose the initiative entirely.<sup>272</sup>

<sup>271</sup> *Az 1944. év története*, 99.

<sup>272</sup> Discussion at FHQ on 7 Jan. 1945, cited by Irving, *Hitler's War*, 823. See also KTB OKW, iv/2, 1635, for the discussion on 23 Jan. 1945.

When a Soviet offensive was launched on 12 January, Guderian wanted to deploy Sixth Armoured Army on the Oder, along with other divisions brought in from the west, in order to attack the Soviet attacking wedge on the flanks. But Hitler insisted on dividing his forces and clearing up the situation in Hungary first. In his view, the remaining divisions would suffice to reinforce the Oder front. And his response to Guderian's objections was the ironic comment: 'You want to attack without oil? Right, let's see how far that gets you.'<sup>273</sup> His generals, it seemed to him, had no idea how to conduct a war.

It was a fact that the Reich's last oil reserves were located in Hungary. And at this point, when rail traffic had collapsed, it would have been very difficult to transport fuel to other theatres of war. The Wehrmacht was therefore obliged to live 'from hand to mouth' and use its oil as near as possible to the point of production. The Hungarian oil reserves made a special contribution to the war effort, since all of Army Group South's fuel requirements, and some of Army Group Centre's, could be met by the Hungarian oil refineries in Komárom. This meant that Army Group South was at that time the only army group still capable of conducting major offensive operations. It was not until 14 March that the Komárom refinery was rendered 70 per cent inoperative by an American air raid. The refinery at Pét was also destroyed in an air raid two days later.<sup>274</sup> The German hydrogenation plants had been bombed repeatedly since May 1944. Production had fallen to such an extent that 'one day the Wehrmacht was bound to come to a standstill by itself'.<sup>275</sup> Mineral-oil production as a whole was down to about a third of its original capacity by December 1944, and as little as a fifth by March 1945. Stocks of aviation fuel at the beginning of April 1945 amounted to only 11,000 tonnes, compared with the 195,000 tonnes—that is, 16 times as much—consumed in May 1944.<sup>276</sup> The Wehrmacht command staff were considering the 'extensive demotorization' of armoured infantry regiments. Although Hungarian oil production, which had grown to 838,000 tonnes of crude in 1943, was not nearly enough to keep the whole of the Wehrmacht moving, it was nevertheless the only means of continuing to conduct the war at all. The German high command was fully aware of this by January 1945 at the latest, when a new Allied bombing offensive put almost all the hydrogenation plants out of action.<sup>277</sup> In March 1945 Hungarian refining capacity was equal to that of the Reich.<sup>278</sup> In January 1945 the Zala and Zistersdorf oilfields already delivered 80 per cent of total fuel production.<sup>279</sup> Hungarian production of (Otto) fuel<sup>280</sup> amounted to 925 cubic metres a day in the first ten days of February, 751 cubic metres a day in the second ten days of February, and 322 cubic metres a

<sup>273</sup> Guderian, *Erinnerungen eines Soldaten*, 349; also KTB OKW, iv/2, 1413.

<sup>274</sup> IfZ, MA1541/15, 237; KTB OKW, iv/2, 173.

<sup>275</sup> Maier, *Drama zwischen Budapest und Wien*, 129.

<sup>276</sup> Ploetz, *Geschichte der Weltkriege*, pt. 2, 16.

<sup>277</sup> KTB OKW, iv/2, 986, 'Bericht des Obersten G. Poleck'. <sup>278</sup> Ibid. 173.

<sup>279</sup> Ibid. 1601, 'Fragment aus der Führerlage am 23.1.1945', and 1604, 'Fragment aus der Führerlage am 5.2.1945'.

<sup>280</sup> In comparing fuel statistics, it should be noted that the army calculated in cubic metres and the Luftwaffe in tonnes; 1 tonne of Otto carburettor fuel = 1.33 cubic metres; 1 tonne of diesel fuel = 1.16 cubic metres.

day in March.<sup>281</sup> However, Army Group South consumed only 609 cubic metres altogether in its offensive operations between 6 and 13 March 1945, so other army groups and the Luftwaffe could also be supplied from Hungary.<sup>282</sup> These were the reasons which Hitler gave Jodl and Dönitz to justify the offensive in Hungary.<sup>283</sup> And these were the reasons why Guderian's objection that it was better not to tap gently on the door in two theatres of war, but to bang hard on one, was valid only insofar as it would have been better, for the conduct of the war as a whole, to concentrate exclusively on Hungary and not, as Guderian proposed, on the Oder front.<sup>284</sup> Hitler was right in theory, since the war could no longer be fought without Hungarian oil. However, all these considerations were relevant only if the war could be prolonged by local successes—which, at this point, was no longer the case. It is true that a decision to concentrate the military effort in Hungary might possibly have helped to achieve a temporary tactical success. By 20 March, however, Hungarian fuel production had come to a complete standstill as a result of the Allied air raids, and it would have been inconceivable, for political reasons, to leave the defence of Berlin entirely bare. Other raw materials, as well as fuel, were also in short supply. After February, total collapse was only a matter of weeks away. A successful military operation would not have changed that in any way.

Hitler already had 'small' and 'big' solutions in mind before the relief attacks on Budapest began. The 'small solution' was to relieve the capital; the 'big solution' was to reconquer the whole of Transdanubia. During the third relief attempt, Second Armoured Army was instructed to prepare a large-scale offensive against the Kaposvár area, under the code-name ICEBREAKER. On 23 January Guderian informed Army Group South that the Führer intended 'to clear up the situation west of the Danube completely'.<sup>285</sup> To that end, C-in-C South-East, with four divisions from Army Group F, was to attack 3rd Ukrainian Front's southern flank between Osijek and Donji Mihojlac in collaboration with Second Armoured Army. Army Detachment Balck was to attack southwards from the Székesfehérvár area. If this double pincer movement succeeded, two Soviet armies would be encircled. The operation was originally to have been launched on 6 February. However, the failure of the relief attacks meant that it had to be put off. On the basis of the above-mentioned considerations, Army Group South then developed the new operation SOUTH, later code-named SPRING AWAKENING. Hitler summoned General Maximilian de Angelis (Second Armoured Army) and Col.-Gen. Wöhler (Army Group South) to Berlin on 2 February and 8 and 9 February respectively, and informed them in person of his plans. 16th SS Armoured Infantry Division was to be assigned to Second Armoured Army and the whole of Sixth Armoured Army

<sup>281</sup> KTB H.Gr. Süd, Feb. (second half) annexes, 24 Feb. 1945. 'Punkte für den Führer-Vortrag', HL microfilm 630, Nos. 213820-21.

<sup>282</sup> KTB H.Gr. Süd, Mar. 1945 (first half) annexes, 'Kraftstoffverbrauch der Heeresgruppe', HL microfilm 632, No. 7214558.

<sup>283</sup> Maier, *Drama zwischen Budapest und Wien*, 129; also 'Die Vernehmung von Generaloberst Jodl', 541.

<sup>284</sup> Guderian, *Erinnerungen eines Soldaten*, 357.

<sup>285</sup> Maier, *Drama zwischen Budapest und Wien*, 134.

to Wöhler, by way of reinforcements. Hitler issued a number of 'Führer orders' on concealment and secrecy in connection with the movements of the two SS armoured corps. All shoulder-strap insignia and cuff titles were to be removed, and vehicle number plates were to be concealed. Any breach of the rules on secrecy was subject to the death penalty. I SS Armoured Corps divisions were disguised as IV SS Armoured Corps 'replacement squadrons', II SS Armoured Corps divisions as a 'training group', and Sixth Armoured Army HQ as 'Senior Engineer Commander Hungary'.

German strategy had to be revised after the fall of Budapest. Deliberately deceptive radio messages were sent, giving the impression that Sixth Armoured Army was moving to the Frankfurt an der Oder–Fürstenwalde area. The commander-in-chief, SS Oberstgruppenführer Josef 'Sepp' Dietrich, made conspicuous appearances at all bases in and around Berlin. Meanwhile, the trains to Vienna were diverted, travelling via Dresden–Prague–Brno. I SS Armoured Corps (1st and 12th SS Armoured Divisions) was the first to reach the Győr–Komárom area, but the arrival of the army was considerably delayed by the breakdown of the rail-transport network caused by the ongoing Allied air raids.

### *Operation SOUTH WIND*

Before embarking on any further offensive operations, Hitler was anxious to preclude the possibility of a Soviet attack from the Garam bridgehead, from which the Pliyev Group could threaten the oil refineries at Komárom and Bratislava, and the gateway to Vienna, at any time. Two armoured corps were therefore to attack and destroy the bridgehead, and establish German bridgeheads across the Garam. I SS Armoured Corps and Armoured Corps 'Feldherrnhalle' were to attack from the north and north-east. The operation, code-named SOUTH WIND, was favoured by the fact that, for once, sufficient infantry (three divisions)<sup>286</sup> was available.<sup>287</sup> Army Group South had 260 operational tanks ready for the attack.<sup>288</sup> A few weeks earlier Malinovsky had withdrawn the Pliyev Group and 6th Guards Armoured Army from the bridgehead to the east for refreshment, so the Soviet defence consisted only of XXIV and XXV Rifle Corps, with a total of six divisions and two armoured brigades.<sup>289</sup>

The attack could not be launched until the morning of 17 February, on account of the weather. Within 24 hours, in spite of the thaw, it broke through the front and reduced the bridgehead by 30 per cent.<sup>290</sup> However, the Soviet forces rapidly

<sup>286</sup> On the Hungarian side, only the 23rd Reserve Division combat group took part in this operation, its units being allocated to the 46th Infantry Division.

<sup>287</sup> Soviet historians sought to attribute the German successes to the fact that the German tanks had night-vision equipment (Zakharov, *Délkelet- és Közép-Európa felszabadítása*, 366). However, that was not the case: only one armoured company deployed in the Hungarian theatre of war had this equipment.

<sup>288</sup> According to figures in KTB H.Gr. Süd, Feb. (second half), annexes, 'Panzerverluste zwischen den 17.–24.2.1945', HL microfilm 630, Nos. 7213824 ff.

<sup>289</sup> See KTB H.Gr. Süd, Feb. (second half), daily report 17 Feb. 1945, HL microfilm 630, Nos. 7213566–72.

<sup>290</sup> KTB H.Gr. Süd, Feb. (second half), daily report 22 Feb. 1945, HL microfilm 630, Nos. 7213813 ff.

established deeply staggered defences. To facilitate the offensive, 96th Infantry Division embarked on a landing operation, crossing the Danube from south to north, and established a bridgehead in the defenders' rear. The division knew exactly what to expect because it had already had experience from the other direction a few weeks earlier. Despite the high water-level (the Danube rose 3.3 metres in a single day), the combat group soon managed to get 20 assault guns over to the other bank. Soviet air superiority caused numerous losses. The Soviet defence stiffened after the first three days, although 7th Guards Army evacuated its southern wing, at considerable loss.<sup>291</sup> The troops of two divisions had to make their way to safety on the other bank of the Garam by jumping from one ice floe to another.<sup>292</sup> Nevertheless, the Soviet artillery still held its ground in the central section of the bridgehead, and the last defended positions were finally taken only on 24 February.

Several Soviet divisions were destroyed in the course of the operation, and both rifle corps lost almost all their heavy weapons. The Wehrmacht reported that it had taken 700 prisoners, counted 4,000 enemy dead, shot down 90 tanks, and captured 334 cannon. The German losses were also high: 6,471 dead, wounded, or missing, and 156 tanks and assault guns out of action for a shorter or longer period.<sup>293</sup> Even more seriously, the concealment of Sixth Armoured Army's advance had been largely sacrificed, and its deployment had been delayed for several days as a result of the tough Soviet resistance. The success of Operation SOUTH WIND was nevertheless an almost essential precondition for any counter-offensives in the Transdanubian area, because a lasting Soviet bridgehead could threaten Komárom, Bratislava, and Vienna at any time and hold the group attacking south of the Danube in check, as had already happened at the beginning of January.

Regardless of these events, the Stavka gave orders on 17 February (the day before Operation SOUTH WIND began) that 2nd and 3rd Ukrainian Fronts were to prepare for a new offensive against Vienna and Bratislava. Three days later, when the Stavka had definite information about the German offensive to be launched in March, Tolbukhin was ordered to go over to the defensive.<sup>294</sup> For the purposes of the planned Soviet offensive, 9th Guards Army (nine replenished rifle divisions, some of them from Finland, and numerous other units) were transferred from the high command's reserves and placed under the command of 3rd Ukrainian Front. The Soviet 26th Army was established, as from 28 January, from the reinforcements brought in. And 2nd Ukrainian Front also assigned 27th Army and other army units to Tolbukhin. The offensive was set to begin on 15 March. Until then, Tolbukhin and his troops had to defend the territory between the Drava and Lake Velence, without deploying 9th Guards Army.

<sup>291</sup> Zakharov, *Délkelet- és Közép-Európa felszabadítása*, 274.

<sup>292</sup> On this, see the critical account in Zamercev, *Emlékek, gondolatok*, Budapest, 5 ff.

<sup>293</sup> KTB H.Gr. Süd, 'Tagesmeldungen und Fernschreiben AOK8 an H.Gr. Süd am 21.2.1945', HL 630, Nos. 7213824 ff.

<sup>294</sup> Zakharov, *Délkelet- és Közép-Európa felszabadítása*, 274–6; Gosztony, 'Planung, Stellenwert und Ablauf der Wiener Angriffsoperation', 136.

*Operation SPRING AWAKENING*

The staffs of Army Group South, Army Detachment Balck, and Sixth Armoured Army drew up several plans of attack based on Hitler's instructions.<sup>295</sup> The planning was made more difficult by the fact that, with Soviet reserves massing to the west and south of Budapest, there was no question of repeating the successes achieved in KONRAD III. Those reserves—9th Guards Army, II Guards Mechanized Corps, and V Cavalry Corps—posed a serious threat to the flank of the attacking group. Sixth Armoured Army accordingly demanded that the concentration of forces round Budapest be destroyed first. However, the army group rejected this solution on the grounds that there were not enough forces or enough time. Furthermore, that option would effectively leave the Second Armoured Army attack over the Drava to itself, whereas a double pincer attack from the south and the north was likely to be much more productive.

On 25 February Weichs, the C-in-C South-East, and Wöhler were summoned to Berlin for private talks with Hitler. That same evening Hitler decided that Army Detachment Balck's improved plan was to be implemented.<sup>296</sup> Under this revised plan, southern Transdanubia was to be attacked first, in the double pincer movement described above, after which the forces round Budapest were to be attacked and destroyed. The plan also provided for I Cavalry Corps to be moved to Second Army so as to form a western attack group before Nagykanizsa. This last measure, however, seemed no longer feasible, because there was not enough time and it would unacceptably weaken the attack group, which was already short of infantry. Hitler did not take into account the risk of a Soviet counter-attack from the Vértes mountains. It is a telling example of his lack of realism that he told Wöhler that, if the offensive was successful, 'substantial bridgeheads were to be established across the Danube, at Dunaföldvár and Dunapentele, with a view to an eastward thrust on Budapest'.<sup>297</sup> A further example of Hitler's illusions is his observation that, if the offensive was successful, 'a rich booty of German weapons' would be recovered from the Bulgarians.<sup>298</sup>

The offensive was ill-starred from the outset. The thaw set in at the end of February, and it poured with rain. The few approach roads were choked with vehicles, which Soviet reconnaissance planes could not fail to spot. In any case, the Soviet general staff had been reliably informed about the forthcoming German operation since the end of February. Huge stretches of land were under water. This seemed to be a particularly bad omen, since German offensives in Transdanubia had already been prevented or strongly hampered by thaw and melting snow on three occasions: the first time in December 1944, when Operation LATE VINTAGE could not be launched; the second time during Operation SOUTH WIND, when the

<sup>295</sup> KTB H.Gr. Süd, 'Planung für "F", Tagesmeldung vom 20.2.1945', HL microfilm 630, No. 7213610, and OKH H.Gr. Süd, 'Vorschläge für Angriff Frühlingserwachen', HL microfilm 630, Nos. 7213770–5.

<sup>296</sup> KTB H.Gr. Süd, daily report 25 Feb. 1945, HL microfilm 630, Nos. 7213651–3.

<sup>297</sup> Based on KTB H.Gr. Süd of 27 Feb. 1945, quoted in Maier, *Drama zwischen Budapest und Wien*, 179.

<sup>298</sup> Ibid.

Table V.vii.13. Relative strength of forces at the beginning of the offensive in Transdanubia on 6 March 1945

	Divisions	Tanks and assault guns	Troops (ration strength)
Army Group South*	25	595	297,903
3rd Ukrainian Front (excl. 9th Guards Army)**	55	407	465,000

\*Most works (e.g. *Geschichte des Großen Vaterländischen Krieges*, v. 226) give the figures for the whole army group, despite the fact that 13 of the 18 divisions in the group faced a different Soviet army front. On the figures for Army Group South, see Ungváry, *A magyar honvédség*, 452 and 568; \*\**Grif sekretnosti sniat*, 228.

effectiveness of German armour was severely reduced by flooding; and the third time when flooding forced C-in-C South-East to move Operation FOREST DEVIL away from the Osijek area to Donji Miholjac.<sup>299</sup> The German staffs already had a great deal of experience of the Hungarian territory and weather in the precise area where it was planned to launch the offensive. However, it was decided to go ahead with the plan, despite previous experience and warnings from a number of Hungarian officers, who pointed out that the banks of the Sárvíz were unsuitable for an attack by armoured forces at this time of year. As an alternative measure, Army Detachment Balck introduced 'road court-martials', which were to 'deliver summary judgement on anyone responsible for repairing the roads who failed to do his duty'.<sup>300</sup>

Apart from tanks and assault guns, the attacking forces were weaker in every respect. The enemy superiority in artillery appeared particularly overwhelming. Sixth Armoured Army only had about 400 cannon to deploy in its 40-kilometre attack sector, whereas the Soviet defenders had up to 65 cannon and grenade launchers at their disposal for every kilometre of the front, that is, 6½ times as many. The only Hungarian units deployed were 25th Infantry Division, a 20th Infantry Division regimental unit, and the Hungarian artillery units already incorporated.

The Soviet side also had problems to contend with. The defensive positions were only 25 to 40 kilometres deep. The terrain was split up by two water barriers, Lake Balaton and Lake Velence, which greatly reduced the room for manoeuvre. The difficulty of getting supplies to 3rd Ukrainian Front across the Danube was another weak point, which had already had an adverse effect during KONRAD III. A decisive remedy was needed, since the four existing military bridges were not enough, so the Soviet forces constructed a rope-bridge over the Danube as well. The supply infrastructure was supplemented by a pipeline and a ferry, and large depots were established on both sides of the Danube. In this way, Tolbukhin managed to ensure supplies of ammunition and fuel throughout the defensive battle, whereas two

<sup>299</sup> KTB H.Gr. Süd, 'Fernschreiben OB Südost an H.Gr. Süd', annexes 22 Feb. 1945, HL microfilm 630, Nos. 7213780–1.

<sup>300</sup> KTB H.Gr. Süd, Mar. 1945 (first half), HL microfilm 631, No. 7214135, daily report 3 Mar. 1945; Maier, *Drama zwischen Budapest und Wien*, 185–91.

months earlier the lack of supplies had been fatal for his troops. The defensive system was built up to a particularly dense concentration of 2,500 to 3,000 anti-tank mines and 65 cannon and grenade launchers per kilometre in the sectors of main effort. Independent anti-tank regiments from the Stavka reserves were brought in, raising the level of anti-tank defence to 28 anti-tank cannon per kilometre.<sup>301</sup>

The Soviet forces established three defence lines and a number of intermediate positions between Lake Balaton and Lake Velence, moving 27th Army and four mobile corps into the second line.<sup>302</sup> Soviet reconnaissance had followed the German advance, so Tolbukhin was able to position his forces without risk of error. He massed 64 per cent of his artillery between the two lakes in the path of Sixth Armoured Army's main thrust. On 3 March, that is, three days before the beginning of the German offensive, 3rd Ukrainian Front was already able to report that the necessary regrouping had been completed.<sup>303</sup> The model for the defensive measures was the tank battle in the Kursk salient, where the Soviet command had already dealt successfully with a qualitatively superior enemy.<sup>304</sup>

The only weak point in the Soviet defence was the front between the Drava and Lake Balaton. Here too, the terrain was not much more favourable. If the entire Sixth Armoured Army was deployed, this was the most likely point for a breakthrough, especially as Tolbukhin's reserves were not positioned behind this section of the front. However, oddly enough, the idea was not mooted in the plans for SPRING AWAKENING. The planners contented themselves with the limited attack by Second Armoured Army.

The attack by C-in-C South-East started first, at 01.00 on 6 March 1945. Second Armoured Army launched its attack soon afterwards at Nagybajom, with relatively limited forces, but it was initially unable to make any headway. The main force struck between Lake Balaton and Lake Velence at 04.00. However, I Cavalry Corps gained no ground, and I SS Armoured Corps too was only able, with difficulty, to advance 2 kilometres. II SS Armoured Corps did not join in the operation at first, because it was not yet fully prepared. Tanks and heavy vehicles remained stuck in the mud. As Dietrich observed in his daily report: 'The roads are catastrophic.'<sup>305</sup> An additional operation by assault troops had no result, apart from heavy losses among the troops themselves. III Armoured Corps too gained little ground. The operation was clearly a failure.

The nervous mood of the army group was heightened on the first day of the operation by misleading reports from II SS Armoured Corps.<sup>306</sup> The corps

<sup>301</sup> Zakharov, *Délkelet- és Közép-Európa felszabadítása*, 285.

<sup>302</sup> *A hadművészeti története*, 74–99.

<sup>303</sup> Zakharov, *Délkelet- és Közép-Európa felszabadítása*, 281–7.

<sup>304</sup> Portugalskii, Domanik, and Kovalenko, *Marshal Timoshenko*, 318. See also Part II of the present volume.

<sup>305</sup> KTB H.Gr. Süd, Mar. 1945 (first half), daily report 6 Mar. 1945, HL microfilm 630, No. 7214172.

<sup>306</sup> KTB H.Gr. Süd, Mar. 1945 (first half), daily report 6 Mar. 1945, HL microfilm 630, Nos. 7214165–70.

**Table V.vii.14.** Breakdown of German and Hungarian units in the Carpathian Basin on 6 March 1945

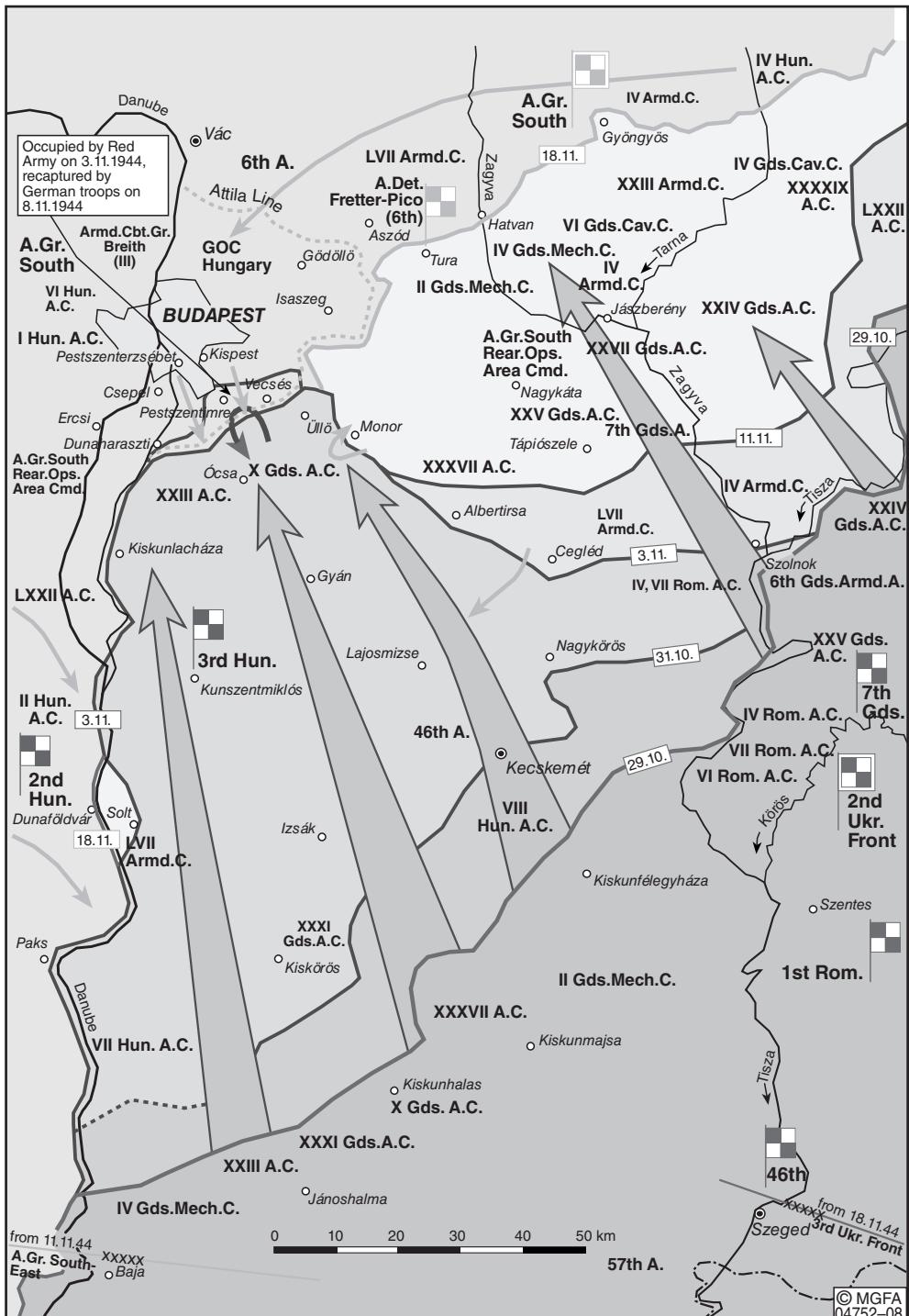
Divisions	Corps	Armies	Under rehabilitation, en route, or under formation
320th P.Inf.Div.			13th Armd.Div.
Hun. 5th Res.Div. (parts)	XXXIX Mtn. (Hun. V)	First Armd.	37th SS Cav.Div. 232nd Armd.Div.
Hun. 16th Inf.Div.			Armd.Inf.Div. FFH 153rd Field
78th P.Inf.Div.		(parts Hun. 1st)	
304th Inf.Div.			Training Division
76th Inf.Div.			Hun. 'Szent László' Inf.Div.
15th Inf.Div.	XXIX.	Eighth	Hun. 1st Mtn.Div.
101st Lt.Inf.Div.	(Hun. 27th Lt.		
Hun. 5th Res.Div. (parts)	Inf.Div.)		
Hun. 24th Inf.Div.			
271st P.Inf.Div.			
Kaiser Div.Btln.	LXXII		(parts Hun. 1st)
8th. Lt.Inf.Div.			
211st P.Inf.Div.			
46th P.Inf.Div.			
Hun. 20th Inf.Div. (parts)	'Feldherrnhalle'		
357th Inf.Div.			
711st Inf.Div.			
Hun. 23rd Res.Div.	Hun. VIII (Hun. 3rd)	Sixth	
96th Inf.Div.			
6th Armd.Div.			
Hun. 1st Cav.Div.			
5th SS Armd.Div.	IV SS Armd.		
3rd SS Armd.Div.		(Balck)	
Hun. 2nd Armd.Div.			
1st. Armd.Div.			
3rd Armd.Div.	III Armd.		
356th Inf.Div.			
2nd SS Armd.Div.			
9th SS Armd.Div.	II SS Armd.		
23rd Armd.Div.			
44th Inf.Div.		Sixth Armd.	
1st SS Armd.Div.			
12th SS Armd.Div.	I SS Armd.		
Hun. 25th Inf.Div. (parts)			(Dietrich)
3rd. Cav.Div.			
4th Cav.Div.	I Cav.		
Hun. 25th Inf.Div. (parts)			
Hun. 20th Inf.Div. (parts)	Hun. II		
118th Lt.Inf.Div.	XXII	Second Armd.	
92nd Armd.Inf.Div.			
13th SS Mtn.Div.		(Angelis)	
71st Inf.Div.	LXVIII		(Hun. 8th Repl.
1st P.Mtn.Div.			Div.)
16th SS Armd.Inf.Div.			

*Note:* See Table V.vii.13. 'Relative strength of forces at the beginning of the offensive in Transdanubia on 6 March 1945'.



Map V.vii.1. The battles round Debrecen in the first half of October 1944

Sources: BA-MA, RH 19 v/37, 51a, 51b; OKH situation maps, 5, 8, and 11 Oct. 1944, BA-MA, Kart RH2, H.Gr.Süd/5776 and 5779, Ost/916; Geschichte des Zweiten Weltkrieges 1939–1945, Karte 134; Zakharov, Délkelet—és Közép-Európa felszabadítása.



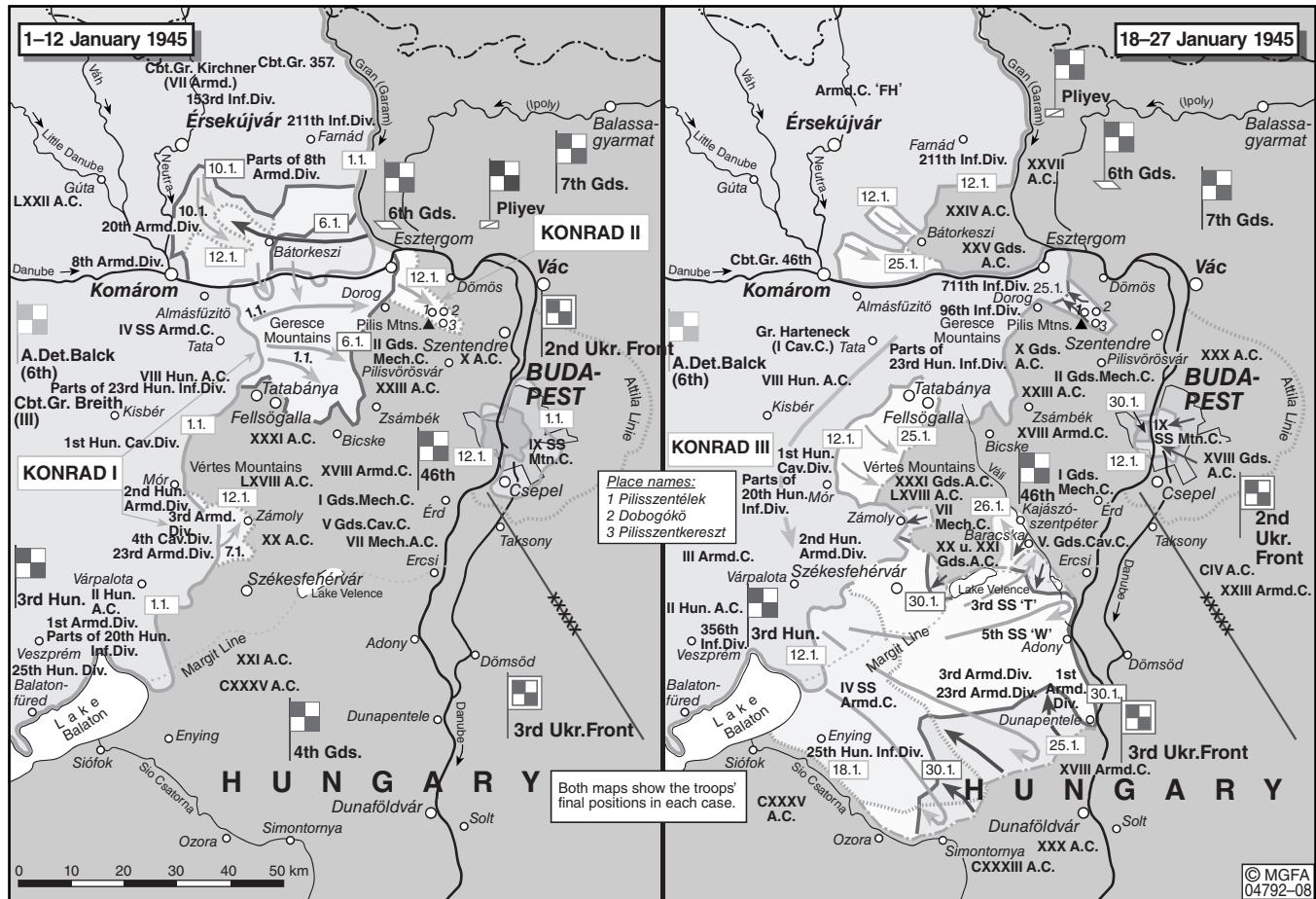
Map V.vii.2. The battles in the Hungarian Lowland Plain (29 October to 18 November 1944)

Sources: OKH situation maps, 29 and 31 Oct., 3, 11 and 18 Nov. 1944, BA-MA, Kart RH2, Ost/1212, 1214, 1215, 1218, 1226 and 1233; Ungváry, *A magyar honvédség a második világháborúban*.



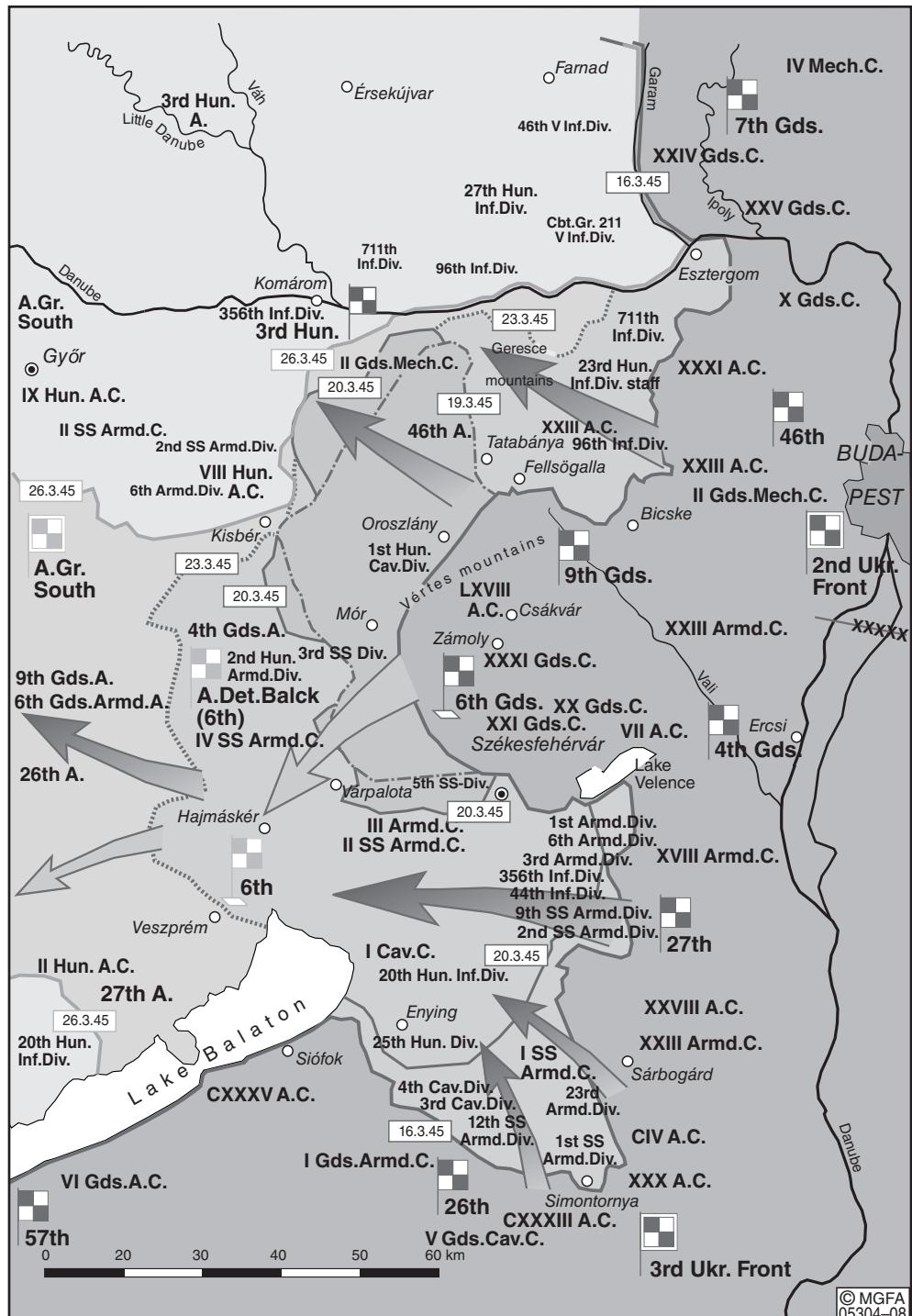
Map V.vii.3. The encirclement of Budapest in December 1944

Sources: OKH situation maps, 26 and 30 Nov., 9, 20 and 23 Dec. 1944, and 1 Jan. 1945, BA-MA, Kart RH2, Ost/1241, 5177, 5187, 1254, 1265, 1268, and 1278; *Geschichte des Zweiten Weltkrieges 1939–1945*, Map 134; Ungváry, *A magyar honvédség a második világháborúban*.



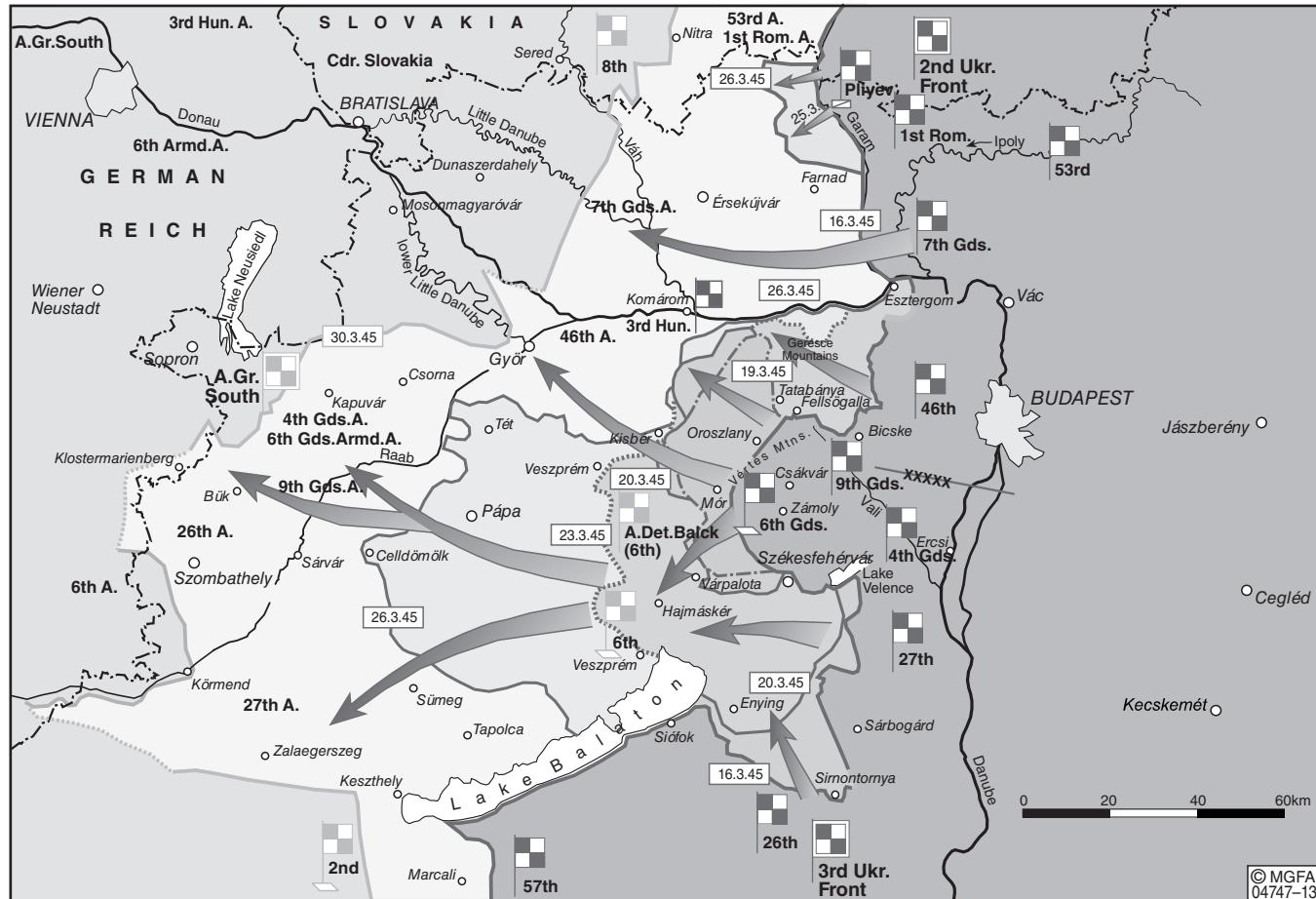
Map V.vii.4. Relief Operations KONRAD I to III (1 to 27 January 1945)

Sources: OKH situation maps, 1, 6, 10, 12, 18, 25, 26, and 30 Jan. 1945, BA-MA, Kart RH2, Ost/1278, 1287, 1294, 1238, 1307, 1321, 1322, and 1331; Ungváry, *A magyar honvédség a második világháborúban*; Maier, *Drama zwischen Budapest und Wien. Der Endkampf der 6. Panzerarmee 1945*.



Map V.vii.5. The Soviet breakthrough at Lake Balaton (16 to 23 March 1945)

Sources: OKH situation maps, 16, 19, 20, 23, and 26 Mar. 1945, BA-MA, Kart RH2, Ost/1414, 1417, 1418, 1421, and 1424; *Geschichte des Zweiten Weltkrieges 1939–1945*, Map 149; Zakharov, *Délkelet—és Közép-Európa felszabadítása*.



Map VII.6. The battles in Western Hungary, mid- to end of March 1945

Sources: OKH situation maps, 16, 19, 20, 23, 26, and 30 Mar. 1945, BA-MA, Kart RH2, Ost/1414, 1417, 1418, 1421, 1424, and 1428; Ungváry, *A magyar honvédség a második világháborúban*; Geschichte des Zweiten Weltkrieges 1939–1945, Map 149.



Map V.vii.7. The battles in the area east of Vienna and the capture of Vienna in 1945

Sources: OKH situation maps, 30 Mar., and 2, 12, and 16 Apr. 1945, BA-MA, Kart RH2, Ost/ 1428, 5514, 6893, and 1430; Uneváry, *A magyar honvédség a második világháborúban*.

repeatedly reported the start of its attack, but there was no sign of it. It finally went into action in the evening. The reason for the delay was most probably that assembly was not yet complete. A substantial part of Sixth Armoured Army, around 290 tanks and assault guns, did not arrive until 13 March.<sup>307</sup> However, this did not have particularly serious consequences, because the weather conditions made it almost impossible to deploy the available tanks in any case.

Further breaches were made in the Soviet defence system on 7 March, but progress was so slow that there could clearly be no question of an operational breakthrough. Army Group South still hoped that 'the attack will [...] gradually eat through the defences, as it did yesterday'.<sup>308</sup> Wöhler was nevertheless obliged to note that the enemy had not yet deployed his operational reserves 'at the front', but was holding them back. By 10 March the German attack in the south had managed to gain some ground, reaching the Sió canal in two places, at Simontornya and Mezőkomárom. But the attacks in the direction of the Danube were unsuccessful. There the Soviet defence held firmly to its positions on the Sárvíz canal. By 11 March the sappers had removed 20,917 mines, but the attackers were still unable to exploit their greatest advantage, their modern armour, on account of the weather. Hitler was getting very nervous, and Sixth Armoured Army was required to produce additional 'Führer reports' for him, every day, on the losses of men, tanks, and assault guns.

Meanwhile, the situation was becoming serious for Tolbukhin too. Sixth Armoured Army's slow but steady advance led him to overestimate the enemy. On 9 March he sought the Stavka's permission to deploy the 9th Guards Army in the defences. He also suggested that it might be necessary for him to move to the other side of the Danube with his staff, or perhaps even with the entire army front. This suggestion is all the more difficult to understand as Tolbukhin still had reserves at his disposal,<sup>309</sup> and Sixth Armoured Army had not even reached the rear defence lines. Stalin replied to this request in person, in his own distinctive style, slowly but raising his voice: 'Comrade Tolbukhin, if you are thinking of prolonging the war for another five or six months, then by all means order your troops to move back. It will undoubtedly be quieter there. But I don't think that is what you want. The defence must therefore be conducted on the left bank of the Danube, and you too should remain there with your staff.'<sup>310</sup>

<sup>307</sup> KTB H.Gr. Süd, BA-MA RH19V/62, 'Führermeldung über Verluste und Panzerlage', according to which Sixth Armoured Army had altogether 979 tanks and assault guns on 13 March 1945, a further 43 having been lost since the attack was launched. On 8 March 1945 the 'Führermeldung' had reported 687 tanks and assault guns.

<sup>308</sup> KTB H.Gr. Süd, March 1945 (first half), daily report 6 Mar. 1945, HL microfilm 630, Nos. 7214159–61; Maier, *Drama zwischen Budapest und Wien*, 217.

<sup>309</sup> By 11 March Sixth Armoured Army had reported the destruction of 34 Soviet tanks, which means that Tolbukhin still had at least 373 tanks and assault guns available. As of 10 March Tolbukhin had not deployed V Cavalry Corps, VII Mechanized Corps, or XVIII and XXIII Armoured Corps at all, or only partially.

<sup>310</sup> Stemenko, *A vezérkar a háború éveiben*, 303 ff.

Stalin was right. Although conditions on the roads began to improve after 12 March, by then the German offensive had already ground to a halt.<sup>311</sup> The German forces had advanced 40 kilometres at most, over a width of 25 to 30 kilometres, and were still more than 20 kilometres from the Danube. Even if they managed to reach the river, they would not be much nearer to achieving the aim of the offensive. Tolbukhin's troops stood to the south and north of the breakthrough area, in some places still in the second defensive line. And between Siófok and Pincehely in the south and Lake Velence, the German forces had not reached the third defensive line at all.

The balance-sheet of the latest German operation was therefore extremely negative. In the first week Army Group South lost 12,358 dead, wounded, or missing (German troops alone). Tank losses were small in comparison (31 out of a total of 1,796, of which 722 were operational),<sup>312</sup> but that merely shows that armour could not be deployed. The offensive cost Tolbukhin 32,899 men altogether, that is, more than twice as many,<sup>313</sup> and 3rd Ukrainian Front lost 152 tanks and 415 anti-tank cannon.<sup>314</sup> This reflects badly on 3rd Ukrainian Front, as the defender always has the advantage in a deeply staggered defensive system.

The fortunes of war had finally turned in favour of the Red Army. On 14 March disturbing news began to arrive from the area of operations of IV SS Armoured Corps and the Hungarian 3rd Army. They reported heavy enemy motorized traffic of up to 1,000 vehicles. German air reconnaissance confirmed these findings.<sup>315</sup> Army Group South and Sixth Armoured Army would have preferred to cease their attack and regroup at Székesfehérvár, in order to meet the impending Soviet counter-attack and to make better use of their own troops' offensive capabilities. Also, the terrain east of the Sárvíz canal was likely to be in a better state. However, everyone seems to have known that Hitler would not approve this regrouping. As expected, he refused to grant the army group's request and insisted that the attack continue. This decision suited the Soviet command, as the attacking units were taking more and more risks and getting further and further away from their Lake Balaton–Lake Velence starting position.<sup>316</sup> Sixth Armoured Army secretly began preparations to regroup I SS Armoured Corps south of Székesfehérvár. Hitler finally approved the regrouping at 21.30 on 15 March. But, by then, it was already too late.

Balck did not take the danger of the Soviet offensive seriously. Apart from a few splinter units, he had not positioned any German reserves in the Vértes mountain passages.<sup>317</sup> The mountains were defended only by the Hungarian 1st Cavalry

<sup>311</sup> KTB H.Gr. Süd, Mar. 1945 (first half), daily report 13 Feb. 1945, HL microfilm 630, No. 7214284.

<sup>312</sup> Pz.AOK6 report to H.Gr. Süd, 15 Mar. 1954, BA-MA RH19V/62.

<sup>313</sup> *Grif sekretnosti sniat*, 228.

<sup>314</sup> KTB H.Gr. Süd, Mar. 1945 (first half), daily report 17 Mar. 1945, HL microfilm 630, No. 7214391.

<sup>315</sup> KTB H.Gr. Süd, Mar. 1945 (first half), daily report 14 Mar. 1945, HL microfilm 630, Nos. 7214289–91 and 7214295.

<sup>316</sup> KTB H.Gr. Süd, Mar. 1945 (first half), annexes, 'Fernschreiben Sepp Dietrich', HL microfilm 632, No. 7214541; Maier, *Drama zwischen Budapest und Wien*, 247 and 582–4.

<sup>317</sup> File note, H.Gr. Süd, 14 Mar. 1945, annexes, 'Reserven des IV. SS-Panzerkorps', BA-MA RH19V/62.

Division and the Hungarian 2nd Armoured Division. The terrain was not suitable for an armoured breakthrough. However, once its forces got through the mountains the Soviet command was able to break through on both sides, through the passages between the Vértes mountains and the Bakony mountains at Mór, and between the Vértes mountains and the Gerecse mountains at Tatabánya, and deploy its armour *en masse* without endangering its rear communications.

Considering the successes that a single German armoured division could achieve in good weather and on well-chosen terrain (20th Armoured Division alone had sufficed to stop an attack by the entire 6th Guards Armoured Army in January 1945, and IV SS Armoured Corps had destroyed nearly all of Tolbukhin's mobile forces in Operation KONRAD III), the decision to deploy a vast armada of tanks seems highly irresponsible on the part of the German command. Army Group South had 1,796 tanks in all on 15 March, but 1,024 of them were under repair—further proof that it was a bad plan to deploy them.<sup>318</sup> The three battalions of King Tiger tanks deployed on this occasion were hardly used at all in the attacks.<sup>319</sup> Sixth Armoured Army had only 957 armoured personnel carriers at its disposal on 13 March (a further 205 were under short-term repair, and 123 under long-term repair). It is telling that only one such vehicle had been written off up to that date, which means that this effective offensive weapon was not used at all.<sup>320</sup> The amount of force expended in the operation is shown strikingly by the fact that some 30 per cent of all German armoured vehicles were deployed in SPRING AWAKENING. In normal circumstances this massive force could have achieved successes similar to those of the Red Army's offensive at Iași–Chișinău in August 1944 or its offensive from the Baranów bridgehead in January 1945. But, fortunately for all involved, this wrong-headed deployment of forces by the German command helped to hasten the end of the war itself.

### *The Soviet Counter-Strike: The Offensive against Vienna and Bratislava*

On 16 March the area north of Székesfehérvár was covered in thick mist. It started to clear only around midday, thus delaying the Soviet attack for a few hours. The Soviet plan for the operation had originally foreseen a two-pronged attack, with 2nd Ukrainian Front attacking at the point of concentration in the direction of Bratislava, while Tolbukhin's 3rd Ukrainian Front advanced on Vienna. Stalin changed these plans on 9 March by assigning 9th Guards Army to Tolbukhin's army front.<sup>321</sup> As an incentive to further resistance during the defence against SPRING AWAKENING, Stalin had already held out to Tolbukhin the prospect of winning the laurels for the conquest of Vienna. Now 4th and 9th Guards Armies were to attack between Zámoly and Székesfehérvár along a 31-kilometre-wide line,

<sup>318</sup> BA-MA, Map RH-2 Ost, 15 Mar. 1945.

<sup>319</sup> As well as 501st SS Heavy Armoured Battalion and 503rd and 509th Heavy Armoured Battalions, 1st and 3rd SS Armoured Divisions also had a Tiger company.

<sup>320</sup> Maier, *Drama zwischen Budapest und Wien*, 105–91.

<sup>321</sup> Gosztony, 'Planung, Stellenwert und Ablauf der Wiener Angriffsoperation', 137; Zakharov, *Délkelet- és Közép-Európa felszabadítása*, 310.

in order to cut off the German Sixth Armoured Army's advance between Lake Balaton and Lake Velence.

The attackers' superiority in artillery was overwhelming, with 5,425 cannon and grenade launchers deployed along the 31-kilometre line. All that the defenders could muster in response to this mass of artillery were 14 cannon and grenade launchers per kilometre. The Soviet superiority was 12½ to 1.<sup>322</sup> The plan was for Malinovsky's 2nd Ukrainian Front to break through the front with 46th Army and 6th Guards Armoured Army at Csákvár, between the Vértes and Gerecse mountains, and extend the attack towards Komárom–Győr. The attacking armies were almost at full strength, with 80 men on average in the 4th Guards Army rifle companies, and 140 in the 9th Guards Army rifle companies<sup>323</sup>—equivalent to the battalion strength of many German and Hungarian divisions at the time. The 3rd Ukrainian Front units deployed in the attack comprised more than 745,600 men in all, and 2nd Ukrainian Front, which was to attack north of the Danube, had 272,200 men at its disposal.<sup>324</sup> This fighting force was supported by close on 1,600 tanks and assault guns, though most of them belonged to the reserve or were deployed against Sixth Armoured Army.<sup>325</sup> More armoured forces were brought in during the offensive, but it is impossible to give exact figures as the records are missing. In carrying out his earlier defensive mission, Tolbukhin had been obliged to position all his mobile corps between Lake Balaton and Lake Velence, so they could not take part immediately in the extension of the attack.

The Soviet attack on 16 March made rapid progress north of Zámoly, where there were only weak Hungarian units holding the front, but IV SS Armoured Corps managed at first to hold its positions to the south. On the German side, it was claimed that the reason for the breakthrough was that the Hungarian hussars 'ran away'. There is no basis for that claim. The hussars division and the Hungarian 2nd Armoured Army launched several counter-attacks that same day, even though they were hopelessly outnumbered.<sup>326</sup> By the evening, the centre of Army

**Table V.VII.15.** Relative strength of forces at the beginning of the Vienna Offensive Operation between Lake Balaton and the Danube on 16 March 1945

	Divisions	Tank and assault guns	Troops
Army Group South	25	772	270,000
2nd and 3rd Ukrainian Fronts	77	approx. 1,250	1,171,800

<sup>322</sup> Zakharov, *Délkelet- és Közép Európa felszabadítása*, 314.

<sup>323</sup> Ibid. 315.

<sup>324</sup> *Graf sekretnosti sniat*, 218, 228.

<sup>325</sup> For detailed figures, see Kolomietz and Moshchansky, *Tank lend-liza*, and Svirin et al., *Boi u ozera Balaton*.

<sup>326</sup> See, in this connection, KTB H.Gr. Süd, Mar. 1945 (second half), daily report 16 Mar. 1944, HL microfilm 631, Nos. 7214587–9, and Balck, *Ordnung im Chaos*. Against this, see HL, Tomka and 2nd Hussar Regiment war diary, TGY-3087, 27.

Detachment Balck's defence in the Vértes mountains had been smashed over a width of 30 kilometres and to a depth of 10 kilometres.<sup>327</sup> This breakthrough in the narrows at Mór was also secured from the north by the destruction of the Hungarian defensive front in the Vértes mountains, so the attack could now be extended. Stalin thereupon personally ordered Malinovsky, who could not conceal his bitter resentment at the decision,<sup>328</sup> to let Tolbukhin have 6th Guards Armoured Army so that he could extend the success in his sector. 6th Guards Armoured Army was to join 9th Guards Army and encircle Székesfehérvár from the north. However, this last-minute regrouping meant that 6th Guards Armoured Army could not be deployed until 19 March—a delay that was to have fateful repercussions for the Soviet operation.

The situation became even more acute in the course of 16 March. The attack by the Soviet 46th Army began and the first battalions were already breaking through the positions held by the Hungarian 23rd Reserve Division, Combat Group Ameiser, and 96th Infantry Division, at Tatabánya in the narrows between the Vértes and Gerecse mountains. By the evening they had penetrated the German-Hungarian positions to a depth of 10 kilometres.

The OKH was very slow to react. Guderian did not notice the impending danger until the next day, when he ordered 'a fundamental revision of all plans'.<sup>329</sup> At first Hitler could not be persuaded to change his mind, and would not allow 16th SS Armoured Infantry Division to be withdrawn from Second Armoured Army and assigned to Army Detachment Balck, as requested. He also insisted that the army group 'telex a situation report' on the latest use of I SS Armoured Corps north of Lake Velence.<sup>330</sup> While this protracted war of words between Führer headquarters and Army Group South was going on, the Soviet spearheads crossed the line on the Vértes mountain ridge. Army Detachment Balck again laid the blame on the Hungarians, who had allegedly withdrawn into the Vértes mountains 'without any enemy pressure'.<sup>331</sup> In fact, the Hungarian positions had been ploughed up by a hurricane of artillery fire and overrun by several army corps. Some units of 1st Hussars Division had been totally destroyed by the fury of the attack.

In this situation, Sixth Armoured Army planned to launch a northward counter-attack from the Székesfehérvár area with I and II Armoured Corps and 356th Infantry Division, so as to cut the Soviet spearheads' rear communications. Even at this point, Balck still did not really grasp the situation. He suggested that it would be better to launch the counter-attack from the Bicske area, north of the Vértes mountains, which would have meant losing two days. This risk was 'still worth taking [...]. If necessary, [...] the battle of annihilation [sic] would have to be fought to the west of the Vértes mountains.'<sup>332</sup> The battle of annihilation was

<sup>327</sup> KTB H.Gr. Süd, Mar. 1945 (second half), daily report 16 Mar. 1945, HL microfilm 631, Nos. 7214924–4.

<sup>328</sup> Stemenko, *A vezérkar a háború éveiben*, 390.

<sup>329</sup> Maier, *Drama zwischen Budapest und Wien*, 261.

<sup>330</sup> Ibid. 263.

<sup>331</sup> KTB H.Gr. Süd, Mar. 1945 (second half), annexes, HL microfilm 631, No. 7214924; Maier, *Drama zwischen Budapest und Wien*, 265.

<sup>332</sup> Maier, *Drama zwischen Budapest und Wien*, 272.

already being waged against Army Detachment Balck, and had been for the past two days! Balck's lack of realism is also shown by the report he sent on 17 March: 'Enemy breakthrough prevented so far.'<sup>333</sup> However, Wöhler had already noted on 15 March that, 'in assessing the situation, General Balck displays his usual optimism, even when misplaced'.<sup>334</sup>

On 18 March Hitler finally gave permission to withdraw II SS Armoured Corps and regroup in the direction of Székesfehérvár. The regrouping of 356th Infantry Division and 6th Armoured Division took place at the same time. The gap to the west of the Vértes mountains was to be secured for the time being by a blocking line manned by 325th Assault Gun Brigade, brought in from Eighth Army, and responsibility for the combat action of the reinforcements brought in there was to be taken over by the staff of XXXXIII Army Corps (also from Eighth Army). It was decided that Sixth Armoured Army should take over Army Detachment Balck's front line. In return, Balck was given command of Sixth Armoured Army's intact front between Lake Balaton and Lake Velence.<sup>335</sup>

This 'juggling' with command posts, and Balck's uncooperative attitude in particular, naturally had an adverse effect on the army group command.<sup>336</sup> Because of the regrouping, strong combat units were sometimes out of action at the very height of the crisis, and the Soviet forces advanced even faster as a result. The front collapsed like a house of cards. In the meantime, Tolbukhin's divisions had already outflanked Székesfehérvár, and were thrusting into the area where the regrouped Sixth Armoured Army units were being assembled. The attack launched by 6th Guards Armoured Army on 19 March was also immediately effective. The army thrust westwards, threatening Várpalota and tying the ring round Sixth Armoured Army and Army Detachment Balck over a stretch of 10 kilometres. Had the army been deployed on the first day of the offensive Tolbukhin's plan might have worked, given the Soviet material superiority. The terrain appeared to be eminently suitable for a 'battle of Cannae', in that Lake Balaton left very little room for withdrawal. If the plan succeeded, the front would collapse immediately, and Tolbukhin's troops would reach the Reich frontier even faster. The German command even helped things along at first, by leaving it until the next day to evacuate the pocket, which, as a result of serious errors on the part of the Soviet command, was not completely enclosed.<sup>337</sup> Meanwhile, the Soviet 46th Army was encircling the Hungarian 3rd Army, with two German divisions and a Hungarian division, in the Esztergom–Komárom area. This involved a landing operation by the Soviet fleet, in which parts of 83rd Marine Infantry landed behind the

<sup>333</sup> KTB H.Gr. Süd, Mar. 1945 (second half), 'Fernschreiben Armeegruppe Balck 17.3.1945', HL microfilm 631, Nos. 7214917 ff.

<sup>334</sup> 'Für das K.T.B.', KTB H.Gr. Süd, Mar. 1945 (second half), 19 Mar. 1945, annexes, HL microfilm 631, No. 7214959.

<sup>335</sup> This measure enabled Balck to pass off his own mistakes as failures on the part of Sixth Armoured Army. See Gosztony, *Endkampf*, 229; cf. Maier, *Drama zwischen Budapest und Wien*, 276.

<sup>336</sup> See Maier, *Drama zwischen Budapest und Wien*, 283.

<sup>337</sup> General Zakharov also directly acknowledges that this was the case. Zakharov, *Délkelet- és Közép-Európa felszabadságása*, 326 ff.

bridgehead, but this operation was successfully blocked. The German–Hungarian group managed to withdraw to the north bank, with over 20,000 men, in the course of the next few days, but it was a close-run thing.<sup>338</sup> This was the fourth time the troops of 96th Infantry Division had crossed the Danube in three months.

On 21 March Gruppenführer Karl Ullrich (5th SS Armoured Division) surrendered Székesfehrvár, despite the Führer order to the contrary. The city had lost its strategic significance long ago as a result of developments in the area round Várpalota, and the Soviet V Guards Armoured Corps tanks were already standing 30 kilometres to the west of Hajmáskér. With 1st SS Armoured Division ‘Leibstandarte’ now under attack from the rear, IV SS Armoured Corps was also threatened with encirclement. Neither Hitler nor the OKH were prepared to face facts. The head of the operations division noted that there was a danger ‘that things might begin to slip if the city was surrendered. Besides, nowhere on the whole of the eastern front was the balance of forces as favourable as in Army Group South’s sector [...]. The Führer was already annoyed that the Sixth Armoured Army attack had not produced better results.’<sup>339</sup> Guderian too was bitterly disappointed, and infuriated by the ponderous and negligent conduct of the command authorities. In his view, that—and that alone—was responsible for the lack of success. As he told the chief of staff of Army Group South: ‘The commanders need a plain talking-to.’ Hitler and Wöhler were still insisting that not an inch of ground was to be given up without a struggle. Despite these orders, the Sixth Armoured Army grouping south-west of Lake Balaton, which was the most threatened, took the appropriate military action of gradually withdrawing north-west. Strangely enough, the officer responsible for this action was not punished, even though he had disobeyed the ‘Führer order’.

By 22 March the connection with the seven German divisions caught in the trap had been reduced to a corridor only 2.5 to 3 kilometres wide. Disaster loomed.<sup>340</sup> 9th SS Armoured Division managed to keep the corridor open until the bulk of the German troops had got back to their own lines, although most of their heavy weapons were lost in the process. 44th Infantry Division ‘Hoch- und Deutschmeister’ and 1st Armoured Division were able to break out of the pocket on 23 March. The intensity of the fighting is shown by the fact that the SS Armoured Regiment deployed in the area shot down no fewer than 108 enemy tanks. The ‘Hoch- und Deutschmeister’ Division was almost completely wiped out during the breakout. Its commander, Lt.-Gen. Hans-Günther von Rost, also lost his life.

The Red Army had now broken through the front and smashed Sixth Armoured Army. Despite the failure of the encirclement, Tolbukhin was in a position, following the first success in the Vienna Offensive Operation, to embark immediately on the second phase, that is, to pursue the enemy into the Vienna area. Since

<sup>338</sup> The statement by Rauchensteiner in ‘Kriegsende’, 116, about the destruction of this group of forces by the Red Army is incorrect. Against this, see Gosztony, *A magyar honvédség*, 253, and *Geschichte der 96. Infanterie-Division*, 377.

<sup>339</sup> Maier, *Drama zwischen Budapest und Wien*, 297.

<sup>340</sup> Tieke, *Im Feuersturm letzter Kriegsjahre*, 506.

the Iași–Chișinău Operation, the plan for the two Soviet army fronts to continue their campaigns without a break had consistently failed, as shown by the battles for Debrecen and Budapest, and in the Ipoly valley. The present success had been achieved by sparing 9th Guards Army and 6th Guards Armoured Army earlier. As a result, the two Soviet fronts were able to conduct a classic operation in depth.<sup>341</sup> There was also a particular reason for moving quickly: Stalin was afraid that the Wehrmacht forces in Italy would surrender and the western Allies would frustrate his plans by advancing to Austria.<sup>342</sup>

Army Group South's armies were unable to establish a continuous defensive system, and the defensive positions that had been built up and partly completed since September 1944 ('Olga', 'Klara', and 'Susanne' in Transdanubia, and the 'Reich Defence Line' on the Hungarian border) were consequently of no use. The Reich Defence Line, also known as the South-East Wall, was one of the Nazi leadership's special projects. Prior to 5 November 1944 it had not even been decided what its course should be. Military considerations favoured the inclusion of Hungarian localities such as Kőszeg and Sopron, but the local Nazi leadership was absolutely opposed to the idea of 'ethnic comrades' building fortifications outside the borders of Greater Germany. It was finally decided that Bratislava and the Lesser Carpathians, as well as the above-mentioned Hungarian localities, should be included in the South-East Wall. Since the available German workforce was not nearly sufficient to complete the proposed fortifications, the Wehrmacht organized a 'Hungarian campaign' to recruit Hungarian sappers and construction troops. But the most important potential source of labour was Budapest Jews who had not been deported in the summer of 1944. From late November they were marched on foot to the Reich border under the control of Hungarian guards. On 24 November Eichmann reported that 38,000 'work Jews' had reached the Reich border. Special concentration camps for these slave-labourers were set up next to the building sites. As well as Jews, people of eleven nations worked on the fortifications.

The reinforcements which Hitler allocated to Army Group South at the end of March (297th Infantry Division, 117th Light Infantry Division, and 14th Waffen SS Infantry Division) were all intended for Second Armoured Army, to protect the Nagykanizsa oilfields. It is little short of a miracle that the German divisions were not completely encircled or wiped out during the withdrawal. Balck, Guderian, and Wöhler all claimed the others were responsible. The Waffen SS and their own men were abused as 'failures'. The SS commanders in turn blamed Balck. This led to the commander of 9th SS Armoured Division sending the following radio message to Sixth Armoured Army on 23 March: 'Division [is] completely shattered and

<sup>341</sup> Kuznetsov, *Marshal Tolbukhin*, 241.

<sup>342</sup> Rauchensteiner, 'Kriegsende', 124; *Geschichte des Grossen Vaterländischen Krieges*, iv. 425 ff., refers, in this connection, to Churchill's plans to steal a march on the Soviet Union by forming a new front in the Balkans in October 1944.

exploited to the last man. Request immediate release from Balck unit and reassignment to Sixth SS Armoured Army.<sup>343</sup>

Those least able to defend themselves against their commanders' failed strategy were the rank and file. By 3 April, orders on the 'maintenance of discipline' and the summary shooting of 'shirkers' had led to the execution, without court martial, of more than 500 of their own men in the area of Sixth Armoured Army alone.<sup>344</sup> Any and every means of increasing the combat strength was now legitimate: specialists and tank crews were handed guns and sent to the foremost lines, regardless of the losses that were likely to ensue. Hitler was beside himself with rage over the allegedly defeatist attitude of the SS Armoured Divisions, and he ordered Himmler to investigate. Himmler accordingly went to Hungary, though he did not venture as far as the divisional command posts. On 26 March Hitler flew into a rage on receiving Sixth Armoured Army's request for permission for a further withdrawal. His response was to declare that the 'Leibstandarte' Division no longer had the right to bear his name. He accordingly issued, through Himmler, the 'cuff title order' requiring all the men in the division to remove the insignia from their sleeves and cuffs. The order was pointless, since the units in question had already removed their insignia before the offensive for camouflage purposes.<sup>345</sup> Hitler, looking for scapegoats as usual, dismissed Wöhler, his chief of staff, the commander-in-chief of 2nd Armoured Army, de Angelis, and Weichs. Wöhler, however, remained in office as deputy until 7 April. As Hitler and Guderian had refused to allow an organized withdrawal, it was quite impossible to build up a defensive position. And the meagre reinforcements that had been sent in to support the front did not change the situation. It was impossible to close the gap in the front between Sixth Army and Sixth Armoured Army until they reached the Alps. The army group command structure descended into chaos. The chain of command changed almost every day.<sup>346</sup> There was no longer any discernible German strategy.

The Army Group South divisions lost the bulk of their tanks in the course of their withdrawal—in most cases without any involvement by the enemy. Fuel was in such short supply that the costly weapons had to be blown up or left standing in the road. Whole columns of armoured vehicles were left behind on the northern shore of Lake Balaton and in the Bakony mountains.<sup>347</sup> 2nd and 3rd Ukrainian Fronts were even able to form armoured companies of their own with the undestroyed armoured vehicles they took as booty.<sup>348</sup> This was entirely due to

<sup>343</sup> KTB H.Gr. Süd, Mar. 1945 (second half), annexes, HL microfilm 631, No. 7215028; Maier, *Drama zwischen Budapest und Wien*, 618.

<sup>344</sup> 'Meldung von Chef des Stabes der Heeresgruppe Süd am 3.4.1945', BA-MA RH2/332.

<sup>345</sup> For details, see Maier, *Drama zwischen Budapest und Wien*, 344–7.

<sup>346</sup> On 28 March 1945, for example, III Armoured Corps contained the following units: II/99th Mtn.Inf. from 1st P.Mtn.Div., seven Hun. Frt.Btlns., parts of SS Rgt.'Ney', Fld.Rep.Btlns. from 1st and 3rd Armd.Div., 509th Hvy.Armd.Btln., 303rd Aslt.Gun Brig., 17th and 19th People's Rocket Launcher Brig., and I/17th Army Art.Btln.

<sup>347</sup> Rebentisch, *Zum Kaukasus*, 500. The illustrated book *Boi u ozera Balaton* contains numerous photographs of such scenes.

<sup>348</sup> *Trofei v krasnoi armii*, 79. On 25 March 1945, 57 captured German tanks and assault guns were deployed in the area of 3rd Ukrainian Front.

Hitler's senseless 'stand firm' order, which inevitably resulted in chaotic withdrawal and the abandonment of military equipment.

On 25 March Malinovsky's 2nd Ukrainian Front launched the long-expected attack north of the Danube. The defence was particularly weak at this point. Malinovsky's divisions and the Pliyev Group broke through the German-Hungarian lines east of Nitra, and by the next day they were already threatening Nitra, Érsekújvár, and Komárom. The defence in this section of the front collapsed like a house of cards, and a new front line could only be formed on the German-Slovakian border. The fact that this operation was not launched until nine days after the start of the offensive in Transdanubia was a serious error on the part of the Soviet planners. For, if both operations had been launched at the same time, the Hungarian 3rd Army and the north wing of Army Detachment Balck would not have been able to avoid encirclement by Tolbukhin's troops by crossing to the north bank of the river, and would have been obliged to surrender earlier.

On 29 March the Soviet 57th Army too launched an attack, on Second Armoured Army. The front was already outflanked by XVII Armoured Corps in the north at this point. De Angelis withdrew his troops to the Reich Defence Line but lost the connection with Sixth Armoured Army, his neighbour to the north. 3rd Ukrainian Front's advance slowed as a result of the natural obstacles in its way. The Soviet spearheads had already reached the Reich Defence Line at Szombathely, south of Lake Neusiedl, where they veered north-west with the aim of taking Vienna en route. However, the Stavka did not want a second Budapest, and it therefore decided on a wide-ranging encirclement operation in which 46th Army, II Guards Mechanized Corps, and XXIII Armoured Corps were to advance to the Danube, west of Vienna, and establish a bridgehead at Stockerau on the north bank. This attack increased the chaos in Army Group South, as there was already a 50-kilometre gap between Sixth Army and Sixth Armoured Army in the first days of April.

As a result of the situation, the Honvéd's combativity was at an all-time low. On 30 March Col.-Gen. Balck was informed that the 'Szent László' Division had 'gone over to the Russians in its entirety', and had 'opened hostilities against the Germans'. In fact, only the chief of staff had deliberately let himself be captured by the Soviets and had then been forced to call on the Hungarian troops, by loudspeaker, to desert. He and another few soldiers were then made to pretend that the whole division had gone over, and Balck had clearly fallen for it.

However, the 'Szent László' Division was still fighting, with I Cavalry Corps, on the German side. It was not even under Balck's command at the time in question. He made no attempt to check the information, but issued an order on the same day that, in view of this 'appalling event', all Hungarian troops in the area covered by Sixth Army were to be disarmed and all Hungarian motor vehicles were to be handed over to the Wehrmacht. The Hungarian troops and their families were to make their way back to their accommodation areas on foot. As a result of this order, the departing Hungarians were attacked and robbed in many places. Not only weapons, but also food, horses, and personal possessions were requisitioned or stolen, with Szálasi government ministers and a number of Honvéd generals

among the victims. The Honvéd ministry protested in vain. Only Col.-Gen. Lothar Rendulic issued a circular warning his units to behave better towards the Hungarians. The OKW sent a delegation of four generals to the Honvéd minister, to apologize on behalf of the Wehrmacht for the attacks that had occurred as a result of Balck's order.<sup>349</sup> Meanwhile, the 'Szent László' Division, and numerous other units that were not under Balck's command, continued to fight on the German side.

But there was no stopping the Soviet advance. The first Soviet units crossed the Reich border at Klostermarienberg on 29 March. Only parts of the Reich Defence Line had been completed, and the forces manning it were weak or non-existent. At best, the line was manned by home-guard battalions which, with their training and equipment, and the weapons at their disposal, were capable of holding out for a few hours at most. For that reason, the home-guard battalions from the Vienna and Salzburg military districts had been withdrawn from the Reich Defence Line in mid-February, and the men had been put to work in factories or on the land, which was thought to make more sense. However, orders were issued on 26 March for the line to be manned again. The measure came too late, as the Soviet troops reached the Reich Defence Line much faster than the home-guard battalions, which were marching there on foot, and the Soviet forces broke through the lines between Kőszeg and Lake Neusiedl.<sup>350</sup> The hilly terrain in this area would have been particularly favourable to sustained defence. The fact that this never happened can be explained only by the almost total lack of combat-worthy German units. Even the Leitha and the other rivers behind it were no obstacle to the Soviet armies.

On 31 March the tanks of 6th Guards Armoured Army reached Wiener Neustadt. Clearly, the Red Army had now perfectly mastered the execution of deep operations, as the advancing 6th Guards Armoured Army units circumvented the defended strongpoints and exploited the absence of a continuous front to thrust forward repeatedly. The Soviet offensive was backed up by in-depth reserves, so the elimination of the few German hedgehog strongpoints was no problem. Wiener Neustadt was approached from three sides on the following day. The defenders did not allow themselves to be encircled, preferring to evacuate the town, which was already in ruins as a result of earlier Allied air raids.

On 1 April the Stavka ordered Tolbukhin to advance into Styria to the western border of the intended Soviet occupation zone. But the main attack was directed at Vienna, which was to be encircled from the west. Bratislava, a 'fortified place', was virtually undefended and fell on 4 April.<sup>351</sup> The front shifted to the Slovak–Czech border and the Lesser Carpathians. By 5 April the first Soviet armoured spearheads had reached Pressbaum, 20 kilometres west of Vienna, and the encirclement of the city had begun.

On 6 April the Soviet 6th Guards Armoured Army reached the Danube at Tulln, thus encircling Vienna from the north as well. The city was not declared a 'fortified place', despite the fact that Hitler had insisted it must be defended. Lt.-Gen. Rudolf

<sup>349</sup> Payer, *Armati Hungarorum*, 554.

<sup>351</sup> Rauchensteiner, 'Kriegsende', 141.

<sup>350</sup> Kissel, *Der deutsche Volkssturm*, 60 ff.

von Bünau had been appointed military commander of Vienna on 3 April.<sup>352</sup> There were hardly any troops in the city, the only forces at Bünau's disposal being two Sixth Armoured Army divisions that were in the process of withdrawing, and a few splinter units. Altogether, he only had about 40,000 men and 26 operational tanks and assault guns. Bünau later wrote that 'the idea of mounting a successful defence of the city at all, or even holding it for some time, had to be ruled out from the start'.<sup>353</sup> The other commanders were of the same opinion. Dietrich joked that his armoured army bore the number six because it had 'only six operational tanks'. He was exaggerating, of course, but the army was only a shadow of its former self.<sup>354</sup> Dietrich also told Bünau that he was not thinking of defending the city. The Reich leader and Reich defence commissar, Baldur von Schirach, on the other hand, planned to adopt the so-called ALRZ procedure (an acronym of *Auflockerung*, *Lähmung*, *Räumung*, *Zerstörung*, that is: break up, paralyse, clear out, destroy). All fire brigades were accordingly moved out of the burning city. And when the mayor, Hanns Blaschke, suggested to Schirach that it was time to stop fighting, since all of the city's water supplies were now in Russian hands and the people could not be expected to hold out without water, Schirach threatened to have him shot.

Pessimism as to the possibility of defending Vienna was not based solely on the weakness of the forces available, but on a realistic and responsible assessment of the situation. It was clear that the city would be completely encircled from the north-west and the east within a matter of days. The Soviet 46th Army, with 152 tanks and 70,000 troops, had crossed the Danube 20 kilometres west of Bratislava without any opposition worth mentioning, thereby increasing the pressure on the defending forces' northern flank after 7 April.<sup>355</sup> In crossing the Danube, 46th Army had also rolled up the favourable defensive position on the Morava from the south. The Soviet command was also well aware of the 'nightmare of Budapest'. On 6 April Tolbukhin had dropped leaflets containing an appeal to the people of Vienna which deliberately invoked the horrific events in the Hungarian capital: 'The retreating German troops want to turn Vienna into a battlefield, as they did in Budapest. Vienna and its inhabitants are thus threatened with the same destruction, the same horrors of war that the Germans inflicted on Budapest and its people.'<sup>356</sup> The German commanders in Vienna were also determined to avoid a second Budapest, as well as to avoid capitulation to the Red Army.

Unofficial attempts were also made to solve the dilemma and spare Vienna. A resistance group led by Bünau's quartermaster-general, Major Carl Szokoll, made plans, under the code-name Operation RADETZKY, to surrender the city to the Soviet

<sup>352</sup> Ibid. 153 ff., with further details about the background to this appointment.

<sup>353</sup> Ibid. 157.

<sup>354</sup> Gosztony, 'Planung, Stellenwert und Ablauf der Wiener Angriffsoperation', 141. Sixth Armoured Army had 52 tanks and assault guns at its disposal at the time in question, i.e. it had lost 90% of its complement in the course of three weeks (Rauchensteiner, 'Kriegsende', 160).

<sup>355</sup> Rauchensteiner, 'Kriegsende', 151; *Geschichte des Grossen Vaterländischen Krieges*, v. 248.

<sup>356</sup> Zakharov, *Délkelet- és Közép-Európa felszabadítása*, 341.

army without resistance.<sup>357</sup> For that purpose, Szokoll forged an order to evacuate the city immediately without a fight. The group contacted the Soviet army on 2 April, and on 4 April the conspirators' plan took off. In the night of 5 to 6 April Szokoll reached an agreement with Col.-Gen. Vasily V. Glagolev in Purkersdorf and then returned to the city. But three officers were arrested by the SS and, on 8 April, they were publicly hanged as 'traitors' at the Floridsdorf bridge in the presence of Skorzeny. However, the SS did not have time to discover the full extent of the conspiracy.

For the defence of the city, the problem was that it was not clear which emergency and home-guard units could still be trusted. Vienna could no longer be held.

On 7 April Tolbukhin's troops penetrated the inner city, captured the southern railway station, and fought for the arsenal. By this time, 50 per cent of the city had already been taken.<sup>358</sup> The defence force was strengthened by the arrival of the 'Führer' Infantry Division in Vienna, but on 10 April the section of the city up to the Danube canal was evacuated, because there were increasingly clear signs of an impending encirclement from the east, so this division too had to be taken out of the city again. Within three days all the districts up to the Danube canal were occupied by the Soviet army. The Nazi measures to destroy the city were prevented by the resistance. The Red Army managed to take the Reich bridge and other bridges over the Danube without any trouble. The home-guard and emergency units were no longer prepared to fight. Many allowed themselves to be persuaded by the population to remove their uniforms and go into hiding. The OKW was resigned, noting in its war diary that a part of the Viennese population had 'lost its grip'.<sup>359</sup> On 13 April I SS Armoured Corps evacuated the last buildings in Vienna. And on the same day the Stavka issued its new instructions for Malinovsky's and Tolbukhin's army fronts. 6th Guards Armoured Army was again placed under the command of 2nd Ukrainian Front, which was assigned the task of capturing Brno, while 3rd Ukrainian Front's mechanized units were to prepare the next strike, in the direction of St Pölten. 9th Guards Army was again held in reserve, as a precaution. To all appearances, the Soviet command's immediate concern was to secure military control of its allotted sphere of interest. That is the only explanation for the fact that the offensive was not continued westwards with full force after reaching St Pölten.

The losses sustained by Army Group South can only be estimated, as archival records are missing. Most of the armoured vehicles, probably over 1,000 tanks, fell into Soviet hands during the withdrawal. Only a fraction were destroyed in battle. Tens of thousands of Hungarian troops surrendered or were taken prisoner. According to their status reports, the divisions lost 20 to 50 per cent of their personnel strength in the fighting.

Meanwhile, fighting in the territory of the 'Ostmark' continued. The main points of concentration of the Soviet attacks, in addition to the Danube valley, were the valleys of the Raab and the Mur. In the first weeks of April, Hitler ordered

<sup>357</sup> For details, see Szokoll, *Die Rettung Wiens 1945*.

<sup>358</sup> Rauchensteiner, 'Kriegsende', 171.

<sup>359</sup> KTB OKW, iv/2, 1229.

Table V.vii.16. Losses in the Vienna Offensive Operation (16 March to 15 April 1945)

	Tanks and assault guns	Cannon and grenade launchers	Troops (killed, wounded, or missing)
2nd and 3rd Ukrainian Fronts and 1st Bulgarian Army*	603	764	177,745
Army Group South**	1,345	2,250	130,000 (prisoners only)

\**Grif sekretnosti sniat*, 217–18, 372. The figures for 2nd Ukrainian Front include only the losses of 6th Guards Armoured Army and 46th Army. Soviet historians do not regard the operations north of the Danube as part of the Vienna Offensive Operation, even though the Pliyev Group (1st Guards Mechanized Cavalry Group), the 7th Army, and parts of the 53rd Army had encircled Vienna from the north. Their losses are attributed to the Bratislava–Brno Offensive. In that operation 2nd Ukrainian Front reported 79,596 men killed, wounded, or missing between 25 April and 5 May 1945 (*Grif sekretnosti sniat*, 228); \*\**Geschichte des Großen Vaterländischen Krieges*, v. 254. The Soviet figures may also include some armoured personnel carriers.

more units to be brought up to Army Group South from Italy and from the reserves (710th Infantry Division, four assault artillery brigades, 2nd Army Armoured Infantry Brigade, 10th Paratroop Division), with the point of concentration on St Pölten. But even these reinforcements could not hold the front. 3rd Ukrainian Front took St Pölten on 16 April. It should be noted that the German divisions were still capable of launching counter-attacks, despite the losses they had suffered. Thus, for example, Combat Group Peiper and Bünaus corps managed to retake a number of towns and villages west of St Pölten.

Sixth Armoured Army's front line bulged far to the west in the Vienna woods between St Pölten and Mürzzuschlag, so Tolbukhin endeavoured to push south from the St Pölten area after 18 April, move in on Sixth Armoured Army's front from the rear, and bring about its collapse. However, the point of concentration of the hostilities shifted to the north. The Soviet 6th Guards Armoured Army and 4th Guards Army were preparing for the attack on the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, with the result that the fighting south of the Danube died down from 20 April.

That same day the military command of the Wehrmacht was divided into two groups, North (A) and South (B). The staff of Command Group South, under Field Marshal Albert Kesselring, was moved to Berchtesgaden. Four days later, Kesselring was appointed commander-in-chief of Army Group South, which was renamed 'Army Group Ostmark'. According to a breakdown dated 9 May 1945, its estimated ration strength was 450,000, not counting the Hungarian troops,<sup>360</sup> of whom there must have been well over 100,000 at the time. With the Americans already approaching Passau, a western front needed to be established as well, and

<sup>360</sup> Maier, *Drama zwischen Budapest und Wien*, 419.

2nd SS Armoured Division was designated for the purpose. But this proved impossible, as the situation was hopeless.

The German and Hungarian commanders' most important task at this point was to ensure that their men did not fall into Soviet captivity. On 7 May, when the unconditional surrender of all German forces was signed at Reims, the Army Group South high command was taken prisoner by the Americans. Its last official act was to transfer command to Sixth Armoured Army and pass on the terms of surrender. The divisions were ordered to move west across the Enns by the morning of 9 May at the latest, and surrender to the American troops. Most of the men managed to do so, but the bulk of 3rd SS Armoured Division was quickly handed over to the Soviet army by the US command. Several of C-in-C South-East's units shared the same momentous fate, including, for example, XV (Cossack) Cavalry Corps, whose men laid down their arms in the Gail valley.

### *The End of the War and a Fresh Start*

In this section of the front, the end of the war had widely differing consequences for those involved. The hardest hit were probably the Soviet citizens who had fled their country, and who were now punished collectively by deportation to concentration camps. Many of them, in fear of reprisals, committed suicide before they were caught. Germans living in Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary, and Hungarians resident in the first two countries and Romania, were the victims of revenge excesses. They were dispossessed and, in some cases, driven out or murdered.<sup>361</sup> Austria was occupied by the Allies and remained under Allied occupation for ten years.

Hungary lost 40 per cent of its national assets. In percentage terms, Hungary's human losses were highest after those of the Soviet Union, Poland, Germany, and Yugoslavia.<sup>362</sup> Of a total population of 14.6 million (post-1941 national borders), approximately 340,000 to 360,000 deaths were recorded for members of the armed forces, and 590,000 for civilians.<sup>363</sup> The latter included 450,000 to 490,000 persons persecuted and murdered as Jews. Some 20,000 civilians in Hungary were killed in Allied air raids, which lasted for only seven months. This relatively high figure shows that the measures taken to protect the civilian population were wholly inadequate, since the Allies did not conduct a total bombing campaign in Hungary as they did in Germany. About 30,000 civilians were killed during military operations. More than 690,000 members of the armed forces and 290,000

<sup>361</sup> It is impossible to determine the exact number of victims. On the number of German victims, see *Germany and the Second World War*, x. In Vojvodina some 20,000 Hungarians were the victims of Communist excesses. Close on 100,000 were expelled to Hungary from Romania, 120,000 from Slovakia, and 65,000 from Yugoslavia.

<sup>362</sup> Historians disagree about the exact number of Hungary's human losses, and it will probably never be possible to ascertain the precise figures, owing to changes in national borders and gaps in the surviving records. The following figures are taken from Stark, 'Magyarország háborús emberveszeté', 433–8.

<sup>363</sup> This includes civilian prisoners of war who died in Soviet prison camps. Some 120,000 to 155,000 soldiers lost their lives at the front from 1941 to 1945. For details, see Ungváry, *A magyar honvédség*, 478 ff.

civilians ended up as prisoners of war—56 per cent of the troops, and almost all the civilians—in the Soviet Union. By 1956 only 419,000 of these prisoners had returned to Hungary. Several tens of thousands were released in neighbouring states. Some 11,500 troops were handed over to the new Hungarian army in Hungary in 1945. It is still not clear what became of the remaining 105,000 to 155,000 prisoners.<sup>364</sup> The last prisoner of war, András Thoma, finally returned home only in 2001.<sup>365</sup>

Hungary was occupied for two generations. The occupying forces were exclusively Red Army troops. This had far-reaching and tragic consequences for the country. Although a pseudo-democracy was maintained in the early post-war years, Hungary's domestic and foreign policy was determined by Moscow from the outset. Large sections of industry, previously owned by Jews and subsequently commandeered by the SS, were seized and dismantled. Under the Paris peace treaty signed in February 1947, Hungary's national territory was again reduced to that of the Trianon state, and Czechoslovakia was allowed to annex three more Hungarian villages near Bratislava. Hungary was obliged to pay \$300 million in reparations: \$200 million to the Soviet Union, \$70 million to Yugoslavia, and \$30 million to Czechoslovakia. In relation to Hungary's part in the war, this sum was disproportionate, in that Romania, which had played a much more active part, had to pay the same amount, and Italy only \$60 million more. The fact that the calculations were based on 1938 prices raised the sum actually paid to some \$500 million.<sup>366</sup> The repressive measures taken by the newly established dictatorship affected those who had been victims of earlier crimes as well as the perpetrators. Many war criminals were brought before the newly established people's courts, but in many cases they were condemned for acts which they had not committed. It was to be 44 years before the first free elections were held, and 46 years after the end of the war before the last of the Soviet occupation troops left the country.

#### 4. HUNGARY'S PLACE IN HITLER'S CALCULATIONS: A FINAL RECKONING

In the specialist literature, relatively little attention has been paid to the events in the Hungarian theatre of war. In the public mind, Hungary's contribution to the war effort as an Axis partner ranks far behind that of Italy. The battles fought on Hungarian soil are largely unknown. And the events in Army Group South's area of

<sup>364</sup> According to *Grif sekretnosti sniat*, 392, there were only 513,700 prisoners, whereas an NKVD source cited by Stark ('Magyarország háborús embervesztesége', 438) gives the figure of 541,530 Hungarian prisoners, only 54,700 of whom died in captivity. However, a great many prisoners died before registration, which was carried out on arrival in the Soviet Union.

<sup>365</sup> It is indicative of conditions in the Soviet Union and Russia that Thoma, a Hungarian soldier serving in the Honvéd, was obliged to spend more than five decades of his life as a prisoner of war, and later as a compulsory patient in a psychiatric institution. Thoma, in amazingly good physical health despite years of hardship, died in Hungary, in the bosom of his family, in 2004.

<sup>366</sup> *Magyarország története*, 304.

operations are overshadowed by events in East Prussia and the Ardennes offensive. However, this view does not take enough account of the strategic importance of the Hungarian front or the significant contribution made by the Hungarian army. The Hungarian contribution to the conduct of the war as a whole, and the battles fought by Army Group South, both warrant closer examination.

It may well be that, prior to 1943, Italy was a much more important partner than Hungary from a geostrategic point of view. However, in terms of its military contribution, Hungary was by no means insignificant even then. Unlike Italy, which depended on substantial imports of food, oil, and coal from Germany, Hungary exported substantial amounts of these commodities to Germany. It also produced large quantities of aircraft parts, munitions, and anti-aircraft guns for Germany. The Italian army took almost no further part in operations after the summer of 1943, whereas Hungary, in addition to the occupation force, was able—and obliged—to contribute a quarter of a million troops from April 1944 and as many as 950,000 troops in September 1944. By then Hungary's contribution was of the same order of magnitude as Italy's in 1941/2. Italy, on the contrary, was nothing but a burden in military terms after 1942.

Hungary played an important part in Hitler's strategy. In the period from April to September 1944, the Hungarian army was able to keep possession of the forefield of the Carpathians and perform other important military tasks. And Hungary was still making an important contribution in March 1945, when the Honvéd army provided 30 per cent of the army group's artillery and 20 per cent of its infantry. The Hungarian army lost 340,000 to 360,000 troops in the course of the war, whereas Italy, three times the size of Hungary, lost 'only' 330,000.

Hitler was quick to recognize Hungary's political importance. But even more decisive, from his point of view, was the realization that Hungarian oil supplies were central to the continued conduct of the war. He therefore moved all the divisions that could be spared to the Hungarian theatre of war. From December 1944 on, his main concern was not Berlin but Transdanubia. Goebbels may have shared that same view, since his diary entries at that time more and more frequently begin with comments on the fighting in Hungary. Also, Hitler was fully aware of the conflicts of interest between the western Allies and the Soviet Union. His last hope, namely that the 'perverse coalition between plutocracy and Bolshevism' could not last and was bound to break down, was in a certain sense naive, but it was not wholly unjustified, as the events surrounding the capitulation in Italy were to show.<sup>367</sup>

Hitler's ideas about the importance of the Hungarian theatre were not widely shared. The Wehrmacht command, particularly Col.-Gen. Guderian, repeatedly insisted that the last reserves must be concentrated in the area between Berlin and Warsaw. Strategically, there were better possibilities for launching a counter-offensive from that area or from East Prussia.

An evaluation of Hitler's decision and his assignment of priority to the Hungarian theatre of war is made difficult by the fact that in 1944/5 the Wehrmacht no longer

<sup>367</sup> On this, see Lingen, *SS und Secret Service*.

had any chance whatever of victory. In that sense, all military measures were now pointless. However, if delaying final collapse can be considered a war aim, then Hitler's decision to shift the point of concentration to Hungary was right, but it was also criminal. Apart from the failure of the SPRING AWAKENING offensive, the deployment of the Wehrmacht forces in Hungary proved highly effective. Not only did they manage to hold the front for three months; they also dealt the enemy a number of severe blows. The three KONRAD offensives showed that, given good leadership, a strong armoured corps could destabilize an entire Soviet army front.

Yet the Hungarian theatre of war also reveals the fragility of Hitler's military calculations. If his decisions had been based on a sober analysis of the situation, then one of the Wehrmacht's largest offensives in 1945 would not have been so poorly planned. In view of the favourable tactical possibilities, the forces deployed in Operation SPRING AWAKENING could have caused serious crises in the enemy camp. But the military planning was clearly poor, since more than half of the costly armour was unusable because of the weather conditions.

The SPRING AWAKENING offensive was pointless not only because it was launched in bad weather. It came much too late to be of any strategic importance. Even if everything had gone according to Hitler's plan, it would have made no difference to the fact that in the heart of the Reich—in the Ruhr district and the approaches to Berlin—there was no longer any serious possibility of defence. Even a victorious Army Group South would have remained isolated in Hungary, since there could have been no question of moving the troops out, given the chaotic transport conditions at the time and the lack of fuel. Nor would the total defeat of 3rd Ukrainian Front have undermined the attacks being prepared by Georgii Konstantinovich Zhukov and Ivan Stepanovich Konev, or the major offensive already launched by the western Allies. There is therefore no point in speculating about the possible success of the SPRING AWAKENING offensive. It is probably also wrong to conclude that it would have been better to deploy 6th Armoured Army for defence purposes in the territory of the Reich: firstly, because the requisite local fuel supplies were not available; and secondly, because the superiority of Konev's and Zhukov's troops was so overwhelming that a counter-attack could no longer have had any prospect of success. In March Hitler had exhausted all the possibilities open to him. The course of the war was now dictated entirely by the Allies. From then on, wrong decisions by the Stavka and Eisenhower were a greater obstacle on the road to Allied victory than the desperate resistance of the Wehrmacht.



PART VI

THE WAR ON THE  
NEIGHBOURING FRONTS



# I. The End of the War in Scandinavia

*Bernd Wegner*

In the context of the spectacular political and military developments of the time, Scandinavia, although directly affected by the war, was largely overshadowed by events in the rest of the world. However, this impression, all too common on the part of the great powers, needs qualification in two respects. In the first place, although developments in northern Europe may have played a relatively minor part in the outcome of the world war, they were of existential importance for the continued national independence and political culture of the societies in question. And in the second place, northern Europe was time and again considered by the German leadership to be, *potentially*, a theatre of prime importance. As a possible target of Anglo-American invasion and Soviet expansion, the Nordic area, which was equally important in respect of the war economy<sup>1</sup> and naval strategy, was repeatedly at the focus of German attention—especially because of relatively inconspicuous developments in that area which Berlin could not afford to disregard. These included, in particular, as well as the formation of resistance movements in Denmark and above all in Norway,<sup>2</sup> the gradual readjustment of the Swedish policy of neutrality to suit Anglo-Saxon interests. Although, in the opening years of the war, in view of Germany's dominant position in the Baltic area and the widespread expectation of its 'final victory', Sweden had generally adapted its officially maintained policy of neutrality to meet Berlin's wishes,<sup>3</sup> and although, despite increasing diplomatic pressure from the western Allies, it had only hesitantly begun to depart from that line even in 1942,<sup>4</sup> the continual German reverses led to a gradual and ultimately fundamental change in Swedish policy from the spring of 1943.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> For a summary, see Petrick, 'Die Bedeutung der Rohstoffe Nordeuropas'.

<sup>2</sup> See *Germany and the Second World War*, v/II, esp. 18–24.

<sup>3</sup> *Germany and the Second World War*, iv. 471–80.

<sup>4</sup> In particular, mention should be made here of the Swedish reduction of transit traffic to Norway in the summer of 1942, officially explained as due to technical rail-transport problems, the reintroduction a few months later of the order to shoot in the event of any breach of Swedish airspace, and Stockholm's restrictive attitude during the negotiations on a trade agreement with Germany in December 1942. For more details, see Carlgren, *Swedish Foreign Policy*, 133 ff., and Radowitz, *Schweden*, ch. 6.

<sup>5</sup> Carlgren concluded that, by the turn of 1944/5 when all trade with Germany came to an end, Sweden had 'by and large contributed more to the war effort of the western powers than it had helped

From the Swedish point of view, this change carried considerable risks. On the one hand, as the war was now expected to end soon, relations with the expected victors, especially the western Allies, had to be placed on a new footing. On the other, the dominant position that Germany still held in Scandinavia and the Baltic area could not be disregarded. In this connection, there were the profitable economic relations with the Reich to be considered,<sup>6</sup> as well as the danger that Germany might occupy the country, especially if the Allies actually invaded Norway.<sup>7</sup> Given the continuing and threatening German presence in the Nordic area, it was important to avoid the impression that Swedish policy was entirely aligned with the Allies. Moreover, the defeat of Germany, which was now generally expected,<sup>8</sup> was by no means associated only with hopes, but also with fears of the Soviet Union's growing influence in Scandinavia.<sup>9</sup> Sweden's security still seemed by no means guaranteed, and the country's room for manoeuvre in foreign policy was less than its interlocutors in London and Washington led it to believe.

In these circumstances, it is not surprising that Sweden should have proceeded cautiously in departing from its policy of appeasement towards Germany. Relatively speaking, the most spectacular step in this direction in 1943 was the termination on 29 July of the transit agreement concluded with the Reich two years earlier.<sup>10</sup> Apart from this measure, publicly justified by the need to placate Norway, the government under Prime Minister Per Albin Hansson continued to pursue its policy of a defensive change of direction in the following months. Its main aim was to enable the country to adapt to the changing situation in the war as a whole, without itself being drawn into the maelstrom of military conflicts. So, for example, while Stockholm came to an understanding with Britain and the United States in the autumn of 1943 to deliver only limited amounts of iron ore and ball bearings to Germany in future,<sup>11</sup> it subsequently managed to get round these arrangements to a large extent by a series of unobtrusive measures.<sup>12</sup>

The Swedish government's reluctance to take a stand on matters directly touching on the interests of German supremacy—a reluctance increasingly criticized by historians writing after the war—was likewise apparent in Stockholm's efforts to bring about a peace settlement between Finland and the Soviet Union. In addition to its continuing dependence on German deliveries of goods, security-policy considerations also played a prominent part in this connection. So long as the German navy was master of the Baltic, and German armies were stationed in Norway and Finland, the possibility that the war might spill over into Sweden

Germany' (Carlgren, 'The Emergence of Sweden's Policy', 29). A similar conclusion is reached in Setzen, *Neutralität im Zweiten Weltkrieg*, 90 ff.

<sup>6</sup> For a detailed account, see Wittmann, *Schwedens Wirtschaftsbeziehungen zum Dritten Reich*.

<sup>7</sup> On Germany's contingency plans for action against Sweden, see Ziemke, *The German Northern Theatre*, 252–64, and Grier, 'Hitler's Baltic Strategy', 468 ff.

<sup>8</sup> See Böhme, 'Stalingrad und Schweden', and Carlgren, 'Die Einschätzung der Lage Deutschlands'.

<sup>9</sup> See Böhme, 'Vermutete sowjetische Ambitionen'.

<sup>10</sup> See Carlgren, *Swedish Foreign Policy*, 149 ff., and Radowitz, *Schweden*, 501 ff.

<sup>11</sup> See Wittmann, *Schwedens Wirtschaftsbeziehungen zum Dritten Reich*, 343 ff.

<sup>12</sup> According to Fritz, 'A Question of Practical Politics'.

could not be precluded.<sup>13</sup> Finland's efforts to get out of the war, which were supported discreetly by Stockholm, were an even greater cause for concern. In the spring of 1944 there was still good reason to suppose that, if Finland withdrew from the war, Germany would respond by taking military action, as it had done in the case of Italy and Hungary. At the heart of Sweden's fears, which Berlin had no reason to dispel, was that Germany might occupy the Åland Islands. The islands were of very considerable strategic importance from the Swedish point of view, and their occupation would expose the Swedish mainland to direct military attack by Germany.<sup>14</sup> In the light of such dangers, it is not surprising that the Stockholm government was not prepared to take decisive measures against Germany until the summer of 1944,<sup>15</sup> when, following the Allied invasion of Normandy, the military threat from the Reich appeared to be at an end, Sweden's economic dependence lessened, and the end of the war was in sight.

## 1. THE PRICE OF PEACE: FINLAND'S SITUATION IN 1943/4

Finland was in an even more precarious situation than Sweden. Although peace on the Finnish–Soviet front, broken only by minor tactical skirmishes, had lasted until the early summer of 1944,<sup>16</sup> the young republic, which had only narrowly escaped falling victim to the earth-shattering political upheavals in the great European powers in 1939/40, was once again in danger of being crushed between the millstones of the continent's mightiest totalitarian dictatorships.

### (a) Relations between Berlin and Helsinki in the Aftermath of Stalingrad

Finland was the most important of Germany's European partners in its war against the Soviet Union and, at the same time, the most difficult to keep in line. The reason for this, apart from the peculiarities of the country's political culture and its policy regarding alliance with Germany,<sup>17</sup> lay in a number of favourable factors that

<sup>13</sup> The criticism, which is objectively justified to some extent, of the inconsistent application of the Swedish policy of neutrality sometimes underestimates and marginalizes the constraints of realpolitik on the Stockholm government, for which neutrality was not an end in itself but simply a means of avoiding any active involvement in the war. See also Setzen, *Neutralität im Zweiten Weltkrieg*, 58–93, Ekman, 'Schweden, Deutschland und der Holocaust', and Nordin, 'Das Verhältnis Schwedens zum nationalsozialistischen Deutschland'.

<sup>14</sup> See Grier, 'Hitler's Baltic Strategy', 480–1.

<sup>15</sup> See Carlgren, *Swedish Foreign Policy*, 199 ff., and for a summary, Wahlbäck, *The Roots of Swedish Neutrality*, 70 ff. However, Radowitz (*Schweden*, 587 ff.) stressed that the threat from Germany was overemphasized at the time—in other words, the Swedish government actually had more room for manoeuvre than was supposed.

<sup>16</sup> For a detailed operational and tactical account of the Finnish battles, see *Jatkosodan Historia*, esp. vol. 4.

<sup>17</sup> See *Germany and the Second World War*, vi. 916–23.

applied to Helsinki, unlike Italy, Hungary, and Romania. Thus, Germany had sympathizers in Finland but there was no 'fifth column' to serve its purposes there, as there was in those other countries.<sup>18</sup> Also, Finland had played absolutely no part in the Stalingrad debacle. On the contrary, it had maintained a stable front against the Soviet Union and was therefore comparatively self-confident and uninhibited in dealing with its German partner. And yet the signs of a rapid deterioration in Germany's situation on almost all fronts (except for the U-boat war in the Atlantic, which was of secondary importance from Finland's point of view), which had begun to appear in the late autumn of 1942, had radically altered the basis of Finnish-German relations. Not that the Finns—like the Italians or the Japanese—had been keen to see a rapid end to the German-Soviet conflict. North of the Baltic, few things were feared more than a renewed German-Soviet understanding, a game in which Finland could all too easily be the 'pawn' to be sacrificed once again, as in 1939. However, in common with Germany's other partners, the Finns were in a state of the greatest uncertainty about the possible consequences of Germany's diminishing military strength.

There were signs of this in August, when the German summer offensives on the Volga and in the Caucasus came to a standstill, then a few weeks later, when it became clear that the Germans had decided not to launch the offensive against Leningrad which the Finns had repeatedly been promised,<sup>19</sup> and at the beginning of November, when the Allies landed in North Africa.<sup>20</sup> Not only German but also foreign observers, such as the Swiss ambassador and the American chargé d'affaires, noted initial moves on the Finnish side towards revising the basic direction of the country's foreign policy.<sup>21</sup> Even so, the real change of course came only in January 1943, when the Red Army succeeded in breaking the Leningrad blockade and forcing a decision in the battle for Stalingrad.

On 3 February 1943, that is, one day after the last German resistance on the Volga was extinguished, the president, Risto Ryti, the finance minister and influential representative of the Social Democrats, Väinö Tanner, and other members of the small informal war cabinet which played a decisive role in determining the government's basic decisions met with the commander-in-chief of the Finnish armed forces, Field Marshal Carl Gustaf Mannerheim, at his headquarters in Mikkeli. Impressed by the thoroughly sobering situation briefing delivered by the head of the intelligence service, Colonel Aladár Paasonen, the circle decided that it was time for Finland to withdraw from the war and normalize relations with the Soviet Union.<sup>22</sup> Further military objectives were to be abandoned, notably the

<sup>18</sup> This was to prove a central factor in preserving Finland's independence when the country withdrew from the war in September 1944.

<sup>19</sup> See Wegner, 'Die Leningradfrage'.

<sup>20</sup> See, e.g., the reports from the head of the Security Police and the SD to the foreign ministry on the Finnish minister Väinö Tanner (4 Nov. 1942), and on the effects on Finland of the military situation in Africa (28 Nov. 1942), PA, Inland IIg 360, fos. 61 ff. See also Vehviläinen, 'Die Einschätzung der Lage', 152.

<sup>21</sup> See Polvinen, 'Finnland und die Westmächte', 67, and Berry, *American Foreign Policy*, 241 ff.

<sup>22</sup> Polvinen, *Barbarossasta Teheraniin*, 202–3, and, more recently, Jokisipilä, *Aseveljää vai liittolaisia?*, 60 ff.

annexation of eastern Karelia which had already started,<sup>23</sup> and the 1939 borders prior to the 'Winter War' were to be chosen as the starting point for the negotiations. Less than two weeks later the Social Democratic Party council adopted a similarly worded resolution, which not only invoked Finland's essential ties with the Nordic countries and the United States but also asserted that the country was free to withdraw from the war so long as its independence and freedom were ensured.<sup>24</sup>

Here, as in other largely left-wing circles and among the Swedish-speaking minority, the peace opposition was clearly growing and, with it, public debate, conducted partly in the press, in what was essentially an acid test of the theory that Finland was engaged in a 'separate war'. For, if Finland was indeed conducting its own war in the east, it was only logical that the government in Helsinki alone could decide independently whether to end that war.

Although the new line being taken by the Finnish government and some of the parties supporting it had been formulated by only a few politicians, it reflected a general swing in public opinion in the country.<sup>25</sup>

Of course, our picture would be incomplete if we failed to mention that, at the same time, many influential people, particularly among the military, were still by no means convinced that the tide of the war had turned against Germany. They included the Finnish general staff's liaison officer at German headquarters, General Paavo Talvela, who sent a telegram to Mannerheim on 4 February, immediately after the German defeat on the Volga, reporting that morale in Germany had certainly been shaken, but that it was out of the question that the German war machine would cease to operate in an orderly and disciplined fashion.<sup>26</sup> Talvela was clearly by no means alone in his optimism. General Waldemar Erfurth could report from Finnish headquarters in the middle of January that 'not one of the senior officers believes in a separate peace or thinks it is possible for the Finns to separate their military destiny from that of the Germans'.<sup>27</sup> Nevertheless, in accordance with Mannerheim's express wishes, the high command in Mikkeli now began to avoid using the term 'ally' when referring to the relationship with Germany.<sup>28</sup>

The dynamics of the turnaround in the military situation as a whole, and the shift in public opinion in Finland itself, led to changes in the Finnish government. The presidential election due to be held in February provided the stimulus. In the run-up to the election, a clear cross-party tendency emerged in favour of appointing Mannerheim to the post. As Goebbels confided to his diary at the time: 'That would not improve matters for us; it would make them worse.'<sup>29</sup> In fact, members

<sup>23</sup> On this, see Laine, *Suur-Suomen kahdet kasvot*.

<sup>24</sup> Soikkanen, *Sota-ajan valtioneuvosto*, 158. On the German reaction, see Kivimäki's reports Nos. 8 and 9 of 17 and 22 Feb. 1943 respectively, Foreign Ministry Archives, Helsinki, 5/C 5 (1943).

<sup>25</sup> See Jutikkala, 'Mielialojen kirjo jatkosodan aikana'.

<sup>26</sup> Talvela, *Sotilaan elämä* ii. 208–9.

<sup>27</sup> Blücher, *Tagebücher* 7, fo. 2318 (15 Jan. 1943), PA, Blücher papers. See also Erfurth, *Der Finnische Krieg*, 141. According to Erfurth, there was more pro-German optimism at the front than in the higher command staffs.

<sup>28</sup> Erfurth, *Tagebuch*, 607 (17 Jan. 1943), BA-MA N 257/v. 3.

<sup>29</sup> Goebbels, *Die Tagebücher*, pt. 2, vii. 257–8 (4 Feb. 1943) and 354–5 (16 Feb. 1943); Mannerheim, *Memoirs*, 462.

of the peace opposition were among the first to back the elderly marshal, who appeared to be the only person with the authority to get Finland out of the war in good time and without too much damage. However, Mannerheim decided at the last minute not to stand, partly for political reasons and partly on account of serious health problems in the months in question, so Ryti—much to the Germans' satisfaction—was eventually confirmed in office by a large majority. He immediately made changes in the cabinet. Hardly surprisingly, in view of the altered circumstances, the members of the far-right 'Patriotic People's Movement' (IKL) left the government, as did the foreign minister, Rolf Witting, supported to the last by the German ally.<sup>30</sup> Witting was replaced by Henrik Ramsay, a reputedly Anglophilic member of the Swedish People's Party of Finland. And the new prime minister was Edwin Linkomies of the conservative National Coalition Party.

The new government—'not expressly a peace cabinet, but a cabinet with a free hand', according to Erfurth<sup>31</sup>—was determined from the start to explore the possibilities and the conditions for an eventual separate peace. This did not mean a change of course as yet, but it did mean a new style of Finnish foreign policy. Rumours on the subject had long been rife in the diplomatic circles of the European capitals, and Moscow had repeatedly made discreet offers to Helsinki in this connection since 1941, but the Finnish government's response had always been to ignore them—most recently in the late autumn of 1942, and then only under strong German pressure.<sup>32</sup> In his Independence Day speech on 6 December 1942, President Ryti had still given no sign of yielding on the matter of peace, thereby finally prompting the Americans to recall their ambassador from Helsinki.<sup>33</sup>

The American threat implicit in this gesture, and the deterioration in Germany's military situation, had already prompted the Finnish government to intensify its contacts with the State Department in January. For example, the Finnish ambassador in Washington, Hjalmar Procopé, had tried to sound out American expectations with regard to the forthcoming presidential election in Finland, and Ryti received American representatives for talks in Helsinki with conspicuous frequency.<sup>34</sup> At the same time, efforts were made to step up dialogue with Swedish government circles, mainly through the Social Democrat ministers, Väinö Tanner and Karl-August Fagerholm, and the new Finnish ambassador in Stockholm, Georg Gripenberg.

<sup>30</sup> See telegram from Blücher, 11 Jan. 1943, PA R 29 583, fos. 26–7. On the other hand, Witting's departure suited the Americans very well; see Berry, *American Foreign Policy*, 231–2.

<sup>31</sup> Erfurth, *Der Finnische Krieg*, 208. See also the statement by the responsible head of department in the foreign ministry (Grundherr), 5 Mar. 1943, PA R 29 583, fos. 200 ff. Goebbels, who had clearly expected something worse, even thought the new government was 'a complete success for the Axis powers' (*Die Tagebücher*, pt. 2, vii. 482, 6 Mar. 1943).

<sup>32</sup> On this, see ADAP, Series E, iv, docs. 116, 243, 263 and 268; on the background, Polvinen, *Barbarossasta Teheranin*, 170 ff.

<sup>33</sup> Berry, *American Foreign Policy*, 236.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid. 245 ff. See also the documentation regarding these contacts in *Foreign Relations of the United States. Diplomatic Papers*, 1943, iii. 219, 222–6, 232–3, 236 ff.

While all these contacts already indicated a certain flexibility in Helsinki's attitude, a brief window of opportunity for concrete negotiations with the Soviet Union appeared to open up shortly after the new government came in. At all events, on 20 March 1943 the State Department, after consulting the governments in Moscow, London, and Stockholm, offered to make its 'good offices' available should the Finnish leaders wish to engage in peace talks with the Soviet Union.<sup>35</sup> The ball was now in Helsinki's court. That was where the decision had to be taken.

It was clear to the Finnish government from the start that its room for manoeuvre in the matter of peace depended primarily on the attitude of its supremely powerful German ally. Germany would have to be persuaded, if at all possible, to tolerate Finland's transatlantic contacts, as there appeared to be no prospect of concealing them any longer. That was the main objective of Helsinki's policy vis-à-vis Germany in the weeks following Stalingrad. To that end, every effort was made to play down the significance of those contacts to Berlin, and to give the impression that they were primarily domestic policy manoeuvres unrelated to foreign policy, that is, their purpose was not to seek a separate peace (of which there was absolutely no realistic prospect) but to allay the growing peace opposition in Finland itself. A break with Washington in the foreseeable future could hardly be avoided, but the Finnish people did not want war with the United States, so, for that very reason and for the sake of the unity within the country that Germany also wanted to see, the government had to be able to show that it had done everything to avoid an American declaration of war.<sup>36</sup>

Despite this official explanation, the government was anxious not to break the connection with Washington altogether in the event that Wilhelmstrasse reacted with hostility. It therefore decided to reply first of all to the above-mentioned American memorandum—regardless of possible German objections. It did so in a note delivered on 24 March 1943, which, unsurprisingly, was polite in tone but evasive in substance, endeavouring to gain time and keep the dialogue going by asking for further details of the basis of the American offer to mediate, without affronting any of the interested parties by making premature commitments.<sup>37</sup> It was a simple and transparent diplomatic manoeuvre, but probably the only realistic one in the circumstances.

What was less realistic, however, was the hope nourished in some government quarters that Berlin would be content to watch Finland's diplomatic games and do nothing about it. The new Finnish foreign minister was to learn that this was by no means the case, now that the situation on the eastern front was stable again, when, immediately after transmitting Finland's reply to Washington, he arrived in Berlin for an 'introductory visit', arranged at short notice.<sup>38</sup> This visit, significantly

<sup>35</sup> Telegram from Hull to the chargé d'affaires in Finland, 19 Mar. 1943, in *Foreign Relations of the United States. Diplomatic Papers, 1943*, iii. 250–1.

<sup>36</sup> Telegram from Blücher, 19 Mar. 1943, in *ADAP*, Series E, v, doc. 225, 430.

<sup>37</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States. Diplomatic Papers, 1943*, iii. 255. See also Ryti's own (unpublished) memoirs, manuscript, 292–3, *State Archives, Helsinki*, Ryti papers, No. 9.

<sup>38</sup> See Weizsäcker's notes Nos. 178 and 180 of 23 Mar. 1943, PAR 29 583, fos. 237–8 and 241, as well as his diary note of 27 Mar. 1941, repr. in Weizsäcker, *Die Weizsäcker-Papiere*, 334. The public prosecutor's

conducted on the Finnish side as a quasi-private mission in the greatest secrecy, clearly shows how little of the comrades-in-arms spirit of the early phase of the war remained in the relations between the two governments. Not only did Joachim von Ribbentrop, in a deliberate diplomatic affront, keep his Finnish colleague Ramsay waiting for six hours after he arrived in Berlin on 25 March, not knowing whether or when he intended to receive him;<sup>39</sup> he made no effort to understand Helsinki's difficult situation, which Ramsay was attempting to discuss with him. On the contrary, the German foreign minister explained to his guest in no uncertain terms that Finland had to decide once and for all which side it was on, and that it was unacceptable to fight at Germany's side and at the same time 'seek assurances from our worst enemy, namely the USA'. Any move by Finland to make a separate peace would be regarded on the German side 'as a betrayal of the crusade against Bolshevism'. In that case, the Reich too would consider that it was no longer bound to Finland, but 'would have an absolutely free hand, and draw its own conclusions'.<sup>40</sup> That was not all. On the same evening, Ribbentrop, supposedly after discussing the matter with Hitler, presented Ramsay with a note containing two demands. First, Berlin expected to receive 'a precise statement' from the Finnish government—a confidential exchange of letters between the two heads of state was suggested—to the effect that it 'would not conclude an armistice or make peace with the USSR without Germany's consent'. And secondly, Helsinki was to make it absolutely clear to the United States without delay, in a note that had already been prepared in Berlin, that it was going to continue the 'defensive battle against Soviet Russia', and that it therefore definitively declined all American offers to mediate.<sup>41</sup>

This marked a change in German policy on Finland, not only in style but also in content, a change that also found expression in Berlin's attitude to its other allies now that the operational crisis in the east had been overcome. Not only was Wilhelmstrasse making it unmistakably clear for the first time that it would not tolerate any move on the part of its 'comrade-in-arms' to conduct an independent foreign policy. It was also attempting to redefine the basis of its relations with Helsinki. Thus, in view of their increasing differences, Berlin now wanted the informality of their mutual relations, which had been unproblematic in times when their interests were largely identical, to be replaced by a legally binding agreement in the nature of a treaty.

For its part, the Finnish government was now in danger of falling between two stools. To accede to the German demands seemed hardly feasible in the domestic

contention in the post-war trials of the Finnish wartime authorities for 'war responsibility', namely that Ramsay's purpose in going to Berlin had always been to disavow the American offer of mediation, is unsustainable in the light of the source material; see Procopé, *Sowjetjustiz über Finnland*, 100.

<sup>39</sup> 'Kronologinen yhteenveto Suomen ja Saksan välisen suhteiden kehittymisestä 1.6.1940–11.9.1944', 92–3 (No. 387), State Archives, Helsinki, Kivimäki papers, ii.

<sup>40</sup> Note on the conversation between Ribbentrop and Ramsay at midday on 26 Mar. 1943 in ADAP, Series E, v. 467–76, particularly 469 ff. See also the Finnish ambassador's report of 29 Mar. 1943 (Report No. 13), Foreign Ministry Archives, Helsinki, 5/C 5 (1943).

<sup>41</sup> ADAP, Series E, v. doc. 251, 480–1, and doc. 257, 493 ff.

political situation, and it would certainly close the door to Washington, that is, to the only real guarantor of a future peace accord. Conversely, an open snub to Germany, even if it led to peace negotiations, carried the intrinsic risk of leaving Finland defenceless against Soviet demands. The uncertainty was exacerbated by the fact that Helsinki was just as unsure about what Moscow actually envisaged in terms of a separate peace as it was about the possibility of backing from the powerful but distant Americans.

Such fears were by no means unfounded. In fact, Washington had no intention of seriously complicating the already difficult relations with Stalin by raising the question of Finland, which was a minor problem from the American point of view.<sup>42</sup> So the offer of mediation made on 20 March was certainly not an expression of any particular American commitment to the Finnish cause, but was primarily an attempt to get Finland out of the Axis coalition.

It is indicative, in this respect, that the United States omitted to inform the Finns of the Soviet demands which Vyacheslav M. Molotov conveyed to the American ambassador in Moscow on 26 March (that is, the day when Ramsay was engaged in negotiations in Berlin).<sup>43</sup> In fact, it was quite rightly assumed in Washington that the Ryti government would consider unacceptable the conditions laid down by Foreign Minister Molotov, which included re-establishment of the terms of the 1940 Moscow Peace Treaty and the payment by Finland of reparations amounting to at least half the war damage caused in the Soviet Union, and that it would only draw closer to Germany again as a result. It was therefore decided to keep the Finns in the dark for the time being, and eventually to inform them on 10 April that the offer made on 20 March had not actually implied the intention to act as an intermediary, but simply the willingness to establish a line of communication for the assumption of direct negotiations between Moscow and Helsinki.<sup>44</sup> The final Finnish reply to the 20 March offer had already been drafted when this information reached Helsinki. In the note handed to the American chargé d'affaires that same day, the government confirmed, in words chosen in no small measure for German ears, that as things stood the Finns had no alternative other 'than to continue their war of defence until the maintenance of the independence, freedom, and democratic institutions of Finland is safeguarded and the menace to Finland has been removed'.<sup>45</sup>

The failure of the Finnish peace-feelers at the beginning of April 1943 certainly did not mark the end of the crisis in the relationship with the German Reich, as Ryti still had to deal with Berlin's demand for a binding 'declaration not to seek a separate peace'. This involved a diplomatic tug of war that lasted a full three

<sup>42</sup> See Berry, *American Foreign Policy*, 272 ff.

<sup>43</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States. Diplomatic Papers, 1943*, iii. 255–6.

<sup>44</sup> Directive to the chargé d'affaires in Finland, 9 Apr. 1943, *ibid.* 264. See also Berry, *American Foreign Policy*, 281 ff.

<sup>45</sup> As quoted in *Foreign Relations of the United States. Diplomatic Papers, 1943*, iii. 265. Ryti told the former Finnish ambassador in Moscow, Juko Kusti Paasikivi, at the time that, had he had satisfactory guarantees from the USA, he would have accepted an offer of a separate peace even if it meant a break with Germany; Paasikivi, *Jatkosodan pääväkirjat*, 279 (1 May 1943).

months—to the great annoyance of Wilhelmstrasse, which had called for a rapid settlement.<sup>46</sup> In order to avoid, if at all possible, making a declaration in the sense expected on the German side, but also to avoid rejecting it altogether and so reigniting the crisis, the Finnish government played for time, as it had already done on the peace issue. Such delaying tactics were particularly advisable, in that opinions about what to do, in the cabinet and in the parliamentary foreign-policy committee responsible for dealing with the matter, were completely at odds. Doubts were increasingly expressed as to whether the constitution even allowed the president to make such an extensive and binding declaration on ending or not ending the war without a decision to that effect being taken by parliament.<sup>47</sup>

In fact, it was precisely these considerations of constitutional law that pointed the way to a political solution of the conflict. Helsinki could quite reasonably proceed on the assumption that, on the German side too, there might be some reluctance to see a public debate in the Finnish parliament on the declaration of loyalty they had demanded, since it would give the peace opposition, which could not yet command a majority but which was increasingly strong, an opportunity to state its position for all the world to hear, thereby exposing the government's carefully cultivated appearance of national unanimity as a fiction. By drawing its attention to this danger, the Finnish government hoped to persuade Berlin to give way.<sup>48</sup>

Helsinki's calculation paid off on this occasion,<sup>49</sup> though not without a preliminary war of nerves. A draft declaration submitted by Ramsay on 29 April, evoking the two countries' mutual 'loyalty born of fighting for a common cause' and 'the Finnish government's firm resolve to continue Finland's defensive battle until the threat from the east had been removed', was rejected by Ribbentrop as inadequate.<sup>50</sup> A few days later, in a counter-proposal to be taken as a minimum demand, the German foreign ministry again attempted to obtain agreement to the main German requirement (that is, that any Finnish decision to withdraw from the war be subject to Berlin's consent) by using a hedged formulation that was, as it were, below the threshold requiring parliamentary approval. According to this proposal, Finland was to declare that it would 'continue to fight at Germany's side until the threat to both countries from the east had finally been removed'.<sup>51</sup> It

<sup>46</sup> Blücher, *Gesandter zwischen Diktatur und Demokratie*, 331.

<sup>47</sup> In fact, the Finnish constitution of 17 July 1919 provides, in paragraph 33(1): 'The President shall determine Finland's relations with foreign states [...] The President shall decide on matters of war and peace with the consent of parliament.' Thus there were definitely legal grounds for the doubts that were expressed, irrespective of their political motivation. See also the constitutional law opinion of 15 April 1943, delivered for the president by E. Castrén; State Archives, Helsinki, Ryti papers, No. 24.

<sup>48</sup> See Blücher's convincing arguments in his telegram of 29 May 1943, in *ADAP*, Series E, vi, doc. 65, 112–13.

<sup>49</sup> Similar conflict situations arose on several occasions in the course of the following year, leading on 26 April 1944 to the Finnish president giving the undertaking demanded by Berlin not to make a separate peace, an undertaking that was revoked soon after. See Menger, *Deutschland und Finnland*, 205–6, and Polvinen, *Teheranista Jaltaan*, 77.

<sup>50</sup> *ADAP*, Series E, doc. 359, 732–3. Alternative drafts in Foreign Ministry Archives, Helsinki, Fb 12 L (Saksa)/73 and Fb 110/10—vol. 1.

<sup>51</sup> *ADAP*, Series E, vi, doc. 9, 27 ff. See also Blücher, *Tagebücher* 7, fos. 2527 ff., PA, Blücher papers.

was all to no avail. The Finns, offended rather than intimidated by the aggressive style of German diplomacy—for example, the German ambassador, Wipert von Blücher, was periodically recalled to Berlin—insisted more than ever on their constitutional reservations. In taking this position, they were not misled by indications that Berlin was prepared to compromise when it came to the legal form of the declaration in question. Initially it had been a question of an undertaking by the president, then of an exchange of notes between foreign ministers, and finally just of a Finnish aide-memoire. In the end, it did not even come to that. On the contrary, the Reich government was eventually satisfied with an extract, submitted in June 1943, from a public address by the prime minister on Remembrance Day, 16 May,<sup>52</sup> which made no mention of Finnish decisions depending on Germany. Linkomies had simply repeated, in deliberately vague terms, that in view of the dubious nature of Soviet intentions the Finnish people would ‘certainly rather fight to the end than put themselves at the mercy of their eastern neighbours’.<sup>53</sup>

It is remarkable that Berlin should have progressively given way in a matter central to the German–Finnish relationship and to the prestige of both countries, and all the more so since the Reich government, perhaps wisely, refrained from exerting all the diplomatic pressure at its disposal. Thus President Rytí—unlike Antonescu, Horthy, and Mussolini for example—was not summoned to Klessheim Castle in the spring of 1943. On the contrary, it was decided not to do so after the government in Helsinki indicated that such an invitation would not be welcome.<sup>54</sup> The German authorities showed similar restraint in the use of economic sanctions to enforce their policy, even though the economic agreements on the exchange of goods, concluded in mid-March, would have provided a perfect opportunity to do so.<sup>55</sup> In fact, Blücher had already suggested in February that, for political reasons, German deliveries should no longer ‘be made far in advance, but should be confined to short-term needs’. However, Ribbentrop had firmly rejected such ideas, and had refused to allow any delaying tactics in the ongoing economic negotiations.<sup>56</sup>

Berlin clearly still preferred to use the ‘carrot’ rather than the ‘stick’ when it came to retaining this important ally in the battle against the Soviet Union—witness the largely undisturbed German food deliveries, some even exceeding the agreed quotas, in the summer of 1943.<sup>57</sup> As for the Finnish government, its victory on points in the diplomatic duel with Berlin in the spring of 1943 could not conceal the fact that its room for manoeuvre between the interests of the rival great powers was alarmingly narrow. The erstwhile comrades-in-arms relationship with

<sup>52</sup> ADAP, Series E, vi, doc. 96, 175–6, and doc. 111, 198. See also Linkomies’ memoirs, *Vaikea aika*, 232 ff.

<sup>53</sup> Quoted in ADAP, Series E, vi, doc. 72, 124.

<sup>54</sup> See telegrams from Blücher, 3 and 7 Jun. 1943, in ADAP, Series E, vi, doc. 76, 129, and doc. 87, 150; also Rytí’s note in his diary, 7 Jun. 1943 (typed version), State Archives, Helsinki, Rytí papers, No. 10.

<sup>55</sup> For details, see Seppinen, *Suomen ulkomaankaupan ehdot*, 166 ff.

<sup>56</sup> Telegram from Blücher, 24 Feb. 1943, and Ribbentrop’s reply, 6 Mar. 1943, in ADAP, Series E, v, doc. 154, 282, and doc. 352, 183.

<sup>57</sup> Seppinen, *Suomen ulkomaankaupan ehdot*, 181.

Germany had gradually but irreversibly developed into a kind of forced marriage and, to pursue the metaphor, the prospects of an amicable divorce and a new partnership had not really improved. In this situation, after the shocking course of the war in the summer of 1943 from the Finnish point of view, it was clear that, in order to safeguard national sovereignty, the Finnish authorities would sooner or later have to negotiate the narrow passage between the threat of German reprisals and the demands of Soviet aspirations to hegemony.

Far-sighted German observers took much the same view. As the German ambassador in Helsinki, Wipert von Blücher, explained in a summary analysis of the situation on 22 July 1943, although 'Anschluss with Russia' was still unthinkable on psychological grounds alone, Finland, faced with the choice between the western powers and Germany, had so far opted for the latter only because it trusted Germany rather than Britain and the United States to 'master the danger posed by Russia'.<sup>58</sup> This—together with Finland's economic dependence on the Reich—was the fundamental reason for their present relationship as comrades-in-arms, while other factors, 'such as traditional friendship, deep-rooted cultural relations, and manifold personal ties' on the one hand, and 'differences of opinion on matters of religion, race, and constitutional law' on the other, played only 'a secondary role'. Thus, according to Blücher, the future of the comrades-in-arms relationship depended first and foremost on whether Finland remained convinced that Germany alone was able and willing to provide it with the necessary protection. The recent growing uncertainty about the outcome of the war had therefore logically encouraged the Finns to adopt a 'flexible policy':

They are therefore endeavouring not to rely more on one side than they have done so far, and perhaps even to distance themselves from Germany to some extent. They are seeking a rapprochement with neutral Sweden. They mean to maintain and cultivate their ties with the United States. They have stopped inveighing against Britain and even, to a lesser extent, against the Soviet Union. They are reducing their contribution to the war to an absolute minimum. However, these attempts have been severely hampered by the fact that, so far, Britain and the United States have evidently been unwilling to do anything for Finland that might damage their own relations with Russia. Also, Finland's freedom of movement is limited by its economic dependence on Germany.<sup>59</sup>

### (b) First Peace-Feelers

Blücher's assessment of the situation was couched in cautious and, in places, (probably deliberately) euphemistic terms, but in substance it was absolutely correct. However quiet and stable the political and military situation in the Finnish area might have appeared in the months in question, the attentive observer could hardly fail to see that the ground was shaky and things were gradually beginning to slide. Confidential surveys carried out by the government revealed a change in public opinion that was barely noticeable in everyday life, but was nevertheless

<sup>58</sup> Tagebücher 8, 2545, PA, Blücher papers.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid. 2546 ff.

dramatic. In the autumn of 1942 the great majority of supporters of all political parties still believed the Axis powers would win, but within a year the picture had changed completely. Apart from a few radical right-wing voters, people of almost every political persuasion were now convinced that the Allies had the upper hand. Among the Social Democrats and supporters of the National Progressive Party, in particular, belief that Germany and its Axis partners would win had sunk almost to vanishing-point—4 per cent in each case. Even in the Conservative camp, where a year ago confidence in an Axis victory (95 per cent) had still been unshakeable, people were now clearly deeply uneasy, and only a minority (38 per cent) still counted on the Germans winning.<sup>60</sup>

The profound change in public opinion was visible in various ways. The national press, which was subject to wartime censorship but was certainly not forced into line,<sup>61</sup> now referred increasingly frequently to the possibility of a political change of direction and expressed the hope of a speedy peace. This was seen, for example, in the articles on the second anniversary of the beginning of the German–Soviet war. Although, in the German military attaché's opinion, 'positive and optimistic articles' still predominated, the arguments nevertheless seemed to him to vary greatly in the weight they carried, 'representing every shade of opinion, from uncompromising support for continuation of the war to a veritable paean of longing for peace, even disowning the war aims proclaimed by the Marshal [Mannerheim] in 1941'.<sup>62</sup>

More sensational was the public emergence of a group, the 'Peace Opposition', consisting of 33 public figures—mainly members of the Social Democrat and Swedish People's Party parliamentary fractions—who, in a letter addressed to the president on 20 August 1943 and published in the press, called for strong and speedy efforts to improve Finland's relations with the United States, 'to take us out of the current war between the great powers' and 'secure our country's freedom, independence, and peace' by way of negotiations.<sup>63</sup>

This step by members of parliament highlights the dilemma of the Finnish government, which had managed to keep its discreet peace-feelers hidden from its own people, its own parliament, and its parliamentary foreign policy committee, although not from its suspicious German comrade-in-arms. This discretion appeared to the government to be essential if it was to retain any freedom of action. Not without reason, it feared the uncontrollable dynamics of public debate and the practical constraints imposed by official announcements. Instead, it banked on an unobtrusive policy of symbolic gestures, as non-binding as possible, in the hope that it would thus be able to avoid serious disadvantages and keep various negotiating options open.

<sup>60</sup> See Jutikhalu, 'Mielialojen krijo jatkosodan ailana', 131 ff. and 145 ff.

<sup>61</sup> See Rusi, *Lehdistönsuuri jathosodassa*.

<sup>62</sup> German embassy/military attaché re 'Militärpolitische Gedankengänge in der finnischen Presse zum 2. Jahrestag des deutsch-russischen Krieges', 6 July 1943 (BA-MA RW 4/v. 325).

<sup>63</sup> Quoted from the German version of the text in Blücher's telegram No. 1768 of 27 Aug. 1943 (PA R 29584, fos. 134–5).

The most spectacular of these gestures, always made with both Berlin and Washington in mind, was the disbandment of the Finnish Waffen SS volunteer battalion in the summer of 1943.<sup>64</sup> In this connection, it was typical of Finnish policy that, as the country needed 'its own able-bodied men more than ever' in view of the tense situation regarding replacements for its own army, no more volunteers were to be recruited, but members of the battalion were to be allowed to continue to serve for a maximum of a further six months, so long as the German side agreed to deploy the volunteers on the eastern front only.<sup>65</sup> In this way, the decision on the future of the unit was formally shifted to the Germans, who promptly said they were prepared to give up the battalion altogether, 'in order to spare the Fin[nish] volunteers any conflict of conscience'.<sup>66</sup>

Apart from that, there was no shortage of issues liable to upset political relations between the comrades-in-arms in the summer and autumn of 1943. They included, above all, the establishment of a—formally private—Finnish-American Society, in which prominent figures of various political persuasions met under the chairmanship of a press magnate and former foreign minister.<sup>67</sup> Unsurprisingly, the German foreign ministry reacted to this with extreme annoyance.<sup>68</sup> Conversely, the increasingly harsh German occupation policy in Norway and Denmark, particularly the deportation of Danish Jews,<sup>69</sup> was openly criticized in Finland. The Finnish press, which published extra numbers in response to the imposition of a state of emergency in Denmark, 'made it absolutely clear that, in this case too, it sympathized with its Nordic brothers'.<sup>70</sup> The Finnish government, which depended on German deliveries of grain and weapons, nevertheless repeatedly took pains to avoid upsetting its partner too much. Thus, for example, the Social Democrat minister Fagerholm was removed from his post when he sharply criticized German occupation policy in Norway.<sup>71</sup> And Finnish policy continued on essentially the same lines. The German ambassador found it 'fluid', noting that the foreign minister, Henrik Ramsay, whom he saw almost every day, 'wasn't telling him everything'. The prime minister, Edwin Linkomies, seemed to him to be 'devious', and only the president, Risto Heikki Ryti, was 'still optimistic'.<sup>72</sup>

By October, the tensions between Helsinki and Berlin had grown to such an extent that Hitler was prompted to send Ryti a 16-page letter, apparently

<sup>64</sup> On the history of the battalion, see Stein and Crosby, 'Das finnische Freiwilligen-Bataillon', and esp. Jokipii, *Panttipataljoona*.

<sup>65</sup> Zechlin's telegram No. 1387 from Helsinki, 30 Jun. 1943 (PA R 29584). See also, in this connection, telegrams Nos. 1386 and 1417, sent on 30 June and 5 July 1943 respectively (*ibid.*) A good idea of the Finnish approach is also given by Erfurth's entries in his private diary on 27 June 1943, 3 July 1943, and 4 July 1943 (BA-MA N 257/v. 3, 704–9).

<sup>66</sup> Erfurth, private diary, 4 July 1943, BA-MA N 257/v. 3, 708. In fact, very few volunteers were prepared to continue to serve, and this must have had a decisive effect on the German decision.

<sup>67</sup> For details, see Berry, *American Foreign Policy*, 306 ff.

<sup>68</sup> See Zechlin's telegrams Nos. 1404 of 2 July and 1454 of 9 July 1943, and the file note by Sonnleithner (foreign minister's office) dated 11 July 1943 (all in PA R 29584).

<sup>69</sup> See *Germany and the Second World War*, v/II, 21–4.

<sup>70</sup> Erfurth, private diary, 31 Aug. 1943 (BA-MA N257/v. 3, 749).

<sup>71</sup> See Menger, *Deutschland und Finnland*, 166.

<sup>72</sup> Blücher to Erfurth, 1 Sept. 1943, Erfurth, private diary, 751–2 (BA-MA N 257/v. 3).

self-composed, complaining—‘in polite but extremely cutting terms’—about Finland’s behaviour.<sup>73</sup> In the letter, delivered personally by Alfred Jodl, the dictator complained, in particular, about unfriendly comments in the Finnish press and about the Finnish government’s refusal to give diplomatic recognition to the puppet state recently established by Benito Mussolini in Salò. But the most threatening feature of Hitler’s letter was his open criticism of the Finnish concept of a ‘parallel war’, which had hitherto been passed over in silence.<sup>74</sup> This did not augur well for the future.

The news and signals reaching Finland from Washington also gave little cause for hope. On the contrary, they confirmed the conclusion, expected on the German side and feared on the Finnish side, that—as the US secretary of state, Cordell Hull, confided to the Swedish ambassador during the foreign ministers’ conference in Moscow—although many people in the United States felt ‘sympathy for this small, clean country’, Russia was much too important an ally ‘[to] risk damaging the main lines’ by hefty support for Finland.<sup>75</sup> So neither the Americans nor the British engaged in a serious conflict with their Soviet partner about the Finnish question during the conference. Although they called for Finland’s national sovereignty to be respected and for the country to be exempted from the demand for unconditional surrender directed at the Axis powers, it was clear that they were prepared to regard Finland’s future as primarily a matter for Moscow.<sup>76</sup> The talks which the Finnish foreign minister, Ramsay, had with the American chargé d’affaires in Helsinki at the beginning of November were shattering. The Finnish side came away with the impression that Finland would clearly be regarded by the Allies as an ‘Axis power’ and almost certainly face a demand for unconditional surrender, and that at least some parts of the country would probably then be occupied by the Red Army.<sup>77</sup>

With the painful realization that what the Finnish authorities had supposed to be the American trump card was no such thing, another mediator became more important, a country which had already used its good offices successfully during the 1939/40 Finnish–Soviet Winter War.<sup>78</sup> However, the conditions in which Sweden now came to act were a great deal more difficult than they had been on the previous occasion. Concerned to maintain its neutrality, Sweden had a strong self-interest in sparing its eastern neighbour the experience of Sovietization, but it naturally carried little political weight in the worldwide political conflict between the great powers. In particular, Stockholm had to bear in mind that any attempt to negotiate a separate Finnish peace would be interpreted by Germany, the dominant power in the Baltic region, as an unfriendly, if not downright hostile, act. So, proceeding with caution, Sweden made its first diplomatic moves to obtain peace

<sup>73</sup> Scherff, according to Erfurth, private diary, 15 Oct. 1943 (*ibid.* 788).

<sup>74</sup> See Erfurth, private diary, 23 Oct. 1943 (*ibid.* 790). See also Menger, *Deutschland und Finnland*, 166–7. Ryti’s reply to Hitler’s letter was restrained and vaguely worded, and Hitler found it a ‘downy-soft epistle’ (quoted in Menger, *Deutschland und Finnland*, 167).

<sup>75</sup> Quoted in Polvinen, ‘Die Alliierten und die finnische Friedensfrage’, 309–10.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.* 310 ff. <sup>77</sup> See Büttner, *Sowjetisierung oder Selbständigkeit*, 64.

<sup>78</sup> On the part Stockholm played at that time, see in particular Jakobson, *The Diplomacy of the Winter War*, and Carlgren, *Swedish Foreign Policy*, ch. 2.

only towards the end of 1943, when it was considered in Stockholm that Germany's defeat was now only a matter of time.<sup>79</sup> The reputedly pro-Finnish Soviet ambassador in Stockholm, Alexandra Kollontai, played a key part in the Swedish–Soviet dialogue once again, as she had done during the Winter War. After preparatory 'private' talks<sup>80</sup> with the Swedish cabinet secretary, Boheman, she was able to deliver her government's response on 20 November, namely that Finnish representatives were welcome to attend peace talks in Moscow, and that, in principle, the Soviet Union had no intention of restricting Finland's independence unless Finnish policy forced it to do so.<sup>81</sup>

The Soviet communication, which made no mention of unconditional surrender, seemed to the Finnish authorities to offer a ray of hope. They accordingly took pains to send a speedy and friendly reply, stressing above all their wish for good neighbourly relations and neutrality under international law. Helsinki declared its readiness to negotiate with Moscow on all issues relevant to the establishment of a lasting peace, including certain border corrections, and it suggested that the talks be based on the 1939 borders. From Stalin's point of view, precisely this reference to the pre-war borders—a similar attempt had already been made in the summer of 1943—proved that Finland was still not realistically aware of its situation, and that it was not really interested in making peace.<sup>82</sup> What followed was a war of nerves, rich in evasive tactical moves and lasting for months. The first backdrop was the Teheran Conference, at which Stalin set out his terms for peace with Finland more clearly than ever before. His main demands were implementation of the 1940 peace treaty, the cession of either Hanko or Petsamo, the payment of Finnish reparations amounting to 50 per cent of the damage that had been caused, the break-off of relations with Germany, the expulsion of German troops from Finland, and, lastly, the demobilization of the Finnish army. The British and Americans made half-hearted attempts to soften some of those demands. Thus, Franklin D. Roosevelt argued that Vyborg should remain in Finland, while Winston Churchill expressed doubts that Finland, poor as it was, could pay any reparations worth mentioning. None of this had any effect. The western powers were prepared to let the Soviets have their way at Teheran, just as they had done in the case of Poland and the Baltic States—all the more so as Stalin gave them a vague parting assurance that, in recognition of Finland's determined resistance, he would safeguard the country's independence. With this arrangement between the great powers, as the Finnish historian Tuomo Polvinen rightly observed, 'the fate of the northern republic was essentially already [...] decided. All that remained was to convince the Finns.'<sup>83</sup>

<sup>79</sup> On Swedish perceptions of the military situation after 1943, see Böhme, 'Stalingrad und Schweden', and Carlgren, 'Die Einschätzung der Lage Deutschlands'.

<sup>80</sup> Wary of Germany, the Swedish foreign ministry still did not venture to appear officially as mediator.

<sup>81</sup> See Polvinen, 'Die Alliierten und die finnische Friedensfrage', 313–14.

<sup>82</sup> On this and the following, see *ibid.* 314 ff., Carlgren, *Swedish Foreign Policy*, 181 ff., and more recently Büttner, *Sowjetisierung oder Selbständigkeit*, 65 ff.

<sup>83</sup> Polvinen, 'Die Alliierten und die finnische Friedensfrage', 318. See also Berry, *American Foreign Policy*, 356–63.

Convincing them, however, proved extremely difficult in the following weeks and months. When, at the beginning of 1944, the Finnish government—against Carl Gustav Mannerheim's advice—refused to enter into negotiations on the basis of the 1940 Moscow peace treaty, the Soviet authorities stepped up the military pressure on their refractory neighbour. In February there were repeated Soviet air raids on Helsinki and other cities in southern Finland, but the damage they caused was fortunately kept within bounds by a combination of bad weather and effective air defence.<sup>84</sup> In the same month, that is, a few weeks after the liberation of Leningrad, Marshal Meretskov was appointed as the new commander-in-chief of Karelian Front and entrusted with preparations for a land offensive.<sup>85</sup> At the same time, with the transfer of the American chargé d'affaires in Helsinki, Robert McClintock, in January, and the instruction given to his successor to keep all official and private contacts in the host country to a minimum, the US pressure on Finland increased sharply, and as the departing diplomat wrote in his last report, the impending and apparently inevitable catastrophe reminded him of a Greek tragedy.<sup>86</sup>

With the liberation of Leningrad after a siege lasting almost 900 days, it seemed to the Finns that the stage was set for the inevitable denouement of a classical tragedy. Leningrad, more than any other place, had been the geographical focus of the German–Finnish brotherhood of arms since 1941. The German Wehrmacht's ability to capture the Russian metropolis on the Baltic, an ability which Finland had initially taken for granted but had increasingly come to doubt, was regarded in Helsinki, more than military developments in other parts of Europe, as a yardstick by which to assess its own prospects for the future. Until 1943 the German authorities had constantly given their Scandinavian ally to understand that Leningrad would definitely be taken shortly.<sup>87</sup> Although such assurances found less and less credence in Helsinki as time went by, the Finnish authorities were deeply shocked by the force of the offensive launched by three Soviet army fronts in mid-January, especially as, within a few weeks, the Soviet forces had opened up a 300-kilometre-wide breach in the German (Eighteenth Army) defence front, cut Army Group North's connection with the Finnish army, and driven it back to Lake Peipus.<sup>88</sup> This was the worst-case scenario, and both Eduard Dietl's army high command and the Wehrmacht operations staff had for months been under no illusions about its consequences for Germany's alliance policy.<sup>89</sup> In fact, Mannerheim finally realized that Germany had lost its war against the Soviet Union,<sup>90</sup> and that

<sup>84</sup> See Pesonen, *Helsinki sodassa*, ch. 11.

<sup>85</sup> On this, see also the memoirs of Marshal Meretskov, *Serving the People*, 286 ff. On the preparations for the offensive, see Erickson, *Stalin's War*, ii. 272 ff., and more recently Manninen, *The Soviet Plans*, 127 ff.

<sup>86</sup> See Berry, *American Foreign Policy*, 382–6, here 385.

<sup>87</sup> See Wegner, 'Die Leningradfrage'.

<sup>88</sup> In a telex to Mannerheim sent on 31 Jan. 1944 (repr. in *Operationsgebiet östliche Ostsee*, 20–1), Field Marshal Keitel was obliged to acknowledge the heavy German setbacks, but he promised to hold the Lake Ilmen–Narva line and offered to provide further German help for the defence of Finland. On the situation at Leningrad, see also Part IV, Chapter I.2 of the present volume.

<sup>89</sup> On the corresponding warnings, see Menger, *Deutschland und Finnland*, 176–7.

<sup>90</sup> See Ryti, unpublished manuscript, 296, State Archives, Helsinki, Ryti papers No. 9.

Finland's very existence was under threat. As the Finnish high command's intelligence section warned in a 5 February situation assessment (not without some overestimation of Soviet possibilities), the Red Army would now be in a position to launch major attacks on the Finnish heartland within a few days, thanks to its secure supply lines. The so-called Aunus area (between Lake Ladoga and Lake Onega), and above all the Karelian Isthmus were particularly threatened, so a start was now made on fortifying them with all speed, and two divisions were transferred to the isthmus as a reserve intervention force.<sup>91</sup>

In this situation, increasingly desperate for Finland from a strategic point of view but still stable for the time being in tactical and operational terms, the Finnish-Soviet peace talks were resumed in February, once again at the instigation of Madame Kollontai and the Swedish government, who acted as mediators.<sup>92</sup> This time the negotiations were conducted on the Finnish side by the diplomat (and future president) Juho Kusti Paasikivi, who was unburdened by any government office and highly valued in Moscow as a conservative political realist. In the last week of March, after preparatory soundings in Stockholm and some diplomatic squabbles, Paasikivi left for Moscow in the company of the former Finnish foreign minister, Carl Enckell, and in fact on a secret mission to negotiate peace. It was a short trip. After only three rounds of talks, the negotiations were at an end. The Soviet demands, presented to the Finnish visitors in the form of an ultimatum, were unexpectedly harsh: not only was Helsinki to break off relations with Germany immediately and drive out or intern the German troops stationed in the country by the end of April, with Soviet assistance if necessary, but the Finnish army was also to withdraw behind the 1940 border, likewise in April, and be demobilized within three months. Furthermore, all Soviet and Allied prisoners of war were to be released immediately, the Petsamo area in the north-eastern part of the country, important for its nickel deposits, was to be ceded to the Soviet Union, and reparations amounting to 600 million dollars were to be paid within five years. If all these conditions were met, then and only then would Moscow be prepared to give up its lease on the Baltic port of Hanko, close to the Finnish capital.<sup>93</sup>

The government and parliament in Helsinki found Moscow's conditions unacceptable and informed the Soviet ambassador in Stockholm accordingly on 19 April 1944. Once again the Finns were playing for time, in the hope that time would not be entirely on the enemy's side. The imminent invasion by the western Allies could permanently alter the balance of power on the continent. In which case, the expected increase in the strength of the Anglo-Saxon powers, the further

<sup>91</sup> These were indeed the points of concentration of the major Soviet offensives launched in June. See Heiskanen, 'The Effect of Finnish Military Intelligence', 284–5.

<sup>92</sup> On this and the following, see Büttner, *Sowjetisierung oder Selbständigkeit*, 71 ff., which is the most detailed and critical account in German, and more recently, in Finnish, Jokisipilä, *Aseveljiä vai liittolaista?*, 240–60.

<sup>93</sup> See Büttner, *Sowjetisierung oder Selbständigkeit*, 74–5. A vivid impression of the content and atmosphere of the negotiations is given in the published record of the talks, Palm, *Finnish-Soviet Armistice Negotiations*, based on Finnish notes. Equally instructive are the later accounts in Passikivi's diaries, *Jatkosodan päiväkirjat*, 355–97, in Polvinen, Heikkilä, and Immonen, *J. K. Paasikivi*, iii. 345–85 and, more recently, in *Kallis toveri Stalin*.

weakening of Germany, and the diversion of the Red Army to the final battles in central Europe might perhaps create favourable framework conditions for Finland. Might the price of peace then be not quite so high for the little country on the edge of Europe that still had an intact army stationed deep in enemy territory?<sup>94</sup>

## 2. GERMAN REACTIONS AND PLANS IN THE EVENT OF FINLAND'S WITHDRAWAL FROM THE WAR

The scale of the reparations was certainly not the main reason why Helsinki found the Soviet peace terms unacceptable, although the government told the public that it was. The demands concerning the relationship with Germany were much trickier, but they were definitely not a suitable subject for public debate. Quite apart from the fact that the very idea of war against its long-standing comrade-in-arms was unthinkable (especially in the ranks of the Finnish army), it was not at all clear how the Soviet demands could be met without the country being occupied by the Red Army, in the guise of assistance, or by the Wehrmacht. However, the recent invasion of Hungary (and the occupation of Italy the year before) had made it clear how Germany proposed to deal with disloyal coalition comrades—a parallel to which the German military drew their Finnish interlocutors' attention more than once, by way of a warning, during the weeks in question.<sup>95</sup> In these circumstances, the German Twentieth Mountain Army, with 200,000 men stationed in the northern part of the country, must have seemed to the Finnish government, which still had about 350,000 men under arms, not only an indispensable protection against Soviet attacks but also a potential threat.

For their part, the Germans had no illusions about the intentions and objectives of Finnish policy, and the methods employed, but they had always felt confident that, despite its 'silly democratic games',<sup>96</sup> military setbacks, pressure from the Allies, and whispered encouragement by Sweden, the country was in no position to withdraw prematurely from the war unless it wanted to be 'gobbled up immediately by the rapacious Bolsheviks'.<sup>97</sup> The relative confidence felt at Führer headquarters and in the OKW was confirmed in September 1943 by the commander-in-chief of the Lapland Army, Col.-Gen. Eduard Dietl, who considered that there was 'nothing to fear [...] at present' in Finland:

The Finns do not take much part in the fighting, but they are good fighters and they do what they can. It is true that they no longer want to be too deeply involved in this war.

<sup>94</sup> See indications to that effect in Menger, *Deutschland und Finnland*, 186.

<sup>95</sup> See Erfurth, *Tagebuch*, 899–900 and 930 (BA-MA N 257/v. 4). The unusually critical Finnish press reaction to the events in Hungary is reported in Kitschmann, 'Als Militärattaché in Helsinki', 125–6 (BA-MA MSg 2/3317).

<sup>96</sup> Thus Goebbels, *Die Tagebücher*, pt. 2, ix. 577, 23 Sept. 1943. The propaganda minister noted, after a talk with Hitler, that it would be a good thing 'if Ryti sent the parties packing. Finland's military forces are perfectly capable of conducting an experiment of this kind painlessly [...] The Führer is afraid the silly democratic games will eventually reduce Finland to a state where, yes, the operation was a success, democracy is alive and well, but the patient, Finland itself, is dead.'

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., pt. 2, x. 179, 27 Oct. 1943.

But the main thing is that they are not backing out. They know perfectly well that our 15 divisions are the only military support they have. The Americans are not thinking of lending them a helping hand, because Stalin would not tolerate it and the United States certainly does not want to get into an argument with the Soviet Union over Finland. It follows that the Finns are entirely dependent on us for military support. They are exploiting it, like all our coalition partners, but in their case there can be no question of abandoning the fighting front in the east, at least not at present.<sup>98</sup>

The predominating confidence that most German observers continued to feel throughout 1943 was severely put to the test by the direct Finnish–Soviet feelers in early 1944. Goebbels noted, in connection with the Finnish special envoy Paasikivi's secret visit to Stockholm in the middle of February, that 'Finland is now the main sensation on the public's mind'. Accepting for the last time a favourable—and in his view, optimistic—interpretation of events, he wrote: 'If the Finnish government's feelers in Stockholm are simply a tactical move to provide itself, vis-à-vis its own people, with an alibi for continuing the war, there can be no objection to them.'<sup>99</sup> Just a few weeks later, he began to adopt a distinctly harsher tone. Goebbels now deplored the fact that the Finns '[enjoy] more sympathy among the German people than they actually deserve',<sup>100</sup> noting that the time had come for propaganda to prepare the German public for the possibility of a Finnish break with the Reich.<sup>101</sup> Then the process of laying blame started. For the first time, Mannerheim himself was the target of massive German criticism. He was, according to Dietl, 'an Anglophile at heart, and would naturally like to get out of the war sooner rather than later'.<sup>102</sup> Hitler too, when he received his minister of propaganda on 4 March 1944 to discuss foreign-policy matters ('Finland being naturally at the top of the agenda'), was quite convinced 'that it is mainly the generals who are giving up in Finland'. While Ryti had 'generally stood firm' in the diplomatic tussle over a possible separate peace for Finland, Mannerheim had 'clearly lost his nerve. Unfortunately, none of our men were there to tighten his stays at the critical moment'.<sup>103</sup> The opinion expressed shortly afterwards about Mannerheim's closest adviser, General Erik Heinrichs, was not much better. The chief of the Finnish general staff, 'of whom we had such high hopes', was now unfortunately 'among the quitters'.<sup>104</sup>

As these comments show, the perceptions and manner of expression of the German leadership changed as the crisis became more acute. So long as Germany's own victory seemed to some degree assured, and Helsinki's withdrawal from the war only a vague possibility, Finland was seen as a small country whose special interests and inherently limited capabilities were to be taken into account in some

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., pt. 2, ix. 472, 10 Sept. 1943.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., pt. 2, xi. 295, 16 Feb. 1944.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., pt. 2, xi. 374, 1 Mar. 1944.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., pt. 2, xi. 389, 3 Mar. 1944. On the reassessment of Finland in the German press, see Peltovuori, *Sankarikansa ja havaltajat*, esp. 194–208.

<sup>102</sup> Goebbels, *Die Tagebücher*, pt. 2, ix. 473, 10 Sept. 1943.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., pt. 2, xi. 396, 4 Mar. 1944.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., pt. 2, xi. 581, 30 Mar. 1944.

form or other. However, as Germany found itself more and more on the military defensive and diplomatically isolated, its comrade-in-arms was viewed only instrumentally, in terms of its contribution to Germany's war effort. Faced with the real threat of a Finnish–Soviet understanding, Hitler, Goebbels, and others resorted to increasingly 'moral' judgements of their coalition partner. As in the case of Italy in the previous summer, Helsinki's policy considerations were no longer seen as calculated *realpolitik* but simply as 'failure', 'cowardice', and 'treachery' on the one hand, or 'loyalty' and 'strong nerves' on the other.

It was nevertheless decided at Führer headquarters not to simply leave things to take their course. As Goebbels noted, summing up the suggestions he submitted to Hitler on 4 March 1944: 'The sooner and harder we weigh in, the better it will be for us'.<sup>105</sup> What the minister had in mind, above all, was to let the Finns know by means of press commentaries, before they took a decision on Moscow's peace terms, 'what they were threatened with if they succumbed, both openly from the Bolsheviks and, in somewhat more veiled terms, from our side'.<sup>106</sup>

Diplomatic action followed the same lines as the propaganda. Ribbentrop hammered home to the German ambassador in Helsinki, who was considered far too soft and understanding,<sup>107</sup> that 'it must be made clear to the Finns, once and for all, that they had no choice and no alternative. Either they won through with Germany and survived or, if they separated from Germany, they would fall victim to Russia. And that would be the end of the Finnish intelligentsia and probably the rest of the Finnish population as well'.<sup>108</sup> Crass generalizations of this kind, combined with assurances 'that, after all, we shall regain the initiative in Russia very shortly', and that Germany was longing for the western powers to invade 'so that we can drive them into the sea',<sup>109</sup> naturally did little to dispel Helsinki's deep distrust of Berlin. However well informed the German ambassador might have been about the ins and outs of Finnish policy, and however much he 'lectured' his Finnish interlocutors,<sup>110</sup> his almost daily efforts led nowhere. Foreign Minister Ramsay, in particular, strove desperately to preserve his minuscule room for policy manoeuvre by all the means at his disposal. In most cases he would stall, deny, or mollify, and generally try to give the impression that his country's foreign policy

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., pt. 2, xi. 397, 4 Mar. 1944. This evidently also included an interview which Hitler personally granted to the Swedish paper *Stockholms-Tidningen* on 19 March 1944; see Peltovuori, *Sankarikansa ja havaltajat*, 204.

<sup>106</sup> Goebbels, *Die Tagebücher*, pt. 2, xi. 396; see also p. 427 (7 Mar. 1944). Thus, at the beginning of March 1944 Goebbels attempted to influence public opinion in Finland by deliberately publishing a letter from the rector of the University of Dorpat (Tartu) to the Swedish scholar Sven Hedin. According to Goebbels, the letter provided 'a deep insight into the methods which the Soviet Union planned to employ to destroy national traditions in the Baltic States'; ibid. 364, 29 Feb. 1944.

<sup>107</sup> On a previous occasion, Hitler had already described the German embassies in Helsinki and Stockholm as 'very poorly' manned but, to avoid arousing political resentment, he had refrained from making any changes; see Goebbels, *Die Tagebücher*, pt. 2, iv. 587–8, 23 June 1942.

<sup>108</sup> Blücher file note *re* telephone call from Reich foreign minister's office, 28 Feb. 1944, *Tagebücher* 8, 2866, PA, Blücher papers.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Blücher's words in a telegram, 29 Mar. 1944, *Tagebücher* 8, 2952, PA, Blücher papers.

was receptive and essentially passive. The cat-and-mouse game was only abandoned, temporarily, at the end of March, when the Moscow negotiations failed.<sup>111</sup>

In the light of this development, the Reich government stepped up the pressure on its recalcitrant partner. It stopped grain deliveries first, at the end of February, then exports of other industrial products at the beginning of April, and, finally, two weeks later, most arms deliveries.<sup>112</sup> The chief of the general staff, Heinrichs, visited Berchtesgaden at the end of the month, but even that did not lead to any relaxation of the ban on deliveries. On the contrary, Field Marshal Keitel's Finnish guest was informed in no uncertain terms—with a sharp reminder of Germany's bad experiences in 1918—that nothing was more poisonous for an army at war than the thought of peace. Never in the history of warfare had doubt served to make men stronger.<sup>113</sup> As though to confirm the message, Heinrichs was even told, during his ensuing courtesy visit to Reich Leader SS Heinrich Himmler, that Germany's final victory in the current international strife was as certain 'as the truths of arithmetic'. Only Col.-Gen. Jodl was more conciliatory, but he pointed out that it was not easy to argue Finland's case to the German leadership at this time. He had two main pieces of advice, in this connection, for his Finnish guest to take home with him. First, the Finnish government should control its national press and ensure that the comrades-in-arms were both fighting the same battle, with the pen as well as the sword. The Führer thought of himself as an artist, and as the guardian of European culture. He was very sensitive, and it was a mistake to denigrate him. Secondly, the head of the Wehrmacht operations staff suggested that the Finnish side might be prepared to give a binding assurance that any weapons delivered to Finland would in no circumstances fall into the hands of the Russians.<sup>114</sup>

If, as Jodl's last remarks suggest, the purpose of the German export ban was to prevent the Finnish government from having any further contact with the enemy, and force it instead to conclude a treaty with the Reich not to make a separate peace, it soon proved to be the very mistake that experienced observers (such as the ambassadors Karl Schnurre and Blücher, but also Generals Erfurth and Dietl) had always feared.<sup>115</sup> Helsinki did indeed take some spectacular measures to tighten

<sup>111</sup> See, e.g., Blücher's file notes on his talks with the foreign minister on 14 Feb., 4 Mar., and 1 Apr. 1944, *Tagebücher* 8, 2813–14, 2883, and 2971–2, PA, Blücher papers.

<sup>112</sup> See Seppinen, *Suomen ulkomaankaupan ehdot*, 202 ff. Only military equipment 'held to be essential for the further pursuit of military activities on the Finnish fronts' was exempt from the embargo on deliveries; telegram from the chief of the OKW, 19 Apr. 1944, PA R 29585, fo. 235. *Ibid.* also contains a list of the goods that were exempt.

<sup>113</sup> On this and the following, see Heinrichs' undated handwritten notes on his visit to the German HQ; Military Archives, Helsinki, Pk 1172/15 Heinrichs.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.* The new Finnish general at the OKW, General Österman, had already faced the same demands on 4 April, during his first visit to Führer headquarters following his appointment, and Dietl, acting on instructions from the OKW, raised the issue in a conversation with Mannerheim on 6 April. When Mannerheim subsequently wrote to Hitler in the middle of May, assuring him more or less in passing that weapons delivered by the German side would never fall into enemy hands, the assurance was regarded in Führer headquarters as by no means sufficiently binding. The Germans clearly wanted the matter enshrined in a formal agreement. See *KTB OKW*, iv. 871 ff., and Ritter, telegram No. 1036 of 17 May 1944, PA R 29585, fo. 319.

<sup>115</sup> See Seppinen, *Suomen ulkomaankaupan ehdot*, 206 ff., and Menger, *Deutschland und Finnland*, 191 ff.

censorship of the press, in order to appease the German side,<sup>116</sup> but it was not prepared to radically change its policy. On the contrary, from the Finnish point of view the German measures only underlined the need to get out of the war as quickly as possible.

Germany now had to adjust seriously to that eventuality. For Goebbels it was clear, when the Finnish crisis came to a head at the beginning of March, that 'firm measures would be needed' if Helsinki were to withdraw from the war, and he saw his Führer as 'naturally determined to take military action' in that case.<sup>117</sup> The minister of propaganda, completely under the impression of the measures which had been decided against Hungary, clearly failed to realize that conditions in the north were very much more complicated, and not only for geographical reasons. In fact, Hitler and the OKW had already decided in the early autumn of 1943 to adopt a defensive strategy—unlike the plans for Italy, Hungary, and Romania—in the event of Finland's military collapse or withdrawal from the war.

The central idea of the plan, based on Führer Directive No. 50 of 28 September 1943, was to withdraw the two corps of Twentieth Mountain Army (XVIII and XXXVI Mountain Corps) from southern to northern Finland to defend the northern cap of the Scandinavian mainland—and especially the Kolosjoki nickel deposits, which were considered essential to the defence economy—in a semicircular front with a radius of some 400 kilometres.<sup>118</sup> The feasibility and advisability of this operation did not go unchallenged. Dietl's HQ rightly pointed out that it would hardly be possible for this well-equipped army to transport its 180,000 tonnes of material rapidly over long distances. Apart from its own lack of transport facilities, there were no railways in northern Finland. The road network was completely inadequate and barely passable in winter, and no provision had been made for sufficient protection against the raids to be expected from the superior Soviet air force during the withdrawal. Nor could sea transport be regarded as a viable option, given the danger of Allied landings in northern Europe. Lastly, it should also be borne in mind that the lengthy preparations for the withdrawal could not be concealed, and would inevitably cause unrest on the Finnish side.<sup>119</sup> For all these reasons, as Dietl reported on 9 October 1943, his army 'would much rather fight honourably in southern Finland than end up starving in the Arctic Ocean'.<sup>120</sup>

Despite all the serious objections, the OKW adhered to the basic principles of Directive No. 50 in the coming months. This was primarily for reasons to do with

<sup>116</sup> See Menger, *Deutschland und Finnland*, and Rusi, *Lehdistönsuuri jatkosodassa*.

<sup>117</sup> Goebbels, *Die Tagebücher*, pt. 2, xi. 397 and 396, 4 Mar. 1944.

<sup>118</sup> See Directive No. 50 of 28 Sept. 1943 Concerning Preparations for the Withdrawal of Twentieth Mountain Army to Northern Finland and Northern Norway, repr. in Hubatsch, *Hitlers Weisungen*, doc. 50, 231–2. See also Menger, *Deutschland und Finnland*, 176 ff.

<sup>119</sup> According to Hitler's Directive No. 50 of 28 Sept. 1943, the measures ordered in the directive were to be taken as inconspicuously as possible, and were to be explained 'to our own troops, and to the Finns, as concerned exclusively with the development of communications between Norway and Finland'. The purpose was 'to enable divisions to be moved from the reserves of Wehrmacht Commander Norway to Finland, even in winter if necessary'; see *Hitlers Weisungen*, 232.

<sup>120</sup> Geb. AOK 20, 'Studie über Rückführung der 20. Gebirgsarmee', 9 Oct. 1943, BA-MA RH 20-20/73.

the war economy, notably the ‘essential need’ to protect north Finnish nickel production.<sup>121</sup> Also, the Wehrmacht operations staff were hardly attracted by the idea of moving the Lapland Army south, and so turning the whole of Finland into a battlefield from which they were not very likely to emerge as victors.

The preparations to implement Directive No. 50 had got off to a rather slow start in the autumn and winter, partly on account of the weather and partly because the political conditions seemed more stable. In mid-February the OKW insisted that the preparations be speeded up, ‘in view of the uncertain political situation in Finland’.<sup>122</sup> At the same time, in addition to the withdrawal movement now code-named Operation BIRCH, orders were given to occupy the Åland Islands (Operation FIR WEST) and the island of Suursaari (Operation FIR EAST).<sup>123</sup> The two FIR operations were offensive at operational level, but they both had a strategic defensive objective. Whereas the main purpose of taking Suursaari was to supervise the German mine barriers, the occupation of the Åland Islands was intended to ensure the necessary military protection for imports of Swedish ore to Germany. In the latter case, in which the navy was in charge, the plans were not without problems and had to be abandoned. Owing to the tricky status of this—officially demilitarized—group of islands in international law, there was, as Blücher warned, a ‘danger that Soviet Russia, Sweden, and even Finland might form [a] united front against us on this question’.<sup>124</sup>

### 3. FROM THE JUNE CRISIS TO FINLAND’S WITHDRAWAL FROM THE WAR

The framework conditions determining Finnish policy and conduct of the war changed dramatically on 9 June 1944. On that day—three days after the start of the Allied invasion of France, and just two weeks before the Soviet assault on the central section of Germany’s eastern front—the Red Army launched its long-planned major offensive on the Karelian Isthmus.<sup>125</sup> For the defenders, the attack itself was less of a surprise than the time when it took place<sup>126</sup> and the singular force with which it was conducted. They had very little to pit against the massive manpower

<sup>121</sup> Speer, in a letter to the foreign ministry, 15 Dec. 1943, quoted in *Expansionsrichtung Nordeuropa*, doc. 93, 168. On the importance of north Finnish nickel production for Germany, see also Vuorisjärvi, *Petsamon nikkeli kansaivalisessä poliitikassa*, 199 ff.

<sup>122</sup> Quoted in Menger, *Deutschland und Finnland*, 189.

<sup>123</sup> See also KTB OKW, iv, 874 ff.

<sup>124</sup> Blücher, telegram No. 569, 29 Mar. 1944, PA R 29585, fo. 156.

<sup>125</sup> For a detailed account of the military action, see *Jatkosodan Historia*, iv and v; also Glantz, *The Battle for Leningrad*, 415–58.

<sup>126</sup> Recent research based on Soviet records shows that the decision to launch the long-planned attack on Finland was taken only after Helsinki rejected the Soviet peace terms in April 1944. In fact, the Finns had expected an attack at that time, and its absence encouraged a false sense of security. The date of the attack, 9 June, was approved by Soviet headquarters only three days earlier, i.e. after the news of the Allied landings in Normandy had arrived. See Büttner, *Sowjetisierung oder Selbständigkeit*, 78–9, Heiskanen, ‘The Effect of Finnish Military Intelligence’, 284 ff., and more recently Manninen, *The Soviet Plans*, 129 ff.

and equipment assembled for the attack. Although the numerical strength of the attacking units,<sup>127</sup> with over 600,000 men, was less than at the height of the legendary 'Winter War' in January 1940, it was still more than twice that of the forces available on the Finnish side. Moreover, this time the Red Army understood, far better than it had three-and-a-half years earlier, that it must concentrate its forces in the breakthrough area, just a few kilometres wide, along the Vyborg–Leningrad railway line. The discrepancy in equipment was perhaps even more decisive, with Soviet superiority of about 5 to 1 in cannon and grenade launchers, and about 7 to 1 in tanks and aircraft.<sup>128</sup>

With such differences in strength, the Soviet troops very quickly achieved a breakthrough. Vyborg, one of the most historically and symbolically important cities in Finland, was lost on 20 June. Mannerheim had already asked Berlin, the day before, for six to eight divisions to be made ready, and for new weapons to be delivered, in order to halt the enemy forces, which had meanwhile advanced to a depth of more than 100 kilometres.<sup>129</sup> The initial German response was so disappointing that on 22 June, just a couple of days later, the Finnish government informed the Soviet Union—again via Stockholm—that it was prepared to break off relations with Germany and enter into peace negotiations. At the same time, the inner circle within the government was considering appointing Mannerheim as president, since the marshal of Finland was seen as the only person with the necessary authority to persuade the people and the army to accept, without resistance, the harsh peace terms that were to be expected.<sup>130</sup>

Events now began to escalate. That same day—the day on which Operation BAGRATION, the Soviet summer offensive against the German Army Group Centre, started<sup>131</sup>—the foreign minister, von Ribbentrop, paid a 'heavy-handed' visit<sup>132</sup> to Helsinki to inform the Finnish government, in the Führer's name, that Germany would stop all support immediately (including aid deliveries already on the way) unless the Finnish government was prepared to sign a formal undertaking not to

<sup>127</sup> The attack was carried out by Leningrad Front's 21st and 23rd Armies (under Gen. Govorov) and Karelian Front's 7th and 32nd Armies (Gen. Meretskov). Govorov's troops were to conduct the attack on Vyborg, while Karelian Front launched its attack a few days later in the direction of Petrozavodsk (Petroskoi). For an account from the Soviet viewpoint, see Stemenko, *Im Generalstab*, ii. 431–44.

<sup>128</sup> For more detailed figures, see Menger, *Deutschland und Finnland*, 195. See also the slightly different data in Stemenko, *Im Generalstab*, ii. 438.

<sup>129</sup> This was Mannerheim's second request for help in the space of a week. Berlin had already cancelled the spring embargo on arms and grain in response to his first request on 12 June. See Jokisipilä, *Aseveljä vai liittolaisia?*, 266 ff.

<sup>130</sup> This idea was based on arguments which Prime Minister Linkomies had put forward back in the spring of 1944. At that time, however, they had been contested in the cabinet and Mannerheim himself had rejected them. See Jokisipilä, 'Die Sonderkriegsthese', 55–6, and Büttner, *Sowjetisierung oder Selbständigkeit*, 81–2.

<sup>131</sup> On this, see Part V, Chapter II.3 of the present volume.

<sup>132</sup> Menger, 'Finnland', 293. The dramatic atmosphere of those days is clearly reflected in the memoirs of those involved. See Mannerheim, *Memoirs*, 481 ff., Blücher, *Gesandter zwischen Diktatur und Demokratie*, 365 ff., and Erfurth, *Der Finnische Krieg*, 241 ff.

seek a separate peace.<sup>133</sup> Only twenty-four hours later, on 23 June, Helsinki received another message, this time from Moscow, inviting it to submit a declaration, signed by the president or the foreign minister, 'that Finland is prepared to capitulate and sue the Soviet government for peace'. On that condition, and only then, was 'Moscow prepared to receive a Finnish delegation'.<sup>134</sup>

The government in Helsinki now had to decide whether to capitulate or, for the sake of some short-term aid, remain tied to a great power that was itself doomed. They were caught, it seemed, between a rock and a hard place, and a decision had to be taken at once, in view of the threat of military collapse. The Finnish war cabinet was wrestling with two main questions in this connection. The first was how the Soviet call for capitulation was to be understood. Was it a demand for *unconditional* surrender, or was it an invitation to enter into negotiations, as the express call to send a Finnish delegation to Moscow might indicate? The fact that the responsible authorities in Helsinki, notably Marshal Mannerheim and Prime Minister Linkomies, interpreted the Soviet note—probably correctly, according to the latest research<sup>135</sup>—as meaning 'unconditional surrender', was to be of decisive importance for the further course of events. The prospect of inevitable and unconditional surrender was the reason (both necessary and sufficient) why the Finnish government was prepared to consider Ribbentrop's final demands at all.

This raised a second problem, namely the question of the form which the agreement with Germany, recommended primarily by Mannerheim and Linkomies, should take. In the tough negotiations with Ribbentrop over the next few days, the Finnish side reiterated the position it had taken on an earlier occasion, namely that a formal treaty was out of the question because, under the terms of the constitution, it would require the consent of parliament,<sup>136</sup> and the result of a vote on the issue was more than doubtful. In the light of this argument, with which the German side could hardly find fault, it was decided instead—as in the spring of the previous year<sup>137</sup>—to seek some way of securing the desired binding assurance from Finland without involving the parliament. It was finally agreed that President Ryti should send Hitler a confidential letter giving the assurances requested by the Reich. In addition, there was to be an official communiqué on the negotiations between the two sides, and a radio address by the prime minister stressing 'Finland's

<sup>133</sup> The most thorough investigation of the subsequent events is Jokisipilä's dissertation, *Aseveljää vai liittolaisia?* His theory that Ribbentrop's demands were the result of a policy which had not been approved by Hitler in that form, and which the foreign minister was pursuing on his own initiative, intent on making his mark, is not accepted in the following, despite some arguments worthy of consideration.

<sup>134</sup> Message from Madame Kollontai, 23 June 1944, quoted in Büttner, *Sowjetisierung oder Selbständigkeit*, 80.

<sup>135</sup> See Büttner, *Sowjetisierung oder Selbständigkeit*, 80–1 and 83–4, based on Soviet sources, also Turtola, 'Finland's Path', 40–1. For a different interpretation, albeit without convincing empirical evidence, see Komarov, 'Finland's Withdrawal', 30.

<sup>136</sup> The Finnish version provided, in paragraph 33(1): 'Decisions on war and peace shall be taken by the president with the agreement of parliament.'

<sup>137</sup> On this, see the author's observations in Part I, Chapter II.2 of the present volume.

self-evident duty to lay down its arms only with the agreement of Germany'.<sup>138</sup> The text of the letter which Ryti addressed to Hitler on 26 June in the wording agreed by the negotiating parties, and which was delivered by Ribbentrop in person, opened with a reference to Germany's willingness to supply Finland with more weapons. This was followed by what, from the German government's viewpoint, was the decisive passage:

I must take this opportunity to assure you that Finland is determined to continue the war against Soviet Russia at Germany's side until the Soviet threat to Finland has been removed. In view of the assistance that Germany is giving to Finland, as its comrade-in-arms, in the difficult situation in which it now finds itself, I declare, in my capacity as President of the Finnish State, that I will make peace with the Soviet Union only with the consent of the government of the German Reich, and that I will not permit Finnish governments appointed by me, or any other persons, to engage in armistice or peace talks, or in negotiations to that end, without the consent of the government of the German Reich.<sup>139</sup>

The deal struck in the so-called midsummer negotiations, which had moreover been rejected by a minority of the Finnish cabinet,<sup>140</sup> did not last long. Paradoxically, this seems to have been mainly because, from the Finnish point of view, the Ryti–Ribbentrop agreement quickly fulfilled its purpose. Although historians still disagree as to whether Ryti's declaration of commitment was really necessary for the restabilization of the front just a few days after the fall of Vyborg,<sup>141</sup> there can be no doubt that the substantial German deliveries of munitions and armour-piercing weaponry, in particular,<sup>142</sup> as well as the promise of further grain deliveries, were such as to strengthen Finland's defences, both psychological and material, for some time to come.<sup>143</sup> Precisely for that reason, they also created what appeared to

<sup>138</sup> Quoted in a letter from Blücher to Grundherr, 28 June 1944 which contains a concise account of the negotiations outlined here from a German point of view (*Tagebücher* 9, fos. 3126–9, PA, Blücher papers). Linkomies gave his address on 2 July 1944, not without adding some remarks qualifying the agreed passage. See Jokisipilä, 'Die Sonderkriegsthese', 58.

<sup>139</sup> Reproduced in *Operationsgebiet östliche Ostsee*, 65 (Annex 3).

<sup>140</sup> The decisive vote in the government resulted in a majority of 10 to 6 in favour of Ryti making the required declaration. The Social Democrat ministers, in particular, voted against the written undertaking. On this, see also Linkomies' memoirs, *Vaikea aika*, 354 ff. In opposition circles, thought was even given to forming a committee-in-exile in Stockholm as a counterweight to the government. On this, see Paasikivi's diaries, *J. K. Paasikiven Päävirkirjat*, pt. 1, 2–3 (30 June 1944).

<sup>141</sup> This has been questioned in recent works, notably by Jokisipilä, *Aseveljä vai liittolaisia?*, 361–6.

<sup>142</sup> A list of the military equipment delivered by Germany in the period 23 June to 3 September 1944 is to be found in *Operationsgebiet östliche Ostsee*, 66 (Annex 4), and also in Jokisipilä, *Aseveljä vai liittolaisia?*, 364 ff.

<sup>143</sup> This circumstance nurtured the view, still held to some extent in Finland, that the country has the German dictator above all to thank for the preservation of its independence. This bizarre view of Hitler as the saviour of the only parliamentary democracy fighting at his side finds no support in the surviving German sources. Quite apart from Hitler's fundamental and unchanging distrust of Finland's democratic culture and institutions, it is clear, especially from Goebbels' since-published diary entries, that the aim of the dictator's Finland policy was never, at any point, to preserve that country's independence but simply to use it as an instrument in his own conduct of the war. See also, to this effect, Wegner, 'Ein "Weg ins Chaos"?'.

Mannerheim and others as the necessary conditions for getting Finland out of the war on more favourable terms than in June.

Developments on the various fronts fully confirmed the Finnish commander-in-chief's calculations. The successful defence mounted by the Finns in the battle of Tali-Ihantala was particularly important. With the help of good radio intelligence, the Finnish forces<sup>144</sup> held their own on a narrow strip of land between Vyborg Bay and the Vuoksi river for almost three weeks (from 25 June to 9 July 1944), in eventful engagements with the numerically superior Soviet 21st Army, which had massive artillery and air support. The heavy fighting all over the Karelian Isthmus came to an end in the middle of July, and shortly afterwards in eastern Karelia too, where the Finnish troops had been involved in heavy withdrawal battles since the end of June.<sup>145</sup> The Finnish army had been obliged to evacuate large stretches of land—approximately 55,000 square kilometres altogether—in both places (see Map vi.1.2), but it had still managed in the end to establish a front line almost identical to that in the 1939/40 Winter War. The Red Army, on the other hand, despite a series of major operational successes, had failed to achieve its strategic aim, namely the military collapse and capitulation of the enemy. Instead, it found itself obliged to withdraw most of its units from the Finnish front in the course of July, in order to deploy them in the decisive battle against Germany that had now begun.

Given these developments, it is not surprising that in mid-July the Kremlin let the Finnish government know, through the customary Swedish channels, that it by no means expected unconditional surrender from Helsinki.<sup>146</sup> This scarcely veiled invitation to renew peace-feelers was all the more welcome since, in reaction to the Ryti–Ribbentrop agreement, the United States—whose willingness to mediate had repeatedly been overestimated by the Finnish side—had meanwhile broken off diplomatic relations with Helsinki,<sup>147</sup> thereby clearly indicating that, in its view, Finnish requests for peace should be addressed exclusively to Moscow. There had also been a further deterioration in Germany's military situation. In particular, great concern had been caused by the news that Army Group North had been obliged to evacuate Narva as well in the closing weeks of July and was now cut off from the rest of the German eastern front.<sup>148</sup> In view of these developments, Mannerheim dropped his resistance to the long-planned reassignment of power in the country. On 1 August, Ryti, physically and mentally exhausted by past events, resigned from his post to make way for the marshal of Finland, on whom the presidency was conferred by special act. An almost entirely new government was appointed.<sup>149</sup>

<sup>144</sup> Consisting of the Finnish IV Corps (Lt.-Gen. Laatikainen) and the only Finnish armoured division (Maj.-Gen. Lagus), reinforced by some German units (Detachment Kuhlmeier and 303rd Assault Gun Brigade). For a detailed account of the fighting, see *Jatkosodan Historia*, v, ch. 4.

<sup>145</sup> See *Jatkosodan Historia*, ii and v.

<sup>146</sup> See Büttner, *Sowjetisierung oder Selbständigkeit*, 87.

<sup>147</sup> See Berry, *American Foreign Policy*, 412 ff.

<sup>148</sup> On this, see Part V, Chapter IV.2 (b) of the present volume.

<sup>149</sup> On this, see also the interpretation of events in Mannerheim, *Memoirs*, 481 ff. and 491 ff.

Both Moscow and Berlin were somewhat reserved at first in their attitude to the new Finnish authorities. As to Hitler, he appears to have initially been ‘not sure how the Finnish question will develop’, whereas Goebbels spontaneously qualified the change of power in Helsinki as ‘a regular *coup d'état*’ by Mannerheim, undertaken for the purpose of ‘starting armistice negotiations with the Soviet Union immediately’.<sup>150</sup> He—quite rightly—expected very little to come from the immediately arranged visit to Mannerheim’s headquarters by the new commander-in-chief of Army Group North, General Ferdinand Schörner. Like the minister of propaganda, Keitel too now thought that ‘Finland would go limp’. Just like Pietro Badoglio, Mannerheim clearly intended to ‘move slowly towards treachery’. It was ‘the same old story. When it comes down to it, it’s always the generals or marshals who surrender.’<sup>151</sup>

While the chronicler of the Reich’s downfall misinterpreted the circumstances surrounding the change of government in Finland in asserting that it was a *coup d'état*, he was nevertheless quite right about the underlying intentions. Couched in official diplomatic language, the justification given for Mannerheim’s assumption of the office of president was, for the time being, quite different. Repeated assurances were given in Helsinki that ‘these are such fateful times that all our forces have to be concentrated in one man’s hands. No further conclusions are to be drawn from this.’<sup>152</sup> That the explanation was threadbare became clear by 17 August at the latest, when the head of the OKW arrived in Finland to confer the Oak Leaves decoration on Mannerheim and the Knight’s Cross on Heinrichs, the chief of the general staff.<sup>153</sup> Immediately following this gesture, which was intended as a symbolic reconfirmation of the hosts’ duty of brotherhood in arms, Mannerheim deliberately informed his visitor that he did not feel bound by the assurances which Ryti had given the Reich. Those assurances had been given ‘only because of the very serious situation Finland had found itself in at the time’, and they were rejected by ‘the majority’ of the Finnish people. With the resignation of Ryti and the ministers who had been parties to the agreement, the Finnish government had ‘regained its freedom of action’.<sup>154</sup>

In making this statement, Mannerheim had officially announced the change of political direction. The foreign ministry may have attempted for a few days to make

<sup>150</sup> Goebbels, *Die Tagebücher*, pt. 2, xiii. 213 and 204, 30 Aug. 1944.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid. 204 and 212, 3 Aug. 1944, also 219 and 224, 4 Aug. 1944. All Goebbels had to say about the new Finnish government was that it consisted of ‘rather colourless characters’ (‘old friends of Russia’), and that ‘nothing particularly good is to be expected’ of it (ibid. 236, entry for 10 Aug. 1944). On Schörner’s fruitless visit, see also Erfurth, *Der Finnische Krieg*, 261 ff.

<sup>152</sup> Telegram from Blücher to the foreign ministry, 1 Aug. 1944, quoted in ADAP, Series E, viii, doc. 143, 269.

<sup>153</sup> Only two months earlier, the German command had urged that the chief of the general staff be dismissed, as he was now considered defeatist. See Erfurth, *Der Finnische Krieg*, 246.

<sup>154</sup> Telegram from Blücher to the foreign ministry, 18 Aug. 1944 (ADAP, Series E, viii, doc. 163). See also Erfurth, *Der Finnische Krieg*, 267 ff., and Mannerheim, *Memoirs*, 492–3. According to the unpublished memoirs of the German military attaché at the time, Colonel Kitschmann, there was ‘probably not a single experienced diplomat in the embassy who seriously thought that the assurances given in the president’s letter were to be trusted’. The circumstances surrounding them had been ‘too much like blackmail’. Kitschmann, ‘Als Militärattaché in Helsinki’, 141–2 (BA-MA, MSg 2/3317).

light of Mannerheim's words, by treating them as politically non-binding comments made in a conversation among military men,<sup>155</sup> but it was very soon clear to all observers that a definitive break between the long-standing comrades-in-arms was now imminent.

The German government was disappointed, and not without reason. There was, of course, a certain unintentional irony in Nazi politicians, of all people, complaining 'that it is unworthy of an honourable state to employ [...] legalistic interpretations to wriggle out of a solemn undertaking',<sup>156</sup> but the arguments advanced against the Finnish side were not easily dismissed. It was argued, in particular, that 'it [is] absolutely unthinkable, according to general legal principles, for one head of state to give another head of state an undertaking of this kind that is binding on himself alone, as suggested in this case'—especially as Ryti had expressly stated, in his letter to Hitler on 26 June, that he was making his declaration in his capacity 'as president of the Finnish state'. Furthermore, the validity of the midsummer agreements 'cannot be impugned by any arguments based on the Finnish constitution, to the effect that Ryti had exceeded his constitutional powers because he had acted without the approval of the Finnish parliament'. In the first place, the parliament's approval was not required in this case, and secondly, even if the opposite view is taken, it does not affect the validity of the agreement under international law, for the purposes of which 'all questions of domestic law are completely irrelevant'.<sup>157</sup>

There can be little doubt that the faltering great power, Germany, was properly duped by its smaller partner. This seems all the more certain in hindsight, since research has found convincing proof that Finland's renunciation of the June agreements was by no means a spontaneous reaction born of necessity, as was still willingly claimed long after the war. On the contrary, it was clearly a manoeuvre planned well in advance—since the spring of 1943, in fact<sup>158</sup>—and designed 'to protect Finland's interests, even in the most difficult crisis situations'.<sup>159</sup> What, then, was the status in international law of the agreements concluded between the comrades-in-arms? Is not the contractual nature of those agreements ascribed to them by the German side doubtful, if it was clear from the outset that the Finnish side had no intention of being legally bound by them? Moreover, the German foreign ministry was well aware that, in view of the aforementioned constitutional problems, Helsinki was seeking an arrangement below the level of a treaty, since that was precisely why the comparatively weaker solution of an assurance in letter form was chosen. Even if these arguments are disregarded, the form of *assensio mentium* adopted by the two states is held to be irrelevant,<sup>160</sup> and Ryti's letter is accorded the status of an international

<sup>155</sup> See telegram from Ribbentrop to Blücher, 23 Aug. 1944 (*ADAP*, Series E, viii, doc. 169).

<sup>156</sup> Quoted in Ribbentrop's telegram to Blücher, 10 Aug. 1944 (*ADAP*, Series E, viii, doc. 152).

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>158</sup> By then, at least, the room for manoeuvre under constitutional law had already been thoroughly tested. See Jokisipilä, *Aseveljä vai liittolaisia?*, 140 ff.

<sup>159</sup> Jokisipilä, 'Die Sonderkriegsthese', 60.

<sup>160</sup> Thus in line with contemporary German doctrine on international law; see Ehrhardt, *Die Ratifikationsbedürftigkeit*, 75.

treaty, there are still doubts as to its validity. First and foremost, there is the fact that the Finnish government did not willingly enter into the agreement demanded by Germany, but did so only under the pressure of an existential predicament, for which the German side was not responsible but which, accompanied by massive threats, it exploited to its own advantage. Without going into the manifold problems of international law in this connection,<sup>161</sup> it nevertheless seems plausible from a historical perspective to regard the midsummer negotiations not as a formal treaty but as a kind of gentlemen's agreement—although, at the time of its conclusion, at least one of the parties had already decided not to behave like a gentleman.

The successful Finnish deceptive manoeuvre helped in no small measure to preserve the country's national independence and political culture in the war between the great powers. As already pointed out, it gave the Finnish government a further breathing space and, with it, an opportunity to make peace on comparatively more favourable terms. That opportunity presented itself on 29 August, when the Soviet government, with the agreement of the western Allies, indicated that it was willing to enter into negotiations, on condition that Helsinki first officially broke off relations with Germany and demanded the withdrawal, by 15 September at the latest, of the German troops remaining on Finnish territory. Regardless of the fact that any such withdrawal within the specified time limit was wholly illusory even under the most favourable circumstances, the Finnish government decided, after some initial hesitation, that it had no alternative but to agree to the Soviet conditions.<sup>162</sup> In what was considered to be a very friendly letter, Mannerheim informed Hitler on 2 September that 'our roads will probably soon part', because Finland, unlike the Reich, could not remain at war any longer 'without the whole future of the small Finnish nation being jeopardized'.<sup>163</sup> That same day, the German ambassador was informed of the Finnish government's decision, which was published two days later.<sup>164</sup> On 5 September the guns on the Finnish–Soviet front fell silent. On 7 September a Finnish delegation led by the new prime minister, Antti Hackzell, set off for Moscow to negotiate the armistice. It was finally concluded on 19 September, after nerve-racking delays and tough negotiations, and by then the German legation and the German liaison general and his staff had already left Finland, on 10 and 13 September 1944 respectively.<sup>165</sup>

<sup>161</sup> There is as yet no thorough assessment of the Ryti–Ribbentrop agreement in historical international law terms.

<sup>162</sup> For details, see Menger, *Deutschland und Finnland*, 222 ff., and Büttner, *Sowjetisierung oder Selbständigkeit*, 89 ff.

<sup>163</sup> Mannerheim's letter to Hitler, 2 Sept. 1944, quoted in Mannerheim, *Memoirs*, 494–5. (The original letter, together with handwritten drafts, is to be found in the National Archives, Helsinki, Mannerheim papers, 503.)

<sup>164</sup> See telegram from Blücher to the foreign ministry, 2 Sept. 1944 (ADAP, Series E, viii. 210).

<sup>165</sup> See Blücher, *Gesandter zwischen Diktatur und Demokratie*, 405 ff., and Erfurth, *Der Finnische Krieg*, 277 ff.

#### 4. THE LAPLAND WAR

In losing Finland, Germany lost the last but one of its allies. Unlike Hungary, which was prevented from taking a similar step only by the force of German arms, and unlike Italy, which had long been a battlefield for the great powers,<sup>166</sup> or Romania, which had declared war on the Reich at the end of August under the pressure of Soviet occupation,<sup>167</sup> Finland had managed to keep its national sovereignty intact—at least for the time being. For Goebbels, however, it was clear that the country had ‘sold its national destiny’.<sup>168</sup> ‘The Finns’, he wrote in his diary on 5 September,<sup>169</sup> ‘have sold out to Bolshevism, lock, stock, and barrel, and they will pay for the short-sightedness of their statesmen with their political death as a nation. They are on the road to chaos.’ In Berlin, according to the same source, the reaction to this development was ‘naturally somewhat stunned’, although the break was ‘not taken too tragically’ at Führer headquarters. ‘Militarily, we were prepared for it, so there can’t be any serious repercussions in this case, or at least not as serious as they were when Romania defected. Politically, of course, Finland’s defection is very regrettable. It is a further blow to our chances in the war.’<sup>170</sup>

At German headquarters, they were not yet really prepared to sit by and watch events unfold, or to take purely defensive political and military measures. On 26 June—that is, at the height of the June crisis—the Wehrmacht command staff presented a ‘Study on continuation of the battle in southern and central Finland in the event of Finland’s collapse’, which was based on proposals Dietl had made during his latest visit to Berchtesgaden and was to be understood as an alternative to the primarily defensive plans for Operation BIRCH. The central idea of the study was that the western and southern coasts of the country—and particularly the ports of Helsinki and Hanko, which were important for controlling access to the Gulf of Finland—were to be kept ‘firmly in German hands’. To that end, the 40- to 60-kilometre-wide stretch of coast between the Gulf of Finland and the southern Finnish Lakeland, where the threat appeared to be most serious, was to be secured by some ten divisions and five or six frontier guard battalions, to prevent the Red Army from advancing against the southern Finnish coast and into ‘the heart of Finland in the Helsinki–Hämeenlinna–Tampere area’. The strategic objective of the operation, in addition to protecting the nickel deposits in the north, was to secure the continued transport of Swedish ore across the Baltic and the delivery of supplies to the Lapland Army through the ports in western Finland, and in general to stop the Russian Baltic fleet gaining access to the Baltic, ‘and thus being able to operate in the area of Army Group North and off the German coast’.<sup>171</sup>

<sup>166</sup> See Part VI, Chapter IV of the present volume.

<sup>167</sup> See Part V, Chapter VI of the present volume.

<sup>168</sup> Goebbels, *Die Tagebücher*, pt. 2, xiii. 410 (4 Sept. 1944).

<sup>169</sup> Ibid. 414 (5 Sept. 1944).

<sup>170</sup> Ibid. 411–12 (4 Sept. 1944).

<sup>171</sup> WFSt/Op (H)/Nord, ‘Studie über die Fortführung des Kampfes im süd- und mittelfinnischen Raum im Falle eines Zusammenbruches Finnlands’, 26 June 1944 (BA-MA RW 4/v. 639, fos. 136–40).

The fatal weakness in the Wehrmacht command staff plan was that it was based, in at least two respects, on premisses that were to prove unrealistic in the coming weeks and months. First, it was taken for granted ‘that substantial sections of the Finnish armed forces would voluntarily undertake to continue to fight under German command’.<sup>172</sup> And second, it was assumed that—‘depending on how political and military conditions within Finland developed’—either ‘a strongly pro-German national government’ would be installed or Mannerheim would take over as military dictator. Consideration was even given to the possibility that a German military administration or a Reich commissioner (as in Norway) might assume full powers if Finland were to collapse.<sup>173</sup>

The hope expressed by Ribbentrop at the same time, namely that there might be a thousand reliable men to be found in Finland who were resolved to seize power in the country, was not shared by Blücher or Erfurth,<sup>174</sup> although the idea continued to occupy the minds of German officials and commanders for several months. Thus, Ribbentrop and Himmler thought of unleashing a Finnish partisan war,<sup>175</sup> while the SS main office, under Obergruppenführer Gottlob Berger, planned to form a Finnish SS regiment, although there were only a few dozen volunteers to be found among Finnish deserters, political refugees, and prisoners of war.<sup>176</sup> The Army Group North general staff produced a proposal—promptly seized on by Hitler—to revive the 27th Light Infantry Battalion, which had become legendary in Finland.<sup>177</sup> There were, in fact, some calls for solidarity, mainly emanating from Finnish military circles, in the crucial weeks before and after the break between the comrades-in-arms.<sup>178</sup> And Blücher saw fit to inform the German foreign ministry, a few days before he left Helsinki, that ‘a few high-ranking Finnish officers’ were thinking of joining the German Lapland Army as volunteers, and that ‘some young Finnish military men’ had already ‘left Finland secretly on German ships’.<sup>179</sup> It was even hoped that, of the Finnish generals, Generals Talvela and Österman would

<sup>172</sup> Ibid., fos. 136.

<sup>173</sup> WFSt/Qu 1, speaking notes, 15 July 1944 (ibid., fos. 148–9).

<sup>174</sup> See Erfurth, diary entries, 8–9 Sept. 1944 (BA-MA N 257/v. 4, 1975 ff.).

<sup>175</sup> In a telegram to Blücher on 5 Sept. 1944, Ribbentrop suggested that he see ‘whether there were possibilities for already making preparations to help organize the partisan movement that was to be expected in the event of Finland’s occupation by Soviet Russia’ (PA, Inland II g, fo. 231).

<sup>176</sup> See also Menger, *Deutschland und Finnland*, 220–1.

<sup>177</sup> See KTB OKW, iv. 897 ff. The Finnish volunteer unit formed in Germany during the First World War was considered to be the original military embodiment of Finnish independence from Russia. In fact, most of the Finnish generals who served in the Second World War came from that battalion. On the history of the unit, see Kesselring’s recent work, *Des Kaisers finnische Legion*.

<sup>178</sup> See, e.g., a telex of 7 Aug. 1944 from former Finnish SS commanders to Himmler (PA, Inland II g, fo. 220).

<sup>179</sup> Telegram from Blücher, 8 Sept. 1944 (Tagebücher 9, fo. 3288, PA, Blücher papers). In this connection, the Twentieth Army chief of staff noted on 5 September 1944 that the Führer would welcome it, ‘if as many Finnish officers and men as possible join us in continuing the battle. Propaganda for that purpose should be spread by word of mouth, not officially by means of leaflets’ (Hermann Höltner, quoted in Menger, ‘Das militärische Verhältnis’, 301).

prove willing and able to organize Finland's continued resistance on the lines suggested by Berlin.<sup>180</sup>

From the German viewpoint, the prospects for such a resistance movement inevitably increased as the situation in Finland itself became more desperate. So, after 5 September, any bad news from Finland was good news, at least for the ideologues in Berlin. Following this twisted logic, by which the representatives of the foundering Nazi state turned evil tidings into hopes of victory, the occupation and 'Bolshevization' of Finland was not only expected but eagerly awaited, since it would, as Goebbels put it, open up 'a whole range of possibilities and opportunities for us'.<sup>181</sup> In mid-September the elated propaganda minister noted 'a kind of counter-movement in the Finnish armed forces'.<sup>182</sup> Now that 'Finland is a lost land with absolutely no hope for the future',<sup>183</sup> he thought the time had come 'for a more active intervention in the Finnish question. We are preparing an appeal to the Finnish people, and we would willingly install a Finnish national government in the part of Finland that we still hold. At all events, there is no question of our giving up Finland without a fight. The propaganda we direct at Finland must, of course, be very sophisticated.'<sup>184</sup>

There was no lack of efforts in that direction in the coming weeks and months. Representatives of the German foreign ministry, the SS, the propaganda ministry, and the OKW propaganda department met in a 'Finland Committee' to coordinate their activities. The main objective was, on the one hand, to strengthen the spirit of anti-Soviet resistance in the country by means of appropriate propaganda measures (including a secret 'Free Finland' radio transmitter), and, on the other, to create the organizational conditions needed in order to set up a Finnish 'freedom committee' and form a Finnish free corps within the framework of the Waffen SS.<sup>185</sup>

The German efforts were doomed to failure, for two main reasons. The first and most important was the fact that the Soviet Union decided not to occupy Finland—as the Finnish authorities too had feared<sup>186</sup>—but was content to insist that its terms for an armistice were correctly fulfilled. Those terms were harsh, but did not constitute a direct threat to the country's existence.<sup>187</sup> The second reason, which was more than merely inconvenient for Germany, was that Mannerheim's authority remained clearly intact, especially in the months when the danger was at

<sup>180</sup> On the key role assigned primarily to Talvela in this connection, see SS-Brigadeführer Schellenberg, telegram to the foreign ministry, 6 Sept. 1944, and a note from Ambassador Ritter, 17 Sept. 1944 (both in PA, Inland II g, fos. 237 and 254).

<sup>181</sup> Goebbels, *Die Tagebücher*, pt. 2, xiii. 500 (17 Sept. 1944).

<sup>182</sup> Ibid. 499.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid. 532 (21 Sept. 1944).

<sup>184</sup> Ibid. 567 (26 Sept. 1944). For more details, see also Wegner, 'Ein "Weg ins Chaos"?' 347 ff.

<sup>185</sup> On this, see Metzger telegram No. 3116, 18 Nov. 1944, and the minutes of various Finland Committee meetings held during that month (all in PA, Inland II g, fos. 263–77).

<sup>186</sup> Plans continued to be made for underground combat operations in the event of a Soviet occupation of the country, especially in the circle of the head of the intelligence service, Colonel Paasonen. For a summary account, see Jussila, Hentilä, and Nevakivi, *From Grand Duchy to Modern State*, 223 ff.

<sup>187</sup> For a detailed analysis of the Soviet attitude, see Büttner, *Sowjetisierung oder Selbständigkeit*, esp. 110–29; also Polvinen, *Between East and West*, Nevakivi, 'A Decisive Armistice', and Troebst, 'Warum wurde Finnland nicht sowjetisiert?'

its greatest. As a result, the ‘fool’ and ‘political dilettante’,<sup>188</sup> the man who was, from Berlin’s point of view, the key figure in the Finnish ‘betrayal’, he of all people had to be spared from attacks by German propaganda, leaving it with no bite at all. At the beginning of October, after the first Finnish attacks on the Lapland Army had been launched, even Goebbels was forced to admit that, in view of the Finnish president and commander-in-chief’s ‘completely undiminished’ authority, there was ‘at present no hope of bringing substantial sections of the Finnish armed forces over to our side’<sup>189</sup> or ‘of building an effective movement against the government or against Mannerheim’.<sup>190</sup> The statement issued in this connection, that the Finnish people ‘had too much respect for authority’,<sup>191</sup> was not without its comical side, coming as it did from the mouth of the Nazis’ chief propagandist.

Things appeared to go remarkably smoothly at first. As soon as the Finnish armistice and its terms were known, the OKW and Twentieth Army HQ launched Operation BIRCH. On both the German and the Finnish sides considerable importance was attached to ensuring that the necessary measures were taken by amicable agreement.<sup>192</sup> The first priority was to evacuate the few Wehrmacht agencies and bases, and other German Reich establishments, in southern Finland. To that end, the office of the German general at Finnish headquarters, which was no longer needed, was rapidly transformed into the ‘South Finland Evacuation Staff’. The Finns, with whose authorities Erfurth had been on extremely friendly terms to the last, obviously had every reason to help, and willingly did so, making transport facilities, particularly ships, available. The only remaining German army unit in southern Finland, 303rd Assault Gun Brigade, embarked on 6 September, and the German airfield at Pori was blown up. The last evacuation transport, with General Erfurth on board, put to sea on 13 September. And, with that, the situation in southern Finland appeared to have been resolved.<sup>193</sup>

However, cooperation between German and Finnish agencies, which had continued to work well, was painfully upset by a bloody incident that occurred just a few days later. The Naval War Staff, seriously concerned to protect the German position in the eastern Baltic for strategic reasons, obtained Hitler’s permission to conduct its long-planned Operation FIR EAST, that is, the occupation of the Finnish island of Suursaari, without delay.<sup>194</sup> The surprise attack, launched in the night of 14–15 September and involving some 3,000 troops, quickly ended in disaster as a result of fierce Finnish defence and Soviet air support. The price that was paid, over

<sup>188</sup> Goebbels, *Die Tagebücher*, pt. 2, xiv. 63 (9 Oct. 1944).

<sup>189</sup> Ibid. 45 (6 Oct. 1944).

<sup>190</sup> Ibid. 77 (11 Oct. 1944). The news in November, that the paramilitary security corps, which were to be disbanded, were rebelling against the prospect of disarmament, briefly rekindled hope in Goebbels and others, but it soon gave way to a sense of impotence in the face of developments in the far north. See Wegner, ‘Ein “Weg ins Chaos”’, 399–400.

<sup>191</sup> Goebbels, *Die Tagebücher*, pt. 2, xiii. 410 (4 Sept. 1944).

<sup>192</sup> See Erfurth, *Der Finnische Krieg*, 288.

<sup>193</sup> See ibid. 277 ff., and Menger, *Deutschland und Finnland*, 222 ff.

<sup>194</sup> On the other hand, the plan to occupy the Åland Islands, code-named FIR WEST, was abandoned, partly because the necessary forces were not available and partly because it was feared that Sweden would intervene. On the naval strategy background, see *Operationsgebiet östliche Ostsee*, 154 ff., and Norberg, ‘Die Ostsee’, esp. 235–6.

150 killed and more than 1,200 German prisoners of war, included a considerable hardening in relations between the former allies, this being the first occasion on which they had come face to face as enemies. The Finnish ships assigned to the transport of German military goods were now instructed by Helsinki to make for Swedish or Finnish ports.<sup>195</sup>

Meanwhile, although no blood had been shed there so far, the situation in northern Finland was proving to be much more complicated than in the south. Like the authorities in Berlin, Twentieth Mountain Army HQ's first thought, on learning of the political rift between the comrades-in-arms, had been to 'undermine the unity of the Finnish nation'<sup>196</sup> and recruit Finnish volunteers who were prepared to resist, but it very soon realized that it was much more important for the future fate of its own army to reach agreement with the responsible Finnish agencies and command authorities for the German units to withdraw with the least possible further fighting.<sup>197</sup> To this effect, Erfurth had already informed Mannerheim—to the latter's great relief—on 6 September, three days after the OKW had given the go-ahead for Operation BIRCH, that Twentieth Mountain Army's withdrawal was under way, though without mentioning the actual purpose of the move.<sup>198</sup> The withdrawal movements of the following weeks went more or less according to plan. XIX Mountain Corps, which was stationed in the far north, remained in its positions outside Murmansk in order to protect the strategically important nickel deposits in the Petsamo area, while the two corps stationed further south (XVIII and XXXVI Mountain Corps) were gradually withdrawn from the Soviet areas they still occupied to the middle of Lapland. At the same time, tens of thousands of tonnes of military equipment and supplies which the army had held for months were taken out, by sea where possible but also by rail and road. Stocks that could not be transported were either destroyed or (as in the case of some 20,000 tonnes of coal) sold to the Finnish authorities.<sup>199</sup>

The first German units had just started to withdraw during the night of 8–9 September when, at the request of Twentieth Army HQ, formal but unofficial consultations took place with authorized representatives of Finnish headquarters on the avoidance of serious military clashes with the Finnish troops that were advancing northwards. Basically, it was a matter of agreeing to engage in a phoney war, if possible with no losses on either side—appropriately described as 'autumn manoeuvres'—that would give the suspicious Soviet observers the impression that the Finns were actively 'driving' the German troops out of the country, and if possible prevent the Red Army from intervening. Agreement was reached, above all, on the timing of the German withdrawal and the Finnish advance, and on the use of Finnish communication networks, rail facilities, and rolling stock by the German high

<sup>195</sup> See *KTB OKW*, iv. 899 ff., and Menger, *Deutschland und Finnland*, 238.

<sup>196</sup> Rendulic, 4 Sept. 1944, quoted in Menger, 'Das militärische Verhältnis', 301.

<sup>197</sup> Twentieth Army HQ considered that the anti-Finnish propaganda put out by the foreign ministry, the ministry of propaganda, and the SS was counter-productive. See Menger, *Deutschland und Finnland*, 235–6.

<sup>198</sup> See Erfurth, *Der Finnische Krieg*, 278, and Mannerheim, *Memoirs*, 496–7.

<sup>199</sup> On this and the following, see Menger, *Deutschland und Finnland*, 228 ff.

command. An understanding was even reached on the destruction of items of transport infrastructure (especially bridges) by the German troops in order to provide a plausible explanation for the delays in the operations of the Finnish forces.<sup>200</sup>

Although, under the terms of the armistice, the deadline for the Finns to clear their country of German troops expired on 15 September, the 'autumn manoeuvres' continued, virtually unimpeded, until the end of the month. However, in the second half of September Mannerheim was obliged, under pressure from the Armistice Commission which had arrived in Helsinki in the meantime, to increase the strength of his forces operating in the north to 60,000, and to order their commander-in-chief, Lt.-Gen. Siilasvuo, to pursue the German troops actively, regardless of all the agreements that had been reached on their withdrawal. On 28 September an exchange of fire between the former comrades-in-arms at Pudasjärvi claimed the first casualties. And three days later Finnish troops arrived by sea at Tornio, taking the German forces by surprise, and engaged them in bitter fighting that soon extended to Kemi. Twentieth Army HQ attempted to retake the two coastal towns in a number of engagements, employing mobile forces from the withdrawal operation, while the Finns landed more troops and pressed forward from Oulu.<sup>201</sup>

Meanwhile, on 7 October the Soviet 14th Army launched its long-expected attack on the Murmansk front. In a series of encirclement operations it soon managed to drive XIX Mountain Corps (6th and 2nd Mountain Divisions) from its positions on and south of the Liza, and advance to the Arctic highway. Within a week, the painstakingly constructed Murmansk line had collapsed.<sup>202</sup> The entire northern Finnish area now had to be evacuated with all speed, on the basis of a decision taken by Hitler on 3 October. In the second half of September the dictator and the OKW had still been determined not to move the Lapland Army back beyond the final positions specified in the plans for Operation BIRCH, but they now thought better of it and ordered the army to withdraw to a long-established defence front in the Lyngenfjord–Narvik area (code-name NORTHERN LIGHT). The reasons behind this change of mind were, on the one hand, the fact that imports of Finnish nickel were becoming less important as German arms production slowed down,<sup>203</sup> and, on the other, the growing realization that it would soon be impossible to keep the Twentieth Mountain Army in its exposed position on the edge of Europe. It was not so much the half-hearted Finnish attacks that were feared in this connection, as massive Soviet offensives and landing operations, combined with British efforts to cut the sea connections that were essential to keep the army supplied.<sup>204</sup>

<sup>200</sup> For details, see Ahto, *Aseveljet vastakkain*, 107 ff., and Menger, *Deutschland und Finnland*, 232 ff.

<sup>201</sup> On the course of the fighting, see Ahto, *Aseveljet vastakkain*, 230 ff. For an account without scholarly pretensions, see Kaltenegger, *Krieg in der Arktis*, 281 ff.

<sup>202</sup> On this and the following, see KTB OKW, iv. 907 ff., and the accounts in Erfurth, *Der Finnische Krieg*, 304 ff., and Menger, *Deutschland und Finnland*, 243 ff. A short report on the combat operations in the Petsamo and Varanger area between 7 October and 27 October 1944 is also to be found in BA-MA RH 20-20/108.

<sup>203</sup> See Petrick, 'Die Bedeutung der Rohstoffe Nordeuropas', 285.

<sup>204</sup> See KTB OKW, iv. 902 ff.

After the Soviet breakthrough to the Arctic highway, which meant that the fighting for Tornio and Kemi had to be abandoned because of the resultant threat, the rest of the German withdrawal, over a distance of some 1,000 kilometres, was completed remarkably quickly. Petsamo was given up on 14 October, and withdrawal from the Rovaniemi area began just two days later. The Kolosjoki nickel mines were evacuated on 21 October, 'after thorough destruction'.<sup>205</sup> The town of Kirkenes, in the extreme north-eastern corner of Norway, which had been declared a 'fortified place' but was by now completely devastated, fell only a few days later (25 October 1944). Finally, after 18 November, all that remained was the last German units (7th Mountain Division) stationed at the extreme north-western tip of Finland, where they managed to hold on for a few months in a position no longer of any military significance.

The withdrawal from Finland of the Lapland Army, over 200,000 strong, with relatively few losses, was undoubtedly an outstanding logistical achievement, even if it was helped by good weather conditions. But for the province of Lapland, which was largely laid waste, it was also the greatest catastrophe in living memory, a catastrophe which is mostly mentioned only in passing in the German memoir literature,<sup>206</sup> but which cast a shadow over German–Finnish relations for decades to come.<sup>207</sup> The formal basis for the 'scorched earth' tactics employed by the German army was a directive from the Wehrmacht operations staff, issued at the time of the Finnish armistice and in agreement with Twentieth Army HQ, which not only provided for the destruction of all German military installations, equipment, and stores that could not be transported, but expressly permitted 'any kind of destruction and blocking measures' that seemed likely 'to be effective in delaying the enemy's advance'.<sup>208</sup>

The extent of the destruction was initially kept within bounds by the agreements between German and Finnish agencies on which the 'autumn manoeuvres' were based. As a result, cities like Oulu and Kajaani suffered no damage. But the situation became more acute when the Finns attacked Tornio, after which they were regarded 'as enemies from this moment on',<sup>209</sup> and when there was also reason to fear massive Soviet thrusts into northern Finland.<sup>210</sup> Up to that point the destruction had been largely confined to communications and transport facilities, and to buildings and stores used by the army, but now whole villages and towns were systematically reduced to ashes. Although the measures ordered were not

<sup>205</sup> Erfurth, *Der Finnische Krieg*, 313.

<sup>206</sup> See, e.g., the various works by Rendulic (including *Gekämpft*); also Hölder, *Armee in der Arktis*, and Thorban, *Der Abwehrkampf um Petsamo und Kirkenes*.

<sup>207</sup> The question of reparations for the damage caused by German troops in Finland in 1944 was again the subject of contentious negotiations prior to the resumption of diplomatic relations in the 1970s; see Putensen, *Im Konfliktfeld zwischen Ost und West*, 261 and 266–301 (ch. 8.3).

<sup>208</sup> WFSt/Qu, 2 (Nord), telex, 5 Sept. 1944, concerning destruction measures in Finland, and the relevant speaking notes, also 5 Sept. 1944 (BA-MA RW 4/v. 639, fos. 152–3).

<sup>209</sup> Hölder's order of 2 Oct. 1944, quoted in Menger, *Deutschland und Finnland*, 242.

<sup>210</sup> In fact, Soviet advances in northern Finland were confined almost exclusively to the capture of the Petsamo area, important for its raw materials. See Büttner, *Sowjetisierung oder Selbständigkeit*, 120 ff.

marked, in their motivation or execution, by the immeasurable brutality characteristic of the ‘scorched earth’ policy pursued in the Soviet theatre of war, their scale quite clearly exceeded what was required to ensure the secure operational withdrawal of the German forces. According to post-war Finnish estimates, a total of around 18,000 buildings in Lapland, that is, at least 40 per cent of all the buildings in the province, were destroyed during the weeks in question. About a third of them were residential buildings, and many hundreds were business premises or public establishments.<sup>211</sup> In addition to a series of smaller municipalities, Rovaniemi, the capital of the province, was particularly hard hit; some 90 per cent of its buildings were systematically destroyed in the days following 10 October. The inhabitants of the city—including some 25,000 refugees who had taken refuge there—had already been evacuated in September, along with their horses and cattle, most of them to northern Sweden and a smaller number to other parts of Finland.<sup>212</sup> About three-quarters of the inhabitants of Lapland suffered a similar fate. After more than three years of what had been, all in all, a remarkably trouble-free coexistence with the German troops posted in the area,<sup>213</sup> more than 100,000 Finnish civilians set out on the forced march south, and were able to return to their devastated home province only in the course of the following year.<sup>214</sup>

The successful ‘eviction’ of the German troops from the country marked the end of the Second World War for Finland.<sup>215</sup> With the ‘Winter War’ (1939/40), the ‘Continuation War’ (1941–4), and the ‘Lapland War’ in the autumn of 1944, it had involved the young republic in no fewer than three wars, at a cost to the Finnish people of more than 84,000 lives and well over twice as many wounded.<sup>216</sup> Under the terms of the 15 September 1944 armistice, the basic provisions of which were confirmed in 1947 in the Treaty of Paris,<sup>217</sup> the country lost about 12 per cent of its territory to the Soviet Union and more than a tenth of its industrial capacity. Over 400,000 refugees and settlers—more than a tenth of the total population—had to be integrated into post-war society. In addition, Finland had to pay the Soviet Union 300 million dollars in reparations.<sup>218</sup> Nevertheless, as has been rightly pointed out, Finland emerged from the war as ‘a heavily burdened but by no means ruined country’.<sup>219</sup> Unlike Germany, it was able to maintain to the last an army that was fit for action, although now about to be demobilized, and a structurally intact economy. Even more importantly, Finland was the only

<sup>211</sup> See Ursin, *Pohjois-Suomen tuhot*, 404.

<sup>212</sup> See Annanpalo, *Rovaniemi*, 51–2.

<sup>213</sup> On this, see the overview in Vehviläinen, ‘German Armed Forces’, and above all the study by Lähteenmäki, *Jänkäjääkäreitä ja parakkipiikoja*.

<sup>214</sup> See Ursin, *Pohjois-Suomen tuhot*, 400. Lähteenmäki, *Jänkäjääkäreitä ja parakkipiikoja*, chs. 11 and 12, and Rautio, *Pohjoisen pakolaiset*, are also instructive.

<sup>215</sup> Helsinki’s declaration of war on the German Reich on 3 March 1945, with retroactive effect from 15 September 1944, need not be considered here, as it was of purely formal significance.

<sup>216</sup> Of the total number of dead, just under a quarter were lost in the Winter War, three-quarters in the Continuation War, and over a thousand in the Lapland War (communication from the Institute of Military Science, Helsinki, 27 June 1978).

<sup>217</sup> For a detailed account of the Paris peace treaty, see Polvinen, *Between East and West*, chs. 17–19.

<sup>218</sup> In reality, the sum was much higher because the calculation was based on the 1938 gold dollar rate. See Menger, ‘Finnland’, 296–7.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid. 298.

European ally of the German Reich, and the only state adjoining the Soviet Union, that managed to avoid occupation of its territory. This fortunate circumstance, which was of course due partly to the country's geostrategically peripheral location, but no less to the government's flair for realpolitik and skilful tactics, is the underlying reason why the Finnish nation was the only one of the powers besieged in the Second World War that was able—despite some initial restrictions—to preserve its political culture and system of government.

## 5. THE END OF THE WAR IN NORWAY

As the war drew to an end in Finland, it seemed to be only just beginning in Norway, which had experienced hardship and terror but had seen no major fighting during the four years of the German occupation. In the autumn of 1944 neither friend nor foe expected the conflict to end in an almost miraculously mild way just over six months later. On the contrary, Reich commissioner Josef Terboven, the man at the head of the occupation administration, left no doubt, right until a few days before Germany surrendered, about his determination to fight for 'Fortress Norway' to the end. Moreover, with an occupation force of some 370,000 men, there were more German troops in the country in relation to the population than in any other area occupied by Germany. This was mainly because, ever since 1941, the German command had considered Norway to be the most likely target for Allied counter-attacks. Unaware of the actual British plans, in which Norway had not played an important part since the spring of 1942, Hitler and the OKW continued to reckon with the possibility of landings on the Norwegian coast even after the Allied invasion of Normandy.<sup>220</sup> 'Fortress Norway' had accordingly been built up over the past few years, at great cost in men and equipment.<sup>221</sup> That it was now to be evacuated without a shot being fired was all the more unexpected in that Twentieth Mountain Army had been moved to Norway in October 1944, bringing the number of German troops stationed in the country to more than half a million, that is, about a sixth of the total Norwegian population.<sup>222</sup> Army commander-in-chief Lothar Rendulic, appointed as the new 'Wehrmacht Commander Norway' in December, announced that in Norway 'everything will be exclusively at the service of the war, and will be arranged accordingly'.<sup>223</sup>

What this meant for the Norwegian people in the worst possible case had already been clear in the northernmost part of the country since October, where the danger of the Red Army pressing forward into Norwegian territory increased

<sup>220</sup> The area round Narvik and the Lofoten islands was thought to be particularly threatened. See Riste, 'German Coastal Defence', and Ludlow, 'Britain and Northern Europe'. On the landings expected by Germany, see also Part I, Chapter I.3 of the present volume, esp. Map I.I.1.

<sup>221</sup> On this, see the recent work by Bohn, *Reichskommissariat Norwegen*, 357–76.

<sup>222</sup> See Bohn, 'Der Rückzug am Eismeer', 115.

<sup>223</sup> KTB entry for 23 Nov. 1944, quoted ibid. 116. Rendulic took over from Col.-Gen. von Falkenhorst as Wehrmacht commander on 18 December 1944, but he was already obliged to hand over to General Franz Böhme in January 1945. See also Lang, 'Operation Nordlicht', 28.

when Twentieth Mountain Army withdrew to the Lyngen line. Not only would Soviet occupation of parts of northern Norway make the military situation of the German units operating on the outer edge of the continent more difficult; it would also, and above all, destabilize Norway's political position by providing the government-in-exile in London with a bridgehead on the Norwegian mainland. In order to prevent any such development, which would be equally disastrous for the German controlling authority and for the dependent collaborationist government of Vidkun Quisling,<sup>224</sup> Reich commissioner Terboven and the Norwegian agencies working for him argued for the evacuation—on a voluntary basis—of those areas of the country that were under threat. Their reasoning was that a depopulated region would afford the enemy difficult terrain for military operations and barren prospects for political propaganda. A government-in-exile could not hope to present itself as the nation's liberator there, as it had recently been able to do in France. However, the evacuation programme soon appeared likely to fail, for two quite different reasons, namely the pig-headedness of a population with traditional roots in the soil, and unwillingness on the part of the relevant Wehrmacht agencies, which regarded the proposed evacuation measures largely as an additional logistical burden on their own troops.<sup>225</sup>

Although the reservations expressed on the Wehrmacht side were shared by other officials (for example, the commander of the security police and SD in Norway) for various reasons, a Führer order addressed to Twentieth Mountain Army and signed by the chief of the Wehrmacht operations staff was issued on 28 October, at Terboven's insistence, according to which 'the entire Norwegian population east of the Lyngenfjord was to be *forcibly* evacuated for their own safety, and all residential buildings were to be burned down or demolished'. Sympathy with the civilian population would be 'misplaced'. On the contrary, it must be made clear to the troops who carried out the order 'that, in a few months' time, the Norwegians would be thankful that they had been saved from Bolshevism'. Whereas 'the barbarous methods employed in the air war against the German homeland and its cultural sites have inflicted a thousand times more suffering on our people', the 'humane methods of evacuation and demolition of residential buildings in northern Norway' were necessary for the purposes of the war, and the price would have to be paid 'with the blood of German troops' if these methods were not employed.<sup>226</sup>

The deportation and destruction measures which now began—measures for which the people were told that the Norwegian authorities were responsible—applied to an area of some 60,000 square kilometres (that is, about one-and-a-half times the size of Denmark). Comprising the Norwegian province of Finnmark and the northern part of the province of Troms, the area had been home to some 50,000 people before the war, rising to about 60,000 (according to German estimates) during the war years.<sup>227</sup> In the late autumn of 1944 the vast majority,

<sup>224</sup> On Quisling's role in the closing phase of the war, see Dahl, *Quisling*, chs. 9 and 10.

<sup>225</sup> See Lang, 'Operation Nordlicht', 28 ff., and Bohn, 'Der Rückzug am Eismeer', 116 ff.

<sup>226</sup> OKW/WFSt telex, 28 Oct. 1944, quoted in IMT, xxvi. 287 ff.

<sup>227</sup> See Lang, 'Operation Nordlicht', 30.

some 40,000 to 50,000, were forced to leave home and hearth, in most cases taking only what they could carry.<sup>228</sup> The subsequent destruction of houses and infrastructure was, as recorded in the Twentieth Mountain Army war diary, ‘as complete as only an efficient army can make it’.<sup>229</sup> According to Norwegian post-war surveys, altogether about 15,000 residential buildings and outhouses, around 1,000 business premises and farm buildings, and well over 300 public establishments (assembly halls and administrative buildings, schools, hospitals, and churches) were reduced to ashes. In the extreme north-east, in particular, where there had also been Soviet air raids and fighting between German, Finnish, and Soviet units, hardly a house had remained intact.<sup>230</sup> Even so, many of the exiles returned to their ancestral homeland in the summer of 1945, soon after the end of the war.

As in the case of Finnish Lapland, so too for the people of northern Norway, who had long been accustomed to living in hard but otherwise remarkably peaceable circumstances, the destructiveness of the ‘scorched earth’ policy was unlike anything they had experienced in the course of their history, and the political and psychological repercussions affected relations between Germany and Norway for decades to come. Another largely forgotten, but even more distressing aspect was the fate of many of the 120,000 or so mainly Russian and Serbian prisoners of war who had been moulderling in hundreds of labour camps, mainly in northern Norway,<sup>231</sup> and were now evacuated to the south in extremely difficult circumstances. About 2,500 of them alone died in what was, for Norway, probably the worst single disaster of the entire war, when the coastal freighter *Rigel* was sunk off Tjøtta by British aircraft.<sup>232</sup>

Meanwhile, the German position in Norway was becoming increasingly hopeless. On the one hand, the occupying power could not rule out the possibility of a further Red Army advance in the north, or of Allied landings along the long coastline, combined with an attack by Sweden. On the other, the increasing threat to Germany itself in the winter of 1944/5 meant that battle-worthy units had to be withdrawn from northern Europe. The withdrawal had to be conducted mainly by land, because of the Allied control of the air off the Norwegian coast and the increasing shortage of coal due to declining deliveries of supplies. However, the process was repeatedly and seriously hampered and delayed by a dramatic increase in acts of sabotage, carried out by the Norwegian resistance in coordination with Allied overall strategy, against railway lines, bridges, port installations, and other infrastructure.<sup>233</sup> In these circumstances, the increasingly urgent question was whether it now made any sense at all to maintain the occupation and engage in a

<sup>228</sup> On the differing German and Norwegian estimates, see the discussion of the figures in Lang, ‘Operation Nordlicht’, 35–6, and Bohn, ‘Der Rückzug am Eismeer’, 122–3. According to Norwegian findings, some 23,000 managed to avoid evacuation by fleeing.

<sup>229</sup> Quoted in Bohn, ‘Der Rückzug am Eismeer’, 123.

<sup>230</sup> See Lang, ‘Operation Nordlicht’, and Bohn, ‘Der Rückzug am Eismeer’.

<sup>231</sup> For more detailed information on the conditions there, see Ottosen, ‘Arbeits- und Konzentrationslager’.

<sup>232</sup> See Lang, ‘Operation Nordlicht’, 34.

<sup>233</sup> On this and the following, see Bohn, *Reichskommissariat Norwegen*, 232 ff.

'final battle' for Norway. A proposal to evacuate northern Norway to a point south of Narvik, submitted at the beginning of March by General Franz Böhme, who had been acting commander of the Wehrmacht since January, was accepted in principle by the Wehrmacht operations staff but rejected by Hitler himself, because the dictator feared that it would make German U-boat operations more difficult and encourage Sweden to enter the war. He was, however, prepared to allow a further reduction in the German occupation force, for the benefit of other theatres of war.<sup>234</sup>

Stockholm was ready and willing to deal with various eventualities, but it showed no interest in escalating the situation in its occupied neighbour, despite growing pressure from the Norwegian government-in-exile, which was intent on the speedy liberation of its country. On the contrary, the Swedish government, which was remarkably well informed about the frame of mind and intentions of the various German operations staffs,<sup>235</sup> proceeded on the assumption that provocations directed at the occupying power, whether by outside intervention or by unrest within the country, would most likely strengthen its spirit of resistance and conjure up a 'final battle' scenario that would be devastating for all sides. On the basis of this thoroughly realistic assessment of the situation, it devoted its efforts to bringing about exploratory talks with German representatives of the SS, the foreign ministry, and the Wehrmacht. Swedish mediators were even able to arrange informal contacts between representatives of the German occupying forces and the Norwegian resistance movement.<sup>236</sup>

In the last weeks of the war Reich commissioner Terboven, the strongest advocate of a German fight to the end in Norway, became increasingly isolated. 'Fortress Norway' had largely lost its strategic significance for the foundering Reich. The idea of withdrawing to Norway and continuing the war from there after the Reich itself had been lost, was—contrary to various rumours—clearly never seriously considered.<sup>237</sup> The Reich commissioner's attempts to influence the military command in the country had already failed in the course of the winter. And there were signs that support in the Nasjonal Samling party was beginning to crumble. The party leader, Quisling, had given orders in February that the members of his paramilitary 'Hird' movement—a movement similar to the German SA—were to mobilize in preparation for the expected final battle, but two months later only the radical, pro-German wing of the party, close to the minister of police Jonas Lie, was prepared to risk starting a civil war. In the end it never came to that, owing to prudence on the Norwegian home front and to the fact that Terboven's policy of radicalization was now increasingly being undermined by his own apparatus.<sup>238</sup> Finally, the fact that in April the Reich plenipotentiary in Denmark, Werner Best,

<sup>234</sup> See ibid. and *Lagevorträge*, 675–6 (16 Mar. 1945); also Warlimont, *Im Hauptquartier*, 536.

<sup>235</sup> See Carlgren, 'The Significance of the Intelligence Services', esp. 52.

<sup>236</sup> See Moll, 'Kapitulation oder heroischer Endkampf', 57–8, and Bohn, *Reichskommissariat Norwegen*, 234 ff.

<sup>237</sup> See Moll, 'Kapitulation oder heroischer Endkampf', 63.

<sup>238</sup> For examples, see Bohn, *Reichskommissariat Norwegen*, 235–6. See also Moll, 'Kapitulation oder heroischer Endkampf', 51 ff., and Paulsen, 'Reichskommissar vs. Wehrmachtbefehlshaber'.

had agreed with the regional leaders in Hamburg and Schleswig-Holstein, Gauleiters Karl Kaufmann and Hinrich Lohse, to give up the German–Danish area in the north to the advancing British troops without a fight<sup>239</sup> also contributed to Terboven's increasing isolation.

The final decision on the form which the end of the war would take in northern Europe fell on 3 May 1945. On that day, the civil and military leaders in charge of the German occupation in Norway and Denmark met with Hitler's successor as head of state, Grand Admiral Karl Dönitz, in Flensburg. Two factors proved decisive for the outcome of the discussion. The first was that Dönitz's authority as commander-in-chief was not called into question by any of the military men who were present. The second was that the Wehrmacht commanders concerned, General Böhme and Col.-Gen. Georg Lindemann, had made it quite clear, in the situation assessments they had submitted beforehand, that any further resistance in the areas under their command would be pointless. In these circumstances, Terboven's plea for one 'last honourable battle [...] to the last man and the last cartridge'<sup>240</sup> was decisively rejected, especially by Dönitz himself. The very next day, the new head of state reached an agreement with the British 21st Army Group (Bernard Montgomery) on an armistice covering the whole northern area of operations from Holland to Denmark. On 8 May General Böhme, acting on a telex he had received from Keitel the day before,<sup>241</sup> informed the Allied headquarters in Edinburgh responsible for dealing with Norway that his troops too would join in Germany's overall surrender. This opened the way for a bloodless and—as the following days and weeks were to show—remarkably smooth transfer of executive authority to the incoming British and Norwegian staffs and agencies.

Reich commissioner Terboven committed suicide on the evening of 8 May. The Senior SS and Police Leader North, Friedrich Wilhelm Rediess, and the commander of the security police and SD in Norway, Heinrich Fehlis, also chose to end their own lives, as did some radical members of the Nasjonal Samling party. A month later, after exactly five years in exile, King Haakon VII returned home from England. In the following months and years Norway underwent a rapid and lasting restoration of its political culture, whose continuity was embodied by the king. The general elections held no later than October 1945 marked the return to democratic normality and the determination for a change of personnel.<sup>242</sup>

Norway, which continued to be *de jure* at war with Germany and Japan until 1951,<sup>243</sup> remained a deeply divided country for years to come, despite all efforts to return to normal. Post-war Norwegian society was involved until the early fifties in a flood of mediation and legal proceedings to deal with the heritage of occupation and collaboration. Only a few hundred cases concerned members of the German occupation force, of whom 81 were eventually convicted, including 15 sentenced to

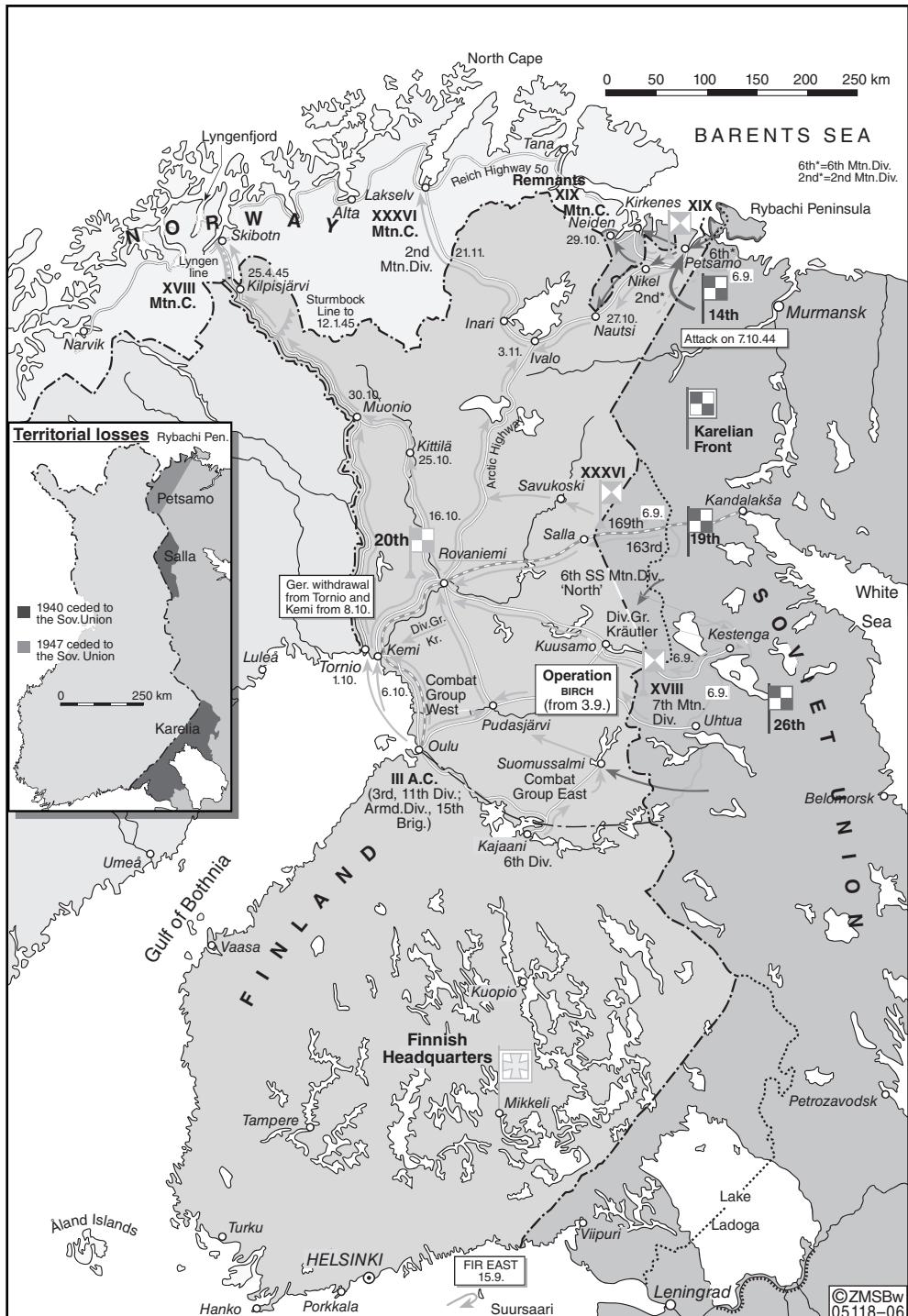
<sup>239</sup> See Herbert, *Best*, 398–9.

<sup>240</sup> Quote in Bohn, *Reichskommissariat Norwegen*, 225. For a detailed and critically documented discussion of the talks on 3 May, contradictory accounts of which appear in the literature on the subject, see Moll, 'Kapitulation oder heroischer Endkampf', 71 ff.

<sup>241</sup> Repr. in *Expansionsrichtung Nordeuropa*, 204–5 (doc. 125).

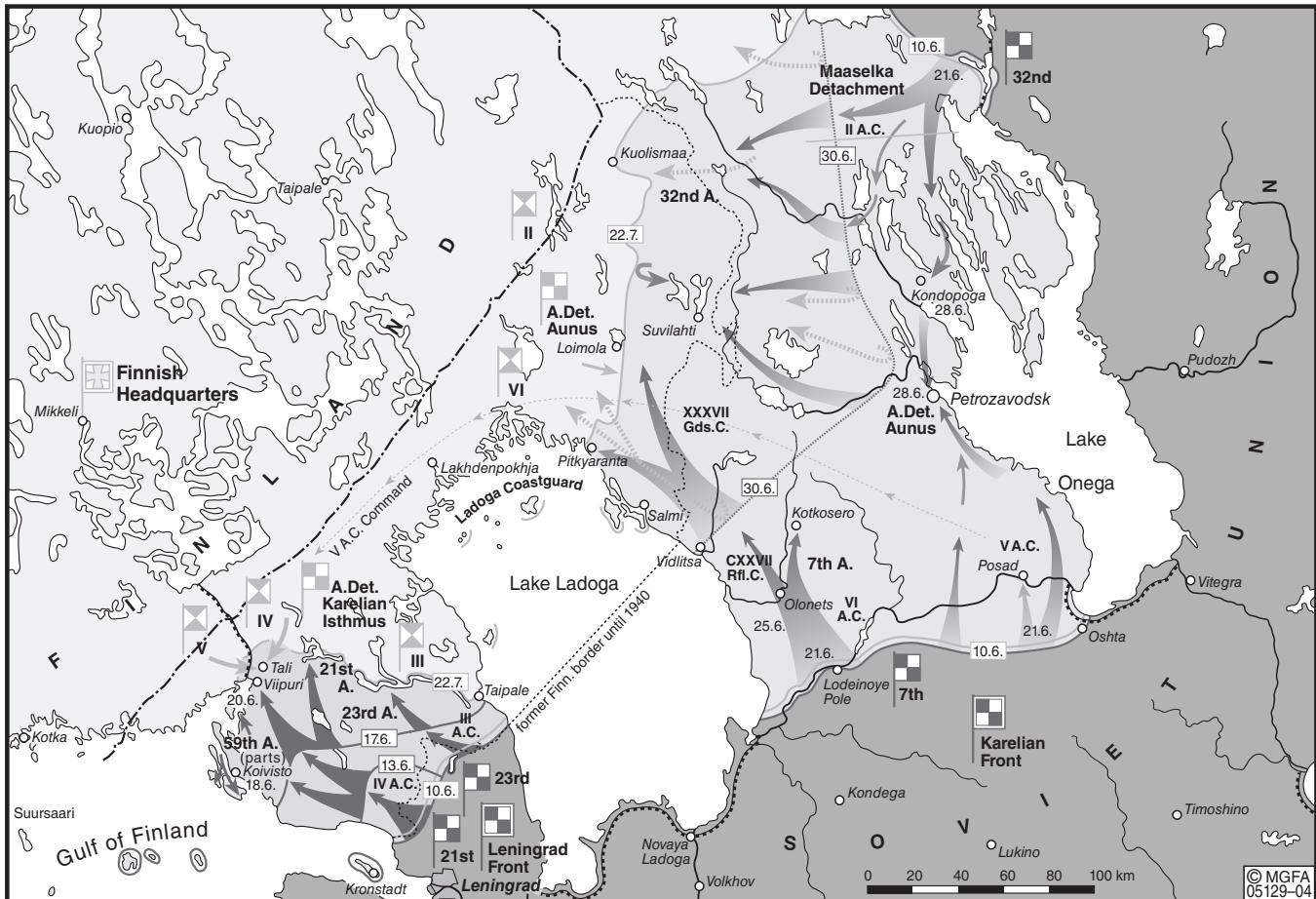
<sup>242</sup> For an overview, see Petrick, *Norwegen*, 242 ff.

<sup>243</sup> Ibid. 243.



Map VI.i.1. The German withdrawal from Finland, September 1944 to January 1945

Sources: Menger, *Deutschland und Finnland im zweiten Weltkrieg*, 230; *Geschichte des zweiten Weltkrieges 1939–1945*, Map 123; *Atlas of the Second World War*, 215.



**Map VI.I.2.** The major Soviet offensive on the Karelian Isthmus and in South Karelia (9 June to mid-July 1944)

Sources: OKH situation maps, 16 June 1944 and 22 July 1944, BA-MA, Kart RH2, N/78 and N/90; *Geschichte des zweiten Weltkrieges 1939–1945*.



Map VI.I.3. Yugoslavia after occupation and partition in April 1941

Sources: OKW situation maps, BA-MA, Kart RH 2W/626 to 708.

death. Far more decisive for social developments within the country was the fact that more than 90,000 Norwegians faced proceedings for actual or alleged treason. More than half of them, mostly members of the Nasjonal Samling party, were sentenced to terms of imprisonment, confiscation of property, fines, or disenfranchisement. In 26 cases—including the case against Quisling himself—the death sentence was carried out.<sup>244</sup> The judicial reckoning with the events of the occupation period ended in 1957, when the last of those who received a life sentence was pardoned, but the debate in society and among historians had only just begun.

<sup>244</sup> For details, see Kolsrud, ‘The Treason Trials in Norway’, and Bohn, ‘Schuld und Sühne’.

## II. The Yugoslavian Theatre of War (January 1943 to May 1945)

*Klaus Schmider*

### 1. GEOGRAPHICAL, TOPOGRAPHICAL, CLIMATIC, AND TRANSPORT CONDITIONS

No other features of Yugoslavia's<sup>1</sup> geography<sup>2</sup> were to present such an obstacle to the military operations of the occupying forces and such a boon to those of the resistance guerrillas as the numerous massifs. They are to be found in the Dinaric Alps (a branch of the Julian Alps), running parallel to the Adriatic coast as far as Albania, and also in isolated rock formations further inland. Thickly wooded, they provided an important refuge and assembly area for the resistance guerrilla groups, and it was always difficult—and, for infantry divisions confined to the roads, often impossible—to comb them thoroughly within a reasonable space of time. This was particularly true of massifs which, like almost all the massifs in this area, were classified as low mountain ranges (less than 2,000 metres high) but are comparable to high mountain ranges in their fissuring and karst formation. The problems this caused were of course compounded by the onset of winter. In this respect, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Montenegro, in particular, afforded conditions for armed resistance the like of which were not to be found anywhere else in occupied Europe. These advantages must be qualified, however, by the fact that the limited areas of

<sup>1</sup> The situation as regards sources on the subject of the Yugoslavian theatre of war can generally be described as very good for the period between 1941 and 1943, the diary-style notes kept by the German plenipotentiary general in Croatia, Edmund Glaise von Horstenau, being particularly important in this connection. For 1944, the loss of 2nd Armoured Army's war diary (KTB) and annexes makes it very difficult to reach conclusions about the military decision-making processes, while for 1945—as far as Wehrmacht and foreign ministry records are concerned—only a few fragmentary documents have survived. For an account of the final months it was necessary to rely essentially on the OKW war diary, memoirs, private diaries, and accounts from the other side. Erika Eichmann (Essen), Sönke Neitzel (Mainz), Simon Trew (Sandhurst), Aleksandar Vecanski (Ingolstadt), Christian von Gyldenfeldt (Lingen), and Peter Lieb (Munich) were of considerable assistance in opening up new sources and suggesting corrections. And I owe a special debt of gratitude to my mother for her unfailing and selfless assistance and support in my work.

<sup>2</sup> A very useful introduction to the complex subject of Yugoslavia's geography in the war is *Militärgeographischer Überblick über Südosteuropa (Donauraum und Balkanhalbinsel)*, completed 15 March 1940, publ. Generalstab des Heeres, Berlin 1940, repr. in Piekalkiewicz, *Krieg auf dem Balkan*, 9–20. For a more detailed treatment, see Mennel, *Der Balkan*.

agricultural land available as a result of this topographical feature could lead to bottlenecks in food supplies for larger resistance formations.<sup>3</sup> The area north of the Sava (Slavonia and Syrmia) has a distinctly larger amount of flat country (except in central Slavonia), but even Syrmia, with its highly developed agriculture, contains at least one wooded mountain range, the Fruška Gora hills, which had been repeatedly 'combed' by the Croats and the occupying forces but had never been permanently 'pacified'. Only the Bačka and Banat regions (north of the Danube) have almost no uplands to speak of.

A topographical feature that was especially advantageous for the occupying forces, on the other hand, was the similarly rocky nature of the coast. In Yugoslavia, unlike Albania, the coast consists mainly of steep cliffs rather than flat, gently sloping sandy beaches. This, combined with the lack of any large harbours south of the Istrian peninsula, meant that an amphibious enemy landing was a relatively calculable risk.

As regards climate, Yugoslavia is divided by the Dinaric Alps into two separate zones. Weather conditions in the coastal strip and on the islands are distinctly Mediterranean in character, whereas the climate east of the Dinaric Alps is predominantly continental or central European. And the bora storms blowing in from the north-east in the winter and the spring can cause sudden drops in temperature.

In 1941 the country's transport infrastructure was very well developed by Balkan standards. The Bosnian road network was essentially a legacy from the period of Austro-Hungarian occupation (1878–1918). For the purposes of the German occupation forces, the Zagreb–Belgrade–Niš rail link was particularly important as the main logistic artery for the troops in the Greek area and the most important link with their Bulgarian ally. The railways in the area south of the Sava were predominantly narrow-gauge lines, which were less efficient and much more open to attack by the resistance, on account of the large number of engineering structures required to cope with the precipitous terrain.

Most of the river systems in Yugoslavia rise to the west or east of the Dinaric Alps and flow either into the Adriatic (for example, the Neretva) or into the Sava (for example, the Una, the Vrbas, and the Bosna). Only two of them played an important part in the partisan war against the occupying forces: the Drina, because the border between Serbia and Croatia established in April 1941 largely followed the course of the river, enabling the German military administration to protect Old Serbia, which was comparatively quiet after November 1941, from the escalating ethnic conflicts in Croatia; and the Danube, because, between 1941 and 1944, some 250 kilometres of the course of this most important waterway in German-occupied Europe touched on or ran through Yugoslavian territory, part of which was deemed to be 'pacified' (the Hungarian Bačka region), while part was considered highly 'problematical' (Croatian Syrmia and the north-eastern part of

<sup>3</sup> As, for example, in May/June 1942, when Tito gathered his remaining units together in the Montenegro–Herzegovina border area after his defeat in the civil war; see the author's interview as confirmed by with Dr Vladimir Velebit, former major-general in the National Liberation Army, during an interview with the author in Zagreb (9/10 May 1998).

Old Serbia). Although even temporary disruption of river traffic was beyond the military capabilities of the resistance, the latent threat to the transport route by which consignments of Romanian oil were delivered to Germany must undoubtedly have contributed to the attention which the Germans paid to this 'secondary theatre of war'.

## 2. A LOOK BACK (MAY 1941 TO DECEMBER 1942)

Some two months after the armed forces of the kingdom of Yugoslavia surrendered to the Wehrmacht on 17 April 1941,<sup>4</sup> the Serbian, Montenegrin, and Slovenian sections of the population began a widely supported insurgency of an intensity unparalleled in occupied Europe.<sup>5</sup> Without any decisive help from abroad, the Communist and—to a much lesser extent—the Serbian nationalist resistance movement gradually took control of more than half the country from the German and Italian occupation forces, inflicting on them losses of 31,000 to 32,000 dead or missing by the end of September 1944.<sup>6</sup>

The victorious Axis powers had themselves laid the foundation for this development in April/May 1941. On the one hand, the demobilization and disarmament of the Yugoslavian army had been extremely superficial. On the other, the country had been divided between the Axis powers in a way that was bound to cause unrest among the peoples of the defeated kingdom. In addition to the expulsions from areas directly annexed by the victorious powers (particularly the German-occupied part of Slovenia), it was above all the creation of the 'Independent State of Croatia' (*Nezavisna Država Hrvatska*, NDH) under Croatian-Herzegovinian lawyer Ante Pavelić's ultra-fascist Ustasha movement, that was to be a permanent source of unrest, not only because a state in this form, based on an Italian initiative, was the fulfilment of the most extreme fantasies of a greater Croatia (comprising Croatia, Syrmia, and the whole of Bosnia-Herzegovina), but also because the new government, despite its own modest power base, immediately set about reducing the 50 per cent 'minority presence' by a process of 'ethnic cleansing'. The Serbian minority (1.95 million), in particular, was able to resist this policy effectively because the areas of Serbian settlement were compact. Finally, the all-too-obvious way in which Italy assigned the role of a satellite state to the young state in the Treaties of Rome signed on 18 May—by annexing Dalmatian areas, appointing a king from the House of Savoy, establishing a demilitarized zone, and banning it

<sup>4</sup> For a detailed account of the history and course of the April campaign, see *Germany and the Second World War*, iii. 449–555.

<sup>5</sup> While the non-Slavic ethnic groups ('ethnic Germans', Albanians, and Hungarians) largely refused to join the resistance, active participation by Macedonians, Bosnians, and Croats prior to 1944 was much less than might have been expected, given their numbers. The differing degrees of commitment to the 'national liberation battle' by the various ethnic groups was a political issue that was kept under cover in Tito's Yugoslavia and became increasingly open after his death. See, most recently, Hoare, 'Whose is the Partisan Movement?'

<sup>6</sup> Half German and half Italian losses. Estimate taken from Schmider, *Partisanenkrieg in Jugoslawien*, 589–90.

from maintaining a navy of its own—ensured that the government would soon be accepted by only a minority, even among the Croat population. The relative numbers of German and Italian occupation forces (718th Infantry Division, still being assembled, on the one hand, and Col.-Gen. Vittorio Ambrosio's Italian 2nd Army, over 200,000 strong, on the other), stationed on either side of a demarcation line running through the new state on a north-west to south-east axis, was a further indication of the hegemony which Berlin willingly conceded to its Axis partner. From the Pavelić government's point of view, the insurgency in the summer and autumn of 1941, which at this point was still confined to the Serbian settlement areas south of the Sava, was less dangerous than the Italian reaction to it. An Italian withdrawal to the coast and Zone I (the territories annexed in Dalmatia), almost completed at the end of July, was stopped immediately, and full-scale occupation was reinstated, first in Zone II (the demilitarized zone) and then in Zone III. The decision to strip Croat bodies of their powers, and to expel almost all arms-bearing Croats (Ustasha and territorial army) into the German area of influence, was due at least as much to the Italian intention to extend the area of annexed territory<sup>7</sup> as it was to the need to combat the uprising. On the German side, this development was noted with concern only by the ambassador, Siegfried Kasche, and the 'German general in Zagreb', Maj.-Gen. Edmund Glaise von Horstenau (as from 1 November 1942 'German Plenipotentiary General in Croatia'). Kasche, in particular, developed into an unreserved advocate of the Pavelić regime in the process, deliberately suppressing the part which the Ustasha had played in starting the insurgency.<sup>8</sup>

Whereas in the NDH, from the end of June 1941, the rebellion embraced isolated geographical areas which had been subjected to Ustasha pogroms, the situation further east was quite different. In the former kingdom of Montenegro, which had been declared to be in personal union with Italy when Yugoslavia was split up and was occupied only by a relatively weak force consisting of a single infantry division, a national uprising broke out on 13 July of such elemental force that even the local Communist Party of Yugoslavia (CPY) was taken by surprise. A numerically overwhelming Italian counter-offensive in August, and the CPY's attempts to take over the leadership of the insurgency by force, led in December to a split in the resistance movement and a rapprochement between its anti-Communist elements and the Italian occupation forces. After they had managed between them to drive the Communists out in May 1942, Montenegro was spared any further major hostilities for almost a year.<sup>9</sup>

There were similar developments in the historic heartland of the Yugoslavian state in the summer and autumn of 1941. Apart from the genuine indignation over the treatment of ethnic Serbs in the NDH, it was, paradoxically, the tempo of German military operations during that year which prepared the ground for the

<sup>7</sup> The Italians were quite disarmingly open about this to their German allies. See 'Bericht der Deutschen Gesandtschaft in Zagreb an das Auswärtige Amt vom 3.12.1941', copy, BA-MA RH 31 III/8.

<sup>8</sup> For a more detailed account of Glaise von Horstenau's and Kasche's motives, see Schmider, *Partisanenkrieg in Jugoslawien*, 45–53.

<sup>9</sup> For more details on Montenegro during the period 1941/2, see ibid. 85–9; Karchmar, *Draža Mihailović*, 370–422; Scotti and Viazzi, *Le aquile delle montagne nere*, and Scotti, *L'inutile vittoria*.

rebellion in Old Serbia. This was firstly because the abrupt withdrawal of most of the original divisions occupying the country on the eve of the Russian campaign reminded many Serbs of similar troop movements in the early autumn of 1918 and the subsequent German collapse, and secondly because the Germans' war against the Soviet Union led to a surge of pan-Slavic solidarity and wildly exaggerated hopes of an imminent devastating counter-attack by their Russian brothers.<sup>10</sup> The insurgency nevertheless developed at a much slower pace than in Montenegro or the parts of the NDH that were affected. This gave the CPY, under its secretary-general, Josip Broz ('Tito'), a chance to intervene directly, aiming its military activities primarily against the bodies of the collaborationist Serbian government. Other armed *odredi* (detachments), formed spontaneously after the Yugoslavian state collapsed but undecided about what course to follow, were also—insofar as they appeared 'unwilling to cooperate'—in the CPY's firing line.

The three German occupation divisions (704th, 714th, and 717th Infantry Divisions), which were still in the process of forming battalions, were markedly restrained in this early phase of the insurrection (late June to early August), leaving things to the gendarmerie of the Serbian 'rump state'. Moreover, the formulation of a coherent strategy was also made considerably more difficult by differences of opinion between General Paul Bader, commander of the troops under LXV Corps HQ, which was responsible for operations in Serbia and northern Croatia, and General Heinrich Danckelmann, Military Commander in Serbia, as to the right way to proceed.<sup>11</sup> By the middle of October the occupation forces had suffered a whole series of setbacks and had been obliged to evacuate large parts of north-western Serbia, but they were to benefit in the next few weeks both from clarification of the command structure<sup>12</sup> and from a political change of heart in large sections of Serbian society. Although this was at least partly due to the deterrent effect of the reprisal executions of hostages since 10 October, in the ratio of 100 to 1, it was mainly attributable to the increasingly open tendency of the CPY to begin implementing its long-term social policy objectives in the areas under its control. The opposition which this aroused in large sections of Serbian society was seen at its strongest among those Serbs who were even prepared to collaborate with the occupiers as a result: the new prime minister, Milan Nedić,<sup>13</sup> appointed on 29 August; the armed wing (the 'volunteers') of the fascistic 'Zbor' party; and

<sup>10</sup> On this, see 'L'incaricato d'affari a Belgrado, Guidotti, al ministro degli esteri, Ciano' (28 Jun. 1941), *DDI*, 9th Series, vii. 309–10, and 'Bericht des Feldwebels Dr. Keidel über seine Gefangenschaft in Krupanj' (5 Sept. 1941), BA-MA RH24-65/9.

<sup>11</sup> Particularly instructive in this connection is a retrospective review by the head of military administration, Harald Turner, in 'Gesamtsituationsbericht an den Reichsführer SS' (16 Feb. 1942), BA, NS 19/1730.

<sup>12</sup> Bader and Danckelmann were placed under XVIII Army Corps HQ, commanded by General Franz Böhme, with effect from 16 September. An attempt by Danckelmann to question this subordination ended in his downfall on 10 October.

<sup>13</sup> Col.-Gen. Milan Nedić had been obliged to resign from his post as minister of war in November 1940 after proposing a rapprochement with the Axis on pragmatic grounds. He commanded 3rd Army in the April 1941 campaign. He had spent the months after Yugoslavia's capitulation not in a German prison camp but—probably on the basis of a recommendation from an unknown source—under house arrest. See also Vecanski, 'General Milan Dj. Nedić', 46–8.

the Chetniks, led by First World War veteran Kosta Pećanac, with traditions going back hundreds of years. Finally, on 2 November, open civil war broke out between the partisans and the most important resistance group loyal to the king, led by Colonel Draža Mihailović. As a result, most of the Communist *odredi* were concentrated in the Užice area, where they presented an exceptionally good target for Operation UZICE, a major operation launched by two German infantry divisions on 25 November. The remnants of the defeated partisan forces were obliged to flee to neighbouring Bosnia and Montenegro. Despite the difficulties which the Wehrmacht's C-in-C South-East, Field Marshal Wilhelm List, had had in accepting volunteers and Pećanac Chetniks as 'auxiliary gendarmerie', the practice became even more extensive at the turn of 1941/2. Whole *odredi* of Mihailović's clearly, if temporarily, anti-German organization found a second livelihood, with the full knowledge (and reservations) of the Germans, as Serbian government units.<sup>14</sup>

Things were much more muddled in the NDH than in Old Serbia, where the events of November/December 1941 led to a measure of uneasy peace that lasted for the next two years. Any lasting pacification of the NDH was prevented not only by the Ustasha's genocidal policy and the gradual deterioration of the NDH's armed forces, but also by Italian efforts to achieve hegemony and German indecision over the policy to be pursued in Croatia. The problems were aggravated after June 1942 by the steady decline in Italy's commitment, despite its strong numerical presence. This shortcoming had increasingly to be made good by a German contingent which, before January 1943, never consisted of more than two divisions.

General Bader initially attempted to reach a political solution to the problem in January/February 1942, when he had discussions with the east Bosnian Chetnik commander, Jezdimir Dangić, about the extensive dismantling of the NDH in the east Bosnian government districts under his control. A decisive factor behind this attempt may have been the realization that it was literally impossible to form a state with the Pavelić regime, as well as the fact that Dangić had just made a similar offer to the Italian 2nd Army's VI Army Corps, which was responsible for Herzegovina and south-eastern Bosnia. This personal initiative of Bader's failed owing to opposition from the OKW and the foreign ministry, and—despite receipt of the first negotiation feelers from the partisans<sup>15</sup>—the rest of the year was spent in military operations. Operation SOUTH-EAST CROATIA (15 to 23 January 1942) drove the bulk of the partisans out of the northern part of east Bosnia and inflicted substantial losses on them. Operations TRIO I and TRIO II/FOCA (22 April to 15 May 1942) were directed against the south-eastern part of Bosnia and, since the area of operations was located both south and north of the demarcation line, it was necessary to mount a joint action with the Italian 2nd Army. In the event, the

<sup>14</sup> For a detailed account of the different partisan and collaborationist groups involved in the conflict, see the Appendix: 'Yugoslavian Resistance and Collaboration Armed Formations', at the end of this chapter.

<sup>15</sup> In August and November 1942. For details, see Schmider, *Partisanenkrieg in Jugoslawien*, 158–60, 171–2.

action turned into an Italian attempt, under the pretext of the ongoing operations, to establish a permanent presence north of the demarcation line in the Sarajevo area. In the end, the repeated disputes between Germans, Croatians, and Italians in this connection led to the premature termination of the operations. The fact that the TRIO operations nevertheless resulted in the extensive collapse of the Communist position in south-eastern Bosnia was due in no small measure to the excessively radical policy pursued by the CPY, which had turned many of its supporters against it. When, in addition to Bosnia, Herzegovina and the party's own base in northern Montenegro were also lost, Tito's headquarters staff decided on 23 June 1942 to use their remaining forces to attempt a fresh start in western Bosnia.

At the same time, a fundamental change in Italy's policy on Croatia took place in Rome. The Italian 2nd Army had suffered its first serious setbacks during the winter, and annoyance at the failure to gain control of territory on the other side of the demarcation line now led to a reduction in Italy's commitment in the Bosnian theatre and a withdrawal in stages (late May/early June 1942, November 1942, April 1943, August 1943) from the interior of the country. Until Italy's exit from the war in September 1943, 2nd Army's operations in the NDH were increasingly devoted to presenting the smallest possible target for enemy attacks and to keeping its own losses to a minimum. The strain on the Axis coalition as a result of this policy was nowhere more apparent than in the attempt by Ambrosio's successor, Mario Roatta (Commander-in-Chief of 2nd Army from 20 January 1942 to 5 February 1943), to delegate his army's military tasks to the Serbian nationalist opponents of the partisans in the civil war by increasingly arming Croatian and Montenegrin Chetniks.<sup>16</sup>

Initially, Bader and his successor, Lt.-Gen. Rudolf Lüters, 'Commander of the German troops in Croatia' from 16 November 1942, did not have the Italians' permission or the necessary troop units to fill the vacuum which the Italian 2nd Army had left in western Bosnia, so the second half of the year was to prove of decisive importance for the further build-up of the partisan forces (from 19 November 1942, the 'National Liberation Army'). The force of barely 5,000 men which Tito had brought with him from Montenegro served as the cadre for a partisan army that increasingly possessed the characteristics of a regular army and experienced exponential growth from the late summer of 1942 on. That development was not prevented by the occupation forces and was, on the contrary, furthered in practice by the weapons captured as booty in every encounter with the demoralized Croatian territorial army. Occasional German successes, such as the destruction of the 2nd Krajina *Odred* in the Kozara Mountains in June/July 1942, or the successful defence of Jajce in central Bosnia in September and December 1942, only affected the edge of the new 'partisan state' (the 'Partisanreich', as Edmund Glaise von Horstenau called it). The surviving medium-term plans which Bader, Lüters, and their divisional commanders made at the time were concerned primarily with the need to prevent any further expansion of the area

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. 135–8, 168–70, 179–80.

under enemy control, or to cause disturbances there at regular intervals. The idea of a campaign to completely destroy the 'partisan state', which had reached the gates of Zagreb by the end of the year, was never considered, owing to the lack of resources.

The fact that such an undertaking would in any case have been left to the German Axis partner is clear from the extension, in November 1942, of the core area under Communist control to the areas of Serbian settlement in the Croatian regions of Lika, Kordun, and Banija. Although, with the capture of Bihać south of the demarcation line on 4 November, the largest city in the NDH fell into the hands of the partisans, the Italian 2nd Army HQ's only response was to inform the Wehrmacht Commander South-East on 18 November that the second phase of the withdrawal to the coast was to begin shortly. This double-edged gift, which lightened the political burden of the Italian occupation but abandoned more land to the partisans, cast the Pavelić government and its sympathizer, the German ambassador Kasche, into a state of veritable schizophrenia.<sup>17</sup>

### 3. CLIMAX AND FAILURE OF THE FIGHT AGAINST THE NATIONAL LIBERATION ARMY (JANUARY 1943 TO SEPTEMBER 1944)

Paradoxically, it was two German disasters that gave the Croats their only ray of hope in this situation. The withdrawal of Field Marshal Erwin Rommel's Armoured Army Africa from El Alamein on 4 November, and the Anglo-American landing in French North Africa on 8 November 1942, created a situation in which a major landing in Greece or Italy, the repeatedly threatened 'Second Front', was a real possibility in the medium term.<sup>18</sup> This radical change in the strategic picture was the main reason why Hitler and the OKW resolved—as they had already done in the case of Serbia in September 1941—to eliminate the trouble spot, at least for the time being, by means of an improvised concentration of forces. The biggest problem proved to be cooperation with their Axis partner, Italy, which had existed almost only on paper since termination of the TRIO operations in May.<sup>19</sup> However, Rome's well-known sensitivities had to be taken into account more than ever in the late autumn of 1942, since it had meanwhile become increasingly obvious that the Italian Axis partner had had enough of the war—a feeling that was shortly to be heightened even further by the impending loss of Libya and the downfall of 8th Army under Col.-Gen. Italo Gariboldi on the Don front (16 to 24 December 1942).

<sup>17</sup> Kasche found himself, once again, in the ludicrous position of having to both endorse and criticize the Italian withdrawal. See *ADAP*, Series E, iv. 433–4, 'Kasche an Auswärtiges Amt' (1 Dec. 1942).

<sup>18</sup> For details, see Part VI, Chapter IV of the present volume.

<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, in view of the untenable situation in Zone III, 2nd Army and the German Commanding General in Belgrade had concluded an agreement in October 1942 setting out the conditions on which German troop units might cross the demarcation line. See KTB Komm.Gen. und Befh. in Serbien, Abt. Ia (entry for 2 Oct. 1942), BA-MA RW 40/34, and 'Komm.Gen. an die 714. und 718. ID' (18 Oct. 1942), BA-MA RW 40/34.

Furthermore, the Wehrmacht Commander South-East,<sup>20</sup> Col.-Gen. Alexander Löhr, and the new commander in the Croatian area, Lt.-Gen. Lüters,<sup>21</sup> had to deal with a coalition partner whose increasing unwillingness to make an unreserved military commitment was ever more patently at odds with its claim to hegemony in the western Balkans.

Whereas in May 1942 the barely concealed expansionism of the Comando Supremo and the Italian 2nd Army at the expense of the NDH had prevented execution of the TRIO operations without friction and had finally led to their premature termination, the situation eight months later was completely different. By giving up Zone III and largely ceasing his army's active involvement in the fight against the partisans, Mario Roatta had decisively favoured the emergence of the partisan state. Closely connected with this was the increasing delegation of the war against the National Liberation Army to Serbian nationalist guerrilla units, only a minority of which (the Milizia Volontaria Anti-Comunista, MVAC) were included in the Italian command and supply structures in a way that allowed the scale of their participation in the battle to be calculated. As to the rest, these were groups operating independently south of the demarcation line which—unlike the Chetnik groups in the area under German control—could properly be described as 'large formations', and their largely independent leaders made little secret of their readiness to join Draža Mihailović in the event of a large-scale Allied landing.<sup>22</sup> Even more troubling was the situation in the Montenegrin area, where the three most important Chetnik leaders had largely been left to run the country autonomously after the Communist formations were driven out in June 1942. Their right to maintain a certain number of heavily armed 'gendarmerie' units had been recognized, in a regular inter-state agreement, by the Italian military command in Montenegro under Col.-Gen. Alessandro Pirzio-Biroli. And the fact that the Serbian nationalists who signed the agreement actually had many times more men under arms than the stipulated number had not noticeably affected the good understanding between them and the military command in Montenegro.

As if, in this situation, any further proof were needed that the Italians intended to resign from their role as occupying power, Roatta, having discussed the matter with the Comando Supremo, informed the Wehrmacht Commander South-East on 23 November 1942 that the second phase of 2nd Army's withdrawal was planned to start in the course of the following month.<sup>23</sup> Starting in the area round Knin, a large part of Zone II, including two stretches of coast west and east of annexed Dalmatia, were to be given up by 15 January 1943. Once this regrouping had been

<sup>20</sup> As from 1 January 1943 'Commander-in-Chief South-East', his post having been changed into an army group high command.

<sup>21</sup> Rudolf Lüters had been appointed 'Commander of German troops in Croatia', with effect from 16 November 1942, a position equivalent to that of a commanding general. His promotion to the rank of general followed on 1 January 1943.

<sup>22</sup> According to a January 1943 estimate by Glaise von Horstenau, there were about 19,000 Chetniks living in the territory of the NDH at that point. See 'Privatbrief Glaise von Horstenaus an Löhr' (13 Jan. 1943), BA-MA RH31 III/12.

<sup>23</sup> Talpo, *Dalmazia*, ii. 1139.

completed, V Army Corps (north-west Croatia), XVIII Army Corps (Dalmatia), and VI Army Corps (Herzegovina) would no longer form a continuous line. The avowed aim was to release three infantry divisions for duties on the home front. Although the Wehrmacht High Command eventually managed, after weeks of persuasion, to get the Comando Supremo to put a (temporary) stop to this move,<sup>24</sup> there were various issues concerning the joint conduct of military operations in Yugoslavia that still remained to be clarified at the turn of 1942/3. In addition to the question of overall command in the planned major operation, and executive authority in Zone III, which was still to be retaken, there was above all the issue of the Italian alliance with the Serbian nationalist Chetniks. Basically, the first two points concerned residual elements of Italy's essentially abandoned hegemony in the NDH. Its transitory claims in this respect were mainly a matter of prestige.

The question of the Chetniks was a different matter. At the beginning of 1943, given the steady retreat before the partisans since June 1942 and the increasing demoralization of the Italian troops, the alliance with the National Liberation Army's Serbian nationalist opponents in the civil war was one of the last remaining bases of Italian power in the Croatian and Montenegrin area. For Roatta and his successor, Mario Robotti, the continuation of the alliance, at least in the medium term, had become a *sine qua non* for the Italian presence on the eastern shore of the Adriatic. The chief of the Comando Supremo, Ugo Cavallero, who leaned towards the German position on this issue, was replaced on 30 January 1943 by Vittorio Ambrosio, who had himself been commander-in-chief of the Italian 2nd Army in 1941, creating a situation in which the political leadership in Rome showed signs of yielding on the question of the Chetniks but the implementation of that policy was systematically thwarted by the responsible military authorities (the military command in Montenegro, the Italian 2nd Army, and the Comando Supremo). The German side encouraged this development by turning its attention to other questions relating to the coalition's conduct of the war. Given the obvious advantages of cooperation with the Serbian nationalists in the civil war, the Commander-in-Chief South-East could not always refuse to listen to the Italian arguments. However, even a firm reminder which Adolf Hitler sent to Benito Mussolini on 16 February 1943,<sup>25</sup> and a subsequent visit to Rome by the foreign minister, Joachim von Ribbentrop, and the Wehrmacht commander, Walter Warlimont, only served to raise the Italian evasive tactics to a pitch of absolute virtuosity.<sup>26</sup> And when, on 16 March, the German–Italian operations to destroy Tito's state in Zone III (Operations WHITE I and WHITE II) came to a temporary standstill on the Neretva in the area on the border between eastern Bosnia and Herzegovina,<sup>27</sup> it must have been clear to all concerned that the military situation

<sup>24</sup> AOK 12, Abt. Ia, KTB entry for 29 Dec. 1942, BA-MA RH 20-12/139.

<sup>25</sup> ADAP, Series E, v. 227–32, 'Hitler an Mussolini' (16 Feb. 1943).

<sup>26</sup> For a more detailed account of the German–Italian negotiations at this point, see Schmider, *Partisanenkrieg in Jugoslawien*, 219–26.

<sup>27</sup> The German spearheads did not stop at the river but pressed on for several kilometres into the heart of the country without, however, continuing their pursuit of the partisan forces. See 'Befehlshaber der deutschen Truppen in Kroatien an 718. ID' (22 Mar. 1943), BA-MA RH 26-118/34.

alone made it impossible to put off the Chetnik problem yet again. On the one hand, Ambrosio and Robotti had succeeded in temporarily ruling out any further military operations in the Mihailović Chetniks' main retreat (Montenegro and the adjoining area in eastern Herzegovina), and on the other, the bulk of the partisans, including Tito and his headquarters staff, had escaped the intended encirclement operations in western Bosnia (WHITE I) and south-eastern Bosnia (WHITE II), and were preparing to launch a whole series of strikes against the Chetniks' main forces on the other side of the Neretva that would be decisive for the outcome of the civil war. Although, superficially, this might have appeared to be entirely in the interests of the occupying powers, a rapid continuation of the operations which had already begun with Operation WHITE I was nevertheless unavoidable in the medium term, both because the defeats of the Chetniks in Herzegovina and (from 6 April 1943) in Montenegro had been accompanied by devastating setbacks for the Italian troops deployed there (VI and XIV Army Corps),<sup>28</sup> followed by immediate appeals to the Germans for help, and because the German command authorities believed they were acting in the certain knowledge that the Allies would shortly be landing on Crete and the Peloponnese,<sup>29</sup> and they were consequently not prepared to give the partisans and the Chetniks time to 'finish each other off'.<sup>30</sup>

The negotiations which took place in Zagreb from 11 March to 1 April 1943 between the National Liberation Army high command, the plenipotentiary-general, and the German ambassador on an exchange of prisoners, recognition of the partisans as a belligerent under international law, and a possible ceasefire<sup>31</sup> produced no results—apart from an arrangement on prisoner exchange. However, they may have had an unexpected side effect in that the suspension of operations on the German side continued until the middle of May.<sup>32</sup> Thus, there are some indications that Tito overestimated Germany's willingness simply to follow the latest development in the Serbian civil war as a spectator, and that this in turn contributed at least in some measure to the element of surprise in the next phase of the operations (Operation BLACK).<sup>33</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Even the language used in the final report by the commander-in-chief of the troops in Montenegro, concerned as he was to put a favourable gloss on the events, is very clear in this connection. See 'Relazione sul ciclo operativo primavera-estate 1943 contro le forze Partigiane in Montenegro' (n.d.), ASUSSME, M3/19.

<sup>29</sup> The OKW was misled by a faulty assessment, apparently confirmed by the British deception device, 'Operation Mincemeat', launched on 30 April. See Howard, *Strategic Deception*, 85–93, 245 ff., and the chapter by Schreiber in the present volume.

<sup>30</sup> Der Komm.Gen. und Befh. in Serbien, Abt. Ia, KTB entry for 29 Apr. 1943, BA-MA RW 40/44.

<sup>31</sup> The partisan command was concerned above all to avoid any interference on the German side in the decisive battle against its Serbian nationalist adversaries in the civil war. On this, see the recent accounts in Leković, *Martovski Pregovori*, and Schmider, *Partisanenkrieg in Jugoslawien*, 242–53.

<sup>32</sup> The idea that this pause was the result of an agreement between the Germans and the partisans can be ruled out; see Schmider, *Partisanenkrieg in Jugoslawien*, 242–53. Unfounded conjectures about an agreement of this kind nevertheless continue to appear in the literature. See Loi, *Le operazioni*, 218; West, *Tito*, 152; and Redžić, *Bosnia and Herzegovina*, 219.

<sup>33</sup> This, at least, is the view expressed by his close collaborator, Milovan Djilas, in Djilas, *Wartime*, 248. However, the principal negotiator on the partisan side in the March talks, Dr Vladimir Velebit, ruled this out in his conversation with the author, 'Befragung Dr. Vladimir Velebit, Zagreb' (9 and 10 May 1998).



Map VI.II.1. Extent of the Italian occupation zone in Croatia (October 1941 to September 1943)

Source: Schmider, *Partisanenkrieg in Jugoslawien*, 577 and 578.

The major operation with which the commander of the German troops in Croatia completed the cycle started in western Bosnia on 20 January had a twofold objective, namely to confront and defeat, in the same area, not only the main body of the National Liberation Army under Tito's command, which had broken into eastern Herzegovina in mid-March and into Montenegro from 6 April on, but also its Serbian nationalist opponents in the civil war. In the case of the Chetniks, it was expected that most of them would be disarmed without resistance, but it is impossible to determine with absolute certainty from the available sources whether priority was to be given to one or other of those objectives if the achievement of either of them was in doubt. The National Liberation Army undoubtedly presented a greater military threat, but to judge by the wording of their orders, Löhr and Lüters appear to have attached more importance to the need to take out Draža

Mihailović's headquarters at the start of the operation than to the simultaneous attack on Tito's high command.<sup>34</sup>

This starting position was similar, to some extent, to the situation on the eve of Operation UZICE, but in terms of coalition policy Operation BLACK was to be the only one of its kind in the Axis powers' joint conduct of the war. If the Italian policy of obstruction on the issue of the Chetniks had not prevented the Germans and Italians from cooperating up to the end of Operation WHITE II, it was only because the operation in question had come to a stop right on the border of Montenegro and eastern Herzegovina, the most important area controlled by the Serbian nationalist resistance. Resumption of the cycle of operations would make it hardly be possible to ignore that issue once again, even if the German side were willing to do so. Adolf Hitler therefore gave top priority to keeping the preparations for Operation BLACK hidden from his Italian ally. The march across the border into Montenegro and the disarming of Mihailović's Chetniks had to be carried out, if need be, even in the face of Italian resistance. The one thing that suggested that the operation could be carried out without friction was the series of defeats which the Italian 2nd Army (in the form of VI Army Corps) and the Montenegro military command (XIV Army Corps) had suffered at the hands of the main body of the National Liberation Army since crossing the Neretva. This alone was responsible for the fact that, at the start of Operation BLACK, German units had already taken up positions in Montenegro at the request of the Italians. 104th Light Infantry Division had occupied key positions in the Sandžak region of northern Montenegro, while the bulk of 1st Mountain Division, coming from Macedonia, joined with Col.-Gen. Alessandro Pirzio-Biroli's divisions as they were being assembled against the partisans. Consequently, the only actual border violation by German troops would be the crossing of the border between Herzegovina and Montenegro by 7th SS Volunteer Mountain Division 'Prinz Eugen'.

Despite this favourable starting position, the first eight days of Operation BLACK were mainly spent in a war of nerves about internal issues within the Axis coalition that had been constantly put off since 20 January 1943—particularly the status of the Chetniks and the question of overall command—rather than in fighting the National Liberation Army. On the German side, an agreement in principle to disarm the Chetniks, reached after the talks in Rome, was simply regarded as a given fact, and the Comando Supremo's decision to quietly ignore it<sup>35</sup> now put the commanders in the field, particularly the commanding generals of VI and XIV Army Corps, Alessandro Piazzoni and Ercole Roncaglia, in an impossible position. Their desperate efforts to protect their Serbian nationalist allies, to conceal their obvious loss of sovereignty, and to avoid armed incidents ended only when

<sup>34</sup> 'Operationsbefehl für die Operation "Schwarz"' (4 May 1943) and 'Operationsbefehl für den Fall "Schwarz"' (6 May 1943), BA-MA RW 40/53.

<sup>35</sup> On this, see the minutes of the talks between Vittorio Ambrosio (Comando Supremo), Mario Robotti (2nd Army C-in-C), and Alessandro Pirzio-Biroli (military command Montenegro); 'Verbale del colloquio fra i generali, Capo di Stato Maggiore Generale, Alessandro Pirzio Biroli, Governatore del Montenegro, e Mario Robotti, comandante di Supersloda, 2a Armata' (3 Mar. 1943) in Talpo, Dalmazia, i. 192–7.

Mussolini largely conceded on the vexed issue of the Chetniks, and the Germans agreed to spare the far south of Montenegro from the sweeping disarmament. As to the strong-arm tactics employed on the German side, the main point is that they had been planned at a time when it had been quite impossible to foresee the most important events that ultimately determined Italy's readiness to compromise (the invasion of Montenegro by the main body of the National Liberation Army and the subsequent series of defeats suffered by XIV Army Corps). Although the German command was prepared to make every possible concession at this stage in order to keep its war-weary ally on board,<sup>36</sup> the danger posed by Mihailović on the eve of an expected major landing was considered such a serious threat that it was even worth risking a military confrontation with the Axis partner.

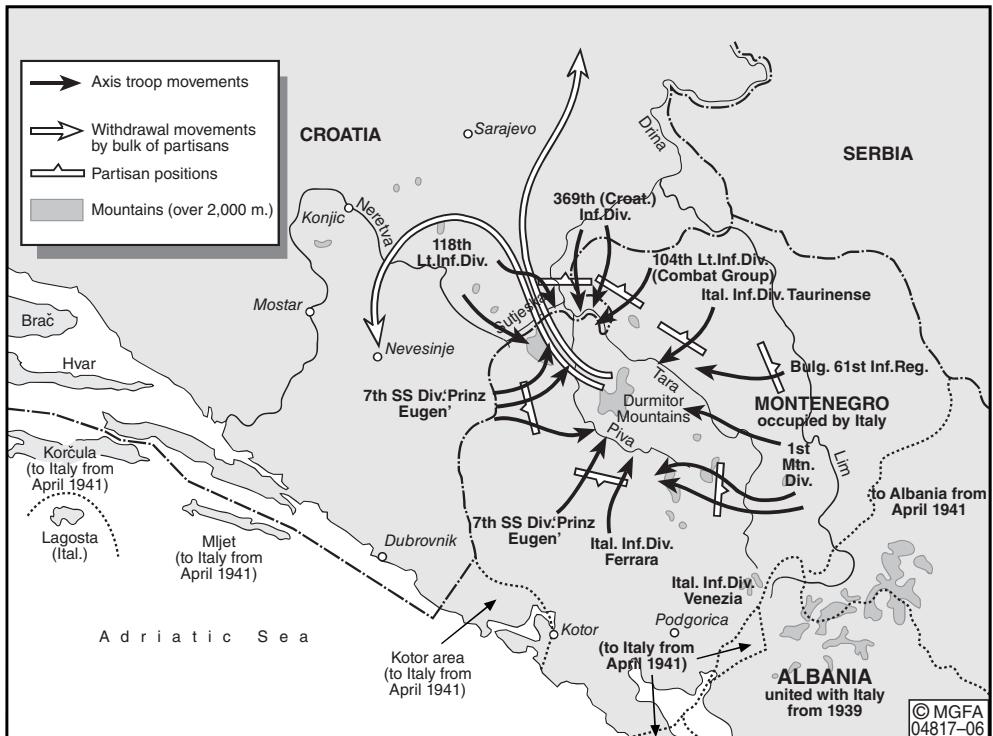
On 22 May, after the four divisions of the National Liberation Army in northern Montenegro had been encircled with the help of some Italian units, the battle began with the partisan brigades that had penetrated into Montenegro on 6 April 1943. This phase of Operation BLACK was to provide the occupation forces with their best opportunity since Operation UZICE to contain a large proportion (some 40 to 50 per cent) of the National Liberation Army's core units and its high command in a confined space and destroy them. However, the partisans benefited from a timely decision on the direction chosen for the breakthrough (back to southern Bosnia),<sup>37</sup> and they had the advantage of the inner line. Tito's men were repeatedly a few hours ahead of their pursuers in securing important river crossings and mountain passes. And in the decisive breakthrough battle during the night of 9 to 10 June 1943, just after they had crossed the Sujetska, the partisans managed to thrust into a gap that was only provisionally secured by a combat group of 369th (Croatian) Infantry Division and break through the ring surrounding them. The partisans' 3rd Division, which had originally been entrusted with defence of the field hospital and had received the order to break out somewhat late in the day, was the only one to be largely destroyed when it attempted to take the same route. Although Tito and most of his senior commanders had managed to escape in even more dramatic circumstances than in the WHITE operations, there was no disguising the fact that the National Liberation Army had suffered a painful defeat. According to concordant German and Yugoslav estimates, about half of the 22,000 partisans<sup>38</sup> originally deployed during Operation BLACK were either dead or missing<sup>39</sup> when the operation came to an end. Never again did the Germans' operational concept of

<sup>36</sup> Such as Hitler's completely senseless confirmation of Italian supremacy in the NDH during the talks with Mussolini at Klessheim a few weeks earlier. See Glaise von Horstenu, *Ein General im Zwielicht*, 209 (May 1943).

<sup>37</sup> Dedijer, *The War Diaries*, ii. 274 (28 May 1943).

<sup>38</sup> According to Kucan, *Borci Sutjeske*, 33, quoted in Hoare, *Whose is the Partisan Movement?*, 29. Earlier Yugoslavian accounts give a total strength of 18,000 to 19,000; see Djilas, *Der Krieg der Partisanen*, 259, and Strugar, *Der jugoslawische Volksbefreiungskrieg*, 136.

<sup>39</sup> 'Befh. der dt. Truppen in Kroatien, Abt. Ia, Verlust- und Beutemeldung Unternehmen "Schwarz"' (n.d.), BA-MA RH24-15/41, gives the figure of 7,489 enemy dead 'counted' and a further 4,000 to 6,000 'estimated'. The figure given in Djilas, *Der Krieg der Partisanen*, 301, is 7,000 dead or missing.



Map VI.II.2. Operation SCHWARTZ (15 May to 16 July 1943)

overcoming the insurgency in the territory of the NDH by means of a large-scale operation come so close to decisive success.

For a number of reasons, however, Operation BLACK gave Pavelić and his allies only a short breathing space. Thus, at the beginning of April, the Italian 2nd Army resumed its withdrawal to the Adriatic, which in December had only been suspended, thereby giving the National Liberation Army even more territory from which the partisan state, which had re-emerged in western and central Bosnia since Operation WHITE I, could draw more forces. On the question of German troops taking over in these areas, Ambrosio and Robotti appeared to be torn between the effort to reduce their own exposure to attack by giving up more Croatian territory on the one hand, and, on the other, the wish to maintain their long-since faltering claim to hegemony for as long as possible.<sup>40</sup> The transfer of these evacuated areas to Croatian units that had been banished to the other side of the demarcation line by

<sup>40</sup> ‘Il ministro a Zagrabia, Casertano, al capo del governo e ministro degli esteri, Mussolini’ (8 May 1943), annex: ‘Colloquio del generale Löhr con il generale Robotti’ (5 May 1943), DDI, 9th Series, x. 401–2.

the Italian 2nd Army in 1941<sup>41</sup> now ran into German objections. The insurgency had spread to northern Croatia in the meantime, and the military duties associated with that development, combined with the expectation that Italy would probably try to move the units in question to Zone III or Zone II and then place them under the overall command of 2nd Army, caused Löhr and Lüters to take a firm stand.

Furthermore, the OKW considered that sending combat-fit front-line mountain units like 1st Mountain Division on a long-term mission against the partisans was justifiable only if there was at least some prospect of encountering a 'modern' adversary, that is, a well-equipped opponent under regular command. So, after Operation BLACK, 1st Mountain Division was sent to Greece, where the danger of a major Allied landing appeared to be much greater than in Yugoslavia. 100th Light Infantry Division was moved from Syrmia to Albania at the end of July for the same reason. Compared with those formations, the divisions brought in at this time, namely the Croatian 373rd Division and 173rd Reserve Infantry Division, were second-class units, seriously deficient in respect of training and equipment.

Finally, a no less important factor was the failure of the NDH to undertake any military or political renewal during the almost five-month-long period of harassment by the main partisan units. Its armed forces continued to deteriorate steadily. As a result, in the second quarter of 1943 alone, the National Liberation Army was able to capture booty—counting only weapons taken from deserters and from troops disarmed without resistance—totalling 3,000 rifles and 118 machine guns.<sup>42</sup> That alone was almost equal to the 3,608 rifles and 220 machine guns lost in Operation BLACK.<sup>43</sup>

On 25 July 1943 an event occurred in Rome that caused the German commanders to regard the fight against the National Liberation Army as being of only secondary importance for the time being. Following a recommendation by the Grand Council of Fascism in the early hours of the morning to remove Mussolini from his post as commander-in-chief of the armed forces, he was dismissed by King Victor Emmanuel III in the late afternoon and subsequently arrested. It was clear to all observers that the purpose of this move could only be to break the 'Pact of Steel' with Germany sooner or later and conclude an armistice with the Allies. However, this did not happen at once, as Hitler feared it might during the first 48 hours after the Duce was deposed.<sup>44</sup> This gave the German command authorities an opportunity at least to keep the consequences of their most important Axis partner's exit from the war within manageable bounds. What could not be foreseen, however, was that their preparations would ultimately be crowned with success. This was due

<sup>41</sup> Roatta's decision to allow eight Croatian battalions to move into Zone II—under Italian command, of course—was still regarded in September 1942 as a considerable concession to Pavelić. See Talpo, *Dalmazia*, i. 737.

<sup>42</sup> 'Lagebeurteilung des Oberbefehlshabers Südost (ObKdo H.Gr. E) für den Monat Juni 1943' (n.d.), BA-MA RH 2/684.

<sup>43</sup> 'Befh. der dt. Truppen in Kroatien, Abt. Ia, Verlust- und Beutemeldung Unternehmen "Schwarz"' (n.d.), BA-MA RH 24-15/41.

<sup>44</sup> The notes made by an officer who was at Führer headquarters at the time are very instructive in this connection. See 'Tagebuch Wolfram von Richthofen', 258–66 (27, 28, and 29 Jul. 1943), BA-MA N 671/11.

in no small measure to the confused strategy pursued by Ambrosio, by the chief of the army general staff, Mario Roatta, and by the new head of government, Pietro Badoglio, whether in order to avoid arousing suspicion on the German side, or because the Italians did not rule out the possibility—depending on how the military situation developed—of continuing to fight on the German side for the time being.<sup>45</sup> Thus, various decisions were taken during the month of August that were bound to be serious obstacles to a change of sides by Italy in the shorter or longer term. Cooperation with the Axis partner continued, both at home and in the occupied territories, and not only was the influx of German troop units not prevented, but it was actually encouraged in some cases. In Italy, this meant that there was at least a chance of holding the southern and central sections of the peninsula, including Rome, when the armistice was announced. In occupied Yugoslavia, the continued withdrawal to the Adriatic,<sup>46</sup> and particularly the surrender of a number of airfields, gave the new Commander-in-Chief South-East (as of 25 August), Field Marshal Maximilian von Weichs, and the commander-in-chief of 2nd Armoured Army, Lothar Rendulic,<sup>47</sup> a chance, before Italy left the Axis coalition, to get their troops into positions that would enable them to disarm the Italian 2nd Army quickly (Operation AXIS). Even the wording of the orders that Badoglio issued to army commands and army groups immediately before 8 September, and the speech he made on the radio in the evening—a speech necessitated by General Eisenhower's prior announcement on Radio Algiers—were clear expressions of this ambivalent policy. There was no mention in either text of the need to cooperate with the Allies or to regard the Germans as enemies from now on.

The consequences for an already war-weary army could not have been more devastating. In the days following 8 September, the Italian 2nd Army and the units of Army Group East<sup>48</sup> that had not managed to escape across the Adriatic appeared to be essentially prepared to hand over their weapons and equipment to whichever party first appeared in some strength before their respective garrisons and recognized the overnight announcement of Italian 'neutrality',<sup>49</sup> and then to await further orders.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>45</sup> An hypothesis that is supported, not least, by Badoglio's conduct in the decisive hours of 8 September. See esp. Aga Rossi, *A Nation Collapses*, 50–102, and Rochat, *Le guerre italiane*, 421–33, in whose opinion the king, Badoglio, and Ambrosio were motivated not so much by rational calculations as by concern for their own (political and physical) survival.

<sup>46</sup> 'Der Bevollmächtigte General in Kroatien an OKW und OB Südost' (24 Aug. 1943), BA-MA RH 31 III/11.

<sup>47</sup> The area formerly under Lüters' command was transferred to 2nd Armoured Army (General Lothar Rendulic) with effect from 26 August 1943. Serbia and, with the entry into force of the Italian armistice, Montenegro and Albania were also placed under 2nd Armoured Army command for operational purposes on 28 August. On the placement of Serbia under its command, see KTB Militärbefehlshaber Südost Abt. Ia (26 and 28 Aug. 1943), BA-MA RW 40/80.

<sup>48</sup> Large unit formed on 15 May under Col.-Gen. Ezio Rosi, with all the separate Italian army units located in Herzegovina (VI AC), Albania (9th Army), and Greece (11th Army) under his command. Montenegro (XIV AC) was placed under his command with effect from 1 July.

<sup>49</sup> The new Italian government did not declare war on Germany until 13 October.

<sup>50</sup> For details of this process, which in most cases led to the deportation of these 'military internees', who had virtually no rights, to serve as forced labour in the Reich, see Schreiber, *Die italienischen Militärinternierten im deutschen Machtbereich*, 231–96.

The total collapse of the Italian units in the western Balkans, and the booty that Rendulic captured as a result, could not, of course, disguise the fact that, in late September and early October 1943, his army was still in an extremely critical situation. The Pelješac peninsula and all the Dalmatian islands, where the National Liberation Army and the Allies had meanwhile established various assembly points for supplies, prisoners, and wounded, still remained to be secured in the next few months. Furthermore, on 2 October 1943 the partisans had begun the systematic conquest of eastern Bosnia, which, as a result of the transfer of forces for Operation AXIS, had been largely abandoned by 2nd Armoured Army and left in the hands of the Croatian ally.<sup>51</sup> The prospect of performing this and other military tasks was made even more difficult by the following circumstances: (a) the National Liberation Army too had also captured so much booty after 8 September that it was now largely self-sufficient in arms and munitions; (b) the German occupation forces in Croatia and Montenegro now faced the problem of somehow compensating for the disappearance from their order of battle of almost 300,000<sup>52</sup>—admittedly badly led and poorly trained—Italian troops; and (c) Germany had lost command of the air in the Yugoslav theatre of war on 27 September, when the British Eighth Army captured the airfields at Foggia in southern Italy. Although handing Italian Dalmatia (the former Zone I) over to the NDH appeared to give the Pavelić regime a brief measure of stability, it had no effect to speak of on the willingness of its armed forces to engage in battle. Mass desertions and surrender after a pretence of combat were once again the order of the day during the battle for eastern Bosnia in October.<sup>53</sup>

Most of Montenegro had also fallen to the National Liberation Army since 8 September, so Rendulic now had to protect the last cornerstone of German power in the western Balkans—Serbia—against invasion from the south or west. This purely defensive task was increasingly the centre of attention from the early autumn of 1943 on, as shown by the lengthy discussions in 2nd Armoured Army and Commander-in-Chief South-East headquarters about a future cycle of operations in eastern Bosnia. The main objective had originally been to destroy the sections of the National Liberation Army operating in the area and reincorporate the whole of eastern Bosnia in the Croatian state entity, but soon the only concern was to stop an invasion force crossing the Drina into Old Serbia.<sup>54</sup>

To that end, the Commander-in-Chief South-East persuaded the OKW to let 2nd Armoured Army have temporary reinforcements for the winter months. Since there was unlikely to be a major landing on the Adriatic coast during that time on

<sup>51</sup> Befh. der dt. Truppen in Kroatien Abt. Ia, 'Lagebeurteilung für die Zeit vom 16.7. bis 15.8.1943' (17 Aug. 1943), BA-MA RH 21-2/609; Gen.Kdo. XV. Geb.AK, Abt. Ia, 'Lagebeurteilung für die Zeit vom 16.8. bis 15.9.1943' (19 Sept. 1943), BA-MA RH 24-15/10.

<sup>52</sup> The Italian 2nd Army and XIV Army Corps must still have had 280,000 to 290,000 men on the eve of 8 September (maximum strength about 350,000 in August 1942). For more detailed figures, see Schmider, *Partisanenkrieg in Jugoslawien*, 587–8.

<sup>53</sup> 'Anlage 1 zur Lagebeurteilung des Gen.Kdo. XV. Geb.AK vom 17.11.1943 ("Erfolg des Einsatzes kroatischer Truppenteile")', BA-MA RH 24-15/12.

<sup>54</sup> 'Pz.AOK 2 an OB Südost' (15 Oct. 1943), BA-MA RH 21-2/616, and *Die geheimen Tagesberichte*, viii. 351 (5 Nov. 1943) and 465 (26 Nov. 1943).

account of the weather, he even managed to get hold of 1st Mountain Division, which had been serving until then as operational reserve for the army in Macedonia. The following divisions were also assigned to 2nd Armoured Army on a temporary basis: 277th Infantry Division (early December 1943 to end January 1944), 371st Infantry Division (early December 1943 to end January 1944), and 367th Infantry Division (early December 1943 to end March 1944)—although it should be noted that all three divisions were new formations which had not yet completed their training. The permanent assignment of 1st Cossack Division at the end of October 1943 and the Croatian 392nd Infantry Division at the beginning of January 1944 was of dubious benefit for the same reasons, with the added difficulty involved in dealing with foreign troops.<sup>55</sup> That problem was reversed in mid-January 1944, when the long-serving 114th Light Infantry Division was transferred to Italy.<sup>56</sup>

From an operational point of view, this regrouping had some success in the short term. The winter campaign in eastern Bosnia (Operation KUGELBLITZ, 2 to 16 December 1943, followed by Operation SCHNEESTURM, 18 to 27 December 1943) dealt the National Liberation Army's III Corps a severe though not fatal blow, delaying the invasion of Serbia for three months. The conquest of the Dalmatian archipelago also went ahead, with some delay because landing craft and fighter units had to be brought in from the Aegean,<sup>57</sup> but distinctly faster than the arduous capture of the Pelješac peninsula, which took more than three weeks. All the southern Dalmatian islands were captured between 22 December 1943 and 19 January 1944, with the almost complete destruction in one case (Operation HERBSTGEWITTER II, 22 to 27 December 1943) of a partisan brigade that was on Korčula planning a fresh landing on Pelješac.

In view of the fact that, on the eve of the Italian armistice, 2nd Armoured Army's position could be described as virtually hopeless, especially given the possibility of a major Allied landing, Rendulic had every reason to be more than satisfied with developments in the past few months. Against all expectations, the disarming of the Italian army units in the area under his command (the Italian 2nd and 9th Armies) had been completed quickly and without friction, the coast and offshore islands had been secured, and the National Liberation Army had been prevented from entering Old Serbia, suffering heavy losses in the process. The Chetniks, greatly weakened by Operation BLACK and the defeats they had suffered in the civil war, appeared increasingly ready, both east and west of the Drina, to place themselves under German command and take part in the fight against the National Liberation Army.<sup>58</sup> The only problems now, although they did not yet pose a real threat,

<sup>55</sup> KTB 2. Pz.AOK 2, Abt. Ia, entry for 20 Oct. 1943, BA-MA RH 21-2/590; XV. Geb.AK, Abt. Ia, 'Lagebeurteilung vom 15.12.1943–15.1.1944' (14. Jan. 1944), RH 24-15/47.

<sup>56</sup> For detailed information on which troops were tied up in the Yugoslavian theatre of war and for what periods, see Schmidler, 'Wehrmacht's Yugoslav Quagmire'.

<sup>57</sup> Group IV of 27th Fighter Squadron was fully engaged until the end of November in recapturing the Italian Dodecanese islands (south-eastern Aegean). A study of this campaign, drawing on Italian and German sources (notably the Naval Group Command South war diary), is still a desideratum.

<sup>58</sup> Until Italy capitulated, German units in the NDH had only very occasionally worked with a few Chetnik groups that were reputed to be particularly reliable. Providing them with arms and ammunition was forbidden in principle but it nevertheless seems to have happened in some cases;

were the Allied command of the air and the exponential growth in numbers of the National Liberation Army (actual strength almost 250,000 at the turn of 1943/4).<sup>59</sup> However, in contrast to this predominantly positive military picture, the political position could not have been bleaker. The Croatian regime had gained nothing to speak of from the incorporation of Italian Dalmatia in the NDH, and it found itself facing an existential crisis once again in October, with the loss of east Bosnia and mass desertions in the regular forces. There were also disputes with the German Axis partner on a whole range of issues, some of them simply the unbroken continuation of friction between Italy and Croatia (over cooperation with Serbian nationalist Chetniks, and the economic exploitation of the country<sup>60</sup>), others the result of specifically German acts or omissions (the recruitment of Croatian citizens into the Wehrmacht and the Waffen SS, and the disputed status of the areas round Fiume and Zara<sup>61</sup>). This crisis had been preceded by a process of radicalization within the Ustasha which, as far as one can see, had several causes.<sup>62</sup> It led, on the one hand, to a renewal of pogrom-like attacks on the Serbian section of the population, but also to a targeted attempt at contact with the enemy<sup>63</sup>—a development which the German foreign minister had categorically ruled out just a few months earlier in view of ‘its [the Ustasha’s] character, and our enemies’ attitude towards it concerning troops that are absolutely reliant on us’.<sup>64</sup>

The depressed state of German–Croatian relations was exacerbated by the fact that the commander-in-chief of 2nd Armoured Army showed very little inclination to meet the Croatian state halfway in areas where he could have done so. His aversion to the Pavelić regime, inherited—as far as one can see—from his

see ‘Befehl an die Četnikführer Cvijeta Todić, Golub Mitrović, Savo Derikonja, Radivoj Kosorić, Bozo Plemić und Dušan Kovačević’ (12 Jan 1943), BA-MA RH 26-118/32; ‘Kdr.- und Stabsbesprechung 9.3.1943, Banja Luka’ (11 Mar. 1943), BA-MA RH 26-114/18; ‘369. (kroat.) ID an Befehlshaber der deutschen Truppen in Kroatien’ (17 Aug. 1943), BA-MA RH 24-15/2. After 8 September Rendulic was obliged, under pressure from his divisional and corps commanders, to legalize collaboration with the Serbian nationalist side in the civil war, including the delivery of munitions; see ‘Befehl des Pz.AOK 2 vom 29.9.1943’ (29 Sept. 1943), BA-MA RH 24-15/6.

<sup>59</sup> Estimate based on Djilas, *Wartime*, 375.

<sup>60</sup> By far the best investigation of this complex subject is to be found in Tomasevich, *War and Revolution*, ii. 611–717.

<sup>61</sup> This concerns towns on the Dalmatian coast and the Istrian–Slovenian border with a majority Italian population which were already part of Italian national territory before April 1941. On Croatian claims after 8 September 1943, see ADAP, Series E, vii. 90, ‘Aufzeichnung des Staatssekretärs des Auswärtigen Amtes Baron Steengracht’ (22 Oct. 1943).

<sup>62</sup> In the opinion of the plenipotentiary general in Croatia, Glaise von Horstenau, this radicalization was a reaction on the government’s part to the mass desertions in October 1943; see ‘Der Bevollmächtigte General an den Militärbefehlshaber Südost’ (20 Oct. 1943), BA-MA RH 19 XI/39. This view is contradicted by other sources, according to which the process of radicalization had already begun in July or August.

<sup>63</sup> ‘Notiz vom 7.3.1944’, ‘Der Bevollmächtigte General an die deutsche Gesandtschaft Agram’ (24 Mar. 1944), and ‘Bericht über Geheimkonferenz alter Ustasha-Kämpfer’ (13 Jun. 1944), PA, Gesandtschaftsakten Zagreb 66/4; ‘XV. Geb.AK, Lagebeurteilung, Stand vom 10.6.1944’ (19 Jun. 1944), BA-MA RH 24-15/52; ‘Gen.Kdo. V. SS-Geb.Korps, Der Kommandierende General an den Reichsführer SS’ (10 Jul. 1944), BA, NS 19/2154. On contacts between partisans and Ustasha before 8 September 1943, see Schmider, *Partisanenkrieg in Jugoslawien*, 124–5, 399–400.

<sup>64</sup> ADAP, Series E, vi, doc. 292, 503–7.

predecessor, Alexander Löhr,<sup>65</sup> was so extreme that he actually noted in his army's war diary that he intended to circumvent a Führer order of 7 September which had stressed the need to remain on good terms with all Croatian bodies.<sup>66</sup> Unlike Löhr, however, Rendulic made no attempt<sup>67</sup>—not even a half-hearted one—to call the NDH's right of existence as a state into question. He preferred instead to circumvent or frustrate the Croatian government and its bodies by all the means that the military circumstances brought to hand—a course of action which further increased the prevailing ill-feeling in the coming months.

In 1944 an issue that was for a time an even greater source of contention between Germany and Croatia than cooperation between Germans and Chetniks was the formation and deployment of 13th Waffen SS Mountain Division 'Handschar', which consisted of Bosnian Muslim recruits. SS recruitment practices had already caused some ill-feeling in the spring of 1943, but that was not all. When Division 'Handschar' returned to the Bosnian theatre of war in February 1944, a political issue of the first order arose over the establishment of a 'security zone' in north-eastern Bosnia which the division was to attempt to 'pacify' durably by means of its permanent presence there. As was only to be expected in the case of 'pacification' of parts of the NDH where the population was not 100 per cent Croat, one of the aims was to neutralize, or at least circumvent, the Ustasha and its organs, in accordance with the concept which Bader and Dangić had developed for the same geographical area in January 1942. In the case of north-eastern Bosnia, the occupation by 13th SS Division began with the outright conquest of the area in March/April 1944 and the initial assumption of executive power. This, together with previous SS contacts with several Bosnian Muslim politicians who had publicly espoused the cause of extensive autonomy for east Bosnia,<sup>68</sup> led the Croatian regime to fear secessionist intentions which in all probability did not exist.<sup>69</sup> In view of the power vacuum in most rural areas of the NDH in 1944, however, secession seemed a perfectly feasible alternative to the existing state of affairs.

From the German point of view, the formation of Division 'Handschar' was welcome, if only because—at a time when the plenipotentiary general could justify the formation of more Croatian units only by the need to deprive the partisans of recruits, at least in the medium term<sup>70</sup>—it appeared to represent by far the most

<sup>65</sup> However, the way Rendulic introduced himself to the ambassador, Kasche, has a bearing on this. See 'Kasche an Auswärtiges Amt' (19 Aug. 1943), PA, StS Kroatien, v. 696.

<sup>66</sup> KTB Pz.AOK 2, Abt. Ia (entry for 12 Sept. 1943), BA-MA RH 21-2/590.

<sup>67</sup> Löhr submitted a memorandum at the beginning of March 1943 in which he argued that the 'Poglavnik' should be put in a 'dummy position'. See 'Denkschrift: Vorschlag für notwendige politische, verwaltungsmäßige und wirtschaftliche Reformen in Kroatien nach Durchführung der militärischen Operationen' (27 Feb. 1943), BA-MA RW 4/667; for more details, see Schmider, *Partisanenkrieg in Jugoslawien*, 239–42.

<sup>68</sup> For more details on the position of the Muslim ethnic group in the NDH, see Tomasevich, *War and Revolution*, ii. 466–510. On contacts with the SS, see *ibid.* 494–501.

<sup>69</sup> It appears from George Lepre's research that the decision to publish the proclamation amounting to the assumption of executive power was taken mainly at the initiative of the commander of 13th SS Division. See Lepre, *Himmler's Bosnian Division*, 169–73.

<sup>70</sup> 'Der Deutsche Bevollmächtigte General in Kroatien an den Oberbefehlshaber Südost' (17 Jun. 1943), BA-MA RH 31 III/11.

sensible form in which to mobilize and deploy the Croatian defence potential.<sup>71</sup> In the case of 13th SS Division, it was also hoped to counteract the corrosive effect that constant exposure to the sight of a homeland torn apart by civil war and ‘ethnic cleansing’ was bound to have on the Croatian forces—and had already had on some of the legionnaire divisions—with the promise that the unit would in no circumstances be deployed outside the narrow bounds of home territory, that is, east Bosnia. So the highly equipped ‘Handschar’ Division was intended in advance to act as a kind of home guard providing local protection.

However, the tensions between Germany and Croatia came to a head in the spring of 1944 as a result of events in which the issues of executive power and German relations with the Chetniks in the NDH were of only secondary importance. The first differences arose in the second half of March 1944 regarding the evacuation of all men of arms-bearing age from the Dalmatian coast and offshore islands by V SS Mountain Army Corps, which the Croatian government—and not it alone—considered to have been conducted with undue ruthlessness.<sup>72</sup> The climax was a massacre of the inhabitants of several villages in the hinterland of Split—especially Otok, Gruda, and Dolac—carried out by sections of 7th SS Division on 28 March. The number of victims (as many as 2,000, according to some sources),<sup>73</sup> the fact that almost all of them were Croats, and the precise circumstances indicating that this was a completely arbitrary act resulted in a protest by the Croatian government that had the undivided support of Ambassador Kasche. Attempts by the Croatian foreign minister, in his protest note, to accuse Chetniks operating side by side with 7th SS Division of complicity may have been prompted by a desire to minimize Croatia’s loss of face. This loophole was promptly closed by the Reich foreign minister, who informed his Croatian opposite number on 20 April that he would have nothing further to do with him from now on, and that ‘the Croatian government must endeavour in future to frame its communications to the Reich government in a form befitting Croatia’s position vis-à-vis the Greater German Reich’.<sup>74</sup> Ambassador Kasche was first reprimanded in

<sup>71</sup> Even assuming that the situation in Croatia had allowed larger units to be deployed on the eastern front, this would probably have been rejected as too risky in view of the critical situation there and the pan-Slavic Soviet propaganda campaign. On this, see the negative experiences with the Croatian fighter squadron in 52nd Fighter Wing in Neulen, *Am Himmel Europas*, 178–83, and Savic and Siglic, *Croatian Aces*, 49–58. Things were different in the case of the small naval legion operating in the Black Sea since 1941. On the eve of this unit’s return home, a report from the naval liaison staff in Croatia read: ‘According to its officers, the legion feels it is a German force. Inherently, it has no desire to return to Croatia, but wishes to continue serving under German command in the Black Sea.’ See Naval Liaison Staff Croatia, ‘Lagebeurteilung und Maßnahmen zur Erfassung der kroatischen Wehrkraft bis Mitte März 1944’ (n.d.), BA-MA RM 35 III/173.

<sup>72</sup> Naval Liaison Staff Croatia, ‘Lagebeurteilung und Ausbildungsmäßignahmen für die Zeit Mitte März bis Anfang Mai 1944’ (7 May 1944), BA-MA RM 35 III/173: ‘In some places, it assumed forms which were difficult for the population to bear.’

<sup>73</sup> In the seventh Nuremberg trial of 1947, which concerned the conduct of German generals in south-eastern Europe, the prosecution gave the figure of 2,014 dead; see *Hostage Case*, 768. An initial estimate of 486 dead had been rejected by the ambassador, Kasche, as too low. See ‘Kasche an Auswärtiges Amt’ (16 Apr. 1944), PA, Inland IIg 401, 2824.

<sup>74</sup> ADAP, Series E, vii. 649–52, ‘Reichsaußenminister Ribbentrop an die Gesandtschaft in Agram’ (20 Apr. 1944).

writing for repeatedly siding with the Croats (13 April),<sup>75</sup> and then ordered back to Berlin to report (6 May), returning to his post only at the beginning of June. During that time the possibility of recalling him was probably discussed frequently and repeatedly deferred. The matter was finally settled in Kasche's favour by the events of 20 July 1944.<sup>76</sup> Although, with regard to the shootings in the Split hinterland, it was soon established unequivocally that German organs were responsible,<sup>77</sup> there are still differing interpretations of the motive for this, the most serious German war crime committed on Croatian soil.<sup>78</sup>

As regards the military aspect, after the end of the winter campaign (Operation WALDRAUSCH from 4 to 18 January 1944 and Operation EMIL from 29 January to 8 February 1944) and the further withdrawal of 1st Mountain Division, Rendulic changed his modus operandi. Major operations were ruled out for lack of strength, and the fight against the National Liberation Army was conducted mainly at battalion and (occasionally) regimental level. This gave the National Liberation Army an opportunity for a fresh attempt to invade Serbia. It began on 17 March, and although it failed in the end, it had the Military Commander South-East in Belgrade holding his breath for a good two months.<sup>79</sup> An attempt by the partisan high command to reinforce the relevant corps, 2nd Proletarian Division and 5th Assault Division, via east Bosnia at the end of April could be prevented only by the expedient of bringing in units of the 13th SS Division from the security zone (Operation MAIBAUM). This 'irregular use' of the division gave rise to a controversy between its commander, SS Brigadeführer Karl-Gustav Sauberzweig, and the commanding general of V SS Mountain Army Corps, Obergruppenführer Arthur Phleps, a controversy that eventually had to be settled by no less a figure than Heinrich Himmler.<sup>80</sup> The need to obtain help from every conceivable source in this situation may finally have prompted Rendulic to tackle the question of the deployment of Chetniks on the German side, as the OKW had already urged him

<sup>75</sup> ADAP, Series E, vii. 625–6, 'Reichsaufßenminister Ribbentrop an Kasche' (13 Apr. 1944).

<sup>76</sup> The most important source for deciphering this 'ambassadorial crisis' (Glaise von Horstenau) is the diary-style notes kept by the commander-in-chief. See Glaise von Horstenau, *Ein General im Zwielicht*, 400–1 (May 1944) and 441 (Oct. 1944). The crucial factor—Hitler's personal evaluation of the 'old campaigner', Kasche—is confirmed by the record of a situation conference in September 1944. See *Hitlers Lagebesprechungen*, 668 ('Abendlage vom 17.9.1944').

<sup>77</sup> On this, see the assessment by C-in-C South-East's chief of staff in 'Besprechung bei Heeresgruppe F' (21 Apr. 1944), BA-MA RH 31 III/9.

<sup>78</sup> Whereas the author of the history of 7th SS Division, Otto Kumm, who commanded the division at the time, presents the events as the result of reprisals ordered directly by 2nd Armoured Army, Glaise von Horstenau and Kasche thought it likely that the decisive motive was the bitterness felt by many members of the division at the recent partial evacuation of 'ethnic German' settlements in Slavonia. See Kumm, *Vorwärts, Prinz Eugen!*, 383, Glaise von Horstenau, *Ein General im Zwielicht*, 396–7 (May 1944), and 'Kasche an Auswärtiges Amt' (16 Apr. 1944), PA, Inland IIg 401, 2824. It should be borne in mind that the two proposed explanations are not necessarily mutually exclusive, especially as Otok shows every sign of having been an excess. The attempt in Casagrande, *Die volksdeutsche SS-Division Prinz Eugen*, 277–83, to see Otok primarily 'in the wider context of an ethnic conflict' is unconvincing, since it takes insufficient account of the operational context.

<sup>79</sup> See section 4 of the present chapter: 'Serbia after the Defeat of the 1941 Uprising'.

<sup>80</sup> 'Reichsführer SS an SS-Obergruppenführer Artur Phleps' (10 May 1944), BA, SSO-Akte Arthur Phleps.

to do.<sup>81</sup> They were 'to be incorporated in the German troops in very small units, or as volunteers'. It was clear from the results of his efforts that Rendulic—like Roatta and Ambrosio the previous year—had not the slightest intention of giving up his valuable Serbian nationalist auxiliaries. In an order issued on 11 May, he ruled that from now on only Serbs who were 'loyal to the Croatian State' were to serve in the Chetnik groups operating with the Germans, and they were to be referred to as the 'Kroatische Kampfgemeinschaft' (KKG) (the Croatian Combat Community) in all official correspondence. It must have been clear to all concerned that the ruling was a fig leaf. According to the surviving contemporary accounts of the troops' impressions, they were in no doubt that Rendulic's order was merely a temporary expedient to placate the ambassador, the Croats, and, if possible, the OKW. As for the Chetniks themselves, according to an NCO responsible for liaison with a unit of this kind, 'they don't know what it means, and they wouldn't like it if they did'.<sup>82</sup>

The incorporation in 2nd Armoured Army of 13th SS Division, with over 21,000 men, reduced the tension to some extent, but Rendulic's operational reserve was still confined to sections of 7th SS Division. So there was still no possibility of mounting a proper major operation on the lines of Operation BLACK that would wrest the initiative from the National Liberation Army, at least for some time. The 2nd Armoured Army commander-in-chief's options were also limited by the western Allies' increasing command of the sea and air. Thus, for example, after months of controversy, the plan to capture Viš, the outermost island of the southern Dalmatian archipelago, was abandoned at the end of April because the likelihood of encountering vastly superior Allied naval forces was simply too great. As a result, the British and partisan forces stationed on the island were able to continue a whole series of surprise landing operations, causing so much trouble in the area, which had been captured at considerable cost at the turn of the year, that the whole point of German operations in the area was called into question. There ensued a heated dispute between the navy and the army about the sense and purpose of occupying the Dalmatian archipelago.<sup>83</sup>

Allied command of the air also played an important part in the failure of Rendulic's next attempt to escape the inevitable impotence resulting from the inferior means at his disposal. Plans by him or his subordinates to decapitate the resistance movements by deploying paratroops or special operations units in 'full camouflage' (that is, disguised as partisans) against Tito's and Mihailović's headquarters can be traced back as far as May 1943.<sup>84</sup> At the beginning of May 1944 Tito's relatively lengthy stay in Drvar, in western Bosnia, finally provided an opportunity to put into action plans that had been repeatedly rejected or

<sup>81</sup> ADAP, Series E, vii. 519–20, 'OKW/WFSt an den Deutschen Bevollmächtigten General in Kroatien Glaise von Horstenu' (19 Mar. 1944).

<sup>82</sup> 'Erfahrungsbericht über Dienstreise Serbien-Kroatien in der Zeit vom 20.6. bis 4.7.1944' (5 July 1944), BA-MA RH 19 XI/15.

<sup>83</sup> The most exhaustive treatment of this subject, if somewhat confined to the British perspective, is McConville, *A Small War*. For a summary account, see Schmider, *Partisanenkrieg in Jugoslawien*, 391–4, 414–15.

<sup>84</sup> Schmider, *Partisanenkrieg in Jugoslawien*, 380–3.

postponed. The operation was kept secret to the last minute, but despite the element of surprise, the attack by a Waffen SS paratroop battalion failed owing to insufficient strength, and because, after the preceding German air raids, Tito had moved to a cave on the edge of the area.<sup>85</sup> The units of Air Commander Croatia were not seen again after the second day,<sup>86</sup> and the ground units sent to relieve the paratroops lost more vehicles as a result of Allied fighter-bomber attacks than ever before (at least in this theatre of war).<sup>87</sup> In the course of the next few days Tito managed to escape to the island of Viš, where he was safe from further German attacks for the foreseeable future.

With Operation RÖSSELSPRUNG, Rendulic had briefly regained the initiative, at least at tactical level. To avoid losing it again immediately, he allowed 7th SS Division to pursue over the next few weeks an idea that its former commander, SS Obergruppenführer Artur Phleps, now commanding general of V SS Mountain Army Corps, had developed in recent months. Phleps' main concern was to achieve greater flexibility in the conduct of operations against major units of the National Liberation Army. The usual practice of encirclement operations adopted so far seemed to him to be too rigid, tied as it was to specific target positions and time frames. Instead, he argued in favour of pursuit, in which the idea of encirclement would play only a secondary part.<sup>88</sup> Bringing in well-rested reinforcements at the right time would establish a tempo ('free hunt')<sup>89</sup> that no partisan brigade could keep up with. The end of the operation would thus be defined in advance as the destruction of the enemy or the complete exhaustion of the German forces, rather than the attainment of a specified target position. It is hard to say whether, or to what extent, the two operations conducted on these lines in June (Operation AMOR) and July (Operation FEUERWEHR) were more successful than conventional encirclement operations, given the absence of primary sources.<sup>90</sup>

The fact that 2nd Armoured Army's next major operation was launched just a few days after the end of Operation FEUERWEHR, and that, as in the case of Operation MAIBAUM, the aim was once again to repel the enemy invasion of Old Serbia, suggests that there were clear limits to the success of Phleps' 'free hunt'.

<sup>85</sup> The best work on Operation RÖSSELSPRUNG is still Wolff, 'Unternehmen Rösselsprung'.

<sup>86</sup> 7th SS Division's final report speaks, in this connection, of being forbidden to start owing to enemy superiority; see '7. SS-Freiw.Geb.Div., Ia-Erfahrungsbericht Unternehmen "Rösselsprung"' (3 Jul. 1944), repr. in Kumm, *Vorwärts, Prinz Eugen!*, 195–209.

<sup>87</sup> 'XV. Geb.AK an Pz.AOK 2' (7.6.1944), BA-MA RH 24-15/59.

<sup>88</sup> This idea appears for the first time in the wording of the order for the launch of Operation SCHNEESTURM. See 'Körps-Befehl für Unternehmen "Schneesturm"' (18 Dec. 1943), BA-MA RH 21-2/611.

<sup>89</sup> There is no factual basis at all for the thesis put forward in Casagrande, *Die volksdeutsche SS-Division Prinz Eugen*, 275–82, that 'free hunt' was a procedure directed primarily against the Yugoslav civilian population.

<sup>90</sup> The 2nd Armoured Army and V SS Mtn.A.C. war diaries for 1944 were both lost at the end of the war. 7th SS Division's occurrence report on RÖSSELSPRUNG ('KNIGHT'S MOVE') seems—although this cannot be stated with absolute certainty—to have already assimilated the occurrences in AMOR. On this, see '7. SS-Freiw.Geb.Div., Ia-Erfahrungsbericht Unternehmen "Rösselsprung"' (3 Jul. 1944), repr. in Kumm, *Vorwärts, Prinz Eugen!*, 195–209. Otto Kumm's account of 'free hunt' is purely descriptive and does not permit of any reliable assessment.

Two regiments of 7th SS Division and parts of 13th SS Division endeavoured (Operation HACKFLEISCH) to block the advance into south-eastern Bosnia of the National Liberation Army's XII Corps (6th, 16th, and 36th Divisions), while 1st Mountain Division, together with a regiment each from 7th and 181st SS Divisions, attempted to encircle and destroy the National Liberation Army's 1st, 3rd, and 37th Divisions in northern Montenegro (Operation RÜBEZAHL). These two operations were launched on 4 August 1944, at a time when the partisans' II Corps (2nd, 5th, and 17th Divisions) had already penetrated into Serbia and joined up with the insurgents in Old Serbia east of the Ibar, so they were clearly a bold and desperate all-or-nothing gamble.<sup>91</sup> In the course of events, the two operations were able to combine under Phleps' overall command on 16 August, but both groups of partisan forces nevertheless managed to escape destruction. The operations in Montenegro were halted prematurely on 26 August, following Romania's change of sides and the consequent destruction of 6th Army at the hands of 2nd and 3rd Ukrainian Fronts.<sup>92</sup> Operations HACKFLEISCH and RÜBEZAHL had delayed the high command's plans to invade Serbia by only a week or so.

In view of the foreseeable change of sides by Bulgaria<sup>93</sup> and the consequent need to establish an interception and defence line along the Bulgarian–Serbian border, the continued defence of Serbia's southern and western borders was left in September to Serbian government forces and the Chetnik units collaborating with them. The inevitable result was the penetration of Serbia by more National Liberation Army divisions, this time from north-eastern and south-eastern Bosnia, and the final decisive battles in the Serbian civil war.

In the NDH too, the partisans now embarked on what at first looked like being almost the last phase in the battle for control of the area west of the Drina. Banja Luka, taken on 20 September, was eventually recaptured, but Tuzla, taken on 17 September, became an assembly point for stronger National Liberation Army forces and a threat to German communication lines in the course of the next few months, despite the fact that it was still located 'behind' the front on the situation map. The series of landings by VIII Corps on the southern Dalmatian islands and the Pelješac peninsula, which began on 12 September, encountered an occupation force seriously weakened by transfers to other hot spots. On 5 October 1944 the Commander-in-Chief South-East, who was seeking reinforcements for his collaborating eastern front,<sup>94</sup> managed to persuade the OKW to agree to evacuate not only the Dalmatian archipelago but the whole of the Dalmatian coastal area as far as Senj in northern Croatia (on a level with the south-eastern tip of the island of Krk).

<sup>91</sup> 'OB Südost an OKW/WFSt' (7 Aug. 1944), BA-MA RH 19 XI/17.

<sup>92</sup> For a detailed account of the Soviet conquest of Romania, see Part V, Chapter VI of the present volume.

<sup>93</sup> The Bulgarian prime minister had already delivered a policy speech with indications to that effect on 17 August. See 'Beitrag zur Vortragsnotiz für die Chefbesprechung am 21.8.1944. Stand: 19.8.', BA-MA RH 19 XI/18.

<sup>94</sup> 'Oberbefehlshaber Südost an OKW/WFSt' (5 Oct. 1944), BA-MA RH 19 XI/28.

The Adriatic front would then be held only by the forces occupying the passes in the Dinaric Alps.<sup>95</sup>

A source of even deeper concern was the continuing decline of the Croatian units, a process which, in September and October, for the first time also affected the legionnaire divisions and 13th SS Division to an unprecedented extent. The collapse of the German position in the south-east was partly responsible for this, as was Tito's offer of amnesty, which guaranteed defectors freedom from punishment up to 15 September but promised heavy penalties after that date. The result was that 3,107 rifles and 148 machine guns were listed as lost through desertions from Croatian-manned units in the first eighteen days of September alone.<sup>96</sup> The hope that the expiry of Tito's ultimatum would put at least a temporary stop to the decline of the Croatian formations proved illusory. There were already mass desertions from a major Ustasha formation (XII Brigade)<sup>97</sup> on 17 September, when Tuzla was taken, and during the Croatian 369th Infantry Division's withdrawal from the coast of Herzegovina there was actual disintegration, which, in the case of one battalion (II/370th), went as far as the murder of the German cadres. This gave the pursuing partisans, who had landed with British naval support on both sides of the Neretva estuary in the early hours of 16 October, the unhoisted opportunity to advance to the outskirts of Mostar. The loss of the Viluše–Trebinje–Mostar road, in particular, had far-reaching consequences for the German command, since it constituted the final stretch of the shortest withdrawal route for XXI Mountain Army Corps, which was deployed in Albania and Montenegro. Successful evacuation of the corps was thus called into question overnight.<sup>98</sup>

#### 4. SERBIA AFTER THE DEFEAT OF THE 1941 UPRISING

The situation which arose in the area east of the Drina at the end of 1941, when the Communist partisans had been defeated in battle and politically discredited, was different from the situation in the NDH. In Serbia, until well into 1944, there were not four or five players in the power game but only three, namely the Commanding General in Serbia (Military Commander South-East as from 26 August 1943), the Serbian government assisting him, and the Serbian nationalist resistance under

<sup>95</sup> The intended future course of the front was the Fiume–Senj–Velebit mountains–Knin–Livno–Mostar–Nevesinje–Gacko line. See 'OB Südost, Abt. Ia an OKW/WFSt' (5 Oct. 1944), BA-MA RH 19 XI/28. Despite the forces that would be saved as a result, this withdrawal was not uncontested. See, e.g., the view expressed by the army group's acting chief of staff in post since 21 October, in 'MSG 1/1508, handschriftl. Tagebuch von Gyldenfeldt' (entry for 30 Oct. 1944). Gyldenfeldt's opinion carries some weight since, as a result of his role in Army Group G's successful exit from southern France (Aug./Sept. 1944), he had practical experience of planning and carrying out major withdrawal movements. On this, see also the very detailed work by Lieb, *Konventioneller Krieg oder NS-Weltanschauungskrieg?*, particularly chs. 2 and 5.

<sup>96</sup> 'Oberbefehlshaber Südost an OKW/WFSt' (21 Sept. 1944), BA-MA RH 19 XI/21.

<sup>97</sup> Earlier accounts, which spoke of the entire unit changing front, have been convincingly challenged recently. See <[www.axishistory.com](http://www.axishistory.com)>, 1. Jan. 2006.

<sup>98</sup> KTB OB Südost, Abt. Ia (19 Oct. 1944), BA-MA RH 19 XI/14.

Draža Mihailović. Although the Chetnik forces too had been defeated and scattered in the wake of Operation UZICE, a considerable number of them enlisted in Serbian government units. This development was observed with some concern on the German side, but only half-hearted attempts were made to prevent it. For the Chetniks, unlike the partisans, December 1941 was not accompanied by a devastating political defeat, because their leaders had not made any untenable promises (such as a Soviet counter-offensive in 1941), nor had they, during the uprising, pursued the aim of overthrowing the existing social order. The Serbian nationalist resistance movement's greater readiness to adapt the nature and scale of its activities to the possibility of German reprisals also brought it the support of the population, who still had the traumatic losses of the First World War very much in mind.<sup>99</sup>

The Serbian government's position was reasonably stable in the winter of 1941/2. Prime Minister Nedić had made it clear, in a series of radio addresses during the summer and early autumn, that the uprising had no prospect of success, and had warned of the reprisals to be expected. Franz Böhme's strategy of specific strikes against regions in the western part of the country that had been identified as centres of the uprising had also left Nedić largely free to use the security forces at his disposal, making some modest but nevertheless important contributions to the defeat of the rebellion, particularly in central and eastern Serbia. However, much of the political capital that had been gained was rapidly lost at the turn of the year, when a Bulgarian corps occupied south-eastern Serbia. The withdrawal of command over the Ljotić volunteers on 27 February, and over the Serbian State Guard in several stages from the beginning of May to the beginning of July,<sup>100</sup> was an unmistakable sign that the Serbian government's relative freedom of decision in the late autumn of 1941 and the following winter was not an expression of Germany's trust but was born of necessity, resulting from the difficulties with which the occupying power had to contend.

On the German side, Böhme's successor, Paul Bader,<sup>101</sup> faced the problem, in December 1941, of controlling a still largely hostile population without 342nd and 113rd Infantry Divisions, which had been withdrawn, so as to prevent, as far as possible, any repetition of the events of the late summer. So the fact that, after the uprising had been put down, almost 20,000 armed Serbians were serving in German units was regarded by Bader as a (future) problem rather than a source

<sup>99</sup> Between 1914 and 1918 around 1,075,000 citizens of the kingdom of Serbia died as a direct result of military operations, or from starvation or epidemics (population at the beginning of the war: approx. 4.5 million). See Judah, *The Serbs*, 101.

<sup>100</sup> Although both formations were placed under the command of the senior SS and police leader, he had to hand over command of the volunteers to the commanding general a month later. On this process, see Schmider, *Partisanenkrieg in Jugoslawien*, 421–34.

<sup>101</sup> As 'Plenipotentiary and Commanding General in Serbia', Bader combined in one person the powers of territorial and military commander with effect from 7 December 1941. After the orphaned staff of the former commander in Serbia had also been incorporated in Bader's command structure, his title was changed to 'Commanding General and Commander in Serbia' with effect from 4 March 1942. The German troops operating in the territory of the NDH were under Bader's command until 16 November 1942.

of possible support.<sup>102</sup> A way out of the dilemma—a solution that was discussed in the OKW at the end of December 1941 in relation to Croatia as well as Serbia—was provided by an offer from the Bulgarian Axis partner, which had hardly been fully stretched so far. As from 5 January 1942, south-eastern Serbia would be handed over to a Bulgarian army occupation corps of three infantry divisions (about 26,000 men), while the German military administration continued to perform its tasks in the area as usual. The obvious disadvantage of this arrangement was the reaction that was to be expected on the Serbian side. In the case of a Bulgarian rather than a German occupation, there was, despite all Bader's assurances, always a lurking suspicion that the occupied area would eventually be annexed. For Serbs willing to collaborate, the Bulgarian occupation proved to be the heaviest burden arising from their pro-German policy. Prime Minister Nedić threatened to resign immediately at the end of December and, for Kosta Pećanac, the loss of face associated with the arrival of the Bulgarians was effectively the beginning of the end of his dominant position in south-eastern Serbia. In the course of the next few months, an area that had been regarded as perfectly quiet during the worst crisis in September/October 1941 became the most important refuge for the partisans in Old Serbia, and eventually the starting base for their advance on Belgrade in October 1944.

Despite this political burden and the prevalence, in the first few months, of predictions that the events of 1941 were about to be repeated, 1942 turned out to be the quietest and most trouble-free year of the occupation of Serbia for the Germans and Bulgarians. The main reason for this is undoubtedly to be found in the relatively strong forces that Bader was able to deploy all over the country, despite the withdrawal of the two front divisions. Apart from the arrival of the Bulgarians, this was due above all to the temporary deployment (from the beginning of September to the end of December) of the 22,000-strong<sup>103</sup> 7th SS Division 'Prinz Eugen', formed in the Banat from 'ethnic Germans' recruited locally, who now had an opportunity to complete their training in the relatively peaceful environment of south-western Serbia. Of almost equal importance was the fact that, as from July 1942, the Wehrmacht Commander South-East's radio intelligence was able to decipher most of the Mihailović organization's<sup>104</sup> radio communications, so Bader always had the information he needed to forestall his most important opponent's next move. With these trump cards in hand, the commanding general was able to impose a regime on the collaborating Chetniks under which—unlike their comrades collaborating with the Italians in Croatia and

<sup>102</sup> Bader's greatest concern in his first months as Böhme's successor appears to have been the fact 'that a great many guns and large amounts of ammunition remain in the hands of the Serbs—in the hands of numerous illegal and so-called legal organizations'. See 'Der Kommandierende General an den Wehrmachtbefehlshaber Südost' (10 Dec. 1941), BA-MA RH 19 XI/81 ('Die Bekämpfung der Aufstandsbewegung im Südostrauraum', pt. 1), 81–4.

<sup>103</sup> 'AOK 12, Abt. Ia, Notiz zur Gefechtsstärke' (31 Oct. 1942), BA-MA RH 20-12/151.

<sup>104</sup> A file note in the papers of the German general in Zagreb provides at least indirect evidence that it had been possible to decipher the partisans' radio messages since May 1942. See 'Aktenvermerk über die Besprechung in Saloniki am 20.5.1942. Beginn: 9.05 h' (n.d.), BA-MA RH 31 III/9.

Montenegro—they were subject to extremely strict conditions in respect of target strength, arms and ammunition, freedom of movement, and area of operation. Units guilty of a serious breach of the rules were disbanded without exception.

The biggest problems still facing the German military administration in this situation were to some extent of its own making. This was inevitable since, although the principal representatives in Belgrade of the Four Year Plan (NSKK-Gruppenführer Franz Neuhausen), the foreign ministry (Ambassador, Felix Benzler), and—as from March 1942—the police and SS (SS Gruppenführer August Meyszner) were under Bader's command, they nevertheless maintained channels of communication with their authorities in Berlin, through which they could, if necessary, easily question directives issued by the commanding general. Moreover, they all had the right to issue instructions to Nedić within their respective remits, so the Serbian government had not just one but four, or (if we include Privy Councillor Harald Turner, head of the military administration) even five, possible interlocutors. In 1942 the OKW and the foreign ministry both made attempts to clear up the confusion to the benefit of their own representatives, and the fact that on the last occasion not even an (admittedly verbal) Führer order sufficed to change the status quo gives a good idea of the extent of the muddle.<sup>105</sup> Only the senior SS and police leader, Meyszner, had some success in this respect. By exploiting, on his arrival, the existing tensions between the commanding general and the Wehrmacht Commander South-East, on the one hand, and the SS representative, Turner, on the other, he was able to bring about the gradual disempowerment and ultimate removal of the privy councillor (November 1942).

The sequence of events that gave rise to the German military administration's only serious crisis in 1942 gives a good idea of the direct, or at least indirect, consequences of this style of administration. First, on 1 September the senior SS and police leader attempted to take over the last remaining powers which the Serbian government exercised over its most numerous military force, the Serbian State Guard, by establishing a 'head of the state security service' under his direct command.<sup>106</sup> Then, just two weeks later, two events occurred almost simultaneously that finally caused the Serbian prime minister to lose patience. In eastern Syrmia, only a few kilometres from the Serbian capital, there was another Ustasha pogrom against the Serbs, in which almost 1,000 people lost their lives. In addition, Nedić learned that the administrator in charge of the Four Year Plan had started exporting grain from occupied Serbia again, breaking a promise he had made in July.<sup>107</sup> Although Ambassador Benzler finally managed to persuade Nedić to withdraw a letter of resignation he had submitted on 16 September, it must have become painfully clear to the Serbian prime minister in the next few weeks that his pro-German policy would not be reciprocated to any appreciable extent in the foreseeable future. Of all the areas in which Nedić had hoped for some concession

<sup>105</sup> For more details, see Schmider, *Partisanenkrieg in Jugoslawien*, 437–42.

<sup>106</sup> 'L'incaricato d'affari a Belgrado, Spalazzi, al ministro degli esteri, Ciano' (5 Sept. 1942), *DDI*, Ninth Series, ix. 112–14.

<sup>107</sup> *ADAP*, Series E, iii. 497–500, 'Benzler an Auswärtiges Amt' (16 Sept. 1942).

on the German side (an end to the Bulgarian occupation, diplomatic recognition of his government, action to curb Ustasha violence, the reduction of grain exports), the only prospect in the medium term was one token concession, namely an official visit from the German foreign minister. From the Serbian point of view, the only valid reason to pursue a policy of collaboration with the occupant in this situation was the fact that the other representative of anti-Communist Serbian nationalism, Draža Mihailović, had suffered a series of setbacks during the period in question (October/November). Most of the 'legal' Chetnik units considered as belonging to his movement, which had enabled him to maintain a cadre of troops ready for deployment at any time, had been disbanded by the occupation forces,<sup>108</sup> and his attempt to organize a sabotage campaign against the rail companies, as well as his call for a universal boycott by civil servants,<sup>109</sup> came to nothing. This was due just as much to the refusal of many of his subordinates to implement the latter measure as to Bader's ability to see exactly what his opponent, Mihailović, was up to in every step he took.<sup>110</sup> The leader of the Serbian nationalist resistance ended the boycott campaign in December. Attempts to sabotage the railways continued, however, but the discrepancy between the reports of successes which Mihailović sent to the Yugoslavian government-in-exile in London<sup>111</sup> and those that can be checked in the files of the commanding general's Ia and Ic departments<sup>112</sup> raises the question whether Mihailović was deceived by his subordinates in this connection, or whether he himself lied for political reasons.

This setback for his most important political adversary may have encouraged the Serbian prime minister—previous disappointments notwithstanding—to try yet again at the turn of the year to obtain a concession from the Germans that was not purely cosmetic. On New Year's Day 1943 he submitted a detailed memorandum<sup>113</sup> to the commanding general, setting out the need to give the regime a broader base and suggesting that a representative body of the people be established for that purpose. Having regard to the grounds on which the German military authorities had rejected a first attempt to broach this question in March 1942, the proposal was based on the positively absurd idea that a quasi-parliament of this kind

<sup>108</sup> 'Korpsbefehl des Kommandierenden Generals und Befehlshabers in Serbien' (18 Nov. 1942), BA-MA RW 40/35.

<sup>109</sup> See German translation in 714th Infantry Division war diary, BA-MA RH 26-114/15.

<sup>110</sup> On this, see KTB Komm.Gen. und Befh. in Serbien, Abt. Ia (entry for 9 Aug. 1942), BA-MA RW 40/32, from which it is clear that Bader had already been told what to expect before the sabotage campaign was launched (explosive charges with detonators set to go off only after the trains left the area of Serbian settlement).

<sup>111</sup> Trew, *Britain, Mihailović and the Chetniks*, 152–5.

<sup>112</sup> The language of the reports by the enemy intelligence and counter-intelligence department, which were distributed to subordinate agencies by the commanding general's staff, is particularly clear in this connection. See 'Ic-Lagebericht 1.10–10.10.1942' (10 Oct. 1942), BA-MA RH 26-114/13; 'Ic-Lagebericht 11.10–18.10.1942' (19 Oct. 1942), ibid.; 'Ic-Lagebericht 19.10–29.10.1942' (29 Oct. 1942), ibid.; 'Ic-Lagebericht 30.10–8.11.1942' (9 Nov. 1942), BA-MA RH 26-114/14; 'Ic-Lagebericht 9.11–18.11.1942' (18 Nov. 1942), ibid.; 'Ic-Lagebericht 19.11–29.11.1942' (29 Nov. 1942), BA-MA RH 26-114/15.

<sup>113</sup> 'Der Präsident des Ministerrates an den Kommandierenden General und Befehlshaber in Serbien Herrn General der Artillerie Paul Bader' (1 Jan. 1943), repr. in Hnilicka, *Das Ende*, 239–52.

would operate without any form of voting system, and that its members would act in a purely advisory capacity. It appears that some members of Bader's staff were inclined to take a positive view of the proposal, but after more than two months a decision arrived from Führer headquarters turning it down.<sup>114</sup> Even if the proposal had been agreed in principle at this point, it is doubtful whether it would have compensated for the setback Nedić suffered when, as from 5 January 1943, the Bulgarian occupation zone was extended to include the whole south of the country (see later discussion).

Despite the devastating blows inflicted on the Serbian national resistance in the autumn of 1942, there were already signs in the first two months of the new year that 1943 would bring a whole new set of problems for Paul Bader and his Bulgarian allies. First and foremost among them was, of course, the transfer of 7th SS Division to the Croatian theatre of war at the turn of the year, which deprived the occupying forces, at a single blow, of 22,000 well-trained and—for guerrilla-warfare conditions—heavily armed troops. As the Bulgarian occupying corps brought only six battalions into the area that had been vacated,<sup>115</sup> the quest for troops to replace the 'Prinz Eugen' Division was as urgent as ever, and it was rendered even more urgent by the prospect of losing the last of the original divisions occupying the area, 704th Infantry Division, which was to be transferred to Greece by the end of July at the latest. Half-hearted attempts to bring in the first two Croatian legionnaire divisions or a Hungarian contingent failed owing to fears of increased ethnic unrest and hesitation on the part of Budapest.<sup>116</sup> In the end, even what was actually the most obvious solution, that is, to strengthen the Serbian government's two most reliable formations, the Russian Corps (RSK) and the Serbian Volunteer Corps (SFK), was undermined by a regular SS smear campaign.<sup>117</sup> The most serious result of this development was the steady decrease in reliable occupying forces in the country. It allowed the Mihailović movement to bring so much pressure to bear on the State Guard—increasingly left on its own and somewhat compromised by its numerous links with the Chetnik movement—that an increasing number of its men deserted, obliging the occupant to concentrate the unit in fewer and fewer posts. This in turn enabled Mihailović first to undermine the Belgrade executive power in rural areas and finally to effectively replace it in many localities.<sup>118</sup> The result, in the summer of 1943, was a situation—contradictory

<sup>114</sup> KTB Komm.Gen. und Befh. in Serbien, Abt. Ia (entry for 30 Mar. 1943), BA-MA RW 40/93.

<sup>115</sup> *Die geheimen Tagesberichte*, vi. 71 (entry for 4 Jan. 1943).

<sup>116</sup> KTB Komm.Gen. und Befh. in Serbien, Abt. Ia (entry for 18 Feb. 1943), BA-MA RW 40/38; ADAP, Series E, v. 345, 'Aufzeichnung des Legationsrats von Grote' (5 Mar. 1943).

<sup>117</sup> Meyszner's reservations may have been motivated by fear that the SFK and the RSK might supersede the Serbian State Guard under his command, as the Serbian state's most important armed force. See KTB Komm.Gen. und Befh. in Serbien, Abt. Ia (entry for 30 Apr. 1943), BA-MA RW 40/40. It is impossible to determine from the available sources how far Himmler's motives in this matter were simply to support his representative in Belgrade. The OKW did not even attempt to make use of the anti-Communist collaborators. See 'Der Chef des Oberkommandos der Wehrmacht an den Reichsführer SS und Chef der deutschen Polizei' (12 Mar. 1943), BA-MA RW 4/709.

<sup>118</sup> 'Kommandierender General und Befehlshaber in Serbien, Ic-Lagebericht für die Zeit vom 1. bis 17.3.1943' (17.3.1943), BA-MA RH26-104/53: 'The cause of the DM [Draža Mihailović] movement's increasing influence out there in the country may be the subordinate administrative

in appearance only—in which the occupying forces were engaged in a large-scale attempt to capture or kill the leader of the Serbian nationalist resistance (Operation MORGENLUFT, 14–21 July 1943),<sup>119</sup> while, at the same time, some German district commanders were endeavouring to safeguard the harvest for which they were responsible by negotiating standstill agreements with Mihailović's subordinates.<sup>120</sup>

The problem of finding enough troops of sufficient quality to occupy Serbia had not been solved by the summer of 1943, and it remained unsolved for the rest of the occupation. Nevertheless, the Allied landing in Sicily on 10 July, and the fall of Mussolini two weeks later, convinced the German authorities of the need to simplify the political and administrative structures in occupied south-eastern Europe, a measure that had been mooted since 1942.<sup>121</sup> The first step was the appointment (on 15 August 1943) of a territorial commander responsible for the whole of Serbia, with headquarters in Belgrade. His task was to relieve the Commander-in-Chief South-East of all duties not connected with the repulsion of an anticipated enemy landing. On 21 August the newly appointed 'Military Commander South-East', General Hans-Gustav Felber, also took over the tasks of the Military Commander in Serbia, Paul Bader, relieving him of his office.

Another measure, the significance of which is harder to evaluate, was the appointment on 24 August of a 'special foreign ministry plenipotentiary for the south-east' to 'ensure unified handling of foreign-policy matters in the area'.<sup>122</sup> That task was, in principle, virtually identical to that of Felix Benzler, but extended to the whole of the south-east. The description of his powers, which was not considered binding, gave little reason to expect that the new special plenipotentiary would not be just as lost in the maze of responsibilities in Belgrade and Thessaloníki as the ambassador, Benzler, had been before him. The fact that the special plenipotentiary, Hermann Neubacher, was an 'old campaigner' of the Nazi movement, and that he was already responsible for important tasks in the south-east, may at least partly explain the rapid increase in his power and influence over the next few weeks. This already became clear on the occasion of Nedić's frequently announced and equally frequently postponed visit to the German foreign minister (on 18 September). When the meeting threatened to end in scandal as a result of Ribbentrop's overbearing manner and uncompromising conduct of the discussions, Neubacher intervened and secured an arrangement for the prime minister to be received

bodies' failure to provide protection against the DM supporters who are terrorizing them. In order to prevent smaller SSW stations from being disarmed, the SSW has been combined with larger units. In the absence of troops and reliable police forces, it is no longer possible to ensure that the local authorities' orders are carried out in various stretches of land that are not on the main transport routes.'

<sup>119</sup> On MORGENLUFT, see KTB Komm.Gen. und Befh. in Serbien, Abt. Ia (entries for 9, 16, 17, 18, and 21 July 1943), BA-MA RW 40/43.

<sup>120</sup> 'Vortrag des OB, Gen.Feldm. Frhr. v. Weichs, beim Führer am 22.8.1944, Leistungen der Agrarwirtschaft im Bereich des Militärbefehlshabers Südost', BA-MA RH 19 XI/31.

<sup>121</sup> See 'Der Führer/OKW/WFSt, Weisung Nr. 48 für die Befehlsführung und Verteidigung des Südostraums' (26 July 1943), in *Hitlers Weisungen*, 218–23. Significantly, this directive was issued a day after Mussolini's downfall.

<sup>122</sup> *Führer-Erlasse*, 350–1.

shortly by Hitler, so the meeting could at least conclude with a propaganda success for both sides.<sup>123</sup> Two weeks later Neubacher put the task of strengthening Nedić at the top of his agenda, and took over Benzler's post for the purpose on 2 October.

The definition and substantial extension of Neubacher's powers as plenipotentiary were confirmed in a directive issued on 29 October. He probably owed this not only to the single-minded pursuit of his aims but also to the fact that, on 24 or 25 October, he had been able to submit to his supreme commander an offer from Draža Mihailović to conclude an armistice and join the coalition. In principle, Hitler was still fundamentally opposed to any agreement with guerrillas, but his aversion had been somewhat mitigated by the dominant role which the Communist resistance was now playing both in Greece and in Yugoslavia.<sup>124</sup> The fact that, at the end of October, Mihailović's last remaining power base came under threat for the first time, as two National Liberation Army divisions advanced on south-west Serbia, may also have made it easier for Neubacher to convince his supreme commander that there was relatively little risk involved in a truce with the Old Serbian Chetniks. Neubacher was accordingly authorized, with effect from 29 October 1943, to enter into 'negotiations with the leaders of partisan gangs', and also to issue instructions to SS and police authorities on political matters, for example, on the question of shooting hostages. At least equally surprising was the number of orders authorizing him to introduce and implement new 'economic policy principles in the south-east' in order to ensure food supplies for the population of the occupied areas.<sup>125</sup>

The first results of this revolution in coalition policy were not long in coming. In Serbia—unlike Croatia, where there is evidence of initially covert cooperation with a few groups of Chetniks operating independently in the early summer of 1942—Bader had always been careful to cooperate only with sections of the Serbian nationalist movement that were prepared to be bound by the straitjacket of German orders and control measures. Moreover, even this was regarded more as emergency assistance, the ultimate aim still being to disband most of these formations. Apart from more basic considerations, another contributory factor was the knowledge that, despite long periods of attentism, most of the Chetniks in Old Serbia regarded themselves as a resistance movement opposed to the occupying power and as subject, at least indirectly, to the authority of the acting minister of war of the Yugoslavian government-in-exile. The units in the NDH, on the other hand, had given up the defensive battle against the Ustasha in the summer of 1941, and their main concern now was to protect their respective settlement areas from their civil-war opponents and ethnic adversaries. The oaths of allegiance to Mihailović that they had sworn in the course of 1942 were often nothing but lip service.

<sup>123</sup> For further details of this meeting, see *ADAP*, Series E, vi. 556–9, 'Aufzeichnung über das Gespräch zwischen dem Herrn Reichsaßenminister und dem serbischen Ministerpräsidenten Nedić am 18.9.1943' (19 Sept. 1943); Neubacher, *Sonderauftrag Südost*, 135.

<sup>124</sup> See also 'Beurteilung der Lage im Südostraum' (1 Nov. 1943), BA-MA RH 21-2/592, and *KTB OKW*, iii/2, 1268 (10 Nov. 1943).

<sup>125</sup> *Führer-Erlasse*, 368–9.

The National Liberation Army's invasion of Serbia in October/November 1943, of which we have already spoken, now forced Mihailović and Neubacher into a community of interests. The Germans and the Chetniks both found themselves—from a strategic point of view, at least—on the defensive against the partisans. The major Allied landing Mihailović was hoping for was unlikely to take place until the next spring, and the idea of an understanding between the two parties in the Serbian civil war had been abandoned again in the summer as having no prospect of success,<sup>126</sup> so from a military point of view at least, all the conditions were met for a temporary alliance between the Germans and the Serbian nationalists. From a political point of view, a possibility that had of course to be reckoned with in the medium term was that this development might drive a wedge not only between the Chetniks and their more radical followers, but also between the Germans and their most loyal collaborators (Nedić, 'Zbor', and the SFK).

It was undoubtedly owing to these considerations that Mihailović left the negotiations to his regional subordinates, that he did not appear in person, and that the agreements—set out in writing—were to run for only six to eight weeks. The fact that the first of these agreements was signed, sealed, and delivered before the Commander-in-Chief South-East even had an opportunity to issue a basic order approving the new course of action gives a good idea of the change in the weight of the leading authorities within the occupying power brought about by the new special plenipotentiary. It is at least conceivable that the Commander-in-Chief South-East's disapproval of the said course of action was the reason why Neubacher's efforts to secure a new arrangement regarding reprisals made such slow progress.<sup>127</sup> The Military Commander South-East had approached Neubacher about this matter in September, that is, even before his powers were extended, but Baron Maximilian von Weichs waited until the end of December before issuing the necessary directive.<sup>128</sup>

The senior SS and police leader was to be even more disturbed than the Commander-in-Chief South-East by Neubacher's course of action. He was unyielding, and thus opposed to Neubacher, on the question of hostages, but that was not all. The special plenipotentiary's concentration of all the most important powers in his own department and that of the military commander inevitably meant a loss of authority for Meyszner (and to a lesser extent Neuhausen). However, the confrontation which the police chief immediately and deliberately sought proved overwhelmingly one-sided. Neubacher's appeals to his good friend,

<sup>126</sup> After talks between Politburo member Milovan Djilas and members of the Chetnik high command. See 'Intercettazioni radio-cetiche' (18 and 20 July 1943), NA, PG T 821, rl 356, fr 479–82, and 'Bericht über das am 16.9.1943 gestellte Begleitkommando nach Berane zur Div. "Venezia"' (16 Oct. 1943), BA-MA RH 21-2/739. Talpo, *Dalmazia*, iii. 611–12, refers to a note of 28 July without letter-heading or signature, probably from the same source as the first two (radio intelligence of the Servizio Informazioni Militari).

<sup>127</sup> 'Weisung des Oberbefehlshabers Südost' (21 Nov. 1943) in Hnilicka, *Das Ende*, 268–9.

<sup>128</sup> 'Befehl des Oberbefehlshabers Südost zu Sühnemaßnahmen' (22 Dec. 1943), BA-MA RW 40/89. The relevant passage in Neubacher's memoirs is of no help in deciphering this process. See Neubacher, *Sonderauftrag Südost*, 140.

Ernst Kaltenbrunner,<sup>129</sup> and to the enemies that the senior SS and police leader had made in his own camp,<sup>130</sup> put paid to any hope of a repetition of the scenario in which Harald Turner had been deprived of his powers. Instead, it was Meyszner who was dismissed from his post, with effect from 15 March 1944. And his successor, SS Brigadeführer Hermann Behrends, was immediately urged by Heinrich Himmler to keep on good terms with Neubacher, come what may.<sup>131</sup>

Meanwhile, the closer relationship with the Mihailović Chetniks ran into criticism from various quarters in the course of the winter, until finally the special plenipotentiary was the only one adhering to it. The worst stumbling block was the continued political expansion of the Serbian nationalist resistance—now protected by the ceasefire—at the expense of the Serbian government and other loyal Serbs, which was the main reason for the second Nedić resignation crisis at the end of February.<sup>132</sup> Felber attempted to counter this development by banning an initially welcome extension of the armistice to the territory of Chetnik commanders who had not signed an agreement, and by finally replacing coalition treaties with the possibility of ‘tacit toleration’. Shortly afterwards, Felber agreed with Neubacher’s superior in the foreign ministry ‘to keep firmly to the Nedić line’, and to receive further initiatives from the Serbian nationalists ‘without showing any particular interest’.<sup>133</sup>

In this situation, only the National Liberation Army could revive the alliance between the occupying power and the Serbian nationalists. On 17 March 1944 Tito’s partisans began their second attempt to invade Old Serbia. However, unlike the offensive in the previous autumn, this one did not come to a halt on the outskirts of Užice but pressed on past the Bulgarian 24th Infantry Division to the Ibar line, with a view to joining up with the Old Serbian partisans in their retreat in south-eastern Serbia. Although the former treaty procedure was not renewed even now, relatively smooth cooperation with the Chetnik units affected was once again possible until the forces in question withdrew to the Sandžak in the middle of May. Significantly, once the partisans had been driven out in most parts of Serbia, most of the Chetnik units immediately resumed their attacks on Serbian collaborators and—to a lesser extent—on Germans. This time Felber appeared determined to make a final break with the practice of the winter of 1943/4 (‘The DM movement is and always will be an *enemy*.’).<sup>134</sup> However, in view of the Bulgarian corps’

<sup>129</sup> ‘Der Sonderbevollmächtigte des Auswärtigen Amtes für den Südosten an den Chef des Reichssicherheitshauptamtes SS-Obergruppenführer Dr. Ernst Kaltenbrunner’ (12 Jan. 1944), BA, SSO-Akte Meyszner.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> ‘Der Reichsführer SS an den Höheren SS- und Polizeiführer, SS-Brigadeführer Behrends’ (18 May 1944), BA, NS 19/1728.

<sup>132</sup> Nedić also complained about the increasing incapacitation of his government by German organs and about the continuing Bulgarian occupation. See ‘Das Präsidium des Ministerrates an den Militärbefehlshaber Südost Herrn General der Infanterie Felber’ (22 Feb. 1944), in Hnilicka, *Das Ende*, 312–20.

<sup>133</sup> ADAP, Series E, vii. 486–7, ‘Unterstaatssekretär Hencke an Gesandten Kasche’ (12 Mar. 1944).

<sup>134</sup> ‘Militärbefehlshaber Südost, Abt. Ic, Betr.: Verhalten gegenüber der DM-Bewegung’ (16 May 1944), BA-MA RW 40/88.

extensive failure during the defensive operation that had just ended, and the fact that there was little prospect of German units being permanently posted to this theatre of war, it must have been clear to all concerned that the unwelcome alliance would be revived when the partisans next attempted to invade the country. Meanwhile, even the Serbian collaborators had come to terms with this idea, as shown by a round of talks on 20 May between 'Zbor' founder Dimitrije Ljotić and Mihailović's chief of staff for the Old Serbia area, Miroslav Trifunović. The fact that Trifunović frankly admitted in the course of the meeting that Mihailović had only very limited control over most of his subordinates,<sup>135</sup> but nevertheless laid down conditions tantamount to the voluntary self-abandonment of the Serbian state and its constituent bodies, shows the position of strength which the Mihailović movement had attained in relation to the occupying forces. By now, Neubacher had nothing to pit against it. He had managed to persuade Nedić not to resign at the beginning of March, but he had even failed to get Hitler's permission for the unification of Serbia and Montenegro, which would have strengthened the Serbian government, symbolically at least.<sup>136</sup>

In Old Serbia, the period up to the beginning of August was largely one of transition and preparation, pending the National Liberation Army's next invasion. It is interesting that, in the event, the German side was remarkably restrained in its further relations with Mihailović. The fragmentary surviving sources<sup>137</sup> do not provide a final answer, but there are some indications that the reason for pursuing this policy had little to do with disappointment over the erratic and unreliable behaviour of most of Mihailović's subordinates. On the contrary, the virtually powerless Serbian prime minister appears to have succeeded, with his 22 February letter of resignation, in making such a lasting impression on Felber and Neubacher that they were prepared to let Nedić take the lead in dealing with future approaches from Mihailović. Although the round of talks on 20 May was largely fruitless, it can undoubtedly be regarded as the first manifestation of this new policy.

The occupying power nevertheless continued to pursue the course of cooperation with the Chetniks in Old Serbia, though only at the military level, culminating in two major operations against the Old Serbian partisans' retreat in the area round Prokuplje. Operation TRUMPF (10–18 July) and Operation KEHRAUS (19 July–6 August) were prime examples of the OKW's strategy of entrusting the tasks of the occupation in Yugoslavia to troop units that could not in any case have been employed in any other theatre of war, given their level of training, nationality, or ethnic composition. Thus, apart from a German police battalion, the only forces deployed in these two operations were units from two Bulgarian divisions, the SFK, and Chetniks willing to cooperate, who fielded for the first time a major new unit

<sup>135</sup> A government state secretary, Čeka Djordjević, was assassinated by Chetniks during the negotiations. See 'Junker an Neubacher' (24 May 1944), PA, SbvolSO R 27302.

<sup>136</sup> Neubacher made a number of attempts in this respect (14 Dec. 1943, 6 May 1944, 6 July 1944). See Ritter, 'Herrmann Neubacher', 216; ADAP, Series E, viii. 24–5, 'Aufzeichnung für den Herrn Reichsausßenminister' (7 May 1944), and 180–1, 'Neubacher an Auswärtiges Amt' (6 July 1944).

<sup>137</sup> The Military Commander South-East's surviving war diary, and all the annexes to it, end in May 1944 (BA-MA RW 40/88).

modelled on the Proletarian Brigades. Although only partially successful, TRUMPF and KEHRAUS were an indication of the change that had come upon the Serbian anti-Communist camp in the meantime. Joint deployment of SFK forces and Mihailović Chetniks would have been wholly unthinkable in the spring. But by the middle of August this development had gone so far that, after a secret meeting with Mihailović (probably on 15 August), Nedić agreed to an unconditional alliance and the effective abandonment of his state, an idea that had already been discussed at Gornji Milanovac on 20 May. This was followed on 17 August by a request that the occupying power join the alliance and provide it with a greater supply of weapons. Neubacher must have received prior warning of this development, because on 16 August he was already speaking to his central authorities about the need to ‘clarify our relations with Draža Mihailović’.<sup>138</sup> Interestingly, Felber and Weichs must both have had a ‘road-to-Damascus experience’ on the question of cooperation with Mihailović at some point after the end of July. Both officers had so far appeared, at best, to have reservations about the possibilities of further collaboration with the Serbian nationalist movement, but this experience seems to have turned them at a stroke into starry-eyed advocates of this course of action. After Nedić made his offer on 17 August, the two commanders-in-chief and Neubacher must have had lengthy talks—of which there are unfortunately no records—before advising their respective superiors, on 19/20 August, to accept it. However, even this development was not destined to turn the tide in the battle against the National Liberation Army. Hitler’s distrust of the Serbs in general and the Mihailović movement in particular,<sup>139</sup> and the small number of booty weapons available in the short term, meant that German arms deliveries, which still continued in the last ten days of August, were kept within reasonable limits. Those deliveries were finally stopped, on the orders of the Commander-in-Chief South-East, after Mihailović’s call to his supporters on 1 September opened up the prospect of the long-awaited national uprising against the occupant.<sup>140</sup> The National Liberation Army’s breakthrough in separate waves from Bosnia and Montenegro, starting on 26 August, was not held up to any appreciable extent by the belated ‘mass uprising of the Serbian people against the Red partisans’ (Neubacher).<sup>141</sup> Mihailović’s people no longer even had the benefit of the German units (particularly 7th SS Division) which were transferred to Serbia at this time. This troop movement was motivated by Bulgaria’s step-by-step<sup>142</sup> change of sides,

<sup>138</sup> ADAP, Series E, viii. 326–7, ‘Neubacher an Auswärtiges Amt’ (16 Aug. 1944).

<sup>139</sup> Particularly apparent in the minutes of his meeting with Weichs on 22 August. See ‘Aktennotiz zum Vortrag des Oberbefehlshabers Südost, Herrn Generalfeldmarschall Frhr. von Weichs, beim Führer am 22.8.1944’ (17.45/20.00), NA, PG T 311, rl 192, fr 802–12.

<sup>140</sup> ‘Ic-Chef, 3.9.1944, 10.35’, BA-MA RH 19 XI/19.

<sup>141</sup> ‘OB-Besprechungen 17. und 18.8., Fragen Serbien—DM und Griechenland’ (18 Aug. 1944), BA-MA RH 19 XI/17.

<sup>142</sup> 23 August: Bulgaria requests withdrawal of the occupation force to the area held before 1 January 1943; 27 August: the occupying force starts withdrawing of its own accord; 30 August: the German military mission is summoned to withdraw all German troops from Bulgarian state territory; 4 September: Germany disarms the Bulgarian units that are still on Serbian soil; 6 September: Bulgaria breaks off diplomatic relations with Germany; 8 September: Bulgaria declares

which, combined with the collapse of the German position in Romania, made it necessary to establish a provisional defensive line on the Bulgarian–Serbian border. By the end of the month, while the Nedić government and the plenipotentiary, Neubacher, watched from the sidelines, the Chetniks' main units, left largely to themselves (particularly the 'Assault Corps', armed with the assistance of the Germans), had been broken up by the advancing partisans and reduced to militarily and politically negligible dimensions.<sup>143</sup> Their remnants subsequently joined the Army Group E units withdrawing through southern Serbia and northern Montenegro in the course of the next few months. Until the end of the war they remained dependent on proximity to the Wehrmacht, which was ever more unwillingly granted,<sup>144</sup> in order to survive.<sup>145</sup> The Chetnik command's sporadic attempts to play its own part during these final months<sup>146</sup> only used up its remaining resources even faster.

## 5. THE YUGOSLAVIAN THEATRE OF WAR AS THE CORNERSTONE OF THE SOUTHERN SECTION OF THE EASTERN FRONT (OCTOBER 1944 TO MAY 1945)

### (a) The Temporary Stabilization of the Front (October to December 1944)

With Romania's change of sides on 25 August, and Bulgaria's on 8 September, the Commander-in-Chief South-East, Baron Maximilian von Weichs, was confronted with the fact that the whole of his eastern flank, from the northern edge of the Banat to the Aegean Sea, had been torn wide open more or less overnight. Only the vast distance that the Soviet spearheads would now have to travel, and the fact that Bulgaria's change of sides had got off to a hesitant start, with no contingency plans to take control of parts of the occupied territories in Serbia, Macedonia, and Thrace in the face of German resistance, gave Felber and Weichs a brief four-week respite to prepare for the inevitable Soviet invasion. The first orders which the Commander-in-Chief South-East gave at this time were still marked by an optimism that would have been more appropriate in an earlier phase of the war. In the knowledge that there was a major fighting force at hand in the form of 1st Mountain Division, which had just been withdrawn from Montenegro (Operation

war on Germany; 9 September: the Bulgarian Communist Party takes power in Sofia. See also Schmider, *Partisanenkrieg in Jugoslawien*, 511–19.

<sup>143</sup> For more details of events in those chaotic days, see *ibid.* 502–21.

<sup>144</sup> Mihailović's control of the numerous Serbian nationalist resistance groups, which was often purely symbolic in any case, was further reduced by the defeat of September 1944, resulting in a sudden, though short-lived, rise in the number of Chetnik attacks on German troops. See KTB H.Gr. E, Abt. Ia, entry for 3 Nov. 1944, BA-MA RH 19 VII/28.

<sup>145</sup> Tomasevich, *War and Revolution*, i. 421–53.

<sup>146</sup> Particularly the unsuccessful attempt to take the north-eastern Bosnian town of Tuzla from the partisans in the closing days of December 1944. *Ibid.* 435.

RÜBEZAHL), and probably under the influence of clear signs of disintegration during the Bulgarian occupation corps' withdrawal from Serbia, initial directives were issued to secure the former Yugoslavian–Bulgarian border and advance on Sofia with a view to disarming the mechanized units of the Bulgarian army (Operation HUNDESOHN).<sup>147</sup> However, such ideas were rapidly overtaken by events and were replaced by the question of what forces would be used to defend the remainder of the German sphere of power. By the end of September, the forces still available in the Banat (4th SS Police Armoured Infantry Division and 92nd Motorized Infantry Regiment), in Old Serbia (1st Mountain Division and parts of 7th SS Division), and in Macedonia (11th Luftwaffe Field Division) looked quite considerable on paper but would still not be numerically strong enough to ensure continuous defence, even with the addition of a number of troop units still being brought in (notably Infantry Regiment 'Rhodos' and parts of 117th Light Infantry Division).<sup>148</sup> Moreover, with the exception of 1st Mountain Division, these units' combat experience was confined to engagements with partisans. That was also true of the Bulgarians now fighting on the other side, but some of them were better equipped than many German units, thanks to the increased German military aid received since the end of 1942 under the 'Barbara Programme'. Owing to the lack of Luftwaffe units, the Soviet and Bulgarian air forces enjoyed almost absolute air superiority, although, owing to the autumn weather and the mediocre level of training of the air crews on the Soviet side,<sup>149</sup> the effect of this superiority was not quite so devastating as in the western theatres of war. It is therefore not altogether surprising that the day after 3rd Ukrainian Front (Marshal Fedor Tolbukhin) began military operations proper with a large-scale attack in the Negotin area of north-eastern Serbia on 29 September, Weichs gave Felber, the military commander south-east charged with defending Serbia (Army Detachment Serbia, as from 6 October), various pieces of advice that must have raised certain doubts in the recipient's mind as to the feasibility of the task entrusted to him: 'Belgrade must be built up into a fortress as quickly as possible [...]. Since there are not yet enough forces available to defend the front—as in the area north of the Danube and in western Serbia—the first thing is to gain time.'<sup>150</sup>

A core element of the Soviet plan was a sweeping movement of the main components of 3rd Ukrainian Front (57th Army and 4th Mechanized Guards Corps, as well as 2nd Ukrainian Front's 75th Rifle Corps, which had been placed under the command of 3rd Ukrainian Front for the purposes of this operation) from north-eastern Serbia to Belgrade, so as to join up there with 2nd Ukrainian Front's 10th Guards Rifle Corps, which would meanwhile have rolled up the

<sup>147</sup> Oberbefehlshaber Südost, Abt. Ia, 'Weisung für die Kampfführung in Mazedonien und Serbien' (5 Sept. 1944), BA-MA RH 19 XI/28.

<sup>148</sup> 'Oberbefehlshaber Südost an den MilBehf. Südost, Herrn-Gen.d.Inf. Felber' (30 Sept. 1944), BA-MA RH 19 XI/28.

<sup>149</sup> On this, see a 117th Light Infantry Division NCO's impressions of a Soviet air raid, reported in Hoffmann, *Rückzug*, 66–7.

<sup>150</sup> 'Oberbefehlshaber Südost an den MilBehf. Südost, Herrn-Gen.d.Inf. Felber' (30 Sept. 1944), BA-MA RH 19 XI/28.

German position in the Banat.<sup>151</sup> The Bulgarian 2nd Army's slightly staggered move against Niš was a flanking operation that was also aimed at the capture of the major traffic nodes of Niš, Kraljevo, and Priština, which were important for the withdrawal of Army Group E. Whereas three more Soviet infantry divisions were assigned to the Bulgarian operation against Niš, no such assistance was forthcoming for the new coalition partner in the neighbouring Macedonian theatre of war. There, the Bulgarian 1st and 4th Armies had to perform the task assigned to them—namely to block the route for Army Group E's withdrawal from Thessaloníki to Skopje—alone.<sup>152</sup> The Mihailović units, concentrated mainly in western Serbia, had been largely defeated by the end of September, so Tolbukhin could also count on the armed support of a dozen divisions of the National Liberation Army.

On 1 October the German 1st Mountain Division, which bore the brunt of the attack and had soon suffered various breaches in its line, informed Army Detachment Serbia that the military task assigned to it 'cannot be executed at the present time'.<sup>153</sup> This was followed, on 3 October, by the first withdrawal movement towards the Morava. The situation north of the Danube, in the Banat, was even bleaker. Command Group Schneckenburger was beaten back on a broad front, and on 3 October, to the dismay of the commander-in-chief,<sup>154</sup> it was forced into two bridgeheads on the east bank of the Tisza (at Titel) and on the north bank of the Danube (at Belgrade). The transfer of operational command in Serbia on 1 October to a particularly well-tried and tested troop commander (General Friedrich-Wilhelm Müller)<sup>155</sup> came too late to remedy the situation.

The situation that took shape in Serbia over the following days gave reason to fear not only the loss of Old Serbia itself, but also that of the bulk of the units in the area. The Soviet 57th Army continued to advance, and on 8 October 1944 took advantage of a gap between 1st Mountain Division and 7th SS Division to thrust forward to the Morava, where it immediately established three connected

<sup>151</sup> *Geschichte des Großen Vaterländischen Krieges*, iv. 479–81. A total of 19 infantry divisions, approximately 500 tanks and assault guns, and 2,000 aircraft from the two army fronts took part in the 'Belgrade Operation'. By way of comparison, 1st Belorussian Front and 1st Ukrainian Front deployed 164 infantry divisions, 6,500 tanks and assault guns, and close on 4,800 aircraft, in the operation to conquer Poland in January/February 1945. See *ibid.* and Erickson, *Stalin's War*, ii. 379 and 447.

<sup>152</sup> *Geschichte des Großen Vaterländischen Krieges*, iv. 480–1.

<sup>153</sup> '1. Geb.Div., Abt. Ia, an 7. SS-Division' (1 Oct. 1944), BA-MA RH 24-34/67.

<sup>154</sup> On this, see the letter to Felber from C-in-C South-East's chief of staff, which refers, *inter alia*, to 'Command Group Schneckenburger's continuing tendency to retreat'; 'Generalleutnant Winter an den Oberbefehlshaber der Armeearbeitung Serbien, Herrn Gen.d.Inf. Felber' (6 Oct. 1944), BA-MA RH 19 XI/22.

<sup>155</sup> At least in the opinion of the commander of the 'Prinz Eugen' Division, Otto Kumm. See Kumm, *Vorwärts, Prinz Eugen!*, 275. Müller had recently been 'commander of the German troops in Crete' from 1 July to 13 September 1944. His substantial force initially included both 7th SS Division and 1st Mountain Division but it became the headquarters (previously 'Müller Group') only from 24 October on. Müller and Felber must have agreed on the division of their respective remits, but there is no evidence of this in the files. Although Müller was largely responsible for the conduct of operations, a few operational orders were left to Felber for the next two weeks. See 'OB Armeearb. Serbien an Kampfkommandant Belgrad, Kampfgruppe Wittman, Kampfgruppe 1. Geb.Div., Rgt. Rhodos,-Gen. Kdo. Müller' (13.10.1944), BA-MA RW 40/120.

bridgeheads on the west bank of the river (9 October).<sup>156</sup> The next day, the Soviet 10th Guards Rifle Corps crossed the Danube west of Belgrade. And, as a result of Felber's efforts to scrape together all available forces to eliminate the Soviet bridgeheads on the Morava, the Belgrade bridgehead north of the Danube had to be abandoned a day later.<sup>157</sup> That same day 7th SS Division, under heavy pressure from the Bulgarian 2nd Army, received permission to abandon Niš, with the proviso that the Morava line was to be held for as long as possible. However, the hope that Serbia might continue to be defended on the basis of that natural barrier, which had meanwhile become extremely fragile, vanished on 13 October, when permission was given to 'withdraw, section by section'.<sup>158</sup>

On the same day, when it became clear that these attempts would fail and that the Soviet mechanized units which had broken through had changed course and were advancing on Belgrade,<sup>159</sup> the logistic link between the Müller Group and the higher German formations in the south-eastern area was broken. Any further contact with Army Detachment Serbia was blocked for the time being by 3rd Ukrainian Front. In the case of 2nd Armoured Army in Croatia, the obstacle was the National Liberation Army's control of the area between Sarajevo and Višegrad in eastern Bosnia.<sup>160</sup> Until the beginning of November, when it was joined by the first sections of 104th Light Infantry Division, Müller's group consisted only of the bulk of 7th SS Division. In this situation, the Commander-in-Chief South-East resorted to the only operational move that remained open to the German command to the last, even in the closing phase of the war, that is, reorganization of the command structure. Although it would still be some weeks before contact was made with the Army Group E spearheads advancing from Greece, Müller was placed under their command for tactical and supply purposes with effect from 14 October. In view of this relationship, Col.-Gen. Alexander Löhr was already instructed on 13 October to ensure that the Müller Group was supplied with ammunition from the abundant stocks still held in the area under his command (notably Crete).<sup>161</sup> Müller's prospects of keeping Kraljevo, at least, open as a rail connection for Army Group E after the loss of Niš were immediately called into question again by yet another setback on the following day. As a result of delays in constructing a bridge over the Morava, the evacuation of the bulk of the 'Prinz Eugen' Division from Niš was held up to such an extent that the pursuing Bulgarians had the opportunity to score their only operational-scale success of the campaign. West of the Morava, 2nd Army's armoured brigade launched an attack from the south against the flank of the division's retreating vanguard, destroying

<sup>156</sup> 'Kampfgruppe Dauner, Befehl über die Wegnahme von Lapovo und Vorstoß entlang des Westufers der Morawa' (11 Oct. 1944), BA-MA RH 24-34/68.

<sup>157</sup> 'ObKdo, Armeearb. Serbien, Abt. Ia an-Gen.Kdo. Schneckenburger, Kampfkdt. Belgrad und 117. Jg.Div.' (10 Oct. 1944), BA-MA RW 40/120.

<sup>158</sup> 'OB Armeearb. Serbien an-Gen.Kdo. Müller' (13 Oct. 1944), BA-MA RW 40/120.

<sup>159</sup> 'Generalkommando F.W. Müller Ia an Wehrmachtbefehlshaber Mazedonien' (13 Oct. 1944), BA-MA RH 24-34/68.

<sup>160</sup> 'OB Südost, Abt. Ia an OKW/WFSt' (19 Oct. 1944), BA-MA RH 19 XI/23; 'Vorkommando Bv.T.O. H.Gr. E an Heeresgruppe E, Abt. Ia' (17 Nov. 1944), RH 19 VII/49b.

<sup>161</sup> 'OB Südost an OKW/WFSt' (13 Oct. 1944), BA-MA RH 19 XI/33.

most of its vehicles and forcing the survivors to embark on an exhausting five-day march on foot westwards across the Kopaonik mountains.<sup>162</sup> At the time, Müller and Felber had to assume that the losses incurred during the SS division's withdrawal from the Niš area had amounted to more than 5,000 men.<sup>163</sup> On that assumption, it would probably have been impossible to mount a successful defence of Kraljevo.

Whereas this near-catastrophe was at least partly attributable to tactical circumstances over which the high command had very little control, the next reverse unquestionably fell within the Commander-in-Chief South-East's sphere of responsibility. In a directive issued on 14 October he already spoke openly about the possibility of abandoning the Yugoslavian capital, but at the same time he ordered 1st Mountain Division, which had been cut off and was engaged in fighting its way back to the west, to join in the battle for the city that had started that day, so as to relieve the numerically weak defence forces. The possibility of withdrawing the division via Šabac on the Sava, which was located further to the west, depended, he said, on how the operational situation developed.<sup>164</sup>

The result was that, in the course of 17 October, 1st Mountain Division—combined with parts of 117th Light Infantry Division, 92nd Motorized Infantry Regiment, and Infantry Regiment 'Rhodos' to form Corps Group Stettner—made a whole series of hopeless and costly attempts to force its way through the ranks of the attacking Soviet forces, which had already been engaged for 48 hours in fighting their way from the south side of Belgrade to the inner city. Stettner did not give the order to break through to Šabac until the evening,<sup>165</sup> and he himself fell in the course of the ensuing fighting. As in the case of 7th SS Division, Felber and Weichs did not know the extent of the losses incurred until almost three days later, but as the 1st Mountain Division radio transmitter was not responding, they feared the worst. On 20 October the Commander-in-Chief South-East found himself facing a situation in which, even with the units transferred from the Yugoslavian capital to Syrmia, there were no more than '5 to 6 battle-worn battalions with a few additional batteries' available to form a new front on the courses of the Sava and the Danube.<sup>166</sup> Only the unexpected arrival in Šabac, on 21 October, of the vanguards of the combat group now under the command of 117th Light Infantry Division,

<sup>162</sup> On this, see impressions gathered from various members of the division, in Kumm, *Vorwärts, Prinz Eugen*, 275–304.

<sup>163</sup> According to 'OB Südost an OKW/WFSt' (4 Nov. 1944), BA-MA RH 19 XI/24, 7th SS Division lost a total of 451 dead and 2,025 missing between 25 September and 25 October 1944, at which time there was no prospect of being joined by any more stragglers from the Niš area.

<sup>164</sup> 'OB Südost, Abt. Ia an Pz.AOK 2 und Armeearbt. Serbien' (14 Oct. 1944), BA-MA RH 19 XI/22.

<sup>165</sup> On this, see the two existing histories of the division, which are, however, largely concerned to exonerate Stettner. The person held to be mainly responsible by both authors is not Weichs but—as a link in the chain of command—the commander of Army Detachment Serbia, Hans-Gustav Felber. Lanz, *Gebirgsjäger*, 282–9; Kaltenegger, *Die Stammdivision*, 330–42.

<sup>166</sup> 'OB Südost, Abt. Ia an OKW/WFSt und OKH/GenStdH' (20 Oct. 1944), BA-MA RH 19 XI/23.



Map VI.II.3. The Soviet breakthrough into Serbia (status: 9 October 1944)

Sources: OKW situation maps, BA-MA, Kart RH2 SO72.

Lt.-Gen. August Wittman, saved Weichs from having to bear the final consequences of his ill-considered directive of 14 October.<sup>167</sup>

This further setback marked the absolute nadir in the German conduct of operations in Serbia. The Russians and the partisans continued to advance towards Syrmia, but only extremely hesitantly. The feared attempt to cut Syrmia off completely, which was a distinct possibility given the lack of any link between the area of the Commander-in-Chief South-East and that of Army Group South,<sup>168</sup> never took place. Instead, the Soviet forces and the National Liberation Army proceeded step by step, and by the end of the month they had reached a line 60 kilometres west of the capital.<sup>169</sup> The evacuation of the Tisza line north of Belgrade, which was held until 21 October, followed in due course by that of the Bačka, went smoothly on the whole.<sup>170</sup> On 23 October Löhr finally presented Weichs with a strategy which, for the first time since Romania changed sides, gave the German defence in the south-east something resembling a medium-term prospect. Command Group Müller was to be reinforced as quickly as possible by 104th Light Infantry Division, which was still relatively strong and was on its way through Macedonia. These forces would then be able to break through to 2nd Armoured Army on the other side of the Drina, and their combined units, including the remains of Army Group E, would be incorporated in the new eastern front on the Serbian–Croatian border.<sup>171</sup> As the bulk of 1st Mountain Division had time to establish the first section of this new defence line along the northern Drina in the last week of October and, despite some setbacks, 11th Luftwaffe Field Division and a regiment of 22nd Infantry Division had managed, since the end of September, to hold off the Bulgarian 1st and 4th Armies advancing against the Thessaloníki–Skopje road, the prospects of implementing the Löhr plan appeared to be good. The danger lay above all in Kosovo, where the forefield of Mitrovica and Priština had to be held against the Bulgarian 2nd Army, which had resumed its advance on 1 November after taking Niš, and in the Kraljevo bridgehead, which had been under attack by Soviet forces since 24 October. The fact that Army Group E was able to hold its ground at both these focal points was due, at least in part, to factors beyond the control of the Commander-in-Chief South-East. In Kosovo, for example, a successful mobilization of the population of arms-bearing

<sup>167</sup> Lanz's estimate of the division's losses during the Belgrade battles (5,000 dead or missing) is probably on the high side. According to KTB OB Südost, Abt. II b, 'Anlage zu Nr. 321/44 g.Kdos. vom 18.12.1944', BA-MA RH 19 XI/27, 1st Mountain Division lost 472 men killed and 2,957 missing between 20 September and 31 October, and it should also be borne in mind that at least some of those losses occurred during the unsuccessful attempt to defend north-eastern Serbia and the Morava line. The figure given in *Die geheimen Tagesberichte*, xi. 146 (21 Oct. 1944), i.e. a total of 15,000 to 16,000 survivors, refers to the corps group as a whole. However, the losses of heavy equipment could only be made good by partly disarming the unreliable 13th SS Division. On the consequent controversy with the Reich Leader SS, see Lepre, *Himmler's Bosnian Division*, 264–71.

<sup>168</sup> 'OB Südost, Abt. Ia an Pz.AOK 2' (22 Oct. 1944), BA-MA RH 19 XI/23.

<sup>169</sup> KTB OB Südost, Abt. Ia (29 Oct. 1944), BA-MA RH 19 XI/14.

<sup>170</sup> *Die geheimen Tagesberichte*, xi. 149, 152 (22 and 23 Oct. 1944).

<sup>171</sup> KTB OB Südost, Abt. Ia (25 Oct. 1944), BA-MA RH 19 XI/14.

age was conducted with the help of local notables,<sup>172</sup> a highly remarkable achievement in view of Germany's fortunes in the war, without which the Schulz Group operating in the area would probably not have been able to hold its 'strongpoint-based front'<sup>173</sup> until 19 November (abandonment of Priština) and 22 November (abandonment of Mitrovica).<sup>174</sup>

The equally positive outcome of the battle for Kraljevo should also be seen mainly in the light of the Soviet command's strategic priorities. After the 68th Rifle Corps of the Soviet 57th Army had attacked the key German position from 24 October to 2 November 1944 without success, the Soviet unit gradually withdrew and was replaced by units of the Bulgarian 2nd Army. Admittedly, the decisive reason for this move was not the German success on the battlefield but the need to attend to the strategically and politically more important Hungarian theatre of war, where the first offensive in the direction of Budapest had already been launched on 29 October and the left flank of the Soviet army front was lagging behind. However, this shift of the point of concentration in the southern section of the eastern front<sup>175</sup> relieved the pressure on the Commander-in-Chief South-East for only a week or so.

Meanwhile, the effective obliteration of the dividing line between the old Yugoslavian and the new Hungarian theatres of war on 9 October<sup>176</sup> had been confirmed on 27 October, when Army Detachment Serbia was dissolved and replaced by a front HQ (LXVIII Army Corps staff under General Rudolf Konrad, flown in from Greece) under the command of 2nd Armoured Army.<sup>177</sup> The hope of establishing a new front west of the Bačka based on the Danube, which flows from north to south in this area, suffered a serious setback on 7 November, when the Soviet forces established a bridgehead. The German command reacted with two measures that were once again of a purely organizational nature. The newly established Drina front was left to the improvised Corps Group Kübler (1st Mountain Division, the bulk of 118th Light Infantry Division released from the

<sup>172</sup> KTB H.Gr. E, Abt. Ia (4 Nov. 1944), BA-MA RH 19 VII/28: 'The order to mobilize all Albanian males between 16 and 60 years of age for the fight against the Bulgarian Communist enemy, issued some 14 days ago at local instigation, has been largely complied with [...] As the Albanians are engaged in ethnic battle against the Slavs [sic], political considerations take second place.'

<sup>173</sup> The term used by Army Group E; see KTB H.Gr. E, Abt. Ia (16 and 27 Oct. 1944), BA-MA RH 19 VII/27.

<sup>174</sup> Two major uprisings had to be dealt with, and martial law had to be declared (Feb. to June 1945), before the province was final reintegrated in the Yugoslavian federation. See Malcolm, *Kosovo*, 310–13.

<sup>175</sup> On the importance which both sides attached to the Hungarian theatre of war in the autumn of 1944, see Part V, Chapter VII of the present volume.

<sup>176</sup> Command of the improvised units (the Böttcher division and Combat Group Kühlwein) that were to hold the front on the Tisza and the Danube had been transferred to 2nd Armoured Army on 9 October. See *Die geheimen Tagesberichte*, xi. 110 (9 Oct. 1944).

<sup>177</sup> All forces on Croatian soil were still under the command of 2nd Armoured Army at this point: LXVIII Army Corps and V SS Mountain Army Corps (Herzegovina–south-eastern Bosnia), XV Mountain Army Corps (western Bosnia–Dalmatia), and LXIX Army Corps on special mission (Croatia north of the Sava). See *Die geheimen Tagesberichte*, xi. 164 (27 Oct. 1944) and 167 (28 Oct. 1944).

Adriatic, and substantial sections of the German–Croatian gendarmerie).<sup>178</sup> LXVIII Army Corps' area of operations was henceforth confined entirely to the area north of the Drava, and its placement under the command of 2nd Armoured Army was confirmed.<sup>179</sup> The removal from Army Group South's area of operations of Hungary south of the Baja–Kaposvar–Lake Balaton (west bank) line was probably due in no small measure to the idea that the army group should be relieved of all tasks not directly connected with the defence or relief of Budapest. This restructuring, however, could not disguise the fact that the weak units at LXVIII Army Corps' disposal in the middle of November (31st SS Volunteer Armoured Infantry Division,<sup>180</sup> the 1st Regiment of Division 'Brandenburg', and 92nd Motorized Infantry Brigade)<sup>181</sup> were wholly inadequate to its task, and that only one more major unit, 44th Reich Infantry Division 'Hoch- und Deutschmeister', was being brought in. The view expressed by the Commander-in-Chief South-East's chief of staff in this connection ('The division must be described as *extremely battle-worn*'<sup>182</sup>) is some indication of how hopeless the task was—precisely because that view was expressed at a point in the war when the admonition to be 'hard' and 'ruthless' had been repeated so often that it was almost a platitude.<sup>183</sup>

The last piece of good news that the Commander-in-Chief South-East was to receive for a long time came during the period when the Soviet bridgehead on the west bank of the Danube was successfully, if temporarily, cordoned off. On 12 November 1944 a link was established between Command Group Müller (Army Group E) and 2nd Armoured Army, although it continued to be disputed. That put within reach, at least in the medium term, the evacuation of the fought-over south-western part of Serbia and the incorporation of numerous, albeit battle-worn, units (7th SS Division, 11th Luftwaffe Field Division, and 104th Light Infantry Division) in the new eastern front.<sup>184</sup> On 17 November V SS Mountain Corps, operating in the eastern Bosnia-Herzegovina area, was placed under the command of Army Group E.

Meanwhile, in order to provide LXVIII Army Corps with the help needed to hold the Danube line, 2nd Armoured Army urged Weichs to move 1st Mountain

<sup>178</sup> 'Gefechtsbericht Korpsgruppe Kübler für die Zeit vom 12.11. bis 12.12.44' (n.d.), BA-MA RH 24-34/74. According to 'OB Südost, Abt. Ia an Pz.AOK 2' (17 Nov. 1944), RH 19 XI/25, the German–Croatian gendarmerie contingent numbered over 15,000 men.

<sup>179</sup> Referred to in the war diary of the C-in-C South-East as 'the dubious gift north of the Drava'; see KTB OB Südost, Abt. Ia (entry for 4 Dec. 1944), BA-MA RH 19 XI/14.

<sup>180</sup> A unit in the process of assembly, consisting of the cadre personnel of 23rd SS Division, disbanded in October, plus ethnic Germans from the Reich territory and the local area. See Tessin, *Verbände und Truppen*, v. 11–12.

<sup>181</sup> 71st Infantry Division was only brought in from 23 November on. See 'OB Südost, Abt. Ia an Pz.AOK 2' (23.11.1944), BA-MA RH19 XI/25.

<sup>182</sup> 'OB Südost, Abt. Ia an Pz.AOK 2' (9 Nov. 1944), BA-MA RH 19 XI/24. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>183</sup> On this, see also the C-in-C South-East's order of the day on 22 November 1944, 'OB Südost, Abt. Ia an OB 2. Pz.Arme' (22 Nov. 1944), BA-MA RH 19 XI/25.

<sup>184</sup> *Die geheimen Tagesberichte*, xi. 204 (13 Nov. 1944). XXXIV Army Corps from Command Group Müller was placed on special mission with effect from the same day.

Division north, largely abandoning the so-called Drina front. Although the commander-in-chief was unwilling to endorse such an extreme approach, he nevertheless agreed to transfer some sections of the elite unit. However, the Red Army got there first, breaching the German defensive line north of the Drava on a broad front in the middle of the day on 22 November. This was followed by a two-stage attack that came to a standstill only in mid-December at the Margit Line, which ran north to south from the western tip of Lake Balaton to the Croatian-Hungarian border. Then, on 23 November, 1st Mountain Division was ordered to move all its forces to the theatre of war north of the Drava, without even waiting to be replaced by the spearheads of 11th Luftwaffe Field Division, although that replacement was absolutely essential to prevent the immediate loss of the link with Command Group Müller, which had only just been re-established.<sup>185</sup>

For Weichs, the worst result of the Soviet offensive in southern Hungary was that within two weeks he found himself facing a new front on the northern edge of the area under his command, a front that was 150 kilometres long and seemed to have emerged from nowhere. There were serious doubts as to the operational status of the forces immediately available to defend the Drava line, with regard both to numbers<sup>186</sup> and to political reliability.<sup>187</sup> Hopes of making more use of the Ustasha in this situation, since it was seen as having ‘opened up the way to a better future’,<sup>188</sup> had been dampened by a 2nd Armoured Army report of 7 November.<sup>189</sup> The Commander-in-Chief South-East’s chief of staff complained loudly in this situation—as his predecessor had already done at the beginning of October—about subordinate units’ ‘tendencies to retreat’, and in the case of 2nd Armoured Army called for its chief of staff, Ulrich Bürker, to be dismissed and replaced by a ‘heavyweight with plenty of experience of the east’.<sup>190</sup> Such complaints and demands were quite usual at this stage in the war.

The next blow to the Commander-in-Chief South-East came from a somewhat unexpected quarter, despite the fact that, by the end of October, most of his

<sup>185</sup> ‘OB Südost, Abt. Ia an OKW/WFSt’ (23 Nov. 1944), BA-MA RH 19 XI/25.

<sup>186</sup> ‘KTB OB Südost, Abt Ia, Ferngespräche am 4.12.1944’, BA-MA RH19 XI/26: ‘I draw attention once again to the Drava front, which is very weak indeed—only three small battalions of Croatian police to cover 60 km, and they are starting to defect to the Ustasha. Even continuous monitoring is impossible’ (20.05: Ia-Gen. Kübler).

<sup>187</sup> There were considerable reservations about deploying 1st Cossack Division against the Red Army; see Eltz, *Mit den Kosaken*, 175 (29 and 30 Nov. 1944).

<sup>188</sup> ‘Oberbefehlshaber Südost an OKW/WFSt, Abt. Ic’ (16 Nov. 1944), BA-MA RW 4/714b.

<sup>189</sup> ‘Panzerarmeeoberkommando 2, Abt. Ia an OB Südost Ia/IId. Betr.: Zersetzungerscheinungen bei kroatischen und Ust.-Verbänden’ (7 Nov. 1944), BA-MA RH 19 XI/38. Although the opinion of Ustasha units tended at least to be more favourable than that of most army units, in this case too assessments such as ‘of limited use for security and defence purposes’ (VII Ustasha Brigade) predominated. The only exception was the ‘Poglavnik’ Bodyguard Brigade, formed in May 1942, which had reached the strength of a two-part division by the end of 1943. This positive evaluation is also confirmed by various personal impressions; see Eltz, *Mit den Kosaken*, 128 (4 July 1944): ‘This bodyguard regiment makes a surprisingly good impression. The officers are well-trained and mannerly.’

<sup>190</sup> ‘KTB OB Südost, Abt. Ia, Ferngespräche am 6.12.1944’ (20.00, Chef-Gen. von Grolman), BA-MA RH 19 XI/26; also ‘handschrifftl. Tagebuch Generalleutnant von Gyldenfeldt’ (9 Nov. 1944), MSg. 1/1508. Colonel Ulrich Bürker was transferred to the Führer reserve with effect from 7 December, but he was to serve once again as 1st Armoured Army chief of staff from 15 February 1945 until the end of the war.

positions on the Dalmatian coast had finally been abandoned, with the aim of withdrawing the Adriatic front to positions requiring fewer troops and thus obtaining more forces (notably 118th Light Infantry Division) to fight on the new eastern front. It was the decision to include Knin, a small town in northern Dalmatia, in the new defensive line that proved problematic. The resulting defensive position protruded into territory controlled by the National Liberation Army, and this, plus the fact that Knin was a local traffic node, made it an attractive and indispensable target for the conduct of future offensive operations in the area. The distant approaches to the town were captured in the first half of November, and the assault on Knin itself, by three divisions (19th, 20th, and 26th Divisions), lasted from 26 November to 4 December. The units involved were fortunate in having been completely rearmed by the British, and they were consequently able to conduct their attack with weapon systems, such as light tanks and medium-calibre artillery, which had occasionally been captured as booty in the past but had never been used for long, owing to the difficulties involved in maintaining them and obtaining ammunition<sup>191</sup>—a problem that was a thing of the past now that a number of ports on the Adriatic had been captured. The outcome was by far the most devastating defeat that the Wehrmacht had suffered so far in its fight with the National Liberation Army. The bulk of a regiment of 264th Infantry Division and a battalion of the (Croatian) 373rd Infantry Division were wiped out in the battle or taken prisoner.<sup>192</sup> And in this case, unlike Banja Luka just two months earlier, the geographical position and the critical situation on the new eastern front made any idea of retaking the town out of the question.

The next challenge for the Commander-in-Chief South-East arose from events on the Hungarian front, where 3rd Ukrainian Front's successful advance into western Hungary from its bridgeheads on the Danube called into question the decision, taken two weeks earlier, to divide the Hungarian theatre of war between Army Group South-East and Army Group South. On the German side, the authorities again responded by taking the only measure still available to them at this stage in the war, that is, reorganization of the command structure. This consisted in the complete and final transfer of 2nd Armoured Army north of the Drava, and the placement of all command groups still in Yugoslavia, with one exception (LXIX Army Corps), under the command of Army Group E.<sup>193</sup> LXIX Army Corps was placed, for tactical purposes, under the direct command of the Commander-in-Chief South-East (Army Group F). The next formal step required—dissolution of one of the two command groups, either Army Group E or Army Group F, and the transfer of the remaining tasks in the south-eastern

<sup>191</sup> e.g. in the Prozor area at the beginning of March 1943; 718. ID Abt. Ic, 'Lagebericht für die Zeit vom 27.2. bis 6.3.1943' (6 Mar. 1943), BA-MA RH 26-118/34.

<sup>192</sup> The OKW situation report gives a total of 2,730 dead or missing, 700 captured, and 1,058 wounded; see *Die geheimen Tagesberichte*, vi. 282 (11 Dec. 1944). Since at this stage in the war any subsequent correction of those figures would necessarily result in their reduction (owing to the return of stragglers), the figure of over 10,000 dead and captured, quoted in the Yugoslavian post-war literature, is presumably a politically motivated exaggeration.

<sup>193</sup> KTB OB Südost, Abt. Ia (1, 2, and 4 Dec. 1944), BA-MA RH 19 XI/14.

area to the other—was not taken until 23 March 1945. However, it became quite clear in Syrmia, only 24 hours later, that this shift of scenery had little or no effect on events at the front. For the time being, this section of the front had to be regarded as the main theatre of war within the remit of the Commander-in-Chief South-East, if only because it contained such a massive concentration of National Liberation Army forces.<sup>194</sup> The proximity to Belgrade, combined with the fact that Corps Group Kübler was able to locate its—albeit strongpoint-based—defence of this area on a section of the Danube that was consequently lacking as a supply line for 3rd Ukrainian Front, may have persuaded the Soviet and Yugoslav commanders to force the German line in Syrmia westwards before the last Soviet army units were finally moved out of Yugoslavia.<sup>195</sup> The beginning of December was an ideal time for such an operation, since Kübler had already been obliged to send some 1st Mountain Division units to the theatre of war north of the Drava, and 118th Light Infantry Division currently consisted, except for three battalions, of German and Croatian units which were only provisionally under its command and whose ‘fighting strength could only be described as minimal’ (Kübler).<sup>196</sup> Lastly, 7th SS Division was still engaged in crossing the Drina and fighting its way northwards through eastern Bosnia. On the Soviet side, 52nd Rifle Division and 1st Guards’ Fortified Area were available, together with half-a-dozen National Liberation Army divisions. The attack launched on 3 December initially took the form of a purely frontal assault that forced 118th Light Infantry Division back some 10 to 15 kilometres. This was followed, in the next few days, by battalion-strength landing operations on the south bank of the Danube at Vukovar, Osijek, and Valpovo. Kübler did not get very far in his attempts to recapture the old main battle line (the Nibelungen line), which was particularly well situated for future defence purposes, but by 11 December he had managed to destroy all the bridgeheads and had largely maintained control of this disputed stretch of the Danube.<sup>197</sup> The Soviet offensive can only be described as half-hearted, suggesting that the Allied side had speculated on a rapid collapse of the German defences. A second attempt, more carefully planned and employing stronger forces, was not to be. On 16 December the Soviet units began to move to the Hungarian theatre of war, leaving only advisers, trainers, and a fighter- and ground-attack group in the Yugoslavian theatre.<sup>198</sup> Their place on the Syrmian front was taken by the first divisions of the Bulgarian 1st Army (3rd, 8th, and 11th Divisions), which had been formed in November to enable Bulgaria to participate in operations beyond the borders of Yugoslavia.

<sup>194</sup> Corps Group Kübler had already identified five National Liberation Army divisions on a relatively narrow section of the front (about 30 km) in the middle of November. See ‘Gefechtsbericht Korpsgruppe Kübler für die Zeit vom 12.11. bis 12.12.1944’ (n.d.), BA-MA RH 24-34/74.

<sup>195</sup> The post-war literature makes virtually no mention of the Soviet part in the hostilities in Syrmia; see Erickson, *Stalin’s War*, ii. 433–4.

<sup>196</sup> ‘Gefechtsbericht Korpsgruppe Kübler für die Zeit vom 12.11. bis 12.12.44’ (n.d.), BA-MA RH 24-34/74.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid.

<sup>198</sup> *Geschichte des Großen Vaterländischen Krieges*, v. 215.

The turn of the year was dominated by three unexpected successes on the German side, obscuring for a few days the disastrous nature of the general situation in which the Commander-in-Chief South-East now found himself. First, an apparently hasty and ill-prepared attempt by the Bulgarians to complete the task assigned to the Soviet 68th Rifle Corps (22 to 28 December 1944) ended in a fiasco that even the glowing accounts of historians in post-war Communist Bulgaria could not entirely gloss over.<sup>199</sup> Although the Bulgarian 1st Army withdrew a few days later, on the orders of its commander-in-chief, to the relatively peaceful Drava front, it seems from the available sources that the German side did not perceive the connection between these two events. At almost the same time, a unit of the German 1st Cossack Division (2nd Brigade) had to be deployed to eliminate a small Soviet bridgehead established on 25 December at Barcs on the south bank of the Drava. Despite political reservations expressed in this connection, the action was a complete success. Then, on 27 December, the Soviet 233rd Rifle Division was driven back on a broad front, incurring substantial losses.<sup>200</sup> With the help of local partisan units, it managed to hold out for a few more weeks on the south bank of the river, but withdrew to the Hungarian side between 26 and 28 January 1945. The relative lack of German forces in the area nevertheless allowed the partisans to maintain a narrow bridgehead at Barcs. In all of this, it must of course be borne in mind that the German success was possible only because of the limited Soviet commitment to operations on Croatian soil.<sup>201</sup> Had the Red Army deployed anything even approaching the—actually quite small—numbers involved in the Belgrade operation, the total collapse of the position held by LXIX Army Corps in Slavonia would probably have been inevitable and, with it, that of the entire south-east command.

On the Syrmian front, a combat group formed around a battalion of 7th SS Division (III Battalion, 14th Regiment) managed to take the National Liberation Army defenders by surprise and largely restore the course of the old main battle line (the Nibelungen line). Fortune favoured the Germans, in that the vanguard of the Bulgarian 1st Army, which had failed in its mission here at the end of December, was already in the process of moving to the area north of the Drava and must not have taken any part in the battles, or at least not in any appreciable numbers.<sup>202</sup>

Nevertheless, none of these successes gave reason to mitigate the situation assessment which the Commander-in-Chief South-East entered in his war diary for 28 December 1944, and which became something of a leitmotif in 1945. The

<sup>199</sup> Semerdshiew et al., *Geschichte der Bulgarischen Volksarmee*, 120–2.

<sup>200</sup> Eltz, *Mit den Kosaken*, 181–2 (25 and 27 Dec. 1944).

<sup>201</sup> The Soviet 233rd Rifle Division's mission appears to have included protection of the flanks of the Soviet units advancing into Hungary and the establishment of a durable connection with the partisans in the adjoining Bilogora mountains. On this, see 'OB Südost, Gruppe Ic, Ic-Abendmeldung vom 27.12.1944', BA-MA RH 19 XI/27; *Die geheimen Tagesberichte*, xi. 329, 333 (28 and 30 Dec. 1944), and Strugar, *Der jugoslawische Volksbefreiungskrieg*, 251.

<sup>202</sup> *Die geheimen Tagesberichte*, xii. 10 (3 Jan. 1945). '14th SS Regiment succeeded in establishing a bridgehead over the river at Nijemici. Enemy (only guerrillas detected).' Otto Kumm, commander of 7th SS Division at the time, states in his memoirs that his forces found themselves facing Russians, Bulgarians, and National Liberation Army units, in equal measure. See Kumm, *Vorwärts, Prinz Eugen!*, 356.



Map VI.II.4. The course of the front in the western Balkans at the turn of 1944/5

Sources: OKW situation maps, BA-MA, Kart RH 2W/626 to 708.

entry in question contained a numbered list of all the sections of the front and the forces available to defend them. After the statement under item 6 that the section in the south-east of the NDH between Nevesinje and Višegrad (although over 50 kilometres long, as the crow flies) was not just somewhat weakly manned but completely exposed, the list concluded with the following: '7. In the interior of the country: there are no longer any forces available for active anti-partisan warfare. 8. C-in-C South-East has no reserves of any kind.'<sup>203</sup>

### (b) The End of the War in Yugoslavia (January to May 1945)

How did things stand for the Commander-in-Chief South-East, in the shrinking area within his remit, at the beginning of 1945? On the positive side, the first

<sup>203</sup> 'KTB OB Südost, Abt. 0Ia' (28.12.1944), BA-MA RH19 XI/14.

noteworthy factor was the completion at this time of the withdrawal of the last sections of Army Group E from the Greece–Albania–Montenegro area (LXXXI Army Corps, with 22nd, 181st, and 297th Infantry Divisions).<sup>204</sup> This meant that the army group now had substantial and extremely welcome reinforcements at its disposal, although the troops in question were admittedly completely battle-worn in many cases. At least equally important was the fact that 3rd Ukrainian Front's comparatively half-hearted attempts to block Army Group E's last escape route at Kraljevo, or to break into Croatian territory through Syrmia, clearly showed that the Soviet high command had decided not to include western Yugoslavia in its further advance. The occupation of the Drava front by the Bulgarian 1st Army—and by the Yugoslavian 3rd Army alongside it to the east—unquestionably confirmed that decision.

On the negative side there was the fact that, primarily for political reasons, Hitler insisted on maintaining the defence of the NDH, which was now in the nature of a salient, and on giving his personal consent for even comparatively minor moves to straighten the front (such as the abandonment of Višegrad in the Serbian–Croatian border area, for example).<sup>205</sup> The result was that, with the exception of the Syrmian front, all other sections of the front could now be manned by appreciable troop contingents only at the most obvious points of attack, while the remainder was only loosely monitored. And, just when military developments seemed likely to force the partisans to adopt a more orthodox form of warfare, this weakness on the part of their opponents enabled them to continue moving large units into the German-occupied hinterland. The development which an increasing number of National Liberation Army brigades and divisions had undergone in recent months was also a source of some concern. On the one hand, there was little doubt that German units with the fighting strength of 1st Mountain Division, 7th SS Division, or even 118th Light Infantry Division would be able to hold their own in any tactical situation for the foreseeable future, even against partisan formations that were numerically superior and well armed by the Allies. On the other, an increasing number of combat units on the German side were deficient in various ways, in respect of training and/or equipment, and were now in danger of getting into serious trouble, as 264th Infantry Division had at Knin, in any encounter with the National Liberation Army's new military hardware.

Lastly, the process by which Ante Pavelić endeavoured to mobilize the last human resources of his Ustasha state at the turn of the year had almost no operational effect. Neither his personal assumption of supreme command of the army, navy, and air force on 4 December 1944<sup>206</sup> nor the announcement of the

<sup>204</sup> The vanguard of this unit reached the Višegrad bridgehead in Croatian territory on 13 January, shortly before it was evacuated. With that, Army Group E's expedition was at an end. See also Part VI, Chapter III of the present volume.

<sup>205</sup> *KTB OKW*, iv/1, 1049 (28 Jan. 1945).

<sup>206</sup> Except during short transitional periods, this office in the NDH had usually been exercised by the minister of war rather than the head of state. See 'Lagebeurteilung und Tätigkeitsbericht des Marineverbindungsstabes Kroatiens für die Zeit von Anfang Dezember 1943 bis Ende Januar 1944' (n.d.), BA-MA RM 35 III/173.

amalgamation of regular army units and Ustasha militia to form 16 new divisions on 1 January 1945 had any impact on the further course of the war. In the first case, this was because, under the agreements concluded in 1942 and 1943, the relevant German army group or the army high command was in any case in command of operations in the field in the vast majority of cases. In the second case, the measure in question did nothing whatever to repair the shattered relationship between the majority of Croatian recruits and their unloved state or to remedy the deficiencies in training and equipment.<sup>207</sup>

Only by means of military successes—insofar as they were still within the realm of possibility—could the Commander-in-Chief South-East hope to change the hapless situation in the area under his command to his advantage, at least in the short term. With the arrival of two ‘Prinz Eugen’ regiments on 17 January, an opportunity arose to build on the success achieved on the Syrmian front on 3 January and, with the assistance of 41st Fortress Division and 11th Light Infantry Division, establish a main battle line that was based on the course of the Danube in the north and on the course of the Sava in the south, and could therefore be held with fewer forces. This operation, code-named FRÜHLINGSSTURM (17 to 19 January 1945), was a complete success. Not only was the Syrmian front moved, as planned, to the narrowest stretch between the Danube and the Sava, but, despite the fact that it had involved a frontal attack on heavily armed enemy forces, the relative losses on either side resembled those of the more successful large-scale operations of 1942/3 rather than those incurred in more regular warfare.<sup>208</sup> On the Yugoslav side, the two Syrmian operations in January 1945 undoubtedly led to a real crisis of confidence within the high command of the National Liberation Army, which was then in the process of restructuring with the regular army.<sup>209</sup> The fact that the two Bulgarian divisions severely damaged in the same theatre of war in December 1944 were shaken by numerous cases of insubordination and mutiny during their move to Hungary<sup>210</sup> could also

<sup>207</sup> German observers were therefore also inclined to take a somewhat cynical view of this latest development: ‘No sign so far of any appreciable start on the general mobilization ordered by the government, especially as—apart from the basic attitude—the organizational and technical prerequisites are also lacking. Some of the conscripts have already been registered, but the general opinion among them is that the preparations will drag on until the situation changes and conscription becomes unnecessary. Efforts are also being made to avoid the call-up by obtaining medical certificates of unfitness, etc. The “general mobilization” is often mocked for being a grand announcement that nobody takes very seriously.’ See ‘Bericht der Einsatzgruppe der Sicherheitspolizei und des SD Kroatien’ (28 Dec. 1944), BA-MA RH 19 XI/38. For details of the amalgamation of regular army and Ustasha armed forces, see Tomasevich, *War and Revolution*, ii. 456–60.

<sup>208</sup> According to *Die geheimen Tagesberichte*, xii. 66 (21 Jan. 1945), enemy losses totalled 2,019 dead and 257 captured, plus booty of 60 rifles and 170 machine guns. *KTB OKW*, iv/2, 1033 (23 Jan. 1945) puts the German losses at 188 dead. For a brief insight into the planning and course of the operation at company level, see Hoffmann, *Rückzug*, 86–95.

<sup>209</sup> Djilas, *Wartime*, 441–2.

<sup>210</sup> Whereas Communist historiography saw these events as the work of ‘reactionary pro-German subversives’, recent Bulgarian research has concluded that the first ‘wave of purges’ in September/October 1944 and the abrupt introduction of the commissar system were primarily responsible for the defeat and the ensuing demoralization; see Ratschew, ‘Bulgarien’. It should, of course, also be borne in

have been entered by Commander-in-Chief South-East on the credit side of his account, had he known about them at the time.<sup>211</sup>

7th SS Division had to move to central Slavonia at the beginning of February for a major operation of conventional proportions. The purpose of the operation was to cut the connection that the National Liberation Army's VI Corps maintained with the outside world through the Barcs bridgehead, and to destroy or capture as booty the stocks of supplies that were thought to be held in the Papuk mountains.<sup>212</sup> 297th Infantry Division and some units of 1st Cossack Division were deployed alongside the 'Prinz Eugen' Division. Although a number of well-stocked supply depots were found in the Papuk mountains and either secured or destroyed, it is difficult to determine from the few sources available just how successful Operation WEHRWOLF (6 to 21 February) was.<sup>213</sup> Although Barcs was taken, partisan movement across the Drava seems to have resumed after a week at most.<sup>214</sup>

Clearly, with the situation as it was, concentrations of forces of the kind that permitted these successes in Syrmia and in the Papuk mountains came at a price. So, after the collapse of the German position in Serbia, there can have been no question of monitoring the front, even partly, in the most northerly section of the Drina. Even after the complete transfer of Army Group E, there was still a yawning 150-kilometre-wide gap between XXI Mountain Army Corps in the Sarajevo area and XXXIV Army Corps in Syrmia. To remedy this situation, 22nd Infantry Division, newly arrived from Montenegro and placed directly under the Commander-in-Chief South-East (Army Group F), was ordered to push north from south-eastern Bosnia and, 'employing mobile tactics, to secure the lower reaches of the river between Zvornik and Drinjaca'. In particular, the associated idea of 'opening up the Zvornik–Tuzla road [...] as a supply line for the division'<sup>215</sup> proved problematic, since this was the supply line used by the National Liberation Army in recent weeks to begin developing Tuzla, which had been held by the partisans since the end of September 1944, into a salient extending deep into the north-eastern part of the country.<sup>216</sup> As a result, 22nd Infantry Division was

mind that, since 1918, the Bulgarian army had had only very limited experience of military action against irregular formations, and that it now faced a completely new task.

<sup>211</sup> On German unawareness of these incidents, see *KTB OKW*, iv/2, 1002: 'Tito's forces are now stationed on the northern front, instead of the Bulgarians; the reason for this is not yet known' (entry for 9 Jan. 1945).

<sup>212</sup> See divisional order for Operation WEHRWOLF (4 Feb. 1945), excerpts of which are reproduced in Kumm, *Vorwärts, Prinz Eugen!*, 366–9.

<sup>213</sup> As far as the course and outcome of WEHRWOLF are concerned, the situation reports and entries in the OKW war diary are confined to a few cryptic comments. This includes the final report, which mentions the figure of 1,988 dead (see *KTB OKW*, iv/2, 1123, 24 Feb. 1945) but contains no information at all about rifles and machine guns captured as booty. No operation file could be obtained.

<sup>214</sup> *KTB OKW*, iv/2, 1131, 1138 (27 Feb. and 2 Mar. 1945).

<sup>215</sup> Excerpts quoted in 22. Infanteriedivision, Abt. Ia, No. 100/45 geh., 'Bericht über die Durchbruchskämpfe aus dem Raum Sokolac–Vlasenice über Zvornik nach Bijeljina' (28 Feb. 1945). See Hnilicka, *Das Ende*, 323–50.

<sup>216</sup> See annex 7 to 22. Infanteriedivision, Abt. Ia, No. 100/45, geh., 'Die Entwicklung der Feindlage im Raum Sokolac–Vlasenice–Zvornik–Musl, Sepak–Janja' (Jan.–Feb. 1945) (Ic): '22nd Division came up against enemy forces which had, in the meantime, made the Drina area their own

exposed during its march north (starting on 27 January) to very heavy attacks, both from the east and from the north, by at least six National Liberation Army divisions and units of three others. Although—unlike 264th Infantry Division two months earlier—the German unit proved equal to every crisis, and tactically superior to the enemy forces in both attack and defence, the persistent Yugoslav counter-attacks made any idea of establishing even a temporary rear communication line completely illusory. On 11 February, after Zvornik had been in German hands again for just a week, the decision was taken to withdraw 22nd Infantry Division from the Drina line and place it at the disposal of XXXIV Army Corps in Syrmia for the defence of its southern front.<sup>217</sup> Subsequent attempts by the Commander-in-Chief South-East to do more than merely ‘monitor’ this section of the front, or to reduce the Tuzla salient (discussed later), were also unsuccessful. For the first time, the National Liberation Army had succeeded in inflicting an operational-level defeat<sup>218</sup> on a major unit of the Wehrmacht that could rightly be described as ‘elite’<sup>219</sup> by the standards obtaining in this theatre of war. A further setback, probably inevitable in the circumstances reigning at the time, was the fall of Mostar (14 February). The Mostar–Nevesinje area, held only by the bulk (that is, 369th and 370th Infantry Regiments) of the (Croatian) 369th Infantry Division, much reduced in numbers since October 1944, had been under large-scale attack by the National Liberation Army VIII Corps (9th, 19th, 26th, and 29th Divisions) since 5 February, an attack in which 1st Armoured Brigade, deployed to such decisive effect at Knin, was also engaged.<sup>220</sup> The German positions were soon overrun on all sides, and the numerical inferiority resulting from the capitulation of the Croatian units attached to the German forces (mainly sections of the Croatian 9th Division, a new division consisting of Domobrani and Ustasha units), and also of the remaining Croatian troops of the (Croatian) 373rd Infantry Division, was felt even more strongly than it would have been in any case. A relief attempt by 181st Infantry Division also failed, so the remnants of the two regiments had to force their way out alone after the fall of Mostar, and only one of them (370th

assembly and transit district, moving the above-mentioned units westwards through it and strongly covering its flanks, especially to the south.’ See Hnilicka, *Das Ende*, 356–61.

<sup>217</sup> See 22. Infanteriedivision, Abt. Ia, No. 100/45, geh., ‘Bericht über die Durchbruchskämpfe aus dem Raum Sokolac–Vlasenice über Zvornik nach Bijeljina’ (28 Feb. 1945). See Hnilicka, *Das Ende*, 331.

<sup>218</sup> Hnilicka’s account is mainly concerned with 22nd Division’s tactical successes, and his conclusion that the operation was ‘successful’ is clearly short of the mark. See Metzsch, *Die Geschichte der 22. Infanteriedivision*, 120–1.

<sup>219</sup> In 1940 the German 22nd Infantry Division and 7th Air Division together formed the only fully operational airborne force in the world (XI Air Corps). 22nd Infantry Division was fully involved in the landing in the Netherlands in May 1940, 5th Mountain Division being deployed in its place in the operation against Crete in the following year. After eleven months on the eastern front the division was stationed in Crete from November 1942 on, to defend it in the event of an anticipated British landing. See also Metzsch, *Die Geschichte der 22. Infanteriedivision*. Although most of the heavy equipment was left behind when the division withdrew to Thessaloníki (Sept./Oct. 1944), it was markedly different from most of the Army Group E units, in that its troops were younger, and its cadres had more front-line experience and more firepower.

<sup>220</sup> Strugar, *Der jugoslawische Volksbefreiungskrieg*, 287.

Infantry Regiment) succeeded.<sup>221</sup> In the following days the partisan units were able to press on and occupy the Neretva valley as far as the 'Ivan Saddle' pass, not far from Sarajevo. And by the beginning of March even this line could be held only with the help of parts of the 13th Regiment of 7th SS Division that were hastily brought in.

Operations such as FRÜHLINGSSTURM and WEHRWOLF may still have been justified in the context of the Yugoslavian theatre of war as a whole, despite the dangerous exposure of other sections of the front that this entailed, but the next operation was a gross misjudgement of the Commander-in-Chief South-East's limited possibilities. As a flanking measure to support the latest German counter-offensive in Hungary (Operation FRÜHLINGSERWACHEN), Army Group E was instructed on 6 March to establish two bridgeheads on the north bank of the Drava, and to advance from there towards Mohacs (Operation WALDTEUFEL). The mobilization of troops for this purpose (297th Infantry Division, 11th Luftwaffe Field Division, 104th Light Infantry Division, and 1st Cossack Division) necessarily meant thinning the forces on the other Yugoslav fronts, a step that was more than irresponsible.<sup>222</sup> In Hungary itself, a position 6 to 8 kilometres deep was successfully established north of the river, but only because the attackers initially faced only two Bulgarian infantry divisions. However, this phase soon came to an end when the Soviet 133rd Rifle Corps joined in the fray. On 19 March the German attempt to seize the initiative on the Drava front ended irrevocably with the evacuation of the bridgeheads.

The National Liberation Army's response was not long in coming. On 20 March the NLA 4th Army (the National Liberation Army had introduced army high commands on 1 January 1945) began a concentric move against the west Bosnian city of Bihać, which was largely free of German troops. The attempt to move 104th Light Infantry Division rapidly to this new focal point, after it returned from Hungary, came too late to have any effect. On the evening of 28 March Bihać fell into the hands of the partisans.<sup>223</sup> The last German offensive operation in this theatre of war also failed because of the practice of shifting most units back and forth from one focal point to another at shorter and shorter intervals. The aim of the operation, code-named MAIGEWITTER (24 to 31 March 1945), was to retake Tuzla in north-eastern Bosnia, captured by the partisans in September 1944. The city had been incorporated in the front of the Yugoslavian 2nd Army since the middle of January, and now formed a salient threatening the supply line to Sarajevo. Although XXXIV Army Corps had quite substantial forces assigned to it, that is, three regiments (one each from 7th SS Division, 117th Light Infantry Division, and 22nd Infantry Division) and the Geiger Group (a provisional combat group of German–Croatian gendarmerie), the attack failed after only a few days. The late arrival of the SS regiment, which had been obliged to assist the hard-pressed 181st Infantry Division

<sup>221</sup> On the course of the battles for Mostar, see Schraml, *Kriegsschauplatz Kroatiens*, 116–22, and the highly descriptive article by Biocic, 'L'Opération de Mostar'. The failure of the remaining Croatian troops of 369th Infantry Division can be deduced only by reading between the lines of Schraml's history of the division, and the OKW assessment ('largely destroyed') is much clearer. See *KTB OKW*, iv/2, 1411.

<sup>222</sup> *KTB OKW*, iv/2, 1148 (6 Mar. 1945).

<sup>223</sup> Ibid. 1191, 1202, 1205 (22, 27, and 28 Mar. 1945).

in the Sarajevo area, gave the Yugoslavian 2nd Army the opportunity to block the attacking wedges that were endeavouring to reach Tuzla from the east (the Geiger Group) and the north (the regiments of 117th Light Infantry Division and 22nd Infantry Division), and embroil them in costly engagements.<sup>224</sup> The operation was terminated on 31 March without achieving its objective.<sup>225</sup>

On 28 March, even before Operation MAIGEWITTER was brought to an end, the Yugoslavian 2nd Army command launched a large-scale attack on the exposed city of Sarajevo, which had been held for so long only because a large part of 7th SS Division had spent the whole of March stabilizing the front in the south and keeping the last supply line to the north (via Zenica) open. On 30 March Führer headquarters bowed to the pressure from seven divisions of the Yugoslavian army and granted XXI Mountain Army Corps permission to abandon the second-largest city in the NDH.<sup>226</sup> Surprisingly, the realization that if the city were evacuated the remaining northern half of the Croatian state would no longer present any of the geographical features required for long-term defence, came only 24 hours later. On 31 March orders were given for Sarajevo to be evacuated and for Croatia also to be evacuated as far as the Bihać area—Una river—Bjelovar—2nd Armoured Army line in Hungary.<sup>227</sup> However, the time allowed in this connection (until 20 April) proved much too generous, because the Yugoslav spring offensive was launched in the early hours of 12 April. From a strategic point of view, this major Yugoslav operation was questionable, to say the least, since in the north the Red Army was already close to Vienna and Berlin. It can be understood only in the context of the fear that was still at the core of Tito's plans, even at this late date—the fear that his opponents within the country might still find a way of securing the assistance of the western Allies at the last minute, and so deny him the unlimited control over the entire territory of the former kingdom of Yugoslavia that he had been seeking since 1941.<sup>228</sup>

From an operational point of view, given the course of the front in the limited area now within the Commander-in-Chief South-East's remit, the most obvious option for the Yugoslavian command would actually have been to delay operations in the east and thrust into the flanks of Army Group E from the Bihać area (4th Army) and the other side of the Drava (3rd Army). Instead, it placed the point of concentration of the attack—with thirteen divisions of 2nd Army, ten divisions of 1st Army, plus the latter's 2nd Armoured Brigade<sup>229</sup>—on the eastern front in eastern Bosnia and Syrmia, where, particularly in the Syrmian section, by far the greatest concentration of German troops per kilometre was to be expected in a relatively narrow space. While this approach was relatively secure and predictable, it

<sup>224</sup> The account in Hoffmann, *Rückzug*, 102–14, gives a vivid picture of the difficulties of fighting an ‘irregular’ opponent who, by now, had distinctly superior firepower.

<sup>225</sup> *KTB OKW*, iv/2, 1213 (31 Mar. 1945).

<sup>226</sup> Ibid. 1210 (30 Mar. 1945). <sup>227</sup> Ibid. 1213 (31 Mar. 1945).

<sup>228</sup> On this, see the impressions of one of his closest advisers during the years in question: Djilas, *Wartime*, 441.

<sup>229</sup> *Historical Atlas of the Liberation War*. Unlike 1st Brigade, deployed at Knin and Mostar, which had been equipped with light American Stuart tanks by the British, this unit fielded Soviet T-34s.



Map VI.II.5. The course of the front in the area of Army Group E (C-in-C South-East) on 12 April 1945

Sources: OKW situation maps, BA-MA, Kart RH 2W/626 to 708.

also involved the prospect of heavy losses on the Yugoslav side.<sup>230</sup> As far as the author knows, it is impossible at present to determine with absolute certainty whether the final decision in favour of a frontal attack was prompted primarily by the desire to make up for the dent suffered on the Syrmian front in January 1945,<sup>231</sup> or by recollections of German units' ability to fight their way out of almost any encirclement as 'moving pockets'. The politically pertinent question as to whether the first option would have been feasible without the help of larger mechanized—that is, foreign (Bulgarian or Soviet)—units may have also played a part.

On the German–Croatian side, the new Commander-in-Chief South-East, Alexander Löhr, had what appeared to be an impressive array of troops at his

<sup>230</sup> Ibid., according to which 1st Army alone lost 36,000 dead during the April campaign.

<sup>231</sup> According to Djilas, *Wartime*, 442, this may have played at least a minor part in the decision-making process.

disposal for defence against this operation, but it consisted largely of units that were either completely worn down (such as the three Croatian legionnaire divisions, reduced to weak regimental strength) or normally used for other purposes (like the German–Croatian police battalions). The only continuously built-up position on the front was the Syrmian section defended by XXXIV<sup>232</sup> and LXXXI Army Corps,<sup>233</sup> and even there the only available means of anti-tank defence were close-combat weapons. XXI Mountain Army Corps' tardy withdrawal<sup>234</sup> from the Sarajevo area towards the Sava did enable the front to be shortened, but it also meant that the crossing over the Sava at Brod had to be held until the evacuation of this large formation had been completed. After the loss of Bihać, the weak XV Mountain Army Corps<sup>235</sup> was immediately exposed to further attacks by the Yugoslavian 4th Army, and it spent the next few weeks fighting its way back along the north Adriatic coast. Eastern Slavonia was held by the newly formed XV Cossack Cavalry Corps,<sup>236</sup> and western Slavonia (below the level of Barcs), including Zagreb, was held by LXIX Army Corps.<sup>237</sup> On the eve of the large-scale Yugoslav attack, the army group reserve in Zagreb consisted of one motorized army sapper battalion, one army anti-aircraft battalion, and one armoured anti-tank company.<sup>238</sup> The fact that the bulk of the newly formed Croatian army, together with three of its own command HQs, was concentrated in an area that—after the experiences of the past few months—would have been regarded as the last possible location for a conventional major enemy operation (western Slavonia) shows that even the reformed Croatian forces were felt to have, at most, the minimal competence required to fight local partisan units.

Lastly, a rear position in which parts of Löhr's army group could have regrouped after losing the salient formed by the NDH existed only on paper. Although the Karlovac–Dugoselo–Koprivinca position, known as the 'Zvonimir line', had been explored in the autumn of 1944 out of consideration for German–Croatian relations, it had not been consolidated to any extent.<sup>239</sup>

An encirclement operation by the Yugoslavian 1st Army in the Syrmia area was blocked for long enough to allow XXI Army Corps to withdraw from eastern Bosnia, but not without a price. 11th Luftwaffe Field Division lost the equivalent of a regiment before 7th SS Division crossed over at Brod on 18 April, enabling the Syrmian salient to be abandoned. There were no further setbacks of this kind, but once again, the attempt to establish even a moderately continuous defensive front lasted barely a week (25 April to 2 May, some 60 kilometres east of Zagreb). It

<sup>232</sup> Composition on 12 April 1945: parts of 7th SS Division, 22nd Infantry Division, 41st Fortress Division, 963rd Fortress Brigade.

<sup>233</sup> Composition on 12 April 1945: 11th Luftwaffe Field Division, 963rd Fortress Brigade.

<sup>234</sup> Composition on 12 April 1945: bulk of 7th SS Division, 181st Infantry Division, 369th (Croatian) Infantry Division, and 964th, 966th, 969th, and 1017th Fortress Brigades.

<sup>235</sup> Composition on 12 April 1945: 373rd (Croatian) Infantry Division, 392nd (Croatian) Infantry Division, 104th Light Infantry Division.

<sup>236</sup> Composition on 12 April 1945: 1st and 2nd Cossack Divisions.

<sup>237</sup> Composition on 12 April 1945: Fischer Division (18th SS Police Mountain Regiment, 5th SS Police Regiment), 20th Light Infantry Reserve Regiment.

<sup>238</sup> Schmidt-Richberg, *Der Endkampf*, 112–13.

<sup>239</sup> Ibid. 117–18.

might already have been suspected that this regrouping too was in vain, because in the meantime XV Mountain Army Corps, in retreating along the Adriatic coast in the face of the Yugoslavian 4th Army's renewed attack on 1 April, had effectively deprived the army group of its deep flank. The bulk of the corps had to withdraw towards Ljubljana, while the Croatian 392nd Infantry Division, driven back in a north-westerly direction, found itself again in the area of XCVII Army Corps (237th Infantry Division, 188th Mountain Division), which was in the process of evacuating the Istrian peninsula.<sup>240</sup> On 20 April, to prevent the Yugoslavian 4th Army from attacking the bulk of his army group on its unprotected right flank, the Commander-in-Chief South-East ordered the Croatian 392nd Infantry Division to form a hedgehog position round Fiume, together with XCVII Army Corps, and tie down the enemy forces. The move was successful, but it resulted in the loss of the three divisions. In the face of superior enemy force, they were obliged to lay down their arms in the early hours of 7 May, the first of the army group's major formations to do so.<sup>241</sup> Meanwhile, the past two weeks had been dominated by Col.-Gen. Löhr's efforts to get as much of his army group as possible into Austria, so that it could surrender to the forces of the western Allies. However, Germany's unconditional surrender on 8 May meant that Löhr's plan only worked for the vanguard of the army group. Between 175,000 and 200,000 German troops ended up in Yugoslav captivity, where the privations were such that less than half of them survived.<sup>242</sup> It is still a matter of debate whether a speedier withdrawal could have prevented such an outcome.<sup>243</sup> Things went even harder for the Croats, Serbs, Slovenes, and Russian exiles (Cossacks) who had been trying to reach the Yugoslavian–Austrian border with Army Group E. They were either taken prisoner by the National Liberation Army or (in the case of the Cossacks) forced back over the border by the British after 9 May. Many of them were shot in a series of mass executions in the second half of May, in which, in the case of the NDH forces, the number of victims was almost as high as the losses they had suffered in the previous four years of war.<sup>244</sup>

<sup>240</sup> XCVII Army Corps was placed under the C-in-C South-East only with effect from 24 April. See Hnilicka, *Das Ende*, 137.

<sup>241</sup> One of the best descriptions of the downfall of XCVII Army Corps is still Schraml, *Kriegsschauplatz Kroatien*, 278–82.

<sup>242</sup> Estimate based essentially on Böhme's analysis in *Die deutschen Kriegsgefangenen in Jugoslawien*, 42–136 and 254. Böhme assumes that about 80,000 Germans and Austrians died in Yugoslav captivity. The picture of the situation in the last days of the war is so confused that it is extremely difficult to determine exactly how many Wehrmacht troops ended up in Yugoslav captivity after 8/9 May 1945, and future research on the subject will still have to rely on estimates. It is even more difficult to estimate how many German prisoners died as a result of arbitrary attacks by their guards in the first days and weeks after they were captured, and how many died of exhaustion in the course of their march into the interior. The custodial authorities may have been unwilling to produce figures for the number of such cases, or they may not have been in a position to do so. The Red Cross has reliable data only on the number of men who returned home in 1948/9 (about 85,000). *Ibid.* 277–8.

<sup>243</sup> Schmidt-Richberg, *Der Endkampf*, 151. There are conflicting accounts of the precise circumstances in which the Yugoslavians captured Löhr and his staff. See *ibid.* 156, and Tomasevich, *War and Revolution*, ii. 756–7.

<sup>244</sup> According to Tomasevich, *War and Revolution*, ii. 765, the Croatian armed forces (Ustasha and territorial army) had reported some 65,000 dead and missing by May 1945. A further 60,000 were killed in the mass executions of May 1945.

## 6. EXCURSUS: WAR CRIMES COMMITTED BY THE OCCUPYING POWERS

The practice of the occupying powers, Germany, Italy, Bulgaria, and Hungary, with regard to deportations and reprisals in the territory of partitioned Yugoslavia has always held a special place in the historiography of occupation regimes in the Second World War. This is attributable on the one hand to the fact that Yugoslavia was the only area in Europe under German rule where the repressive measures were comparable in scale and intensity to those adopted in Belorussia and Poland. This, in turn, is closely bound up with the question of the driving forces behind this policy, and the extent to which racist motives played a decisive part and therefore justify speaking of 'ethnic cleansing', or even genocide, in this connection.

The crimes discussed in greatest detail in the research literature are those committed on the German side during the repression of the 1941 Serbian uprising. This applies both to the numbers shot (about 20,000 in barely four months)<sup>245</sup> and to the connection with the Holocaust resulting from the extensive extermination of the Jewish community. The murder of the Jews has largely contributed to a bewildering confusion of Holocaust and reprisal policy in post-war perceptions.<sup>246</sup>

In order to classify German, Italian, Bulgarian, and Hungarian reprisal policy during the occupation, one must first consider the different political conditions in the various occupation zones or successor states resulting from partition. In this respect, northern Slovenia (occupied by Germany), central Dalmatia and the offshore islands (occupied by Italy), eastern and central Macedonia (occupied by Bulgaria), and the Bačka and the Mur area (occupied by Hungary) were special cases, since they were all, *de facto* and *de jure*, provinces of the occupying mother country. The ensuing deportations certainly justify the use of the term 'ethnic cleansing', but they differed greatly in respect of aims and intensity. The policy first appeared, in its clearest and most uncompromising form, in German-occupied Slovenia and in the Bačka, whereas in Dalmatia the Italians preferred to reduce the Croatian share of the population by encouraging existing ethnic conflicts. In Macedonia, the willingness to wait and see with which the majority of the population greeted annexation by the Bulgarians, with whom they had close cultural and historical ties, rendered a policy of 'ethnic cleansing' largely superfluous.

In Slovenia and the Bačka, the hardest hit were members of the intelligentsia (teachers, clerics, lawyers), who were regarded as the bearers of national aspirations, and farmers, whose farms were confiscated and handed over to ethnically 'more acceptable' new settlers—in the case of Slovenia, to ethnic Germans from the Gottschee area in the Italian occupation zone.<sup>247</sup>

<sup>245</sup> 'Der Bevollmächtigte Kommandierende General in Serbien an den Wehrmachtbefehlshaber Südost' (13 Feb. 1942), BA-MA RW 40/26.

<sup>246</sup> It was primarily Wehrmacht units that were responsible for murdering almost all the male members of the Jewish population during the 1941 Serbian uprising. On this, and the reasons for the intersection of Holocaust and reprisal policy in Serbia in 1941, see Browning, *The Origins*, 334–46, and Manoschek, *Serbien*.

<sup>247</sup> On German occupation policy in Slovenia, see Griesser-Pecar, *Das zerrissene Volk*, 17–32.

While such measures are unquestionably contrary to international law, the historian is faced with an incomparably more complex state of affairs when it comes to assessing the reprisals that were taken in fighting the resistance. The international laws of war that were applicable during the Second World War had for the most part been codified in the years preceding the outbreak of the First World War, and as a result of the many compromises made in the process of drafting them there were a number of gaps. A further problem was that the idea that Europeans might one day go to war with the intention not only of defeating neighbouring peoples but of permanently subjugating or even exterminating them had never entered the heads of educated men and women at the time. A natural-law theorist would probably have considered a situation such as that which arose for the Serbs in the NDH after the summer of 1941 as a classic case of legitimate self-defence. An international-law theorist, on the contrary, would have paid less attention to the causes of this defensive battle than to the manner in which it was conducted. The recognition of guerrillas as belligerents under the 1907 Hague Regulations respecting the Laws and Customs of War on Land was subject to conditions which both the partisans and the Chetniks probably met only in isolated cases, at least until the late summer of 1944.<sup>248</sup> No less problematic was the invocation, under the Hague Regulations, of a basic right of resistance of the civilian population of an occupied country, a right which has never existed in that form but which some recent writers deduce from Article 2 of the Hague Regulations.<sup>249</sup> In the case of the National Liberation Army, this lack of entitlement was further cemented by the fact that, unlike the Chetniks in the Mihailović organization, the NLA was not in a position to claim the status of a force recognized and commanded by the Yugoslav government-in-exile. However, according to the understanding of the international laws of war that was current in the inter-war years, that would have been a *sine qua non* for the recognition of belligerent status, even in theory. Under the law as understood at the time, whether captured guerrillas were to be spared was entirely and exclusively at the discretion of the occupying power.<sup>250</sup>

The legal position was less clear with respect to reprisals taken by the occupying power against the civilian population in the area of operations. Article 50 of the Hague Regulations stipulated that reprisals against the civilian population were

<sup>248</sup> The conditions were: 1. To be commanded by a person responsible for his subordinates; 2. To have a fixed distinctive emblem recognizable at a distance; 3. To carry arms openly; and 4. To conduct their operations in accordance with the laws and customs of war. The requirement to have a fixed distinctive emblem recognizable at a distance, a requirement that was particularly difficult for a guerrilla organization to meet, may have been fulfilled for the first time by the National Liberation Army's VIII Corps, which came over from the island of Viš and landed in Herzegovina in September and October 1944. However, this large formation had been equipped by the Allied high command in Italy. Schmider, *Partisanenkrieg in Jugoslawien*, 414–15.

<sup>249</sup> See, e.g., Meyer, *Die deutsche Besatzung in Frankreich*, 245, n. 10. Article 2 of the Hague Regulations spoke only of the right of the inhabitants of a state at war, on the approach of the enemy, to spontaneously take up arms and, with a fixed distinctive emblem recognizable at a distance, take part in the hostilities.

<sup>250</sup> On this, see the commendably sober analysis in Lieb, *Konventioneller Krieg oder NS-Weltanschauungskrieg?*, ch. I.1, with further references.

permissible only if there was clear evidence of resistance. Of course, this did not alter the principle, accepted by most international-law theorists in the inter-war period, that it was permissible to take hostages in order to ensure the internal security of occupied territory. As to whether reprisals might extend to killing hostages, the Hague Regulations had nothing to say either for or against. This omission, and the view taken by German international-law theorists that Article 50 applied only in occupied areas that were demonstrably no longer within the ‘combat area’—that is, that given the continuing war in the air and the threat of a ‘Second Front’, it applied in almost none of the countries under German rule—was the legal basis for most of the crimes committed by units of the Wehrmacht involving the death of members of the Yugoslav civilian population. The Nuremberg war crimes tribunals sentenced the Wehrmacht commanders who had engaged in this practice to long terms of imprisonment, but the sentences handed down by the Allied judges were based on the excessive use of the practice (shooting 50 for 1 or 100 for 1), not on the view that killing civilians was in itself reprehensible.<sup>251</sup>

The one-sided interpretation of the international laws of war discussed above might suggest that German occupation policy was subordinated from the outset to an all-embracing concept of repression that left no room for political priorities. That was by no means the case, as is shown by the way the occupiers felt compelled to take account of the different framework conditions they encountered in the independent state of Croatia on the one hand, and the Serbian ‘residual state’ on the other. The fundamentally different conditions prevailing in those two territories, and the effect of those conditions on the reprisal policy of the German, Italian, and—as from January 1942—Bulgarian occupying powers, have not always been sufficiently taken into account in the literature.<sup>252</sup>

The first thing to bear in mind is that Old Serbia, essentially confined to its 1912 borders (including the Banat), was not even recognized as a sovereign state by the Axis alliance until the end of German occupational rule, so that public life there was wholly determined by the military law of the occupier. The situation in the NDH was different. Although the Pavelić regime was partially incapacitated by the Italians (1941/2) and the Germans (1943/5) in many areas (such as tactical command of the bulk of its own armed forces), its status as a member country of the Tripartite Pact enabled it to negotiate a considerable attenuation, or even cancellation, of many German or Italian demands. With regard to reprisals, this meant that the usual practice in Serbia of shooting 50 for 1 or 100 for 1 was reduced to shooting 10 for 1 west of the Drina, where, furthermore, the task had to be performed by the Croatian security organs. It should also be borne in mind that the special circumstances in the NDH (above all, the fact that the leader of the Serbian nationalist resistance movement had little influence there) facilitated a gradual rapprochement between the German occupying power and a number of

<sup>251</sup> See *ibid.* and the official publication on the 7th Nuremberg Trial (the South-East Case), *Hostage Case*.

<sup>252</sup> See, e.g., the extensive suppression of this aspect in Gumz, ‘Wehrmacht Perceptions’, esp. 1018, 1024, and 1030.

Chetnik groups. In Old Serbia such a rapprochement did not begin until November 1943, and it was always overshadowed by Mihailović's fundamental readiness to engage in armed uprising ('The DM movement is and always will be an enemy').<sup>253</sup> The Old Serbian Chetniks and their followers were therefore exposed to German reprisals in the same way as the partisans, especially during periods when they were taking stronger action against the occupying forces (in the autumn of 1942 and, to a lesser extent, the summer of 1943).

A further point to be mentioned in this connection is the operational context of German reprisals east and west of the Drina. In Serbia, the collapse of the uprising in the late summer/autumn of 1941, and the subsequent willingness of large sections of the Serbian nationalist movement to wait and see, enabled the situation to be stabilized, resulting in a gradual reduction of the shooting of hostages, and finally to the virtual end of the practice. In the NDH, however, developments were incomparably more complicated, mainly because the spiral of violence was driven by the genocidal pogroms of the Ustasha rather than the actions of the occupation forces. At the same time, the Ustasha's weakness, and its inability to bring the wildfire unleashed by its 'ethnic cleansing' operations under control again by its own means, encouraged the formation of armed resistance groups. Even after the Ustasha's initial attempts to clear whole stretches of land inhabited by Serbs were over, the memory of the murderous attacks of 1941 was one of the main reasons why most partisans, however war-weary, never thought of giving up or changing sides.<sup>254</sup> With the Pavelić regime losing control of wide areas of the country, the attempt to transfer responsibility for reprisals to the Croatian government gradually lost all credibility,<sup>255</sup> and the troop units concerned increasingly took matters into their own hands. As a result, the dividing line between shootings that were, in principle, 'legitimate' under the international laws of war and unlawful excesses became increasingly blurred. And this leaves entirely out of account the extent to which the regular mass murders of Muslims by Montenegrin or Bosnian Chetniks, and vice versa,<sup>256</sup> helped to create an atmosphere of existential insecurity. In such an environment, where—unlike in Serbia—cooperation with the occupying power was by no means enough to secure even halfway reliable protection against possible murder or abduction for oneself and one's family, reprisals largely failed to achieve their aim and only contributed to a further escalation of the violence.

Bulgarian reprisal policy is the easiest to classify, because in Old Serbia—unlike the annexed area of Greece and Macedonia—it was essentially an instrument of German occupational rule. Thus, with regard to its deployment, the Bulgarian

<sup>253</sup> 'Militärbefehlshaber Südost, Abt. Ic, Betr.: Verhalten gegenüber der DM-Bewegung' (16 May 1944), BA-MA RW 40/88.

<sup>254</sup> A highly instructive source in this connection is '714. ID, Abt. Ic: Aus Vernehmungen und Feindpapieren—Nachrichtenblatt Nr. 12' (15 Mar. 1943), BA-MA RH26-114/18.

<sup>255</sup> 'Vorsprache des Deutschen Bevollmächtigten Generals beim Poglavnik am 3.3.1943', BA-MA RH 31 III/9.

<sup>256</sup> 'Verhältnis zu den Četniks' (13 Oct. 1942), BA-MA RH 26-118/29; 'Die nationale Aufstandsbewegung der Četniks im Unabhängigen Staat Kroatien, Slovenien und Montenegro. Stand: 1.5.1943' (5 May 1943), BA-MA RH 24-15/4.

occupation corps was under the command of the Commanding General in Belgrade in the same way as a German occupation division. The administration of Bulgarian-occupied territory in Nedić's Serbia remained in the hands of the German military and local headquarters. It was the commander in Serbia, General Paul Bader, and his successor, General Hans-Gustav Felber, who were responsible for deciding whether hostages were to be shot in reprisal for the killing or wounding of a Bulgarian soldier. The only problem preventing any real pacification of the Bulgarian-occupied area proved to be the historic antagonism between the two Slavic ethnic groups. This resulted politically in permanent Bulgarian opposition to any attempt at German-Serbian collaboration,<sup>257</sup> and militarily in a whole series of excesses in the wake of major operations against the Old Serbian partisans, in the course of which—according to Yugoslavian data—more than 11,000 civilians died by the end of the war.<sup>258</sup> After a good twenty months of Bulgarian rule of a large part of Serbia, things had reached a point where, even in military command south-east headquarters, this trend was felt to be counter-productive. Even allowing for the fact that the more-or-less simultaneous attempt at a rapprochement with the Serbian national resistance (discussed later) certainly played an important part in the resulting change of course, the memorandum of 13 October 1943, in which Felber records his impressions during his latest visit to the Bulgarian occupation corps, is certainly a curiosity unique in the history of German occupational rule: 'The Bulgarians again raised the question of hostages. They say that every Serb done away with is of value to us [...] Order to be issued: Bulgarian operations planned well in advance: Gendarmerie and SD must be present, to ensure that innocent people, women, and children are not shot, and that houses are not burned down.'<sup>259</sup>

It is difficult to determine how far this change of course was or was not implemented in the months that followed. Occasional indications of a particularly good relationship between the Bulgarian troops and the Serbian civilian population, to be found in Tito's radio messages to the Comintern for example, may, of course, have been prompted by the Yugoslavian partisan leadership's need to influence the Bulgarian chairman of the Comintern, Georgi Dimitrov, in its favour, rather than by a realistic assessment of the situation.<sup>260</sup>

In the case of the Italian 2nd Army (Slovenia/Dalmatia/Herzegovina) and 9th Army (Montenegro and Kosovo), the first months of the occupation were dominated by costly attempts to ease the lot of the subject population by means of a mild occupation regime and ample deliveries of food.<sup>261</sup> These efforts were largely in

<sup>257</sup> See, e.g., 'Bericht für den stellvert. Befehlshaber Südost General Kunze [sic], über die Lage in dem vom 1. Kgl. Bulg. Okkupationskorps besetzten Raume zum 12.6.1942', BA-MA RH 20-12/146, and 'KTB Militärbefehlshaber Südost, Abt. Ia' (22 Feb. 1944), BA-MA RW 40/85.

<sup>258</sup> Glisic, Mitrovski, and Ristovski, *Das bulgarische Heer in Jugoslawien*, 156.

<sup>259</sup> 'Bericht über den Besuch des Herrn MilBefh. Südost in Nisch beim 1. Kgl. Bulg. Okkupationskorps am 13.10.1943' (n.d.), BA-MA RW 40/81.

<sup>260</sup> This relationship became very strained as the war went on, as a result of Tito's requests for material support, which were turned down. See Dimitroff, *Tagebücher*, i. 492 (8 Mar. 1942), 521–2 (24.5.1942), 527 (1 June 1942), 648 (10 Feb. 1943).

<sup>261</sup> On Montenegro, see Verna, *Jugoslavia under Italian Rule*, 164–8.

vain, as was shown most clearly by the brute force with which the Italian authorities in Montenegro crushed the uprising in July 1941. As a result of these events, Vittorio Ambrosio and Alessandro Pirzio-Biroli had hostages shot at a rate not far short of Franz Böhme's in Serbia.<sup>262</sup> However, the shootings were substantially reduced following a temporary lull in the situation in Montenegro and Herzegovina in 1942,<sup>263</sup> and the practice was amended in at least one area (that of XI Army Corps in Slovenia), where there was no longer any fixed 'reprisal rate', and it was left to the responsible military authority to determine the scale of retribution,<sup>264</sup> although this did not affect the usual practice of automatically shooting captured partisans, including the sick and wounded.<sup>265</sup>

But the most devastating consequences for the civilian population were the pillaging of 'suspect' villages after large-scale operations, and the Italian authorities' tendency to delegate the task of combating the National Liberation Army to that army's opponents within Yugoslavia (particularly the Serbian nationalist Chetniks), in order to avoid incurring losses themselves—a tendency that became increasingly apparent in 1942 and 1943. The ethnically motivated mass murders that frequently resulted from this policy may certainly have suited the occupier's political agenda in Dalmatia, but the increasingly poor operational status of most Italian troop units meant that the Italian 2nd Army and the military command in Montenegro had less and less control over their local auxiliary forces. By the beginning of 1943 this had gone so far that Pavle Djurišić's Montenegrin Chetniks were able to extract their Italian patrons' agreement to the mass murder of thousands of Muslim civilians (mainly women and children) simply by intimating that they might not take part in the forthcoming battle against Tito's main group.<sup>266</sup>

With regard to German reprisal policy, the observer is presented with the picture of a wave-like movement with two distinct crests, clearly defined in time. In one of these periods, which lasted roughly from August/September 1941 to March/April 1942 and was mainly devoted to suppression of the Serbian uprising, it was normal practice to shoot hostages at the rate of 100 for 1, and also to shoot not only all the guerrillas who were caught, including deserters, but also any civilians found in the

<sup>262</sup> A Pirzio-Biroli directive of 12 January 1942 stipulated that 50 hostages were to be shot in reprisal for the killing of a rank-and-file soldier or the wounding of an officer, and 10 for the wounding of a rank-and-file soldier. See Scotti and Viazzi, *Le aquile delle montagne nere*, 114.

<sup>263</sup> See *ibid.* 337; Talpo, *Dalmazia*, ii. 1187; Cuzzi, *L'occupazione italiana*, 198–9.

<sup>264</sup> See Cuzzi, *L'occupazione italiana*, 198–9.

<sup>265</sup> That this was still normal practice, even in May/June 1943, is clear from the final report on Operation BLACK by the C-in-C of the military command in Montenegro: 'Relazione sul ciclo primavera-estate 1943' (n.d.), ASUSSME, M3/19.

<sup>266</sup> For details of these events, see the Ic reports of the Commanding General and Commander in Serbia, based largely on information obtained by decoding Chetnik radio communications: 'Komm. Gen. und Befh. in Serbien, Abt. Ic, Lagebericht für die Zeit vom 31.12.1942 bis 8.1.1943' (8 Jan. 1943), BA-MA RH 26-114/16; 'Komm. Gen. und Befh. in Serbien, Abt. Ic, Lagebericht für die Zeit vom 9.1. bis 18.1.1943' (19 Jan. 1943), BA-MA RH 26-114/16; 'Komm. Gen. und Befh. in Serbien, Abt. Ic, Lagebericht für die Zeit vom 30.1. bis 8.2.1943' (8 Feb. 1943), BA-MA RH 26-114/17. Also 'Die nationale Aufstandsbewegung der Četniks im Unabhängigen Staat Kroatien, Slovenien und Montenegro. Stand: 1.5.1943' (5 May 1943), BA-MA RH 24-15/4, particularly 19–21, and 'Bericht über die montenegrinische Frage im Zusammenhang mit dem Sicherheitsproblem auf dem Balkan. Auf Grund einer Montenegroreise im Juni' (n.d.), BA-MA RH 21-2/749.

wider operational area. The operations in north-eastern Bosnia in January/February 1942 were the only exception. As this area was largely controlled by Serbian nationalist Chetniks under the command of Jezdimir Dangić, who was known to be consistently pro-German, his men—provided they were disarmed without resistance—were granted prisoner-of-war status.<sup>267</sup> However, it did not escape even German officers known to favour a hard line that such a policy of indiscriminate repression was problematic, if only because its lasting application required forces that could be spared for the Yugoslavian area, if at all, only for a short time. On 1 November 1941 the plenipotentiary commanding general in Serbia decreed that civilians in intervening territory were to be shot only if found with weapons in their hands.<sup>268</sup> The commander of 342nd Infantry Division, Maj.-Gen. Hoffmann, followed suit on 11 December, forbidding reprisals against Serbian civilians suspected of supporting the Serbian nationalist side in the civil war ('they had no alternative if they didn't want to go over to the Communists').<sup>269</sup> On 24 November the troops received formal orders for the first time that they were to take Communist partisans into custody, although the orders said nothing about their ultimate fate.<sup>270</sup> The hostage-shooting rate of 100 for 1 applying in Serbia, which had led in October to outright massacres of civilians mostly uninvolved in the fighting, was finally halved on 22 December 1941.<sup>271</sup> The insistence on 'ruthless severity' appears to have been more emphatic the further the commanders in question were from events at the front. General Walter Kuntze, Wehrmacht Commander South-East from 29 October 1941 to 8 August 1942, is a typical case in point. Countermanding an order from Böhme's successor, Paul Bader, who was endeavouring to clarify the highly contradictory situation regarding orders on taking partisans into custody, Kuntze stressed the absolute need to kill every prisoner and deserter: 'Captured insurgents must always be hanged or shot. If they are used for intelligence purposes, that shall only mean that their death is briefly postponed.'<sup>272</sup> Bader felt compelled to counter this demand, which grotesquely ignored his own options and was bound to play straight into the partisan leaders' hands. On 23 March 1942 he finally wrested his superior's agreement to a compromise under which deserters at least would be allowed to live.<sup>273</sup>

The phase from April to October 1942 was marked by a certain relaxation of the German policy on repression. This was probably attributable, at least partly, to the defeat of the insurgents in Old Serbia and the fact that a major uprising which the

<sup>267</sup> 'KTB Komm.Gen. und Befh. in Serbien, Abt. Ia, Kampfanweisung zur Belehrung der Truppe' (14 Apr. 1942), BA-MA RW 40/50.

<sup>268</sup> 'Bev. Komm.Gen., Abt. Ia, Befehl für die Vernichtung der Aufständischen südostwärts Šabac' (1 Nov. 1941), BA-MA RH 26-342/15.

<sup>269</sup> 'KTB Befh. Serbien, Abt. Ia,' (11 Dec. 1941), BA-MA RW 40/14.

<sup>270</sup> 'Gen.Kdo. XVIII, Abt. Ia, Befehl für die Vernichtung des Feindes im westl. Moravatal und in der Gegend Uzice' (18 Nov. 1941), BA-MA RH 26-342/16, and 'Divisionsbefehl für Vernichtung des Gegners im Raum Uzice' (24 Nov. 1941), BA-MA RH 26-342/17.

<sup>271</sup> 'Befehl des Bev. Komm.Gen. an die 714. ID' (22 Dec. 1941), BA-MA RH 26-114/3.

<sup>272</sup> 'Derstellvertr. Wehrmachtbefehlshaber Südost an den Kommandierenden General und Befehlshaber in Serbien' (19.3.1942), BA-MA RH20-12/218.

<sup>273</sup> 'KTB AOK 12, Abt. Ia' (23 Mar. 1942), BA-MA RH 20-12/139.

Germans had expected in March had still not occurred by the beginning of spring. The surviving records contain a number of orders issued at the time by Paul Bader in Belgrade, and by Maj.-Gen. Johann Fortner, the commander of what was, until July 1942, the only German division in the NDH, with a view to halting the escalation.<sup>274</sup> It is no coincidence that the first exchange of prisoners between the Wehrmacht and the National Liberation Army took place during this period. Many of these arrangements were contrary to both the spirit and the letter of the directives in force, issued by the Wehrmacht Commander South-East, Walter Kuntze. It is no longer possible to determine, in this case, whether Kuntze had experienced a Damascene conversion in the meantime, or whether Bader quite simply and systematically went behind his back.

The arrival of Kuntze's successor, Col.-Gen. Alexander Löhr, as Wehrmacht Commander South-East from 8 August 1942 to 25 August 1943 ('Commander-in-Chief South-East' as of 1 January 1943), marked a new turn towards 'intensification' of the war against the partisans. In his first tour of the area under his command, Löhr already spoke of the need not to let the enemy see any sign of weakness in the region.<sup>275</sup> Then, when the notorious 'Commando Order' was issued, he added an appendix on his own initiative, specifying that it must be made absolutely clear to the insurgents that 'in no circumstances' would they escape with their lives.<sup>276</sup> Löhr had probably been induced to make this disconcerting U-turn during his latest visit to Führer headquarters. There, on 23 September 1942, in the presence of Löhr, Kasche, and the Croatian head of state, the Führer had exclaimed so vehemently against the alleged lack of severity in conducting the fight against the partisans that even the notoriously pro-Ustasha Kasche feared that the 'Poglavnik', Pavelić, might see it as a call for a repeat of the 1941 pogroms against the Serbs.<sup>277</sup> An OKW basic order on the conduct of the fight against the partisans, issued on 16 December 1942, which was tantamount to a general pardon for all crimes committed in this theatre of war,<sup>278</sup> could only strengthen this new turn in German reprisal policy in the western Balkans.

Paradoxically, the cycle of operations conducted in the first six months of 1943, which were wholly directed at the destruction of the main forces of the National Liberation Army (Operations WHITE I and II and Operation BLACK), was characterized both by compliance with these new directives and by failure to comply with them. First, there was the clause in the order for the launch of Operation WHITE I stipulating the systematic deportation of all civilians found in the 'partisan state' of western Bosnia. This was quietly removed on 15 January, apparently as a

<sup>274</sup> 'Divisionsbefehl zum Unternehmen "Zenica"' (29 May 1942), BA-MA RH 26-118/27; 'KTB Komm.Gen. und Befh. in Serbien, Abt. Ia' (21 June 1942), RW 40/30; 'Divisionsbefehl der 718. ID' (1 Jul. 1942), RH 26-118/28.

<sup>275</sup> 'Aktennotiz über Reise OB nach Belgrad und Agram vom 28.8. bis 1.9.42' (2 Sept. 1942), BA-MA RH 20-12/149.

<sup>276</sup> 'Zusätze Wehrmachtbefehlshaber Südost' (28 Oct. 1942), BA-MA RH 19 XI/7.

<sup>277</sup> 'Kasche an Staatssekretär v. Weizsäcker' (12 Oct. 1942), PA, Gesandtschaftsakten Zagreb R 29857.

<sup>278</sup> 'Betr.: Bandenkämpfung' (16 Dec. 1942), BA-MA RH 20-12/218.

result of a protest by Glaise von Horstenau.<sup>279</sup> As regards the capture and preferential treatment of deserters, the commander of the German troops in Croatia gave orders that were diametrically opposed to Löhr's directive of 28 October. The reality on the battlefield appears to have been somewhere between the two theoretical scenarios. Even allowing for the fact that, at this point, the National Liberation Army command structures enabled the weapons of combatants who had been killed or wounded to be recovered, the ratio of enemy dead to recovered weapons at the end of the WHITE operations nevertheless suggested that there must have been a large number of unarmed civilians among the dead.<sup>280</sup> At least in some cases, even partisans who were captured or who deserted were shot on the spot or immediately after capture.<sup>281</sup> And, at the same time, there was the absurd situation of the Commander-in-Chief South-East launching an initiative to support deserting partisans, and making complete nonsense of his own directive of 28 October 1942 in the process.<sup>282</sup> A further glimmer of light was a directive issued by Paul Bader on 28 February, who took advantage of the situation in Serbia, his area of command, which was still quiet, to substantially reduce the number of hostages shot in future by specifying the circumstances in which 'retribution' was permissible.<sup>283</sup>

The escalation reached its peak during the large-scale Operation BLACK in northern Montenegro and south-eastern Bosnia. Although the troops in these areas were ordered to treat the local Muslim civilian population well,<sup>284</sup> and were also allowed to take both Serbian nationalist Chetniks and Communist partisans prisoner, the Communist partisans at least appear to have been shot automatically, as a general rule.<sup>285</sup> To prevent Tito escaping undetected from the forces that were

<sup>279</sup> 'Privatbrief Glaise von Horstenaus an Löhr' (4 Jan. 1943), BA-MA RH 31 III/12; 'Divisionsbefehl für Unternehmen "Weiß"' (15 Jan. 1943), BA-MA RH 26-117/5. Glaise von Horstenau had pointed out to Löhr that 'everyone in Croatia is particularly pleased when the wrong people are shot as hostages'.

<sup>280</sup> For 11,915 enemy troops reported dead, there were 47 machine guns and 589 rifles. See 'Lagebeurteilung OB Südost (Ob.Kdo. H.Gr. E) März 1943' (1 Apr. 1943), BA-MA RH 2/683. On the shooting of a group of fugitives by a 7th SS Division unit, see 'Erfahrungsbericht über Unternehmen "Weiß II" und Mostar' (26 Mar. 1943), BA-MA RH 24-15/2.

<sup>281</sup> See 'Div.Kdr.-Besprechung in Sanski Most am 16.2.43, 13.00 Uhr', BA-MA RH 26-118/33. These minutes contain the following, highly informative admonition to Lüters' divisional commanders from their commanding general: 'Deserters who have been confirmed by us and who make statements, have been shot, in some cases simply because they could not be returned immediately. This is intolerable!' See also *Die geheimen Tagesberichte*, vi. 207 (6 Mar. 1943), on the shooting of captured partisans by 7th SS Division.

<sup>282</sup> On the occasion of a visit to 718th Infantry Division in the closing phase of Operation WHITE II; see 'KTB 718. ID, Abt. Ia' (12 Mar. 1943), BA-MA RH 26-118/31. There is no mention of this in the war diary kept by Löhr's own department.

<sup>283</sup> 'Körpsbefehl des Kommandierenden Generals und Befehlshabers in Serbien' (28 Feb. 1943), BA-MA RW 40/38.

<sup>284</sup> Except if the civilian population showed a 'hostile attitude', in which case they were to be dealt with by means of 'ruthless and brutally harsh' measures; see 'Komm.Gen. und Befh. in Serbien, Abt. Ia, Operationsbefehl für den Fall "Schwarz"' (6 May 1943), BA-MA RW 40/53.

<sup>285</sup> In the case of 1st Mountain Division, 411 of the 498 men captured were shot; see 'Bericht der 1. Gebirgsdivision über den Einsatz in Montenegro' (10 Jul. 1943), BA-MA RH2/682.

rapidly closing in during the final phase of the operation, Lüters even gave orders on 10 June that all prisoners taken from then on were to be shot.<sup>286</sup>

The further—and this time permanent—change in German reprisal policy is generally attributed to the ‘new policy’ adopted by the special envoy, Hermann Neubacher, who was entrusted on 24 August with the task of coordinating cooperation between the occupying power and all anti-Communist forces in the western Balkans. It culminated in a directive issued by the Commander-in-Chief South-East on 22 December 1943 in which, for the first time on the German side, the number of hostages to be shot in a given case was no longer laid down but was left to the discretion of the officer responsible for taking the decision.<sup>287</sup> However, Neubacher’s task was facilitated by the fact that there had already been signs of a turnaround in German repression policy in the weeks preceding his arrival. Although the driving forces behind this development cannot be identified with absolute certainty, there is some evidence that experience on the eastern front played a decisive part. An OKH directive of 1 July 1943 on the treatment of prisoners and deserters from the Soviet partisan movement stipulated that captured guerrillas were to be shot in future only if they were wearing German uniform or were ‘caught in the act’.<sup>288</sup> Then, on 18 August, an OKW directive was issued which went so far as to specify that guerrillas were generally to be granted prisoner-of-war status.<sup>289</sup> However, this was never followed by an order putting a complete stop to the shooting of hostages in any form, although that would have been the only logical consequence of this development, since otherwise the absurd situation would inevitably arise in which the guilty were spared while those who were most probably innocent were shot.

For the historian, the search for evidence that this directive was actually implemented in the Yugoslav theatre during the last 18 months of the war is a thankless task. What is clearly documented, above all, is that in Old Serbia ‘systematic’ shootings of hostages were substantially reduced and, in some places, stopped altogether, mainly as a result of the rapprochement between the Serbian nationalist resistance and the German occupying power. It is much harder to determine the extent to which instructions to spare captured partisans or civilians found in the theatre of operations were actually followed at divisional and battalion level. In the NDH, for example, the decline of the Croatian executive resulted, from 1943 to 1945, in a situation in which the central direction of reprisals by the Croatian authorities existed on paper only. There is also evidence of German units engaging in spontaneous retribution as early as 1942, but such cases became increasingly routine in the following years, and Neubacher’s ‘new policy’ does not seem to have

<sup>286</sup> ‘Der Befehlshaber der deutschen Truppen in Kroatien an die 1. Geb.Div.’ (10 Jun. 1943, 18.25), BA-MA RH 28-1/96.

<sup>287</sup> ‘Komm.Gen. und Befh. in Serbien, Abt. Ia, Befehl des Oberbefehlshabers Südost zu Sühnemaßnahmen’ (22 Dec. 1943), BA-MA RW 40/89.

<sup>288</sup> ‘Oberkommando des Heeres HQu., Grundlegender Befehl Nr. 13a über die Behandlung von Partisanen’ (1 July 1943), BA-MA RH 3/746.

<sup>289</sup> The original directive is no longer available, but there are frequent references to it in correspondence in the following months, as, e.g., in BA-MA RW 4/714b.

affected them particularly. Given the state of the sources, it is extremely difficult to form even an approximate idea of the numbers involved. Reliable data is available only for cases which had still had political repercussions during the war, possibly because they were likely to compromise collaboration with the ethnic groups concerned.<sup>290</sup> In addition, and above all, the ratio of the number of small arms seized in the course of an operation to the number of enemy dead is a reasonably reliable indication as to whether the operation in question had a military purpose or was more in the nature of retribution. The conclusions reached in Yugoslavia after the war by the 'State Commission for the Investigation of the Crimes of the Occupants and their Accomplices' can be accepted only with some reservations, in view of the Tito government's systematic falsification of the country's losses during the war.<sup>291</sup>

In conclusion, German reprisal policy in the territory of occupied Yugoslavia was marked by two relatively clear periods, followed by phases of de-escalation. It is noticeable, however, that in the first peak period of German repression (August 1941 to March 1942), particularly bloodthirsty and unrealistic directives issued by the OKW or the Wehrmacht Commander South-East were often watered down or even ignored at corps and divisional level—a trend that gathered strength in subsequent months. Evidence of a divisional commander knowingly going beyond what was officially required exists only in the case of 342nd Infantry Division in September/October 1941. In the second peak period too (October 1942 to June 1943), it seems that the directives of 28 October and 16 December 1942, which called for particularly uncompromising repression of the partisans, were actually implemented by the local commanders only in the first couple of months.<sup>292</sup> The first directives watering down this 'new old' policy were already issued during the WHITE operations, and the turnaround in July/August 1943 largely reversed it. The fact that the reversal of policy remained patchy in the war against the partisans west of the Drina was due mainly to the special circumstances obtaining in the Bosnian theatre of war. In that area, unlike Serbia, a war constantly spilling over into genocide had been raging since June 1941. Isolated attempts at de-escalation on the German or Yugoslavian side had been too brief, or too closely tied to a specific objective (the exchange of prisoners), to permanently halt the forces unleashed by the murderous policy of the Ustasha.

Thus, the observer is presented with a picture of the last year and a half of the war in embattled Yugoslavia that is full of contradictions. On the one hand, there are troops who, under the pressure of years of local genocidal ethnic conflict, appear

<sup>290</sup> See, e.g., 'Gedächtnisnotiz (auszugsweise) über meine Besprechung mit Nedić am 19.10.1942' (20 Oct. 1942), BA-MA RW 40/93; 'Aktennotiz über die Besprechung des Reichsführers SS mit SS-Obergruppenführer Phleps am 28.7.1943', BA, NS 19/1434; Glaise von Horstenau, *Ein General im Zwielicht*, 396 (May 1944); 'Kasche an Auswärtiges Amt' (9 and 16 Apr. 1944), PA, Inland IIg 401, 2824.

<sup>291</sup> The number of Yugoslavs who died in the war was rounded up to 1,706,000 by the new government, for reasons of domestic and foreign policy (real figure: approx. 1,015,000). A summary of the current state of research on the subject is found in Tomasevich, *War and Revolution*, ii. 718–50.

<sup>292</sup> See, e.g., the orders on the shooting of civilians found in intervening territory in 'Divisionsbefehl für die Säuberung des Raumes Prijedor, Bronzani Majdan, Sanski Most' (4 Jan. 1943), BA-MA RH 26-114/16.

to have abandoned all restraints. In addition to the killing of National Liberation Army prisoners, offences against property that cannot, with the best will in the world, be attributed to any conceivable form of retribution appear to have become commonplace.<sup>293</sup> Remarks such as Glaise von Horstenu's observation, that in the fifth year of the war it had become normal for troops, 'among other things, to obey even Führer orders only to a limited extent',<sup>294</sup> as well as excesses such as those committed at Otok (28 March 1944), point to a process of escalation at company and battalion level that seems to have been beyond senior commanders' ability to control. But, at the same time, reports have survived from which it can be concluded that, by the autumn of 1943, bringing prisoners back and accommodating them had become quite normal and was no longer exceptional.<sup>295</sup> There are even documented cases of bedridden patients being moved from partisan field hospitals and given further treatment in German establishments.<sup>296</sup> Whereas during the first year and a half of the war basic orders issued at army group or army high command level were surprisingly often watered down at corps and divisional level by officers acting on their own initiative, this practice appears to have shifted downwards by several levels of command between 1943 and 1945. It seems to have been regimental and battalion commanders of long-serving 'Balkan units', in particular, who were now often prepared to disobey orders that seemed to them to make little sense. Unlike the early years, when this creative disobedience was effective in putting a damper on the existing processes of escalation, it now had the opposite effect.

## 7. CONCLUSION

Whereas, until the summer of 1944, the German command in Old Serbia succeeded in holding, at relatively little cost, a state where most of the population was hostile,<sup>297</sup> the German–Italian occupation policy in the independent state of Croatia was a complete fiasco, the worst in the whole of occupied Europe. From a relatively promising start, with most ethnic groups (Croat and Muslim) prepared to give German rule the benefit of the doubt on the basis of their past experience of life under the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, by the turn of 1941/2, at the very

<sup>293</sup> 'Der Bevollmächtigte General in Kroatien an den Militärbefehlshaber Südost' (20 Oct. 1943), BA-MA RH 19 XI/39; Glaise von Horstenu, *Ein General im Zwielicht*, 293 (Oct. 1943) and 334 (Dec. 1943).

<sup>294</sup> 'Der Bevollmächtigte General an das Pz.AOK 2' (15.11.1943), BA-MA RH31 III/12.

<sup>295</sup> KTB OKW, iii/2, 1393 (30 Dec. 1943).

<sup>296</sup> '371. ID, Abt. Ia, Gefechtsbericht Unternehmen "Panther" (31 Dec. 1943), BA-MA RH24-15/33. This was admittedly a unit from outside the Balkans that was deployed there for only six weeks.

<sup>297</sup> The part played by Milan Nedić resulted in his unconditional condemnation as a 'Quisling' in the post-war historiography of Communist Yugoslavia, which took no account of his achievements in providing food for Serbian refugees from Kosovo and the NDH, and reducing the German hostage quotas. A distinctly more balanced picture of Nedić is found in more recent research; see esp. Vecanski, 'General Milan Dj. Nedić', 126–31; Tomasevich, *War and Revolution*, ii. 209–28; Schmider, *Partisanenkrieg in Jugoslawien*, 421–524.

latest, a situation had arisen in which the radical fascists of the Ustasha party had irrevocably turned large sections of their own people against them with their partly implemented and partly failed programme of 'ethnic cleansing', and had forcibly provoked the formation of various resistance movements which enjoyed both historical and topographical advantages. Most of the responsibility for this avoidable catastrophe undoubtedly lay with the Italian command authorities, at whose insistence overall control of the new state of Greater Croatia had been transferred to Ante Pavelić and his Ustasha party in April 1941. Mussolini's continued support for his man in Zagreb during 1942 and 1943 shows the price that Rome was prepared to make Croats pay in order for it to hold on to what had by now become a wholly undermined 'hegemony' in the western Balkans.

The fact that the consequences of this situation for German conduct of the war were relatively easily absorbed was due more to chance than to the perspicacity of the German high command. From 1942 on, the resistance succeeded in substantially reducing and, in some cases, even completely preventing the exploitation of most of the mineral resources that were important for German armaments (particularly bauxite, low-phosphorus iron ore, copper, and chromium). This could have had decisive military consequences, most of all in the case of chromium. However, that crucial metal happened to be mined in Macedonia, an area which, because of the ethnic mix of the inhabitants, had become involved in the fight against the occupants only at a very late stage. The result was that German chromium mining was still at record levels in 1944.<sup>298</sup>

The element of chance also played an important part with regard to the strategic threat posed by the existence of a large insurgent area on the southern edge of 'fortress Europe'. Thus, with the best will in the world, the OKW could not have foreseen that first the western Allies (from July/August 1943) and then the Soviet Union (from October/November 1944) would spurn the operational possibilities offered by an invasion of the NDH State in favour of other options. It was only in the choice of troops to defend this secondary theatre of war that the professionalism of the German staffs helped to keep the consequences for the conduct of the war as a whole to a minimum. Apart from training units and local formations for which no sensible use could have been found in most of the other theatres of war, they were mostly foreign volunteers, whose training and/or national characteristics meant that there were problems about using them against the western Allies (SS Brigade 'Nederland', Croatian legionnaire divisions, Russian Corps) or against both the western Allies and the Soviet Union (1st Cossack Division, 13th SS Division). This helped to keep the number of divisions withdrawn from the fronts in Russia, Italy, and north-western Europe within tolerable limits for the purposes of the German conduct of the war as a whole.<sup>299</sup>

<sup>298</sup> A more detailed account of the procedure adopted by the occupants in exploiting occupied Yugoslavia, and the long-term effects on the national economy, is to be found in Tomasevich, *War and Revolution*, ii. 611–717. For an analysis that takes account of the National Liberation Army's attempts to stop this process, see Schmider, *Partisanenkrieg in Jugoslawien*, 555–68.

<sup>299</sup> The number of German units confined to this theatre of war by the need to combat the National Liberation Army has been hotly debated for more than 50 years in the British and American

Despite this damage limitation, the final assessment of the German war in Yugoslavia is that a bloody campaign, accompanied by numberless genocidal excesses, could probably have been avoided, at least at that level of intensity. For that to have happened, however, the German authorities in the area who had been in a position to gain a picture of the crimes committed by the Ustasha and who had reasonably regular access to the top political leadership—namely Edmund Glaise von Horstenau, Walter Kuntze, Alexander Löhr, Maximilian von Weichs, and Lothar Rendulic—would have had to insist in 1942/3 that Hitler get rid of the Pavelić government, and to have threatened to resign unless he did so.

## Appendix: Yugoslavian Resistance and Collaboration Armed Formations

### CHETNIKS, FROM THE WORD ČETA (BAND)

Serbian nationalist monarchist guerrillas in the centuries-old tradition of resistance to the Ottomans. Except for those in Old Serbia, they were primarily engaged in fighting the Communist partisans from 1941 on. *Odredi* (detachments) of various strengths formed spontaneously in Serbia, Montenegro, and the NDH in the summer of 1941, and it was quite common in the early stages for them to act in concert with Communist or Communist-influenced elements. The two movements drifted apart between November 1941 and April 1942, and most Chetnik leaders chose to join Draža Mihailović. At the same time, most Chetnik units appeared to be prepared to collaborate with Italian and—to a lesser extent—German occupying forces. Mihailović periodically attempted to get the units, often only nominally under his command, to agree on joint action against the Axis powers. These attempts came to nothing because the civil war in Serbia took priority, the large-scale Allied landing failed to materialize, and, from the middle of 1943 on, he lacked the necessary military strength. The president of the traditional pre-war Chetnik movement, First World War veteran Kosta Pećanac, was the first Chetnik leader to call for collaboration with the German occupying power in August 1941. Although he was a potential rival of Mihailović at the time, his position was largely undermined by German distrust, and by the Bulgarian occupation of his home region around Prokuplje (January 1942).

literature. According to the author's estimates, not counting the units that would have been needed in any case for defence purposes in the event of invasion, six more average-strength divisions were needed for the period January to June 1943 (Operations WHITE and BLACK), five more average-to-low-strength divisions for the period July 1943 to September/October 1944 (Soviet–Bulgarian invasion of eastern Yugoslavia), and three more high-strength divisions for the cycle of large-scale operations (winter 1943/4). See Schmider, 'Wehrmacht's Yugoslav Quagmire', 14–24.

## CHETNIKS, ILLEGAL

(a) In Old Serbia, there were relatively few Chetniks operating illegally between the end of 1941 and the beginning of 1943, because Mihailović was given the opportunity to employ most of the legal Chetniks as a cadre to prepare a major uprising on the approach of the Allied armies. Forced by the disbandment of these units, and favoured by the Serbian government's gradual surrender of remote regions from the spring of 1943 on, Mihailović set about forming a force comprising a large number of 'standing' units without, however, abandoning the basic principle of mobilization only in case of need (in the event of an Allied landing or a National Liberation Army invasion). Although, in the late summer of 1943, some Chetnik leaders began to substantially increase their attacks on collaborators, Bulgarians, and Germans, Mihailović was increasingly obliged to join the occupying forces in combating three invasions by the National Liberation Army (October/November 1943, March/April 1944, and August/September 1944). Maximum actual strength: approx. 25,000 (August 1944),<sup>300</sup> although most of the men were no match for the partisans.

(b) In the NDH and Montenegro: resulting from growing divisions in Croatia and Montenegro, which began at the end of 1941 and culminated in a split between guerrillas loyal to the king on the one side and Communist (or Communist-led) guerrillas on the other. Most of the Chetnik groups in mid-1942 had every reason to think they were winning the civil war in Serbia. In 1942/3, in numbers alone, they constituted the most powerful force that Draža Mihailović was ever to have at his disposal. However, there were problems arising from the wide political and regional differences between these units, the wavering loyalty of many of their leaders, and the fact that this made it virtually impossible to reach any firm conclusion about their military potential. Despite receiving more than adequate supplies of weapons from the Italian side, the main units led by Pavle Djurišić and Bajo Stanišić suffered a series of disastrous defeats in combat with the National Liberation Army between March and May 1943, so that the survivors, from a position of weakness, were obliged to serve in the 2nd Armoured Army as auxiliaries after 8 September 1943. Maximum actual strength: over 30,000 (January 1943).<sup>301</sup>

## CHETNIKS, LEGAL

(a) In Old Serbia: Chetnik detachments deployed by the German occupying power as auxiliary gendarmerie from October 1941 to March 1943. Although most of these units belonged to the wide following of the loyalist Chetnik leader Kosta Pećanac, indications (in decoded Mihailović radio communications) of increasing infiltration of these units by the Mihailović movement prompted the commanding general in Belgrade to disband the bulk

<sup>300</sup> 'Mappe Vortrag des OB, Gen.Feldm. Frhr von Weichs, beim Führer am 22.8.1944. Vermutliche Stärken der D.M. [Mihailović]-Verbände (oD.), festgehaltene Schätzung des Militärbefehlshabers Südost' BA-MA RH 19 XI/31. Although there may have been a certain tendency to round the figures up in this case (Weichs was particularly concerned to emphasize the strength of the Mihailović organization in his report to Führer headquarters), it should be remembered that the collaboration between 'Old Serbian' Chetniks and the occupying power, which had started in October 1943, had given the German staffs a unique insight into the military structures of the monarchist resistance east of the Drina.

<sup>301</sup> 19,000 in the NDH and 15,000 in Montenegro, according to Italian estimates. See Kasche to Foreign Ministry, 11 Jan. 1943, BA-Mam RH 31 iii/7.

of them in the autumn of 1942. Some of the men were deployed again in the ranks of the Serbian State Guard. Maximum actual strength: 13,400 (May 1942).<sup>302</sup>

(b) MVAC. Anti-Communist, mostly Serbian nationalist, auxiliary troops formed by the Italian 2nd Army in the spring of 1942. Unlike the illegal Chetniks in the NDH State, they were attached to specific Italian divisions or command headquarters, from which they received not only arms, ammunition, and food supplies but also rudimentary uniforms. Their contacts with the Mihailović organization were so advanced that it appeared highly doubtful that they would be loyal to the Italian occupying power in the event of a large-scale Allied landing. An estimate of their actual strength is problematic owing to the indiscriminate use of the MVAC acronym by various Italian agencies.

### GENDARMERIE, GERMAN–CROATIAN

The attempt, following the WHITE cycle of operations (March/April 1943), to permanently secure territory recaptured from the National Liberation Army by deploying gendarmerie with German cadres was the first German attempt to prevent a repetition of the experiences following Operation TRIO I/II in 1942 (when returning Serbs were terrorized and robbed by Croatian gendarmerie) by depriving the Croatian executive of some of its powers. Since the assembly phase did not begin until the WHITE operations had been concluded, and since mustering Reich German and ethnic German police cadres<sup>303</sup> and Croatian rank-and-file<sup>304</sup> took an unexpectedly long time, the new unit was mainly deployed not in west Bosnia—as originally planned—but in the Slavonian region of northern Croatia, where there were fewer partisans to be reckoned with. Contrary to the original task assignment, the gendarmerie was increasingly obliged, owing to increasing enemy pressure, to engage with the National Liberation Army not as security forces at village level but as a compact unit. Total strength in December 1944: almost 15,000, all deployed as a divisional unit on the Syrmian front.

### CROATIAN TERRITORIAL ARMY (DOMOBRANI)

A regular army of the NDH. Barely out of the cradle, the territorial army, whose members were known as Domobrani, played a decisive part in checking the first wave of the uprising in the late summer/autumn of 1941. A structure gradually emerged in the course of these operations, in which brigades comprising three to six infantry battalions were preferred to regiments. Divisional- and corps-level command structures played a diminishing role at operational level from month to month, because the nature of the partisan movement they were fighting made it necessary to split up the available formations, and the overall conduct

<sup>302</sup> 'Komm.Gen. u. Befh. in Serbien an W.B. Südost', 1 Dec. 1942, BA-MA RW 40/36. There were only 3,800 men still under arms on 1 December 1942.

<sup>303</sup> The plan specified 5,000 but only 250 were available on 5 April 1943: see 'H.Gr. F, KTB Abt. 1a', 5 Apr. 1943, BA-MA RH 19 VII/7.

<sup>304</sup> See 'Aktenvermerk zur Besprechung des Deutschen Bevollmächtigten Generals mit Brigadeführer Kammerhofer in Esseg am 21.6.1943' (n.d.), BA-MA RH 31/III/9, according to which the new gendarmerie numbered only 2,300 ethnic Germans and 2,069 Croats after more than three months. See also the statement by the Reich Leader SS to the C-in-C South-East during a short visit to Zagreb on 5 May, reported to the Foreign Ministry by Kasche on 5 May 1943 and reproduced in PA, StS Kroatiens, iv. 693, that 'deployment of the Kammerhofer police was not expected to have an impact for at least six months'.

of operations was, more and more often, taken over by the Germans or Italians. This trend continued in the course of 1942 and 1943, until the final reorganization of the territorial army, which began with a politically motivated amalgamation of the Domobrani and the Ustasha (20 November 1944), re-established the role of the division, at least on paper. In the following years the operational effectiveness of the Domobrani was reduced by an increasingly widespread collapse of morale, caused mainly by the rift between the Pavelić regime and its aims, on the one hand, and the majority of Croats, on the other. German attempts to counteract this development by taking an ever-increasing part in the command and training of the Croatian army were only partly successful (notably, in the case of five mountain brigades established with German assistance in March/April 1942). From the turn of 1942/3 it could no longer be denied that most territorial army units could now be deployed with some prospect of success only to defend the narrow confines of their homeland against adversaries in the Yugoslavian civil war. The clearest evidence of this development was not so much desertions to the partisans as engagements which, in many cases, did not even amount to a pretence at combat, and which repeatedly enabled the National Liberation Army to replenish its stocks of arms and ammunition at very little cost. However, this experience did not prevent Tito from wreaking bloody revenge on Domobrani who, despite repeated calls to desert, remained on the side of the Pavelić regime until the end of the war.<sup>305</sup>

#### LEGIONNAIRE DIVISIONS, GERMAN–CROATIAN

Two-part infantry divisions of the German Wehrmacht, manned by Croatians with German cadres (planned target strength 10,000 to 12,000).<sup>306</sup> Identical in conception to the Croatian infantry regiment defeated at Stalingrad, the first legionnaire division (Croatian 369th Infantry Division), which was originally still intended for service on the eastern front, was instead deployed at home from January 1943. The inclusion of Croatian conscripts in German command, disciplinary, and supply structures was, in the end, simply an attempt to protect the troops, if possible, from the demoralizing realities of their martyred homeland and the regime they served. As was only to be expected, this attempt—especially given the general course of the war—could work only for a limited time. The two divisions that followed after the Croatian 369th Infantry Division (the Croatian 373rd Infantry Division in July 1943 and the Croatian 392nd Infantry Division in January 1944) were already markedly less operational. From June 1944 on, the German authorities even began to stop Croatian troops taking any leave, for fear of desertions. Then, from the end of September 1944, all three divisions were shattered by mutinies and mass desertions, reducing them to combat groups approximately two battalions strong, half of which consisted of German cadres. The formation and deployment of the Bosnian Muslim 13th SS Division ('Handschar')

<sup>305</sup> By far the most detailed breakdown of the Croatian armed forces (Ustasha and territorial army) at the present time exists only in electronic form: <[www.axishistory.com](http://www.axishistory.com)>. Its publication in book form is a desideratum of the first order.

<sup>306</sup> The actual strength of the (Croatian) 373rd Inf.Div. still being assembled at the beginning of March 1943 was 9,079. See 'Aktenvermerk über eine Besprechung Döllersheim', 8 Mar. 1943, BA-MA RH 31 III/9.

followed the same course, but in this case less was achieved at greater cost because of the relatively short period of deployment (March to October 1944).

### MIHAILOVIĆ MOVEMENT

Umbrella organization of the Serbian nationalist resistance, under the command of Draža Mihailović, a colonel in the royal army and (as from January 1942) Yugoslavian minister of war. Most of the Chetnik units outside Serbia had been formed in 1941 without Mihailović's involvement, so his powers of command were subject to substantial limitations. Only in eastern Herzegovina and the neighbouring state of Montenegro did Mihailović have both a high military potential and largely unchallenged political powers of command between May 1942 and May 1943.

### *ODRED* (DETACHMENT)

Yugoslav term for a guerrilla unit of unspecified size attached to a particular geographical region, whose strength depended on local framework conditions (such as harvest time and winter weather). Efforts to expand this concept of guerrilla warfare, which was based on centuries-old tradition, by establishing major formations of fixed size were pursued by the partisans with much greater consistency and success than by their Serbian nationalist opponents in the civil war.

### PARTISANS, AS FROM 19 NOVEMBER 1942 NATIONAL LIBERATION ARMY

Armed wing of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (CPY). At the outbreak of the first battles against the occupant in June/July 1941, the CPY was in an exceptionally favourable position. The collapse of the defeated kingdom, the partition of the country, the Ustasha genocide, and the uprisings against foreign occupation in Serbia and Montenegro favoured by historical tradition together opened the prospect of establishing a Stalinist Soviet dictatorship on the ruins of the old Yugoslavia. Where the small number of CPY members<sup>307</sup> precluded the formation of exclusively Communist guerrilla detachments, the party leaders endeavoured to take over the existing detachments by infiltrating or eliminating the command apparatus. These methods, and the premature imposition of some of their long-term social and political objectives in areas liberated by the CPY, provoked a backlash, with the result that by May/June 1942 the most important Communist sphere of power in eastern Bosnia, Montenegro, and Herzegovina had largely collapsed, and an approximately 5,000-strong vanguard had hastily withdrawn to western Bosnia. The almost simultaneous surrender of this area by the Italian 2nd Army, and the relatively long period (six months) that elapsed before the Axis powers' next major operation, enabled Tito to make a fresh political start and to form a regular army, based on 1,000-strong brigades which, unlike the *odredi*, were not tied to a specific area. This, together with a command structure which,

<sup>307</sup> According to Redzic, *Bosnia and Herzegovina in the Second World War*, 201, the CPY had about 12,000 members in Yugoslavia in July 1941, only 830 of whom were in what was to be the main theatre of war, Bosnia-Herzegovina.

unlike that of the Mihailović organization, was based clearly on the principle of command-and-obey, enabled the partisans to defeat and destroy even numerically superior enemy forces in 1943, in the decisive battles of the civil war. Despite the CPY's political claim to speak for all Yugoslav ethnic groups, Serbs and Montenegrins were distinctly over-represented in the partisans' ranks before 1944. Maximum actual strength before the capture of eastern Yugoslavia in the autumn of 1944: almost 300,000 (late autumn 1943), although this figure was put forward mainly by historians and journalists close to the partisans' cause, so it is probably on the high side.<sup>308</sup>

### RUSSIAN CORPS (RSK)

Volunteer formation raised by the White Russian community in Belgrade at the height of the Serbian uprising and placed at the disposal of the Nedić government, initially to protect economically important industrial installations (original title: Russian Factory Protection Corps). Much more reliable than the Serbian State Guard, the RSK had to contend with an age-related problem, since most of its men were veterans of the Russian Civil War (1918–21). Moves in 1943 to enlist Soviet prisoners of war or Russian exiles living in Romania as supplementary forces, although very promising, had to be abandoned under pressure from the Reich Leader SS. Maximum actual strength: 11,118 (August 1944).<sup>309</sup>

### SERBIAN STATE GUARD (SSW)

Old Serbian gendarmerie formation which was the Serbian government's most important executive organ in 1942/3. For the occupying forces it was a doubtful tool, in that, from the middle of 1943 at the latest, it was influenced and infiltrated by the Mihailović organization to such an extent that its reliability was of noteworthy proportions only in operations against Communist partisans. In phases of open confrontation between Mihailović and the occupying power (e.g. in September 1943), the SSW could be regularly crippled by rapidly mounting desertions. It was under the command of the senior SS and police leader August Meyszner from April 1942 on, and it is conceivable, though difficult to prove, that his open Slavophobia accelerated the process of desertion. Maximum actual strength: almost 15,000 (turn of 1943/4).<sup>310</sup>

### SERBIAN VOLUNTEER CORPS (SFK)

Political militia which emerged from the fascist 'Zbor' movement during the Serbian uprising and offered its services to the occupants in the fight against the insurgents. Although the SFK was not a large force (about 2,500 in 1941), and although it was initially neglected by the Nedić government in favour of more 'traditional' anti-Communists, the

<sup>308</sup> Most recently in Redzic, *Bosnia and Herzegovina in the Second World War*, 227. See also Djilas, *Wartime*, 374–5.

<sup>309</sup> Militärbefehlshaber Südost 1a, 'Gegenüberstellung der Feindstärken und der eigenen einsatzfähigen Kräfte im serbischen Raum', 21 Aug. 1944, BA-MA RH 19 XI/31.

<sup>310</sup> 'Militärbefehlshaber Südost, Chef des Generalstabes an den Herrn Chef des Generalstabes der H.GR. F', 19 Jan. 1944, BA-MA RW 40/84.

volunteers soon proved to be by far the strongest fighting force among the Old Serbian collaborators. Despite their primarily anti-Communist orientation, they also showed great commitment in combat against the Serbian nationalist guerrillas, who regarded them for a time as opponents in the civil war. This singular commitment to the occupying power ought to have prompted a move to combine the demobilization of clearly suspect Serbian troops (SSW, legal Chetniks) with systematic consolidation of the SFK. Lack of imagination, and an almost pathological distrust of the Serbian nation, even among Wehrmacht officers who had no prior prejudices in this connection (based on the prevalent Slavophobia or on close connections with the NSDAP), meant that such action was taken only at a point (December 1943) when, as a result of the course of the war, Serbian willingness to collaborate had distinctly waned. German observers nevertheless considered that the volunteers' contribution to the defence during the National Liberation Army's second invasion of Old Serbia (March/April 1944) was more substantial than that of the German and Bulgarian units involved. Maximum actual strength: 9,886 (August 1944).<sup>311</sup>

### USTASHA

Croatian militia of the NDH State party, more or less comparable in its own eyes to the German Waffen SS. Initially a relatively small force (15,000 in November 1941), it was established as the 'political' army of the Croatian state following rapid expansion which resulted in the formation of 23 battalions between August 1941 and April 1942, followed by the creation of the first five brigades. As a result of its close connection with the new state, the Ustasha soon proved to be the only noteworthy support for the Pavelić regime in its 1941 deportation and destruction campaigns against the Serbian population. In addition to substantial privileges as compared with the regular (territorial) army, this was apparent above all in its steady growth, its takeover of other armed state formations (assumption of command of the Croatian gendarmerie on 26 June 1942), and, in the second half of the war, its increasing actual strength compared with that of the army (September 1943: Ustasha 28,500, territorial army 124,000; December 1944: Ustasha 76,000, territorial army 70,000).<sup>312</sup> A particular problem, from the German point of view, was that in most Ustasha units—unlike the SS—radical political views were translated into greater operational capability and military efficiency only to a limited extent. The few exceptions to this rule (e.g. the 'Black Legion' and the Ante Pavelić Bodyguard Division) were by no means sufficient to make up for the political damage caused by the mere existence of the militia.

<sup>311</sup> Militärbefehlshaber Südost, 'Gegenüberstellung der Feindstärken und der eigenen einsatzfähigen Kräfte im Serbischen Raum', 21 Aug. 1944, BA-MA RH 19 XI/31.

<sup>312</sup> Tomasevich, *War and Revolution*, ii. 423-4; Schmider, *Partisanenkrieg in Jugoslawien*, 588.

### III. The Withdrawal from Greece

*Klaus Schönherr*

On 23 August 1944 the German–Romanian defence in Moldavia and Bessarabia collapsed. This event had a shattering effect on the Wehrmacht’s military position throughout south-eastern Europe. There was now almost nothing to prevent the Red Army from pressing forward into northern Yugoslavia. The German troops in the south of the Balkan peninsula were in danger of being cut off. This applied particularly to Army Group E, which in the late summer of 1944 had 300,000 men deployed in Greece, on the Ionian and Aegean islands, and on Crete.

In September 1943 the army group—consisting of three corps, the Fortress Crete garrison, and Assault Division ‘Rhodos’—had been obliged to assume responsibility for the security of occupied Greece when, following Italy’s capitulation, control of the occupation passed almost completely into German hands. The army group’s resources were sufficient only to protect the coastal strips against enemy landings and to monitor regions of economic and strategic importance. As in Yugoslavia, the situation in Greece was determined by resistance groups established mainly in the interior of the country. Thus, the Communist-controlled Greek People’s Liberation Army (ELAS) held political sway in Boeotia, Epirus, and the Peloponnese, virtually unhampered by the Germans. In addition to the 20,000 Communist partisans, some 8,000 nationalist-monarchist insurgents of the National Democratic Greek League (EDES) were fighting the occupants in north-western Greece. However, the combat strength of the resistance groups was absorbed by mutual rivalry, so that by the summer of 1944 the Wehrmacht was essentially master of the situation.<sup>1</sup>

The resistance groups could become a considerable threat to the German forces if, in the event of a withdrawal, the army group was obliged to reduce its strength in the occupied territory. However, the situation in Yugoslavia was much more dangerous, because by the middle of 1944 the People’s Liberation Army was strong enough to cause serious and, above all, lasting damage to Army Group E’s rear communication lines.<sup>2</sup> The only effective transport route from Thessaloníki to Belgrade via Niš—the army group’s lifeline, essential for any withdrawal movement—was particularly exposed to sabotage. The situation in the southern

<sup>1</sup> *KTB OKW*, iv/1, 665–70, 677–80.

<sup>2</sup> For details, see Part VI, Chapter II of the present volume.

section of the eastern front could also become a source of enormous danger to the German troops in Greece. For if Romania and Bulgaria were to leave the Axis coalition as a result of military developments, the Balkan peninsula would be left almost completely unprotected against the Soviet advance. In those circumstances Army Group E, under its commander-in-chief, Col.-Gen. Alexander Löhr, had to make all necessary preparations to avoid being cut off in the south of the Balkan peninsula.

## 1. THE WITHDRAWAL MOVEMENT IN GREECE

When the southern section of the eastern front collapsed in the second half of August 1944, there were eight German divisions and five fortress brigades in Greece, south of the Corfu–Thessaloníki line, the strongest forces being stationed on Crete and the Aegean islands. In view of the critical situation on the eastern front, the high command in Thessaloníki was prompted to make plans for a possible withdrawal from Greece. It was proposed to allow about three months for the operation. Although the occupation of Crete, the Aegean islands, and the Peloponnese was of little operational importance, Hitler had so far refused to permit any change in the status quo. After the fiasco in Romania, the Commander-in-Chief South-East considered it necessary to issue an order on 29 August 1944 instructing Army Group E to defend the south-eastern area.<sup>3</sup> Pursuant to that order, combat units and command staffs were to start moving out of the Greek islands in the strictest secrecy, and preparations were to be made to evacuate the mainland.<sup>4</sup> The order did not involve any radical change in the army group's situation, as it had already started making the necessary preparations to withdraw at the end of August, insofar as they could be concealed from the OKW.<sup>5</sup> However, the dramatic deterioration in the situation east of Belgrade and on the Bulgarian–Serbian border required substantial forces to be moved to that area immediately.<sup>6</sup>

On 26 August the Commander-in-Chief South-East had already ordered 4th SS Police Armoured Infantry Division to move from north-western Greece to the Skopje area.<sup>7</sup> At the end of August the troops in the Romanian–Bulgarian area of operations were facing a fiasco. So, on 3 September, the commander-in-chief decided to withdraw 11th Luftwaffe Field Division from the Athens region and deploy it as a safety measure on the eastern border of Macedonia.<sup>8</sup> At this point there were still 34,000 German troops on Crete, and more than 23,000 on the

<sup>3</sup> OB Südost (H.Gr. F), Abt. Ia, No. 0217/44 g.Kdos. Chefs., 29 Aug. 1944, 'Befehl für die Verteidigung des Südostraums Nr. 7', BA-MA RH 19 XI/28, fos. 50–1.

<sup>4</sup> KTB H.Gr. E, Abt. Ia, No. 3, i. 870–2 (29 Aug. 1944), ii. 885–6 (1 Sept. 1944), BA-MA RH 19 VII/25, fos. 240–2; RH 19 VII/26, fos. 3–4; Schmidt-Richberg, *Der Endkampf*, 26.

<sup>5</sup> KTB H.Gr. E, Abt. Ia, No. 3, ii. 870–2 (29 Aug. 1944), BA-MA RH 19 VII/25, fos. 240–2.

<sup>6</sup> The units in question were 4th SS Pol.Armd.Inf.Div., 18th Pol.Rgt., 117th Lt.Inf.Div., parts of XXI Mtn.A.C.

<sup>7</sup> KTB OB Südost (H.Gr. F), Abt. Ia, No. 3, 252 (26 Aug. 1944), BA-MA RH 19 XI/14, fo. 251.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. 292 (3 Sept. 1944), BA-MA RH 19 XI/14, fo. 291.



Map VI.III.1. The withdrawal of Army Group E from Greece (September and October 1944)

Source: Schmidt-Richberg, *Der Endkampf auf dem Balkan*, diagrams 1 and 2.

islands in the Dodecanese.<sup>9</sup> Despite the precarious situation on the southern section of the eastern front, it was not until 6 September that Hitler took the decision to move as many units as possible from the islands to the mainland.<sup>10</sup> As it had become clear in the first half of 1944 that the superiority of the British navy in the eastern Mediterranean more or less precluded any possibility of moving them out by sea, the bulk of the German units had to be evacuated by air, and almost all the heavy military equipment was left behind on the islands. Although the withdrawal had already started on 28 August, when parts of 22nd Infantry Division were moved out of Crete, the operation proper only got going at the beginning of September, reaching its climax in the middle of the month, when 100 transport aircraft a day were engaged in the evacuation.<sup>11</sup> Hitler finally approved the complete evacuation of the Greek islands only in mid-September.<sup>12</sup> The daily transport capacity diminished after that point, owing to Allied air superiority and the need to fly the evacuated units as far as Thessaloníki or even to the Belgrade area. Nevertheless, by the end of October some 2,050 missions had successfully transported almost 31,000 men and 1,000 tonnes of equipment to the mainland.<sup>13</sup> The evacuation of the Greek islands had to be halted on 30 October, when Army Group E abandoned the Thessaloníki region. There were still 11,800 German troops and 4,750 Italian troops on Crete, and they formed a hedgehog position in the Chania area, which they continued to defend until the capitulation on 8 May 1945. In the eastern Aegean it was impossible to evacuate Rhodes, Leros, and Kos completely. About 11,200 German and 5,500 Italian troops were left behind on those islands.<sup>14</sup>

Along with the evacuation of the Greek islands, the withdrawal on the mainland started according to plan at the beginning of September. 41st Fortress Division in the Peloponnese moved northwards in stages, and a strong bridgehead was established in the Corinth area. This served both as a rear assembly zone for the retreating land forces and as protection for southern Greece. Thanks to the secret preparations, the evacuation of the Peloponnese was completed without much difficulty by 21 September, in four stages.<sup>15</sup>

To prevent any threat to a speedy withdrawal, Army Group E felt it necessary to establish a strong defensive position at Antirion, in order to defend south-western Greece and the Gulf of Corinth. Moreover, Bulgaria's entry into the war on 8 September on the side of the Allies forced the army group not only to evacuate Greece immediately but also to protect the open flank in south-eastern Macedonia, and 'cooperation' between Bulgarian and Soviet troops to drive the German enemy

<sup>9</sup> Hümmlchen, 'Balkanräumung 1944', 574. There were also about 6,500 Italian paramilitary auxiliaries on Crete, and nearly 7,350 troops on the Aegean islands.

<sup>10</sup> OKW/WFSt No. 773259/44 g.Kdos. Chefs., 6 Sept. 1944, KTB OB Südost (H.Gr. F), Abt. Ia, No. 3, i. 311 (7 Sept. 1944), BA-MA RH 19 XI/14, fo. 310.

<sup>11</sup> KTB OKW, iv/1, 714.

<sup>12</sup> OKW/WFSt No. 773391/44 g.Kdos. Chefs., 15 Sept. 1944, KTB OB Südost (H.Gr. F), Abt. Ia, No. 3, i. 345 (15 Sept. 1944), BA-MA RH 19 XI/14, fo. 344.

<sup>13</sup> Hümmlchen, 'Balkanräumung 1944', 576.

<sup>14</sup> FS OB Südost (H.Gr. F), Abt. Ia, No. 5924/44 g.Kdos., 31 Oct. 1944, BA-MA RH 19 XI/33, fo. 19.

<sup>15</sup> KTB H.Gr. E, Abt. Ia, No. 3, ii. 987 (21 Sept. 1944), BA-MA RH 19 VII/26, fo. 105.

out of the Balkans was one of the issues ‘discussed’ in the Bulgarian–Soviet armistice negotiations on 10 September.<sup>16</sup>

On 13 September the 3rd Ukrainian Front chief of staff, General Sergei Semyonovich Biryuzov, was sent to Sofia to prepare the Bulgarian forces for the offensive against the Wehrmacht. Then, only three days later, Marshal Fedor Ivanovich Tolbukhin assumed operational command of the Bulgarian army. The operation against the German defensive front on Bulgaria’s western border was not launched until 21 September, an earlier start having been prevented by a substantial restructuring of the Bulgarian forces—in particular, a ‘purge’ of the officer corps to suit the new masters. The aim of the Bulgarian–Soviet forces in this offensive, whose point of main effort was directed against the southern section of the Macedonian front, was to break the important Thessaloníki–Skopje–Niš connection—the potential weak link in any German withdrawal to Yugoslavia—so that Army Group E would be cut off in Greece. Despite their superior strength, however, the Bulgarians failed to achieve any decisive successes initially, because the loss of tactical commanders prevented effective deployment of the operational forces.<sup>17</sup> 22nd Infantry Division and 11th Luftwaffe Field Division held out against the enemy offensive until the end of the month, without losing much ground.

During the last ten days of September 3rd Ukrainian Front HQ, on the Stavka’s instructions, worked out the plan for Operation BELGRADE. The operation, to be launched in mid-October, was designed as a coordinated offensive by Soviet, Yugoslav, and Bulgarian troops, aimed at liberating Belgrade and attacking Army Group E’s withdrawal routes to prevent the enemy forces from leaving Greece.<sup>18</sup> The Commander-in-Chief South-East already had information about an impending large-scale Soviet offensive at the end of September, and Field Marshal Maximilian von Weichs had repeatedly asked the OKW to decide on the measures it planned to take in Greece. On 3 October the OKW finally issued the order to evacuate Greece, southern Albania, and southern Macedonia.<sup>19</sup> The high command in Thessaloníki was given the task of moving the forces under its command as quickly as possible north of the Scutari–Skopje–Klisura line.<sup>20</sup> According to Weichs’ instructions, the evacuation was to start ‘on 10 Oct. 1944 [...] and was not to include full withdrawal of the forces occupying the islands’.<sup>21</sup>

The Wehrmacht forces still in Greek territory at the end of September were XXII Mountain Corps,<sup>22</sup> securing the area west of the Pindus mountains, and LXVIII Army Corps,<sup>23</sup> on the east coast between Corinth and Thessaloníki. The withdrawal movement started promptly in the first days of October. LXVIII Corps dismantled the Corinth bridgehead and gradually evacuated the Athens–Piraeus area. On 12 October the last German units left the Greek capital, which had

<sup>16</sup> Ratschew, ‘Bulgarien’, 106.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. 105–10.

<sup>18</sup> *Geschichte des zweiten Weltkrieges 1939–1945*, ix. 215.

<sup>19</sup> KTB OKW, iv/1, 720.

<sup>20</sup> KTB OB Südost (H.Gr. F), Abt. Ia, No. 3, 420 (3 Oct. 1944), BA-MA RH 19 XI/14, fo. 419.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> At the end of September, 104th Lt.Inf.Div., 966th and 1017th Frt.Brig. were under the command of XXII Mtn.A.C.

<sup>23</sup> LXVIII A.C. included 133rd Frt.Div., 41st Frt.Div. and various combat groups.

already been declared an 'open city' on 10 October.<sup>24</sup> The first British units reached Athens two days later in the course of Operation MANNA, the purpose of which was to secure the capital and reinstate the Papandreu government, and so prevent ELAS from taking advantage of the power vacuum left by the Wehrmacht's departure to take control of the city.<sup>25</sup>

The German withdrawal along the Aegean coast went without major difficulties, because although the opposing British forces were in close pursuit, they avoided direct engagements.<sup>26</sup> The defensive attitude of the pursuing British forces led the German side to speculate that the enemy might possibly be interested in Army Group E remaining in northern Greece and southern Macedonia. As a result, the high command in Mitrovica appears to have come up with the fantastical idea of entering into negotiations with the British, with a view to their 'taking over the task of supplying Army Group E, in return for which [...] Army Group E would remain on Greece's northern border to defend it against the Soviet and Bulgarian forces'.<sup>27</sup> However, there were compelling reasons for the British attitude. In the first place, the roads were in such bad condition that the British 2nd Parachute Light Infantry Brigade could only follow the retreating LXXXI Corps<sup>28</sup> slowly, and secondly, some of the British forces had to be regrouped in connection with Operation MANNA. The reality was that the units deployed in Greece had been withdrawn for that purpose from the Italian theatre of war, where they were now urgently needed.<sup>29</sup> Some British troops remained in Greece, with the task of ensuring that the country remained stable if the Papandreu government managed to re-establish a functioning administration.<sup>30</sup> Despite the Allied air raids, which seriously hampered the withdrawal from Greece, the rearguard of LXXXI Army Corps reached the Larissa area five days later, and finally left the city on 25 October.

The situation proved much more problematic west of the Pindus mountains, where General Napoleon Zervas' Greek nationalist resistance group fiercely engaged the retreating forces of XXII Mountain Corps.<sup>31</sup> The combined forces of 104th Light Infantry Division and the fortress brigades in the Ioánnina area were nevertheless able to withdraw via Bitola without serious losses and reach Veles, where they joined up with the LXVIII Army Corps units that were retreating northwards. By the middle of October, XXII Mountain Corps had already left Greece and was fighting in southern Yugoslavia, where it was defending the southern border of Kosovo. At this point, Army Group E operations were already commanded from Mitrovica, where the army group HQ had moved on 14 October.<sup>32</sup> The last German troops abandoned Thessaloníki on 31 October

<sup>24</sup> KTB H.Gr. E, Abt. Ia, No. 3, iii. 1095–6 (10 Oct. 1944), BA-MA RH 19 VII/27, fos. 52–3.

<sup>25</sup> *The Mediterranean and Middle East*, vi/II. 208–10.

<sup>26</sup> KTB OB Südost (H.Gr. F), Abt. Ia, No. 3, 476 (12 Oct. 1944), BA-MA RH 19 XI/14, fo. 475.

<sup>27</sup> KTB OKW, iv/1, 722.

<sup>28</sup> On 19 October 1944 LXXXI A.C. had taken over command of the forces of LXVIII A.C.; OB Südost (H.Gr. F) daily report of 20 Oct. 44, BA-MA RH 19 XI/23, fo. 93.

<sup>29</sup> *The Mediterranean and Middle East*, vi/II. 441–5.

<sup>30</sup> *German Antiguerrilla Operations in the Balkans*, 64.

<sup>31</sup> Röhricht, 'Die Entwicklung auf dem Balkan', 398.

<sup>32</sup> KTB H.Gr. E, Abt. Ia, No. 3, iii. 1107 (14 Oct. 1944), BA-MA RH 19 VII/27, fo. 64.

and crossed the Greek–Macedonian border on 2 November 1944. Only the Greek partisans had hampered the German withdrawal from time to time, and by the end of October 1944 Army Group E had lost very few men as a result of their attacks.<sup>33</sup> Crossing the border to Macedonia marked the end of German occupational rule in Greece, which had lasted for more than three years.<sup>34</sup>

## 2. THE WITHDRAWAL BATTLES IN MACEDONIA

If Löhr hoped that the army group's withdrawal in Macedonia too would be rapid and relatively trouble-free, then he underestimated the Bulgarians, who seriously hampered the German retreat in eastern Macedonia. In mid-October, while Löhr's rearguard was still in Greece, Tolbukhin launched Operation BELGRADE, an offensive by 3rd Ukrainian Front and units of the Yugoslav People's Liberation Army with its point of concentration directed towards Belgrade. The main attack was supported by the Bulgarian 2nd Army with a flanking thrust against Niš, aimed at capturing this major traffic node and preventing the German troops' withdrawal from the south of the Balkan Peninsula.<sup>35</sup> At first Tito refused absolutely to have Bulgarian troops participating in operations on Yugoslav territory, and he agreed only under pressure from Stalin.<sup>36</sup> With the fall of Belgrade and the loss of Niš in the second half of October, Army Group E's withdrawal route was permanently blocked in two places. The German troops in southern Macedonia and northern Greece were effectively cut off. The only remaining way out was the road from Skopje to Sarajevo, via Mitrovica and Kraljevo, and Tito's units posed a threat to transport routes in Kosovo and eastern Bosnia.

The successes in the second half of October prompted the Soviet–Bulgarian enemy to continue his offensives on a massive scale. While the Bulgarian 1st, 2nd, and 4th Armies operated in the Skopje area, a Soviet corps launched an attack to the north, aimed at capturing the weakly defended city of Kraljevo. The loss of Belgrade and Niš had deprived the Commander-in-Chief South-East of his direct link with Army Group E, so Weichs transferred the conduct of operations in Macedonia and southern Serbia to Löhr, placing the Müller Group<sup>37</sup> under the command of Army Group E.<sup>38</sup> The only way the army group could save itself in this critical situation was to hold the key positions in Kraljevo and Skopje until the last German units had passed them. Löhr's first step was to strengthen the defence of Kraljevo by flying in the remains of 22nd Infantry Division and Assault Division

<sup>33</sup> A.Gr. E incurred approx. 8,300 losses (1,500 dead, 5,550 wounded, and 1,000 missing) in the period 1 Sept. to 28 Oct. 1944, the majority, i.e. about 6,050 men, as a result of the heavy fighting in Macedonia between 21 and 28 Oct. 1944; BA-MA RW 6/v. 559, fos. 29–35.

<sup>34</sup> FS Ob.Kdo. H.Gr. E, Abt. Ia, 11355 geh., 2 Nov. 1944, BA-MA RH 19 XI/33, fo. 10; *KTB OKW*, iv/1, 720–1; Hümmerchen, 'Balkanräumung 1944', 578–9.

<sup>35</sup> See Part VI, Chapter II of the present volume.

<sup>36</sup> Ratschew, 'Bulgarien', 112–13.

<sup>37</sup> The Müller Group comprised LXXXI A.C. HQ, two divisions, and two C.Gr.

<sup>38</sup> OB Südost (H.Gr. F), Abt. Ia, No. 5523/44 g.Kdos., 14 Oct. 1944, BA-MA RH 19 XI/22, fos. 311–12; KTB H.Gr. E, Abt. Ia, No. 3, iii. 1108–9 (15 Oct. 1944), BA-MA RH 19 VII/27, fos. 66–7.

Table VI.III.1. Army Group E: order of battle (status: 28 September 1944)

11th Lw.Fld.Div.	W.Cdr. Macedonia	
22nd Inf.Div.		
297th Inf.Div.		
181st Inf.Div.		
21st SS Mtn.Div. 'Skanderbeg' (Alb. No. 1) [under formation]	XXI Mtn.A.C.	
968th Frt.Brig.	LXXXI A.C. (special duties)	Army Group E
104th Lt.Inf.Div.		
966th Frt.Brig.	XXII Mtn.A.C.	
1017th Frt.Brig. (Corfu)		
41st Frt.Div.	LXVIII A.C.	
133rd Frt.Div. [arriving]		
Aslt.Div. 'Rhodos' [arriving]		
939th Frt.Brig. (Rhodes)	Cdr. Eastern Aegean	
967th Frt.Brig.		
938th Frt.Brig.		
133rd Frt.Div.	Fortress Crete	

'Rhodos' to the endangered region, and bringing parts of 104th and 118th Light Infantry Divisions up to the front at Kraljevo. From 22 October to 2 November a bitter battle was fought for possession of the city, the cornerstone of German defence in southern Serbia. Hitler's reaction, in this critical situation, was to demand that the army group pull out of Macedonia in a series of forced marches<sup>39</sup>—clear evidence that Hitler and the OKW were helpless in the face of the virtually hopeless situation of the army in Greece. In a last desperate effort, the Soviet offensive was halted and the city held. An existential threat had been temporarily averted.<sup>40</sup>

In addition to the Soviet advance in southern Serbia, the Bulgarian forces south and south-west of Niš constituted the main threat to the last German withdrawal route, the road from Skopje to Sarajevo. The point of concentration of the Bulgarian offensive was the traffic node at Skopje. To avoid being cut off again, the high command in Mitrovica deployed parts of 22nd Infantry Division at Skopje, while 11th Luftwaffe Field Division shielded the operational area to the north at Priština. For this defensive operation, in the absence of combat troops, the army group was obliged to rely on fortress troops, Luftwaffe march battalions, and naval companies. In the course of the fighting a crisis arose at Priština at the beginning of November, when the remains of 11th Luftwaffe Field Division gave way under the massive Bulgarian assault. The army group nevertheless managed to establish a new blocking line and restabilize the defence front, enabling the German position at Skopje, essential to the evacuation of Macedonia, to be held. The rearguard of 41st Fortress Division abandoned Veles on 11 November, and the

<sup>39</sup> FS OB Südost (H.Gr. F), Abt. Ia, No. 5737/44 g.Kdos., 25 Oct. 1944, BA-MA RH 19 XI/23, fo. 165.

<sup>40</sup> KTB H.Gr. E, Abt. Ia, No. 3, iii. 1139–86, iv. 1187–99 (22 Oct. to 3 Nov. 1944), BA-MA RH 19 VII/27, fos. 97–143, RH 19 VII/28, fos. 4–16.



**Map VI.III.2.** The withdrawal of Army Group E (October to December 1944)

Source: Schmidt-Richberg, *Der Endkampf auf dem Balkan*, diagrams 3 and 4.

hard-fought-over city of Skopje three days later. The last German units left Macedonian territory on 16 November.<sup>41</sup>

At the end of October, in view of the critical situation at Kraljevo and Skopje, Löhr had already deployed a combat group to open up a march route through the Sandžak, while the Müller Group attempted a breakthrough in the direction of

41 KTR OKW iv/1 726

Višegrad at the beginning of November. Despite heavy fighting with units of the Yugoslav People's Liberation Army, both formations managed to reach the Višegrad area by 11 November, thus restoring the link with Second Armoured Army and the Commander-in-Chief South-East. The German forces' withdrawal from the southern part of the Balkan Peninsula was now largely complete.<sup>42</sup> All that remained to be done was to get XXI Mountain Corps, which was still in Albania, out of the country, so as to establish a continuous defensive front on the southern border of Croatia.

### 3. XXI MOUNTAIN CORPS' WITHDRAWAL FROM ALBANIA

Italy's capitulation in September 1943 necessitated the establishment of a new political order in Albania. Berlin wanted the country's independence restored. A pro-German national government would pacify the country and the German military presence in Albanian territory would subsequently be reduced to a minimum. Nevertheless, in parallel to the national government of Rexhep Bej Mitrovica, the Germans set up a power structure of their own, of which the main pillar was XXI Mountain Corps, with its two divisions.<sup>43</sup> Although it had some success at first, especially in forcing the Communist-influenced 'National Liberation Movement' to give ground, the experiment did not achieve its intended aim. In the end, the resistance group was so strong that by the autumn of 1944 it had gradually extended the area under its control. As the occupying power's administrative structures gradually collapsed during the summer of 1944, the 'National Liberation Movement' gained the upper hand both militarily and politically.<sup>44</sup>

The military developments in the Serbian and Hungarian theatres, and the consequent inevitable withdrawal of Army Group E, meant that the 21,000-strong XXI Mountain Corps also had to withdraw from Albania. However, this substantial unit had to protect Army Group E's south-western flank until its rearguard had evacuated Greece and Macedonia. The Commander-in-Chief South-East's withdrawal plan had originally been for XXI Corps to move away northwards to Mostar, via Scutari and Nikšić. But by the time the last units of LXXXI Corps reached the Serbian–Macedonian border in the middle of November, the Yugoslav People's Liberation Army was already firmly established in Montenegro and on the Neretva. Thus, the German forces in Albania were 'cut off from [their] natural withdrawal route'.<sup>45</sup> They now had to fight their way north-east through the karst mountains, where Tito's troops were also in control. Starting from Podgorica, XXI Mountain Corps endeavoured, from 20 November, to break through the enemy blocking line at Nikšić, but without success. The Commander-in-Chief South-East therefore

<sup>42</sup> Hnilicka, *Das Ende*, 88–96; Hümmelchen, 'Balkanräumung 1944', 579–81; Gosztony, 'Der Krieg zwischen Bulgarien und Deutschland', 92–4.

<sup>43</sup> XXI Mtn.A.C. consisted of 181st Inf.Div., 297th Inf.Div., and a number of fortress brigades.

<sup>44</sup> Rhode, 'Albanien', 1283–7; Hösch, *Geschichte der Balkanländer*, 234–5; Schmidt-Neke, 'Geschichtliche Grundlagen', 54–6.

<sup>45</sup> KTB OKW, iv/1, 725.

decided to turn the corps north-east at Podgorica—through Kolasin and Bjelopolje to Prijepolje—so as to join up with the units that were coming from Macedonia.<sup>46</sup> However, it took until 29 November for the last units to leave Scutari. The withdrawal from Albania was accompanied by hard and continuous battles with the People's Liberation Army, and the bad weather and disastrous flooding made it even more difficult. In the end, the corps was able to escape encirclement only because the army group HQ 'sent the [...] only active army unit that was left, namely 22nd Infantry Division, through the mountains to meet it'.<sup>47</sup> The breakthrough succeeded after heavy fighting with Tito's units, and XXI Mountain Corps joined with the army group on 18 December.<sup>48</sup>

With the arrival of the last units of Army Group E in the area of the Montenegro–Croatia border in the middle of December, the withdrawal from the southern part of the Balkan peninsula was completed more or less successfully, though with considerable losses.<sup>49</sup> Although partisan activity in Greece, Yugoslavia, and Albania, increasingly intense after the summer of 1944, had made life difficult for the German occupying forces, it was the military disaster in Romania that gave rise to the danger threatening Army Group E. When Romania and Bulgaria changes sides and joined the Allies, the Commander-in-Chief South-East's strategic position deteriorated to such a degree that withdrawal from the Balkans became the only option. Finally, the Soviet–Bulgarian troops cut the major withdrawal routes in southern Serbia and Macedonia. The threatening destruction of Army Group E was avoided only by skilful manoeuvring, the early dismantlement of positions in Greece, and evacuation of the Greek islands. When Army Group E reached southern Croatia in mid-December 1944, it seemed that the danger of destruction had finally been overcome.

<sup>46</sup> KTB OB Südost (H.Gr. F), Abt. Ia, No. 3, 632 (24 Nov. 1944), BA-MA RH 19 XI/14, fo. 631.

<sup>47</sup> Röhricht, 'Die Entwicklung auf dem Balkan', 402.

<sup>48</sup> KTB OB Südost (H.Gr. F), Abt. Ia, No. 3, 749 (18 Dec. 1944), BA-MA RH 19 IX/14, fo. 748.

<sup>49</sup> KTB OKW, iv/1, 725–6; Stamm, 'Zur deutschen Besetzung Albaniens', 115–17. In the period 1 Oct. to 20 Dec. 1944, A.Gr. E lost approx. 13,000 men (2,000 dead, 7,500 wounded, and 3,450 missing); BA-MA RW 6/v. 559, fos. 29–40.

## IV. The End of the North African Campaign and the War in Italy, 1943 to 1945

*Gerhard Schreiber*

On 4 November 1942 the German–Italian armoured army under Field Marshal Erwin Rommel suffered a catastrophic defeat at the Egyptian city of El Alamein.<sup>1</sup> But the military leaders and the home front still hoped to become ‘masters of their fate’ once again, despite the turn of events in North Africa.<sup>2</sup>

Four days later, on 8 November, the Allies landed in Morocco and Algeria (Operation TORCH),<sup>3</sup> and the situation came to a dramatic head. The word now, on the German side,<sup>4</sup> was that the war had acquired ‘a new look’ overnight; its enemies were aiming to ‘drive the Axis’ out of North Africa, and ‘regain control of the Mediterranean shipping lanes’—with adverse consequences for its own conduct of naval operations. This strategic threat was recognized in the Wehrmacht high command, but they were unable and unwilling to move the main focus of operations to the Mediterranean.<sup>5</sup>

The Axis powers, at odds in respect of their war aims,<sup>6</sup> responded to TORCH by occupying the rest of France and Corsica and establishing the Tunisian bridgehead.<sup>7</sup> This was something which Berlin and Rome could ill afford, since the ever-widening gap between the demands of the front and the satisfaction of needs was a compelling reason to concentrate their forces. Moreover, two years of desert warfare had

<sup>1</sup> *Germany and the Second World War*, vi. 721–90; Greiselis, *Das Ringen*, 53–72. The following account of the military events from February 1943 to May 1945 is extremely brief, and the author proposes to cover the events in the Italian theatre of war in a detailed monograph. He takes this opportunity to thank Dr Jürgen Förster (Freiburg), Prof. Manfred Messerschmidt (Freiburg), and Lt.-Col. Michael Poppe (Mengerskirchen) for their valuable advice and information on hidden sources. He would also like to thank Dr Klaus A. Maier (Schliengen), Prof. Wolfgang Michalka (Heidelberg), Prof. Klaus-Jürgen Müller (Hamburg), Dr Werner Rahn (Berlin), Dr Hans Umbreit (Freiburg), and Brig.-Gen. (ret.) Winfrid Vogel (Bad Breisig) for their painstaking perusal of the manuscript.

<sup>2</sup> KTB Skl, pt. A, xxxix. 78 (4 Nov. 1942); *Meldungen aus dem Reich*, xii. 4427.

<sup>3</sup> Greiselis, *Das Ringen*, 73–99; Levisse-Touzé, *L’Afrique du Nord*, 233–61; *The Mediterranean and Middle East*, iv. 109–91.

<sup>4</sup> KTB Skl, pt. A, xxxix. 155–6 (8 Nov. 1942); see Salewski, *Die deutsche Seekriegsleitung*, ii. 148–84, esp. 169.

<sup>5</sup> KTB Skl, pt. A, xxxix. 156 (8 Nov. 1942).

<sup>6</sup> Müller, ‘Strategische und operationelle Aspekte’, 62–4.

<sup>7</sup> Greiselis, *Das Ringen*, 100–10; *Germany and the Second World War*, vi. 801–21; Montanari, *Le operazioni in Africa Settentrionale*, iv. 5–225.

brought insoluble supply problems. Nevertheless, on 19 December 1942 Adolf Hitler, infected by the opportunistic optimism of the Commander-in-Chief South, Field Marshal Albert Kesselring, decided to 'hold North Africa'.<sup>8</sup> Benito Mussolini opened up the practical possibilities for this soon afterwards by instructing Field Marshal Rommel, who had been placed under his command, to move his army to Tunisia.<sup>9</sup> The German and Italian troops had made their way back there by February 1943—fighting all the way, but unable to halt the British 8th Army advancing from Egypt under the command of General Bernard Law Montgomery.

### 1. NORTH AFRICA AND ITALY IN THE STRATEGY OF THE ANTI-HITLER COALITION AND THE AXIS ALLIANCE AT THE BEGINNING OF 1943

'Problems of Victory' was the title Winston S. Churchill gave to the chapter of his memoirs in which he discussed the Allies' situation in November and December 1942. The British prime minister's choice of words was an ironic reference to the differences of opinion between the Americans, British, and Russians—after the victory in North Africa—on the question of military commitment in southern Europe.<sup>10</sup> Talks were needed in this connection,<sup>11</sup> particularly on the question of a second front on the old continent.<sup>12</sup> When and where should they take place? As the Soviet dictator, Joseph V. Stalin was apparently unable to travel on account of the battle raging in and around Stalingrad,<sup>13</sup> only President Franklin D. Roosevelt and Prime Minister Churchill attended the conference, which was held in Casablanca from 14 to 24 January 1943.<sup>14</sup>

The contradictory ideas which the British and the Americans had at the time about how to proceed in north-western Europe, in the Mediterranean area, and in East Asia were soon resolved.<sup>15</sup> The principal western powers now decided to concentrate on plans for the landing in Sicily, Operation HUSKY, making the Mediterranean area temporarily the main theatre of war. The success of HUSKY would further secure the east–west connection in the Mediterranean and persuade Rome to exit the war. Hitler would then be forced to occupy not only Italy but also the areas occupied by Mussolini's forces in the south of France and the Balkans, and the islands in the eastern Mediterranean. In order to do so, the Germans would have to withdraw substantial land and air forces from north-western Europe and the east, thereby weakening their attack and defence potential in those areas. The Red Army, above all, would benefit from this. On the other hand, the decision to opt for

<sup>8</sup> *KTB OKW*, ii. 1157–8 (19 Dec. 1942).

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 1200 (29 Dec. 1942); 'Tagesbericht GFM Rommel, 2.1.1943', BA-MA N 117/74.

<sup>10</sup> Churchill, *The Second World War*, iv. 581–92. <sup>11</sup> *Grand Strategy*, iv. 225–37.

<sup>12</sup> *Germany and the Second World War*, vii. 478–93; Böttger, *Winston Churchill*, 73–90.

<sup>13</sup> *Germany and the Second World War*, vi. 1060–172.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 87–95; *Grand Strategy*, iv. 239–88; Woodward, *British Foreign Policy in the Second World War*, ii. 410–17.

<sup>15</sup> On the following, see *Grand Strategy*, iv. 239–88.

HUSKY meant that Roosevelt and Churchill were effectively postponing the landing in Normandy until 1944. And that was not in Stalin's interest.

Rome and Tokyo would have liked a similar point of concentration for the operations of the Axis powers, but in that case the war would have ceased to be Hitler's war.<sup>16</sup> The Germans had indeed attempted to deploy their own troops in the Mediterranean area in the summer of 1940, with a view to freeing the Wehrmacht's rear during the eastern campaign by defeating and destroying the British in North Africa and thus persuading them to reach a settlement with Berlin before the attack on the Soviet Union. That attempt had failed, on the one hand, because of Mussolini, who thought he could use his forces to conduct a 'parallel war' exclusively designed to serve Italian interests, and, on the other, because of the Spanish head of state and government, Generalissimo Francisco Franco y Bahamonde, who, it seems, was never really prepared to enter the war on the German side at any point, despite his occasional waverings: from the Spanish point of view, the risk was simply too great.<sup>17</sup> Hitler's strategists accordingly proposed to leave major operations in Africa and the Near East until the battle against Stalin had been won.<sup>18</sup>

German troops were nevertheless stationed in the Balkans from the spring of 1941,<sup>19</sup> and engaged in operations in the North African area from February that year, where an attack on Egypt and even on the Middle East seemed within the possibilities open to the Axis powers.<sup>20</sup> In fact, this all rested on a situational calculation. Germany had been supporting the precarious regime in Rome since the end of 1940—unwillingly but, of course, in its own vested interest, since Europe's southern flank could well be exposed to the enemy if Italian fascism were to collapse. This danger was all the more serious in 1943, when Mussolini's position deteriorated even further as a result of the heavy military setbacks suffered by the Axis partner. The Italians were shaken, in particular, by the loss of Tripoli, which had to be evacuated on 23 January 1943. The dictators therefore attempted to hold Tunisia, in the hope that tactical successes there would help relieve the domestic tension in Italy. A realistic assessment of the situation would have required abandonment of that theatre of war, which was under the Wehrmacht high command (OKW). That never happened. The Axis' conduct of operations in the Mediterranean continued, as before, to resemble a series of contradictory experiments. It was pure propaganda when the Duce spoke of its 'decisive importance' for 'final victory'.<sup>21</sup>

In April 1943 Hitler and Mussolini discussed the strategic situation at Klessheim Castle near Salzburg. A few days earlier, the Italian head of government had

<sup>16</sup> Krebs, 'Gibraltar', 65–73; Schröder, 'Bestrebungen', 187–217.

<sup>17</sup> *Germany and the Second World War*, iii. 197–246.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. 624–40.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 449–555; on the occupation, see *Germany and the Second World War*, v/I. 92–9, v/II. 38–45.

<sup>20</sup> *Germany and the Second World War*, iii. 643–754. On bold theories concerning the German-Italian conduct of operations in the African–Arabian area, see Mallmann and Cüppers, 'Beseitigung der jüdisch-nationalen Heimstätte in Palästina', 153–76.

<sup>21</sup> ADAP, Series E, v, doc. 135, 16 Feb. 1943, 229, and doc. 192, 9 Mar. 1943, 377: Mussolini spoke of Tunisia as an 'important factor in the overall strategic plan'. But there was no overall strategic plan.

deliberately declared to the ambassador, Hans Georg von Mackensen, that the Axis was ‘mathematically certain’ to win if the eastern front could be ‘liquidated’.<sup>22</sup> A peace treaty would seem to be the best solution, failing which the question of organizing defence behind an impregnable eastern wall should be considered.<sup>23</sup> However, the German dictator would not hear of it,<sup>24</sup> which, in view of his exchange of letters with Hitler on the eve of the Salzburg ‘shadow play’ in 1943,<sup>25</sup> can hardly have come as a surprise to Mussolini.<sup>26</sup> The Duce then proceeded to indulge, in his talks with the Führer, in dreams of attacking the enemy ‘in the rear, via Spain and Spanish Morocco’, and seizing control ‘of the western Mediterranean’.<sup>27</sup> He was determined, in any case, to defend Tunisia ‘to the last bullet’. On this they were both agreed. Hitler assumed that if, in the bridgehead, the ‘Mareth Line, or at least [...] the Chott Line could be held, and if order could be restored in the convoy system’, his own position in North Africa would be impregnable.<sup>28</sup>

## 2. THE FINALE IN TUNISIA

At the beginning of January 1943 German and Italian diplomats met in Rome at the Chigi palace, the seat of the Italian foreign ministry, for a ‘conference on Tunis’.<sup>29</sup> Policy was discussed again, and there was no lack of subjects connected with the occupying powers’ ongoing wartime routine.<sup>30</sup> Special items were added to the agenda, for example, the fate of the Tunisian Jews,<sup>31</sup> the difficult relations with the French administration,<sup>32</sup> the distrust of Vichy’s resident-general in Tunis, Admiral Jean-Pierre Esteva,<sup>33</sup> the delicate dealings with the Bey of Tunis, Mohammed al Munsif,<sup>34</sup> the uncertainties regarding the assessment of the Arab nationalist leader Habib Bourguiba,<sup>35</sup> and the formation of a German–Arab volunteer unit.<sup>36</sup> These were important individual issues, but the participants in the talks all held that

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., doc. 269, 1 Apr. 1943, 516, and doc. 252, 26 Mar. 1943, 482.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., doc. 252, 26 Mar. 1943, 482.

<sup>24</sup> On the meeting in Klessheim (7–10 Apr. 1943), see Plehwe, *Schicksalstunden*, 14–33; Deakin, *The Brutal Friendship*, 259–75; De Felice, *Mussolini l’alleato*, i. 1297–303; Schreiber, *Die italienischen Militärinternierten im deutschen Machtbereich*, 37 ff.

<sup>25</sup> Schmidt, *Statist*, 551.

<sup>26</sup> ADAP, Series E, v, doc. 135, 16 Feb. 1943, 227–36; doc. 192, 9 Mar. 1943, 376–80; doc. 207, 14 Mar. 1943, 402–6; doc. 252, 26 Mar. 1943, 481–4.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., doc. 192, 9 Mar. 1943, 377, and doc. 252, 26 Mar. 1943, 483.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., doc. 207, 14 Mar. 1943, 404–5. <sup>29</sup> Ibid., doc. 7, 2 Jan. 1943, 8–11.

<sup>30</sup> Greisels, *Das Ringen*, 160–87; Metzger, *L’Empire colonial*, 613–68; Moellhausen, *Il gioco è fatto*, 336–494; Rahn, *Ruheloses Leben*, 199–211; Rainero, *La rivendicazione fascista*, 357–70.

<sup>31</sup> Carpi, *Between Mussolini and Hitler*, 228–40; Greisels, *Das Ringen*, 178; Mallmann and Cüppers, ‘Beseitigung der jüdisch-nationalen Heimstätte in Palästina’, 168–9; and Metzger, *L’Empire colonial*, 641–3.

<sup>32</sup> Metzger, *L’Empire colonial*, 614–15.

<sup>33</sup> Greisels, *Das Ringen*, 106.

<sup>34</sup> Metzger, *L’Empire colonial*, 616–19; Rainero, *La rivendicazione fascista*, 532–3.

<sup>35</sup> ADAP, Series E, v, doc. 7, 2 Jan. 1943, 10; doc. 88, 1 Feb. 1943, 159; doc. 286, 10 Apr. 1943, 543–55, esp. 543; and Rainero, *La rivendicazione fascista*, 533–6, 548–9.

<sup>36</sup> Fritz Grobba, ‘Die deutsche Ausnutzung der arabischen Eingeborenenbewegung im zweiten Weltkrieg’, n.p., 1954, *passim*, BA-MA ZA 1/2258; Metzger, *L’Empire colonial*, 669–74.

they were less important than the fact that, 'at the moment, the whole problem of Tunis is primarily a military one',<sup>37</sup> and the problem of supplies was central.

In fact, from the very beginning it was always the case that the North African theatre of war could be adequately supplied only if more Luftwaffe units were transferred from continental Europe to the Mediterranean area. Malta was eliminated as a base for the Royal Air Force (RAF), at least for a time,<sup>38</sup> but from November 1942, when the Tunisian bridgehead too had to be supplied, the supply situation became alarmingly acute. The head of the German naval command in Italy, Vice-Admiral Eberhard Weichold, recommended to Rommel that he permit withdrawal to Tunisia; otherwise it would be impossible to keep the armoured army supplied, and it could well cease to be operational. Rommel himself considered that the battle in Libya and Tunisia was a lost cause anyway,<sup>39</sup> but the authorities in Rome and Berlin refused to believe it. The Führer and the Duce clung to Tunisia, and their hopes were high when their troops established themselves in the bridgehead in February 1943. And indeed they were safe there for a time, but ultimately they were doomed.

Impending operational developments were marked, even more clearly than in previous months, by the Grand Alliance's absolute command of the sea<sup>40</sup> and air,<sup>41</sup> and by the successes of Britain's ULTRA decryption system.<sup>42</sup> Not least on that account, there were early signs of disaster for Army Group Africa (commander-in-chief Field Marshal Rommel), formed on 23 February 1943 and comprising Fifth Armoured Army (Col.-Gen. Hans-Jürgen von Arnim) and the Italian 1st Army (Col.-Gen. Giovanni Messe), formerly the German-Italian Armoured Army.

The Germans and Italians improvised desperately. There was often no room for them on normal transport vessels, so men and military equipment of all kinds were taken to Tunisia by air, and on warships (even U-boats) and small boats. As the last-mentioned could not set out in heavy seas, there were frequent bottlenecks at the front—even without any enemy intervention.

The next development was therefore something of a foregone conclusion. To see the situation in Tunisia for himself, the deputy chief of the Wehrmacht operations staff, Lt.-Gen. Walter Warlimont, visited Rome and Tunis from 5 to 14 February 1943. In his report he identified 'shortage of supplies' as the crucial deficit in the German conduct of operations. The bridgehead needed about 150,000 tonnes of supplies a month, whereas the Comando Supremo was proceeding on the assumption that '80,000 tonnes at most, i.e. half the amount needed, could be provided' every month. Thus, allowing for the 25 per cent 'sinkage rate', 60,000 tonnes would have been a realistic figure.<sup>43</sup> The reality was even more discouraging. According to

<sup>37</sup> ADAP, Series E, v, doc. 7, 2 Jan. 1943, 8.

<sup>38</sup> Gundelach, *Die deutsche Luftwaffe*, i. 338–46, 351–66, and 431–7.

<sup>39</sup> Rommel, *The Rommel Papers*, 360–3; Schreiber, *Revisionismus*, 367–73.

<sup>40</sup> Roskill, *The War at Sea*, ii. 427–44; *The Mediterranean and Middle East*, iv. 246–54, 407–28.

<sup>41</sup> Gundelach, *Die deutsche Luftwaffe*, ii, 519–84; Herington, *Air War*, 385–413.

<sup>42</sup> Bennett, *Ultra and Mediterranean Strategy*, 196–218; and Hinsley, *British Intelligence*, ii. 573–614; Santoni, *Ultra siegt im Mittelmeer*, 208–29.

<sup>43</sup> KTB OKW, iii. 130–1 (15 Feb. 1943).

the official Italian records, a monthly average of 42,314 tonnes of supplies of all kinds was successfully shipped to Tunisia in 1943.<sup>44</sup> There were also 4,787 Italian and 37,780 German servicemen, of whom 4,126 and 35,336 reached North Africa.

Like Rommel, Warlimont, saw his own position as a 'house of cards'. Furthermore, he thought that professionalism and pugnacity alone would not make up for the shortage of manpower, arms, ammunition, fuel, motor vehicles, materials, and reserves on the long front. In any case, there was good reason to suppose that neither Fifth Armoured Army, facing the British 1st Army in the north, nor the Italian 1st Army, in the 35-kilometre-wide Mareth Line stretching from the sea to the Matmata Hills, would withstand a determined large-scale attack.<sup>45</sup>

Altogether, the lieutenant-general was in favour of evacuating Tunisia, and wanted to inform the Führer of his view. The commander-in-chief of the Luftwaffe, Reich Marshal Hermann Göring, and Field Marshal Kesselring prevented him from doing so. Hitler was all too willing to believe their confident assurances, which they knew to be false. The head of the OKW, Field Marshal Wilhelm Keitel, shared Warlimont's concerns but did not dare make them known to his Führer.<sup>46</sup>

Operation TEBESSA (Algeria), better known as the battle of the Kasserine Pass, is to be seen in this context. The operation was originally intended to serve two purposes. The first was to 'secure the Tebessa area by an attack via Sbeitla-Gafsa', that is, to reach the enemy's rear area. Ideally, if the advance went as far as Bône, or at least Constantine, 120 kilometres south-west of Bône, it would be possible to destroy the Allies' north-western front and compel their commander-in-chief, General Dwight D. Eisenhower, to withdraw the bulk of his forces to Algeria. The second aim was to destroy the enemy positions in south-western Tunisia. The Wehrmacht high command's idea was to prevent the Allies from using Gafsa as a base for operations at Gabes on the east coast so as to separate the two armies. The German-Italian forces would then be regrouped and mustered for an attack on the British 8th Army south-east of the Mareth Line.

On 14 February 1943, with a view to ensuring that Fifth Armoured Army could not be separated from the Italian 1st Army at any time in the foreseeable future, the official Comando Supremo in Tunisia ordered Col.-Gen. von Arnim, with 21st Armoured Division and parts of 10th Armoured Division, to attack the American troops (II US Corps) at Sidi Bou Zid and Sbeitla, and largely destroy them (Operation FRÜHLINGSWIND). A day later, a Rommel combat group, consisting essentially of the German Africa Corps (DAK) and parts of Armoured Division 'Centauro', was to take Gafsa (Operation MORGENLUFT).<sup>47</sup>

<sup>44</sup> *La Marina Italiana nella seconda guerra mondiale*, i. 140–5, esp. 143–4. On the varying figures for 1943, see Gundelach, *Die deutsche Luftwaffe*, ii. 569–77; Schreiber, *Revisionismus*, 373–7; *La Marina Italiana nella seconda guerra mondiale*, viii. 37–69, 181–265. On the war at sea, see Bernotti, *Storia della guerra*, 274–81; Kemnade, *Die Afrika-Flottille*, 374–401; Santoni and Mattesini, *La partecipazione tedesca*, 327–59.

<sup>45</sup> KTB OKW, iii. 130–1 (15 Feb. 1943).

<sup>46</sup> Ibid. 131–2; Warlimont, *Im Hauptquartier*, 326–7; Greiselis, *Das Ringen*, 205–6.

<sup>47</sup> KTB OKW, iii. 52–3 (19 Jan. 1943) and 115 (10 Feb. 1943); Rommel, *The Rommel Papers*, 397; Kesselring, *Soldat*, 202–6; on the operational events in the battle of the Kasserine Pass and the atmospheric conditions, see the qualitatively very different works of Ambrose, *Eisenhower*, 92–4;

The attackers made good progress, helped by the fact that their American adversary had not yet seen any action. Bir el Hafey, Sidi Bou Zid, Hadjeb el Aioun, Pichon, Sbeitla, Gafsa, Feriana, and Thelepte fell in the course of the first few days. Rommel therefore decided, on 18 February, ‘to take the risk and, with all his forces’, attack Tebessa, an important traffic node, supply centre, and airbase. In order to ‘bring about the collapse of the entire British front in Tunis’, he needed—in addition to the DAK combat group already under his command—10th and 21st Armoured Divisions, and ‘adequate provisions’ from Fifth Armoured Army HQ. In this situation it proved particularly irksome that Col.-Gen. von Arnim was ‘not keen’ on Rommel’s proposal.

The field marshal—bold and determined as ever, but not rash—nevertheless did all he could to obtain the Comando Supremo’s permission for his operation.<sup>48</sup> It arrived at 01.30 on 19 February. However, the attack was not to be directed to the north via Tebessa, but to El Kef via Thala and Sbiba. Rommel later described that decision as ‘an appalling and unbelievable piece of shortsightedness’ which ‘caused the whole plan to go awry’. A thrust along that line ‘was far too close to the front and was bound to bring us up against the strong enemy reserves’. That was true enough, but Rommel initially thought his troops might nevertheless ‘destroy the Anglo-American positions’.<sup>49</sup> The attacks were launched that same day, on Sbiba (21st Armoured Division), which the Allies successfully defended, and on the Kasserine Pass (DAK combat group and parts of 10th Armoured Division), where the breakthrough was achieved on 20 February. However, the enemy was able to ward off what was to have been the decisive thrust to Thala, having managed to move reserves up to the front line at the last minute, effectively strengthening his defences.<sup>50</sup>

In view of this military situation, and the simultaneous threat to the southern front from the British 8th Army, Rommel and Kesselring agreed on 22 February that ‘continuation of the Le Kef operation’ had no prospect of success. They therefore considered that it would be ‘advisable’ to ‘gradually wind up’ the operation.<sup>51</sup> But Rommel had not given up. Just before taking ‘overall command in

Behrendt, *Rommels Kenntnis*, 274–6; Carell, *Die Wüstenfuchs*, 393–7; Hoffmann, *Claus Schenk Graf von Stauffenberg*, 274–86; Irving, *The Trail of the Fox*, 316–31; Jackson, *Alexander*, 167–77; Kurowski, *Brückenkopf Tunesien*, 133–42; Lewin, *Rommel as Military Commander*, 200–1; Macksey, *Crucible of Power*, 140–78; *The Mediterranean and Middle East*, iv. 287–303; Montanari, *Le operazioni in Africa Settentrionale*, iv. 277–331; Nicolson, *Alexander*, 175–9; Remy, *Mythos Rommel*, 162–4; Spivak and Leoni, *La Campagne de Tunisie*, 217–42; Theil, *Rommels verheizte Armee*, 147–58.

<sup>48</sup> ‘Tagesbericht GFM Rommel’, 18 Feb. 1943, BA-MA N 117/74; Rommel, *The Rommel Papers*, 400–1; on von Arnim’s attitude in particular, see Theil, *Rommels verheizte Armee*, 147–50.

<sup>49</sup> See, in this connection, Rommel, *Krieg ohne Hass*, 353 ff.; Rommel’s comments on the Comando Supremo’s decision in the daily report for 19 February 1943 were somewhat milder. It reads: ‘The C-in-C considers an advance towards Le Kef to be inadvisable, as it would be too close to the front and would probably come up against the British reserves, whereas an advance on Tebessa would be more effective from a psychological point of view, and would cause immense confusion in the enemy camp.’ BA-MA N 117/74.

<sup>50</sup> Rommel, *Krieg ohne Hass*, 354–61.

<sup>51</sup> ‘Tagesbericht GFM Rommel’, 22 Feb. 1943’, BA-MA N 117/74; see Josef Moll, ‘Ausarbeitung Kriegsschauplatz Nord-Afrika, 15.11.1942–15.5.1943’, written in June 1943, BA-MA N 733/7, 26.

Tunisia', he again felt the urge to 'go on the offensive'—this time towards the south-east, where Montgomery was assembling the British 8th Army facing the Mareth Line.<sup>52</sup>

On 6 March the field marshal launched his last offensive in the North African theatre of war. The major attack on the British positions began at 06.00. This was Operation CAPRI, generally referred to as the battle of Medenine.<sup>53</sup> It soon became clear that there was no chance of success in this battle against a militarily superior enemy, which was, moreover, aware of German intentions thanks to its ULTRA signals decryption system. In short, when the enemy was not taken by surprise, CAPRI was doomed. Rommel broke the operation off,<sup>54</sup> handed the high command over to Col.-Gen. von Arnim on 8 March 1943, and left Tunisia the next day. This step was in no way an attempt to avoid responsibility. The field marshal was convinced that 'for the army group to remain on the African continent any longer' would be tantamount to 'suicide',<sup>55</sup> and this firm conviction was given particular emphasis by the step he took.

For the German–Italian troops, it turned into suicide by instalments, starting on 20 March with the British attack on the Mareth Line.<sup>56</sup> The attack was unsuccessful, and the bulk of the British 8th Army then had to circumvent the defenders in the west and circle round to the east through the Tebaga Gap. It managed to get through the gap and break into the German–Italian defence line south-west of El Hamma. However, the Axis troops, mainly Italian 1st Army units, escaped encirclement and withdrew to the Chott–Akarit line. After Montgomery resumed the offensive on 6 April 1943, they moved back to the Enfidaville line within a few days.

At that point, Army Group Africa—with 999th Africa Division (a probationary unit still en route), 10th Armoured Division, and 21st Armoured Division now placed under its direct command—still consisted of the Italian 1st Army and 5th Armoured Army (see Diagram VI.IV.1).<sup>57</sup>

An unequal battle ensued, in which strong, well-supplied Allied divisions—optimally equipped with tanks, artillery, ammunition, and fuel—faced battle-worn Axis divisions. The latter were no longer receiving any supplies to speak of, and as most of them were short of both fuel and ammunition, they were only partly operational. Moreover, the British and Americans had complete command of the air and sea respectively. Theoretically, they would have been in a position to starve the bridgehead out.

<sup>52</sup> 'Tagesbericht GFM Rommel, 22.2. (Zitat) und 24.2.1943', BA-MA N 117/74.

<sup>53</sup> *The Mediterranean and Middle East*, iv. 324 ff.

<sup>54</sup> 'Tagesbericht GFM Rommel', 6 March 1943', BA-MA N 117/74; Hamilton, *Monty. Master of the Battlefield*, 152–71.

<sup>55</sup> Rommel, *Krieg ohne Hass*, 367; 'Tagesberichte GFM Rommel', 8 and 9 March 1943, BA-MA N 117/74.

<sup>56</sup> Hamilton, *Monty: Master of the Battlefield*, 183–95; *Operazioni italo-tedesche in Tunisia*, i. 77–155; Montanari, *Le operazioni in Africa Settentrionale*, iv. 339–421; Theil, *Rommels verheizte Arme*, 252–63.

<sup>57</sup> KTB OKW, iii. 262 (9 Apr. 1943). On 'probation unit' 999, which consisted of political opponents of the regime and actual and alleged criminals, see Klausch, *Die 999er*, 74–120.

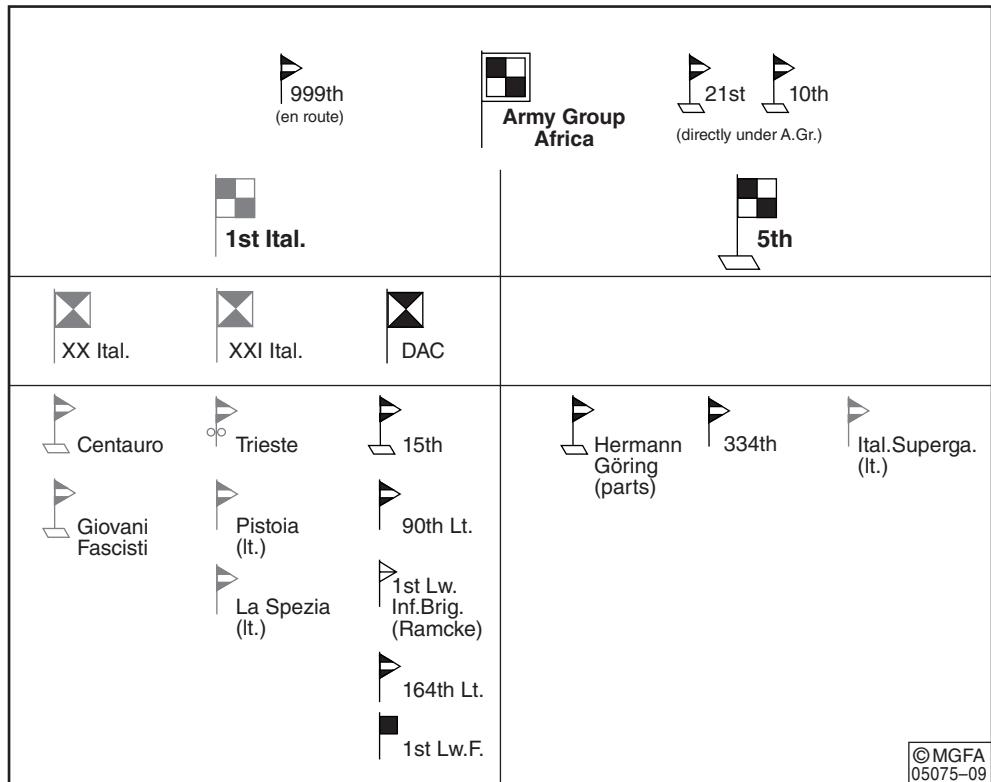


Diagram VI.IV.1. Forces under C-in-C South (status: 9 April 1943)

Source: KTB OKW, iii. 262.

Nevertheless, the Tunisian affair had already taken longer than expected, and was proving to be much more difficult than had been supposed. This was making even Churchill nervous. On 27 February General Harold R. L. G. Alexander, who was Eisenhower's deputy and commander-in-chief of the Allied 18th Army Group at the time, wrote to him: 'Hate to disappoint you, but final victory in North Africa is not just around the corner.'<sup>58</sup>

Then again, the Germans and the Italians too could have put an end to the senseless enterprise. But the generals lacked the necessary courage, preferring to obey insane orders to hold on. Every day counted, according to Hitler and Mussolini and their entourage. In fact, the bridgehead, for which the Allied, German and Italian troops were fighting so fiercely, was shrinking almost by the hour. Tunis and Bizerta fell on 7 May, and deliveries of supplies by sea had to be stopped three days later. The Axis powers' last major formation, the 1st Italian

<sup>58</sup> Churchill, *The Second World War*, iv. 683.

Army under its newly appointed commander-in-chief, Field Marshal Messe, surrendered on 13 May. The previous day the German Africa Corps, led by General Hans Cramer under Messe's overall command, had sent the following radio message: 'Ammunition gone. Arms and equipment destroyed. The DAK has fought on, as ordered, until it could fight no more. The DAK will rise again. Heia Safari!'<sup>59</sup>

Contrary to what this suggests, the campaign in North Africa was by no means a happy hunting expedition, and troops were not its only victims. The British, Americans, and French lost 11,109 dead, 40,782 wounded, and 24,134 missing in Tunisia. The Wehrmacht lost some 3,600 officers there, a loss that weighed particularly heavily.<sup>60</sup> Between 267,000 and 275,000 highly seasoned Italian and German troops were captured. And the Axis alliance also lost about 40,000 dead and wounded.<sup>61</sup> With facts like these in mind, it seems no exaggeration to say that—in purely quantitative terms—Tunisia was a second Stalingrad for the invaders.<sup>62</sup> Altogether, the Allies lost about 220,000 men and the Axis 620,000 in the North African theatre of war.<sup>63</sup>

### 3. THE ATTACK ON 'FORTRESS EUROPE': SICILY 1943

Hitler had predicted in March 1943 that the loss of Tunisia would result in the loss of Italy.<sup>64</sup> But it was only at the beginning of May that the German high command set about doing what they and their opposite numbers in Rome had essentially left undone, namely making the necessary organizational, logistic, infrastructural, and tactical preparations to repel an attack on the Italian mainland, Corsica, Sardinia, Sicily, or the Peloponnese and Dodecanese.<sup>65</sup> This was a difficult task, given the Allied superiority at sea and in the air, and the Axis powers' shortage of transport capacity, air defence, and convoy escort vessels, as well as the deficient loading and unloading facilities in the various ports. To discuss all these matters, the commander-in-chief of the German navy, Grand Admiral Karl Dönitz, spent 12 to 14 May 1943 in Rome. He also discussed with Mussolini the question of where the enemy invasion would take place.

<sup>59</sup> KTB OKW, iii. 465 (12 May 1943); KTB Skl. pt. A, xlv. 266 (14 May 1943), and 201 (10 May 1943), which contains the following quotation from Fifth Armoured Army HQ's final report: 'In loyal fulfilment of their duty, the last remaining Fifth Armoured Army troops send greetings to their homeland and our Führer. Long live Greater Germany.' There must have been an exceptionally large number of convinced National Socialists among the German troops fighting in Africa. Even after the surrender in Tunisia, 'most of them continued for a long time to believe firmly in "final victory" and to express the deepest hatred for anti-fascists', i.e. the 999ers. Quoted in Klausch, *Die 999er*, 120.

<sup>60</sup> Schmundt, *Tätigkeitsbericht*, 84.

<sup>61</sup> *The Mediterranean and Middle East*, iv. 460; *World War II in Europe*, 1609; Clodfelter, *Warfare and Armed Conflicts*, ii. 808–9.

<sup>62</sup> Overmans, 'Das andere Gesicht des Krieges', 439–46.

<sup>63</sup> *World War II in Europe*, 1609.

<sup>64</sup> *Lagevorträge*, 473 (18 Mar. 1943).

<sup>65</sup> KTB OKW, iii, docs. 11, 12, 13, and 14, 1428–31 (8–13 May 1943).

The Germans and Italians had failed to reach any agreement on this point by 9 July, and the British naturally did everything they could to encourage this uncertainty. On 30 April they launched Operation MINCEMEAT, an elaborate deception manoeuvre designed to get the enemy to believe that there were to be landings on the Peloponnese and Sardinia. Hitler and his henchmen were completely taken in by it.<sup>66</sup>

As regards the Grand Admiral's talks with the Duce, however, the latter, unlike the Führer, maintained that the strategically important island of Sicily was the most likely target, not Sardinia and the Peloponnese. The occupation of Sicily would finally give the enemy free access to the sea route via the Mediterranean, which—compared with the tonnage required for transport via the considerably longer route round the Cape of Good Hope—would be tantamount to a saving of up to 2 million gross registered tonnes. It was all the more surprising that Mussolini refused Hitler's offer to move five German divisions to Italy, or to form five divisions there. The Duce, who appeared surprisingly optimistic despite his precarious military and internal political position,<sup>67</sup> assured his interlocutor that three divisions would suffice, though he asked, in the same breath, for 'much greater deployment' of the Luftwaffe.<sup>68</sup>

According to the German military attaché in Rome, General Enno von Rintelen, it was Mussolini who was the source of the perceptible 'resistance' to having any more German troops stationed in Italy after the North African disaster. The Italian dictator may have overestimated the fighting strength of his own troops once again, and he probably also wanted to preserve the nation's prestige. There were also practical considerations, since the large number of Wehrmacht troops in the country imposed enormous economic burdens.<sup>69</sup>

Rintelen, who as military attaché also held the post of 'resident German general in the headquarters of the Italian armed forces', had to form three infantry divisions from the 'Tunis reserve' of German troops who would no longer be sent to North Africa. There were just enough men to form two large units. One was 'Division Sardinia', formed as from 12 May. Its staff was referred to as 'Sardinia HQ' until 16 September 1943, and its components were commanded as 90th Armoured Infantry Division from 6 July. The other was 'Division Sicily' (formerly 'Sicily command'), which grew, from 14 May, out of the 'march battalions for Africa' assembled on the island after which it was named. Its name was changed to 15th Armoured Division on 1 July, and to 15th Armoured Infantry Division 14 days later.<sup>70</sup> Until the invasion of Sicily, the other divisions and corp HQs for the defence of Italy came from Army Group D in France.<sup>71</sup>

<sup>66</sup> On MINCEMEAT, see Montagu (who was personally involved in the operation), *The Man Who Never Was, passim*; Deakin, *The Brutal Friendship*, 347–68, 444–7; Hinsley, *British Intelligence*, iii/I, 78, 120 (note).

<sup>67</sup> ADAP, Series E, vi, doc. 35, 13 May 1943, 65.

<sup>68</sup> *Lagevorträge*, 490–506 (12–14 May 1943).

<sup>69</sup> KTB OKW, iii, doc. 20, 1447–8 (14 Jul. 1943); Rintelen, *Mussolini*, 199.

<sup>70</sup> Hitlers *Lagebesprechungen*, 326–7, n. 3; KTB OKW, iii, doc. 20, 1447 (14 July 1943); Schröder, *Italiens Kriegsaustritt*, 121; Tessin, *Verbände und Truppen*, iv, 9–11, and xiv, 200, 223.

<sup>71</sup> The transfer of the remnants of Luftwaffe Armoured Division 'Hermann Göring' began on 16 May. It was followed in turn by that of XIV Armoured Corps HQ, 16th Armd.Div., 29th Armd.Inf. Div., Aslt.Brig. 'Reichsführer SS', 3rd Armd.Inf.Div., 26th Armd.Div., and LXXVI Armd.Corps HQ;

As well as increasing the number of German troops in Italy, Hitler was able to strengthen his grip on the planning and conduct of operations in the Mediterranean area by reallocating responsibilities. As also evidenced by Kesselring's service instruction of 23 June, this involved strengthening the position of the Commander-in-Chief South. All army units, SS units, and Luftwaffe units to be deployed in ground operations, the German naval command in Italy, Air Fleet 2, and the German general in the Royal Italian Air Force headquarters were henceforth under his command. Rintelen and the Mediterranean plenipotentiary of the Reich commissioner for shipping were also placed under Kesselring's command, with certain restrictions.<sup>72</sup>

When that service instruction came into force, the German high command had already been preparing, for almost five weeks, to defend Europe's southern flank alone if necessary, but that did not mean that Berlin was looking towards the break-up of the Axis.<sup>73</sup> Washington and London, on the other hand, were hoping that Rome would capitulate as a result of the landing in Sicily.<sup>74</sup>

The planning of the largest landing operation in history, a process that started in January 1943, proved an arduous task. This was mainly due to the complicated Allied command structure in the Mediterranean theatre (there was no unified British and American high command in that area until December 1943), the occasionally inconsistent situation assessments, and the difficult personal relations in some cases.<sup>75</sup>

From an operational point of view, it was necessary to capture efficient harbours and usable airfields as quickly as possible. This was clearly important, because not all parts of Sicily were within the range of fighter aircraft based in Malta, so they would not be able to provide cover for all the troops on the ground. But apart from that, there was no better place for a landing. Not only did the island have a long coastline, which obliged defenders to spread their forces; it also offered a secure link with the supply area of North Africa. The Germans, on the other hand, in planning the defence of Sicily on land and sea, had to take account of the fact that their supply lines were stretched over a long distance and in danger of attack by enemy air and naval forces.

nine fortress battalions, formed in Italy or transferred from the south of France, were brought in, of which 902nd, 905th, 906th, 907th, and 908th Battalions and the staffs of 925th Battalion and the newly established 155th and 200th Fortress Regiments were stationed on Sardinia. 903th, 904th, and possibly 926th Fortress Battalions were earmarked for Sicily. See *Die geheimen Tagesberichte*, vi. 415, 424, 439, 450–1, 458; vii. 5, 19, 43, 51–2, 68, 74–5, 81, 83, 100, 103, 107, 111–12, 132, 177, 200; Schröder, *Italiens Kriegsaustritt*, 120–3; Tessin, *Verbände und Truppen*, xiii. 106, 108–9, 111–14, 131; KTB OKW, iii. 754–6 (6 Jul. 1943); 'Meldungen OB Süd für die Lage am 1.7., 7.7. und 9.7.1943', BA-MA RH 2/647.

<sup>72</sup> Quoted from 'Dienstanweisung OB Süd', 23 Jun. 1943, BA-MA RM 7/237, fos. 133–4; see Schröder, *Italiens Kriegsaustritt*, 123 ff.

<sup>73</sup> KTB OKW, iii. 832–4 (25 Jul. 1943); Warlimont, *Im Hauptquartier*, 334–46; Schreiber, *Die italienischen Militärinternierten im deutschen Machtbereich*, 39–41; Schröder, *Italiens Kriegsaustritt*, 176–95.

<sup>74</sup> *Grand Strategy*, iv. 359–73 (Howard); *The Mediterranean and Middle East*, v. 1–34.

<sup>75</sup> See Alexander, *The Alexander Memoirs*, 105–8; Carver, *The War in Italy*, 1–7; Liddell Hart, *History of the Second World War*, 557 ff.

Between 11 and 14 June the Allies occupied the small islands of Pantelleria, Lampedusa, Lampione, and Linosa, in the forefield of their intended landing area. Then, after months of logistic and military preparations and a massive air offensive, Operation HUSKY began at 23.50 on 9 July—with a wholly failed attempt at an airborne landing at Syracuse.<sup>76</sup>

Axis aerial reconnaissance located the enemy landing units at around 16.30 on 9 July. Naval command rightly assumed they were on their way to Sicily, to land in the ‘Syracuse–Cape Passero or Gela–Licata area’.<sup>77</sup> And in fact US 7th Army troops landed in the latter sector at 02.45 on 10 July. The British followed at 04.15, in a sector south-west of Syracuse.

The commander-in-chief of the invasion troops was General Eisenhower. Admiral Andrew Browne Cunningham commanded the naval forces, Air Marshal Arthur William Tedder the air forces, and General Alexander the land forces, that is, 15th Army Group, which then comprised General Montgomery’s 8th Army and General George S. Patton’s US 7th Army.<sup>78</sup>

The invasion force had a total of 2,590 to 3,000 ships and boats at its disposal (including six battleships and two large fleet carriers) and 3,462 combat aircraft, of which 2,510 were reported operational on 10 July. Following the successful, professionally executed landing, there were 1,800 cannon, 600 tanks, 14,000 vehicles, and 181,000 troops on the island. And at the end of the 38-day campaign there were 467,000 or possibly even 478,000 Allied military personnel in Sicily.<sup>79</sup>

While the invasion force initially encountered little resistance on land, the pilots of the Axis powers achieved remarkable successes against the attackers,<sup>80</sup> although the numbers show they were fighting a losing battle. The Italian air force had 930 aircraft on the day of the invasion, 449 of which were considered to be operational. In Air Fleet 2, under Field Marshal Wolfram von Richthofen’s command, 563 of the 932 aircraft were operational.<sup>81</sup>

The naval forces deployed by the Axis powers against the landing were negligible. That applied, without exception, to the Italian heavy units: all they could do off Sicily was simply pointless sacrifice.<sup>82</sup>

<sup>76</sup> On this and the following discussion, see Gundelach, *Die deutsche Luftwaffe*, ii. 584–651; *The Mediterranean and Middle East*, v. 35–184; Santoni, *Le operazioni in Sicilia e in Calabria*, 129–407; Roskill, *The War at Sea*, iii/I. 105–52; Schröder, *Italiens Kriegsaustritt*, 158–76, 258–69. The figures given by the various authors are not compatible. On the implications of the landing in Sicily for German operations on the eastern front, see Part II, Chapter III of the present volume.

<sup>77</sup> KTB Skl, pt. A, xlvi. 164–8 (9 Jul. 1943); ‘Meldung OB Süd, Lage am 9.7.1943’, BA-MA RH 2/647; Roskill, *The War at Sea*, iii/I. 121. The small island of Cape Passero lies about 6 km south-east of Pachino.

<sup>78</sup> *The Mediterranean and Middle East*, v. 26–7; *The West Point Atlas*, ii, map 90.

<sup>79</sup> Blumenson, *Sicily*, 45; Clodfelter, *Warfare and Armed Conflicts*, 843–4; *The Mediterranean and Middle East*, v. 46; Santoni, *Le operazioni in Sicilia e in Calabria*, 100; *World War II in Europe*, 1677–8.

<sup>80</sup> Roskill, *The War at Sea*, iii/I. 138–9.

<sup>81</sup> Figures according to Santoni, *Le operazioni in Sicilia e in Calabria*, 94, n. 26. Different figures are given by Gundelach, *Die deutsche Luftwaffe*, ii. 605, according to whom Air Fleet 2 had 838 combat aircraft (507 operational) on 10 July 1943, of which 282 (142 operational) were located in Sicily.

<sup>82</sup> Baum and Weichold, *Der Krieg der ‘Achsenmächte’*, 338–41.

Col.-Gen. Alfredo Guzzoni, the commander-in-chief of the Italian 6th Army, was responsible for defending the island, under the direct authority of the Comando Supremo. On 26 June 1943 Lt.-Gen. Fridolin von Senger und Etterlin, the German liaison officer to the Italian 6th Army, had assumed responsibility for the interests of the German troops which were placed under Guzzoni's command for tactical purposes. He acted as 'Wehrmacht commander' of the German forces on the island until 18 July, when General Hans Valentin Hube, the commander of XIV Armoured Corps, took command of all the German units in Sicily.

The German forces in Sicily before the invasion comprised Armoured Division 'Hermann Göring'—reinforced by the OKW before 10 July with the Maucke Infantry Regiment (three battalions), Infantry Battalion 'Reggio' (a march battalion), Construction Battalion 'Messina', a Tiger company (17 tanks), and a heavy GHQ artillery battalion with three batteries—plus 15th Armoured Infantry Division, 22nd Anti-Aircraft Brigade (mot.), and 903rd Fortress Battalion. Once the hostilities began, they were joined by the bulk of 1st Paratroop Division (from 12 July) and 29th Armoured Infantry Division (from 15 July), Battalions I, II, and III of 382nd Armoured Infantry Regiment, 904th Fortress Battalion, the staff of 924th Fortress Regiment, and a fortress battalion (probably 923rd) on which there is no concrete information.<sup>83</sup>

General Guzzoni's 6th Army consisted of two army corps. XII Army Corps had Infantry Divisions 'Aosta' and 'Assietta', 202nd, 207th, and 208th Coastal Divisions, and 136th Infantry Regiment under its command. XVI Army Corps had the Infantry Division 'Napoli', 206th and 213th Coastal Divisions, and XVIII and XIX Coastal Brigades at its disposal. The army reserves comprised eight 'mobile' groups and eight tactical groups, as well as Infantry Division 'Livorno'.

Altogether, there were close on 28,000 German and 175,000 Italian first-line troops in Sicily on 10 July. There were also 57,000 supply troops, bringing the total military personnel to 260,000. By the end of the campaign the German trench strength had increased to 62,000, and the Italian trench strength to 191,931 men. Including the 65,000 members of the supply services, 5,000 of whom were German, the Axis powers had up to 320,000 men at their disposal.<sup>84</sup>

Three days after the landing, Kesselring reported to the OKW that most of the Italian forces had fallen by the wayside, with the result that the situation was now perilously acute. The 'burden of battle' rested entirely on the shoulders of the German army, which was operating without the necessary air support because the strength of the 'Luftwaffe close-combat units' had been drastically reduced. A 'counter-attack' was no longer possible. In Kesselring's words: 'The island cannot be held with the present German forces alone.'

<sup>83</sup> 'Meldungen zur Lage beim OB Süd am 7., 10., 12., 13., 15., 16., 19., 22., 23., 25. und 26.7.1943', BA-MA RH 2/647; Frido von Senger und Etterlin, 'Der Kampf um Sizilien', n.p., 1951, BA-MA ZA 1/1321, fos. 1, 28, 35 and 51–2; Walter Fries, 'Der Kampf um Sizilien', Neustadt 1947, BA-MA ZA 1/2311, 5, 23, 38–41; KTB OKW, iii. 796 (16 July 1943) and 804 (18 July 1943); Tessin, *Verbände und Truppen*, xiii. 108 ff., 130 ff.; Santoni, *Le operazioni in Sicilia e in Calabria*, 340.

<sup>84</sup> Santoni, *Le operazioni in Sicilia e in Calabria*, 85, 400, 499.

The field marshal dithered over increasing the troop contingent, as military logic required, on the assumption that ‘the reinforcement of German troops in Sicily’ would ‘probably’ be unable to keep pace with that of Allied troops. On the other hand, there was no question of evacuation. In the end, Kesselring nevertheless preferred to send more troops to the island in order to gain time, as it were. According to the field marshal, the ‘rapid loss’ of the island was likely to have ‘serious repercussions on the Italians’ powers of resistance’. That may well have been so, but what was the *slow loss* of Sicily expected to mean, apart from a few thousand more dead?

From a purely operational point of view, it was a matter of ‘bringing the enemy advance to a standstill at a fall-back position before Etna, roughly on the Santo Stefano–Adrano–Catania line’. The Italians were to help, but Hitler ordered XIV Armoured Corps HQ to take ‘overall command of operations in the Sicilian bridgehead’, ‘discreetly bypassing’ the relevant Italian ‘command posts’.<sup>85</sup> German–Italian relations deteriorated rapidly after this. There were some serious armed incidents, with casualties on both sides. Even so, General Guzzoni—acting on the instructions of the Comando Supremo—handed over ‘command of all German and Italian troops in the combat zone’ to General Hube on 31 July.<sup>86</sup>

With the Axis partners increasingly divided, the US divisions had occupied the whole of western Sicily by 23 July, thanks to the operational proficiency which the units previously deployed in North Africa had very quickly acquired there. They then turned eastwards, operating to the west and north of the boundary between the armies. In the period from 23 July to 17 August 1943 the boundary moved from a point near Pozzallo, via Modica, eastwards past Ragusa and Chiaramonte, west of Caltagirone and Piazza Armerina to Enna, from there to a point between Agira and Nicosia, and in the south from Troina to Randazzo, finally reaching Messina. General Patton’s men were in the city on 17 August. The British, who had been fighting their way north, to the east of the boundary between the armies, followed soon afterwards.

The gate to ‘Fortress Europe’ was open. All the difficulties they had experienced counted for little. It was a triumph all along the line, even if the Allies found Messina empty, which was an annoying setback. In a skilful evacuation operation (LEHRGANG),<sup>87</sup> executed in a professional, though not exactly comradely fashion with regard to their relations with the Italians, the Germans had successfully transported 39,569 Wehrmacht troops and their weapons, 9,065 motor vehicles, 27 tanks, 94 cannon, 1,100 tonnes of ammunition, and 970 tonnes of petrol to the mainland between 11 and 17 August 1943. Between 3 and 17 August 62,000 Italians had also reached the mainland safely.

<sup>85</sup> On this, see *KTB OKW*, iii. 776–9 (13 Jul. 1943); Warlimont, *Im Hauptquartier*, 350 ff. The quotations are from *KTB OKW*.

<sup>86</sup> Frido von Senger und Etterlin, ‘Der Kampf um Sizilien’, n.p., 1951’, BA-MA ZA 1/1321, fos. 51 ff.

<sup>87</sup> Schröder, *Italiens Kriegsaustritt*, 263.

Human losses in the fighting on the island were as follows: 4,678 German, 4,325 Italian, 2,721 British, and 2,811 American troops died, that is, about 237 Axis troops and 146 Allied troops a day. The wounded numbered 13,500 Germans, 32,500 Italians, 7,939 British, and 6,470 Americans, and a further 9,892 American and 11,590 British troops caught malaria in Sicily, a disease that was often fatal at the time; 4,583 Germans and 40,655 Italians were reported missing, and 5,532 members of the Wehrmacht and 116,681 members of the Italian armed forces were taken prisoner.<sup>88</sup>

#### 4. ITALY'S EXIT FROM THE WAR

Since November 1942 there had been a danger that Rome might exit the war. The prospect was a veritable nightmare for Hitler. It is true that, in the course of a two-hour-long situation briefing on 15 May 1943, he said he would not be averse to a neutral Italy in the 'present situation', but he immediately took that back. Italy, he asserted, 'would be unable to remain neutral but would go over to the enemy, either of its own free will or under pressure'. Hitler prepared his high command for that contingency, and counter-measures were planned. At the same time, however, the National Socialist regime continued to give its Axis partner extensive military and material support. Berlin was thus proceeding along two tracks. In fact, draft directives for two operations, code-named ALARICH and KONSTANTIN, were already on the table on 21 May. The first of these concerned Italy, its islands, Corsica, and the Italian-occupied areas in the south of France, while the second concerned the Balkan states and islands in the eastern Mediterranean that were occupied by Italy. The intention was to occupy the territories in question and disarm the Italian forces, and when Operation HUSKY destabilized Mussolini's regime, Hitler was forced to act. The dictators met on 19 July in Feltre, a small town in the province of Belluno in northern Italy.<sup>89</sup> The Führer had two reasons for arranging the meeting. On the one hand, he wanted to find out whether the Italians were really able to hold out, and on the other, he intended to persuade them to increase their military commitment.<sup>90</sup>

As the Italians saw it, however, the Germans lacked commitment with regard to defence of the Mediterranean region. In mid-July 1943 Rome's ambassador in Berlin, Dino Alfieri, suggested to Hitler that the latter's only concern was 'to prevent any attack on Reich territory for as long as possible'. The 'occupied or

<sup>88</sup> On this, see Santoni, *Le operazioni in Sicilia e in Calabria*, 400–1; *World War II in Europe*, 1679; Clodfelter, *Warfare and Armed Conflicts*, 844.

<sup>89</sup> On the situation conference of 15 May 1943, see the handwritten letter of that date from Captain Wolf Junge, OKW/WFS/L Op M, to the commander-in-chief of the navy, referred to in Schreiber, *Die italienischen Militärinternierten im deutschen Machtbereich*, 39; on what follows, see ibid., 42–3. The problem of a 'separate peace' is discussed by Aga Rossi, *Una nazione*, 37–42, who argues that it would have been out of the question in the period between mid-1942 and the fall of Mussolini; see also Ciano, *Diario*, 690 ff. (19–25 Jan. 1943).

<sup>90</sup> Plehwe, *Schicksalstunden*, 62–3.

allied states on its borders' were of interest to the Führer solely and exclusively 'as bastions of Fortress Germany'.<sup>91</sup>

A Comando Supremo memorandum dating from that time, which is unsigned but must have come from Col.-Gen. Vittorio Ambrosio, opens with the ominous words: 'Sicily's fate must, sooner or later, be regarded as sealed.' And it closes with the observation that the Germans:

cannot convince us that the Axis still has a chance of winning while the war in Russia is still going on, if steps are not taken to prevent the formation of a second front in Europe. If this cannot be prevented, it would be incumbent on the highest political authorities to consider whether it would not be advisable and indeed essential to spare the country from further suffering and ruin, and to terminate the struggle by anticipation, because the end result would undoubtedly be even worse in one or more years' time.<sup>92</sup>

This was a clear formulation of the key motive for Italy's exit from the war, dictated by reasons of state.

The political and military authorities had furnished Mussolini with arguments for exiting the war. According to the urgent demand presented by Ambrosio, and supported by Alfieri and the under-secretary of state in the foreign ministry, Giuseppe Bastianini, the country should end hostilities within 14 days.<sup>93</sup>

But in direct confrontation with the Führer, the Duce once again behaved lamentably. His attendant staff were appalled. Hitler, for his part, apparently left Feltre with renewed confidence in Mussolini's staying power. He even issued an order—never carried out on account of the events of 25 July—cancelling his earlier orders for ALARICH and KONSTANTIN. Furthermore, Field Marshal Rommel was no longer to be in overall command in Italy, but was to 'take over command in Greece and the islands'.<sup>94</sup>

Back in Rome, Mussolini engaged in some damage-limitation exercises, first with King Victor Emmanuel III, who, since the middle of May, had not ruled out separating the Italian forces from the German forces.<sup>95</sup> The Duce assured the sovereign that he would sever his links with Germany by 15 September.<sup>96</sup> But as ever, on the aforesaid 25 July 1943, the solution came at a stroke, in the form of the deposition of the Duce—carried out at the initiative of a group of officers and the Crown, and condoned by the fascist executive body, the Grand Council of Fascism. Shortly afterwards, Mussolini was arrested. And so, from 17.20 that same day,

<sup>91</sup> *I Documenti Diplomatici Italiani*, 9th series, x, doc. 511, 659–60 (14 July 1943); the document reproduced in Alfieri, *Due dittatori*, 298–9, is incomplete.

<sup>92</sup> See Plehwe, *Schicksalsstunden*, 65–8 (quotations on pp. 65 and 68).

<sup>93</sup> Alfieri, *Due dittatori*, 311, 313–14; Bastianini, *Uomini, cose, fatti*, 121, 165.

<sup>94</sup> 'Tagebuch GFM Rommel', 18, 20 (quotation), 21, and 22 Jul. 1943, BA-MA N 117/77. This source is more detailed than Rommel, *The Rommel Papers*, 430 ff.; see also Warlimont, *Im Hauptquartier*, 355; Schreiber, *Die italienischen Militärinternierten im deutschen Machtbereich*, 48 and n. 75.

<sup>95</sup> Deakin, *The Brutal Friendship*, 340 (15 May, 1943). Note 3.

<sup>96</sup> Schreiber, *Die italienischen Militärinternierten im deutschen Machtbereich*, 43–4.

fascist rule in Italy was a thing of the past.<sup>97</sup> The new head of government was an old acquaintance, Marshal Pietro Badoglio. There are indications that the fall of Mussolini had crucial repercussions for the fate of the Nazi regime itself, since the turnaround in Italy removed the basis for the plans of the German resistance, which were well advanced at the end of July 1943. It meant that 'all the troops they had hoped to use in order to seize power left Berlin and the surrounding area [heading south] in the first few days of August'.<sup>98</sup>

As for Italian fascism, its time was up, and to quote ambassador Hans Georg von Mackensen, it 'quietly vanished from the scene'.<sup>99</sup> Hitler reacted to events in Italy with primitive verbal abuse, directed at the Vatican in particular, but he nevertheless attempted to return the 'Blackshirts' to power by means of Operation EICHE, the successful liberation of the 'ex-Duce', on 12 September 1943, and Operation SCHWARZ (also known as Operation STUDENT), that is, a violent *coup d'état*. The Italians took defensive measures, so the coup was never carried through. Nevertheless, by planning an unsuccessful coup against the leaders of what was still an allied country, Hitler established 'treachery, German style'<sup>100</sup> as a historical fact. There was no other 'treachery' in the south. In fact, the Badoglio government only began armistice negotiations with the Allies on 12 August 1943, after putting out feelers that were in no way binding.<sup>101</sup> After 26 July the Germans were no longer entitled to speak of 'treachery', irrespective of whether the Italian exit from the war was conducted in secret or not.<sup>102</sup>

After El Alamein in November 1942, Stalingrad in January 1943, Tunisia and the loss of the U-boat war in May 1943, most Germans were depressed by the news from Italy, whereas, in Italy itself, people were buoyed up for a short time by the hope that the end of fascism also meant the end of the war. That hope faded when Badoglio proclaimed, in an address to the Italians: 'The war continues'.<sup>103</sup> The watchword for the home front was 'discipline, calm, and verbal restraint'.<sup>104</sup>

The ensuing political developments were marked, until 8 September 1943, by the extraordinarily complex process of dissolving the Axis alliance—a process in which distrust was the prime factor—and by the laborious rapprochement between

<sup>97</sup> See De Felice, *Mussolini l'alleato*, i. 1089–410; Deakin, *The Brutal Friendship*, 419–85; Grandi, 25 luglio, with a comprehensive introduction by Renzo De Felice, 7–133, esp. 73–87; Plehwe, *Schicksalstunden*, 79–96; Schröder, *Italiens Kriegsaustritt*, 196–202.

<sup>98</sup> Hoffmann, *Stauffenberg und der 20. Juli*, 68–9.

<sup>99</sup> ADAP, Series E, vi, doc. 178, 26 Jul. 1943, 305; see, in direct connection with this, Woller, *Die Abrechnung*, 9–21.

<sup>100</sup> The telling title (*Verrat auf deutsch*) of the book by Erich Kuby; see also Rusconi, *Deutschland—Italien*, 186–9.

<sup>101</sup> The Germans listened in on a telephone conversation between Churchill and Roosevelt on 29 July 1943, as a result of which it was wrongly concluded that armistice negotiations were already 'under way': KTB OKW, iii. 854 (29 July 1943) and 1529.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid. 1530; see also Schreiber, *Die italienischen Militärinternierten im deutschen Machtbereich*, 45–57.

<sup>103</sup> From ADAP, Series E, vi, doc. 172, 25.7.1943, 297 ff.; on the prevailing mood in the population at large, see *Meldungen aus dem Reich*, xiv. 5540–6.

<sup>104</sup> Weizsäcker, *Die Weizsäcker-Papiere*, 29 July 1943, 344–5.

the Allies and the kingdom of Italy in the context of Grand Alliance strategy.<sup>105</sup> While all this was going on, the Axis partners continued to discuss joint defence tactics. Talks at the highest level took place on 6 August in Tarvisio, and for the last time, on 15 August in Casalecchio near Bologna, where the Italians learned, to their displeasure, that Rommel was to be commander-in-chief of Army Group B in northern Italy.<sup>106</sup>

Moreover, the Comando Supremo and the army general staff assumed that the German government was primarily interested in continuing to exploit the economically important Padan Plain.<sup>107</sup> From their point of view, Berlin clearly regarded the land south of the Apennines as a forefield for military operations, and was indifferent to Italy's vital concerns. There was distrust on both sides, since for their part the German authorities suspected that Rome wanted to move the Wehrmacht units so as to prevent them, first of all, from withdrawing northwards when the country capitulated, and later to hand them over to the Allies.<sup>108</sup>

In these circumstances, the rupture of the Berlin–Rome Axis was foreseeable. It came to pass when, on 8 September, the Allies published the conditions of armistice, or 'short terms', signed five days earlier at Cassibile in Sicily. The short terms consisted of twelve articles dealing essentially with the termination of hostilities. The conditions for Italy's complete surrender (the Instrument of Surrender, or 'Long Terms') were delivered later.<sup>109</sup> The Instrument of Surrender was a document containing 44 articles, including the Allies' demand that Italy surrender unconditionally and that Mussolini be handed over to them.<sup>110</sup> On 29 September, however, when Eisenhower and Badoglio signed the Italian unconditional surrender in Malta on board the British battleship *Nelson*,<sup>111</sup> Mussolini was already head of state and government in a puppet state at Hitler's grace and favour.<sup>112</sup>

In the meantime, the Wehrmacht had been preparing itself systematically for Operation ACHSE—the code-name, since 1 August 1943, for the counter-measures to be taken in the event of Italy's exit from the war—and, in particular, for the transfer of numerous units to Italy, the south of France, and the Balkans.<sup>113</sup> An

<sup>105</sup> See Böttger, *Winston Churchill*, 99–110; Deakin, *The Brutal Friendship*, 490–548; Ellwood, *Gli inglesi e l'8 settembre*, 289–314; *Grand Strategy*, iv. 461–538; Kuby, *Verrat auf deutsch*, 219–52; Miller, 'Der Weg zu einer "special relationship"', 49–53; Petersen, 'Sommer 1943', 23–48; Rainero, 'Gli armistizi', 27–64; Schröder, *Italiens Kriegsaustritt*, 202–80; Sechi, 'Die neutralistische Versuchung', 95–7; Varsori, 'Bestrafung', 131–7; Woodward, *British Foreign Policy in the Second World War*, ii. 461–500.

<sup>106</sup> 'Tagebuch GFM Rommel', 15 Aug. 1943, BA-MA N 117/77; Schreiber, *Die italienischen Militärinternierten im deutschen Machtbereich*, 63–4 (Tarvisio) and 73–7.

<sup>107</sup> As a short selection of works on the German occupation of Italy and the economic exploitation of the country, see *Germany and the Second World War*, v/II, 78–94; Klinkhammer, *Zwischen Bündnis und Besatzung, passim*; Wedekind, *Nationalsozialistische Besatzungs- und Annexionspolitik, passim*.

<sup>108</sup> Warlimont, *Im Hauptquartier*, 388.

<sup>109</sup> *Grand Strategy*, iv. 672 ff.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid. 674–81; Article 29 concerns the apprehension and surrender of Mussolini, among others.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid. 529 ff.; Plehwe, *Schicksalstunden*, 263 ff.; Schreiber, *Die italienischen Militärinternierten im deutschen Machtbereich*, 73, 80, n. 214.

<sup>112</sup> The new fascist state was known first as the 'Stato nazionale repubblicano d'Italia', and then, from 1 December 1943 to April 1945, as the 'Repubblica sociale italiana'.

<sup>113</sup> Aga Rossi, *Una nazione*, 61–111; Schreiber, *Die italienischen Militärinternierten im deutschen Machtbereich*, 57–78; Schröder, *Italiens Kriegsaustritt*, 215–45.

order of 30 August, prepared for that eventuality, contained instructions for the occupation of all territories under Italian control, the disarmament of the royal forces, the return of the German troops stationed in southern Italy and Sardinia, the execution of 'destruction measures' 'as in enemy territory', the control of the Apennine passes and 'all mountain crossings', and the 'movement of [Army Group B] security forces to a line east of Elba–Perugia–Porto Civitanova, to join up with the forces of Commander-in-Chief South'.<sup>114</sup>

Army Group B (with headquarters at Lake Garda) was to be responsible for implementing the counter-measures in northern Italy. For that purpose, Field Marshal Rommel had at his disposal four army corps, with eight divisions:

- Withöft Corps HQ: 44th and 71st Infantry Divisions, and Brigade 'Doebla';
- LXXXVII Army Corps HQ: 76th and 94th Infantry Divisions;
- II SS Armoured Corps: SS Armoured Infantry Division 'Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler' and 24th Armoured Division;
- LI Mountain Army Corps (en route): 65th and 305th Infantry Divisions.

The forces to be disarmed on the Italian side were:

8th Army (headquarters in Padua), comprising:

- XXIII Army Corps (Venezia Giulia area): Infantry Division 'Sforzesca';
- XXIV Army Corps (Veneto): Infantry Division 'Torino' and Alpine Division 'Julia';
- XXXV Army Corps (South Tyrol): Alpine Divisions 'Cuneense' and 'Tridentina'.

Infantry Division 'Cosseria' and 3rd Bersaglieri Regiment were in Lombardy, 3rd Motorized Division was stationed in Emilia Romagna;

5th Army (headquarters in Viterbo):

- II Army Corps (Tuscany): Infantry Division 'Ravenna', 215th and 216th Coastal Divisions;
- XVI Army Corps (Liguria): Infantry Division 'Rovigo' and Alpine Division 'Alpi Graie';

and 4th Army (headquarters in Sospel):

- I Army Corps: 223rd and 224th Coastal Divisions;
- XII Army Corps: Infantry Division 'Taro', Alpine Division 'Pusteria', and 2nd Motorized Division;
- XV Army Corps: 201st Coastal Division.

<sup>114</sup> KTB OKW, iii. 1026–9 (29 Aug. 1943). On developments to the south-east that are not covered here, including the disarming of Italian forces in that area, see Schreiber, *Die italienischen Militärinternierten im deutschen Machtbereich*, 139–207; see also Part VI, Chapter II of the present volume.

The bulk of the Italian 4th Army was being moved back to Italy from the south of France at the time, so the task of disarming it fell not only to Army Group B but also to Army Group D, Nineteenth Army (Armoured Infantry Division ‘Feldherrnhalle’, 356th and 715th Infantry Divisions, 157th Reserve Division, and parts of 2nd Air Division), which was responsible for the south-of-France area.

Field Marshal Kesselring (headquarters in Frascati) was responsible for implementing Operation ACHSE orders in southern and central Italy. The boundary between the area under his command and that of the commander-in-chief of Army Group B was the Pisa–Arezzo–Ancona line. In other words, the German troops deployed south of that line, and on the islands off the Italian coast, were under Kesselring’s command. The order to disarm also applied to the Commander-in-Chief South. However, the evacuation of his own troops from Sardinia to Corsica, where Assault Brigade ‘Reichsführer SS’ was assembled, took priority. The most urgent task appeared to be to move Tenth Army, reconstituted on 22 August, from southern Italy back towards the capital. That was another reason why the Germans wanted to take Rome, a task which Field Marshal Kesselring assigned to XI Air Corps (General Kurt Student) with 2nd Paratroop Division and 3rd Armoured Infantry Division.<sup>115</sup>

The Italian forces assigned to defence of the capital had been under the direct command of the Army General Staff since 5 September. They consisted of the following units:

- Corpo d’Armata motocorazzato (an armoured corps, referred to as ‘mot. A.C.’ in the German sources): Armoured Divisions ‘Centauro’ and ‘Ariete’, Motorized Infantry Division ‘Piave’, and Infantry Division ‘Granatieri di Sardegna’;
- XVII Army Corps: Motorized Infantry Division ‘Piacenza’, Infantry Divisions ‘Re’ and ‘Lupi di Toscana’ (both en route), 220th and 221st Coastal Divisions;
- Corpo d’Armata di Roma (Rome Army Corps): Infantry Division ‘Sassari’, Division ‘Podgora’ (Carabinieri Reali), and an armoured infantry regiment.

The Germans prepared for armed clashes with the Italians in the course of the withdrawal from southern Italy. This applied to:

- XIV Armoured Corps: Luftwaffe Armoured Division ‘Hermann Göring’, 16th Armoured Division, 15th Armoured Infantry Division, and parts of 1st Paratroop Division; and also to:
- LXXVI Armoured Corps: 26th Armoured Division, 29th Armoured Infantry Division, and the bulk of 1st Paratroop Division.

Tenth Army was—theoretically—under threat from the Italian 7th Army (headquarters in Potenza), comprising:

- IX Army Corps: Infantry Divisions ‘Piceno’ and ‘Legnano’, 209th and 210th Coastal Divisions, and XXXI Coastal Brigade;

<sup>115</sup> Schreiber, *Die italienischen Militärinternierten im deutschen Machtbereich*, 49–57.

- XIX Army Corps: Infantry Division 'Pasubio', 222nd Coastal Division, and XXXII Coastal Brigade;
- XXXI Army Corps: Infantry Division 'Mantova', 211th, 212th, 214th, and 227th Coastal Divisions.

On Sardinia, 90th Armoured Infantry Division, and the five fortress battalions and three fortress regiment staffs faced the following units:

- XIII Army Corps: Infantry Division 'Sabauda', 203rd and 205th Coastal Divisions, and XXXIII Coastal Brigade;
- XXX Army Corps: Infantry Division 'Calabria', 204th Coastal Division (parts), IV Coastal Brigade, and 19th Coastal Regiment.

As for mobile reserves, 'Military Command Sardinia' had at its disposal Infantry Division 'Bari', Paratroop Division 'Nembo', and an armoured battalion. The Italian forces in Corsica were VII Army Corps troops (Infantry Divisions 'Friuli' and 'Cremona', 225th and 226th Coastal Divisions, an Alpine battalion, and an armoured battalion) which, like 'Military Command Sardinia', were under the direct command of the Army General Staff when Italy exited the war. The occupation force on Elba consisted of 5th Army troops, mainly 108th Coastal Regiment. All in all, there were 6,273 Italian and 80 German troops on the island.<sup>116</sup>

Thus, after 25 July, Berlin made rigorous preparations to take command in the south, while Rome created the conditions that were to turn its withdrawal from the world war into Italy's greatest military and social catastrophe in modern times.<sup>117</sup>

In attempting to explain the disastrous course of events, it is important to bear in mind, first and foremost, that the Italian authorities did not try to prevent the German troops from 'marching in' at all costs, by blocking the border crossing points, for example. It is also a fact that Badoglio's autocratic rule had serious political repercussions within the country, making it impossible to establish any basis of trust between the people and their leaders. One result of this state of affairs was the extreme secrecy surrounding the preparations for the armistice, which meant that the troops were not prepared, either militarily or psychologically, for withdrawal from the war on 8 September. Fatal technical mistakes were also made; for example, orders which, for no logical reason, forbade use of the element of surprise. The Italian forces were permitted only to react to German aggression.

This all had fateful consequences. But the two main reasons why armed resistance collapsed so quickly were the general and ever-increasing war-weariness of the Italian troops and the fact that, in the crucial phase of 9 to 11 September, they were operating with practically no contact with the highest authorities. The king and his family, the government, the head of the Comando Supremo, the chief of the army general staff, and other highly placed dignitaries had left Rome early in the morning

<sup>116</sup> On the relative strength of the forces, see *ibid.* 101–8, 133–4; Torsiello, *Le operazioni delle unità italiane*, 52–60 and 196–7, n. 46; *Die geheimen Tagesberichte*, viii. 563 (5 Sept. 1943).

<sup>117</sup> See Rochat and Massobrio, *Breve storia dell'esercito*, 299.

of 9 September, travelling first to Pescara and from there, by ship, to Brindisi, where Victor Emmanuel III and the head of government, the Comando Supremo, and the general staffs of the three military services established themselves on 10 September in the afternoon.<sup>118</sup> And from there, on the following day, the order was issued that the Germans were to be treated as enemies. The official declaration of war, never acknowledged by the Nazi regime, was dated 13 October 1943.<sup>119</sup>

In this connection, historians have repeatedly argued that the king's flight was necessary in order to preserve the continuity of the state. There is little to be said against that view. However, it in no way diminishes responsibility for the failure to prepare properly for withdrawal from the war. This applies especially to generals and admirals who unnecessarily left their men in the lurch and betrayed them when they found themselves, unprepared, facing armed clashes with units of the Wehrmacht.<sup>120</sup>

In September the Allies had achieved their aim, and the central problem of their strategy in the Mediterranean area after Casablanca, that is, Italy's exit from the war, had been solved. An important contributory factor was the success of Operation HUSKY, which encouraged the British and Americans to invade the Italian mainland (Operation PRICELESS). Specifically, they planned landings in Calabria (Operation BAYTOWN) and the Gulf of Salerno (Operation AVALANCHE).

This raises the question why the Allies did not decide to invade further north, rather than in the Gulf of Salerno. Contrary to a widespread assumption, everything required for a landing further north could have been made available. What carried most weight in the decision to land at Salerno was the fact that the stony beaches north of Naples appeared unsuitable for a landing. But above all, further north the Americans and British would have been able to deploy only carrier-based aircraft, and they thought that was too risky. Salerno, on the other hand, was still within range of the fighters stationed in Sicily, and the beaches of the bay were good for landing purposes. The drawback was that the defenders had a clear view of that whole stretch of the coast. The fact that this disadvantage did not dissuade the Allies from staging the invasion in the Gulf of Salerno was, apart from the question of air support, mainly because the area promised to provide a stable base for the attack on Naples and a good starting point for an operation to encircle the German units located in Calabria.

On 24 August, while the armistice between the Italians and the Allies was still in the making, Eisenhower presented the plans for the landing prepared by his staff in Algiers to the Combined Chiefs of Staff. In doing so, he did not conceal the fact that he had reservations about Operation AVALANCHE. He considered that the forces available were not strong enough, and the build-up of Allied forces after the landings would probably be a slow process. In addition, there were doubts

<sup>118</sup> Badoglio, *Italy*, 76–86; Roatta, *Otto milioni di baionette*, 337; Aga Rossi, *Una nazione*, 113–21; Garland and Smyth, *Sicily*, 513–19.

<sup>119</sup> ADAP, Series E, vii, doc. 42, 14 Oct. 1943, 78.

<sup>120</sup> On the initiation of the armistice, see Garland and Smyth, *Sicily*, 436–509; Schreiber, *Die italienischen Militärinternierten im deutschen Machtbereich*, 79–92; Torsiello, *Le operazioni delle unità italiane*, 34–48.

concerning the possibilities for rendering the harbours serviceable, and a large proportion of the troops had seen very little action.

Alexander, the commander-in-chief of the Allied 15th Army Group, took a very similar view. Possible remedies were considered. But just a few days later, on 28 August, Eisenhower suggested that the risks attaching to Operation AVALANCHE would be greatly reduced if Italy could be persuaded to give its active, or at least passive, support.<sup>121</sup> Both forms of cooperation had already been mentioned, as possibilities to be pursued, in the guidelines that Roosevelt and Churchill had given General Eisenhower on 18 August, on his way to negotiations with Badoglio's negotiator, Maj.-Gen. Giuseppe Castellano.<sup>122</sup> So Eisenhower's suggestion was aimed at securing a binding commitment. It should be noted, in this connection, that Castellano had mentioned the possibility of changing sides during the armistice talks on 15 August. He had not been authorized to do so, even indirectly, and that created problems.<sup>123</sup>

For the rest, Eisenhower's professional diplomacy, with substantial military backup, had indeed brought about the armistice of 3 September, but the attempt to coordinate the Allied and the Italian plans for withdrawal from the war failed, in a bewildering mixture of deceit, delusion, misunderstanding, incompetence, cowardice, dilettantism, and irresolution.<sup>124</sup>

The whole thing became a tragicomedy when, early in the morning of 8 September, the American commander-in-chief received a telegram from Badoglio asking him (less than 24 hours before Operation AVALANCHE was due to begin) not to announce the armistice because the situation had supposedly changed dramatically. Eisenhower refused. In this connection, he was assured, in a message from President Roosevelt and the British prime minister, Churchill, late that afternoon, that 'no consideration, repeat no consideration, need be given to the embarrassment it [i.e. announcement of the armistice] might cause the Italian Government'.<sup>125</sup>

At 18.30 GMT, Eisenhower, speaking in his capacity as commander-in-chief of the Allied forces, announced on Radio Algiers that the Italian armed forces had surrendered unconditionally, whereupon he had granted an armistice which Rome had accepted without reservations. He further declared that all Italians 'who now act to help eject the German aggressor from Italian soil will have the assistance and support of the United Nations'. Ten minutes later, Rome having said nothing in the meantime, Radio Algiers broadcast the announcement agreed between Badoglio and the Allies.

The Germans were officially informed by the foreign minister, Raffaele Guariglia, who summoned the ambassador, Rudolf Rahn, to his office shortly before 17.00 hours, so that he could put him in the picture. The German spoke of betrayal, the

<sup>121</sup> On the foregoing as a whole, see *Grand Strategy*, iv. 497–513 (Howard); on Salerno, see Alexander, *The Alexander Memoirs*, 113–18; Jackson, *Alexander*, 227–32.

<sup>122</sup> Churchill, *The Second World War*, v. 94–5.

<sup>123</sup> Aga Rossi, *Una nazione*, 81–2; Churchill, *The Second World War*, v. 88–98.

<sup>124</sup> *Grand Strategy*, iv. 520–35; Aga Rossi, *Una nazione*, 83–98; Schreiber, *Die italienischen Militärinternierten im deutschen Machtbereich*, 80–96.

<sup>125</sup> *Grand Strategy*, iv. 532.

Italian would not have it, and they parted without shaking hands.<sup>126</sup> Hitler himself received a telegram from the Italian head of government in which the latter stated quite correctly: 'Italy no longer has the strength to resist.'<sup>127</sup>

This merely served to bring the hatred and malice of the Germans down on Badoglio's head. At about 20.00 on 8 September 1943, after the code-name ACHSE had been transmitted, over 600,000 members of the German army, navy, Luftwaffe, SS, and police set about disarming the Italian troops in Italy, the south of France, and the Balkans—around 3,488,000 in all in the summer of 1943.<sup>128</sup>

From the outset, the German counter-measures, originally planned as a pragmatic reaction to the constraints imposed by Italy's exit from the war, turned into a murderous act of vengeance, marked by resentment and racism. Criminal orders issued by Hitler and the OKW on 10, 12, and 18 September, and measures taken by German commanders in breach of international law, were intended as state legitimisation of reprehensible behaviour based on the principle that right is what is advantageous for the German people. All in all, about 7,000, possibly even as many as 12,200 officers, NCOs, and men died, not counting the 13,300 or so who lost their lives—often because there was no life-saving equipment—while they were being taken off the islands.<sup>129</sup>

About 1,007,000 men were disarmed. The rest apparently vanished without a trace. Those who were taken into custody were classified as military internees, on the basis of a so-called Führer order of 15 September 1943. It is still not clear why this classification was chosen, but the results are very clear: their captors could do whatever they liked with the Italian prisoners, most of whom offered unarmed resistance by refusing to work, because, having been thus labelled, they did not have the status of prisoners of war and were consequently not protected by the Geneva Convention of 27 July 1929. On average, 523,000 of them toiled away as military slaves in the German war economy, with no rights, hungry, weak, and—with little medical care—extremely prone to illness. In August 1944, as a political gesture to help the Duce on the home front, Hitler ordered a change of status to civilian workers.<sup>130</sup>

The disarmament operation as such was completed in Italy itself by September 1943, but it lasted somewhat longer in the Balkans and the islands in the eastern Mediterranean. The Germans often had an easy job, although not always. There was, for example, heroic resistance on Cephalonia, in Naples, Barletta, and Monterotondo, and at Mont Cenis.<sup>131</sup>

<sup>126</sup> ADAP, Series E, vi, doc. 290, 8 Sept. 1943, 501; Rahn, *Ruheloses Leben*, 229–30.

<sup>127</sup> ADAP, Series E, vi, doc. 291, 8 Sept. 1943, 501–2.

<sup>128</sup> On the disarmament process, see Schreiber, *Die italienischen Militärinternierten im deutschen Machibereich*, 93–230; also Hammermann, *Zwangarbeit*, 35–58; Klinkhammer, *Zwischen Bündnis und Besatzung*, 40–51.

<sup>129</sup> Schreiber, *Deutsche Kriegsverbrechen in Italien*, 39–92, 255–96; on the number murdered, see the revised figures in Schreiber, *La vendetta*, 38–89.

<sup>130</sup> Hammermann, *Zwangarbeit*, 73–93; Schreiber, 'Die italienischen Militärinternierten—politische, humane und rassenideologische Gesichtspunkte'. On resistance by military internees, see esp. Natta, *L'altra Resistenza*, *passim*.

<sup>131</sup> Schreiber, 'Die italienischen Militärinternierten', 109–38, 147–207.

The successful conduct of Operation ACHSE can be described, with sarcasm, as the Wehrmacht's final victory. The army, the Luftwaffe, and the navy acquired an enormous amount of loot, even though the bulk of the Italian fleet had managed to escape to Malta and ports in the Balearic islands.<sup>132</sup> The most important acquisition was the men and women who, as deportees and military internees, were employed as forced labour in the factories and freed Germans for deployment at the front. The material gains were also considerable:<sup>133</sup> aircraft, battleships and merchant ships, raw materials, all sorts of equipment, medical supplies, fuel, tents, camouflage netting, horses, clothing, blankets, food, and wine in large quantities. And, by 31 December 1943, the following weapons and vehicles had been seized: 977 tanks, armoured reconnaissance vehicles, and assault guns, 5,568 cannon, 8,736 grenade launchers, 1,173 anti-tank cannon, 1,581 anti-aircraft cannon, 179 anti-tank rifles, 39,007 machine guns, 13,906 sub-machine guns, 1,285,871 rifles, and 16,236 pistols, as well as 762 traction vehicles, 13,128 heavy goods vehicles, 2,422 motor cars, and 320 other vehicles.

The disarmament process, which included the immediate enrolment of volunteers and paramilitary auxiliaries in the Wehrmacht and SS, was accompanied by the organization of German occupational rule in Italy and of relations with Mussolini's satellite state—starting with the 'Führer order on the appointment of a Greater German Reich plenipotentiary in Italy and the structure of Italian territory occupied on 10 September 1943'.<sup>134</sup> As has been concluded succinctly: 'For the most part, Italian sovereignty amounted to no more than administrative autonomy under German supervision.'<sup>135</sup> In effect, the Duce's role was reduced to that of the Führer's stooge in facilitating German exploitation of the country for the war effort.

The essential nature of the Nazi occupation in the Apennine peninsula, and of German–Italian relations, is shown concretely by the fact that, from September 1943 to May 1945, a daily average of 160 men, women, and children, of all ages,

<sup>132</sup> Ibid. 214–30.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid. 214–21; Schröder, *Italiens Kriegsaustritt*, 302–13.

<sup>134</sup> ADAP, Series E, vi, doc. 311, 11 Sept. 1943, 533–5. With regard to the formation and structure of the occupation regime, attention should be paid in particular to the role and responsibilities of the following: the Greater German Reich plenipotentiary in Italy (senior envoy Rahn, from 5 November 1943 German ambassador in Fasano); the special adviser on police affairs with the Italian Fascist National Government and senior SS and police leader (SS-Obergruppenführer and Waffen SS General Karl Wolff); the supreme commissioners for the operational zones 'Adriatic Littoral' (SS Obergruppenführer Friedrich Rainer) and 'Alpine Foreland' (NSKK Obergruppenführer Franz Hofer); and the plenipotentiary general of the Wehrmacht in Italy (Infantry General Rudolf Toussaint); as well as to the influence which the general plenipotentiary for manpower (Gauleiter Fritz Sauckel) and the Reich minister for armament and war production (Albert Speer) exerted on the alliance between the Third Reich and the ensuing 'Italian Social Republic', and to the structure of the military administration. Attention should also be paid to the following subject areas: economic relations; looting and plundering; the deportation of Jews, political prisoners, and forced labourers; the formation of fascist combat units and police forces (Klinkhammer, *Zwischen Bündnis und Besatzung*, 355–421; Schreiber, *Die italienischen Militärinternierten im deutschen Machtbereich*, 341–409); partisan repression and reprisals; the prevailing mood in the population at large. On the last three subjects, see esp. Bocca, *Storia dell'Italia partigiana*, *passim*; Pavone, *Una guerra civile*, *passim*; Schreiber, 'Partisanenkrieg'; and on all subjects, see *Germany and the Second World War*, v/II. 78–97, 273.

<sup>135</sup> *Germany and the Second World War*, v/II. 86.

died directly or indirectly at the hands of the Germans. This figure does not include the 44,720 partisans killed in battle or murdered,<sup>136</sup> the 2,027 Italians who died fighting on the Allied side,<sup>137</sup> or the victims of the effects of war, especially the air raids. The Italian records for the period 10 June 1940 (when Italy entered the war) to 25 April 1945 show that 64,354 died in air raids, of whom 59,796 civilians and 4,558 members of the armed forces.<sup>138</sup> After January 1943, when, among other things, the strategic air war against 'Hitler's Europe' was discussed at the Casablanca Conference,<sup>139</sup> American and British bombers attacked objectives in Italy day and night. The main target, as in the bombing campaign against the Reich,<sup>140</sup> was public morale, and carpet bombing, preferably of suburbs where key industries were located, was adopted as a means to that end.<sup>141</sup> However, this view of things is not uncontested. It has been rightly pointed out that most of the damage from the air raids was to infrastructure, communications, roads and railways, and housing. Industry got off comparatively lightly.<sup>142</sup>

As regards the effect on public morale, some people fled from the cities, but it should be remembered that there were virtually no effective anti-aircraft defences and no air-raid shelters to speak of.<sup>143</sup> That proved to be a particularly serious disadvantage when, after Italy withdrew from the war, the Allies carried out heavy raids on German-occupied northern Italy: 43,402 or possibly even more than 50,000 Italians were killed in those raids, of whom at least 41,420 civilians of all ages.<sup>144</sup>

## 5. THE WAR IN ITALY (SEPTEMBER 1943 TO JUNE 1944)

The main thing about the strategic bombing campaign in the Mediterranean area is that it was repeatedly interrupted or restricted by operational or tactical demands. That had been the case during the preparations for and conduct of the invasion in Sicily, and it happened again during the landing in the Gulf of Salerno, already referred to, when the Allied high command was compelled to bring in the Strategic Air Force of the Northwest African Air Command for tactical purposes.<sup>145</sup>

<sup>136</sup> Schreiber, *Deutsche Kriegsverbrechen in Italien*, 8.

<sup>137</sup> 'Dati statistici relativi al contributo dell'Esercito alla Liberazione' (n.d., but written after 8 May 1945), ASUSSME (I-3), Busta 1509 B. The fascist side gave the official figure of 3,235 casualties for the period 8 Sept. 1943 to 31 Mar. 1945: Ministero delle Forze Armate, Gabinetto, Ufficio Statistico delle Perdite, 'Situazione numerica dei caduti, feriti e dispersi alla data del 31.3.1945', ACS, S.P.d.D., R.S.I. Busta 41, Fascicolo 378, Sottofascicolo 7.

<sup>138</sup> Bonacina, *Obiettivo: Italia*, 265.

<sup>139</sup> *Grand Strategy*, iv. 265 (Howard).

<sup>140</sup> *Germany and the Second World War*, vii. 9–15.

<sup>141</sup> *The Oxford Companion to the Second World War*, 1073 ff. (Overy).

<sup>142</sup> Ferrari, 'Un'arma versatile', 399, 430.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, 394; Overy, *Why the Allies Won*, 129.

<sup>144</sup> Bonacina, *Obiettivo: Italia*, 265; *The Oxford Companion to the Second World War*, 1073 (Overy).

<sup>145</sup> *The West Point Atlas*, ii, map 96.

### (a) The Decisive Battle of Salerno

The name ‘Salerno’ symbolizes the solo role of the Americans and the British in the drama of Italy’s exit from the war. It also denotes one of the decisive battles of the Second World War. While their victory in Sicily had opened the gate to ‘Fortress Europe’ for the powers of the anti-Hitler coalition, only the outcome of the battle at Salerno would determine whether they could remain there indefinitely. Would the de facto second front last, or would the Wehrmacht succeed in throwing its adversaries back into the sea? In the latter case, the war on the Italian mainland would probably be suspended indefinitely, and Hitler would be able to transfer some battle-tried units to the eastern front or to the south-east, where they were urgently needed.

If, on the contrary, the troops of the Grand Alliance managed to break out of beachheads in the Gulf of Salerno and move inland in pursuit of the German defenders, substantial Wehrmacht forces would be tied down in the Italian theatre, probably until the end of the war. As is known, precisely that strategic diversionary effect was the Allies’ main objective.

Seen in that way, Salerno offered the Führer one last chance to turn the tables in the south, and prevent the Mediterranean from becoming an inland sea and Italy an unsinkable enemy aircraft carrier from which Allied pilots could attack the territory of the Reich and the irreplaceable Romanian oilfields.

The Americans and the British, like the Germans themselves, were conscious of the strategic importance of the battle of Salerno. Both sides were accordingly highly committed, and in the event, the troops of Commander-in-Chief South very nearly imposed a ‘military fiasco’ on the US 5th Army.<sup>146</sup>

On 3 September, six days before the landing in the Gulf of Salerno, Operation BAYTOWN was launched. At 3.45, preceded, as usual, by air attacks and heavy artillery fire, parts of the Canadian 1st Infantry Division belonging to the XIII Army Corps of the British 8th Army, together with troops of the British 5th Infantry Division, landed at Reggio di Calabria. The Allied force met with no noteworthy resistance. Even the Luftwaffe attacks made little impact.<sup>147</sup> 5th Infantry Division then advanced along the west coast towards Salerno, and on 15 September it was at Sapri on the Gulf of Policastro, by which time the Canadian 1st Infantry Division had reached Trebisacce on the east coast of Calabria.<sup>148</sup> The Allies expected Operation BAYTOWN to result in the withdrawal of German troops—in this case, 16th Armoured Division and Armoured Division ‘Hermann Göring’—from the areas where the Operation AVALANCHE landings were planned.<sup>149</sup> If, in these circumstances, the Germans were to move south, the main attack at Salerno would cut their connections with the north.

<sup>146</sup> Subtitle of Morris, *Salerno: A Military Fiasco*, which gives a vivid picture of the course of the battle.

<sup>147</sup> Gundelach, *Die deutsche Luftwaffe*, ii. 670 ff.; Schröder, *Italiens Kriegsaustritt*, 272 ff.

<sup>148</sup> *The Mediterranean and Middle East*, v. 236–42; Santoni, *Le operazioni in Sicilia e in Calabria*, 410–29.

<sup>149</sup> *The Mediterranean and Middle East*, v. 223.

These hopes were not fulfilled. The commanding general of the British XIII Corps, General Miles Dempsey, did not achieve even part of his aim in landing 231st Brigade Group at Pizzo Calabro on 8 September, namely to at least cut off the German units that were withdrawing before his 5th Infantry Division.

In the event, after some exceptionally hard fighting in the Pizzo Calabro area, the German Tenth Army units continued to move steadily northwards.<sup>150</sup> The main units involved were 26th Armoured Division, 29th Armoured Infantry Division, and 1st Paratroop Division.<sup>151</sup>

A third Allied landing, Operation SLAPSTICK, was carried out at Taranto on 9 September. Its main aim was to occupy ports that were in good working order, which was considered an urgent necessity. The British 1st Airborne Division was deployed for the purpose, having been brought in from Bizerta on warships.<sup>152</sup> The Italians cooperated willingly, so there were no problems on their side.<sup>153</sup> The Germans caused no problems either, since their only basic concern was 'to get the Tenth Army and Luftwaffe units out of southern Italy by means of swift, flexible action', including the evacuation of Sardinia.<sup>154</sup>

On the Allied side, the planning for the main landing at Salerno, by which the Americans and British hoped to gain a firm foothold in southern Italy, had since 27 July 1943 been in the hands of the US 5th Army, which together with the British 8th Army, as already mentioned, formed the Allied 15th Army Group at that time.<sup>155</sup>

The beaches in the Gulf of Salerno are known to be exceptionally suitable for landing purposes. However, it must be borne in mind that the narrow coastal plain is surrounded on three sides by high, steep hills, which gave the defenders a good view of the landing area and provided ideal firing positions. Furthermore, the Germans had strung barbed-wire barriers along the dunes at the waterline, and had laid mines further out.<sup>156</sup> The Italians are said to have disclosed information to the Anglo-Americans before 5 September about the mines that had been laid, and about mine-free routes in the bay.<sup>157</sup> Be that as it may, the invasion fleet included 48 minesweepers, which cleared five fairways before the landing started.<sup>158</sup>

<sup>150</sup> *The West Point Atlas*, ii, map 94; Hinsley, *British Intelligence*, iii/I. 109; on Pizzo, see KTB Skl, pt. A, xlxi. 165, 169 (8 Sept. 1943); *The Mediterranean and Middle East*, v. 240–1; Santoni, *Le operazioni in Sicilia e in Calabria*, 435.

<sup>151</sup> Schröder, *Italiens Kriegsaustritt*, 272. 1st Paratroop Division fought with the bulk of 1st Paratroop Regiment and II Battalion of 2nd Paratroop Division in Apulia, and with 3rd and 4th Paratroop Regiments under the command of 26th Armoured Division in Calabria. III Battalion of 1st Paratroop Regiment was attached to Armoured Division 'Hermann Göring' in the Naples area.

<sup>152</sup> *The Mediterranean and Middle East*, vi. 242–3.

<sup>153</sup> Roskill, *The War at Sea*, iii/I. 170; Coakley and Leighton, *Global Logistics and Strategy*, 191.

<sup>154</sup> KTB OKW, iii. 1077 (8 Sept. 1943).

<sup>155</sup> On this and the following, see Carver, *The War in Italy*, 59–77; Coakley and Leighton, *Global Logistics and Strategy*, 193; Kesselring, *Soldat*, 249–61; *The Mediterranean and Middle East*, v. 255–329; Nicolson, *Alexander*, 212–23; Roskill, *The War at Sea*, iii/I. 153–66, 170–85; Schröder, *Italiens Kriegsaustritt*, 293–302; *World War II in Europe*, 1663–7.

<sup>156</sup> Mennel, *Der nordafrikanisch-italienische Kampfraum*, 222–4; *The West Point Atlas*, ii, map 94.

<sup>157</sup> KTB OKW, iii. 1079 (8 Sept. 1943); information from the intelligence services is referred to in *The Mediterranean and Middle East*, v. 264, and Roskill, *The War at Sea*, iii/I. 171–5.

<sup>158</sup> Roskill, *The War at Sea*, iii/I. 160–1.

The landing force itself consisted of 627 ships and boats, including four battleships, three fleet carriers, and five escort carriers (Force H and Force V).<sup>159</sup> The German navy had only three U-boats and a couple of S-boats to fight this armada.<sup>160</sup> And, once again, the Allied air forces proved superior in every respect. In the end, it was the air forces and the impressively effective naval artillery that determined the outcome of the back-and-forth battle, in which the commander-in-chief of the landing force, General Mark Wayne Clark, had 3,127 operational aircraft at his disposal on the day of the attack, including 1,395 fighter bombers and fighters;<sup>161</sup> 660 of the latter provided air support during the landing.<sup>162</sup>

The German Air Fleet 2, with Field Marshal von Richthofen as commander-in-chief since June 1943, had, *inter alia*, 181 (91) fighters, 90 (51) fighter bombers, and 260 (110) bombers at its disposal on 30 August 1943. It possessed 722 (387) aircraft in all, including reconnaissance and transport planes. After the battle of Salerno, Richthofen only had 641 (345) aircraft at his disposal, including 111 (67) fighters, 32 (20) fighter bombers, and 195 (113) bombers.<sup>163</sup>

In the medium term, Operation AVALANCHE was designed to facilitate the capture of Naples, which was one of the operational objectives. The land operations began at 3.30 on 9 September on the stretch of coast between Amalfi and Agropoli. For tactical purposes, General Clark divided his forces into two attack groups. In the north, the British X Corps (General Richard L. McCreery) landed between Maiori, 4 kilometres north-east of Amalfi, and the mouth of the river Sele, with two British commando forces, three US ranger battalions, and troops of the British 46th and 56th Infantry Divisions. The British 7th Armoured Division was to follow four days later. South of the Sele estuary, the only attacking force was the reinforced 36th Infantry Division of US VI Corps (Lt.-Gen. Ernest J. Dawley). There was also a floating reserve in the form of two regimental combat groups from US 45th Infantry Division, which landed on 10 September.

Clark was counting on the element of surprise on 9 September, so he decided to forgo artillery support from the British X Corps, a mistake that was to prove costly for the troops of the US 36th Infantry Division<sup>164</sup>—especially as the landing by no means found the Germans without weapons. The relevant German HQ had been inclined since 18 August to classify the ‘Naples–Salerno coastal area’ as the area ‘under greatest threat’. The situation assessment varied from time to time, but all in all, on 5 September the OKW was expecting a landing in the Naples area.<sup>165</sup> Two days later the aerial reconnaissance reports removed any remaining doubts: a major landing was in the offing! It was still not clear exactly where the enemy would land,

<sup>159</sup> *The Mediterranean and Middle East*, v. 261–5; Potter and Nimitz, *Sea Power*, 595.

<sup>160</sup> Roskill, *The War at Sea*, iii/I. 177; KTB Skl, pt. A, xl ix. 190, 234, 254, 276, 294, 315, 377 (9, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 17, and 18 Sept. 1943).

<sup>161</sup> Gundelach, *Die deutsche Luftwaffe*, ii. 677–8.

<sup>162</sup> *The Mediterranean and Middle East*, v. 271.

<sup>163</sup> Gundelach, *Die deutsche Luftwaffe*, ii. 665–85. The figures in brackets denote operational aircraft.

<sup>164</sup> *The Mediterranean and Middle East*, v. 258–61, 280–1; *World War II in Europe*, 1664–5; *The West Point Atlas*, ii, map 95.

<sup>165</sup> KTB OKW, iii. 964 (18 Aug. 1943) and 1056 (5 Sept. 1943).

but XIV Armoured Corps (Lt.-Gen. Hermann Balck, pp. General Huber), to which 15th Armoured Infantry Division (Gulf of Gaeta), Armoured Division 'Hermann Göring' (Naples), and 16th Armoured Division (Gulf of Salerno) belonged, prepared for a probable landing.<sup>166</sup>

The task of repelling a landing expected in the Salerno area accordingly fell to 16th Armoured Division, and its commander subdivided the 45-kilometre defensive front into eight strongpoints, as deeply imbedded as possible. Among other things, the troops manning them had heavy weapons (anti-tank cannon and some anti-aircraft cannon) at their disposal. Four mobile units were positioned behind the strongpoints, since there were not enough forces to man a continuous defence line.<sup>167</sup> 16th Armoured Division was soon unable to hold its ground any longer in the face of the massive naval artillery barrage, and by 10 September it had withdrawn, as instructed, to a line running from Bellizzi (16 kilometres south-east of Salerno) through Persano to Capaccio.<sup>168</sup>

On the first day of the operation the Americans and British managed to establish four bridgeheads and hold on to them. More determined action might perhaps have achieved a breakthrough into the interior, but in any case, as 9 September drew to a close, 23,000 of X Corps' 74,000 troops were on the beaches at Salerno, with 80 tanks, 325 cannon, and 2,155 motor vehicles.<sup>169</sup> Even so, for Clark the battle was still far from being won.

By the morning of 10 September neither the German nor the Allied side had gained the upper hand. However, the strong Italian forces in the vicinity of Rome surrendered that same day, to the great relief of Commander-in-Chief South. The German 3rd Armoured Infantry Division and 2nd Parachute Division had been tied down in the capital, and Field Marshal Kesselring could now deploy them elsewhere.

In the course of the next six days a complicated battle ensued, with many vicissitudes. There were no breaks, but four phases can be distinguished.<sup>170</sup> The *first phase* was the struggle for the bridgeheads, a struggle which the landing forces eventually settled to their advantage. In the event, the decisive factor was that the attempts by the mobile combat groups of 16th Armoured Division to drive the enemy forces back to the coast were generally halted by the concentrated fire from the ships' guns. Those unsuccessful attacks were followed by a move onto the defensive, and then by the above-mentioned withdrawal to the new resistance line ordered by Tenth Army HQ, approximately 10 kilometres east of the beach, which was to be held until the arrival of the German reinforcements en route from the south and the north.

The *second phase* of the battle, in which the Americans and British strove, with some initial success, to extend their bridgeheads, began on 10 September and lasted

<sup>166</sup> Gundelach, *Die deutsche Luftwaffe*, ii. 672–3; Schröder, *Italiens Kriegsaustritt*, 295.

<sup>167</sup> *The Mediterranean and Middle East*, v. 266–8.

<sup>168</sup> Schröder, *Italiens Kriegsaustritt*, 296.

<sup>169</sup> *The Mediterranean and Middle East*, v. 286 ff.

<sup>170</sup> On the following, see *ibid.* 289 ff.; Schröder, *Italiens Kriegsaustritt*, 296–302.

for three days. Their intention was then to open up the roads leading north from Salerno and neighbouring Vietri sul Mare. They managed to establish themselves in both those places, but in the meantime the Germans had established firm positions in Altavilla and in Battipaglia, which appeared favourable for launching a counter-offensive. Kesselring, General Heinrich von Vietinghoff-Scheel, and the commander of LXXVI Armoured Corps, General Traugott Herr, were all confident that they would beat the enemy. From 11 September General Herr's corps took charge in the section of the front south of Salerno, while the units on the army's right wing remained under the command of XIV Armoured Corps.

Starting from Battipaglia, Eboli, and Altavilla, Tenth Army HQ launched the attack on 13 September, with 16th Armoured Division, 29th Armoured Infantry Division, and parts of 26th Armoured Division. The forces for this *third phase* of the battle had been prepared faster than the opposing Allied forces, and the attack made rapid progress. The sense of crisis among the Allies, both inside and outside the visibly shrinking bridgehead, became so acute that they even considered plans for withdrawal.<sup>171</sup> Shortly afterwards, however, the German side's confident reports of victory proved premature. The enemy recovered, mobilized all its remaining reserves, and fought bitterly. But above all, the American and British aerial and naval bombardment resumed with even greater fury, causing painful losses on the German side.<sup>172</sup> That was the turning-point. A German counter-offensive on 16 September soon ground to a halt.

On 18 September, in the *fourth phase*, the German Tenth Army stopped fighting and began its withdrawal to new defensive positions. Churchill, quoting the Duke of Wellington after the battle of Waterloo, summed up the bitter struggle in the Gulf of Salerno as 'a damned close-run thing'.<sup>173</sup> It was also a very costly thing in terms of losses.<sup>174</sup>

### (b) Back and Forth—Nearing the End

The political and military actions taken by the combatants in the southern theatre of war after the Allied victory at Salerno must, of course, be judged in the light of the planned, and anticipated, landing in northern France. The main aim of both parties was, in Italy, to use as few of their own troops as possible to keep as many enemy troops as possible tied down there.<sup>175</sup> The Germans followed the tactical principle of 'fighting forwards while moving backwards', which repeatedly resulted

<sup>171</sup> See Roskill, *The War at Sea*, iii/I. 178 ff.

<sup>172</sup> KTB Skl, pt. A, xl ix. 337 (16 Sept. 1943).

<sup>173</sup> Churchill, *The Second World War*, v. 131.

<sup>174</sup> According to Clodfelter, *Warfare and Armed Conflicts*, ii. 845 ff., whose figures relate to the period from 9 September to 6 October 1943, the Allies lost 2,149 dead, 7,366 wounded, and 4,105 missing, and total German losses were around 8,000. According to Morris, *Salerno*, 305, which is based on the 'official histories', the losses—albeit in the period from 9 to 18 Sept. 1943—were as follows: the Wehrmacht lost 840 dead, 2,002 wounded, and 630 missing; the Americans lost 225 dead, 835 wounded, and 589 missing; and the British forces lost 725 dead, 2,734 wounded, and 1,800 missing.

<sup>175</sup> *Germany and the Second World War*, vii. 558.

in a war of position that facilitated German exploitation of important economic resources<sup>176</sup> in parts of the country not yet occupied by the Allies.

So, basically, the Wehrmacht units had to withdraw to the north,<sup>177</sup> but they had to do so as slowly as possible, in order to gain the necessary time to build up rear defensive positions and undertake destruction measures. There was also the above-mentioned economic motive. In southern Italy this involved the transport of considerable quantities of loot and the deportation of 'slaves', in what was described as a brutal 'manhunt'.<sup>178</sup>

In practice, what the withdrawal meant for Kesselring's troops was that they moved from one blocking line to the next in a series of debilitating defensive battles.<sup>179</sup> Tactics of this kind required strong defensive positions if the German divisions, which were fighting in Italy more and more often without 'cover'—that is, with no air support worth mentioning—were not to be destroyed sooner or later.

The Americans and British, on the other hand, were in a comfortable position. They could deploy their air forces almost without restriction. At the height of the military operations in the Salerno area their aircraft cut off all access to the battlefield (air interdiction) and completely stopped the traffic on the German supply routes.<sup>180</sup>

After Commander-in-Chief South terminated the fighting, Tenth Army had to swing back round the Salerno 'pivot' from the previous defence line, which had stretched from the coast to Altamura via Potenza, and move through security lines 1, 2, and 3 (terminating on the coast at Trani, Margherita di Savoia, and Zappaneta respectively) to resistance line zero, which it reached on 25 September. It was instructed to hold that line, which ran from Salerno through Bovino to the Adriatic at Manfredonia, at all costs until the end of the month.<sup>181</sup>

On 25 September Kesselring marked out the course of the Bernhardt Line, as follows:<sup>182</sup> Minturno, west bank of the Garigliano, Monte Camino, north of Mignano, Venafro, west of Colli a Volturno, Castelnuovo a Volturno, Alfedena, Roccaraso, Pescocostanzo, Montagna della Maiella, Mozzagrogna, and Fossacesia Marina on the Adriatic.

A day later Tenth Army HQ defined its operational plans for the coming weeks. According to those plans, the troops were to withdraw from the line zero to the Bernhardt Line through nine intermediate blocking lines. The withdrawal movement started on 27 September<sup>183</sup> and, at the beginning of October, the troops took up their positions on the Viktor Line, which they were to defend until 15 October. That line ran along the Volturno to Castel Campagnano, and from there, via

<sup>176</sup> See Klinkhammer, *Zwischen Bündnis und Besatzung*, 62.

<sup>177</sup> KTB OKW, iii. 1112 (17.9.1943).

<sup>178</sup> Schreiber, *Die italienischen Militärinternierten im deutschen Machtbereich*, 226.

<sup>179</sup> Schreiber, 'La Wehrmacht', 118–19.

<sup>180</sup> Gundelach, *Die deutsche Luftwaffe*, ii. 678 ff.

<sup>181</sup> AOK 10, KTB No. 1, 18 Sept. 1943, 52, BA-MA RH 20-10/54; Schreiber, 'La Wehrmacht', 117–18.

<sup>182</sup> Schreiber, 'La Wehrmacht', 123.

<sup>183</sup> KTB OKW, iii. 1147 (27 Sept. 1943); Schreiber, 'La Wehrmacht', 118.

Guardia, San Giuliano, Campodipietra, Casacalenda, and Guglionesi, to the coast south of Termoli.<sup>184</sup>

When British units landed there on 3 October, Kesselring dispatched 16th Armoured Division to the Adriatic at forced march. There followed a series of costly battles, in which the division at first put up an outstanding fight. It lost the battle in the end, however, because it lacked the necessary reserves and there was nothing to match the strength of the Allied air forces.<sup>185</sup>

The hostilities at Termoli were still under way when, on 5 October, Tenth Army HQ took command on the Bernhardt Line, a deeply staggered system of blocking lines. A second main battle line, the Gustav Line, was established on the Castelforte heights, following first the course of the Garigliano and then running along the Gari north of Sant'Ambrogio, to take in Sant'Angelo in Theodice and Cassino, and finally west of the Rapido to Alfedena, where it joined the Bernhardt Line.

In building the Bernhardt–Gustav defensive system, Tenth Army HQ attached particular importance to armour security and protection against artillery fire. It therefore decided on a reverse slope position. The various sections were accordingly flanked by artillery units, securing the front of the defence line. The defensive installations were deeply embedded, wherever possible, and forward command posts were positioned on the ridges and overhangs. Enormous importance was attached to the deployment of mines.

When the Tenth Army units gradually withdrew everywhere to positions along the Bernhardt Line in the first week of November, without occupying the line immediately, work on the fortifications was still far from finished. They were said to be 50 per cent complete in some sections, but only 25 per cent in most of them.<sup>186</sup>

As the German high command saw it, the occupation of the Bernhardt Line would mark the beginning of a decisive phase in the war in Italy. So, on 4 October, Vietinghoff-Scheel expressly called on the men under his command to be prepared for sacrifices. They must all be resolutely 'determined to fight hard to the last man'. He warned the officers to take care that the delaying tactics imposed by the enemy did not give rise to general defeatism. The German command's primary aim in establishing this new defence line was, of course, 'to secure central Italy, which was of great importance both militarily and politically', but the Bernhardt Line could also serve as a base from which to launch their own 'offensive operations'. The officers must ensure that the troops believed this.<sup>187</sup>

Meanwhile, on 16 September, the Italian forces occupying the island of Elba surrendered.<sup>188</sup> And by 18 September approximately 28,500 members of the Wehrmacht had left Sardinia and were heading for Corsica. When it became apparent that the navy would not be able to provide adequate supplies for a garrison capable of defending the island, the OKW gave orders for Corsica to be evacuated by sea and air. By 4 October 1943, 29,486 Germans, 700 prisoners of war, 105 tanks, 361 cannon, 3,026 motor vehicles, and 6,032 tonnes of equipment had

<sup>184</sup> Schreiber, 'La Wehrmacht', 119.

<sup>185</sup> *The Mediterranean and Middle East*, v. 433–7.

<sup>186</sup> Schreiber, 'La Wehrmacht', 121 ff.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid. 121.

<sup>188</sup> Schreiber, *Die italienischen Militärinternierten im deutschen Machtbereich*, 131–2.

reached the mainland. The Luftwaffe lost 32 aircraft, including 25 transport planes, in the process.<sup>189</sup> The navy reported that it had lost the following craft during the evacuation of Sardinia and Corsica: '1 J-boat, 7 naval ferry barges, 2 submarine hunters, 1 tugboat, 3 Siebel ferries, 1 peniche, and 3 steamers, each of 16,943 [GRT].'<sup>190</sup>

A little earlier, in reaction to German occupation policy in the city, there had been a bloody popular uprising in Naples, lasting four days, from 27 to 30 September 1943. There, for the first time, the autonomous resistance of military and civilian forces compelled the Wehrmacht to abandon an occupied city sooner than planned.<sup>191</sup>

Before they left Naples, the German troops put into practice the OKW's order of 18 September regarding the withdrawal movement in southern and central Italy, that is, to inflict the greatest possible destruction. The order applied to power-supply, food-production, and arms-production plants, as well as to port installations, transport facilities, railway lines, and roads in general. Regarding its implementation, Field Marshal Keitel specified: 'The commanders in charge, of all ranks, are expected to conduct the evacuation and destruction with the utmost energy, giving no quarter and showing no regard, in view of the unparalleled nature of the betrayal and the German troops lost as a result of that betrayal. Inflicting damage on the enemy must outweigh all human considerations.'<sup>192</sup>

Hitler's generals, most of whom had served in the east, understood that order and carried it out accordingly. Even cattle were not to fall into the hands of the Allies alive. Any that were not carried off were to be slaughtered 'ruthlessly', regardless of the fact that the civilian population was starving. And the territory to be surrendered must be nothing but a 'wasteland' when left to the enemy.

It was not just a matter of starvation and material damage. On the contrary, the Wehrmacht left a broad trail of blood behind it during its withdrawal from southern Italy. So, for example, men in German uniform massacred close on 700 people in the province of Caserta alone.<sup>193</sup>

The role of the 'Resistenza' must also be borne in mind. Its 'unofficial Italy', where national liberation committees with varying degrees of political weight performed central or regional administrative functions, depending on the situation,<sup>194</sup> existed, de facto, alongside the kingdom of Italy (seat of government Brindisi, and later, as from June 1944, Rome), which, though dependent on the Allied occupation powers, maintained the continuity of the state, and the

<sup>189</sup> Oberbefehlshaber der Luftwaffe, Führungsstab Ic, HQ, 31 Oct. 1943, 'Kurzbericht über Leistungen der Luftwaffe bei Räumung der Insel Korsika und des Kubanbrückenkopfes', BA-MA RH 2/637, fos. 108–11.

<sup>190</sup> KTB Skl, pt. A, I, 115 (6 Oct. 1943); see also Schreiber, *Die italienischen Militärinternierten im deutschen Machtbereich*, 107–8.

<sup>191</sup> Schreiber, *Deutsche Kriegsverbrechen in Italien*, 136 ff.

<sup>192</sup> Quoted in Schreiber, *Die italienischen Militärinternierten im deutschen Machtbereich*, 130–1; see also Klinkhammer, *Zwischen Bündnis und Besatzung*, 52–62.

<sup>193</sup> Capobianco, *Il recupero*, 171–90; on the south as a whole: *Terra bruciata, passim*; *Mezzogiorno 1943, passim*.

<sup>194</sup> Enciclopedia dell'antifascismo, i. 599–614; Kramer, *Geschichte Italiens*, ii. 104.

'Repubblica sociale italiana', linked to the Germans (Mussolini resided at Salò).<sup>195</sup> Superficial doubts are often expressed about the military efficiency of the 'Resistenza' in Italy, but given its successful attacks on the German supply lines, it was actually—from an operational point of view—among the most effective European resistance movements. In some cases its fighters gave Hitler's divisions more trouble than the Allies,<sup>196</sup> with whom they repeatedly fought shoulder to shoulder. After attacks by resistance fighters, the Germans and their fascist allies took revenge in the cruellest fashion, usually on innocent civilians.<sup>197</sup>

It would certainly have been a blessing for the people in southern and central Italy if the Wehrmacht troops had withdrawn quickly to the northern Apennines, as Hitler and his military commanders had considered doing immediately after 8 September 1943. In fact, the Wehrmacht high command had made plans for a defence line in the north at the narrowest point between the Adriatic and the Ligurian Sea. Army Group B HQ was entrusted with the relevant reconnaissance, and on 25 September Hitler approved the results presented by Rommel. In reality, however, the Führer had already changed his mind. He now wanted to defend the country much further south, roughly on the Gaeta–Ortona line,<sup>198</sup> and the relevant directive concerning 'the command structure in Italy' was issued on 6 November 1943.<sup>199</sup>

According to that directive, the Bernhardt Line was 'to be held permanently', and it was therefore essential that 'all the forces in Italy be placed under a unified command'. To general surprise, Hitler chose Kesselring, not Rommel, for the purpose.<sup>200</sup> Rommel had suspected some such thing at the end of October,<sup>201</sup> but it was only on 5 November, during the briefing at Führer headquarters, that the field marshal learned that he was to be put in charge of an army group on special mission, directly under Hitler's command, to defend against an Allied landing in north-western France.<sup>202</sup> His enemies and enviers had apparently brought the plot they hatched in North Africa to a successful conclusion. Goebbels' diaries provide a synthesis of the defamation levelled at Rommel. In the autumn of 1943, we read, Rommel 'had become rather weak and inconsistent in his views'. 'He can almost be said to have a defeatist attitude to the war.' Frequently 'the view is expressed that Rommel has become a general who only knows how to retreat'. His 'long time in North Africa' had apparently 'broken him inside'—a 'fact' that, according to the propaganda minister, was 'not to be mentioned in public at present'. Finally, Rommel was still the 'military idol of the German people', but the one gaining

<sup>195</sup> Lill, *Geschichte Italiens*, 376–85.

<sup>196</sup> Schreiber, 'Il settore occidentale della Linea Gotica', 51–75.

<sup>197</sup> Andrae, *Auch gegen Frauen und Kinder, passim*; *Deutschland im zweiten Weltkrieg*, v. 617 ff. and vi. 493 ff.; Klinkhammer, *Zwischen Bündnis und Besatzung*, 422–88; Schreiber, 'Partisanenkrieg', 93–129; Schreiber, 'La resistenza italiana', 596–611; Schreiber, *Deutsche Kriegsverbrechen in Italien, passim*.

<sup>198</sup> Warlimont, *Im Hauptquartier*, 390–5; Schreiber, 'La Linea Gotica', 29 ff.

<sup>199</sup> KTB OKW, iii. 1465–6 (6 Nov. 1943). <sup>200</sup> Schreiber, 'La Linea Gotica', 26–32.

<sup>201</sup> Rommel, *The Rommel Papers*, 447 (26 Oct. 1943).

<sup>202</sup> KTB OKW, iii. 1466–7, ('Bildung der Heeresgruppe z.b.V.', 6 Nov. 1943).

in prestige was Kesselring, who, as a result of ‘Rommel’s failure [...] had naturally acquired a somewhat higher standing’.<sup>203</sup>

On 21 November 1943 Kesselring took command in Italy as Commander-in-Chief South-West and commander-in-chief of Army Group C. At the same time, Army Group B handed over command to Fourteenth Army (Col.-Gen. Eberhard von Mackensen).<sup>204</sup> Commander-in-Chief South-West was now in command of the ‘units of the three Wehrmacht formations and the Waffen SS units that were engaged in land combat’, as well as the Mediterranean plenipotentiary of the Reich commissioner for shipping in matters affecting the ‘conduct of military operations’, and those parts of the Todt Organization that were in the Italian area.

The German naval command (Rear Admiral Wilhelm Meindsen-Bohlken) and Air Fleet 2 remained under the command of the commanders-in-chief of the navy and Luftwaffe respectively, for the purposes of operations at sea and in the air. However, in the case of operations on the mainland and in connection with coastal defence, they were to receive their instructions from Commander-in-Chief South-West. Corresponding rules applied to the plenipotentiary general of the Wehrmacht in Italy, General Rudolf Toussaint, with regard to matters that fell within the remit of Commander-in-Chief South-West or ‘indirectly’ affected his conduct of military operations. Kesselring was also granted ‘permission to exercise executive power in the operational areas in Italy’.<sup>205</sup>

One point that was not settled in the directive on ‘the command structure in Italy’ was the question of the respective responsibilities of Kesselring and the special adviser on police affairs with the Italian Fascist National Government, senior SS and police leader Karl Wolff, with respect to the repression of partisans. This led to friction, and Himmler was obliged to intervene. Finally, on 26 April 1944, Keitel transferred ‘supreme command of all banditry repression in the Italian area’ to Commander-in-Chief South-West. However, ‘responsibility for conducting’ such action outside the area of operations, and outside a 30-kilometre-wide coastal area, was assigned to the senior SS and police leader—under Kesselring’s personal command and acting on his instructions.<sup>206</sup>

The most important task assigned to Commander-in-Chief South-West under the 6 November 1943 directive was ‘to defend central Italy’ north of the Bernhardt Line. He was also responsible for coastal defence in the Adriatic, the Ligurian Sea, and the Tyrrhenian Sea. In addition, Kesselring had to liberate north-eastern Italy, partly occupied by rebel forces, and prepare draft plans for an attack on Apulia in case the Americans and British intended to attack the Balkans.<sup>207</sup> Hitler and the OKW assumed that the ‘main attack by the western powers’ would be directed at south-eastern Europe. That was one of the reasons why, at the end of September

<sup>203</sup> Goebbels, *Die Tagebücher*, pt. 2, x. 180 (27 Oct. 1943).

<sup>204</sup> *KTB OKW*, iii. 1295 (21 Nov. 1943).

<sup>205</sup> Ibid., doc. 31, 1465–6 (*Befehlsregelung in Italien*), 6 Nov. 1943.

<sup>206</sup> Schreiber, ‘Partisanenkrieg’, 94–7.

<sup>207</sup> *KTB OKW*, iii. 1257 (6 Nov. 1943) and 1465–6.

1943, the Führer already wanted to defend in southern Italy and keep his adversaries 'at sword's point' there.<sup>208</sup>

Apart from concern about the south-east, the fact that, surprisingly, the Allies were advancing only very slowly was also a key factor in determining the German conduct of operations in Italy after 8 September 1943.<sup>209</sup> On 27 September the British 8th Army had captured the large airbase at Foggia, which had suffered serious and lasting damage, and on 1 October the US 5th Army had marched into Naples, which had already been liberated by its inhabitants.

American experts were unexpectedly quick in repairing the port installations, which had been devastated by Allied bombardment and German destruction measures: 212,000 men, 45,000 motor vehicles, and 154,000 tonnes of cargo were landed in the Naples–Salerno area in the first week of October, so that 13 of the planned 20 Allied divisions were now in place on the Italian mainland.<sup>210</sup> At the beginning of October, Rommel and Kesselring had 18 divisions and two brigades at their disposal.<sup>211</sup>

After the battle of Termoli, the Germans had to withdraw Tenth Army's left wing to the north bank of the Biferno, while, in the west, the US 5th Army reached the Volturno on 6 October. In view of this encouraging development, Eisenhower gave orders to continue the advance on Rome, and Alexander even planned to push on from there as far as Livorno and Florence. Both generals mistakenly assumed, on the basis of reports that had been overtaken by events, that Kesselring still intended to withdraw his units to northern Italy. In any case, Clark attacked on 12 October, and Montgomery's 8th Army went on the offensive on the 22nd. In the face of fierce German resistance, the British succeeded in crossing the Trigno and approached the south bank of the Sangro.<sup>212</sup>

On 23 November Montgomery continued his offensive, with the aim of reaching the road from Pescara to Avezzano. It was hampered from the start by torrential downpours, causing operations to be suspended temporarily and severely restricting the deployment of aircraft. Nevertheless, on 2 December the whole of the 8th Army was on the north bank of the Sangro, where the main battle line now ran roughly from Castel di Sangro to the coast.

In the area of the British V Corps the front had been driven back to a line running from Casoli, through Orsogna, to a point on the coast 10 kilometres south of Pescara, thus creating a breach in the Bernhardt Line.<sup>213</sup> However, the 8th Army did not take advantage of this success, although it was superior in armour, infantry, and artillery to LXVI Armoured Corps, which was positioned on the Adriatic. Its commander-in-chief, who won many battles, was not one of those military

<sup>208</sup> Warlimont, *Im Hauptquartier*, 393 ff.

<sup>209</sup> Jackson, *Alexander*, 242.

<sup>210</sup> Coakley and Leighton, *Global Logistics and Strategy*, 224–5; *The West Point Atlas*, ii, map 97.

<sup>211</sup> *KTB OKW*, iii. 1160 (4 Oct. 1943).

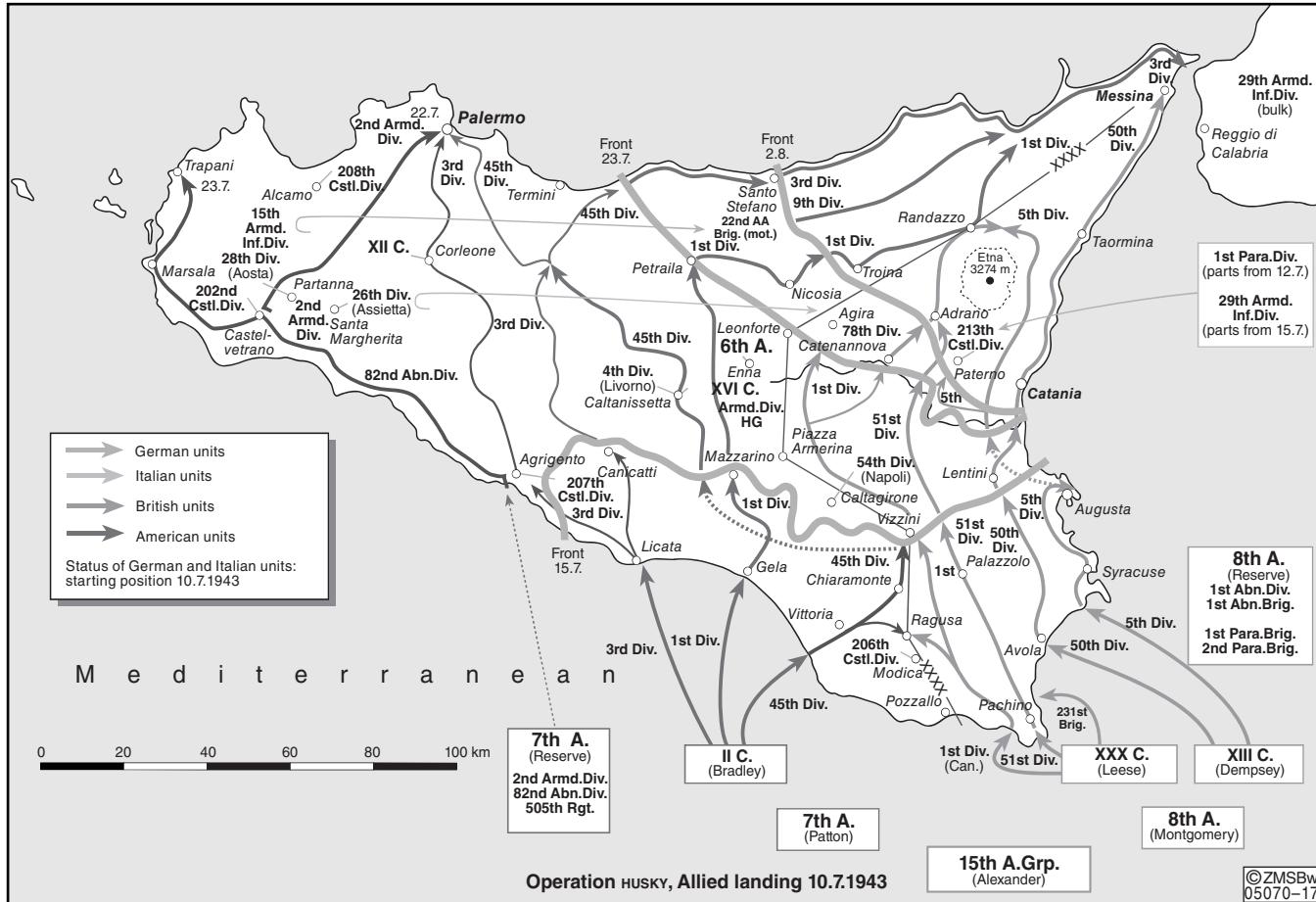
<sup>212</sup> *The West Point Atlas*, ii, maps 97 and 98.

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid.*, map 99; *World War II in Europe*, 1667–8.



Map VI.iv.1. The battles in Tunisia up to the surrender on 13 May 1943

Sources: OKW situation maps 11 Feb., 12 May 1943, BA-MA, RH 2 A/268, 294.



Map VI.iv.2. The battle for Sicily, 10 July to 17 August 1943

Sources: OKW situation maps 3 July, 20 July 1943, BA-MA, Kart RH 2 SW/3,4; Nicholson, *The Canadians in Italy*; The West Point Atlas, ii; *Atlas of the Second World War*, Garland and Smyth, *Sicily*



**Map VI.iv.3.** German and Italian forces in Italy up to 5 September 1943

Sources: OKH, situation south 7 Sept. 1943, BA-MA, Kart RH 2 SW/8; Ministero della Difesa, *Le Operazioni delle unità Italiane nel Settembre-Ottobre 1943*.



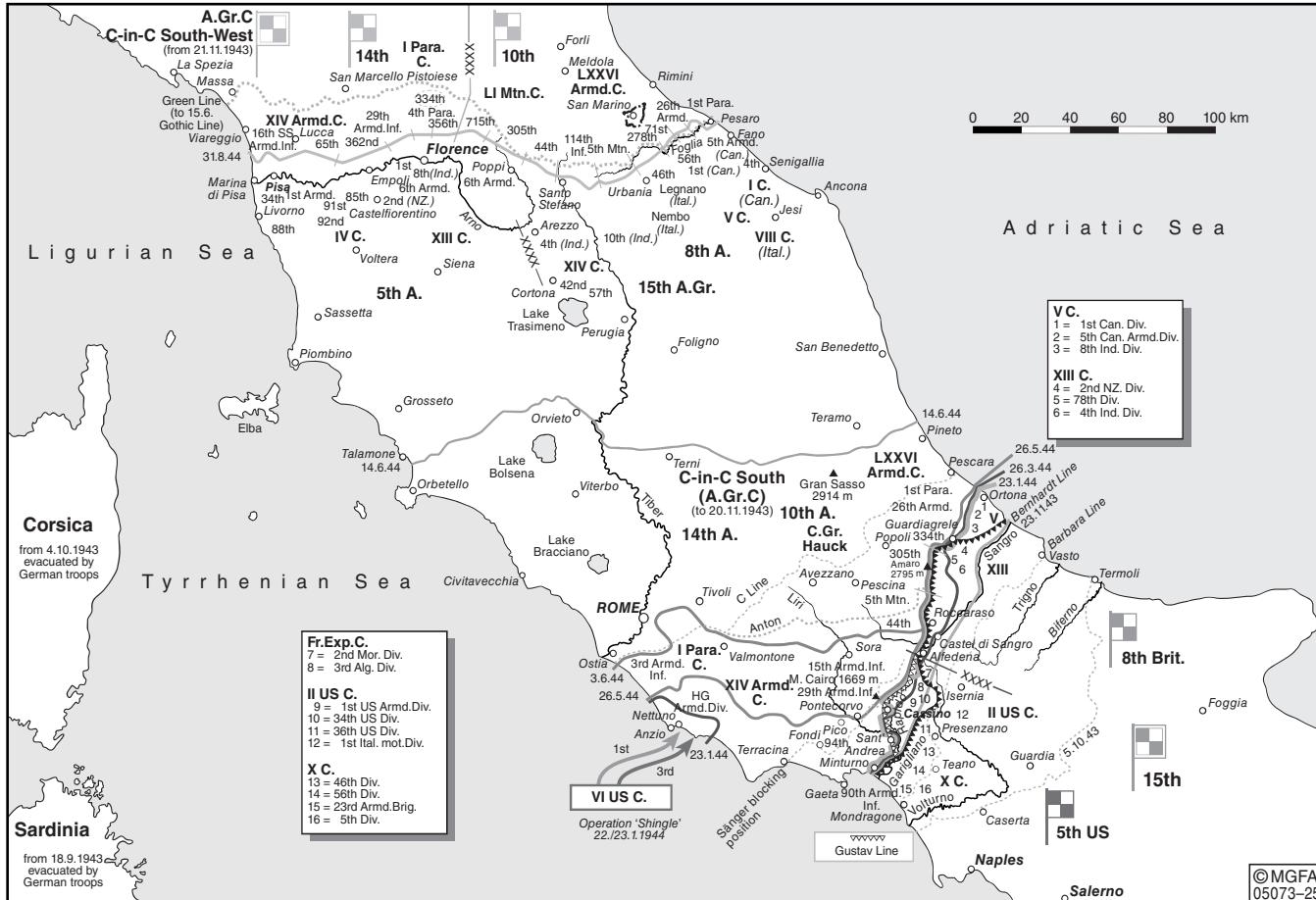
Map VI.rv.4. Development of the situation in Italy, 3 to 20 September 1943

Sources: OKW situation maps 3 to 20 Sept. 1943, BA-MA, Kart RH 20-10/58; Nicholson, *The Canadians in Italy*; *The West Point Atlas*, ii; *Atlas of the Second World War*, Garland and Smyth, *Sicily*.



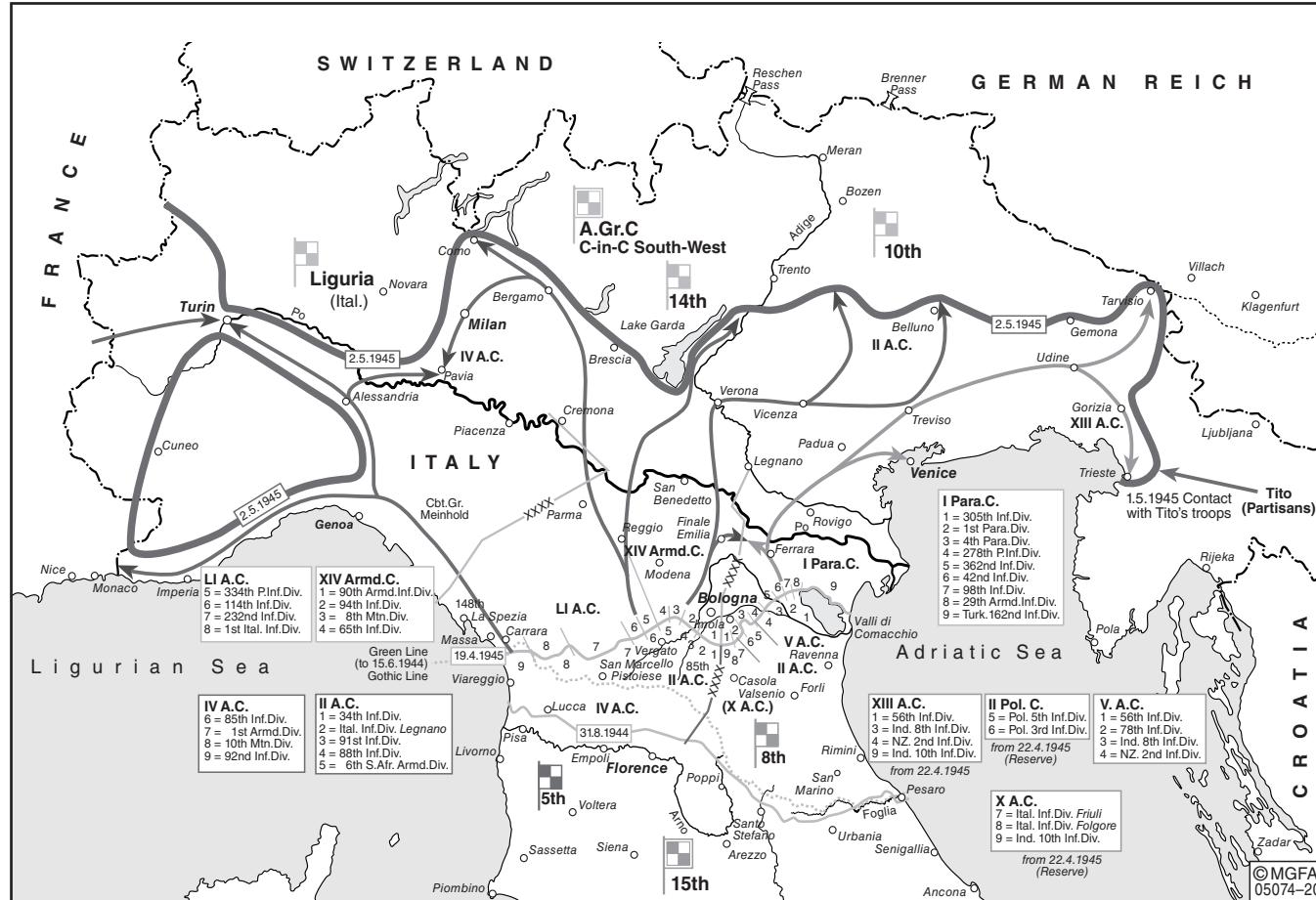
Map VI.iv.5. Development of the situation in Italy, 21 September to 5 October 1943

Sources: OKW situation maps 27 Sept., 4 Oct. 1943, BA-MA, Kart RH 2 SW14, 15; Tenth Army situation maps 21 Sept. to 5 Oct. 1943, RH 20-10/66 K; Nicholson, *The Canadians in Italy: The West Point Atlas*, ii; *Atlas of the Second World War*.



#### **Map VI.iv.6. Development of the situation in Italy, 5 October 1943 to 31 August 1944**

Sources: OKH situation maps for the relevant dates, BA-MA, Kart RH 2, SW/15, 22, 42, 180, 210, 224; Tenth Army situation maps RH 20-10/81 K, 111 K, 164 K, 269 K, 272 K; Fourteenth Army situation maps, RH 20-14/22 K, 31 K, 40 K, 58 K; *The West Point Atlas*, ii; *Atlas of the Second World War*.



commanders who are prepared to take risks.<sup>214</sup> He considered it necessary to regroup, and he was worried about the rapidly dwindling supplies of artillery ammunition. He also was concerned by the heavy losses incurred, and on top of everything, the weather was getting even worse. When, in the night of 27 to 28 December, the men of the German 1st Paratroop Division abandoned Ortona, for which they had fought for a whole week in murderous house-to-house battles and close combat, Montgomery halted the offensive.<sup>215</sup> Three days later he left Italy for England, to take command of the Allied 21st Army Group, which subsequently took part in the major landing in Normandy on 6 June 1944.

General Oliver William Hargreaves Leese took over as commander-in-chief of 8th Army at the end of December 1943. His main task was to maintain the status quo on the Adriatic, and he was to undertake deception measures to induce the German command to believe that a further attack on LXXVI Armoured Corps was imminent. In addition, the actions of 8th Army were still designed to help the US 5th Army, whose offensive had come to a temporary halt in icy weather conditions about 8 kilometres south of the Rapido.<sup>216</sup>

In retrospect, the course of the battle on the Sangro suggests that the Allies could have achieved more there if their operational planning had been bolder. They managed to force the German Tenth Army to withdraw the front to the Adriatic, but when the British 8th Army command suspended the offensive it had not yet achieved its operational objectives, namely the city of Pescara, the river Pescara, and the road from there to Avezzano.

From January 1944 on, military operations on the Adriatic declined. The point of concentration in the Italian theatre of war moved west, to the area of XIV Armoured Corps (General Fridolin von Senger und Etterlin), where the US 5th Army had launched its expected offensive on 12 October with two corps, each comprising three divisions. By 15 October the US forces had established three strong bridgeheads on the north bank of the Volturno.

Kesselring's troops, withdrawing slowly but steadily, demanded everything from their adversaries. And the closer the front got to the outposts of the Gustav Line—after the Barbara Line, which ran south from Mondragone towards Isernia via Presenzano, had been breached and the Bernhardt Line overcome—the more bitter the German resistance became.

The advance required a great deal of force. On 13 November 1943 General Clark was obliged to order his completely exhausted and partially decimated units to halt hostilities for two weeks, and he took advantage of the pause to regroup his forces. The attack was resumed on 29 November and 1 December, but by 15 January 1944 Clark's men had gained very little ground in a series of bloody encounters—not least on account of the bad weather.<sup>217</sup> Nevertheless, the US 5th

<sup>214</sup> On this, see Montgomery, *The Memoirs*, 176–80.

<sup>215</sup> *World War II in Europe*, 1668; *The West Point Atlas*, ii, map 99.

<sup>216</sup> *The Mediterranean and Middle East*, v. 510; *Atlas of the Second World War*, 123.

<sup>217</sup> *The Mediterranean and Middle East*, v. 438–54, 513–21; Ellis, *Cassino*, 32–7; Holmes, *Battlefields*, 101; *The West Point Atlas*, ii, maps 99–102.

Army now stood facing the Gustav Line, and the real ‘major battle’ on the Italian mainland was about to begin—a battle that ‘in some respects’ surpassed even ‘the ferocity of the battles in the east’.<sup>218</sup>

The Liri valley opens to the south of Cassino, a town of 25,000 souls located at the foot of the ancient abbey of Monte Cassino, and consisting largely of solidly built houses that were reduced to rubble in the course of the hostilities. Unusually for the Apennine peninsula, this valley runs north-west to south-east, not east to west or vice versa. It seemed ideal for the purpose of a rapid advance on Rome, some 125 kilometres away, forming, as it were, the natural approach to the capital. However, it is flanked on the northern and southern sides by mountains that were in German hands at the time and would be very difficult for an attacker to cross.<sup>219</sup>

On 4 January 1944, with the battle for Cassino looming, the German Tenth Army, which had taken over responsibility for repelling the enemy forces, comprised XIV and LXXVI Armoured Corps, and the Hauck Group. XIV Armoured Corps was to defend a 70-kilometre section of the 135-kilometre long, 16-kilometre deep Bernhardt–Gustav defence system, starting at the west coast. It consisted of 5th Mountain Division, 15th Armoured Infantry Division, and 44th and 94th Infantry Divisions, while LXXVI Armoured Corps was able, at that point, to deploy 1st Paratroop Division, 26th Armoured Division, 3rd Armoured Infantry Division (en route), 90th Armoured Infantry Division, and 334th Infantry Division. The Hauck Group consisted essentially of 305th Infantry Division, with Armoured Division ‘Hermann Göring’ as a reserve force. There were also independent units of the army and the two armoured corps, and the units under the senior 316th Artillery commander and the rear area commander (1017th Military Command).<sup>220</sup> As regards the conditions of deployment, the Wehrmacht’s divisions were certainly inferior to the Allies’ in respect of head count, artillery, and air support, but the difficult terrain was to their advantage.

In the following account, contrary to the usual practice, the hostilities at Cassino are treated not as a series of three or even four battles, but as phases in a single battle lasting from mid-January to mid-May 1944. This seems to make better sense, on the one hand, because the hostilities were never completely suspended, and on the other, because the field of battle, the tactics adopted, the operational objectives, and the units deployed all remained unchanged throughout that period.

On 15 January 1944 the major formations on the Allied side were deployed as follows:<sup>221</sup> on the British 8th Army’s right wing there was the British V Corps (General Charles Walter Allfrey), together with the Canadian 1st Infantry Division, parts of the Canadian 5th Armoured Division, and the Indian 8th Infantry Division; on its left wing, the British XIII Corps (Gen. Sidney Chevalier Kirkman), together with the New Zealand 2nd Infantry Division (army group reserve as from 17 January), the British 78th Infantry Division, and parts of the Indian 4th Infantry Division.

<sup>218</sup> KTB OKW, iv. 80.

<sup>219</sup> Ben Arie, *Die Schlacht*, 78.

<sup>220</sup> AOK 10, KTB No. 4, ann. 88 a–c, BA-MA RH 20-10/88; Ben Arie, *Die Schlacht*, 78–91.

<sup>221</sup> *The Mediterranean and Middle East*, v. 595 ff.

On the US 5th Army's right wing there was the French Expeditionary Corps (Gen. Alphonse Juin), together with the Moroccan 2nd Infantry Division and the Algerian 3rd Infantry Division; in the centre of the front, the US II Corps (Gen. Roger Keyes), to which the US 1st Armoured Division, the US 34th and 36th Infantry Divisions, a brigade (special unit), and the Italian 1st Motorized Group belonged; and on the left flank, the British X Corps (Gen. McCreery), with 5th, 46th, and 56th Infantry Divisions, and 23rd Armoured Brigade—all British units. The US 45th Infantry Division was ready as army reserve.

In works on the battle of Cassino, it is virtually a must to discuss, in addition to the military developments, the rescue of the cultural and artistic treasures in the Monte Cassino monastery, the bombardment of the abbey, and in that connection, the question whether—contrary to the agreement with the Vatican—there were German soldiers stationed in the monastery.

The fact is that in 1943 the cultural treasures in the abbey had been both rescued and stolen. After the war 13 masterpieces belonging to Neapolitan museums turned up in a tunnel in the Altaussee salt mines, where Hitler and Göring stored their 'art collections'. Like many other valuable items, they had been moved to Monte Cassino during the war.<sup>222</sup>

The bombardment of the abbey of Monte Cassino on 15 February 1944 claimed the lives of some 300 civilians. There were about 800 people in the monastery, mostly monks and refugees, and the Allies had dropped leaflets there a few days before, informing them of the impending aerial bombardment and urging them to leave the abbey.

15th Army Group command had concerns about the action. Witness, *inter alia*, the controversy between General Clark, who would have preferred to avoid destroying the monastery, and General Alexander, who decided against his American subordinates in favour of the commander of the New Zealand Expeditionary Corps, General Bernhard Cyril Freyberg. In the end, Freyberg's men were to attack Cassino in the very spot where the US 34th and 36th Infantry Divisions had lost up to 80 per cent of their combat strength in heavy fighting. Freyberg knew what awaited the New Zealanders. The Germans on the monastery hill were like shadows, invisible and omnipresent. They watched the battlefield from excellent cover, recorded every move their adversaries made, and directed their artillery fire accurately against the enemy troops, who were stuck in the freezing mud on the floor of the valley. No wonder the attackers, including Freyberg, were 'obsessed' with the hill.

Freyberg insisted on the bombardment and destruction of the monastery. This was partly because the German defensive positions were within 300 metres of the abbey, and he firmly believed that Field Marshal Kesselring would sooner or later order his troops to occupy it. Freyberg also assumed that if the monastery were destroyed, it would be easier to take than if the buildings were intact. He was wrong about this. The ruins of Monte Cassino, as General Clark rightly pointed out, provided ideal defensive possibilities.

<sup>222</sup> Klinkhammer, *Die Abteilung 'Kunstschutz'*, 503–14.

The question remains whether there were members of the Wehrmacht stationed in the monastery illegally, that is, contrary to the agreement that had been reached with the Vatican. According to German contemporary witnesses and sources, that was not the case. Thus, for example, Baron Ernst von Weizsäcker, who had been German ambassador to the Holy See since 31 March 1943, wrote in his 'papers' on 19 February 1944:

Yesterday, the old abbot of Monte Cassino [!] came to see me after his monastery had been reduced to rubble. I was sorry to have to extract yet another statement for propaganda purposes from this broken man, trembling, exhausted, and dirty as he was. It is surprising that our press has so much sympathy for the monastery. We are not usually keen on Catholic monasteries [...] But the truth is that we have never used or occupied the monastery for military purposes. The enemy knew that from my message via [!] the Vatican.

In fact, that appears to have been so. However, Allied troops who were there firmly maintain the contrary.<sup>223</sup>

The battle for Cassino was still in its early days when, at 02.00 on 22 January 1944, the US VI Corps (Gen. John P. Lucas) landed on both sides of Anzio (Operation SHINGLE), about 50 kilometres south of Rome. The following forces were deployed: 1st Infantry Division, 2nd Special Brigade, an armoured regiment, and an armoured battalion (all British units), and the US 3rd Infantry Division, a US armoured battalion, three US ranger battalions, and a regiment and battalion of US airborne troops.

The naval force consisted of 30 large and 103 smaller warships, and 241 landing craft. The German navy had three small speedboats and two U-boats to oppose them. The U-boats were to reach the theatre of operations within 30 hours—and that was all. The relative strength of the forces shows, once again, that German naval operations in the Mediterranean after Italy's exit from the war can only be classified as 'also fighting'.

As to aircraft, the Allies had more than 2,700 at their disposal for deployment at the Anzio beachhead,<sup>224</sup> whereas the German Air Fleet 2 had a total of 337 aircraft on 20 January, of which only 223 were operational.<sup>225</sup>

The expectation on the Allied side was that the landing would lead to the tactical combination of Operation SHINGLE with the planned frontal attack on the Gustav Line. For that to happen, General Lucas had only to make rigorous use of the element of surprise and advance against the rear of the German Tenth Army immediately after the landing, so as to cut it off or at least threaten it with encirclement. It was assumed that this would force Col.-Gen. von Vietinghoff-Scheel to abandon the western section of the German defence line.

<sup>223</sup> The quotation is from Weizsäcker, *Die Weizsäcker-Papiere*, 369–70 (19 Feb. 1944); see Klinkhammer, *Die Abteilung 'Kunstschutz'*, 514 ff.; Carver, *The War in Italy*, 142–6; *The Mediterranean and Middle East*, v. 704–14; *World War II in Europe*, 1585–8.

<sup>224</sup> *The Mediterranean and Middle East*, v. 650–4; KTB Skl, pt. A, liii. 396 (22 Jan. 1944).

<sup>225</sup> Gundelach, *Die deutsche Luftwaffe*, ii. 767.

The US VI Corps landing, at least, came as a complete surprise, as the German naval command recorded: 'Neither the assembly nor the approach of the landing force were in any way detected by German reconnaissance. The landing therefore encountered no resistance, precisely in an area where the military forces deployed to combat landings had been withdrawn a few days earlier for transfer to the southern front.'<sup>226</sup>

Since General Clark and General Lucas did not take advantage of the chance they were given, the German Tenth Army was not cut off. The two Allied commanders' primary concern was to consolidate the bridgehead, in which there were already up to 50,000 men on 24 January, and they proposed to resume the offensive only in a second, as yet unspecified phase of the operation. This decision met with very sharp criticism in Allied military circles, but also with some understanding. In any case, when Lucas finally attacked on 30 January, it was far too late, and on 22 February 1944 he was replaced by Lt.-Gen. Lucian K. Truscott.

Field Marshal Kesselring used the time which the enemy had given him to establish a robust defence front as quickly as possible, under the overall supervision of Fourteenth Army HQ, a front that very soon acquired considerable offensive strength. On 28 January, Fourteenth Army HQ was in command of the following major formations:<sup>227</sup>

I Paratroop Corps (Gen. Alfred Schlemm):

- Armoured Division 'Hermann Göring' (minus armoured regiment),
- 26th Armoured Division (en route),
- 3rd Armoured Infantry Division (minus the reinforced 8th Motorized Infantry Regiment),
- 71st Infantry Division (minus the reinforced 211th Infantry Regiment, but with the bulk of 191st Infantry Regiment),
- 715th Infantry Division,
- Pfeiffer Group (Maj.-Gen. Hellmuth Pfeiffer) (65th Infantry Division, en route, but minus the reinforced 146th Infantry Regiment),
- 4th Paratroop Division (operational sections),
- 104th Armoured Infantry Regiment (minus III Battalion),
- 2nd Artillery Training Regiment (en route),
- 1027th and 1028th Motorized Infantry Regiments (en route),
- Berger Combat Group (Lt.-Col. Berger, commander of 9th Armoured Infantry Regiment) with the 114th Light Infantry Division's reinforced 721st Light Infantry Regiment,<sup>228</sup> which was to serve as army reserve upon arrival;

<sup>226</sup> KTB Skl. pt. A, liii. 395 (22 Jan. 1944); see also *Grand Strategy*, v. 225–31; *The Mediterranean and Middle East*, v. 643–89, 723–75, and on Lucas in particular, 750 ff.

<sup>227</sup> AOK 14, KTB No. 2, ann. 4a, 26 Jan., and ann. 21, 28 Jan. 1944, BA-MA RH 20-14/25.

<sup>228</sup> Schreiber, 'La Wehrmacht', 143; Tessin, *Verbände und Truppen*, vi. 254.

LI Mountain Army Corps (General Valentin Feurstein):

- 362nd Infantry Division (minus the reinforced 954th Infantry Regiment),
- the Commandant of Elba,
- and numerous other separate troop sections and independent units.

A few days later LXXVI Armoured Corps HQ took over the divisions previously under the command of I Paratroop Corps HQ, and I Paratroop Corps HQ took command of the units of the Pfeiffer Group and the German Commander in Rome.<sup>229</sup>

In the end, the attacks and counter-attacks by the opposing forces proved inconclusive, and, from 18 February on, the bridgehead was in deadlock and the front was frozen.<sup>230</sup> At the end of the month LXXVI Armoured Corps, I Paratroop Corps, and nine divisions and three regiments of the German Fourteenth Army were tied down in this situation.<sup>231</sup>

The first phase of the battle for Cassino had also come to an end in the middle of February. The British and American forces' attempt to take the German defence line by storm had failed, and XIV Armoured Corps rightly accounted this a defensive success. Optimism spread, encouraged, among other things, by the hope that Fourteenth Army might yet succeed in clearing the Anzio bridgehead and launching a counter-offensive.<sup>232</sup>

However, the war on the Cassino front simmered quietly for a while. Both sides took advantage of the lull to make material and military preparations for a second intensive phase in the battle. It began on 15 March, when, after the usual demonstration of power by the Allied artillery, fighting flared up dramatically. The raging battle died down only gradually, on 23 and 24 March.<sup>233</sup>

Tenth Army HQ considered that the second phase of the battle for Cassino had also been a success. For that very reason, Col.-Gen. von Vietinghoff-Scheel and his staff assumed that the enemy would shortly launch a third major attack on the Gustav Line. After all, the Allies could not be expected to accept two defeats in quick succession.<sup>234</sup>

This state of affairs obliged General Alexander to take the initiative. His intention was to destroy the right wing of the German Tenth Army and then force any surviving remnants of von Vietinghoff-Scheel's troops, together with

<sup>229</sup> AOK 14, KTB No. 2, ann. 34, 3 Feb., and ann. 45, 4 Feb. 1944, BA-MA RH 20-14/25.

<sup>230</sup> On Anzio, in addition to the works already cited, see *KTB OKW*, iv. 122–72; Churchill, *The Second World War*, v. 424–38; Ellis, *Cassino*, 111 ff.; *The West Point Atlas*, ii, map 103.

<sup>231</sup> AOK 14, KTB No. 2, ann. 159, 1 Mar., 'Gliederung der großen Verbände, Stand 28.2.1944', BA-MA RH 20-14/26. The following major formations were involved: Armoured Division 'Hermann Göring', 26th Armoured Division, 3rd and 29th Armoured Infantry Divisions, 4th Paratroop Division, 114th Light Infantry Division, 65th, 92nd, and 715th Infantry Divisions, as well as the German Commandant in Rome.

<sup>232</sup> *KTB OKW*, iv. 151–70.

<sup>233</sup> These were the days on which the Wehrmacht and the SS committed a terrible crime in the Ardeatine Caves in Rome. In reprisal for an attack in the Via Rasella, in which the 2nd company of Police Regiment 'Bozen' lost 33 men, they massacred 335 people who had had nothing whatever to do with it. See Prauser, 'Mord in Rom', 269–301; Staron, *Fosse Ardeatine*, 32–70.

<sup>234</sup> XIV Armoured Corps, KTB No. 6, ann. 685 and 735, BA-MA RH 24-14/110.

those of the Fourteenth Army, back to the north of Rome. After that, he intended to pursue them relentlessly as far as the Rimini–Pisa line, inflicting maximum losses in the process.

In the event, the British general took his time. It was seven weeks before he launched his final offensive, Operation DIADEM, in the night of 11 to 12 May 1944. The attack was launched on a 32-kilometre-long front, running from Scauri on the Tyrrhenian Sea to Sant'Elia Fiumerapido. According to the reported ration strength, there were 269,371 men in the ranks of the British 8th Army and 350,276 in those of the US 5th Army. On the German side, there were 365,616 Wehrmacht troops.<sup>235</sup> The combat strength of the German forces, that is, the number of men actually fighting or directly assisting men who were actually fighting, was 81,932 on 23 April in the case of Tenth Army, and 76,873 on 10 May in the case of Fourteenth Army.<sup>236</sup>

Alexander's spring offensive, Operation DIADEM, was preceded by Operation STRANGLE, an air offensive launched on 19 March 1944, which continued until the night of 11 to 12 May. The attacks were aimed primarily at the road and sea links, but they also focused on the railway lines and shunting yards south of the Pisa–Rimini line. The Allies chose targets that were at least 100 kilometres north of the main battle line, in order to put even more pressure on the overstrained German transport system. Their aim was to oblige Kesselring to make increasing use of his scarce heavy goods vehicles, which were vulnerable to attack from the air, in the risky transport of supplies.

The Luftwaffe lacked the means to prevent an enemy interdiction of this kind, which made it extraordinarily difficult for the Germans to conduct operations in Italy. On the other hand, the Allies failed to achieve the actual aim of Operation STRANGLE, that is, the Wehrmacht's withdrawal from the Gustav Line, despite the fact that the American and British pilots flew about 21,000 sorties (388 a day), dropping almost 22,500 tonnes of bombs, in the course of an operation which lasted almost eight weeks.<sup>237</sup>

In this third phase of the battle for Cassino the British 8th Army had five corps with 13 divisions at its disposal. The US 5th Army had three corps, also with 13 divisions, of which the US VI Corps, including a seven-division reinforcement ordered by the commander-in-chief of the Allied 15th Army Group, was stuck in the now completely overcrowded Anzio bridgehead,<sup>238</sup> surrounded by the forces of the German Fourteenth Army.<sup>239</sup> At the opening of hostilities, the German Fourteenth Army brought two corps and seven divisions to the front. On 17 May the German Tenth Army had two corps and eleven divisions under its command.<sup>240</sup>

<sup>235</sup> Clodfelter, *Warfare and Armed Conflicts*, ii. 849.

<sup>236</sup> *The Mediterranean and Middle East*, vi/I. 71.

<sup>237</sup> Ibid. 34–44.

<sup>238</sup> *The West Point Atlas*, ii, map 104.

<sup>239</sup> Ellis, *Cassino*, 290; *The Mediterranean and Middle East*, v, map 43.

<sup>240</sup> Tessin, *Verbände und Truppen*, iii. 162, 289.

In the US 5th Army's area of attack, the points of concentration of the Allied offensive were on either side of Minturno and Castelforte, on Monte Fuga and Monte Maio, and at Sant'Andrea and Sant'Apollinare, that is, in the inhospitable Aurunci Mountains, where units of the French Expeditionary Corps and, in the south, troops of the US II Corps were fighting their way forward.

The British 8th Army's area of attack stretched roughly from the confluence of the Liri and Rapido rivers, through Cassino, to Caira, about 6 kilometres to the north. The main attack in the area of Cassino, Monte Cairo, the Liri valley, and the Sacco valley was conducted by troops of the British XIII Corps and the Polish II Corps (General Władisław Anders).<sup>241</sup>

On 17 May Kesselring learned that the French Expeditionary Corps, with the support of the US II Corps, had 'broken through the German front in southern Italy'.<sup>242</sup> This happened at a point where no special measures had been taken to build up the defensive positions, because it was assumed that this was unnecessary in the rocky, trackless terrain of the Aurunci Mountains<sup>243</sup>—a mistake that played a decisive part in the outcome of the battle for Cassino.

Since Sicily, however, the Wehrmacht high command had regularly attributed 'enemy successes' not to its own operational errors, of which there was no shortage, but solely and stereotypically to the Allies' 'material superiority' in aircraft, armour, and artillery. That dominance certainly existed, and the inability of the Wehrmacht's very weak air forces to relieve the burden on the hard-pressed front in the Italian theatre of war weighed especially heavily. The information about German plans and intentions that was obtained by means of the ULTRA decryption system also played a part, as did the competent command of the French Expeditionary Corps in particular, and the fighting spirit of many Allied troops. Their spirit was in no way inferior to that of the German troops, whose fortitude was described by Col.-Gen. von Vietinghoff-Scheel as tantamount to 'deliberate self-sacrifice in some cases'.<sup>244</sup>

In any case, this says little about the nature of the war in Italy which, like that of every war, was primarily reflected in the fate of the civilian population. Two examples will serve as illustration. Members of the French North African divisions committed atrocities in Italy, notably rape on a large scale, in circumstances which the French military authorities have not convincingly clarified to this day, especially as regards responsibility.<sup>245</sup>

The same applies to crimes committed by members of the Wehrmacht, the SS, and the German police in the Italian theatre of war. In October 1943 the 16th Armoured Division tribunal recorded in its minutes that German soldiers were 'increasingly' moving through the country 'like marauders in the Thirty Years War,

<sup>241</sup> AOK 10, KTB No. 6, 12 May 1944, fos. 70–75, BA-MA RH 20-10/113; *The West Point Atlas*, ii, map 104; *Atlas of the Second World War*, 124–5.

<sup>242</sup> Ben Arie, *Die Schlacht*, 386.

<sup>243</sup> *The West Point Atlas*, ii, map 104.

<sup>244</sup> KTB OKW, iv. 488.

<sup>245</sup> Mourrut, 'La campagna d'Italia', 58 ff.

totally without supervision'. 'Plunder and rape [are] the order of the day.' Kesselring, who must have known this better than anyone else, stated after the war that Germans, 'in large numbers, raided and robbed even peaceful villages and their inhabitants'. Even inherently 'well-disposed members of the Italian population in the ranks of the partisans' behaved in the same way. On 8 July 1944, when plunder had become a real epidemic, Commander-in-Chief South-West ordered that 'plunderers caught in the act' were to be 'shot immediately, i.e. without court martial'. However, under pressure from Reich Marshal Göring and Field Marshal Keitel, he revoked his order on 1 August.<sup>246</sup> At that point in time the front, in the form of the Arno Line, ran from Marina di Pisa through Florence to Senigallia on the Adriatic.<sup>247</sup>

Let us now return to the operational developments. By 17 May the retreat of the German troops had become inevitable, and the following day they were forced to abandon the battlefield at Cassino and Monte Cassino. The Wehrmacht's war in Italy—effectively lost since Salerno in September 1943—was not yet over, but the end was in sight.

On 20 May 1944 units of the US 5th Army thrust into the Senger Line (formerly known as the Hitler Line), which ran, at a distance of 10 to 40 kilometres north-west of the Gustav Line, from Terracina, through Pontecorvo and across the Liri valley, to Monte Cairo. Shortly afterwards Allied troops breached the Senger Line in the Pico–Pontecorvo area. Terracina fell on 25 May, and the US II Corps at once joined forces with the US VI Corps, which had broken out of the Anzio bridgehead on 23 May.

The last serious obstacle before Rome was now the 215-kilometre-long C line, which was still under construction and ran from the west coast (20 kilometres south of Ostia) to Valmontone (2.5 kilometres south-west), then through Avezzano (5 kilometres north-west) to Pescara on the Adriatic. On 26 May Hitler ordered the C line to be held 'come what may', although its loss was now a foregone conclusion.<sup>248</sup>

Given the situation on 25 May, the bulk of the German Tenth Army seemed doomed. It was about to be encircled. But then the unimaginable happened. Instead of turning east, Clark ordered the US 5th Army units to march straight on to Rome. And on 4 June 1944 his troops entered the capital in triumph.

The American general's egocentric coup saved the German Tenth Army, at least temporarily.<sup>249</sup> Once the Italian capital had fallen, there was no all-out, decision-seeking pursuit of the hard-hit German troops, although Alexander had included this in his strategic plan to march on to Vienna.<sup>250</sup>

<sup>246</sup> Schreiber, *Deutsche Kriegsverbrechen in Italien*, 52 ff.

<sup>247</sup> H.Gr. C, 'Kampf in Italien', fo. 8, 2 Aug. 1944, BA-MA RH 19 X/34 K.

<sup>248</sup> *KTB OKW*, iv. 475, 493, 497.

<sup>249</sup> *The Mediterranean and Middle East*, vi/I. 97–293; *KTB OKW*, iv. 487–501.

<sup>250</sup> Alexander, *The Alexander Memoirs*, 138 ff.; *The Oxford Companion to the Second World War*, 578.

## 6. THE ITALIAN THEATRE OF WAR ON THE SIDELINES (JUNE 1944 TO MAY 1945)

The American chiefs of staff had no regard at all for Alexander's ambitious plans, which Churchill supported.<sup>251</sup> For them, the Italian campaign served merely as preparation for the operations in France. Thus, the operations in the south, conceived as a strategic diversion, were always overshadowed by Operation OVERLORD and Operation DRAGOON, the landings in Normandy on 6 June and in the south of France on 15 August 1944.<sup>252</sup>

For that reason, the Allied 15th Army Group had to give up three American divisions, two Moroccan divisions, an Algerian division, and a French division. While some special units were assigned to the group by way of compensation,<sup>253</sup> the fact remained that this bloodletting reduced the British and American forces in the Italian theatre by a quarter. General Alexander was consequently obliged to abandon his plan for a frontal attack by the US 5th Army and the British 8th Army, to be launched on both sides of the Futa pass (about 40 kilometres east of San Marcello Pistoiese) and aimed at Bologna.<sup>254</sup>

Operation DRAGOON presented Commander-in-Chief South-West with a new front to man in the western Alps, where four divisions were now tied down.<sup>255</sup> At the same time, both his armies, which he had ordered on 8 June to apply 'scorched earth tactics' more ruthlessly than ever, were now withdrawing step by step to the 270-kilometre-long Green Line, extending from Cinquale to Pesaro (known as the Gothic Line until 15 June 1944).<sup>256</sup> The fierce resistance to the Allies was sometimes felt to be counter-productive even on the German side, because it used up the reinforcements in men and equipment before the Green Line was reached. The intention behind such resistance was to gain the necessary time to build up the defensive position, but that was a pious hope. On 22 August Tenth Army, the left wing of Army Group C, already began moving to positions in the forefield of the Green Line, and from 31 August on, Fourteenth Army withdrew, section by section, directly to the Green Line itself.<sup>257</sup>

From 3 August 1944 on, Army Group C also included Army 'Liguria', commanded by Marshal Rodolfo Graziani. This was a German-Italian formation, developed from Gustav-Adolf von Zangen's army detachment (LXXXVII Army Corps HQ).<sup>258</sup> Altogether, Commander-in-Chief South-West had three armies, six

<sup>251</sup> Macmillan, *War Diaries*, 455–79 (5 Jul. 1944).

<sup>252</sup> On Operation DRAGOON, see *Germany and the Second World War*, vii. 636–62.

<sup>253</sup> *The Mediterranean and Middle East*, vi/II. 176 (Jackson).

<sup>254</sup> *The Oxford Companion to the Second World War*, 578.

<sup>255</sup> *KTB OKW*, iv. 352–3, 547–50, 567–8.

<sup>256</sup> *Deutschland im zweiten Weltkrieg*, v. 143–4.

<sup>257</sup> *KTB OKW*, iv. 550 ff.; *Deutschland im zweiten Weltkrieg*, vi. 146, where the daily strength of Tenth Army on 2 Oct. 1944 is given as 94,332, and the fighting strength as 54,725.

<sup>258</sup> Tessin, *Verbände und Truppen*, xiv. 146. According to the records of the general staff of the 'Italian Social Republic', the puppet state had 143,000 troops in its army in the autumn of 1944, 26,000 in its navy, and 79,000 in its air force. In addition to these 248,000, there were another 564,000 men serving in German military units (122,000), in 'Organization Todt, etc.' (120,000), in

army corps, one corps detachment, 29 divisions (including an armoured division), one fortress brigade, and a regiment of Division 'Brandenburg' under his command on 12 August. As for the Allied 15th Army Group, on 25 August it comprised two armies, seven corps, 20 divisions (five armoured divisions), six armoured brigades, a Greek mountain brigade, an Italian relief corps, and a Brazilian expeditionary corps.<sup>259</sup>

The Green Line, continuously under construction since Italy's exit from the war, failed to deliver what the Germans expected of it and the Allies feared, especially in the weak Adriatic sector. The practical constraints, resulting from the shortcomings in the last major defensive line before the Po valley, forced Kesselring and his generals to improvise on a massive scale.<sup>260</sup>

The transfer of forces for the purposes of Operation DRAGOON had made it impossible for the British 8th Army to carry out its intended frontal attack in the centre of the Green Line. The plan now was for it to launch an offensive on the Adriatic and, after taking Pesaro, Rimini, and Ravenna, to advance on Bologna. General Clark's army was to launch an offensive 14 days later in the original direction of thrust, that is, frontally.

This combined offensive was code-named Operation OLIVE. The British 8th Army's attack began on 25 August and, as it soon became clear that the Green Line was not very resistant, the frontal attack by the US 5th Army was brought forward and launched on 1 September. By mid-September the German defensive positions had been breached in many places, but the nature of the terrain and the atrocious autumn weather made it difficult for the attackers to advance. On the east coast, Rimini fell on 21 September, after extremely fierce fighting on the Gemmano and Coriano ridges. On 1 October, however, Clark, having deployed all his reserves, was still trying to force access to Bologna. His attempt failed on 20 October, when the attack was brought to a standstill by massive German fire, just 14 kilometres from its goal. The exhausted American divisions settled in for the winter in the Apennine mountains. Their attack had not been altogether in vain, however, since it had forced Field Marshal Kesselring to withdraw troops from the area where the British 8th Army was attacking, thus enabling it to gain more ground. At the beginning of December the British forces launched a limited offensive designed

'Organizzazione Paladino', named after the head of the general labour inspectorate (40 000), in Germany as 'militarized workers' (100,000), in the 'Guardia Nazionale Repubblicana' (150,000), with the 'Blackshirts' (22,000), and in the Italian Waffen SS (10,000). Figures quoted in Cospito and Neulen, *Salò-Berlino*, 85. On the other hand, C-in-C South-West assumed on 16 March 1945 that there were 676,500 (revised figure) 'deployed Italians' on the German side, of whom 73,000 were serving in the fascist army, 16,200 in 'the SS and police', 16,000 in the 'Black Brigades', 68,300 with C-in-C South-West (30,300 in coastal battalions, etc., 29,000 in the Luftwaffe, and 9,000 in the navy), 286,000 in the Todt Organization in Italy, and 74,000 employed by construction organizations in Germany. The deployment of the remaining 143,000 was not specified. Figures quoted in 'Tagebuch Generaloberst Jodl', 82 ff., BA-MA RW 4/v. 33. On the organization of the forces of the Italian Social Republic, see Battistelli, 'Formationsgeschichte'.

<sup>259</sup> *Deutschland im zweiten Weltkrieg*, vi. 140 and 143; *KTB OKW*, iv. 1881 (16 Sept. 1944); *ibid.* 1903 (1 Mar. 1945).

<sup>260</sup> Schreiber, 'La Linea Gotica', 35 ff.

primarily, in line with the Allied 15th Army Group's main task, to prevent the German troops withdrawing from Italy. On 15 January 1945, as a result of that offensive, the front ran from the Comacchio wetlands on the north bank of the Senio river, north of Casola Valsenio and south of Vergato, to the Ligurian Sea south of Massa.<sup>261</sup>

The end of 1944 brought changes in the Allied high command. Alexander, promoted to field marshal in November (with effect from 4 June), became the Allied commander-in-chief in the Mediterranean. Clark (promoted to colonel-general soon afterwards, in March 1945) took over 15th Army Group, General Truscott succeeded him as commander-in-chief of the US 5th Army, while General McCreery had already replaced General Leese as commander-in-chief of the British 8th Army in November.<sup>262</sup>

On the German side, Vietinghoff-Scheel took over from Kesselring as Commander-in-Chief South-West and commander-in-chief of Army Group C on 10 March 1945, before Clark launched his spring offensive. General Herr remained in command of the German Tenth Army until the end of the war.<sup>263</sup>

There had been a lull in the fighting on the front in the western Alps and in the Apennines since December 1944. It lasted, with some exceptions, until the end of March 1945, but did not apply to the 4,000 or so aircraft deployed by the Americans and the British.<sup>264</sup> The Luftwaffe had only 79 aircraft in Italy in April 1945, and the Mussolini regime had a similar number.<sup>265</sup> Enemy aircraft regularly attacked the German supply lines, particularly the bridges over the Po, and the railway lines (there were 900 major disruptions in December 1944, for example), and the enemy air superiority was so overwhelming that the German and Italian fascist pilots were reduced to the role of extras.<sup>266</sup>

The Wehrmacht high command staff saw the 'problem of supplies' as being of decisive importance in the Italian theatre of war—rightly so, since the motorized units were so short of fuel that they could only 'move another 150 kilometres' in February. With a 'major enemy attack' expected in the Po valley since 23 March, this was not a promising prospect, despite some improvements during the lull in the fighting.<sup>267</sup>

The Allied high command was intent on destroying the bulk of the German forces as far as possible before they withdrew to the other side of the Po. To that end, the British 8th Army was to concentrate its operations initially on Ferrara, after which the US 5th Army was to take Bologna and advance to Bondeno, some 16 kilometres north-west of Ferrara. The two armies would then join up, cross the Po together, and advance on Verona, in order to prevent the units of Army Group C

<sup>261</sup> KTB OKW, iv. 553–79; *Deutschland im zweiten Weltkrieg*, vi. 139–55; *The Mediterranean and Middle East*, vi/II. 119–44, 225–306, 339–60, 386–433, and vi/III. 112–30; *The West Point Atlas*, ii, maps 105 and 106; Kesselring, *Soldat*, 287–320.

<sup>262</sup> *The Mediterranean and Middle East*, vi/III. 69–70; *The Oxford Companion to the Second World War*, 27, 243, 704, 1126; *World War II in Europe*, 211–12, 260–1, 397, 530–1.

<sup>263</sup> Tessin, *Verbände und Truppen*, iii. 161, and xiv. 43.

<sup>264</sup> *The West Point Atlas*, ii, map 107.

<sup>265</sup> Gundelach, *Die deutsche Luftwaffe*, ii. 830.

<sup>266</sup> KTB OKW, iv. 1390–1.

<sup>267</sup> Ibid. 1394 ff.; *Deutschland im zweiten Weltkrieg*, vi, 748.

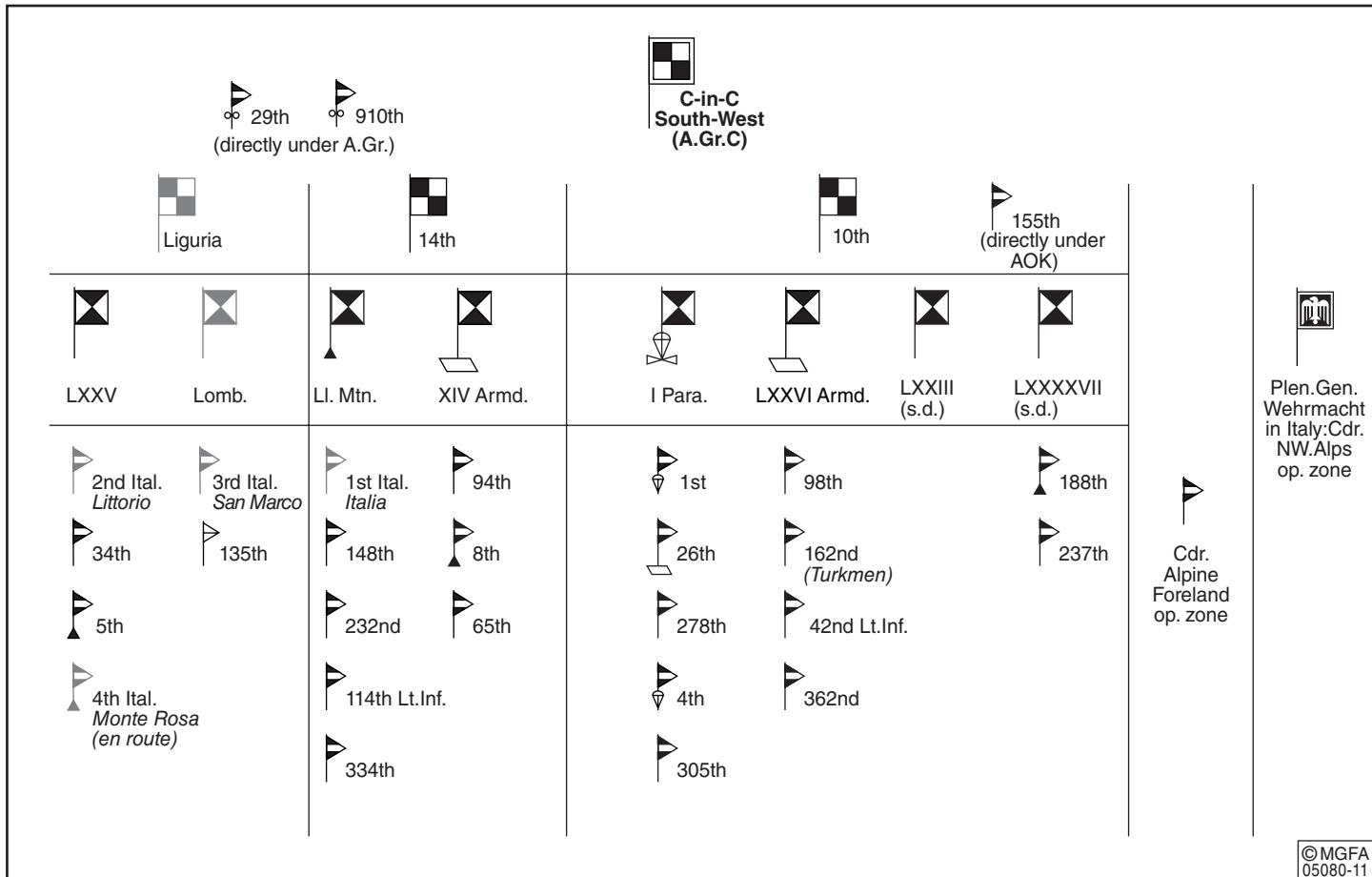


Diagram VI.iv.2. Major units under C-in-C South-West (status: 7 April 1945)  
 Source: OB Südwest, BA-MA RH 19 X /64.

from retreating to Germany. The offensive to destroy the German forces south of the Po, code-named Operation GRAPESHOT, began at 19.00 on 9 April 1945, following an artillery barrage and aerial bombardment, with an attack by the British V Corps and Polish II Corps in the direction of Ferrara and Bologna.

As to the relative strength of the forces,<sup>268</sup> there were 1,500,000 men and women serving in the Allied forces in Italy at the time. Of these, 266,000 belonged to the US 5th Army and 350,642 (including 70,468 Italians) to the British 8th Army. So there were altogether 616,642 men and women serving in these two major units in April 1945. The rest of the military personnel belonged to rear-area services and the military administration. On 7 April 1945 the total strength of the troops fighting for Germany was 599,514 (including 160,180 Italians).

German resistance to the attack by the British V Corps collapsed on 14 April. Units of the British 8th Army also got through the operationally important Argenta Gap in the Comacchio wetlands. The Polish II Corps, efficiently supported by the British XIII Corps, had taken Imola on the previous day.

The US 5th Army also attacked on 14 April in the morning. General Truscott, who possessed air support on a scale unprecedented in the Italian theatre of war, massed his units—except for the reinforced US 92nd Infantry Division, which was moving on to La Spezia—on a front that was only 40 kilometres wide. On 20 April the Americans, who now had some mountain troops at their disposal as well, crossed the mountains and reached the plain outside Bologna, north of the main battle line.

In this situation, Vietinghoff-Scheel's task was to get his army group to the north bank of the Po, occupy the prepared positions, and establish a new front. It was a virtually impossible operation. Almost all of Army Group C's fuel supplies had been used up by 17 April, and its armour and motor vehicles could move another 50 kilometres at most. Munitions would probably run out in three or four days. The transport situation had deteriorated dramatically as a result of the Allied air attacks on the railway lines, and no supplies had arrived via Brenner for over a week. Moreover, the troops had to leave local stocks of provisions behind as they withdrew, and there was no sign of any improvement in transport conditions. In these circumstances, the army group's quartermaster-general, Col. Ernst Fähndrich, thought it no longer possible to withdraw the troops across the Po.<sup>269</sup> To make matters worse, they would have to move through flat, easily reconnoitred terrain without any protection from Allied aircraft, and the excellent road network

<sup>268</sup> Figures according to *Deutschland im zweiten Weltkrieg*, vi. 152 ff. Army Group C ('Spitzengliederung, Offizierstellenbesetzung und Ostverbände'), Ia/Id, HQu, 6 May 1945, gives very different figures for the units, independent combat units, and supply troops of Army Group C as at 9 Apr. 1945, BA-MA RH 19 X/70, fo. 15: AOK 10 (151,999), AOK 14 (71,462), AOK Liguria (29,099), and O.Qu. (3,297), i.e. 255,857 men in all; independent combat units: AOK 10 (18,420), AOK 14 (9,719), AOK Liguria (7,316), and O.Qu. (329), total 35,784 men; supply troops: AOK 10 (10,493), AOK 14 (5,867), AOK Liguria (2,761), and O.Qu. (16,771), i.e. 35,892 men, making altogether 327,533 men. According to *The Mediterranean and Middle East*, vi/III. 333, the German land forces in Italy on 9 April 1945 totalled 439,224 men, not including the Italians.

<sup>269</sup> Geschichte der Waffenstreckung der deutsch-italienischen Truppen in Italien, 1945', BA-MA N 422/2, fo. 11.

in the Po valley made it easy for the highly mobile enemy divisions to outmanoeuvre their lame adversaries. Finally, there was yet another extremely serious problem: the bridges over the Po were all gone, and the river itself was unwadeable.

Bologna fell to the Allies on 21 April, and the race to the Po began. The US 10th Mountain Division got there first, reaching the river on the next day. German rearguard units put up bitter resistance at Finale Emilia, enabling strong Army Group C contingents to get across the river using improvised means of transport, though without their heavy weapons and equipment. But establishing a continuous front with those troops was no longer possible.<sup>270</sup>

By the end of April, when the National Liberation Committee (Comitato di liberazione nazionale) called for the great popular uprising<sup>271</sup> commemorated on Italy's Liberation Day (25 April), there was virtually no military resistance—apart from the partisans. And it was the partisans who summarily executed Mussolini on 28 April 1945.<sup>272</sup>

Describing the military situation at that point, the chief of staff of Army Group C, General Hans Röttiger, recorded in an account written shortly afterwards:<sup>273</sup> ‘All the existing gaps in the front had widened. Men streaming back were gathered together at central points by special reception bodies, reorganized, and deployed in the gaps, but they did not fight on. As a rule, they had no arms and no ammunition. The infantry was almost entirely wiped out. The last prepared and built-up resistance line, a territorially strong blocking position at the northern end of Lake Garda, was occupied by the enemy.’ And Fourteenth Army reported a hopeless situation regarding the weapons at its disposal: ‘2 light field cannon with 30 rounds of ammunition between them[,] 1 operational anti-tank cannon[,] 8–10 machine guns on a 100-kilometre-wide front[,] no tanks.’ The German Tenth Army was in a similar situation, reporting, on the night of 28 to 29 April 1945, ‘that it has practically ceased to exist’ because ‘most of the heavy weaponry, the motor vehicles and the heavy equipment [...] are left south of the Po’. And ‘there are no longer any links with subordinate staffs because of the lack of signalling equipment’. In other words, Army Group C had effectively ceased to exist. All that remained was the surrender (Operation SUNRISE), which had been discussed, and partly implemented, for weeks. It should be emphasized that Army Group C command, which was responsible for the process on the German side, acted on military grounds in the light of the local situation. Questions of overall strategy, and the frictions that arose within the anti-Hitler coalition in connection with the partial surrender of the

<sup>270</sup> Ibid., fos. 11 ff.; KTB OKW, iv. 1389–401; Alexander, *The Alexander Memoirs*, 146–53; Carver, *The War in Italy*, 248–91; *Deutschland im zweiten Weltkrieg*, vi. 152–5; *Grand Strategy*, vi. 117–22; *The Mediterranean and Middle East*, vi/III. 156–61, 195–230, 257–95, 315–28; *The West Point Atlas*, ii, maps 107–10.

<sup>271</sup> Bocca, *Storia dell'Italia partigiana*, 511–29; Longo, *Viva l'Italia libera*, 264–84; Lill, *Geschichte Italiens*, 382 ff.

<sup>272</sup> See Ercolani, *Gli ultimi giorni di Mussolini*, 61–90; Lepre, *La storia della Repubblica di Mussolini*, 305–10; Mittermaier, *Mussolinis Ende*, 207–20; Woller, *Die Abrechnung mit dem Faschismus*, 257–64.

<sup>273</sup> The following quotations on the military situation are taken from ‘Geschichte der Waffenstreckung der deutsch-italienischen Truppen in Italien’, 1945, BA-MA N 422/2, fo. 19.

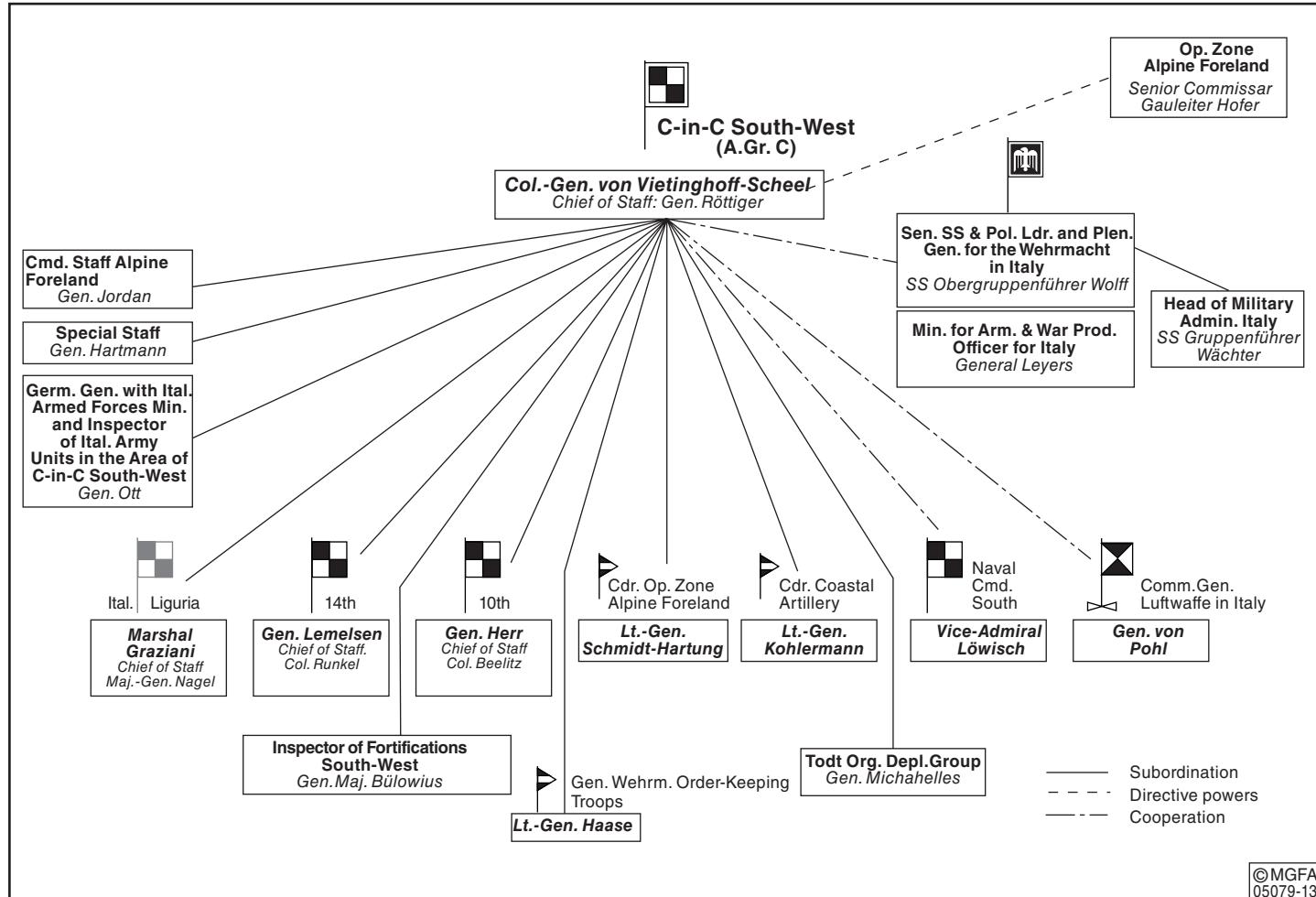


Diagram VI.iv.3. Senior command structure under C-in-C South-West (status: 9 April 1945)

Source: OB Südwest, BA-MA RH 19 X /64.

German forces,<sup>274</sup> were somewhat secondary considerations, but that does not mean that the German side did not attempt to take advantage of them.

In any event, on 29 April Army Liguria laid down its arms with immediate effect,<sup>275</sup> and the instrument of unconditional surrender of the German forces in Italy was signed at Allied headquarters in Caserta near Naples. Lt.-Col. Victor von Schweinitz of the general staff signed the document on behalf of Col.-Gen. von Vietinghoff-Scheel, the Commander-in-Chief South-West and commander-in-chief of Army Group C. SS Sturmbannführer Eugen Wenner signed for SS Obergruppenführer and Waffen SS General Wolff, who, in addition to his function as senior SS and police leader, was also the plenipotentiary general of the Wehrmacht in Italy. General William D. Morgan, as chief of staff, signed on behalf of Field Marshal Alexander. The surrender entered into force at 14.00 on 2 May.<sup>276</sup>

The frequently described genesis of Operation SUNRISE can be traced back to the autumn of 1944. This was the first time an entire theatre of war had surrendered, and the reasons for the operation are correspondingly complex. Ideological, economic, military, and political considerations all played a part. The hard confrontation between the western Allies and the Yugoslavs on the issue of Trieste in 1945 was providing a foretaste of the Cold War, and Army Group C command and its associates endeavoured to take advantage of the clouds gathering on the political horizon. They put forward the watchword that the real enemy was in the east, which enabled them to offer themselves as allies in the battle against Bolshevism. However, the Grand Alliance held firm, and the German approaches, aimed at achieving a split, were stoutly rejected. The main motivation of the Allied, Italian, and Swiss parties involved in the Operation SUNRISE process was the fear of massive destruction, which had to be prevented at all costs with a view to the economic stabilization of Italy in the post-war period, as well as humanitarian concern to end the senseless bloodshed.

In this connection, writers constantly claim that the surrender by the German and Italian fascist forces shortened the hostilities in Europe by at least six, if not eight, weeks, spared northern Italy from devastation, and saved tens of thousands of lives. However, this view, which derives from statements by Field Marshal Alexander, is at odds with General von Vietinghoff-Scheel's assessment of the situation. Commander-in-Chief South-West noted, on 28 April 1945, that the fighting would quite simply stop in a day or two because of the lack of arms and ammunition. If this realistic assessment is accepted, there would hardly have been tens of thousands killed if the hostilities had continued. As to the destruction measures ordered by the Führer, Army Group C also took steps to ensure, from 11 April 1945 at the latest, that Hitler's orders in this connection would not be carried out, even if Operation

<sup>274</sup> On this, see Gruchmann, *Der Zweite Weltkrieg*, 463 ff.

<sup>275</sup> Max-Josef Pemsel, 'Kapitulation des Armeoberkommandos "Ligurien" am 29.4.1945', Materialsammlung 1945–1973, BA-MA MSG 1/2359. The unconditional surrender, which entered into force immediately, was signed in Castiglione (Piedmont) by the chief of staff, Lt.-Gen. Pemsel, on behalf of AOK Liguria. The commanding general of the American IV Army Corps, Lt.-Gen. Willis D. Crittentenberger, signed on behalf of the US Army.

<sup>276</sup> KTB OKW, iv. 1662–6 (announcement of surrender and execution order).

**Table VI.IV.1.** Losses incurred by the German Field Army in Italy, September 1943 to 31 March 1945

	Dead	Wounded	Missing	Total losses
Army 'Liguria'	76	(5)	204 (13)	70 (2)
Fourteenth Army	17,145	(544)	59,195 (1332)	45,734 (644)
Tenth Army	20,550	(1074)	106,174 (3075)	161,736 (4672)
Other units	1,034	(42)	2,998 (81)	699 (8)
Total	38,805		168,571	208,239 415,615 (11,482)

*Source:* Figures (corrected) from *KTB OKW*, iv. 1516. The numbers in brackets refer to officers. The figures in this table are those of the OKH medical officer, which do not include the losses shown in the last report and are not to be equated with the total losses incurred by C-in-C South-West.

SUNRISE failed. It was a matter of negotiating tactics that the other parties were not informed of this state of affairs. In fact Army Group C command, without whose consent Operation SUNRISE would not have been feasible, continued to haggle until the very last minute in order to obtain the best possible terms of surrender. With regard to the delaying tactics employed by some of the generals, it should also be remembered that many would have preferred not to negotiate until a decision on their 'fate' had been taken in the Reich. Their oath of allegiance apparently provoked some pangs of conscience. There was also the question whether the younger officers would also be involved in the surrender. They were well aware of the chaotic state of Army Group C command at the end of April. Furthermore, Field Marshal Kesselring, who was by then Commander-in-Chief West, intended to have Col.-Gen. von Vietinghoff-Scheel and General Röttiger court-martialled and shot as the military commanders primarily responsible for initiating the surrender. In the end, the terms of the agreement remained 'unconditional surrender'. They were accepted shortly before Hitler's suicide facilitated a return to 'normality', at a point when Commander-in-Chief South-West effectively had no alternative.<sup>277</sup> And some of those involved in the proceedings may already have been thinking about their personal future in the post-war period.

## 7. CONCLUSION

The war in Italy ended on 2 May 1945, a war in which the Allied side had lost 312,000 men and Commander-in-Chief South-West's field army had lost at least

<sup>277</sup> On the present summary, see Capus, 'Zwischen allen Fronten', IV; Deakin, *The Brutal Friendship*, 759–74; *Deutschland im zweiten Weltkrieg*, vi. 749–52; Dollmann, *Dolmetscher der Diktatoren*, 213–49; Dulles, *The Secret Surrender*, *passim*; *From Hitler's Doorstep*, *passim*; *Grand Strategy*, vi. 122–8; Knesebeck, *Zeiten des Übergangs*, 207–12; Kreis, 'Das Kriegsende in Norditalien', 507–21; *The Mediterranean and Middle East*, vi/II. 424 ff., and vi/III. 181–2, 237–45, 296–9, 328–36; Rahn, *Ruheloses Leben*, 275–95; Schiemann, 'Der Geheimdienst beendet den Krieg', 142–65; Smith and Agarossi, *Operation Sunrise*, *passim*; Theil, *Kampf um Italien*, 259–394; Vietinghoff-Scheel, *Kriegsende in Italien*, 179–238; Waibel, 1945—*Kapitulation in Norditalien*, *passim*.

415,615.<sup>278</sup> On the Italian side, at least 330,000 men, women, and children had lost their lives. Most Italians initially regarded the war as a ‘war of national liberation’. Subsequently—and in a sense, vying with that view—the idea of ‘civil war’ was introduced, an idea originally preferred by neo-fascist authors. The controversy over these competing views has become highly emotional and political, and at the same time abstract.

The practical legacy of the war that raged in Italy from September 1943 to May 1945 can be described, in short, as the damage to the image of humanity caused by brutal criminal atrocities and the impact of the war in general, or as the murderous consequence of the inhuman National Socialist regime. When they were obliged to leave the political or military stage, the very people who were jointly and specifically responsible for the murder, torture, deportation, and exploitation falsified historical reality by creating the myth of the immaculate Wehrmacht.

That myth, with regard to the Italian theatre of war, first took shape on 3 May 1945, when General Vietinghoff-Scheel issued an order of the day in which he expressed no sympathy for the victims of German tyranny, but stated, among other things: ‘It is with great pride that we can look back on the Army Group’s deeds on historic Italian soil.’ Perhaps the former Commander-in-Chief South-West was able to consider the events on the Apennine peninsula only from a technocratic viewpoint. He may have had in mind only the tactical and operational skills of the German troops, and their talent for improvisation when it came to supplies and transport. But no one could have felt any pride in Germany’s occupation policy in Italy as a whole, or in the conduct of operations by the Wehrmacht, the SS, and their fascist accomplices. A sense of shame would appear more right and proper.

As to the part the war in Italy played in the strategy of the principal protagonists, both sides pursued diversionary operations wherever possible. From the Allied point of view, the decision to embark on the campaign in Italy made sense in 1943, when London and Washington wanted to get Rome to capitulate, despite the fact that a second front in Italy could never determine the outcome of the war. For the Wehrmacht, operations in the south ultimately served solely and exclusively to prolong the war, in other words, to delay Germany’s inevitable collapse and keep the enemy first out of ‘Fortress Europe’, then out of ‘Fortress Germany’, and finally out of ‘Fortress Berlin’. In practice, however, Hitler’s troops in Italy—since the Allied invasion of Sicily in 1943 at the latest—were no longer capable of anything but a fighting withdrawal.

<sup>278</sup> On the Allied losses, see Clodfelter, *Warfare and Armed Conflicts*, ii. 851.



# PART VII

## GERMANY ON THE BRINK OF THE PRECIPICE

*Bernd Wegner*



# I. Waging War ‘as if . . .’

## Germany’s Strategic Position from the Spring of 1944 Onwards

Of the manifold strategic problems facing the German leadership in the second half of the war, the shortage of forces on all fronts was perhaps the most difficult, in that it was ultimately insoluble. As the possible timing of coordinated major offensives by the Allies against ‘Fortress Europe’ became clearer, so the question of how an area of rule that was still far overstretched was to be held with shrinking reserves against a numerically superior enemy became increasingly pressing. It is therefore not surprising that the struggle between the Wehrmacht High Command (OKW) and the Army High Command (OKH) over the allocation of the few forces still available became increasingly acute in the run-up to the invasions in the spring of 1944.<sup>1</sup> All the more so, since the unavoidable conflicts of interest between the central command authorities and departments were not, as a rule, settled by tough negotiations (as they were in the case of the western Allies, for example) but were simply overridden by ‘Führer decisions’. Knowing that Hitler’s priorities went to the western theatres of war, the OKW was in a more favourable position in this respect.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, right until the Allies landed in Normandy the OKW had repeatedly to defend itself against the complaint that, while half the army was fighting desperately in the east for the very survival of the German people, the other half was in the rest of Europe doing nothing, waiting for an invasion that never came. It is only too easy to sympathize with the disappointment and frustration that Kurt Zeitzler, for example, must have felt when, during a visit from the head of naval command, Vice-Admiral Wilhelm Meisel, in March 1944, at the height of the crisis in the Crimea, he informed his guest that, according to his calculations, ‘53 per cent of the fighting troops were currently on the eastern front, and 47 per cent, most of them “on standby”, in OKW theatres of war’.<sup>3</sup> One of the bitter witticisms circulating at the time was that the war had been lost in 1918 thanks to the ‘fleet in being’, and it was now being lost thanks to the ‘army in being’.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The problems in this connection are discussed at length in *Germany and the Second World War*, v/II and vii.

<sup>2</sup> See Part III, Chapter III.1 of the present volume.

<sup>3</sup> ‘Niederschrift über die Dienstreise C/Skl ins Führerhauptquartier vom 10. bis 13.3.1944’, 4, BA-MA RM 7/261.

<sup>4</sup> See ‘OKW/WFSt, Strategischer Überblick und Verteilung der Gesamtstreitkräfte des deutschen Heeres vom 13.4.1944’, 2, BA-MA RW 4/v. 876.

In mid-April 1944 the Wehrmacht Operations Staff addressed a self-justificatory memorandum on the subject to the command authorities in the east. According to that memorandum, only 131, that is, less than 40 per cent, of the 341 army and Waffen SS units that were fully operational were not deployed either in the east or on the home front. And, of those, only 41 divisions were, by their nature, suitable for deployment in the east, but they were mostly engaged in combat in Italy and Finland, in coastal protection, and in fighting partisans. The Wehrmacht High Command also warned that:

In view of the few reserves that are available, a successful enemy landing in Denmark, the North Sea, Holland, Belgium, or France that is not repelled or immediately blocked will lead to the loss of the war in a short time. For that reason, the Supreme Command, in full knowledge of the crises in the east, has taken a risk which is at the limit of its responsibility to history and the nation. The Führer expects that this explanation of the issues will suffice to prevent any more unseemly debates about the allocation of military forces in the future.<sup>5</sup>

Despite the geographical shift in strategic priorities, the Soviet Union was still the most important European theatre of war in the spring of 1944, in terms of the size of the forces deployed by all sides. A Foreign Armies department estimate of the distribution of enemy forces mustered for the assault on 'Fortress Europe' (although it contained some errors) left little doubt as to the real point of concentration. According to the department's calculations, the Soviet Union had more than 380 major formations (apart from army and army group reserves) located on its European front in February 1944, whereas the western Allies had barely 120 divisions covering the area between Iceland and North Africa, Britain and the Near East (see Table VII.I.1).<sup>6</sup> On the German side too, as the Wehrmacht Operations Staff reassuringly pointed out, 'the vast majority of the German armed forces, in respect of the number of units as well as the combat efficiency of those units, are deployed in the east'. According to the above-mentioned OKW memorandum, only 46 of the 162 army and Waffen SS infantry divisions that were operational or under assembly on 1 March 1944 were deployed 'elsewhere than in the east or on the home front', and in the case of armoured divisions, only 11 out of 34.<sup>7</sup>

While such number games provided useful support for arguments in the struggle between the Wehrmacht High Command and the Army High Command over the allocation of forces, they were no more than window dressing when it came to

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. 23. See also Jodl's similar exposition in 'Die strategische Lage im Frühjahr 1944', a briefing to the Reich cabinet on 5 May 1944, 25–31, BA-MA N 69/18.

<sup>6</sup> Even if, for the purposes of comparison, the strength of the Soviet forces is assumed to be only 50% of that figure, that still gives them a superiority of 190 to 120 divisions. According to the same Foreign Armies estimate, the British and American forces were superior only in fighters and bombers, with 13,000 aircraft in all compared with 10,400 Soviet aircraft. See OKW, Europakarte, 10 Feb. 1944 (date handwritten), Central Archives of the Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation (Podolsk, Russia), fond 500/op. 12450/d. 292.

<sup>7</sup> See OKW/WFSt, 'Strategischer Überblick und Verteilung der Gesamtstreitkräfte des deutschen Heeres', 13 Apr. 1944, BA-MA RW 4/v. 876, esp. p. 21 and annex. On the basis of Overmans' findings in *Deutsche militärische Verluste*, 300–1, it must be assumed that the eastern army had in fact long been weaker than the figures suggested, because the figures for losses were incomplete.

Table VII.I.1. Distribution of Allied land and air forces (divisions and aircraft as per Wehrmacht Operations Staff estimates, status: February 1944)

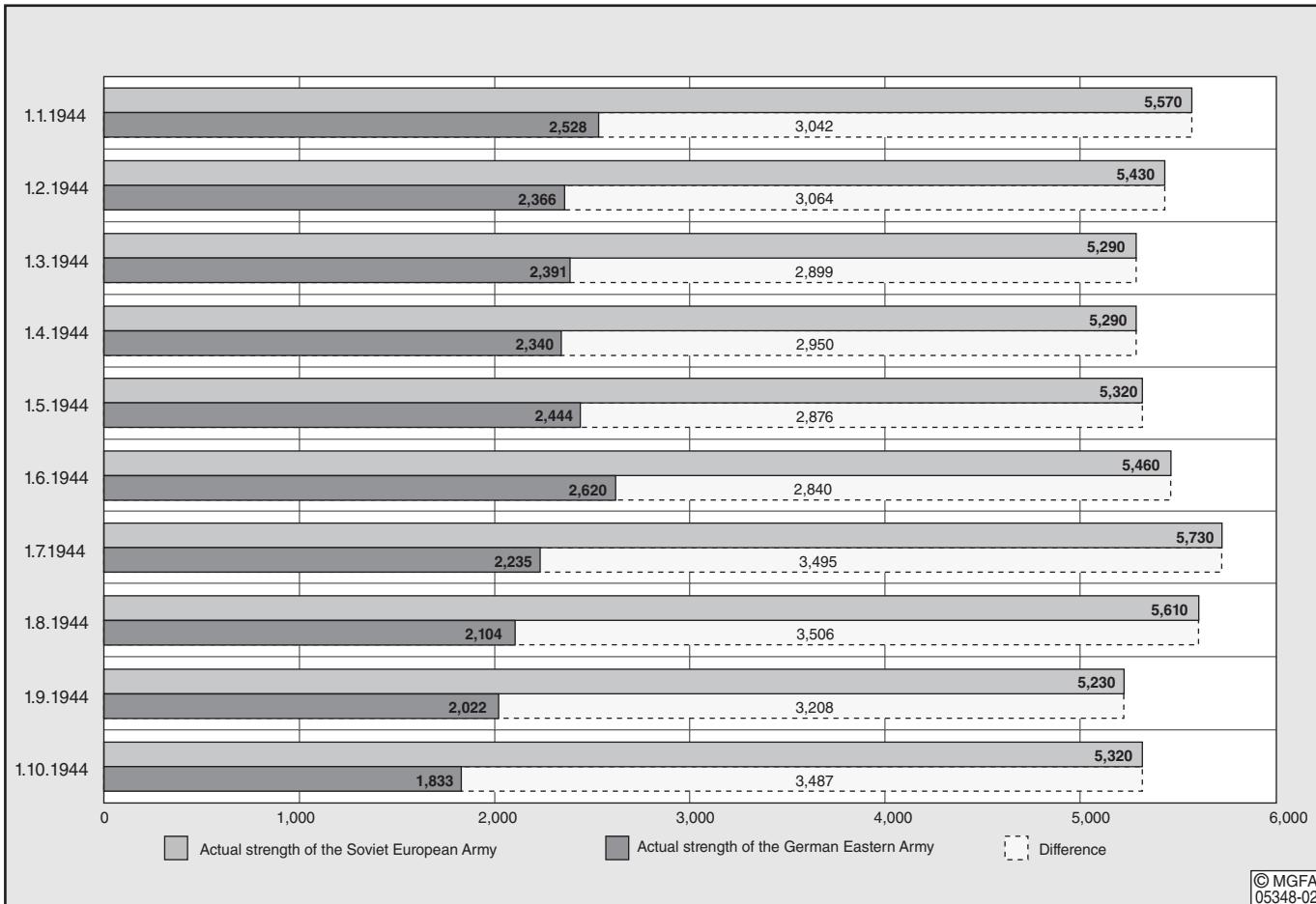
	Inf.Div.	Armd. Div.	Abn. Div.	Total Divisions	Fighters	Bombers <sup>(a)</sup>	Total Aircraft
Iceland	2	—	—	2	—	—	—
Britain	35	14½	5	54½	3,940	4,275 (300)	8,215
Sardinia/Corsica	1½	—	—	1½	385	315 (315)	700
Italy (en route)	16½	5½	1½	23½	—	—	—
Italy (fully available)	4½	2½	1	7%	1,235	1,380 (935)	2,615
North-West Africa (Algeria/Tunisia)	10½	5	½	15%	640	425 (150)	1,065
North-East Africa (Libya/Egypt)	1	3½	½	5	560	555 (480)	1,115
Near East	5	4	½	9½	—	—	—
Total Western Allies	75½	35	9	119½	6,760	6 950 (2 180)	13,710
Soviet Union <sup>(b)</sup>	329	54	—	383	5,100	5 300	10,400 <sup>(c)</sup>

<sup>(a)</sup> in brackets: number of twin-engined aircraft; <sup>(b)</sup> units at the front only, excluding army reserves; <sup>(c)</sup> plus 1,390 reconnaissance and transport aircraft.

Source: Military Archives, Podolsk, Fond 500/op. 12450/d. 292.

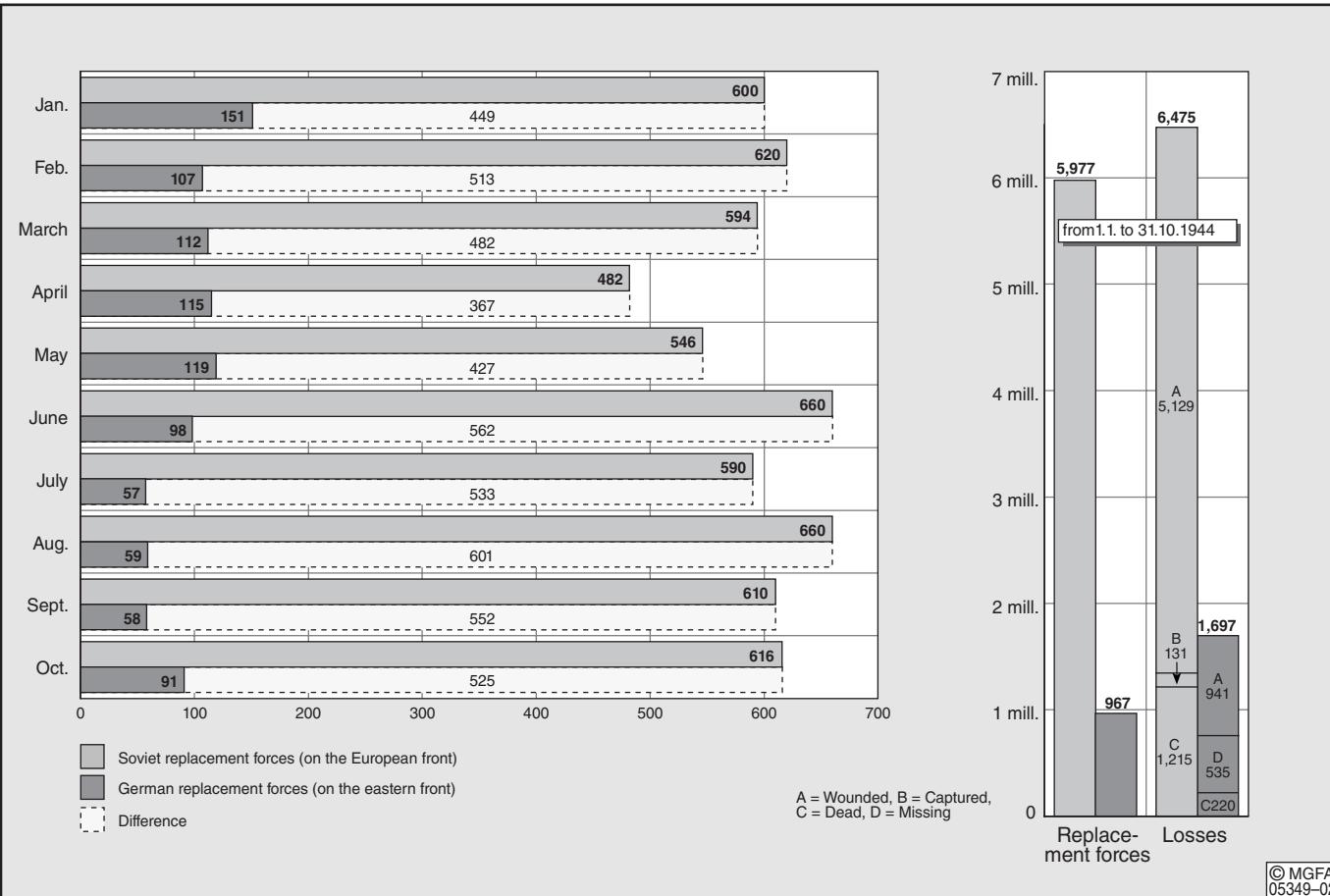
Germany's real needs in the eastern theatre of war. In the course of 1944, with the relative depletion of the German eastern army on the one hand, and the massive concentration of Soviet offensive units on the other, the disparity between the opposing forces on the eastern front assumed increasingly grotesque proportions. According to estimates by Foreign Armies East, the actual strength of the eastern army was already only 45 per cent of that of the Red Army sections deployed (and held in reserve) on the Soviet front in Europe at the start of the year, but it had dropped to just over a third (34.5 per cent) by the beginning of October (see Diagram VII.I.1).<sup>8</sup> This development is all the more remarkable as Soviet losses during that period were estimated at almost four times those of the Germans. The explanation for this apparent contradiction was found by Reinhard Gehlen's department to be that the Red Army had apparently brought in six times (!) more replacement forces than Germany's eastern army (see Diagram VII.I.2). Things were somewhat different, according to German estimates, with respect to the armoured capability of the opposing units. Here the German capability, which had sunk to a minimum after Stalingrad, had been doubled within a year by steadily bringing in new tanks and assault guns. The defensive capability had thus been strengthened, but it was undermined by two factors: on the one hand, only a relatively small proportion of the tanks supplied to the eastern army were in fact

<sup>8</sup> In fact, the relative inferiority of the eastern army was even greater, since the Germans continued to underestimate the head count of the Red Army forces.



**Diagram VII.I.1.** Comparison of actual strength of the German Eastern Army and the Soviet army on the European front, 1 January to 1 October 1944 (in thousands)

Source: Fremde Heere Ost (IIa), No. 174/44, gKdos, Chefsache Anlage 1, MGFAIII H 403/3.



**Diagram VII.i.2.** Comparison of the German and Soviet replacement forces moved to the German eastern front between January and October 1944 (in thousands)

Source: Fremde Heere Ost (IIa), No. 174/44, gKdos, Chefsache Anlage 2, MGFAIII H 402/3.

operational,<sup>9</sup> and on the other, the Red Army had also been able to increase what was in any case a vastly superior armoured capability of tanks—to a lesser extent in terms of proportion, but to an even greater extent in absolute numbers.<sup>10</sup>

Given the relative strength of the forces on the eastern front, a situation that had grown steadily worse since the failure of Operation CITADEL, it is not surprising that what Hitler had accepted as a 'last resort' in Directive No. 51, namely 'a loss of territory even on a major scale' in the east,<sup>11</sup> had long since developed into one long series of setbacks and retreats, with only the occasional breathing space. The Soviet Central Front under General Konstantin Rokossovsky had already succeeded in crossing the Dnieper in September, and this was followed almost immediately by the Soviet autumn offensive, in which Dnepropetrovsk, Kiev, and Gomel were lost just a few weeks later. The reverses suffered in the winter were even more deeply symbolic. On 4 January 1944, 1st Ukrainian Front crossed the Soviet–Polish border of September 1939 for the first time, at Sarny. Army Group North also came under heavy attack in the same month, and Leningrad, where Hitler had placed such high hopes in the blockade, was finally liberated. In February the German defenders had to abandon the mineral deposits at Nikopol and Krivoy Rog—including the manganese-ore mines of which, only a year before, the Führer had said that for him their loss would mean that the war was over.<sup>12</sup> Vinnica, where the German dictator had launched Operation BLUE in the summer of 1942, fell on 20 March. And just a week later Soviet troops crossed the Prut, north of Iași, and advanced into Old Romania. At the end of March, with winter on the way out, the German units on the southern wing of the eastern front found themselves thrown back almost everywhere some 300 to 500 kilometres from the positions which they had held in December. And the end of the Soviet offensive was not yet in sight. On 7 April an attack on the approaches to the Crimea was launched, leading within days to the loss of Odessa. Four weeks later the Red Army recaptured Sevastopol as well.

In these circumstances, strict compliance with Führer Directive No. 51 was out of the question. On the contrary, developments in the east forced the OKW, on 25 March 1944, to release a series of units, including the only fully operational large armoured formation in the west, II SS Armoured Corps (9th and 10th SS Armoured Divisions), for deployment on the eastern front. But this was to be the last time that Hitler yielded to Erich von Manstein's massive demands.<sup>13</sup> In the course of the winter and spring of 1944 the dictator had come to terms with the fact that the time for large-scale operations in the east was over.<sup>14</sup> It was no accident that he gave the very same reason when, at the end of March, he decided to change the

<sup>9</sup> According to a Foreign Armies East comparison of forces dated 14 Oct. 1943, 700 tanks were actually operational, out of a total of 2,304 at the disposal of the German units on the eastern front (BA-MA RH 2/2598).

<sup>10</sup> According to semi-official Russian data, the Red Army had 11,732 tanks altogether at the end of 1943, of which 5,357 were deployed at the front and 2,350 were with reserve army fronts; there were 271 tanks in the Stavka reserve and 3,754 in the hinterland. See *Velikaya Otechestvennaya Voina 1941–1945*, iii. 426.

<sup>11</sup> *Hitlers Weisungen*, 233.

<sup>12</sup> See Part I, Chapter III, n. 6 of the present volume.

<sup>13</sup> See Manstein, *Verlorene Siege*, 610–12; Ziemke, *Stalingrad*, 280.

<sup>14</sup> Manstein, *Verlorene Siege*, 615.

commanders of Army Group A and Army Group South (now renamed 'Army Group South Ukraine' and 'Army Group North Ukraine'<sup>15</sup>). Walter Model and Ferdinand Schörner, simultaneously appointed field marshal and colonel-general respectively, took the place of Manstein and Ewald von Kleist.<sup>16</sup> Neither of the new army group commanders had the reputation of a strategist, but they were both expected—not without reason—to have considerable 'staying power'.<sup>17</sup> Their unrelenting toughness, and a marked inclination to lead 'from the front' and not from behind a desk, meant that they were never suspected of being among those generals 'sitting on their backsides', 'who have given us so many losers on the eastern front'.<sup>18</sup> Equally important was the fact that both generals were reputed to be absolutely true to the party line: Schörner, holder of the *Pour-le-mérite* medal ('a leader from tip to toe'<sup>19</sup>) had been a convinced National Socialist since the early 1930s, and Model too was seen as 'a man truly in the National Socialist mould'.<sup>20</sup> Accordingly, high hopes were placed in the dictator's circle on the appointment of these two generals. Now that there were 'first-class army group commanders in the east once again', they were expected not only 'to achieve a decisive reversal of the military situation in the southern section of the eastern front, but also to overcome the "crisis of confidence" reigning hitherto in relations between the Führer and the army group commanders'.<sup>21</sup>

Not everyone shared the brief euphoria felt at Führer headquarters and by Joseph Goebbels. We find, reading between the lines of his memoirs, that Manstein himself seems to have had a much more cautious opinion of his successor's capabilities.<sup>22</sup> And he was not alone. Almost all his staff resolutely sought to resign. Far more serious, and more significant of the inner condition of the top military leadership, was the fact that the chief of the Army General Staff, the dictator's most important adviser on the conduct of the war in the east, was prompted by Manstein's and Kleist's dismissal to tender his own resignation.<sup>23</sup> Zeitzler's request to be relieved of his post, which was submitted orally and in writing and was brusquely refused by Hitler, was

<sup>15</sup> In view of the fact that both army groups had already been driven out of the Ukraine, this change of titles was, probably quite rightly, understood as purely programmatic. See Görlitz, *Model*, 182.

<sup>16</sup> See Schmundt, *Tätigkeitsbericht*, 132 (31 Mar. 1944). On the manner of his dismissal, when Hitler—as also in the case of Kleist—was at pains to avoid any suggestion of a crisis of confidence, see Manstein, *Verlorene Siege*, 615.

<sup>17</sup> See also, to the same effect, the recent biographical sketches by Ludewig, 'Stationen'; Mitcham and Mueller, 'Generalfeldmarschall Walter Model'; Schönher, 'Ferdinand Schörner'; Steinkamp, 'Generalfeldmarschall Ferdinand Schörner'.

<sup>18</sup> Goebbels, *Die Tagebücher*, pt. 2, xii. 314 (18 May 1944). That this description refers indirectly to the dismissed field marshals is clear from the propaganda minister's diary entry of 23 April 1944, in which he commented that the debacle in the east was 'mainly attributable to the fact that both Kleist and Manstein conducted their command exclusively at the map table, and that neither of these two marshals had any direct relationship with the troops' (*ibid.* 173).

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, xii. 173 (23 Apr. 1944). <sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, xi. 587 (31 Mar. 1944).

<sup>21</sup> Thus Goebbels' view, which was strongly influenced by Schmundt: *ibid.*, xi. 589 (31 Mar. 1944), and xii. 38 (1 Apr. 1944); see also *ibid.* 52 (5 Apr. 1944).

<sup>22</sup> See Manstein, *Verlorene Siege*, 616–17, and Görlitz, *Model*, 183.

<sup>23</sup> On this and the following, see Manstein, *Verlorene Siege*, 615; Heusinger, *Befehl im Widerstreit*, 303 ff. and 306 ff.; Warlimont, *Im Hauptquartier*, 449–50 and 469, and Meyer, *Adolf Heusinger*, 257–8.

an expression both of personal exhaustion and of a general mood of resignation that was spreading in the Army General Staff during the spring of 1944. That resignation was more than a passing phenomenon. It did not spring from some spectacular quarrel, but rather from all-round mental wear and tear. Years of working on the staff under extreme nervous tension, the constant responsibility for hundreds of thousands, indeed millions, of human lives, the daily, often fruitless struggle to put through measures which they knew to be right, and the endless news of military disasters—all weighed heavily on the senior members of the Army General Staff, especially when there was little prospect of any real turn for the better. Zeitzler's hopes of reforming the structure of the top military leadership also began to fade once Manstein was gone. Moves, in conjunction with Friedrich Fromm and Albert Speer, 'to break up the military coterie surrounding the Führer' and instead install 'a commander-in-chief of the army, an energetic head of the OKW, assisted by a good quartermaster-general for the Wehrmacht as a whole',<sup>24</sup> soon got bogged down.

The chief of the Army General Staff, who was now increasingly represented by a deputy, was clearly demoralized and unwell, and he was not the only one. Adolf Heusinger, who, as head of the operations division, was responsible for representing Zeitzler, would have been only too glad to give up his post. 'Not being a fighter by nature',<sup>25</sup> he confessed (in letters to his wife) that he had suffered 'inwardly throughout the entire course of the war', and that he awaited its end with growing despair, haunted by thoughts of suicide.<sup>26</sup> In these circumstances, the atmosphere in the General Staff also suffered inevitably, and many disagreeable issues that should have been dealt with at once were put on the back burner. Colleagues were reminded of the conditions that had prevailed earlier under Franz Halder and Walther von Brauchitsch. Heusinger repeatedly held orders up, 'because Zeitzler was not in the mood, and Zeitzler thought Hitler was not in the mood, and so on'.<sup>27</sup>

The fact that Zeitzler and his colleagues were tired of office did not go unnoticed outside the General Staff, and it became a source of further friction. Goebbels noted at the time—not, it would seem, without *Schadenfreude*—that 'Schmundt is getting a sore throat cursing the General Staff, which is constantly causing problems and is wholly unwilling and unable to comply with the Führer's way of thinking and working.' Zeitzler appeared to Hitler's chief adjutant to have fallen 'completely into the hands of the General Staff officers around him, who have turned him into a creature suited to their purposes'.<sup>28</sup> Even other officers who—like Heinz Guderian,

<sup>24</sup> *Alles was ich weiß*, 207.

<sup>25</sup> According to the contemporary opinion of his ordnance officer, Captain Münchhausen, quoted in Meyer, *Adolf Heusinger*, 262.

<sup>26</sup> Heusinger's letter to his wife, 26 Apr. 1944, quoted in ibid. 258.

<sup>27</sup> Thus Münchhausen, quoted in ibid. 261 and 865 (n. 372). Guderian wrote later (*Erinnerungen eines Soldaten*, 320) that he had inherited 'a disorganized staff' from his predecessor.

<sup>28</sup> It was therefore, above all, 'difficult, at present, to get him on board with regard to the National Socialist transformation of the army'. Goebbels, *Die Tagebücher*, pt. 2, xii. 409 (6 Jun. 1944). In Speer's opinion too, expressed shortly after the end of the war, Zeitzler, despite his energetic and active nature, was 'not personally in control of the situation. He relied to a great extent on the opinion of his general staff. He was therefore largely under its control, and was more or less its mouthpiece.' *Alles was ich weiß*, 205.

Table VII.1.2. Foreign Armies East's estimate of Soviet land forces (status: 1 June 1944)

Deployed on Germany's eastern front			Deployed elsewhere			Location unknown <sup>(e)</sup>
At the front	In reserve	Total <sup>(a)</sup>	Caucasus <sup>(b)</sup>	Iran <sup>(c)</sup>	Far East <sup>(d)</sup>	
234 Rfl.Brigs.	209 Rfl.Divs.	443 Rfl.Divs.	9 Rfl.Divs.	1 Rfl.Div.	24 Rfl.Divs.	6 Rfl.Divs.
71 Rfl.Brigs.	76 Rfl.Brigs.	—	—	—	11 Rfl.Brigs.	17 Rfl.Brigs.
5 Rfl.Brigs.	21 Cav.Divs.	21 Cav.Divs.	—	4 Cav.Divs.	8 Cav.Divs.	2 Cav.Divs.
4 Armd.Brigs.	125 Armd. Brigs.	129 Armd. Brigs.	4 Armd. Brigs.	1 Armd. Brig.	9 Armd. Brigs.	41 Armd. Brigs.
3 Armd.Regts.	121 Armd. Regts.	124 Armd. Regts.	—	—	—	46 Armd. Regts.

<sup>(a)</sup>Assumed total strength: 5,000,000 men; <sup>(b)</sup>Assumed total strength: 128,000 men; <sup>(c)</sup>Assumed total strength: 43,000 men; <sup>(d)</sup>Assumed total strength: 600,000 men; <sup>(e)</sup>Assumed total strength: 112,000 men. A fighting strength of one-third was taken as the basis for calculating the total strength of units in the 'location unknown' column.

Source: Fremde Heere Ost (IIc), 9 Jun. 1944 (BA-MA RH 2/2602, fo. 72).

for example—still imagined that a dozen armoured divisions could turn the war around, had nothing good to say about the Army General Staff. The inspector-general of armoured troops suspected, probably rightly, that Zeitzler's staff were half-hearted and dilatory in executing the orders from on high to release units from the eastern front for the benefit of the west.<sup>29</sup> Guderian's further accusations, that the General Staff was remote from the front and reluctant to take decisions, broke into the open at the beginning of May and led to a further request from Zeitzler to be relieved of his post, which Hitler again refused.<sup>30</sup>

Another reason—by no means the least important—why the army leadership must have been depressed by the dismissal of Manstein and Kleist was that it probably meant that the battle for mobile defence in the east was now finally lost. It is true that Hitler had been persuaded in February, literally at the last minute, to allow the German units encircled on Eighth Army's left wing at Cherkassy to break out,<sup>31</sup> and that, on 8 May, he had finally abandoned his resistance to evacuation of the Crimea. Nevertheless, both events are evidence not so much of the army leadership's influence as of its impotence. In both cases, Hitler had been able to impose his principle that every square metre of captured territory must be defended until the last possible moment, irrespective of horrendous losses. In the case of the Crimea, where he feared that evacuation would also have negative political repercussions on Romania, Bulgaria, and Turkey,<sup>32</sup> he held to this principle for a full six

<sup>29</sup> See Guderian, *Erinnerungen eines Soldaten*, 293.

<sup>30</sup> Schmundt, *Tätigkeitsbericht*, 138 (9 May 1944). See also Meyer, *Adolf Heusinger*, 261 and 865 (n. 374).

<sup>31</sup> For details see Part VII, Chapter III.6(c) of the present volume.

<sup>32</sup> See Hillgruber, *Die Räumung*.

months, and on 30 April—just eight days before he himself issued the order to evacuate!—he demonstratively dismissed Col.-Gen. Erwin Jaenecke, the commander-in-chief who, more than any other, had constantly insisted that the army should withdraw from the Crimea.<sup>33</sup>

The same line of holding on at all costs was taken in Führer Order No. 11 of 8 March 1944, on the appointment of 'battle commandants' of 'local strongpoints' and 'fortified places'.<sup>34</sup> The commandants, each of whom was to be 'a specially selected, hardened soldier', were to be given comprehensive full powers, with the main task of preventing the enemy from occupying areas of decisive operational importance. They were to 'allow themselves to be surrounded, thereby holding down the largest possible number of enemy forces and establishing conditions favourable for successful counter-attacks'.<sup>35</sup> However, in the course of the next few months the concept of 'fortified places' proved counter-productive, and sometimes, as in the case of Vitebsk and Vilnius, positively catastrophic.<sup>36</sup> Frequently eroded from the outset in the conflict of interests between the front commanders and Führer headquarters, it never really achieved its main aim of delaying and weakening the Soviet advance. Ultimately, the 'fortified places' seemed to have tied down the German forces rather than those of the enemy, which simply overran or bypassed them, and did not allow themselves to be tied down. By 13 July 1944 the Red Army had taken eleven of the original twelve 'fortified places' in the area of Army Group Centre. The consequences for the garrisons in question were devastating in every case, with more than 30,000 men lost in Vitebsk alone. Altogether, about 10 per cent of all German losses incurred by mid-July, in the course of the Soviet summer offensive against Army Group Centre, were attributable to the fortress concept.<sup>37</sup>

However, there was no focus on any of this before the launch of the major Allied offensives in June 1944. In the spring of that year, despite all the Soviet successes, the eastern front remained curiously overshadowed by the impending invasion in the west. Preparing for that invasion was 'the overriding preoccupation of Hitler and his military advisers'.<sup>38</sup> But the invasion took its time coming, and the wait was nerve-racking. The Army General Staff was not alone in beginning to wonder whether the western Allies 'are really going to invade'.<sup>39</sup> Even Hitler, although convinced in his heart of hearts that the invasion was imminent, could 'not help

<sup>33</sup> For the last time in a letter to Hitler dated 30 Apr. 1944, BA-MA RH 20-17/270. Jaenecke had served as commanding general in Stalingrad during the siege, and he was determined not to repeat the experience. In late October 1943, as commander-in-chief of Seventeenth Army, he had already warned that his units would break out on their own authority if necessary. The following entry in Goebbels' diary on 27 Apr. 1944 is particularly telling in this connection: 'The Führer does not think much of Col.-Gen. Jaenecke in the Crimea either. I am sharply critical of him. Jaenecke is the sort of smug, self-satisfied officer who goes into shock if a serious crisis occurs' (*Die Tagebücher*, pt. 2, xii. 197). In January, however, the propaganda minister had still been referring to Jaenecke in much more positive terms, not least because he was impressed by the latter's reports from the Stalingrad pocket; see *ibid.* xi. 176 (26 Jan. 1944).

<sup>34</sup> *Hilfers Weisungen*, doc. 53, pp. 243–50.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> See Pauli, 'Der Zusammenbruch der Heeresgruppe Mitte', ch. 5.3.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.* 185 and 190.

<sup>38</sup> Kershaw, *Hitler 1936–1945: Nemesis*, 615.

<sup>39</sup> According to Heusinger in a letter dated 11 May 1944, quoted in Meyer, *Adolf Heusinger*, 262.

**Table VII.I.3.** Foreign Armies East's estimate of numbers of Soviet tanks and assault guns in the first half of 1944

Date	Deployed on Germany's eastern front		Deployed elsewhere <sup>(b)</sup>	Pool <sup>(c)</sup>	Total
	at the front	in reserve <sup>(a)</sup>			
1.1.44	3,700	6,300	1,000	2,600	13,600
1.5.44	2,400	7,100	1,000	3,700	14,200
1.6.44	200	9,100	1,000	5,800	16,100

<sup>(a)</sup>Includes reserves stationed close to the front and in the rear; <sup>(b)</sup>Finland, Iran, Caucasus, Far East; <sup>(c)</sup>Including long-term repairs and units in unknown locations.

Source: Fremde Heere Ost (IIc), 9 Jun. 1944 (BA-MA RH 2/2602, fo. 72).

thinking, sometimes, that the whole thing is ultimately just brazen theatrics'.<sup>40</sup> The calm was deceptive. The atmosphere in the dictator's circle at the Berghof struck a visitor as 'a mixture of war and peace'.<sup>41</sup> In the east too, the situation seemed remarkably undramatic for the time being, apart from developments in the Crimea and some lesser trouble spots. In a directive issued at the beginning of April, Hitler boldly asserted that the Russian offensive in the southern section of the eastern front had 'passed its peak. The Russians have exhausted and fragmented their forces.' Thus, 'the time has come to bring the Russian advance to a final standstill'.<sup>42</sup> Alfred Jodl too, in an address to the Reich cabinet a month later, expressed his conviction that Joseph Stalin's victorious advance had 'reached its culminating point'.<sup>43</sup>

Such optimism appears surprising, and not only with the benefit of hindsight. In March the Foreign Armies East department of the Army General Staff had already pointed out 'that there was no reason, in respect of manpower or equipment, to expect any let-up in the Russian offensive in the coming months, apart from short pauses in the operations'. And as Gehlen expressly recorded in a file note,<sup>44</sup> this situation assessment, which was obviously also presented to Hitler, was 'fully endorsed by the chief of the Army General Staff'. In the following weeks Gehlen's department had repeatedly warned that the Red Army was preparing to launch a large-scale summer offensive with far-reaching objectives, so the Army General Staff had mixed feelings about the perceptible decline in the fighting in the east from mid-May. On the one hand, the relaxation of tension came as a relief. Compared with the nerve-racking situation in the west, and the dramatic deterioration in Italy, where the Allies entered the capital on 4 June 1944,<sup>45</sup> the eastern

<sup>40</sup> *Hitlers Lagebesprechungen*, 556 (situation at noon on 6 Apr. 1944).

<sup>41</sup> Heusinger, private letter dated 12 Apr. 1944, quoted in Meyer, *Adolf Heusinger*, 259.

<sup>42</sup> OKH/GenStdH/Op.Abt. (I), Operational Order No. 7, 2 Apr. 1944, quoted in *Hitlers Weisungen*, doc. 54, pp. 250–1. Hitler repeatedly expressed the same view in conversations with Goebbels during the weeks that followed. See Goebbels, *Die Tagebücher*, pt. 2, xii. 129 (18 Apr. 1944), and 196 (27 Apr. 1944).

<sup>43</sup> 'Vortrag vom 5.5.1944: Die strategische Lage im Frühjahr 1944', 10c, BA-MA N 69/18.

<sup>44</sup> FHO (Chef), file note, 13 Apr. 1944, BA-MA RH 2/2565.

<sup>45</sup> On developments in Italy and the fall of Rome, see Part VI, Chapter IV of the present volume.

front seemed, for the time being, almost like a secondary theatre of war. Zeitzler talked of a consolidation of conditions in the east, and Heusinger too appeared 'quite confident' at times.<sup>46</sup> On the other hand, there were no illusions about the fact that the calm was probably just the calm before the storm, from which—as Heusinger ominously predicted on 12 June—there could well be 'a rude awakening in a few days' time'.<sup>47</sup>

The fact that the Red Army would launch a large-scale summer operation sooner or later had been an open secret since May. Even propaganda minister Goebbels, who only received his information at second hand, had been expecting—a full month before Operation BAGRATION was actually launched—an 'enormous Soviet offensive [...], probably timed to coincide with the invasion planned by the English and the Americans'.<sup>48</sup> The question that was harder to answer was *where* the point of concentration of the offensive that everyone expected would lie. Basically, as the Germans saw it, the enemy had two options: either he could try to advance from the Lutsk–Kovel–Kamin Kashirskiy area, via Warsaw, to the Baltic coast, or he might be tempted to launch an attack against the Balkans from the area between Pripyat and the Black Sea, via Romania, Hungary, and Slovakia.<sup>49</sup> On the assumption that, apart from minor holding attacks on other sections of the front, the Red Army would be in a position to launch only *one* of the two large-scale operations, Foreign Armies East quickly and unambiguously settled on the Balkan operation as the more likely scenario. The distribution of the Soviet forces, as well as political considerations, appeared to support this assumption. Would the loss of the Romanian oilfields not hit Germany incomparably harder than the loss of Belorussian forests? Strong Communist influence in the Balkan States, and the likelihood of weaker resistance there, also promised rapid, resounding successes. Furthermore, a Balkan operation would, it was thought, guarantee the Soviet Union political control of the strategically important south-eastern area, where the British and American powers were also interested in gaining a foothold.<sup>50</sup>

As in the case of the forthcoming invasion in the west, the predictions as to the point of concentration of the attack in the east proved to be well-founded but wrong. The German intelligence services in the east, like those in the west, had fixed on a specific geographical area where they expected the attack to take

<sup>46</sup> See Goebbels, *Die Tagebücher*, pt. 2, xii. 419 (7 Jun. 1944), and Meyer, *Adolf Heusinger*, 263.

<sup>47</sup> Meyer, *Adolf Heusinger*, 263.

<sup>48</sup> Goebbels, *Die Tagebücher*, pt. 2, xii. 333 (21 May 1944). See also Jodl's comments in his briefing to the Reich cabinet on 5 May 1944, 'Die strategische Lage im Frühjahr 1944', 23–4, BA-MA N 69/18.

<sup>49</sup> These options already formed the basis for the Wehrmacht Operations Staff's judgements in February. See 'WFSt/Op (H), Vortragsnotiz für Chef OKW vom 13.2.1944', 2–3, BA-MA RW 4/v. 829. See also Heider's analysis in 'Zum Einfluß falscher Lagebeurteilung', Kröker's in *Fehleinschätzung*, and esp. Part V, Chapter I.3 of the present volume.

<sup>50</sup> This calculation was highly relevant, particularly in the context of British ambitions. However, London was already able to come to an arrangement with Moscow on 5 May 1944, based on a proposal—fatally reminiscent of the 1939 Hitler–Stalin pact—to divide south-eastern Europe into two separate operational zones (Romania as the Soviet operational zone, and Greece the British operational zone). The two powers' respective spheres of influence in the region as a whole were subsequently negotiated in percentage terms when Churchill met Stalin in Moscow on 9 October. See Hillgruber, *Der Zweite Weltkrieg*, 135–6 and 141–2.

place—in the east, the southern section of the eastern front, and in the west, the Channel coast—and they stuck firmly to their view of the situation to the very end. Indications to the contrary, produced by the Luftwaffe high command among others, were noted, but their operational and strategic significance was misinterpreted. Zeitzler too was apparently still convinced on 20 June that an attack would be launched against the southern rather than the central section of the front,<sup>51</sup> and even on the morning of 25 June, when the Soviet offensive against the central section of the front had been under way for almost three days, the head of Foreign Armies East still assured the chief of the General Staff that, 'despite the developments in the area of Army Group Centre, there is at present no reason to change the assessment of the enemy's plans, particularly as regards the point of concentration of the entire Russian operation, which is expected to be in the area of Army Group North Ukraine'.<sup>52</sup> Hitler himself, on the other hand, had already appeared more sceptical in the last few days before the Soviet offensive was launched, and had warned the Luftwaffe on 21 June that Army Group Centre was about to be attacked. Goebbels noted, after a private discussion on the same day, that the Führer 'is quite sure the offensive will be launched tomorrow morning, Thursday 22 June, because of the date's connotation. The Bolsheviks' preparations for the offensive are complete'.<sup>53</sup>

Once again, as the next day was to show, the dictator's proverbial intuition had not failed him. Those who still believed in him may well have seen this as proof of his genius. And there were still some straws—though fewer and fewer—to clutch at, in those months before the summer's great disasters. After all, weren't new units still being formed overnight, and new records being achieved in the arms industry? Hadn't the Allied advance in Italy been successfully blocked, the situation in Hungary stabilized since the Germans moved in, and Finland successfully deterred from coming to terms with the Soviet Union? And, above all, wouldn't the retaliation weapons, the V-1 rockets deployed against England from 12 June on,<sup>54</sup> turn the tide of war? For the optimists—and optimism was a duty, after all!—it was all a matter of interpretation. And it seems that confidence increased in direct proportion to the deterioration in the real situation. Jodl's above-mentioned address to the Reich cabinet on 5 May 1944 is a typical example.

Without in any way concealing the serious nature of the situation and the potential threats to the Reich, the chief of the Wehrmacht Operations Staff—if his speaking notes are to be believed—took a much more optimistic view than in his sombre address to the Reichs- and Gauleiters six months before.<sup>55</sup> Doubts as to

<sup>51</sup> See Irving, *Hitler's War*, 644.

<sup>52</sup> FHO (Chef), file note, 25 June 1944, BA-MA RH 2/2565, fo. 18. Gehlen's assurance is all the more surprising in that he draws attention, in the same connection, to 'the almost complete lack of radio intelligence and air reconnaissance', and to the fact 'that the picture of the enemy forces is based almost exclusively on reports from agents'.

<sup>53</sup> Goebbels, *Die Tagebücher*, pt. 2, xii. 524 (22 Jun. 1944). See also Irving, *Hitler's War*, 644.

<sup>54</sup> For a more detailed account of the use of V-weapons, see *Germany and the Second World War*, vii. 420–58.

<sup>55</sup> The text of the address delivered on 7 November 1943 is contained in *KTB OKW*, iv. 1534–62.

whether Germany had sufficient forces at its disposal to defend its territory were brushed aside with a reference to history: 'Very few commanders have ever been lucky enough to have sufficient forces at their disposal!' In any case, 'the strongest possible efforts' had been made to create more reserves. 'The impossible had been demanded, and all that was possible had been achieved.'<sup>56</sup> Jodl's statements about the eastern front bordered on euphoria. At the peak of the battles for the Crimea, and only a few days before the Germans were forced to withdraw from the peninsula, he told the members of the cabinet, in all seriousness, that the southern section of the front 'is standing firm, and is being increasingly fortified, day by day'; Army Group North and Army Group Centre were, in any case, 'firmly established in good positions'. Moreover, 'Bolshevik material and manpower too [...] are not inexhaustible either.' The fighting value of the Red Army was deteriorating 'rapidly, month by month', and above all, 'the bulk of the infantry was no longer worth powder and shot'.<sup>57</sup> As to Finland, Hitler's chief strategist actually stated that major Soviet attacks were 'impossible' at present.<sup>58</sup> He was also hopeful about the war at sea, despite the prevailing crisis. New U-boats would go into action in the summer, and 'attacks on the enemy's maritime connections will be resumed, with the prospect of major successes'.<sup>59</sup> Jodl even had encouraging remarks to make about the air war. Pointing to the rising production figures for fighters, fighter bombers, night fighters, and heavy fighters, he stressed that the new fighter types equipped with jet engines, in particular, would give Germany 'a decisive lead over enemy aircraft'. Furthermore, even Allied experts had meanwhile realized that 'aircraft alone [...] have never beaten a well-equipped modern army'.<sup>60</sup> Only a week after Jodl's address, 935 daylight bombers from the US 8th Air Force attacked fuel plants in central and eastern Germany. As Speer later recounted, this marked 'a new era in the air war' and meant 'the end of German arms production'. 'On that day,' he wrote, 'the technological war was decided.'<sup>61</sup>

Jodl's assertions had almost nothing to do with the realities of the war. The purpose of his declarations, in this case as in many others, was clearly not to inform listeners about the war situation as such, but rather to erect psychological and rhetorical barriers against the despair that was taking hold, even in leadership circles. The more hopeless the battle against the external enemy, the more resolute must be the fight against 'defeatism', seen as the most dangerous internal enemy. Shattering reports from the front could no longer be prevented, but they should not be allowed to go down so badly that nothing positive could be derived from them. The attitude to the unmistakable rapprochement between Japan and the Soviet Union which Jodl adopted in his address was entirely along these lines. Describing

<sup>56</sup> 'Die strategische Lage im Frühjahr 1944', manuscript, 25–6, BA-MA N 69/18.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid. 10a–c.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid. 11. The major Soviet attack on the Karelian Isthmus was launched less than six weeks later. See, in this connection, the account in Part VI, Chapter I of the present volume.

<sup>59</sup> 'Die strategische Lage im Frühjahr 1944', manuscript, 40, BA-MA N 69/18.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid. 36–7.

<sup>61</sup> Speer, *Erinnerungen*, 357. On the background and sequence of events, see *Germany and the Second World War*, vii. 146–9.

the rapprochement as 'not altogether pleasing', he nevertheless saw an 'advantage' in it for the conduct of the war as a whole, since it put paid to America's hope of 'using Vladivostok as a base for the air war against Japan, and could therefore make the hard battle a little easier to fight'.<sup>62</sup> The wait for the British and American landing in western Europe was of great assistance to the German leadership in its efforts to present the military situation in an optimistic light, and to prevent any reduction in readiness to wage war. Depicted as the decisive battle of the war, the invasion was, as it were, the event on which all Germany's hopes were pinned in the spring of 1944. It was presented as the key event that would mark the division between the problem-ridden present and the bright future. Germany's anticipated victorious defence would 'transform the military and political situation from top to bottom, because a landing operation of this kind, prepared in every detail over many years, could not simply be repeated, not to mention the political repercussions in England and America'.<sup>63</sup>

Hitler himself had long held that the invasion would decide the outcome of the war and its failure would be 'the end of the story'.<sup>64</sup> Everything would take a turn for the better, and in an inherently hopeless strategic situation a new horizon would open up, putting all present hardships and problems into perspective. That bright future seemed already lost, however, when the Soviet summer offensive broke through the German eastern army on 22 June, and the hopes that had been bound up with it gave way to a perceptibly more sombre mood. Bernard Montgomery's Allied army group had managed to assemble well over 600,000 troops, more than 200,000 tons of equipment, and close on 100,000 motor vehicles in the bridgehead on the Normandy coast. A fruitless German counter-attack on the invasion front east of the Orne had to be broken off after a few days. The Atlantic fortress of Cherbourg was blocked off. In Italy, Perugia fell to the Allies in those same days, and the German troops on Elba were evacuated. Finland appeared to be on the brink of collapse in the face of very heavy Soviet attacks. On top of everything, the US 8th Air Force had bombed industrial targets (above all, hydrogenation plants) in northern Germany just before the Soviet Operation BAGRATION was launched, and had then sent some 2,500 bombers and fighters against Berlin on 21 June. As Goebbels had to record, the government quarter in particular had been 'very hard hit by the enemy air gangsters'.<sup>65</sup> Nevertheless, as the next few weeks were to show, this was all relatively harmless compared with the orgy of destruction to which the eastern front was about to be exposed.

The shattering effect of the Allies' coordinated multi-frontal attack on 'Fortress Europe' in June 1944 was felt, as Hitler's 'Platterhof speech' shows, at the very centre of power. On 26 June 1944 more than 100 high-ranking participants in an

<sup>62</sup> 'Die strategische Lage im Frühjahr 1944', manuscript, 46, BA-MA N 69/18.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid. 50. See also, in very similar vein, Goebbels, *Die Tagebücher*, pt. 2, xii. 407 (6 June 1944).

<sup>64</sup> Hitler's *Lagebesprechungen*, 444 (evening situation, probably 20 Dec. 1943). The fact that the invasion was also regarded on the Allied side as absolutely decisive for the outcome of the war is quite rightly stressed by Salewski, 'Die Abwehr der Invasion', 220 ff.

<sup>65</sup> Goebbels, *Die Tagebücher*, pt. 2, xii. 533 (23 Jun. 1944).

armaments conference Speer had organized in Linz gathered at the Platterhof<sup>66</sup> to hear a speech by the Führer.<sup>67</sup> Although none of those present had any idea that this was to be the last speech that Hitler would make to a large non-military audience, there were already—at least in hindsight—many signs of the approaching end. There was, first of all, the appearance of the speaker himself, whose 'frightening state of exhaustion'<sup>68</sup> the armaments minister was not alone in noting. Other leading industrialists and ministry officials who were present, Hans Kehrl for example, who had heard the dictator express himself 'clearly and precisely' in discussions only a few weeks earlier, were appalled:

The man that Speer was bringing in looked nothing like the same man. [...] It was almost as if Speer had to propel him onto the podium like a puppet. His movements were awkward, his arms hung limp at his sides, his voice was weak. He talked about everything under the sun, except what we had expected to hear. [...] He had once been a master of the spoken word. Now, he spoke haltingly, didn't finish his sentences, became lost in thought; in short, he looked like someone in a state of extreme exhaustion and mental distraction. He was clearly not in control of himself.<sup>69</sup>

Although Hitler employed the keywords which Speer had given him, he was manifestly unable to convince his audience on the substantive issues, or to grip their emotions.<sup>70</sup> 'We were all dumbfounded,' the armaments minister admitted later.<sup>71</sup> And Kehrl summarized the general impression which Hitler had left on his audience as follows: the man was 'no longer capable of ruling', and they were all 'on a stricken ship, with no one at the helm'.<sup>72</sup>

Hitler's dreadful physical and mental condition on that day—and increasingly often in the further course of the war<sup>73</sup>—not only sheds light on the individual problem of a chronically overworked and increasingly overburdened dictator. Even

<sup>66</sup> 'Platterhof' was the name of a hotel built in Obersalzberg before the war, on Hitler's instructions, mainly to provide accommodation for guests of the dictator, who lived at the Berghof nearby.

<sup>67</sup> Domarus, *Hitler. Reden und Proklamationen*, ii. 2113, gives the wrong date, 4 July, for this event. Sources also vary as to how many people were present. Speer, *Erinnerungen*, 369, speaks of 'about a hundred', whereas, according to Kehrl, *Krisenmanager im Dritten Reich*, 395, there were about 150 and, according to Domarus, as many as 200. On the purpose and subject matter of the armaments conference, see *Germany and the Second World War*, vi/II. 808–9.

<sup>68</sup> Speer, *Erinnerungen*, 369. <sup>69</sup> Kehrl, *Krisenmanager im Dritten Reich*, 395–6.

<sup>70</sup> Significantly, according to the surviving sound documents, the speech was interrupted only once by applause. See Domarus, *Hitler. Reden und Proklamationen*, ii. 2114.

<sup>71</sup> Speer, *Erinnerungen*, 370.

<sup>72</sup> Kehrl, *Krisenmanager im Dritten Reich*, 396–7. Only Goebbels, who was not present at the speech, wrote in his diary a few days later that Hitler had made some 'extraordinarily strong and decisive statements about the current military situation'; *Die Tagebücher*, pt. 2, xii. 568 (29 June 1944).

<sup>73</sup> The main reason for this was Hitler's Parkinson's disease, but the extremely unhealthy life he led must also have played a part. His ability to lead was seriously compromised in that he was confined to his bed for days at a time, particularly in the last week of September and first week of October. On this, see Kershaw, *Hitler 1936–1945: Nemesis*, 611–12 and 726 ff.; also Irving, *The Secret Diaries of Hitler's Doctor*, 52 and 119, Schenck, *Patient Hitler*, 388 ff., and Carr, *Hitler*, 144 ff. Hitler told Goebbels on 2 December 1944 that 'he has his enemies in the General Staff, not his enemies at the front, to thank for this nervous disease' (Goebbels, *Die Tagebücher*, pt. 2, xiv. 333).

more, it illustrates one of the decisive structural weaknesses of an autocratic regime in which—with the collapse of traditional government institutions—the person of the leader, as Goebbels asserted without exaggeration, was 'for us, the decisive factor for the outcome of the war'.<sup>74</sup> In the given situation, Hitler's condition was therefore nothing less than a serious impairment of the strategic decision-making centre at a time of extreme military threat. Three weeks after the invasion in the west, and four days after the major Soviet offensive against Army Group Centre began, disaster was looming simultaneously on both sides of the continent. From the east, 'news of a large-scale Bolshevik breakthrough' arrived on 26 June 'like a bolt from the blue', and in the west, Cherbourg, a deep-water harbour on the Atlantic coast that was extremely important to the Allies for supply purposes, was 'now expected to fall any day, or almost any hour'.<sup>75</sup> Developments in the days and weeks that followed<sup>76</sup> exacerbated and accelerated the leadership crisis in the regime that had long been the normal state of affairs. A striking illustration of the process was the increasingly hectic 'renewal' of personnel in almost all top military posts.

Apart from some vacancies due to accidental death or similar misfortune (Hans Valentin Hube, Eduard Dietl, Erwin Rommel),<sup>77</sup> the reshuffle was prompted by the unending series of spectacular military setbacks in the west and in the east, for which—as in previous months and years—scapegoats were sought and found. But now, unlike then, the victims of Hitler's crisis management were not just those he found awkward, but also generals who were distinctly loyal to the Führer. The first to go was Field Marshal Ernst Busch, who was replaced as commander-in-chief of Army Group Centre by Walter Model on 28 June, and who was only employed again in the last weeks of the war. Significantly, the charge that he had been a 'complete military failure'<sup>78</sup> was levelled at a man who was regarded in Führer headquarters as 'very sound politically' and who had simply obeyed his Führer's orders.<sup>79</sup> Just two days later Hitler also fell out with the chief of the Army General Staff. In a heated argument with Hitler, Zeitzler refused to take responsibility for the defence of Courland, which in his view was pointless, and for the encirclement thus threatening Army Group North. He had already been persuaded to act against his own convictions on two occasions—'once at Stalingrad, and once regarding the Crimea'—and he was not about to do so for the third time. Moreover, he said, the

<sup>74</sup> Goebbels, *Die Tagebücher*, pt. 2, xii. 196 (27 Apr. 1944). Kershaw, *Hitler 1936–1945: Nemesis*, 611–13, rightly criticizes Speer's individualistic interpretation of the dictator's weaknesses.

<sup>75</sup> Goebbels, *Die Tagebücher*, pt. 2, xii. 551 (26 June 1944). Heusinger too admitted at the time that 'the scale of the crisis in the east is very surprising' (quoted in Meyer, *Adolf Heusinger*, 264). On the battles for Cherbourg, see Neitzel, 'Der Kampf um die deutschen Atlantik- und Kanalfestungen', 387 ff. and, on the Soviet operations, see Part V, Chapter II of the present volume, esp. section 3.

<sup>76</sup> For more on developments in the west, see *Germany and the Second World War*, vii. 585–635 and, on developments in the east, Part V, Chapter II of the present volume.

<sup>77</sup> Col.-Gen. Hube and Col.-Gen. Dietl, who were highly valued by Hitler, lost their lives in plane crashes on 21 April and 23 June 1944, and Field Marshal Rommel was forced to commit suicide on 14 October 1944.

<sup>78</sup> This quotation and the following one are from Goebbels, *Die Tagebücher*, pt. 2, xii. 563 (28 June 1944).

<sup>79</sup> See Mitcham, 'Generalfeldmarschall Ernst Busch', 24 ff.

war was lost and it was time to end it.<sup>80</sup> The dispute ended with the chief of the General Staff having a heart attack. He remained formally in office for the time being, but had to be represented once again by Heusinger. Finally, on the evening of 20 July, his tasks were entrusted to Guderian.<sup>81</sup> Other eminent commanders were also relieved of their posts during those weeks: in the east, the commander-in-chief of Army Group North, Col.-Gen. Lindemann, who had long been an awkward customer, was replaced by General Johannes Friessner on 3 July, and in the west, the Commander-in-Chief West, Gerd von Rundstedt, was replaced by Günther von Kluge on the same day.<sup>82</sup> Then, only two weeks later, Rommel was wounded and von Kluge had to take command of Army Group B as well.

These numerous dismissals, and many more of the same kind, together with vacancies arising for other reasons,<sup>83</sup> largely contributed to the new face of the German military leadership, particularly the Army High Command, from the summer of 1944 on. The repercussions of the assassination attempt on 20 July were even more decisive in this respect. For one thing, the ensuing wave of arrests included, in addition to the narrow circle of accomplices, many actual or alleged accessories, thus adding to the already long list of changes and new appointments required. For another, the campaign against the army leadership as a 'hotbed of reaction' could not fail to affect its professional self-image. While, on the night of 21 July, Hitler still held that 'only a very small clique of ambitious, unscrupulous, and criminally stupid officers' were responsible for the plot,<sup>84</sup> only a few days later he showed himself determined 'to exterminate, root and branch, the whole clan of generals who have stood against us, and to break down the wall that this clique has artificially erected between the army, on the one hand, and the Party and the people, on the other'.<sup>85</sup> Limits may have been set to the 'process of extermination'<sup>86</sup> for the time being, in view of the extremely precarious military situation, but the psychological effects were obvious. Daily work, particularly that of the army's operations staffs, was now conducted in a constant atmosphere of fear and suspicion, distrust, hatred, and denunciation.<sup>87</sup> Hitler's appointment of Reich Leader SS Heinrich Himmler in place of Friedrich Fromm, as the new head of army armament and commander of the replacement army (increasing the duties

<sup>80</sup> Zeitzler, 'Abwehrschlachten in Rußland', 165 ff., BA-MA N 63/80.

<sup>81</sup> Manstein, Schmidt, and Reinhardt had apparently also been considered as successors to Zeitzler; see Goebbels, *Die Tagebücher*, pt. 2, xiii. 121 (15 July 1944). Zeitzler was subsequently transferred to the 'Führer reserve' and discharged from the Wehrmacht on 31 January 1945. See also Stahl, 'Generaloberst Kurt Zeitzler', 288–9, and Meyer, *Adolf Heusinger*, 264 ff.

<sup>82</sup> Just seven weeks later, on 17 August, Kluge too was relieved of his command, and two days later he committed suicide on the way back to Germany; see Mueller, 'Generalfeldmarschall Günther von Kluge', 134. Rundstedt was reappointed Commander-in-Chief West soon afterwards.

<sup>83</sup> e.g. Dollmann, the commander-in-chief of Seventh Army, died on 28 June, and the commander-in-chief of Armoured Group West, Geyr von Schweppenburg, was obliged to stand down along with Rundstedt; see *Germany and the Second World War*, vii. 600. Many other generals were taken prisoner in the course of the Soviet summer offensive.

<sup>84</sup> Radio address of 21 July 1944, quoted in Domarus, *Hitler. Reden und Proklamationen*, ii. 2128.

<sup>85</sup> Quoted in Goebbels, *Die Tagebücher*, pt. 2, xiii. 142 (23 July 1944). <sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> See also Meyer, *Auswirkungen des 20. Juli 1944*, 476 ff.

associated with that post at the same time),<sup>88</sup> which he carried out right away on 20 July, was just as symptomatic of the new style of leadership as was the collaboration of the new chief of the Army General Staff, Guderian, with the military 'court of honour', established on Hitler's orders, which was to expel the 20 July 'traitors' from the Wehrmacht and hand them over to the people's court to be tried as common criminals. Quite apart from the question of how far Guderian's policy of compliance was determined by inner conviction, tactical considerations, or personal animosity towards the old General Staff,<sup>89</sup> one thing is certain: his efforts to transform what was, in his view, a 'disorganized'<sup>90</sup> and in fact a 'virtually leaderless' General Staff, now that Heusinger and many other officers were gone,<sup>91</sup> into a tool in the dictator's hands with no will of its own soon bore fruit. True, not all the General Staff officers in the operations division left for the front within 24 hours, as Guderian had clearly intended initially, but, as one of them noted with regret, 'the old solidarity and comradeship' gradually disappeared.<sup>92</sup> Hitler himself described the same state of affairs, in his own way, when he told Goebbels at the beginning of December that 'his enemies in the General Staff' had finally been 'reduced to silence, for fear of the noose'.<sup>93</sup>

The new army leadership now largely fell in with Hitler's line, not only politically and ideologically, but in military matters too. His principle of holding on at all costs was no longer fundamentally called into question. More and more large cities and traffic nodes were classified, by decree, as 'fortresses' and 'fortified places', thus countenancing their total destruction into the bargain. Capital cities and cultural metropolises had been spared so far, provided they were not seen as symbols of Bolshevik power, but they too were now to fall victim to systematic destruction. In the case of Rome, the possibility of comprehensive destructive measures had already been discussed at the beginning of June, just before the Allies moved in, but in the end the 'eternal city' was declared an 'open city'.<sup>94</sup> As for Paris, Hitler had expressly stated on 23 August that the enemy should find nothing but 'a pile of rubble' if it fell into their hands,<sup>95</sup> and if the French capital remained almost intact in the end, it was primarily because the 'Wehrmacht Commander of Greater Paris', Lt.-Gen. Dietrich von Choltitz, refused to obey orders.<sup>96</sup> Warsaw's fate was infinitely worse. The underground Polish Home Army began an uprising there on

<sup>88</sup> For details of Himmler's position, see Stumpf, *Die Wehrmacht-Elite*, 345 ff., n. 177.

<sup>89</sup> On this, see Meyer, *Auswirkungen des 20. Juli 1944*, 481 ff., Wilhelm, 'Heinz Guderian', 200 ff., Megargee, *Inside Hitler's High Command*, 294 ff., and Guderian's own account, *Erinnerungen eines Soldaten*, 313 ff.

<sup>90</sup> Guderian, *Erinnerungen eines Soldaten*, 320.

<sup>91</sup> According to Wilhelm, 'Heinz Guderian', 201. Heusinger, who had been wounded in the attack, spent several weeks locked up and was then assigned to the 'Führer reserve'. See Meyer, *Adolf Heusinger*, 266–90.

<sup>92</sup> Quoted in Meyer, *Adolf Heusinger*, 287.

<sup>93</sup> Quoted in Goebbels, *Die Tagebücher*, pt. 2, xiv. 333 (2 Dec. 1944). According to the same source (p. 326), Hitler also announced on this occasion that 'he intended to do away with the general staff altogether after the war, and replace it with a small, very carefully selected operations staff'.

<sup>94</sup> See Weizsäcker, *Die Weizsäcker-Papiere*, 378–9 (11 June 1944), and Goebbels, *Die Tagebücher*, pt. 2, xii. 397 (4 June 1944) and 403 (6 June 1944).

<sup>95</sup> Quoted in *Germany and the Second World War*, vii. 614.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*

1 August, but—although it was improvised and ostentatiously ignored by the Red Army standing just outside the gates of the city—it took German SS and army units more than two months to put it down.<sup>97</sup> What was left of the city was so thoroughly destroyed by German sappers that even Goebbels found the pictures he was shown 'gruesome'.<sup>98</sup> In crushing the uprising,<sup>99</sup> which was aimed militarily against the German occupation but politically also against the Soviet Union, the German units ultimately did the Red Army's work for it. And in causing the death of not only hundreds of thousands of civilians but also most of the surviving members of the Polish ruling class, they removed what was potentially the decisive barrier to the subsequent Sovietization of the country.<sup>100</sup>

What the Germans did in Warsaw, and the crushing of the Slovakian uprising a few weeks later,<sup>101</sup> were symptomatic of the 'strategy' of continuing radicalization of the war, imposed above all by Hitler himself. The chances of implementing that strategy had obviously improved as a result of the events of 20 July. The dictator's endlessly repeated insistence on the 'need to fight for every square kilometre, and thus for every week of time gained' might not have made such a strong impression on everyone as it did on the chief of the Wehrmacht Operations Staff,<sup>102</sup> but it was henceforth accepted as the general line for the defence of Germany, a line that was undisputed, if not always followed consistently. In fact—apart from ending the war—there was no longer any alternative. As a result of the reshuffle of top personnel before and after 20 July, there were no longer any advocates of the concept of flexible defence over large areas which had long been favoured by the army leadership. Moreover, the military setbacks in the summer meant that there were no longer spaces in which such operations could be conducted.<sup>103</sup> The 'spatial capital we are living off',<sup>104</sup> which Jodl had still considered indispensable in May, had been irrevocably exhausted by the late summer of 1944. Hitler himself had no illusions on that score. On the contrary, in a discussion with Jodl and Walter Warlimont on 31 July, he suggested that 'given the situation as a whole, it may not be such a bad thing that we are relatively hemmed in. It has its disadvantages, but there are advantages too. If we hold on to the territory we now possess, it will still be sufficient for us to live in, and our forces will no longer have to cover such vast distances'.<sup>105</sup>

<sup>97</sup> See Borodziej, *Der Warschauer Aufstand 1944*.

<sup>98</sup> Goebbels, *Die Tagebücher*, pt. 2, xiv. 51 (7 Oct. 1944).

<sup>99</sup> On the massacres perpetrated by SS and police units, especially in the initial phase of the uprising, see Borodziej, *Der Warschauer Aufstand 1944*, 119–25; Umbreit, 'Wehrmachtverbände und Sondercheinheiten', and, for a palliative gloss, Guderian, *Erinnerungen eines Soldaten*, 322 ff.

<sup>100</sup> Weinberg, *A World at Arms*, 710, goes so far as to describe this irony of history as 'a repeat performance of the 1939 Nazi–Soviet Pact against Poland'.

<sup>101</sup> See Germany and the Second World War, v/II, 97–9, and Schönher, 'Die Niederschlagung'.

<sup>102</sup> Jodl, 'Tagebuch', 56–7 (3 July 1944), BA-MA N 69/33.

<sup>103</sup> In this context, Hitler's opinion that Guderian was 'the first mobile and flexible chief of the General Staff' since the beginning of the war has a certain—doubtless involuntary—irony about it. Quoted in Goebbels, *Die Tagebücher*, pt. 2, xiii. 401 (3 Sept. 1944).

<sup>104</sup> Jodl, 'Die strategische Lage im Frühjahr 1944', 2, BA-MA N 69/18.

<sup>105</sup> Hitlers *Lagebesprechungen*, 584 (31 July 1944).

Quite clearly, as this and many other testimonies show, the devastating defeats of the summer had not broken the determination of the dictator and his committed entourage to continue the war. Before the Allied invasion began, everyone had been saying that its success or failure would decide the outcome of the war. After the German failure to repel it, however, no one would listen to that view.<sup>106</sup> How many times in the war had there been talk of 'decisive battles', when, in fact, there had been nothing decisive about them! If, from a historical point of view, the summer months of 1944 nevertheless seem to us to represent a decisive turning point, it is not because they decided the outcome of the war. That had long since been decided. It is because the post-war era was decided in those months. The significance of 9 May 1945 for the ensuing division of political power in Europe—that is the perspective of a later generation, not of those who were there at the time.<sup>107</sup> Most German contemporaries must have seen the great setbacks suffered by the Wehrmacht on the western, eastern, and southern European fronts as just more in the long series of disasters which they had grown used to hearing about. Whether they thought the war could still be won or that it was already lost, none of them knew how much longer it would last or what it still held in store. Nor was it entirely safe to be heard speculating about it. In those circumstances, the vast majority of the German 'folk community' clearly thought it best to resign themselves to the 'normality of the abnormal',<sup>108</sup> do what was demanded of them as their duty, and for the rest, keep as low a profile as possible.

Those in charge of the conduct of the war behaved in much the same way. Against the background of the purges in the army leadership after 20 July, senior staff endeavoured, as far as ever possible, to continue 'business as usual'. The war was conducted as if it were still to be decided and, if possible, won. This conduct of the war 'as if' was facilitated by the absence of realistic explanations when hopes were disappointed, and the absence of new plans or rumours that might raise fresh hopes. After all, according to the information from the SS about the background to the attempted coup, wasn't it obvious that 'the collapse of our front in the west [...] was due entirely to treachery', and that the breakdown in 'the central section of the eastern front was caused by the defeatism' of Henning von Tresckow, 'which had contaminated the entire general staff of Army Group Centre'?<sup>109</sup> And now that the Führer, saved by Providence, was ruthlessly extinguishing the disease at its source, should 20 July not also be seen as 'the day of our resurrection'?<sup>110</sup> Were there not now grounds for new hope? In addition to the continuing prediction of the breakdown of the enemy coalition, the main reasons for fresh hope were

<sup>106</sup> In a discussion with Goebbels on 24 August 1944, Hitler stressed 'once again that he will never surrender, that his belief in victory is completely unshaken' (Goebbels, *Die Tagebücher*, pt. 2, xiii. 314). See also the similar account in Below, *Als Hitlers Adjutant*, 375–6.

<sup>107</sup> This is also emphasized by Salewski, '1944—Nach fünfzig Jahren', 15–16.

<sup>108</sup> Thus the title of an essay by Wegener, 'Die Normalität des Anormalen'.

<sup>109</sup> Thus Hitler, quoted in Goebbels, *Die Tagebücher*, pt. 2, xiii. 402 (3 Sept. 1944) and 210 (3 Aug. 1944).

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., xiv. 350 (4 Dec. 1944).

Germany's own 'retaliation weapons' ('the best horse in our stable')<sup>111</sup> and the 'blitz bomber' project based on development of the Me 262.<sup>112</sup> Plans for offensive land operations were also being discussed again. While the front in Italy was to remain on the defensive, Hitler and the OKW were already engaged in preliminary discussions in August with a view to a major operation in the west, the future Ardennes offensive.<sup>113</sup> And, as regards the east, Hitler already showed signs of renewed confidence at the beginning of September, announcing that the situation on the northern and central sections of the front was 'stable' and that 'the Soviets would shortly be dealt some heavy operational blows'.<sup>114</sup>

In view of the developments on the various fronts, which were apparent to all concerned, such announcements sounded positively bizarre. In the west, the US 7th Army, together with Free French units, had landed on the French Mediterranean coast in mid-August (Operation DRAGOON).<sup>115</sup> The Allied troops were advancing rapidly in the south of France, and Charles de Gaulle made a triumphal entry into Paris on 25 August 1944. Meanwhile, the Red Army had been successfully continuing its series of large-scale summer offensives since 20 August, with 2nd and 3rd Ukrainian Fronts launching an attack on Army Group South Ukraine.<sup>116</sup> In a kind of domino effect, the Reich rapidly lost almost all influence in south-eastern Europe. Turkey had already broken off relations with Berlin on 2 August,<sup>117</sup> and Romania<sup>118</sup> and Bulgaria<sup>119</sup>—overrun by the Red Army just a few days after it launched its attack—followed Ankara's example later in the month. Furthermore, the Red Army's advance to the Yugoslav border now gave it the chance to operate in conjunction with Tito's partisan units and oblige the German occupying forces in Greece (Army Group E), which were in danger of being cut off, to leave the country.<sup>120</sup>

Since 8 September, as a result of the virtually simultaneous change of sides by Romania, Bulgaria, and Finland,<sup>121</sup> Germany had now been at war, *de jure* or *de facto*, with three of its four hitherto most important European partners. Only Hungary was kept in line for a few more months, thanks to the persuasive powers of

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., xiii. 97 (12 July 1944). The first Type A-4 (V-2) rocket was launched against England on 8 September 1944. More than 1,000 V-2 rockets had hit England by the time the V-weapon offensive came to an end at the end of March 1945. For further details, see *Germany and the Second World War*, vii. 438–44 and 453–8.

<sup>112</sup> On the Me 262, and the bomber–fighter controversy associated with its production, see *Germany and the Second World War*, vii. 338 ff.

<sup>113</sup> See *Germany and the Second World War*, vii. 678–83.

<sup>114</sup> Quoted in Goebbels, *Die Tagebücher*, pt. 2, xiii. 400–1 (3 Sept. 1944).

<sup>115</sup> See *Germany and the Second World War*, vii. 653–62.

<sup>116</sup> For details, see Part V, Chapter VI of the present volume.

<sup>117</sup> On the background, see Önder, *Die türkische Außenpolitik*, 231 ff., and Deringil, *Turkish Foreign Policy*, 172–3.

<sup>118</sup> In addition to the earlier account by Hilgruber, *Hitler, König Carol und Marschall Antonescu*, 209 ff., see esp. Erickson, *Stalin's War*, ii. 346–69, and, for a summary, Gosztony, 'Rumänien im August 1944'.

<sup>119</sup> See Hoppe, *Bulgarien*.

<sup>120</sup> For details, see Part VI, Chapter II of the present volume.

<sup>121</sup> On Finland, see Part VI, Chapter I of the present volume.

German bayonets.<sup>122</sup> The loss of these allies—collectively labelled ‘treachery’ at Führer headquarters<sup>123</sup>—had long been feared by Hitler, and he had employed all the diplomatic and, ultimately, in the case of Romania, all the military<sup>124</sup> means at his disposal to prevent or at least delay it. By no means the least of the problems he faced were the increasingly serious repercussions of the military developments on the war economy. In the north, the imminent fall of Petsamo meant the irreplaceable loss of 87 per cent of Germany’s entire nickel requirement,<sup>125</sup> and in the south-east, the damage to the Ploieşti oilfields by American air raids, followed by the Soviet occupation at the end of August, deprived Germany of its most important source of fuel. The loss of Romanian oil was all the more disastrous for Germany’s conduct of the war because the Allied air raids on hydrogenation plants in Germany, which had been going on since the spring, had also reduced the domestic production of synthetic fuel to a minimum.<sup>126</sup> That finally put paid to any idea of a ‘mobile’ conduct of operations by Germany.

In the course of the summer and autumn, Germany lost not only the territorial, political, and economic basis for any conduct of the war beyond short-term improvisation. The human losses incurred during the summer put all the past catastrophes—including Stalingrad—in the shade. The OKH estimated German losses in the first three weeks following the start of the Soviet offensive against Army Group Centre, that is, from 22 June to mid-July, at around 300,000 dead or missing, and the Red Army’s subsequent operation in the south-east cost the Wehrmacht an estimated total of 380,000 men in an even shorter space of time.<sup>127</sup> According to recent research, the Wehrmacht lost three-quarters of a million men, in dead alone, in just three months (June to August). This was approximately equal to the total number lost in the previous nine months, or in no fewer than the first fifteen months of the war in the east.<sup>128</sup> Admittedly, the full extent of the massive losses was concealed, not only from the public—with more

<sup>122</sup> One last attempt by the Regent, Horthy, to extract Hungary from the war ended on 15 October 1944 with his arrest by the SS and subsequent replacement by Szálasi, the leader of the radical right-wing Arrow Cross party. The new man was ‘the very last piece on the chessboard’ (Borus, ‘Die Einschätzung der Lage Deutschlands’, 173). According to Guderian, he gave the impression that ‘nothing could be expected of him. He seemed a reluctant upstart. We no longer had any Axis partners’ (Guderian, *Erinnerungen eines Soldaten*, 378). See also Part V, Chapter VII of the present volume.

<sup>123</sup> A typical entry by Goebbels on 3 September 1944 reads: ‘The southern front would certainly not have got into such an appalling mess if Romania had not suddenly broken ranks. It had long been accepted that the Romanian royal clique wanted to betray us, but doing it in such a vile fashion was something fairly new, even after the earlier example of Italy. The Romanians will have a high price to pay for their treachery’ (*Die Tagebücher*, pt. 2, xiii. 400). Just a day later the minister noted, apropos of Mannerheim, that he ‘had revealed himself as a marshal of capitulation’ and had ‘faithfully followed in Badoglio’s footsteps’ (*ibid.* 409).

<sup>124</sup> After the fall of Antonescu on 23 August, the Romanians offered to allow the unimpeded withdrawal of all German troops. Hitler responded with air raids and an unsuccessful attempt at military occupation of Bucharest. At the same time, he installed the commander of the Iron Guard, Horia Sima, who was being held in the Buchenwald concentration camp, as the head of a puppet government—a completely powerless government-in-exile based in Vienna.

<sup>125</sup> See Vuorisjärvi, *Petsamon Nikkeli kansainvälisessä politiikassa*, 201.

<sup>126</sup> On the context, see *Germany and the Second World War*, v/II. 813–19.

<sup>127</sup> Figures according to Wegner, ‘Im Schatten’, 120, and Weinberg, *A World at Arms*, 714.

<sup>128</sup> See Overmans, *Deutsche militärische Verluste*, 238 (fig. 3).

and more families waiting for the return of men reported 'missing'—but apparently also from the operations staff in the Army and Wehrmacht High Command. The losses in the eastern army before the collapse of Army Group Centre and Army Group South Ukraine were already about half a million higher than the figure given in the Wehrmacht statistics, and the discrepancy was to rise to about a million dead by the end of 1944.<sup>129</sup> The gradual collapse of the reporting system thus meant that the central operations staffs—and Hitler too—were increasingly working with units on their situation maps that, in reality, no longer existed in that form.

Despite increasingly serious errors of this kind, the absolutely 'wretched situation regarding replacements for the east'<sup>130</sup> was no secret: it was even, to some extent, the consciously accepted price of the debilitating 'stand firm strategy' ordered by Hitler and supported by the new Army General Staff. The reason for that support was decidedly no longer military but ideological. As Guderian declared in November during a Home Guard swearing-in ceremony, it was a matter of proving to the enemy that '85 million National Socialists [...] stand behind Adolf Hitler', so that the 'invincibility of our generation', which had 'defended the right against all foes', would go down in history.<sup>131</sup> This vision of invincibility, and thus ultimately of 'final victory', was increasingly placed at the centre of all public and semi-public pronouncements, the stronger the reasons for doubting it became. As Goebbels said, in an address designed to raise the spirits of the German people and broadcast during the darkest days of July: 'We must persist through this hell of opposition, burdens, and dangers before we can emerge in the open once more and breathe fresh air.' He had no doubt that 'we shall succeed. We *must* succeed; otherwise we shall all be lost.'<sup>132</sup> The striking emphasis on the *necessity* of victory, of which there are endless examples, especially after 1943, was a rhetorical means of escaping the fact—increasingly clear to the German leadership, above all—that the *will* to win is not the same thing as the *ability* to win. If, to quote Nietzsche, the *will* to achieve something means nothing else than subjecting one's own ability to the test, the Third Reich was quite clearly in the process of failing that test.

The developments in the military situation in the second half of 1944 led to a growing realization that this supposedly worst of all outcomes was a real possibility. In response, the leading members of the regime adopted two intrinsically conflicting attitudes. On the one hand, the fact that the enemy was now right on the German borders, in the west (at Aachen) and in the east (in East Prussia), prompted serious thought about the form which destruction operations should take in Germany itself.<sup>133</sup> On 16 September Hitler issued a basic directive which

<sup>129</sup> Figures according to *ibid.* 300–1.

<sup>130</sup> Guderian, quoted in Goebbels, *Die Tagebücher*, pt. 2, xiii. 194 (2 Aug. 1944).

<sup>131</sup> Quoted in Schwendemann, 'Strategie der Selbstvernichtung', 228.

<sup>132</sup> Radio address of 26 July 1944, quoted in *Archiv der Gegenwart* (1944), 6465 (author's emphasis). Goebbels was repeating, almost word for word, a formulation which Hitler himself had used in conversation with him just two days earlier; see Goebbels, *Die Tagebücher*, pt. 2, xiii. 155 (24 July 1944).

<sup>133</sup> On the organizational aspect, which is not dealt with further here, see in particular Hitler's decrees of 13 July, 19 September, and 20 September 1944, repr. in *Führer-Erlasse*, 426–9 (docs. 336 and 337) and 455–7 (docs. 362 and 363).

anticipated the spirit of the notorious 'Nero Decree',<sup>134</sup> and in its destructive consequences went far beyond the undoubtedly radical measures envisaged in the 'Morgenthau Plan' that Franklin D. Roosevelt and Winston Churchill were discussing at the same time in distant Quebec.<sup>135</sup> According to the directive, signed by Jodl, 'every bunker, every block of houses in every German town, and every German village, must become a fortress against which the enemy bleeds himself dry or in which the garrison goes under in hand-to-hand combat. All that remains to us is holding on or destruction.'<sup>136</sup> Field Marshal von Rundstedt, whom Hitler had just reinstated as Commander-in-Chief West, added that the severity of the fighting in their home country might oblige them 'not only to abandon property but also to destroy it on operational grounds', and that this also applied to artistic monuments and other works of cultural value.<sup>137</sup>

Hitler saw his proposal to apply the 'scorched earth' principle to his own country too as the consistent final step in radicalizing his war,<sup>138</sup> and it was justified by some of his supporters on precisely those grounds: '[I]t is now a matter of the final step and, when the nation is fighting for its life, we must not shrink from taking the final step.'<sup>139</sup> Nevertheless, the dictator's call for what amounted to nothing less than collective self-destruction was a definitive departure from the aim propagated until then, namely to emerge *victorious* from the war. It is hardly surprising that not everyone was prepared to accept the complete mental 'somersault' of shaping one's own downfall rather than that of the enemy. Reservations, incomprehension, and covert rejection were therefore to be expected among the general population, but they were evident even in the Führer's inner and outer circle.<sup>140</sup>

The probability that Germany would be defeated could no longer be waved away after the heavy defeats suffered in the summer. Towards the end of 1944, the nightmarish prospect of its complete destruction—whether at its own hands or at the hands of the enemy—finally turned the thoughts of high-ranking military and civilian members of the dictator's entourage once again in a completely different direction. Wolfram Freiherr von Richthofen<sup>141</sup> and Rommel<sup>142</sup> had both endeavoured, in the course of the summer, to persuade Hitler to soften his policy so as to

<sup>134</sup> On the text of the decree, see *ibid.* 486 ff. (doc. 394). See also the observations in the next chapter.

<sup>135</sup> The main purpose of the plan, which was named after its initiator, the American finance minister, and discussed during the British-American Quebec Conference (12 to 16 Sept. 1944), was to turn post-war Germany into a deindustrialized and demilitarized agricultural country, to internationalize the Ruhr district and other areas, and to divide what remained of Germany into two separate states. On the background, see Greiner, *Die Morgenthau-Legende*.

<sup>136</sup> Hitler's order issued on 16 Sept. 1944, BA-MA RW 4/v. 494, fo. 108.

<sup>137</sup> Quoted in Schwendemann, 'Strategie der Selbstvernichtung', 229.

<sup>138</sup> See the next chapter for further details.

<sup>139</sup> Thus Goebbels, *Die Tagebücher*, pt. 2, xiii. 492 (16 Sept. 1944).

<sup>140</sup> See, e.g., *ibid.* 491; Speer, *Erinnerungen*, 411 ff.; and Sereny, *Albert Speer: His Battle with the Truth*, ch. 18.

<sup>141</sup> See Below, *Als Hitlers Adjutant*, 385.

<sup>142</sup> Rommel sent the following telegram to Hitler on 15 July 1944: 'The troops are fighting heroically everywhere, but the unequal battle is almost over. I must ask you to draw the necessary conclusions from this situation without delay.' Quoted in *KTB OKW*, iv. 1573). See also Below, *Als Hitlers Adjutant*, 375, and Fraser, *Knight's Cross*, 452 ff.

allow the possibility of a separate peace, or at least an armistice. Kluge too had implored his Führer, in a farewell letter written the day before his suicide on 19 August 1944, to have the magnanimity now, after fighting a 'great and honourable battle', to 'bring the hopeless struggle, if necessary, to an end'.<sup>143</sup>

Goebbels had also finally concluded in August that, in order to avoid surrender, an effort had to be made 'to get out of this war on two fronts by inclining towards either the west or the east'.<sup>144</sup> Considering that he himself was undoubtedly the right man to initiate the relevant 'reorientation of our foreign policy',<sup>145</sup> the minister submitted a memorandum to his Führer a few weeks later, designed essentially to persuade the dictator to put out peace-feelers to the Soviet Union: 'Stalin, a cool-headed calculator, must know that he is bound to clash with the western powers sooner or later, and that he cannot afford to allow himself to be bled dry on the eastern front first, nor still less allow the English and the Americans to take possession of a major share of Germany's armaments and human potential in the meantime.'<sup>146</sup>

The generals who, as the dictator's closest advisers on strategy, should have done their duty in this connection long ago, finally spoke up three months later, though far less resolutely than the propaganda minister. Only towards the end of the year, when an attack by vastly superior Soviet forces on the German front between the Baltic and the Carpathians was imminent, endangering 'seven hundred years of German work, German battles, and German successes',<sup>147</sup> did Guderian urge Hitler, strongly, but in vain, to move the point of concentration of all his forces to the eastern front, in order—as he put it<sup>148</sup>—to create the necessary conditions for 'a different kind of peace' from 'unconditional surrender', which seemed to him criminal, shameful, and unacceptable. Even Jodl, the most energetic opponent of Guderian's plans, plucked up his courage when the Ardennes offensive—of which there had been such high hopes<sup>149</sup>—came to a standstill towards the end of the year. In an ultimately fruitless one-to-one meeting, he made his apparently first and only attempt, in a roundabout way and with the help of false claims, to persuade Hitler to undertake a political initiative to end the war.<sup>150</sup>

Given the nature of the National Socialist regime's command and decision-making structures, which we have already discussed,<sup>151</sup> it is not really surprising that all the above-mentioned rather half-hearted attempts to find a political solution to the strategic dilemma of the war got no further, especially as the advocates of a political

<sup>143</sup> Quoted in *KTB OKW*, iv. 1576 (18 Aug. 1944).

<sup>144</sup> Goebbels, *Die Tagebücher*, pt. 2, xiii. 207 (3 Aug. 1944).

<sup>145</sup> Ibid. Goebbels' statements and activities are to be seen in connection with his constant efforts to influence foreign policy himself, and to have Ribbentrop dismissed. See xiii. 502 (17 Sept. 1944) and xiv. 194 (10 Nov. 1944); 'I shall continue my constant attacks on the Foreign Ministry.'

<sup>146</sup> Ibid., xiii. 536–42, at 539 (21 Sept. 1944).

<sup>147</sup> Thus Guderian, *Erinnerungen eines Soldaten*, 347.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

<sup>149</sup> On this, see Hitler's positively euphoric statements to Goebbels on 2 December 1944, reported in Goebbels, *Die Tagebücher*, pt. 2, xiv. 318–21.

<sup>150</sup> Percy E. Schramm, annex to letter of 4 May 1946 re '1944: Vorschlag an die Verteidiger des Generalobersten Jodl', BA-MA N 63/15.

<sup>151</sup> See Part I, Chapter II.2 of the present volume.

solution were not, as a rule, inclined to link their own future to the proposals they made. On the contrary, apart from Rommel and Kluge, they were all perfectly willing to accept Hitler's brusque rejections, and to pursue the appointed course of collective self-destruction. This willingness is a further illustration of the importance of Hitler's person in the closing phase of the war, and it raises once again the question of the personal motives of the man himself, who contributed, more than any other, to the prolongation of what had long become a senseless war.

## II. Orchestrating the End

The question why Hitler himself never made any serious attempt to prevent the impending downfall of the Reich by political or diplomatic means, but absolutely insisted on fighting on, a decision that was to cost the Wehrmacht more than twice as many men in the last year and a half of the war as it had lost in the whole of the first four years,<sup>1</sup> is a question to which historical research has found differing answers. Common to most historians is the assumption that Hitler held obsessively to his original war aims right to end<sup>2</sup> and, despite all the setbacks, never ceased to believe that, ‘if they only held out, the war could still be won’.<sup>3</sup> The assumption that Hitler continued to harbour delusions of final victory, an assumption that is apparently confirmed by a host of pertinent Führer quotations and assertions by third parties, is—implicitly or explicitly—at the interpretative core of almost the entire historiography of the Second World War.<sup>4</sup> However, the research carried out in the course of the present project has raised considerable doubts about this interpretation. Those doubts are summarized once again below, as the starting point for a reinterpretation of Hitler’s determination to continue the war. The objections to the thesis that Hitler was an unworldly strategist, besotted with the idea of ‘final victory’, are threefold. First, the thesis is incomplete; second, it is dubious as to its content; and third, it is far less strongly substantiated from the sources than might appear at first sight.

The thesis briefly outlined here is incomplete, in that there are many gaps in the explanation it offers, gaps that can be closed only by making contradictory assumptions. For example, if it was an unshakeable belief in the possibility of a turnaround in the war that caused Hitler to insist on continuing it, that does not plausibly

<sup>1</sup> On the figures, see primarily Overmans, *Deutsche militärische Verluste*, 238 (fig. 3).

<sup>2</sup> Thus, e.g., Weinberg, ‘Zur Frage eines Sonderfriedens im Osten’, 182. Hillgruber, *Der Zweite Weltkrieg*, 128–9, also emphasizes the ‘consistency of Hitler’s main strategic concepts’ to the very end.

<sup>3</sup> Bullock, *Hitler and Stalin*, 843.

<sup>4</sup> See also, in addition to the works mentioned in nn. 2 and 3, Gruchmann, *Totaler Krieg*, 226; Dülffer, *Deutsche Geschichte 1933–1945*, 142; Wendt, *Deutschland 1933–1945*, 556; and Kershaw, *Hitler 1936–1945: Nemesis*, 607 ff. All these authors assume that Hitler still believed long after 1942, i.e. at least until the summer of 1944, in the possibility of a military turnaround and the collapse of the Allied coalition. ‘He had to believe these ideas,’ Kershaw writes, with respect to the ‘final victory’ rhetoric, ‘and did, certainly down to the summer of 1944, if not longer’ (p. 792). Kershaw’s reasoning is apodictic rather than empirical: ‘Without the inner conviction, Hitler would have been unable to sway those around him, as he continued so often to do, to find new resolve. Without it, he would not have engaged so fanatically in bitter conflicts with his military leaders. Without it, he would have been incapable, not least, of sustaining in himself the capacity to continue, despite increasingly overwhelming odds’ (p. 610).

explain why the dictator still showed this determination even when the realization that his cause was lost impelled him to commit suicide.<sup>5</sup> Thus, at the latest, when he was writing his political testament on 29 April 1945, there must have been other reasons why Hitler called on the commander-in-chief of the Wehrmacht units ‘to strengthen by all possible means the spirit of resistance of our troops according to the ethos of National Socialism’.<sup>6</sup> Nor does the thesis explain why Hitler—who, on the evidence of his own statements and in the opinion of most historians writing about him, counted on the break-up of the Allied coalition to the very end—made no serious diplomatic efforts of any kind to exacerbate the tensions between the western powers and the Soviet Union, tensions that undoubtedly existed and were registered in Germany too,<sup>7</sup> by engaging in political manoeuvres of his own—such as ostensibly secret talks on a separate peace—to bring about the break-up.<sup>8</sup> If he had really thought ‘that every military defeat gives us a political opportunity’, and that all the Red Army’s military successes would ‘have a positively shattering effect on the enemy in the west’,<sup>9</sup> it is impossible to see why he did not seize any of these political opportunities, although pressed on all sides, and instead insisted obstinately and exclusively on holding out militarily.

Even more important than this explanatory deficiency is the internal inconsistency of the picture of Hitler that emerges. The common idea of Hitler as simply a fanatical dictator, militarily incompetent and therefore lacking in insight, was first propagated by the surviving generals after the war, partly out of genuine subjective conviction and partly for transparent personal motives, that is, self-exculpation,<sup>10</sup> and historians have since made only half-hearted attempts to correct it.<sup>11</sup> A more thorough investigation of Hitler’s role as a military commander in the second half of the war quickly shows how unsound this idea is. There may still be some grounds for the accusation of professional incompetence and obstinacy in the purely operational conduct of the war, but it is not justified at the strategic level. From the outset, Hitler had a very much more modern and complex idea of warfare than the great majority of his generals, and a relatively clearer idea of the demands of a war involving the whole of society.<sup>12</sup> The fact that the structural constraints of his regime made it impossible for him to put his ideas into practice is quite another matter.

Even the undoubtedly justified reference to the deterioration in the state of the dictator’s health as the years went by does not justify the assumption that Hitler

<sup>5</sup> Kershaw’s arguments in *Hitler 1936–1945: Nemesis* appear illogical on this point.

<sup>6</sup> *Hitlers politisches Testament*, quoted in KTB OKW, iv. 1968.

<sup>7</sup> 1./Skl, Kriegstagebuch, pt. C/VIII, entry for 8 Nov. 1943, ‘Beurteilung der Konferenz von Moskau’, BA-MA RM 7/214, fo. 336.

<sup>8</sup> Thus also Haffner, *Anmerkungen zu Hitler*, 117 ff.

<sup>9</sup> Quoted in Goebbels, *Die Tagebücher*, pt. 2, xii. 406 (6 June 1944).

<sup>10</sup> For a detailed discussion, see Wegner, ‘Erschriebene Siege’.

<sup>11</sup> In fact, German historians in particular have shown little interest in Hitler’s function as a military leader during the second half of the war—a failing that is all the more surprising as the dictator devoted by far the greatest proportion of his time to military matters during those years.

<sup>12</sup> Schramm, *Hitler als militärischer Führer*, 57, quite rightly warned against ‘belittling Hitler as a strategist’. On this, see also the basic points made in Plack, *Wie oft wird Hitler noch besiegt?*, 25–31.

misread the dramatic increase in the pace at which the strategic balance tipped against Germany after 1942/3. On the contrary, there is no lack of examples showing that Hitler had a sober view of strategic trends during this time. Thus, we know from internal statements that he already reckoned at the beginning of 1942 that the United States could probably be the overall winner in this war,<sup>13</sup> that he also reckoned from January 1943 onwards that North Africa would be lost and that Italy would exit the war,<sup>14</sup> that he also had few illusions about his Axis partners' efforts to withdraw,<sup>15</sup> and that in the very last weeks of the war he came to the following remarkably clear conclusion about subsequent developments:

After defeat of the Reich, pending the rise of nationalist movements in Asia, in Africa, and possibly in South America too, there will be only two powers left in the world that can stand up to each other on equal terms: the United States and Soviet Russia. Given the historical forces at work and the geographical situation, these two giants are bound to take the measure of each other's strength, whether militarily or only on the economic and ideological level. And it is equally certain that both powers will be enemies of an independent Europe.<sup>16</sup>

Against this background, it is hard to maintain that Hitler completely misunderstood the direction that the war took from the winter of 1941/2 on.<sup>17</sup> These doubts are confirmed by an analysis of the available source material. True, there is no lack of relevant quotations supporting the picture of a Führer who believed in victory to the very end. In countless orders of the day, proclamations, speeches, and minutes of meetings we come across those fixed ideas that constituted the endlessly recurring set pieces of an increasingly bizarre 'final victory' propaganda, that is, the belief in the strategic advantage of the 'inner line',<sup>18</sup> the hope placed in 'the existence of hitherto unknown, singular weapons',<sup>19</sup> the expectation that crises in manpower and food supplies would finally bring about the inevitable collapse of the Soviet Union,<sup>20</sup> and, last but not least, the above-mentioned speculation about growing differences within the enemy coalition that would ultimately cause its breakdown.<sup>21</sup> Such statements

<sup>13</sup> Hitler, *Monologe*, 199.

<sup>14</sup> See Goebbels, *Die Tagebücher*, pt. 2, vii. 176 (23 Jan. 1943), Below, *Als Hitlers Adjutant*, 334, and 'privatdienstliches Schreiben von Kapitän z.S. Junge an Dönitz vom 15.5.1943 über den Inhalt der "Führerlage" vom gleichen Tage', BA-MA RM 7/260; also Hitler's discussion with Keitel on 19 May 1943, repr. in *Hitlers Lagebesprechungen*, 205–12.

<sup>15</sup> See 'Junge an Dönitz, 15.5.1943', BA-MA RM 7/260, and Hitler's discussion with Keitel, 19 May 1943, in *Hitlers Lagebesprechungen*, 205–12.

<sup>16</sup> Quoted in Hitler, *Hitlers politisches Testament*, 124 (2 Apr. 1945).

<sup>17</sup> Jodl's opinion, expressed in 1946, is significant: 'Hitler suspected and knew that the war was lost sooner than anyone else in the world' (quoted in *KTB OKW*, iv. 1721).

<sup>18</sup> As, e.g., in Hitler's address to Reichs- and Gauleiters on 8 May 1943 (Goebbels, *Die Tagebücher*, pt. 2, viii. 239).

<sup>19</sup> Hitler's proclamation to the troops of Army Group South and Air Fleet 4 on 19 February 1943, quoted in Domarus, *Hitler. Reden und Proklamationen*, ii. 1989.

<sup>20</sup> See, e.g., Goebbels, *Die Tagebücher*, pt. 2, vii. 292 (8 Feb. 1943) and 593 (20 Mar. 1943), and *Hitlers Lagebesprechungen*, 477 (27 Dec. 1943).

<sup>21</sup> Thus Hitler, in an order of the day issued on 15 April 1945, the day of Roosevelt's death: 'At this moment, when fate has removed the greatest war criminal of all time from this earth, the turnaround in the war has been decided' (*KTB OKW*, iv. 1590); see also Hansen, *Das Ende des Dritten Reiches*, 41–2.

are unhesitatingly advanced as proof of continuing confidence in victory, but they are taken out of context: a critical reading of the sources shows that they are statements *ad usum delphini* rather than expressions of inner conviction. In fact, only relatively few of Hitler's statements in the closing years of the war must have been spontaneous expressions of his opinion or personal confessions.<sup>22</sup> On the contrary, when he was speaking, whether in a large or a small circle or in one-to-one conversation, he was as a rule fully conscious of his role as the solely responsible 'Führer'. And it would have been completely incompatible with his understanding of that role to admit that he was at a loss or could not see a way out.<sup>23</sup> Hitler's increasingly strong display of strategic optimism in the last two years of the war must therefore be regarded primarily as an instrument employed by a dictator totally convinced of his rhetorical powers of persuasion, in order to strengthen the universally crumbling belief in the possibility of final victory, irrespective of the real situation, and so maintain the most important mental precondition for resolute continuation of the war.<sup>24</sup>

This predominantly tactical use of arguments in conversation easily led to contradictions, as some of the dictator's close circle also noted.<sup>25</sup> With regard to the V-weapons, for example—the 'retaliatory weapons' that were hailed as decisive for the outcome of the war—we know that even Hitler doubted their effect.<sup>26</sup> Another example is Hitler's oft-repeated contempt for strategic comparisons of numbers, which, combined with the excessive importance he attached to pure 'willpower', is often taken as the expression of a lack of realism. That this might have been a rhetorical device to repel unwelcome arguments is supported by an unquestionably authentic statement which Hitler made in a very small circle on 20 August 1942. The history of war, he said, contained 'not a single example of a situation where, despite a gross disparity in the strength of the forces on either side, victory went to the smaller number. Frederick the Great was always lucky that we somehow managed to muddle through.'<sup>27</sup> The last sentence is also significant, since it sheds light on Hitler's subsequent attempts to present the difficult situation of the king of Prussia in the Seven Years War as an encouraging precedent and a source of hope.<sup>28</sup>

Other sources too show that, as the war went on, Hitler believed less and less in a miracle à la 1763, that is, a collapse of the Allied coalition. Thus, for example,

<sup>22</sup> See Speer, *Erinnerungen*, 446. On the context, see Eichholz, *Geschichte der deutschen Kriegswirtschaft*, iii. 662 ff., and Sereny, *Albert Speer: His Battle with the Truth*, ch. 18.

<sup>23</sup> See *Staatsmänner und Diplomaten*, pt. 2, 379 (16 Mar. 1944). Consciously or unconsciously, Hitler was engaging in the cult of the leader promulgated in the nationalistic poetry of his generation and popularized by Flex, e.g. in his poem 'Leutnantsdienst' (repr. in Flex, *Im Felde*), KTB Skl, pt. A, xlvi. 635-A, n. 90 (9 July 1943). Significantly, this statement was omitted in the version of the minutes of the meeting approved by Dönitz.

<sup>24</sup> For that reason, Hitler repeatedly expressed the firm view that 'military command without optimism is absolutely impossible' (*Hitlers Lagebesprechungen*, 614, situation at noon, 31 Aug. 1944).

<sup>25</sup> e.g. Below, *Als Hitlers Adjutant*, 357, on the subject of discussions with Hitler towards the end of 1943, recalls that 'he often contradicted himself'.

<sup>26</sup> See Goebbels, *Die Tagebücher*, pt. 2, xii. 525 (22 June 1944). Even the propaganda minister had to admit that 'retaliation [...] was, of course, just a drop in the ocean', 568 (29 June 1944).

<sup>27</sup> Hitler, *Monologe*, 354.

<sup>28</sup> Thus, e.g., in Goebbels, *Die Tagebücher*, pt. 2, vii. 292 and 294–5 (8 Feb. 1943).

during a naval commander's conference on 11 November 1943, Karl Dönitz reported—apparently with direct reference to similar statements by Hitler—that 'there are indeed some possibilities of strife in the enemy camp,' but it 'would not have any effect on military developments at present', since 'they have a common interest in bringing the war in Europe to an end quickly, Russia on account of the huge losses it has suffered, and Britain and America on account of their plans in Eastern Asia'.<sup>29</sup> As late as 2 April 1945, Hitler told Martin Bormann that he was convinced that the enemies of the Reich 'certainly [will] not lay down their arms until they have destroyed National Socialist Germany, annihilated it, and completely broken it up'.<sup>30</sup>

The doubts expressed here about the all-too-easily accepted view of a 'Führer' out of touch with the realities of war open the way for an alternative interpretation of his strategic behaviour. If some of the building blocks for that interpretation are provided in what follows, it is not because they are completely new,<sup>31</sup> but because their sustainability has scarcely been explicitly discussed hitherto. Basically, it is a matter of certain insights that are essential to the interpretation of German policy and conduct of the war during its second half. They are reiterated here in the form of theses with supporting evidence.

After the failure of Germany's second eastern campaign in the late summer of 1942, the German leadership no longer had an overall strategic concept for the continued conduct of the war.<sup>32</sup> Hitler was increasingly aware that 'his' war was unwinnable. The enormous confidence in victory that he undoubtedly felt in the summer of 1941, at the peak of 'his' war, was based primarily on the conviction that the attack on the Soviet Union, conceived as a 'blitzkrieg', would succeed, and that Operation BARBAROSSA would accordingly be over before the winter started.<sup>33</sup> This, in turn, was based on the traditional view that a winter war could be waged only with difficulty,<sup>34</sup> and above all, on the calculation that the rapid conquest of extra space in the east for raw materials and arms production would render further war against the Anglo-American naval powers unnecessary in the short term and winnable in the long term.<sup>35</sup> The definitive failure of the German attack on Moscow, foreseeable in the late autumn of that year, therefore meant not only an operational disaster but nothing less than the collapse of the strategic basis for

<sup>29</sup> 'OBdM, Befehlshaberbesprechung am 11.11.43', BA-MA RM 7/98, fo. 159.

<sup>30</sup> Hitler, *Hitlers politisches Testament*, 120–1 (2 Apr. 1945).

<sup>31</sup> See similar suggestions and starting points for interpretation, notably in Schramm, *Hitler als militärischer Führer*, in Haffner, *Anmerkungen zu Hitler*, 141, in various studies by Fest (*Hitler*, 910–11, *Fremdheit und Nähe*, 135–6, and *Der Untergang*), and in Lukacs, *The Hitler of History*, ch. 5. On the other hand, despite some apparently similar conclusions, the following reflections have nothing to do, either empirically or methodologically, with Fromm's thesis, advanced in *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness*, ch. 13, that Hitler had a necrophilia-induced death wish.

<sup>32</sup> On this, see the discussion in *Germany and the Second World War*, vi, esp. 142–4, and in Part I, Chapter I.3 of the present volume.

<sup>33</sup> See Kroener, 'Der "erfrorene" Blitzkrieg', 133–48.

<sup>34</sup> See also Hitler's candid remarks to Mannerheim, repr. in Wegner, 'Hitlers Besuch in Finnland', 132–3.

<sup>35</sup> For a basic discussion of this issue, see *Germany and the Second World War*, iv. 13–51 and 118–224.

German conduct of the war. Hitler had already begun to suspect in November 1941 that 'the two enemy groups cannot destroy each other'.<sup>36</sup> Against this background, Jodl's claim in the first few days after the end of the war, which he repeated many times thereafter, that Hitler—and he too, as Hitler's most influential adviser on strategy—had been well aware, 'since that crucial point at the beginning of 1942', that 'victory could no longer be achieved' seem entirely credible.<sup>37</sup>

The dictator nevertheless considered that he had not yet exhausted all strategic options. In Hitler's view, the dangers to the Reich arising from the change from a short to a long war might possibly be offset by the opportunities afforded by the simultaneous change from a European to a global war. Assuming Japanese successes in the area, the opening of the Pacific theatre would tie down the American military forces, which were by no means ready for war, for a long time and delay their deployment in Europe.<sup>38</sup> This appeared to give the German dictator, once again, a narrow time frame in 1942 in which to round off his conquests in the east and adapt German conduct of the war to the changed situation, before the full weight of American military power was brought to bear against the Reich. The main aim of German planning in the summer of 1942 had therefore been to capture the Soviet production centres of the armaments and raw materials essential for a long war, especially the heavily industrialized Donets Basin and the Caucasian oilfields. This would have deprived the Soviet Union in the medium term of the material conditions for its own conduct of the war, and have provided Germany with the extra space needed for the expected confrontation with the Anglo-American naval powers, thereby establishing the decisive condition for engaging in the long war that was now inevitable.<sup>39</sup> Thus, the failure of these military ambitions, which had been unmistakably clear to Hitler since the beginning of September 1942 and gave rise to the regime's worst leadership crisis so far<sup>40</sup>—combined with growing awareness of the turnaround in the war in the Pacific brought about by the battle of Midway<sup>41</sup>—marked the definitive end of German autonomous overall strategy.

In this sense, although the failure of the second German campaign against the Soviet Union was not a 'turning point in the war' in general,<sup>42</sup> it was nevertheless a turning point in German *conduct* of the war. The decisive mark of this change was not that, strategically, Germany was henceforth a reactive rather than an active power, since history provides many examples of the fact that reactive powers too can decide the outcome of wars in their favour. Rather, the crucial factor was that, from the autumn of 1942 on, the German leadership no longer had any idea of

<sup>36</sup> Halder, *Kriegstagebuch*, iii. 295 (19 Nov. 1941).

<sup>37</sup> KTB OKW, iv. 1503 (15 May 1945), 1501 (13 May 1945), 1712 ff., and 1721 (Jodl's notes, written in prison in Nuremberg in 1946).

<sup>38</sup> See also *Germany and the Second World War*, vi. 116–17.

<sup>39</sup> See *ibid.* 843–63. <sup>40</sup> On the September crisis, see *ibid.* 1048–59.

<sup>41</sup> For a more detailed account of the strategic significance of Midway, see Willmott, *Empires in the Balance*, 518 ff.

<sup>42</sup> On the 'turning point' question, see the discussion in Part I, Chapter I.1 of the present volume.

how, with its own forces, it might bring the war as a whole to a victorious or even tolerable conclusion.

The constantly recurring core problem for German conduct of the war during its second half was the increasingly unbridgeable and ultimately grotesque gap between the German command's realization of the enemy's strategic possibilities, on the one hand, and its awareness of the inadequacy of its own means, on the other. Now, in contrast to 1941 or even the spring of 1942, the relevant German authorities no longer underestimated the enemy's strength and resources. They were well aware of the Allies' strategic possibilities for conducting a reciprocally coordinated multi-front war, and of the impossibility of conducting offensives of their own that could determine the outcome of the war. Consequently, despite the enormous forces deployed, even the large-scale German offensive against the Kursk salient in July 1943, code-named 'Citadel', was the first summer offensive in which Hitler himself had no strategic aims but merely operational objectives.<sup>43</sup> Significantly, the dictator had already let it be known before the attack was launched that he had resolved, in case of doubt, to concentrate the main effort in his further military endeavours on preventing the opening of a second front in southern or western Europe,<sup>44</sup> thus indirectly admitting the failure of his expansionist plans in the east.

This perception of his own military situation was therefore a sign of increasing, rather than decreasing realism. It was not blindness, but an attempt to avoid the conclusions to be drawn from his own assessment of the situation, that caused Hitler and his closest associates to resort increasingly, from 1943 on, to ideological wishful thinking, propaganda, and empty promises. At moments of extreme pressure, even those who were responsible for producing it realized how empty the propaganda was. Thus, at the height of the crises on the western and eastern fronts at the end of June 1944, Goebbels, of all people, complained that 'the OKW are unrestrained over-optimists, not to say illusionists. They throw dust in their own eyes. Every bit of bad news from the front is given a liberal dose of whitewash, so that only a critical intelligence can get to the truth of the matter'.<sup>45</sup> The minister's criticism was nothing less than hypocritical, since he knew full well that 'critical intelligence' getting to the heart of the matter had long ceased to be of any concern. What was wanted was by no means rational calculation, but an 'unlimited declaration of belief in German victory'.<sup>46</sup> It was in this spirit that Jodl declared, in November 1943: 'we shall win because we must win, for otherwise world history will have lost all meaning'.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>43</sup> See Part I, Chapter III.1 of the present volume. Hitler himself repeatedly referred to the planned operation as a 'limited offensive'; see Goebbels, *Die Tagebücher*, pt. 2, viii. 225 (7 May 1943).

<sup>44</sup> On this see Part I, Chapter I.3 of the present volume.

<sup>45</sup> Goebbels, *Die Tagebücher*, pt. 2, xii. 552–3 (26 June 1944).

<sup>46</sup> Ibid. 134 (18 Apr. 1944).

<sup>47</sup> Quoted in *KTB OKW*, iv. 1562. Hitler himself also constantly emphasized that they *must* win, and that there *could* be no doubts about the possibility of winning. See, e.g., Goebbels, *Die Tagebücher*, pt. 2, xiii. 155 (24 July 1944).

The interpretation presented here raises the question why, despite his early realization that there was no prospect of military success, Hitler made no attempt to reach a political settlement—as most Anglo-American intelligence experts expected—but resolutely continued the fight, in a process of internal and external radicalization, right until his own downfall. The answer to this question leads us to another basic thesis. Despite the language which the regime continued to use, it was no longer ‘final victory’, but the form his own end would take, that increasingly became for Hitler the central point of everything he thought and did during the last two and a half years of the war. By seeking to orchestrate his downfall as a great historical event (drawing on a virulent tradition of heroic self-sacrifice dating back to the Romantic movement), he hoped to transform military defeat into moral victory.

On the reasons that caused him to take this course, two central themes in particular have been the subject of detailed recent research: on the one hand, the profound impression made on him by the experience of collapse, revolution, and counter-revolution following the 1918 armistice,<sup>48</sup> and on the other, the connection between military and genocidal war, which the dictator considered indissoluble by 1941 at the latest.<sup>49</sup> Accordingly, only continuation of the war—whether it was winnable or not—would give Hitler the opportunity to physically annihilate European Jewry and thus bring his personal historic mission to a ‘successful’ conclusion. It is true that Hitler’s decision on the Holocaust was already firmly established, but more recent research<sup>50</sup> appears to confirm Martin Broszat’s earlier finding that, as the prospects of military victory faded, ‘the fateful battle against the Jews came to be depicted as the war itself’—a war which, despite everything, Hitler still believed could be won.<sup>51</sup> It is this connection between military war and genocide that explains the renewed intensification of Hitler’s ‘extermination’ rhetoric from the end of September 1942 on,<sup>52</sup> that is, from the very month that marked a major turning point in the process of his strategic disillusionment. It was by no means merely a rhetorical reinterpretation of the war, aimed at assigning world-historical significance to the failing military struggle. There was a much more concrete interconnection between what was happening in the extermination camps and the military developments. The events on the battlefield served not least of all as cover for measures to achieve the ‘final solution’, which were stepped up again precisely after Stalingrad (in France, the Ukraine, and Hungary, for example), while the genocide, for its part, constituted a decisive psychological barrier to any idea of ending the war on 1918 lines. By the time he first began to have doubts about the military outcome, the murder of approximately half a million Jews in the first five

<sup>48</sup> On this, see Large, *Where Ghosts Walked*, and Kershaw, *Hitler 1889–1936: Hubris*, chs. 4 and 5; ‘Discovering a Talent’, ‘The Beerhall Agitator’.

<sup>49</sup> Of particular interest in the context of the questions discussed here, Mayer, *Der Krieg als Kreuzzug*, and Friedrich, *Das Gesetz des Krieges*, 164–90.

<sup>50</sup> See Gerlach, ‘Die Wannsee-Konferenz’, 7–44, and Gerlach, ‘Die Ausweitung der deutschen Massenmorde’, 10–84.

<sup>51</sup> Broszat, ‘Hitler und die Genesis der Endlösung’, 771.

<sup>52</sup> For detailed evidence of this, see Mayer, *Der Krieg als Kreuzzug*, 515 ff.

months of the eastern campaign alone<sup>53</sup> must have already been for Hitler a constraint that ruled out all thought of a compromise peace. Convinced that ‘a life-and-death struggle [...] cannot be decided by diplomatic manoeuvres’,<sup>54</sup> the dictator saw from the outset no alternative to further radicalization of Germany’s conduct of the war. Goebbels got to the crux of the matter a few weeks after Stalingrad, when he noted with reference to a conversation with Göring that the latter was ‘quite clear about what threatens us all if we weaken in this war [...] On the Jewish question, above all, we are so deeply committed that there is no escape. And a good thing too. Experience shows that a movement and a people who have burnt their bridges put up a far more determined fight than those who still have the possibility of retreat.’<sup>55</sup> Hitler himself expressed the same view a few weeks later, when he assured the Romanian head of state, in remarkably similar terms, that he ‘would rather burn all the bridges, because Jewish hatred is enormous anyway’.<sup>56</sup>

While Hitler may have felt there was ‘no turning back on the road embarked upon’,<sup>57</sup> a historic way out of an entirely different kind seemed open to him. Although it involved what can certainly be described as a ‘strategic’ concept in the broader sense of the term, the implications for the historiographical discussion of German policy and conduct of the war in its second half seem not to have been fully recognized. The concept in question was that, if the war could no longer be won militarily, it should be lost in a way that would cause later generations to thrill with admiration. After a visit to Führer headquarters at the beginning of May 1943, state secretary Weizsäcker described the prevailing mood there in the following terms: ‘What they were saying was this: We shall win. If not, we shall go down with honour, fighting to the last man. That was also Frederick the Great’s motto.’<sup>58</sup>

The adoption of that attitude was prompted by the destruction of Sixth Army at Stalingrad a few months earlier. The German soldier’s ability to stand steadfast and immovable, with no thought for himself, when there seemed to be no sense in fighting and no prospect of success, was raised by Goebbels (with Hitler’s express approval) to a basic principle of his propaganda, in which the battle on the Volga was portrayed as a ‘heroic drama’ and an ‘image of truly classical grandeur’ that ‘put even the *Nibelungenlied* in the shade and [...] would endure for centuries’.<sup>59</sup> Ultimately, it was above all a matter of exploiting the shock caused by the military disaster to further radicalize the conduct of the war. The dead were to be used to obligate those still living to go to the ultimate extreme, so that their sacrifice became the measure of what was demanded in future. Entirely in this spirit, the

<sup>53</sup> See Longerich, ‘Vom Massenmord zur “Endlösung”’, 251.

<sup>54</sup> Thus, not without threatening undertones, to the Hungarian Regent, Horthy, on 16 April 1943, quoted in *Staatsmänner und Diplomaten*, pt. 2, 248.

<sup>55</sup> Goebbels, *Die Tagebücher*, pt. 2, vii. 454 (2 Mar. 1943).

<sup>56</sup> Quoted in *Staatsmänner und Diplomaten*, pt. 2, 233 (16 Apr. 1943). <sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Weizsäcker added the laconic comment: ‘I think Frederick the Great was talking about himself, not the Prussian state’ (Weizsäcker, *Die Weizsäcker-Papiere*, 337; 2 May 1943).

<sup>59</sup> Goebbels, *Die Tagebücher*, pt. 2, vii. 175 (23 Jan. 1943) and 211 (28 Jan. 1943). Goebbels’ comments about Paulus on 1 February 1943 are also instructive: ‘Fate put him in a situation where, especially as so many of his men had fallen, he had to give up fifteen or twenty years of his life to ensure that his name would live for thousands of years’ (*ibid.* 234).

SS newspaper *Das schwarze Korps* wrote that the fate of the troops who fought at Stalingrad was ‘like entering a realm from which there is no return [...] That is what they demand of us, that we all advance to the place where they now lie.’<sup>60</sup>

This interpretation, with its specific transformation of the dead into heroes, grief into pride, and defeat into victory, became the prevailing interpretative model for the subsequent events that led ultimately to the collective downfall of the Reich.<sup>61</sup> In the last two years of the war it was no longer policy or strategy, but increasingly the orchestration of this historic collective ending, that was Hitler’s main concern. Once it became necessary to leave the stage of history, he wanted at least to ‘slam the door behind him so that the whole world heard it’.<sup>62</sup> Hitler’s confidence in victory despite developments in the war—which he displayed demonstratively, although he knew better, especially from the autumn of 1943 until a few weeks before his suicide<sup>63</sup>—is not inconsistent with this aim. On the contrary, it was the necessary precondition for its achievement. Hitler was firmly (and probably quite rightly) convinced that everything depended on his personal behaviour. After all, *one* hero could ‘turn a thousand cowards into men’, just as *one* coward could ‘turn a thousand men into weaklings’.<sup>64</sup> Only a leader who remained strong and optimistic in all circumstances would be able to keep the German people with him until the very end. In an order issued on 25 November 1944, the dictator insisted that ‘a commander of German troops’ must be a man ‘who, with every mental, spiritual and physical fibre of his being, himself meets every day the demands he must make of his troops. Energy, decisiveness, firmness of character, strong conviction, and unconditional readiness for action are essential qualities in battle. Anyone who lacks those qualities, or no longer possesses them, cannot be in command and must stand down.’<sup>65</sup> There can be little doubt that Hitler took this as the standard for his own conduct too. Consequently, he saw it as his task, ‘especially since 1941’, above all ‘[not] to lose his nerve in any circumstances but, wherever there was a [collapse], always to[find] some way out, some way of remedying the situation’.<sup>66</sup> The more hopeless Germany’s situation became, the more important he felt it was for him, as

<sup>60</sup> Quoted in Kumpfmüller, *Die Schlacht von Stalingrad*, 71. See also Bernig, *Eingekesselt*, 233 ff. Contemporary works of art depicting the dead are in the same category, e.g. Rudolf Warnecke’s woodcut *Soldiers’ Graves*, bearing the inscription: ‘War graves are fields of eternal victory, sown with the seeds of fame’, repr. in Schmidt, ‘Maler an der Front’, 679.

<sup>61</sup> Typical examples include Guderian, who declared exultantly, in a speech he made at a Home Guard swearing-in ceremony on 6 November in his capacity as chief of the Army General Staff, that ‘the invincibility of our generation’ would still be spoken of ‘hundreds of years from now’ (quoted in Schwendemann, ‘Strategie der Selbstvernichtung’, 228).

<sup>62</sup> Thus Goebbels in the spring of 1945, quoted in Heiber, *Goebbels*, 391. Fest, *Der Untergang*, 71, quotes the minister as saying: ‘But when we bow out, let the whole earth shake.’

<sup>63</sup> According to Speer, *Erinnerungen*, 305, Hitler had appeared ‘depressed at times’ from the spring of 1942 to the summer of 1943. ‘But after that, a remarkable change seemed to take place. He generally appeared confident of final victory, even in desperate situations.’ See also Below, *Als Hitlers Adjutant*, 361, according to which Hitler alternated ‘between an occasionally sober, indeed serious way of looking at things and unjustified confidence’.

<sup>64</sup> Hitler, *Reden, Schriften, Anordnungen. Februar 1925 bis Januar 1933*, iv/I. 31 (25 Oct. 1930).

<sup>65</sup> Quoted in Kunz, ‘Die Wehrmacht in der Agonie’, 110.

<sup>66</sup> Thus to Generals Westphal, Krebs, and Keitel in a briefing on 31 August 1944, quoted in *Hitlers Lagebesprechungen*, 611.

'a shining example of the National Socialist fighting spirit', to 'restore confidence among his military commanders', depressed as they were by the constant setbacks.<sup>67</sup> In a conversation in the spring of 1944, he explained that the mass of people basically wanted to be led like a military company, and he explicitly likened his own role to that of the commander of a military unit: 'What a disastrous impression it would make if a company commander were to tell his men, in a difficult situation, that he himself did not really know what to do at the moment.'<sup>68</sup>

In fact, it is one of Hitler's most remarkable, but also one of his most fateful, achievements as leader that he only rarely gave his associates that impression. It is true that he openly admitted that he was strategically at a loss on at least one occasion, when he confessed to Dönitz in the summer of 1943—at the height of the Kursk offensive—that he was 'muddling along from one month to the next'.<sup>69</sup> This was a notable lapse, but it was not typical of the way Hitler presented himself to his inner or outer circle. Visitors who met their Führer in less informal situations than Nikolaus von Below, on the other hand, had very little chance of seeing through the façade. So, for example, in an interview given soon after the end of the war, Zeitzler, who as chief of the Army General Staff had had occasion to observe Hitler for years in daily situation briefings, gave the following possibly exaggerated but probably essentially accurate account of his general behaviour: 'Never spoke a word—even in private!—that was not deliberate. Probably never spoke or acted on impulse. What looked like acting on impulse was usually deliberate! An amazing achievement.'<sup>70</sup>

Trusting in the enduring cohesive power of the image he presented, Hitler was able—with very little resistance—to organize the war as a 'heroic downfall'. Measures such as the preparation of an 'East Wall', the adoption of 'scorched earth' tactics, the designation of strongholds and 'fortified places' that were to be held at all costs, and the continuation of counter-offensives that had no prospect of success and involved heavy losses—all this had less to do with the strategic outcome of the war than with setting the scene for its end. The culmination of this self-destructive conduct of war was the 'scorched earth' policy which Hitler sought to introduce in his own country with the 'Nero Decree' of 19 March 1945.<sup>71</sup> The decree ordered the destruction of 'all military transport and communications facilities, industrial establishments, and supply depots, as well as anything else of value within Reich territory', because if the war was lost, then the people too were

<sup>67</sup> Thus Goebbels' enthusiastic impression on 2 December 1944 in the run-up to the Ardennes offensive (*Die Tagebücher*, pt. 2, xiv. 321).

<sup>68</sup> Quoted in *Staatsmänner und Diplomaten*, pt. 2, 379 (16 Mar. 1944). Consciously or unconsciously, Hitler was engaging in the cult of the leader promulgated in the nationalistic poetry of his generation and popularized by Flex, for example, in his poem 'Leutnantsdienst' (repr. in Flex, *Im Felde*).

<sup>69</sup> KTB Skl, pt. A, xlvi. 635-A, n. 90 (9 July 1943). Significantly, this statement was omitted in the version of the minutes of the meeting approved by Dönitz.

<sup>70</sup> Müller-Hillebrand, note of 11 April 1948 on a conversation with Zeitzler the day before, BA-MA N 553/v. 42. According to Below, *Als Hitlers Adjutant*, 352, Zeitzler had already ceased to believe 'a single word that Hitler said' in November 1943.

<sup>71</sup> See *Führer-Erlasse*, doc. 394, 486–7.

lost. There was therefore ‘no need to consider what the German people would require for primitive survival’.<sup>72</sup>

Significantly, the ‘Nero Decree’ was not the desperate act of a dictator suddenly driven mad by delusions of victory, but simply the end result of a long-term policy of self-destruction.<sup>73</sup> Hitler had already informed the relevant ministries of his intentions in this connection in the late summer of 1944, and had prepared the German public for the unthinkable. ‘Not a blade of German grass shall feed the enemy,’ read a leading article by the dictator himself in the *Völkischer Beobachter* of 7 September 1944. ‘No German mouth shall give them information. No German hand shall offer them help. They shall find every bridge destroyed, every road barred. They shall meet with nothing but death, destruction, and hatred.’<sup>74</sup>

To the historian judging it with hindsight, Hitler’s unmistakable recourse to battle as an end in itself after the military failures in the Caucasus, at Stalingrad, and in North Africa—and his concomitant acceptance, affirmation, and staging of his own downfall—seems an unparalleled act of monstrous cynicism, but to the dictator and part of the generation that had consciously experienced the end of the First World War, it was a thoroughly familiar concept. Hitler, and no few of his henchmen, saw themselves as consummators of a quasi-Romantic tradition in which not only was war glorified as an inspiring and rejuvenating element in the life of nations and a vehicle of moral progress and national integration, but defeat and downfall—even more than victory—were celebrated as the hero’s hour. According to this understanding, the greatest manifestation of the human—or, to be more precise, masculine—will was the readiness to defy the superior power of destiny and face one’s own end without fear.<sup>75</sup> It was no accident that the *Nibelungenlied*, with its pathos of death, was so popular with German Romantics,<sup>76</sup> and that Richard Wagner’s interpretation thereof was probably the strongest formative experience in the life of the young Hitler, who admired, above all in the figure of Siegfried, the ‘magnificent mystery of the dying hero’.<sup>77</sup> It provided an interpretative model which propagandists and interpreters of their own downfall could easily invoke at any time. That the events at Stalingrad invited this interpretation is clear, both from the comments by Goebbels referred to earlier and, above all, from Göring’s notorious appeal to the Wehrmacht on 30 January 1943, in which he likened the final battles in the metropolis on the Volga to the fight in

<sup>72</sup> See Speer, *Erinnerungen*, 446. On the context, see Eichholz, *Geschichte der deutschen Kriegswirtschaft*, iii. 662 ff., and Sereny, *Albert Speer: His Battle with the Truth*, ch. 18.

<sup>73</sup> See also Hitler’s directive of 16 September 1944, which anticipated the spirit of the ‘Nero Decree’. Extracts from that directive are quoted in Part VII, Chapter I of the present volume.

<sup>74</sup> Quoted in Speer, *Erinnerungen*, 412.

<sup>75</sup> On this see, *inter alia*, Zimmer, *Auf dem Altar des Vaterlandes*, 58 ff., Portmann-Tinguely, *Romantik und Krieg*, 387 ff., and Stolpe, ‘Wilde Freude, fürchterliche Schönheit’, 37–53.

<sup>76</sup> For a detailed discussion, see Krausse, ‘Zur Darstellung des Todes im Nibelungenlied’, 245–257, Ehrismann, ‘Siegfried’, 39 ff., and Swanton, ‘Heroes, Heroism and Heroic Literature’.

<sup>77</sup> Statement made by Hitler in 1936, quoted in Fest, *Hitler*, 684. See also Hamann, *Hitlers Wien*, 89 ff., and Köhler, *Wagners Hitler*, 11 ff.

Etzel's hall, and proclaimed that Stalingrad would be remembered by future generations as the place where 'Germany set the seal on final victory'<sup>78</sup>

In addition to the Nibelungen material, the repertoire of downfall rhetoric mustered by the National Socialist leadership in the second half of the war mainly consisted of the works of authors and poets dating from the 1813 'War of Liberation'. Apart from the universally recognizable symbolic reference to 1813,<sup>79</sup> it seems to have been mainly their intoxicating affirmation of death that destined poets like Ernst Moritz Arndt, Max von Schenkendorf, and above all Theodor Körner to be the main witnesses of National Socialist downfall ideology. Körner, for example, had seen himself as one of the 'martyrs in the holy German cause', prepared, 'in bold and joyful sacrifice', 'to throw their young bodies with delight into the fray'. 'Your heart beats high, high grow your oaks, what matter then your piles of corpses? Plant freedom's banner high upon them!'<sup>80</sup> It is hardly surprising that Körner's name is also linked with the events at Stalingrad. In his speech at the Sportpalast on 18 February 1943, Goebbels' framed his call for total war in the words of the opening lines of one of Körner's poems: 'Now people arise and storm break forth!'<sup>81</sup> Just a year before his own war was unleashed, Hitler recalled with enthusiasm that long ago, in his youth, he himself had 'so often sung that same song with a heart full of belief'.<sup>82</sup>

There is no need, for the purposes of this discussion, to consider whether, and to what extent, the National Socialist leadership's references to historical and literary precedents were internally consistent or justified. The only question is by whom the material was invoked and whose interests it served. There is much to support the view that, for Hitler at least, invoking the Romantic gesture of self-destruction was more than a propaganda device to boost the troops' fighting spirit. On the contrary, it appears to have furnished the dictator with the ideological model and historical justification for his own orchestration of downfall.

In this respect, possibly the most illuminating example is Hitler's invocation of Clausewitz, which, although both frequent and consistent, has so far been mentioned only in passing in the relevant historiography.<sup>83</sup> Hitler had already concerned himself with the works of the Prussian military theorist before the First World War,<sup>84</sup> and repeatedly referred to them in his speeches, writings, and conversation from 1921 until the very eve of his death. Remarkably frequent—especially in

<sup>78</sup> Quoted in Krüger, 'Etzels Halle und Stalingrad', 180.

<sup>79</sup> The evidence for this is too extensive to be listed in detail here; suffice it to mention institutions such as the Iron Cross.

<sup>80</sup> Quotations from Körner's poems 'Die Eichen' (1810) and 'Aufruf' (1813). On the context, see also Lutz, *Vom Sterben im Krieg*, 36 ff.

<sup>81</sup> On the historical significance of the speech, see Moltmann, 'Goebbels' Rede', and Boelcke, 'Goebbels und die Kundgebung im Berliner Sportpalast'.

<sup>82</sup> Quoted in Hamann, *Hitlers Wien*, 25. On Körner and on the question of the historical significance of National Socialist images of the hero, see also Schilling, 'Die soziale Konstruktion', id., 'Die "Helden der Wehrmacht"', and lastly id., *Kriegshelden*, ch. 1.

<sup>83</sup> The few exceptions include Tallgren, *Hitler und die Helden*, 243–52, and Maser, *Adolf Hitler*, 24 ff. The still controversial question of the extent to which Hitler actually applied Clausewitz's principles in his conduct of the war is of secondary importance here.

<sup>84</sup> For evidence, see Maser, *Adolf Hitler*, 242–3.

the early twenties and the later war years—are the references to Clausewitz's 'Memorandum of Confession', written in the spring of 1812,<sup>85</sup> in which the author, then at a turning point in his life, appears as passionate patriot rather than cool theorist. The first part of the memorandum contains the following passage:

I believe and confess that a people can value nothing more highly than the dignity and liberty of its existence; that it must defend these to the last drop of its blood; that there is no higher duty to fulfil, no higher law to obey; that the shameful blot of cowardly submission can never be erased;

That this drop of poison in the blood of a nation is passed on to posterity, crippling and eroding the strength of future generations, that one can only lose one's honour once; [...]

That even the destruction of liberty after a bloody and honourable struggle assures the people's rebirth. It is the seed of life which one day will bring forth a new, securely rooted tree;

I solemnly declare before the world and posterity that the false cunning with which little men would avoid danger is to me the worst consequence of fear and anxiety; [...]

That I would be only too happy to find a glorious death in the splendid struggle for freedom and dignity of the fatherland!<sup>86</sup>

Significantly, these are the passages to which Hitler referred over and over again throughout his life, and which must have impressed him more than anything else in Clausewitz's works. To him, they seemed 'forged for our time [...] word for word'.<sup>87</sup> They served as the rhetorical weapons with which Hitler, the young party platform speaker, attacked the 'system politics' of the Weimar Republic,<sup>88</sup> Hitler the putschist defended his actions in court,<sup>89</sup> and Hitler the political theorist grounded his understanding of the 'right of emergency defence'.<sup>90</sup> In the run-up to the launch of war in 1939, Hitler again attuned his civilian and military comrades to the words of Clausewitz's 'Memorandum',<sup>91</sup> and in the following years too he left no doubt that it would serve as his guideline for action. The reference to Clausewitz's 'Memorandum' was present in Hitler's last brief radio message to the commander-in-chief of Sixth Army, on the point of destruction in Stalingrad, where the confession was 'about to find fulfilment',<sup>92</sup> as well as in Jodl's November 1943 speech, already mentioned, the conclusion of which was

<sup>85</sup> Repr. in Clausewitz, *Politische Schriften und Briefe*, 80–119.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid. 85–6.

<sup>87</sup> 'Völkischer Beobachter', 24 Nov. 1925, quoted in Hitler, *Reden, Schriften, Anordnungen*, i, doc. 84, 217.

<sup>88</sup> See, for the period 1921 to 1925 alone, the references in Hitler, *Sämtliche Aufzeichnungen*, 330, 444, 692, 1201–2, and Hitler, *Reden, Schriften, Anordnungen*, i. 58, 212–13, 216, 252.

<sup>89</sup> On Hitler's closing speech on 27 March 1924, see Boepple, *Adolf Hitlers Reden*, 113.

<sup>90</sup> Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 759–60.

<sup>91</sup> As in his speeches on 14 September 1936 and 8 November 1938 (see Tallgren, *Hitler und die Helden*, 246), and in his address on 10 February 1939, repr. in Dülffer, Thies, and Henke, *Hitlers Städte*, 309.

<sup>92</sup> Radio message, 30 Jan. 1943, BA-MA RL 30/5.

formulated in very similar terms to the sentences of Clausewitz quoted above.<sup>93</sup> Those same sentences are to be found on leaflets inserted in German officers' paybooks, and it was they which still motivated the dictator on the eve of his suicide, when, invoking the spirit of Clausewitz, he called for the fight against 'the enemies of the Fatherland' to continue.<sup>94</sup>

A look at the First World War shows the effect that the tradition of self-destructive idealism, briefly outlined here, had on Hitler's own generation. The pomp and circumstance of the centenary celebrations held in the year before the war had already shown that, although the political situation as a whole was now completely different, the 'ideas of 1813' were still—or rather, were once again—very much alive.<sup>95</sup> It was the spirit of the German liberation wars (rather than, say, the spirit of the foundation of the Reich in 1870/1) which appeared to the enthusiastic protagonists of war in 1914 as 'the truly congenial parallel'.<sup>96</sup> Celebrating war as 'the eternal form of higher human existence',<sup>97</sup> they connected seamlessly with the cult of unconditional dedication—that is, dedication that asks for no success—developed a hundred years earlier. In the age of mass armies, what had been a personal need of individual volunteers in the War of Liberation was radically transformed into a collective demand for self-commitment, whereby all were required to make the supreme sacrifice. Readiness to die was raised to the criterion separating the worthy from the unworthy.<sup>98</sup> The precious element in 'German fidelity', as the German philologist Gustav Roethe put it in 1915, 'is the unreserved commitment of the whole man who, without haggling or weighing the cost, stands firm to the end, even if it leaves the whole world in ruins'.<sup>99</sup> This was more than one lone voice, as the Reich Chancellor, Max von Baden, discovered to his cost in the autumn of 1918, when he agreed to Erich Ludendorff's request that he take political steps to end the war. His decision was by no means universally approved. It also met with protests from national associations, ecclesiastical circles, and women's organizations, insisting even then that the country 'fight to the end'.

The calls from publicists and war poets, theologians and men of letters were increasingly put into practice by the armed forces. When the German Admiralty ordered the High Seas Fleet to attack in October 1918—an order which resulted in a naval mutiny—it was from the outset not for solely military purposes but also—indeed, primarily—in order to orchestrate an honourable collective defeat.<sup>100</sup> That too was the decisive motive for the scuttling of the fleet at Scapa Flow in June of the following year.<sup>101</sup> And the military men who, enraged by the terms of the Versailles peace treaty, called for the war to be resumed in 1919 were well aware that their

<sup>93</sup> See *KTB OKW*, iv. 1562.

<sup>94</sup> *Hitlers politisches Testament*, quoted in *KTB OKW*, iv. 1668.

<sup>95</sup> See Siemann, 'Krieg und Frieden', 298–320.

<sup>96</sup> Thus, with numerous detailed examples, Burkhardt, 'Kriegsgrund Geschichte?', 37.

<sup>97</sup> Oswald Spengler, quoted in Münkler and Storch, *Siegfrieden*, 109.

<sup>98</sup> See also Behrenbeck, 'Heldenkult', 143–59.

<sup>99</sup> Quoted in Krüger, 'Etzels Halle und Stalingrad', 165.

<sup>100</sup> Thus Deist, 'Die Politik der Seekriegsleitung'.

<sup>101</sup> See also Shephard, 'Death of a Fleet', and Krause, *Scapa Flow*.

demands made no military sense, but they nevertheless held that the fight must continue, even at the cost of destroying the Reich, for the sake of ‘honour’ alone.<sup>102</sup>

The same self-destructive concept of honour was popularized by nationalist war writers in the years that followed. Claiming that only the fallen soldier, ‘a figure belonging to eternity’, was truly immortal, Ernst Jünger, for example, called for the training of a warrior type ‘capable of seeing death as the highest freedom’.<sup>103</sup> ‘Man’s deepest happiness is to be sacrificed, and the highest art of command is to show him goals worthy of sacrifice.’<sup>104</sup> Writing at the same time, Ernst von Salomon prefigured the end of the Third Reich, extolling the men of the ‘lost company’ who, deprived of hope, lit a funeral pyre ‘in which ideas, values, demands, and norms were reduced to blackened crusts’—men for whom all that remained was ‘to consign themselves to the harsh splendour of their fate’.<sup>105</sup>

These ideas did not fail to impact the self-image of the professional soldier. On the occasion of the Langemark commemoration in Berlin in 1934, Field Bishop Franz Dohrmann, for example, urged German youth to be ‘readier to die joyfully’.<sup>106</sup> And two years later the following passage appeared in the semi-official *Manual of Modern Military Science*, under the heading ‘The Art of War’: ‘Even attacking with no hope of victory, attacking for its own sake, may be justified as a last act of desperation that leads to a heroic end instead of ignominious surrender’.<sup>107</sup> The same spirit marked an order issued by Grand Admiral Dönitz on 10 February 1944. Invoking the ‘time-proven naval tradition that the commander of a ship fights with his crew to the last shell’, it was left to the commander’s discretion whether to allow himself to be rescued once he had done his duty, ‘as the officer in question cannot know what further tasks await him in his country’s service’. But at the same time, it was emphasized that ‘a different standard’ applied to the conduct of senior naval commanders: ‘A commander who goes down with his ship will live on in the history of the German nation as an emblem of the highest soldierly virtue and the finest German fulfilment of duty. His heroic death renders the greatest service to the fighting spirit of later generations of soldiers and to their military training’.<sup>108</sup>

These demands with regard to the conduct of war at the operational level were fulfilled by Hitler at the strategic level. He was not the inventor of the ideology of self-destruction, but its final executor. Consciously or not, he resembled the type of the ‘heroic idealist’ who, following Ernst Jünger, ‘was capable of passionately blowing himself up and seeing that very act as confirmation of the rightful order’.<sup>109</sup> For

<sup>102</sup> For examples, see Breit, *Staats- und Gesellschaftsbild deutscher Generale*, 109–10. No less a figure than Hindenburg declared at the time that he doubted whether there was any chance of military success if the fight was resumed, but that he must, ‘as a soldier, prefer an honourable fall to an ignominious peace’ (quoted in Wohlfeil, ‘Heer und Republik’, 89).

<sup>103</sup> Jünger, *Der Arbeiter*, 37–8.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid. 71. On the context, see Bohrer, *Die Ästhetik des Schreckens*.

<sup>105</sup> Salomon, ‘Der verlorene Haufe’, 126.

<sup>106</sup> Quoted in Schilling, ‘Die “Helden der Wehrmacht”’, 557.

<sup>107</sup> *Handbuch der neuzeitlichen Wehrwissenschaften*, i. 212.

<sup>108</sup> Directive issued by Dönitz on 10 Feb. 1944, BA-MA RM 7/1099.

<sup>109</sup> Ernst Jünger, quoted in Mohler, *Die konservative Revolution*, 126. The establishment of a suicide squadron to attack the invasion fleet with manned flying bombs was in fact discussed in

Hitler too, a heroic end was no meaningless act of desperation. It was not the physical destruction of the people that he feared, but their social destruction. He had already expressed the view, in *Mein Kampf*, that peoples do not necessarily perish as a result of lost wars, but only when ‘military defeat is the payment meted out for their inner rottenness, cowardice, lack of character, in short, unworthiness’.<sup>110</sup> Conversely, a heroic end might be a chance, rather than a loss. The closing years of the Second World War can therefore—as the prospect of victory became ever more remote—be seen as a ‘second-best solution’. They marked the Führer’s failure as a politician, but not as a theoretician. Hitler had already drawn a clear distinction between politicians and theoreticians in *Mein Kampf*, explaining that, while ‘the art of the politician is the art of the possible, the theoretician is one of those of whom it can be said that they are pleasing to the gods only if they demand and want the impossible. [...] For the greater a man’s works for the future, the less the present can comprehend them, the harder his fight, the rarer success.’<sup>111</sup>

Hitler clearly regarded himself, especially in the years of his definitive political and military failure, as one of the ‘marathon runners of history’ who, ‘not understood by the present, are nevertheless prepared to carry the fight for their ideas and ideals to their end’.<sup>112</sup> At all events, as his own end approached, the dictator increasingly placed hope in a more distant future.<sup>113</sup> Although, in the closing phase of the war, he had repeatedly painted a dismal picture of the complete destruction threatening a defeated Germany, in the last weeks of the war he often let it be known that ‘even this vision of horror’ could not take from him ‘his unshakeable belief in the future of the German people. [...] The more we shall have to suffer, the more spectacularly will the imperishable Reich rise again!’ It remained a ‘law of nature in this cruel age [...] that only those white peoples who are capable of holding out and, devoid of hope, still have the courage to fight to the death, only they have the prospect of surviving and flourishing once more’.<sup>114</sup> And, on the day before his death, he dictated the following sentence to Bormann, once again invoking Clausewitz: ‘Through the sacrifices of our soldiers and my own fellowship with them unto death, a seed has been sown in German history that will one day grow to usher in the glorious rebirth of the National Socialist movement in a truly united nation.’<sup>115</sup>

Luftwaffe circles in 1944; see *Germany and the Second World War*, vii. 336–7. And in October 1944, when the Allies were expected to advance into Germany, Himmler even spoke enthusiastically of using the population to turn the territory of the Reich into ‘a living minefield’ (address to the men of the Prussian Home Guard, 13 Oct. 1944, quoted in Kunz, ‘Die Wehrmacht in der Agonie’, 105).

<sup>110</sup> Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 250. On interpretation, see also Zehnpfennig, *Hitlers Mein Kampf*, 112–13.

<sup>111</sup> Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 231–2. <sup>112</sup> Ibid. 232.

<sup>113</sup> On Hitler’s concept of the future, see Kroll, ‘Geschichte und Politik im Weltbild Hitlers’, 338–9.

<sup>114</sup> Hitler, *Hitlers politisches Testament*, 121 and 125 (2 Apr. 1945).

<sup>115</sup> Quoted in *KTB OKW*, iv. 1668 (29 Apr. 1945). On similar allegorical lines, Hitler had already imagined, in the years and decades preceding his failed putsch in November 1923, that the ‘blood of the fallen’ in his movement would be transformed into ‘water to baptize the Reich’; Reichel, *Der schöne Schein*, 221.

Here, at the latest, the contradiction always inherent in Hitler's world-view between Romanticism's 'sacrificial hero' and the 'leader-hero' of Social Darwinism is unmistakable.<sup>116</sup> While the leader-hero had repeatedly warned that, if it became weak, the German people would rightly be destroyed and would not be worth lamenting,<sup>117</sup> the sacrificial hero appeared to find hope precisely in hopelessness. The leader-hero was defined exclusively and directly by victory, the sacrificial hero by his end. That end was, in the Romantic view, not so much an end as a beginning, containing the seed of an all the more glorious future victory. By finally resorting to the role of the dying hero—a role which he, as an 'artist', had always admired<sup>118</sup>—Hitler apparently left the Social Darwinist behind him in a final attempt to give a sense to what had long been senseless.

<sup>116</sup> For a fundamental discussion of this question, see Behrenbeck, *Der Kult um die toten Helden*, 99 ff.

<sup>117</sup> Thus, again, to Speer on 18 March 1945; see Speer, *Erinnerungen*, 446.

<sup>118</sup> Mention should be made, in this connection, of the lasting impression that Wagner's opera *Rienzi* made on the young Hitler. The overture to this work, which deals with the rise and fall of the tribune celebrated and eventually betrayed by the people of Rome, was played every year at the opening of the Party congress in Nuremberg; see Hamann, *Hitlers Wien*, 39–40. In this connection, Joachim Fest has aptly observed that Hitler 'regarded the avoidance of downfall as one of struggling humanity's original sins'; see Fest, *Fremdheit und Nähe*, 296–7.

# Concluding Summary

*Karl-Heinz Frieser*

From today's viewpoint, the war unleashed by Hitler must be considered to have been lost by the end of 1941. After the collapse of the blitzkrieg strategy in the autumn of 1941 and the failure of the 'second campaign' against the Soviet Union a year later, the German command, as Bernd Wegner explains in his introductory chapter, was at an end—not yet operationally but nevertheless strategically, in terms of 'grand strategy'. Largely forced onto the defensive, it no longer had any coherent overall strategic conception of how the war could be brought to a victorious, or at least tolerable, conclusion. The 'stand firm strategy' characteristic of German conduct of the war from 1943 to 1945 was essentially a defensive concept geared solely to gaining time, *without* any strategy.

The dilemma facing the German command rested on a series of systemic and external factors. Among the latter, the main problem was the unfavourable evolution of human and material resources. Despite the conversion to a 'total war' economy, the losses could scarcely be made good any longer. Instead, Germany was increasingly failing to keep up with the dynamic growth of the Allies' mobilization and production capacities. The problem of the increasingly asymmetrical distribution of resources between the two sides was further aggravated from 1943 on by the growing interconnection between the European theatres of war. This interdependence of the eastern and southern European theatres is shown in exemplary fashion by Hitler's decision to break off Operation CITADEL.

Both the new front in Italy and the threat of a 'second front' in the west or north of the continent helped to undermine Germany's military action on the eastern front. The Allies' ability to attack 'Fortress Europe' at many different points imposed the need for defensive preparations all the way from Norway to France and from Italy to Greece. More and more units had to be withdrawn from the east, constantly reducing the strength of Germany's eastern army, while the size of the Red Army—despite horrendous losses—reached new heights. For that reason, as Foreign Armies East clearly recognized, further setbacks were virtually programmed in advance. The collapse of the centre of the eastern front in June 1944—which, in contrast to the invasion of France taking place at the same time, has almost entirely disappeared from German historical consciousness—was the dramatic consequence of that development. To Hitler, however, the most heavily contested theatre of operations no longer seemed the most important. In the course of 1943 he had

come to the conclusion that strategic victory in the east was scarcely possible any longer, whereas strategic defeat in the west might yet be avoided. Führer Directive No. 51 was therefore based on the premiss that Germany was more directly threatened by an invasion in the west (if only for geographical reasons) than by further setbacks in the east.

From 1943 on, the discrepancy between strategic necessities and available resources led to a heightening of already existing tensions within the German command. That is true of the conflict between the Army and Wehrmacht High Commands caused by separation of the OKH and OKW theatres of war, which developed into a bitter battle for the allocation of dwindling resources. But in relations between Hitler and his generals too, the mutual distrust which had always been apparent, and was outweighed by euphoria only in times of military success, increasingly became the basis of their daily joint activity. Suggestions for a political end to the war remained undiscussed, as did proposals for reform of the top military leadership. Spectacular proclamations of the top generals' loyalty to their Führer took the place of systematic discussion of the strategic situation and the consequences to be drawn from it. In reality, there existed in the Third Reich neither a war cabinet nor any other body competent to deal with fundamental issues of war and peace. The dictator himself, a man increasingly marked by overstrain and illness, was and remained the only organ responsible for issues of overall strategy. This situation was doubtless advantageous for Hitler's standing in his regime, but for the difficult conduct of a total war it was certainly disastrous.

## OPERATIONS ON THE EASTERN FRONT

Hitler's offensive plans in the war against the Soviet Union grew more modest from year to year. In the summer of 1941 the dictator had still believed he could shatter the Red Army in a blitzkrieg in a matter of months. For the summer of 1942, however, he planned a campaign aimed at conquering the raw-materials base needed for continuation of the war. In the summer of 1943 the offensive in the Kursk area was only *operational* in character. Thereafter, until the end of the war, the German forces conducted only local counter-attacks.

The decisive strategic paradigm shift occurred at the end of 1941, after the failure of the blitzkrieg approach in the winter battle before Moscow. That was when the nightmare of the First World War—a war of attrition lasting for years, which the German command had wanted to avoid at all costs—became a reality. Hitler's 'second campaign' against the Soviet Union in the following year was no longer planned strategically as a blitzkrieg. After its failure in the spring of 1943, a further paradigm shift took place: Hitler increasingly moved the point of main effort from the eastern front to the west of the continent. Faced with the realization that the Red Army could no longer be decisively defeated, he refrained from any further strategic offensive. For the summer of 1943 he planned only a 'limited offensive' in the Kursk area. While that was under way, a new danger loomed in the rear of the eastern front as the western Allies prepared to land in Italy from North

Africa. Germany would have to fight a multi-front war, and only a small window of time remained before it started. To forestall coordinated action by his enemies, Hitler planned to concentrate all his forces one last time on the eastern front and deal the Red Army a punishing blow.

In this operation the Army High Command had only two limited aims. One was to establish a more favourable defensive line by slicing off the Kursk salient, so as to be able to withdraw troops for the anticipated second front against the western powers. The other was to deal the Soviet forces massed in the Kursk salient a preventive blow before they could begin their summer avalanche offensive, that is, to attack the waiting avalanche before it started to roll. Operation CITADEL was thus only a relief attack from the strategic defensive. Hitler was by no means an unequivocal advocate of the Kursk offensive, mainly because his closest advisers in the Wehrmacht High Command were opposed to it. They did not want the precious armoured reserves to be sacrificed in the east for tactical/operational objectives, when they were needed in the west for the strategic purpose of preventing a multi-front war.

The failure of Operation CITADEL was virtually programmed in advance, since the attackers were facing forces that were many times superior and entrenched in a deep defensive system. But the main reason why Hitler broke off the offensive was an event that occurred 3,000 kilometres away. Scarcely had the German units penetrated the first Soviet lines when American and British troops landed in Sicily. In that situation, the dictator reacted exactly as he had already decided to do in the event of an Allied landing: he stopped the offensive in the east. By coincidence, the greatest armoured battle of the war took place at the same time to the south of Kursk—a battle that was later to be raised to the status of a legend. According to the Soviet version, the outcome of the war was still balanced on a knife edge, and it was settled in a titanic tank battle at Prokhorovka in which Soviet forces ‘broke the neck’ of the German armour.

In truth, the battle of Kursk was by no means a turning point in the Second World War, whose outcome was long since decided. Even if the German plan had succeeded and the two pincer arms had joined at Kursk, it would have been only another of the habitual ‘lost victories’, that is, a temporary operational success, and would soon have been rendered meaningless by the war on two fronts now beginning. Moreover, at Prokhorovka the Red Army suffered a fiasco. Whereas the German armour emerged from the clash with insignificant losses, those inflicted on the Soviet armoured units were catastrophic. And that is true of the battle of Kursk overall. The Red Army lost a total of over 6,000 fighting vehicles, more than eight times as many as the Germans. The Wehrmacht’s preventive strike was thus a partial success, since it took the impetus out of the ensuing Soviet summer offensive. Stalin had planned to advance to the German border in 1943, but only managed to do so a year later.

The real turning point in the summer of 1943 was the Allied landing in Italy, since it marked the beginning of the two-front war in Europe. In its conflict with the Soviet Union, Germany had actually been obliged from the outset to conduct a multi-front war at sea, in the air, and also on land. That factor—and with it, the

role of the worldwide British empire—has so far been underestimated in both Soviet and British historiography. The United States too, as an economic super-power, supplied the Soviet war economy with aid under the lend-lease programme that was of considerable strategic importance from 1943 on. The air forces of the western Allies proved especially dangerous. While the greatest land-air battle in history was taking place at Kursk, the Luftwaffe lost in Italy and on the ‘home front’ many times more aircraft than were shot down on the eastern front.

After the failure of Operation CITADEL the Red Army finally gained the initiative, while for the German troops there began the phase of continuous setbacks and withdrawal battles. Hitler sought to prevent that development by holding on rigidly to specified areas—an approach exaggeratedly described as a ‘stand firm strategy’. That led to a lasting dispute between him and some of his generals over the rival concepts of ‘mobile’ versus ‘rigid’ defence. The dictator refused to give up space and stubbornly insisted on linear forward defence, whereas his generals, having regard to Russia’s vast expanses, wanted to use space as a weapon and adopt mobile operation. Such ‘free operation’, however, was both difficult and risky. It required a high degree of professional command expertise, which Hitler did not possess. To him, ‘operating’ often seemed merely an excuse for rearward withdrawal. The longer the war lasted, the more strongly he enforced his will. At first, the German generals still possessed some room for manoeuvre. Although they were unable to stop the Red Army permanently by means of their ‘offensive defence’, the Soviet forces had to pay dearly for every territorial gain. During that phase the Wehrmacht was still in a position, even in the case of bitter defeats, to inflict many more times as many losses on the enemy as it suffered itself.

The main problem for German conduct of the war in the east was that Hitler had gone over to strategic defence without carrying it through consistently at operational level. Above all, he ought to have chosen a favourable defensive line that enabled him to repel Soviet attacks durably. In the late summer of 1943 his military advisers urged him to carry out a large-scale withdrawal to the ‘Panther Line’, which was formed by wide rivers like the Dnieper. That shortening of the front would have freed up enough units to create an operational reserve at last. The dictator, however, wanted to hold on to every little front salient. Above all, he refused to withdraw from the Donets Basin, which was important for Germany’s war economy, even though he lacked the forces to defend it. When he finally did authorize withdrawal, it was far too late. The mechanized Soviet units won the race to the Dnieper and were able to establish bridgeheads in several places.

In the winter of 1943/4 the Red Army conducted a major offensive along the whole front, from Leningrad to the Black Sea. Once again, Hitler’s ‘stand firm’ mania had disastrous consequences. He repeatedly brought about a fiasco by his constant refusal to withdraw in time. Instead of active delaying combat, there was often only hasty flight from a threatening encirclement. But sometimes the trap snapped shut. At the end of March, First Armoured Army was enclosed by seven Soviet armies at Kamenets Podolsky. Its destruction would have meant the collapse of the eastern front’s whole southern wing. In that situation, Field Marshal von Manstein pulled off an operational master stroke, rescuing First Armoured Army

from the trap and outmanoeuvring his opponent, Marshal Zhukov. But his most dangerous opponent was Hitler, who once again wanted to reject a breakout. The dictator acceded to Manstein's demand only when the field marshal threatened to resign. And soon afterwards Hitler relieved him of his command.

Manstein's dismissal was a highly symbolic act that introduced a new paradigm shift. Hitler announced that the time for large-scale operations in the east was over. Instead, what was needed was simply to 'stand firm rigidly'. With that, one of the dictator's most disastrous ideas came into play: the concept of 'fortified places'. According to Führer Order No. 11, the troops concentrated in places so designated should voluntarily allow themselves to be enclosed, in order to tie down the strongest possible enemy forces. Up till then, the dictator had wanted to defend lines rather than operating flexibly in space. Now he narrowed his defensive concept to points. He believed that, in using such 'fortified places' as breakwaters, he had found the recipe for stemming the flood of enemy attacks.

In reality, however, Hitler's obsession with rigid defence on the eastern front arose from a hazardous offensive strategy which, for 1944, can be expressed by the simple formula: 'strike in the west, hold on in the east.' But that was an all-or-nothing game. The dictator planned on inflicting a decisive defeat on the Allied invasion troops on the coast, so as to turn the tide of war. In pursuing that idea, he worked himself up into an 'autosuggestive euphoria' (Albert Speer). At the same time, however, his interest in the eastern front visibly declined. He sent more and more tanks and aircraft to the OKW's western theatre of war, although the units in the OKH's eastern theatre had long been obliged to fight a 'poor man's war'. Most alarming of all was the fact that there was no operational reserve immediately available in the event of a Soviet breakthrough. That reserve was 2,300 kilometres away, on the western front. Hitler's intention was to throw 35 divisions onto the eastern front immediately after victory on the Atlantic, and return to the offensive. That scenario is reminiscent of the Schlieffen Plan, according to which a decisive battle would first be fought in the west and the bulk of troops would then be transferred to the east.

The Army High Command viewed this asymmetrical distribution of forces with great concern. It feared the Red Army could take advantage of the temporary period of weakness on the eastern front to launch a decisive offensive. For that reason, German enemy intelligence stared spellbound at the Kovel salient, which pointed towards Warsaw. If a breakthrough was achieved there, the Soviet tanks could advance to the Baltic coast and enclose two German army groups. However, the Red Army high command did not venture to mass the bulk of its troops for an offensive that would decide the outcome of the war. Instead of thrusting into the rear of Army Group Centre from Kovel, it attacked the Belorussian balcony directly from the east. With that change of the point of main effort, the Soviet high command allegedly achieved a complete surprise. In fact, the Soviet intentions were relatively well known from intelligence reports up to the level of the army command. But the commander-in-chief of Army Group Centre, Field Marshal Busch, intimidated by Hitler, failed to pass on such 'defeatist' findings properly, resulting in misinterpretation at the top command level.

The collapse of Army Group Centre was the most costly defeat in German military history. In the summer of 1944 the weakened eastern front was like a house of cards about to fall. The German units increasingly resembled those of the First World War, and usually had to race against the enemy's mechanized and motorized enemy troops on foot and with horse-drawn carts. Soviet superiority, especially in terms of material, had meanwhile become overwhelming; in many sectors of the front it attained grotesque proportions. At the same time, in the summer of 1944 the Red Army underwent a decisive transformation into a modern war machine. As the Soviet forces had taken over various successful methods from the Wehrmacht, the two sides came increasingly to resemble each other, though moving in opposite directions: in 1944 the Red Army practised the German war of movement of 1941, whereas the Wehrmacht was now imitating the Red Army's rigid defence of the same period. After the disastrous results of his 'stand firm' orders at the beginning of the war, Stalin had realized that he had to heed the advice of the military experts. In Hitler's case, on the other hand, the breathtaking initial successes led to a loss of touch with reality. No general was capable of talking the 'military commander' Hitler out of the doctrine of rigid defence.

When Army Group Centre's front collapsed at the very beginning of the Soviet major offensive in June 1944, immediate withdrawal from the trap was called for. Fourth Army and large parts of the two neighbouring armies were threatened with enclosure. Although the commanding generals desperately demanded retreat, the dictator ordered them to 'stand firm at all costs'. In those circumstances, the 'fortified places' proved a perversion of static defence, since enclosure was programmed in advance. While defeat appeared inevitable, Hitler's 'stand firm' orders turned it into a catastrophe. In the summer of 1944 German losses on the whole eastern front rose dramatically. A large proportion, however, were self-inflicted. Hundreds of thousands of dead, wounded, and captured are unequivocally attributable to Hitler's crassly wrong decisions.

When Field Marshal Model was appointed as the new commander-in-chief of Army Group Centre, the front had collapsed along a width of 400 kilometres. As he was too weak to defend, Model chose to attack. Without bothering too much about Hitler's linear defence concepts, he let the Soviet spearheads advance and then attacked them in the flank with his tanks. After some reserves had been brought in, he did manage to stabilize the situation to some extent. But then the front of the neighbouring Army Group North Ukraine also collapsed, and that was followed immediately by the offensive thrust which the OKH feared most—a breakthrough near Kovel. Armoured units of 1st Belorussian Front pushed towards the almost undefended area to the east of Warsaw. From there, they would have been able to advance along the Vistula to the Baltic Sea and enclose the whole northern wing of the German eastern front. On 1 August 1944, which also saw the beginning of the Warsaw Uprising, the fate of the eastern front hung in the balance. That day Model saved the front by a surprise counter-attack at the gates of the Polish capital, and the Germans were able to hold the Vistula line until January 1945.

Operation BAGRATION, which took the Red Army from Vitebsk to Warsaw, was a great Soviet success. Nevertheless, it did not achieve what would probably have

been possible, that is, to bring about the collapse of the eastern front with one mighty blow. At that stage the war was not only lost for Germany; it was actually almost at an end, since the eastern front resembled a house of cards. But the Soviet command did not venture to concentrate all of its available forces at the critical point, Kovel, in order to deal the German eastern army the death blow. Even during the final phase of Operation BAGRATION, the (belated) pincer attack with relatively weak armoured forces might still have succeeded. From today's perspective, it is clear that a major offensive in that direction, combining the whole Soviet offensive potential, would probably have ended the war earlier.

After the Red Army had been stopped at the Vistula, Hitler made one more attempt to turn the tide. The strategic approach was the same as in the early summer of 1944: strike in the west, hold on in the east. The dictator saw his only chance in the contradictions within the enemy coalition, and predicted its imminent collapse 'with a huge clap of thunder'. To that end, he planned the Ardennes offensive as a surprise blow that would inflict 'another Dunkirk' on the western Allies. In this respect, the interdependencies with the eastern front are interesting. Historians have repeatedly puzzled over why Hitler refused to allow Army Group North to withdraw from the Baltic region in October 1944, thereby obliging it to submit voluntarily to enclosure in the Courland peninsula. With its 500,000 men, it should have been deployed, in the view of the OKH General Staff, as an operational reserve in defence of the territory of the Reich. But Hitler intended to use Courland as a bridgehead to return to the attack, and to do so immediately after the Ardennes offensive. The massive transfer of troops from the west to the eastern front, which he had originally been planning for the summer once the Allied invasion had been successfully repelled, would then at last take place. So in Hitler's eyes the Courland pocket was a bridgehead, indeed a springboard, for a future offensive. The Courland 'fortified area' was intended to serve the same purpose as the system of 'fortified places' on the eastern front in the summer of 1944. From the purely tactical viewpoint, those 'fortresses' had the defensive function of breakwaters against the assault of the Red Army. At the same time, however, they were intended—and not even most of the generals knew this—as springboards for future attacks, in accordance with Hitler's utopian offensive strategy. That also explains their exposed position in bridgeheads or front salients like Vitebsk, which were extremely difficult to defend. Hitler acted increasingly like a gambler going for broke. In Albert Speer's view, he had manoeuvred himself into such a hopeless position that he had only the choice of 'the offensive or defeat'. But that reckless 'all-or-nothing' strategy was a criminal risk for the German people, and above all for the troops sacrificed in suicidal missions.

In the literature so far, especially the memoir literature, we repeatedly encounter the cliché of the generals' operational competence and Hitler's operational incompetence. It has led to the creation of a satirical stereotype. A comprehensive evaluation of the German files leads to the surprising conclusion that the satire is surpassed by reality. Hitler's operational interventions were even more amateurish, and his strategic visions even more reckless, than previously assumed. In addition, the Führer stubbornly interfered, like a 'one-man high command', in the tiniest

tactical details. In the end, he managed to override the military experts, which resulted in an increasing de-professionalization of Germany's conduct of the war. But the blame lies also with the generals. It was they who let themselves be incapacitated by Hitler, the civilian. In contrast to the First World War, when the military dominated politics, the Second World War saw the opposite extreme—a perverse primacy of politics.

Germany's standing as a military power rested not only on its quantitative superiority, but above all on the operational school of thought of its general staff. Since Moltke the Elder, that institution had been on a higher intellectual level than in any other country. Although Hitler as 'commander' blunted that intellectual weapon, it remained effective, even in the offensive war against the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, a very ambivalent judgement of the role of Germany's military elite is called for, even regarding those officers who were not actively involved in crimes. In 1941 many generals stood by and watched as Hitler pursued a war of annihilation against the population of the Soviet Union. In the further course of the war, most generals also stood by and watched as Hitler sacrificed their men. Thus they failed on their own ground. Precisely because their understanding of military matters was so highly developed, they must have realized at an early stage what would be the consequences of Hitler's orders for the troops entrusted to them. They asked their men to attack Soviet tanks with hand-held rocket-propelled grenade launchers and sticky bombs, whereas most of them did not have the courage to rebel against the Führer's orders. That is precisely where the moral and ethical failings of many generals lie, as does the failure of the military command system as a whole. Only a few, like the 20 July conspirators, dared resort to active resistance.

In the practice of their craft, the German officers mostly proved very efficient. In 1941 the Wehrmacht had advanced to the gates of Moscow in less than five months, whereas it took the Red Army another three years to force it back to its starting position. The two armies were structured differently, mainly because of the geostrategic premisses. Since Germany lay in the centre of Europe, its general staff naturally assumed that it would have to fight simultaneously against enemy superiority on several fronts. Significantly, the basic principle of the Schlieffen school was: 'from inferiority to victory'. An obsession with efficiency developed, since quantitative inferiority had to be compensated for by qualitative superiority. That also resulted in the modern operational war of movement known as blitzkrieg, aimed at high-speed execution, with which the Wehrmacht achieved spectacular successes at the beginning of the Russian campaign. To its adversaries, the Wehrmacht then appeared an astonishingly well-operating war machine. In no other army in the world did officers enjoy such freedom of action in a framework of mission-type tactics. Nowhere was the value of teamwork so clearly recognized. While the Stalinist system treated the individual soldier as an exchangeable 'mass-production item', the Wehrmacht, at least in the first half of the war, put a premium on welding its men together in close-knit primary groups. Only then were they sent to the front. Combined-arms combat also functioned remarkably well because the officers, in units of manageable size, were well attuned to each other, whereas the Red Army piled any number of units together in gigantic

formations. The same striving for qualitative superiority was apparent in the technical field. The German armour, a generation behind because of the restrictions imposed by the Treaty of Versailles, at first appeared to have little chance against the T-34s. From 1943 on, however, its Tigers and Panthers gave it technical superiority. The mere fact that all German fighting vehicles were fitted with radios proved an inestimable advantage. Nevertheless, the weight of numbers prevailed. Although the Soviet armour suffered 96,500 total write-offs (which meant a cruel death for many crews in burning tanks), the number of fighting vehicles produced was even greater.

German soldiers who had served on various different fronts largely concurred in reporting that the Red Army troops were the most difficult of their adversaries. Their toughness was astonishing. They fought even under weather and hygienic conditions which units of western armies would have rejected as unacceptable. Their defiance of death was particularly shocking. But precisely therein—in the spirit of self-sacrifice of those brave soldiers—lies an immeasurable tragedy, since the Stalinist leadership availed itself of the seemingly limitless mass of human beings without the slightest scruples. For Soviet officers too, it was much easier to crush the enemy without regard to one's own losses than to attempt risky manoeuvres. At that time, independent and innovative thinking could be extremely dangerous in civilian life too. While the official figures for Red Army losses are shockingly high in themselves, the real number remains a puzzle. In the Soviet era, military operations which proved particularly disappointing were simply blotted out of memory.

For some years there has been a controversy among military historians as to whether the Wehrmacht's fighting power resulted primarily from National Socialist ideology or from its own systemic efficiency. The study of an abundance of documents concerning the war in the east has shown without doubt that the latter hypothesis is to be preferred. In the second half of the war, above all, ideology played an ever-decreasing role. The Wehrmacht troops were fighting not for 'Lebensraum' but for bare survival.

The longer the war went on, the fiercer it became. Both sides fought with terrifying cruelty. The increasing ferocity was felt by prisoners of war in particular, if indeed prisoners were taken. Since the Germans had committed numerous crimes, especially in the first phase of the war, many Red Army soldiers were bent on revenge. In turn, fear of capture pushed the Wehrmacht troops into desperate resistance that cost the Red Army huge losses, for which further vengeance was exacted. And so the violence escalated. In the course of their retreat, the Germans employed 'scorched earth' tactics to destroy the infrastructure which the Red Army needed for its military operations. They left behind a wide trail of devastation and inflicted great damage on the mass of the population. At the same time, many people were deported to Germany as forced labourers. The partisans played a fatal role in the whole witches' cauldron. By attacking German troops, they provoked reprisals against the civilian population. The ensuing German 'counter-insurgency' measures, portrayed as complying with international law, were partly a cloak for genocidal conduct of the war. However, the various partisan movements

fought among themselves and also oppressed the population. After the territory was liberated by Soviet troops, the population was again caught up in the maelstrom of war. A wave of terror began against real or alleged collaborators. Massive recruitment operations were conducted, in which large numbers of men, and even adolescent youths, were enlisted in the Red Army and sent to the front as cannon fodder without any training worth mentioning. On the other hand, the retreating Wehrmacht units were accompanied by a wave of civilian refugees who feared the return of Stalin's commissars. In October the fury of war reached East Prussia: the massacre of German civilians in Nemmersdorf was the first writing on the wall.

### THE SOUTH-EAST EUROPEAN, ITALIAN, AND SCANDINAVIAN THEATRES OF WAR

At the end of February 1944 Soviet troops marched into northern Transnistria. For the first time, as Klaus Schönerr recounts, military operations on the eastern front reached the territory of one of Germany's allies. The Red Army now directly threatened *Romania*, which had supported the eastern campaign with numerous units. While the Soviet advance was stopped at first, the hostilities on old Romanian territory led to the end of German hegemony in south-eastern Europe. Although Germany's most important ally at that time intensively supported the formation of a defensive front in Moldavia and on the Dniester, the first cracks appeared in the coalition. Romanian war-weariness was one of the main causes of the internal political changes now beginning. When the Red Army launched its summer offensive at the end of August 1944, the German–Romanian front collapsed at the first assault. The Soviet breakthrough at Iași and Tiraspol led to a military catastrophe in which Sixth Army was destroyed for the second time. That development led to the country's withdrawal from the war. Even though German post-war literature attributes the fiasco to 'Romanian betrayal', the documents show that errors of command on the part of the Wehrmacht were largely to blame. The German side displayed arrogance and lack of perspicacity. Despite the political changes, it believed it could conquer Bucharest by purely military means and install a pro-German government. The Bucharest–Ploiești adventure also ended in a debacle and gave Romania grounds for hostilities against the German troops.

The few German troops who had escaped the disaster in Romania established a new security line in southern Transylvania with Hungarian support. Almost at the same time, a national uprising broke out in Slovakia, another member of the Axis coalition. At the beginning of September the Stavka took advantage of the situation to launch a large-scale pincer operation against Army Groups North Ukraine/A and South Ukraine/South. The Red Army attacked from the Beskids and southern Transylvania, with the aim of enclosing large parts of the two army groups in the Carpathian salient. However, the German forces were still strong enough both to suppress the uprising and to fend off the Soviet offensive.

Germany's coalition partner *Bulgaria* had kept out of the fighting throughout the war and had by no means declared war on the Soviet Union. With a military disaster looming in Romania, the Bulgarian government sought to withdraw from the coalition and stress its political neutrality vis-à-vis the Soviet Union. In an attempt to win Soviet goodwill, it adopted a restrictive attitude to the German troops. But despite all Bulgaria's efforts to avoid a military and political confrontation, the Red Army marched in at the beginning of September 1944 and occupied the country. Only a few weeks later, after Bulgaria had concluded an armistice with the Allies, it fought on the side of the Soviet Union against its former coalition partners.

In *Greece*, Army Group E responded to the fiasco in the Romanian theatre by preparing withdrawal from the Greek islands and the mainland. The withdrawal movement from the southern Balkans, as Klaus Schönherr also recounts, went very well at first. But then the German troops' retreat from Macedonia and Albania was also threatened with disaster. By the end of the year, however, Army Group E had managed to repel the attacks by Soviet and Bulgarian troops and the Yugoslav People's Liberation Army to such an extent that it was able to establish a relatively stable defensive line on the Bosnian-Macedonian border.

As Krisztián Ungváry stresses, events in the *Hungarian theatre of operations*, and especially the role of the Honvéd Army, have received little attention in the German specialist literature. In most accounts, the description of German military strategy ends with the Ardennes offensive in December 1944. But it was only afterwards that Hungary became, from Hitler's viewpoint, a major theatre of operations. It was in Hungary that the Wehrmacht conducted its last offensives in the Second World War, and they would have been impossible without Hungarian support. In September 1944 the Honvéd Army provided 950,000 troops, and even in March 1945 it accounted for 30 per cent of Army Group South's artillery and 20 per cent of its infantry. That made it the Wehrmacht's most important ally in the last twelve months of the war. Yet the German war diaries mention the Honvéd troops almost only in regard to their failures. The importance of the partnership in terms of material supplies was even greater than its military importance. Hungary produced large quantities of armaments, and became, from 1944, Germany's most important supplier of foodstuffs. Without Hungarian oil supplies, Germany would have been unable to continue the war by September 1944 at the latest. For that reason, Hitler transferred numerous divisions to the Hungarian theatre instead of reinforcing the territory of the Reich. In the end, half of the armoured divisions on the eastern front were stationed there. Most Wehrmacht operations in Hungary proved effective. After Christmas 1944 the Germans launched five large-scale operations, while remaining on the defensive in all other theatres of war. Those operations inflicted heavy losses on the Red Army. Strong Soviet forces were tied down in the region, which relieved the pressure on the home front. The fighting in Hungary largely contributed to the continuation of the war for several more months. According to the Stavka's plans, the Soviet troops should have already conquered Austria by the spring of 1945 and should have been approaching

Bavaria. In the event, only a small part of Austria, including the capital, Vienna, had fallen to the Red Army.

In *Yugoslavia*, as Klaus Schmider argues, the occupation policy of the Axis powers was doomed to failure. In the territory of the NDH (Independent State of Croatia) coalition partner, the insurgency movements of the Communist partisans and the Serbian nationalist Chetniks were soon afforded extensive possibilities for development. The causes were the arbitrary demarcation of the border, the genocidal excesses of the Ustasha militia, and Italy's Croatia policy, which oscillated between patronage and bullying. In Serbia the temporary build-up of a point of military concentration, along with terroristic reprisals, made possible the 'pacification' of that territory until the summer of 1944, whereas in the NDH similar measures failed or were effective only in the short term. The considerable numbers of ground forces which the Croatian state put into the field in 1943 also failed to contain, let alone solve, the problem, owing to their increasing demoralization (in the case of most Territorial Army units) or political unreliability (in the case of the Ustasha). In this respect, the extensive lack of interest of most German officials in the offers to collaborate from a significant minority of the Serbian community was an appreciable negative factor. A change came only in the summer of 1944, under the pressure of military developments, but by then it was much too late. Only the gradual rallying of the losing side in the internal Serbian civil war—the Chetniks—to the occupying power could be reckoned by the latter as a positive, if unintentional, by-product of its occupation policy.

When Old Serbia was conquered by 2nd and 3rd Ukrainian Fronts and parts of the People's Liberation Army in the autumn of 1944, it was mainly thanks to the transfer of most Soviet units to the Hungarian theatre that 2nd Armoured Army and Army Group E (Col.-Gen. Alexander Löhr), which was withdrawing from Albania, Macedonia, and Montenegro, were saved from destruction. In the next few weeks the German forces managed to stabilize the front. Löhr's army group was also evacuated via south-western Serbia, northern Montenegro, and finally south-eastern Bosnia. In the following months, together with the units already transferred to Bosnia, the Germans strove to maintain the largest possible part of the NDH against a People's Liberation Army which, with Soviet aid, was turning into a regular combat force. The transition from small-scale operations to normal ground warfare, including combined-arms combat, brought the former partisans both major setbacks (on the Syrmian front in January 1945) and the first victories over their former arch-enemy (the battle for Tuzla in February 1945). After the Red Army conquered almost all of Hungary, the NDH formed a balcony-like salient in the southern part of the eastern front. The attempt by Hitler and the OKW to maintain that salient with insufficient forces ended in disaster in the last days of the war. A large-scale offensive launched by the People's Liberation Army on 12 April 1945 herded the forces of Commander-in-Chief South-East together in costly battles in the Slovenian–Austrian border area. The few units that escaped destruction eventually surrendered to British forces.

The *Italian theatre of war*, discussed in this volume by Gerhard Schreiber, strikingly illustrates the interdependencies in the multi-front war. The western

Allies' landing in Sicily on 10 July 1943 was the main reason why Hitler called a halt to the Operation CITADEL offensive against Kursk. In any case, he sent only part of the originally intended troops to Italy, since other conflagrations had broken out on the eastern front. The German troops' tactical and operational action in Italy must nevertheless be deemed efficient. They displayed an astonishing talent for improvisation, especially in regard to supplies and transport. But even the greatest military skill was unable to make up for the Germans' material deficits in comparison with the Allies. The fact that the Wehrmacht's losses in Italy were generally higher than those of the Allied forces, although the latter were continuously on the attack, is largely explained by the Allies' overwhelming air superiority. Another fact which, as the author stresses, even a purely military account of events must not fail to mention, is that the Wehrmacht and SS repeatedly engaged in criminal and racially motivated warfare. In terms of the integration of the war in Italy in the overall strategy of the main powers, both sides fulfilled their relevant strategic diversionary tasks by tying down strong enemy forces in the Italian theatre. The campaign in 1943, when London and Washington sought to bring about Rome's withdrawal from the war, was significant but never decisive for the outcome of the war. For the Wehrmacht, the purpose of operations in the south was, in the final analysis, only to prolong the war, that is, to delay the long-certain German collapse and keep the enemy away as long as possible, first from 'Fortress Europe', then from 'Fortress Germany', and finally from 'Fortress Berlin'. In reality, however, at the latest since the Allied landing in Sicily, the German forces were no longer capable of anything more than 'fighting forwards while moving backwards'.

For a long time, as Bernd Wegner explains, *Northern Europe* lay in the lee of the large European theatres of war, but there too a gradual shift to Germany's disadvantage was discernible from 1943 onwards. Increasing resistance among the population of Norway and Denmark, the reorientation of Swedish neutrality policy in favour of the western Allies, and the cautious defensive manoeuvres on the part of the Finnish 'comrade-in-arms' all pointed to a change in the situation, which remained below the surface at first but assumed dramatic form with the beginning of the Soviet offensive on the Karelian peninsula in June 1944. From a seemingly hopeless starting position, Finland managed to cleave a way out of the war and—as Germany's only European ally, and at the same time the only European state directly bordering on the Soviet Union—avoid occupation and preserve its constitutional order. That was not only the result of bitter military resistance and a number of lucky historical circumstances, but especially the fruit of skilful—at times, devious—policy on the part of Helsinki, which understood how to take best advantage of the little room for manoeuvre remaining to it.

#### THE 'STRATEGY OF DOWNFALL'

Looking, in conclusion, at the deficiencies of German strategic warfare in the second half of the war, one is struck in particular by the extensive renunciation of creative foreign affairs and alliance policy. It is all the more surprising, as in

previous years the regime had acted with notable success in precisely that area. The dwindling importance of the foreign ministry and the simultaneous growth of the influence of the SS, the ministry of propaganda, and other departments was not so much a cause as a symptom of a development in which politics was increasingly reduced to propaganda. Against that background, the German alliance system eroded all the more quickly as, apart from anti-Communism, it was based almost exclusively on the initial superiority of German arms, and hardly at all on long-term common interests or shared values.

Even more damaging was Hitler's refusal, imposed against the wishes of most of his coalition partners and many of his advisers, to seek a political way out of a war that was recognizably lost. His rejection on principle of all attempts to conclude a separate peace had to do neither with the Allied demand for unconditional surrender nor even with his supposed belief, in defiance of the strategic realities, in a German 'final victory'. Rather, Hitler's decision to continue the war, once begun, to the last extremity was rooted—as Bernd Wegner argues—in his determination to stage the downfall, which he himself recognized as inevitable, as a heroic finale. The ensuing 'orchestration of the end' led to a radicalization of Germany's conduct of the war, and thus contributed decisively to prolonging the war and adding millions to the number of victims. Perhaps the most horrendous expression of that will to destruction was the 'scorched earth' tactic adopted in the east (which Hitler wanted adopted in the last months of the war in Germany too, in accordance with the 'Nero Decree'). But the orgy of destruction did not only affect bridges and power stations. The toll of human lives mounted to a crescendo through forced deportations and murder operations, as, for example, during the evacuation of the concentration camps. The measures adopted in the Soviet theatre of war, until recently dealt with only sketchily in the research literature, led to a further increase in the dynamic of destruction set in train in 1941 under entirely different auspices. Now, in the mind of the dictator, it was also directed against his own people, to whom—in the event of defeat—he denied the very right of existence. He had left no doubt about it, having issued the threat years before: 'In this, too, I am as cold as ice. If the German people proves no longer strong enough, or sufficiently self-sacrificing, to pay for its existence with its own blood, then let it perish and be destroyed by another, stronger power [...] then I shall shed no tears for the German people.'<sup>1</sup> Thus, Hitler's only strategy in the final phase of the war was a 'strategy of downfall'.

<sup>1</sup> This statement was made by Hitler on 27 November 1941 in the presence of the Danish foreign minister, Erik Scavenius, and the Croatian foreign minister, Mladen Lorković; see Haffner, *Anmerkungen zu Hitler*, 152. A similar pronouncement is reported in Speer, *Erinnerungen*, 446.



# Bibliography

## I. UNPUBLISHED SOURCES

### 1. British Archives and Collections

*Imperial War Museum, London*

- AL 1709/2 Kriegstagebuch Heeresgruppe B [War Diary Army Group B],  
21.10.1943–20.11.1943

### 2. Finnish Archives and Collections

*Ulkoasiainministeriön Arkisto [Foreign Ministry Archives], Helsinki*

- 5/C5 Embassy reports from Berlin (1942/43)  
Fb 12L/73 Germany  
Fb 110/10 The Finnish War 1941–44/Finnish–Soviet and Finnish–German Relations

*Valtion Arkisto [State Archives], Helsinki*

- Kivimäki papers  
Mannerheim papers  
Ryti papers

*Sota Arkisto [Military Archives], Helsinki*

- Pk 1172/15 Gen. Heinrich papers

### 3. German Archives and Collections

*Federal German Archives, Koblenz (BA)*

- NS 19 Reichsführer SS [Reich Leader SS]  
R 43 II Reichskanzlei [Reich Chancellery]  
R 63 Südosteuropagesellschaft [South-East Europe Association]  
Personalakten des SS-Offizierkorps (SSO) [Personnel Files of SS Officer Corps]

*Federal German Military Archives, Freiburg (BA-MA)*

(a) Files

- Kart 40 Dislozierung der fliegenden Verbände [Deployment of Flying Units]  
N 9 Nachlaß Biermann, Otto [Otto Biermann papers]  
N 19 Nachlaß Weichs, Maximilian Freiherr von [Baron Maximilian von Weichs  
papers]  
N 22 Nachlaß Bock, Fedor von [Fedor von Bock papers]  
N 24 Nachlaß Hoßbach, Friedrich [Friedrich Hossbach papers]  
N 63 Nachlaß Zeitzler, Kurt [Kurt Zeitzler papers]  
N 69 Nachlaß Jodl, Alfred [Alfred Jodl papers]  
N 117 Nachlaß Rommel, Erwin [Erwin Rommel papers]  
N 236 Nachlaß Dönitz, Karl [Karl Dönitz papers]  
N 245 Nachlaß Reinhardt, Hans [Hans Reinhardt papers]  
N 257 Nachlaß Erfurth, Waldemar [Waldemar Erfurth papers]  
N 370 Nachlaß Pfeffer-Wildenbruch, Karl [Karl Pfeffer-Wildenbruch papers]  
N 422 Nachlaß Röttiger, Hans [Hans Röttiger papers]  
N 533 Nachlaß Beutin, Ludwig [Ludwig Beutin papers]  
N 553 Nachlaß Müller-Hillebrand, Burkhardt [Burkhart Müller-Hillebrand papers]

- N 594 Nachlaß Sodenstern, Georg von [Georg von Sodenstern papers]  
 N 647 Nachlaß Balck, Hermann [Hermann Balck papers]  
 N 671 Nachlaß Richthofen, Wolfram Freiherr von [Baron Wolfram von Richthofen papers]  
 N 733 Nachlaß Moll, Josef [Josef Moll papers]  
 N 756 Sammlung Vopersal, Wolfgang [Wolfgang Vopersal collection]  
 RH 2 Oberkommando des Heeres/Generalstab des Heeres [Army High Command/General Staff]  
 RH 3-1 Oberkommando des Heeres/Generalquartiermeister [Army High Command/Quartermaster-General]  
 RH 10 Oberkommando des Heeres/Generalinspekteur der Panzertruppen [Army High Command/Inspector-General of Armoured Troops]  
 RH 19 I Heeresgruppe Süd [Army Group South] (1941)  
 RH 19 II Heeresgruppe Mitte [Army Group Central]  
 RH 19 III Heeresgruppe Nord/Kurland [Army Group North/Courland]  
 RH 19 V Heeresgruppe A/Südukraine/Süd [Army Group A/South Ukraine/South]  
 RH 19 VI Heeresgruppe Süd/Nordukraine/A [Army Group South/North Ukraine/A]  
 RH 19 VII Heeresgruppe E/Oberbefehlshaber Südost [Army Group E/C-in-C South-East]  
 RH 19 IX Heeresgruppe B [Army Group B]  
 RH 19 X Heeresgruppe C [Army Group C]  
 RH 19 XI Heeresgruppe F/Oberbefehlshaber Südost [Army Group F/C-in-C South-East]  
 RH 20-2 Armeeoberkommando 2 [Second Army HQ]  
 RH 20-4 Armeeoberkommando 4 [Fourth Army HQ]  
 RH 20-6 Armeeoberkommando 6 [Sixth Army HQ]  
 RH 20-8 Armeeoberkommando 8 [Eighth Army HQ]  
 RH 20-9 Armeeoberkommando 9 [Ninth Army HQ]  
 RH 20-10 Armeeoberkommando 10 [Tenth Army HQ]  
 RH 20-12 Armeeoberkommando 12 [Twelfth Army HQ]  
 RH 20-14 Armeeoberkommando 14 [Fourteenth Army HQ]  
 RH 20-16 Armeeoberkommando 16 [Sixteenth Army HQ]  
 RH 20-17 Armeeoberkommando 17 [Seventeenth Army HQ]  
 RH 20-18 Armeeoberkommando 18 [Eighteenth Army HQ]  
 RH 20-20 Armeeoberkommando 20 [Twentieth Army HQ]  
 RH 21-1 Panzer-Armeeoberkommando 1 [First Armoured Army HQ]  
 RH 21-2 Panzer-Armeeoberkommando 2 [Second Armoured Army HQ]  
 RH 21-3 Panzer-Armeeoberkommando 3 [Third Armoured Army HQ]  
 RH 21-4 Panzer-Armeeoberkommando 4 [Fourth Armoured Army HQ]  
 RH 23 Kommandanten rückwärtiger Armeegebiete [Army Rear Area Commanders]  
 RH 24-1 Generalkommando I. Armeekorps[I Army Corps HQ]  
 RH 24-2 Generalkommando II. Armeekorps [II Army Corps HQ]  
 RH 24-3 Generalkommando III. Panzerkorps [III Armoured Corps HQ]  
 RH 24-11 Generalkommando XI. Armeekorps/Generalkommando z.b.V. Raus/  
     Gruppe Stemmermann  
     [XI Army Corps HQ/Raus/Stemmermann Group (s.d.) HQ]  
 RH 24-15 Befehlshaber der deutschen Truppen in Kroatien/  
     XV. Gebirgsarmeekorps [Commander of German Troops in Croatia/XV  
     Mountain Army Corps]

- RH 24-24 Generalkommando XXIV. Armeekorps (mot.)/Generalkommando XXIV. Panzerkorps/Gruppe Nehring [XXIV Army Corps (mot.) HQ/XXIV Armoured Corps/Nehring Group HQ]
- RH 24-34 Generalkommando XXXIV. Armeekorps [XXXIV Army Corps HQ]
- RH 24-40 Generalkommando XXXX. Panzerkorps  
[XXXX Armoured Corps HQ]
- RH 24-42 Generalkommando XXXXII. Armeekorps/Gruppe Mattenkrott/  
Befehlshaber Krim/Armeegruppe M  
[XXXII Army Corps/Detachment 'Mattenkrott' HQ/  
Commander Crimea/Army Detachment M]
- RH 24-47 Generalkommando XXXXVII. Panzerkorps  
[XXXVII Armoured Corps HQ]
- RH 24-48 Generalkommando XXXXVIII. Panzerkorps  
[XXXVIII Armoured Corps HQ]
- RH 24-49 Generalkommando XXXXIX. Gebirgsarmeekorps  
[XXXIX Mountain Army Corps HQ]
- RH 24-52 Generalkommando LII. Armeekorps [LII Army Corps HQ]
- RH 24-59 Generalkommando LIX. Armeekorps [LIX Army Corps HQ]
- RH 24-65 Generalkommando LXV. Armeekorps [LXV Army Corps HQ]
- RH 24-72 Generalkommando LXXII. Armeekorps [LXXII Army Corps HQ]
- RH 26 Infanteriedivisionen [Infantry Divisions]
- RH 27 Panzerdivisionen [Armoured Divisions]
- RH 28 Gebirgsdivisionen [Mountain Divisions]
- RH 31 I Deutsche Heeresmission Rumänien 1940–1944  
[German Army Mission to Romania 1940–4]
- RH 31 II Deutscher General beim Oberkommando der kgl. bulg. Wehrmacht 1941–1945  
[German General with the Royal Bulgarian Armed Forces 1941–5]
- RH 31 III Deutscher General in Agram/Bevollmächtigter General in Kroatien  
[German General in Agram/Plenipotentiary General in Croatia]
- RH 31 IV Deutsche Heeresmission Slowakei 1939–1944  
[German Army Mission to Slovakia 1939–44]
- RH 31 V Bevollmächtigter General der Wehrmacht in Ungarn 1941–1945  
[Plenipotentiary General of the Wehrmacht in Hungary 1941–5]
- RH 31 VI Bevollmächtigter General der Wehrmacht in Italien 1941–1945  
[Plenipotentiary General of the Wehrmacht in Italy 1941–5]
- RH 31 VII Deutscher General beim Oberbefehlshaber 'West' in Vichy 1942–1944  
[German General with Commander-in-Chief West, Vichy 1942–4]
- RHD 18 Oberkommando des Heeres/Generalstab des Heeres: Heeresdruck sachen  
[Army High Command/Army General Staff  
Army Printed Material]
- RL 2 III Generalstab der Luftwaffe, Generalquartiermeister  
[Luftwaffe General Staff, Quartermaster-General]
- RL 7 Kommandobehörden und Verbände der Luftwaffe  
[Luftwaffe Command Authorities and Units]
- RL 30 Sonderstäbe der Luftwaffe [Luftwaffe Special Staffs]
- RM 2 Kaiserliches Marinekabinett [Imperial Navy Cabinet]
- RM 6 Oberbefehlshaber der Kriegsmarine [Commander-in-Chief of the Navy]

- RM 7 Seekriegsleitung [Naval War Staff]  
 RM 31 Marinestation der Ostsee [Baltic Naval Base]  
 RM 35 III Marineverbindungsstab Kroatien [Naval Liaison Staff Croatia]  
 RS 2-2 Generalkommando II. SS-Panzerkorps  
     [II SS Armoured Corps HQ]  
 RS 5 Ersatz- und Ausbildungseinheiten, Schulen, Ergänzungs- und Fürsorgedienststellen der Waffen-SS [Waffen SS replacement and training units, schools, recruitment and supply departments]  
 RW 4 Oberkommando der Wehrmacht/Wehrmachtführungsstab [Wehrmacht High Command/Wehrmacht Operations Staff]  
 RW 5 Oberkommando der Wehrmacht/Amt Ausland/Abwehr [Wehrmacht High Command/Foreign Affairs/Intelligence]  
 RW 6 Oberkommando der Wehrmacht/Allgemeines Wehrmachtamt [Wehrmacht High Command/General Department]  
 RW 19 Oberkommando der Wehrmacht/Wehrwirtschafts- und Rüstungsamt [Wehrmacht High Command/War Economy and Armaments Department]  
 RW 40 Befehlshaber Serbien/Kommandierender General und Befehlshaber in Serbien/Militärbefehlshaber Südost [Commander in Serbia/Commanding General and Commander in Serbia/Military Commander South-East]  
 RW 49 Dienststellen und Einheiten der Abwehr [Counter-Intelligence Departments and Units]  
 WF 10 Bev.Komm.Gen. in Ungarn [Plenipotentiary Commanding General in Hungary]  
 WI I F2 Wirtschaftsstab 'Ost' [Economic Staff East]

## (b) Military History Collections

MSG 1

MSG 2

## (c) Studies by Wehrmacht officers for the Historical Division of the US Army/US Air Force Army Study Group

- ZA 1/1220 Raus, Erhard: Abwehrtaktik bei Durchbrüchen im Osten [Defence Tactics Against Breakthroughs in the East]  
 ZA 1/1234 Natzmer, Oldwig von: Der Einsatz der deutschen Panzerwaffe 1943–1945 [Deployment of German Armour 1943–5]  
 ZA 1/1321 Senger and Etterlin, Frido von: Der Kampf um Sizilien [The Battle for Sicily]  
 ZA 1/1428 Waldenfels, Rudolf von: Vor- und Durchstoß der 6. Panzer-Div. zur Befreiung und Rückführung der in und westlich Wilna eingeschlossenen Kampfgruppen, 15. und 16.7.1944 [Advance and breakthrough by 6th Armoured Division to relieve and bring back the combat units encircled in and to the west of Vilnius, 15 and 16 July 1944]  
 ZA 1/1532 Mattenkrott, Franz: Beteiligung des XXXXII. Armeekorps am Entsatz von Kowel, 19.3.–5.4.1944 [Participation of XXXXII Army Corps in the relief of Kovel, 19 Mar. to 5 Apr. 1944]  
 ZA 1/1569 Möbius, Rolf: Die schwere deutsche Panzerwaffe [German Heavy Armour]  
 ZA 1/1601 Breith, Hermann: Durchbruch des III. Panzerkorps durch ein tief gegliedertes feindliches Stellungssystem in der Schlacht bei Charkow ('Zitadelle'), Juli 1943

- [Breakthrough by III Armoured Corps through deeply staggered enemy defences during the Battle of Kharkov (Operation CITADEL), July 1943]
- ZA 1/1700 Teske, Hermann: Die Bedeutung des Eisenbahn-Transportwesens einer Heeresgruppe (H.Gr. Mitte) bei Aufmarsch, Verteidigung und Rückzug, März bis Sept. 1943 [The role of rail transport in the advance, defence, and retreat of an army group (Army Group Centre), Mar. to Sept. 1943]
- ZA 1/1734 Zeitzler, Kurt: Das Ringen um die großen Entscheidungen im Zweiten Weltkrieg: Abwehrschlachten in Rußland 1943–44 [The conflict over the major decisions in the Second World War: defensive battles in Russia 1943–4]
- ZA 1/1968 Dethleffsen, Erich: Durchbruch russischer Panzerkräfte im Oktober 1944 in Ostpreußen [The breakthrough by Russian armoured forces in East Prussia in October 1944]
- ZA 1/2045 Sixt, Friedrich: Der Feldzug gegen die Sowjetunion im Nordabschnitt der Ostfront. III. Der Übergang der Initiative an den Russen (Kriegsjahr 1943) [The campaign against the Soviet Union in the northern sector of the eastern front. III. The initiative passes to the Russians (war year 1943)]
- ZA 1/2046 Sixt, Friedrich: Der Feldzug gegen die Sowjetunion im Nordabschnitt der Ostfront. IV. Der Rückzug der Heeresgruppe Nord in die Baltischen Länder und das Ringen um den Zusammenhang mit der Gesamtfront, Jan. bis Mitte Sept. 1944 [The campaign against the Soviet Union in the northern sector of the eastern front. IV. The retreat of Army Group North in the Baltic countries and the struggle to connect with the front as a whole, Jan. to mid-Sept. 1944]
- ZA 1/2047 Sixt, Friedrich: Der Feldzug gegen die Sowjetunion im Nordabschnitt der Ostfront. V. Einschließung in Kurland und Endkampf der Heeresgruppe Nord/Kurland, Mitte Sept. 1944 bis Mai 1945 [The campaign against the Soviet Union in the northern sector of the eastern front V. Enclosure in Courland and the final battle of Army Group North/Courland, mid-Sept. 1944 to May 1945]
- ZA 1/2052 Hofmann, Rudolf: Der Feldzug gegen die Sowjetunion im Mittelabschnitt der Ostfront. V. Kriegsjahr 1943, April bis Anfang Okt. 1943 [The campaign against the Soviet Union in the central sector of the eastern front. V. War year 1943, Apr. to beginning of Oct. 1943]
- ZA 1/2053 Hofmann, Rudolf: Der Feldzug gegen die Sowjetunion im Mittelabschnitt der Ostfront. VI. Abwehrschlachten, Anfang Okt. 1943 bis April 1944 [The campaign against the Sovier Union in the central sector of the eastern front. VI. Defensive battles, beginning of Oct. 1943 to Apr. 1944]
- ZA 1/2054 Hofmann, Rudolf: Der Feldzug gegen die Sowjetunion im Mittelabschnitt der Ostfront. VII. Der Zusammenbruch der Heeresgruppe Mitte im Sommer 1944 und der Kampf ums ostpreußische Vorfeld, Juni bis Dez. 1944 [The campaign against the Soviet Union in the central sector of the eastern front. VII. The collapse of Army Group Centre in the summer of 1944 and the battle for the East Prussian forefield, June to Dec. 1944]
- ZA 1/2071 Hauck, Friedrich Wilhelm: Die Operationen der deutschen Heeresgruppen an der Ostfront 1941–1945/Südliches Gebiet, V. Frühjahr und Sommer 1943 bis zum Scheitern der letzten deutschen Offensive ('Zitadelle') [The operations of the German army groups on the eastern front 1941–5/

- Southern Area. V. From spring and summer 1943 to the failure of the last German offensive (Operation CITADEL)
- ZA 1/2073 Hauck, Friedrich Wilhelm: Die Operationen der deutschen Heeresgruppen an der Ostfront 1941–1945/Südliches Gebiet, VI., Bd 1: Die russische Offensive nach Rumänien und Galizien bis zur Räumung der Krim, Juli 1943 bis Mai 1944 (Kapitel 1 und 2) [The operations of the German army groups on the eastern front 1941–5/Southern Area. VI, i. The Russian offensive against Romania and Galicia up to the evacuation of Crimea, July 1943 to May 1944 (Chapters 1 and 2)]
- ZA 1/2074 Hauck, Friedrich Wilhelm: Die Operationen der deutschen Heeresgruppen an der Ostfront 1941–1945/Südliches Gebiet, VI., Bd 2: Die russische Offensive nach Rumänien und Galizien bis zur Räumung der Krim, Juli 1943 bis Mai 1944 [The operations of the German army groups on the eastern front 1941–5/Southern Area. VI, ii. The Russian offensive against Romania and Galicia up to the evacuation of Crimea, July 1943 to May 1944]
- ZA 1/2075 Hauck, Friedrich Wilhelm: Die Operationen der deutschen Heeresgruppen an der Ostfront 1941–1945/Südliches Gebiet, Anhänge zum Teil VI, erster Band [The operations of the German army groups on the eastern front 1941–5/Southern Area, annexes to Part VI, i]
- ZA 1/2076 Hauck, Friedrich Wilhelm: Die Operationen der deutschen Heeresgruppen an der Ostfront 1941–1945/Südliches Gebiet, Anhänge zum Teil VI, zweiter Band [The operations of the German army groups on the eastern front 1941–5/Southern Area, annexes to Part VI, ii]
- ZA 1/2077 Hauck, Friedrich Wilhelm: Die Operationen der deutschen Heeresgruppen an der Ostfront 1941–1945/Südliches Gebiet, VII. Die russische Offensive durch Südpolen, Rumänien und Ungarn, Juli 1944 bis Febr. 1945 [The operations of the German army groups on the eastern front 1941–5/Southern Area. VII. The Russian offensive through Southern Poland, Romania, and Hungary, July 1944 to Feb. 1945]
- ZA 1/2078 Hauck, Friedrich Wilhelm: Die Operationen der deutschen Heeresgruppen an der Ostfront 1941–1945/Südliches Gebiet, VII. Die russische Offensive durch Südpolen, Rumänien und Ungarn, März bis Mai 1945 [The operations of the German army groups on the eastern front 1941–5/Southern Area. VII. The Russian offensive through Southern Poland, Romania, and Hungary, Mar. to May 1945]
- ZA 1/2082 Reinhardt, Hellmuth: Russische Luftlandeoperationen [Russian airborne operations]; General der Pz.Tr. a.D. Walther Nehring, Der Einsatz russischer Fallschirmjägerverbände am 24./25. September 1943 [The deployment of Russian paratroop units on 24–5 Sept. 1943]
- ZA 1/2153 Hofmann, Rudolf: Das XXVI. Armeekorps in der Abwehrschlacht südlich des Ladoga-Sees, Juli bis Sept. 1943 [XXVI Army Corps in the defensive battle south of Lake Ladoga, July to Sept. 1943]
- ZA 1/2154 Hofmann, Rudolf: Der Rückzug des XXVII. Armeekorps an der Autobahn Smolensk–Orscha im Sept. und Okt. 1943 [The retreat of XXVII Army Corps on the Smolensk–Orsha autobahn in Sept. and Oct. 1943]
- ZA 1/2258 Grobba, Fritz: Die deutsche Ausnutzung der arabischen Eingeborenenbewegung im zweiten Weltkrieg [German exploitation of the indigenous Arab movement in the Second World War]

- ZA 1/2311 Fries, Walter: Der Kampf um Sizilien [The battle for Sicily]
- ZA 1/2340 Heinrici, Gotthard: Der Feldzug in Rußland. Ein operativer Überblick, II. Teil: Nov. 1942 bis Mai 1945 [The Russian campaign. An operational overview, Pt. II: Nov. 1942 to May 1945]
- ZA 1/2341 Heinrici, Gotthard: Der Feldzug in Rußland. Ein operativer Überblick, II. Teil: Nov. 1942 bis Mai 1945. Kapitel 12: 'Zitadelle': Der Angriff auf den russischen Stellungsvorsprung bei Kursk [The Russian campaign. An operational overview. Pt. II: Nov. 1942 to May 1945. Chapter 12: Operation CITADEL: The attack on the Russian salient at Kursk]
- ZA 1/2342 Heinrici, Gotthard: Der Feldzug in Rußland. Ein operativer Überblick, II. Teil: Nov. 1942 bis Mai 1945. Kapitel 13: Die russische Sommeroffensive führt zum Verlust des Orel- und Donezgebietes und zum Rückzug hinter den Dnjepr, Juli bis Sept. 1943 [The Russian campaign. An operational overview. Pt. II: Nov. 1942 to May 1945. Chapter 13: The Russian summer offensive leads to the loss of the Orel and Donets areas and to withdrawal behind the Dnieper, July to Sept. 1943]
- ZA 1/2343 Heinrici, Gotthard: Der Feldzug in Rußland. Ein operativer Überblick, II. Teil: Nov. 1942 bis Mai 1945. Kapitel 14: Der aussichtslose Kampf um die Dnjepr-Linie, die Krim und um die Front vor Leningrad.—Das Auffangen der russischen Offensive südlich des Pripjet, im Karpatenvorland und im Nordabschnitt beiderseits des Peipus-Sees [The Russian campaign. An operational overview, Pt. II: Nov. 1942 to May 1945. Chapter 14: The hopeless battle for the Dnieper line, the Crimea and the Leningrad front.—The reception of the Russian offensive south of the Pripyat Marshes, in Sub-Carpathia and in the northern sector on both sides of Lake Peipus]
- ZA 1/2346 Natzmer, Oldwig von: Das Zurückkämpfen eingekesselter Verbände zur eigenen Front; Teil 3: Lieb, Tscherkassy [Encircled units fighting their way back to their own lines]
- ZA 1/2373 Busse, Theodor: Der Angriff 'Zitadelle' im Osten 1943; hierzu Kartenband [The CITADEL offensive in the east, 1943; with an accompanying volume of maps (ZA1/2375)]
- ZA 1/2374 Reichhelm, Günther: Die Schlacht der 2. Panzerarmee und der 9. Armee im Orelbogen vom 5. Juli bis 18. Aug. 1943 [The battle of Second Panzer Army and Ninth Army in the Orel Bulge from 5 July to 18 Aug. 1943]
- ZA 1/2379 Groeben, Peter von der: Der Zusammenbruch der Heeresgruppe Mitte und ihr Kampf bis zur Festigung der Front, 22.6.–1.9.1944 [The collapse of Army Group Centre and its combat up to consolidation of the front, 22 June to 1 Sept. 1944]
- ZA 1/2380 Groeben, Peter von der: Der Zusammenbruch der Heeresgruppe Mitte und ihr Kampf bis zur Festigung der Front, 22.6.–1.9.1944; Skizzenband: 7 Skizzen [The collapse of Army Group Centre and its combat up to consolidation of the front, 22 June to 1 Sept. 1944; volume of sketches: 7 sketches]
- ZA 1/2386 Guderian, Heinz: Die Wechselwirkungen zwischen Ost- und Westfront [The interaction between the eastern and western fronts]
- ZA 1/2568 Müller-Hillebrand, Burkhardt: Die Rückzugskämpfe der Heeresgruppe Nord im Jahre 1944, Bd. 1 [The withdrawal battles of Army Group North in 1944, vol. 1]

- ZA 1/2569 Müller-Hillebrand, Burkhardt: Die Rückzugskämpfe der Heeresgruppe Nord im Jahre 1944, Bd 2 [The withdrawal battles of Army Group North in 1944, vol. 2]
- ZA 1/2661 Reinhardt, Hellmuth: Die Abwehrschlacht der 6. Armee am Mius im Juli/August 1943 [The defensive battle of Sixth Army on the Mius in July–Aug. 1943]
- ZA 1/2662 Reinhardt, Hellmuth: Der Ausbruch der 1. Pz. Armee aus dem Kessel bei Kamenez-Podolsk, März bis April [The First Armoured Army breakout from the Kamenets Podolsky pocket, Mar. to Apr.]

## Luftwaffe Study Group

- ZA 3/746 Der Feldzug im Osten 1941–1945: Der Einsatz der deutschen Luftwaffe im Osten 1943 [The campaign in the east 1941–5: deployment of the Luftwaffe in the east in 1943]
- ZA 3/748 Einsatz der Luftflotte 4 im Kampfraum Süd der Ostfront, 1.1.1943 bis 12.9.1943 [Deployment of Air Fleet 4 in Combat Zone South of the eastern front from 1 Jan. to 12 Sept. 1943]
- ZA 3/750 Sowjetrussische Luftlande-Unternehmen Ende September 1943 im Bereich der 4. Panzerarmee—Kampfraum Süd [Soviet Russian airborne operations at the end of Sept. 1943 in the area of Fourth Armoured Army—Combat Zone South]
- ZA 3/407 Materielle und personelle Verluste der deutschen Luftwaffe [The Luftwaffe's material and human losses]

*Institut für Zeitgeschichte [Institute of Contemporary History], Munich (IfZ)*

- Fb. 102/1-2 Szálasi-Tagebuch [Szálasi Diary]
- MA Sammlung militärgeschichtliche Akten [Military History Document Collection]
- ZS 317/II Unterlagen SS-Obergruppenführer und General der Waffen-SS Karl Friedrich Otto Wolff [Documents of SS-Obergruppenführer and Waffen-SS General Karl Friedrich Otto Wolff]
- ZS 3129 Unterlagen Dr B. Mayr von Baldegg [Documents of Dr B. Mayr von Baldegg]

*Militärgeschichtliches Forschungsamt [Research Institute for Military History], Potsdam (MGFA)*

- Study D-369 Railroad Transportation, Operation CITADEL (1943), by Col. Hermann Teske
- Study M 2/1-2 Ausarbeitung Pál Darnóy, Organisation und Gliederung der kgl. ungarischen, Teil E [Study by Pál Darnóy, Organization and Structure of the Royal Hungarian Honvéd Army, Part E]
- Study P-114c German Army Group Operations on the Eastern Front 1941–1943. Southern Area, by Maj.-Gen. Hellmuth Reinhardt
- Study T-9 The Axis Campaign in the East, Nov. 1942 to May 1945 (A Strategic Survey), by Col.-Gen. Gotthard Heinrici
- Study T-26 The Zitadelle Offensive, 1943, by Inf. Gen. Theodor Busse and five others
- Study T-42 Interrelation of Eastern and Western Fronts, by Col.-Gen. Heinz Guderian

*Foreign Ministry Political Archives, Bonn (PA)*

- R2974 Büro des Staatssekretärs [State Secretary's Office]

R27302	Sonderbevollmächtigter Südost [Special Plenipotentiary South-East]
R29581–5	Büro des Staatssekretärs [State Secretary's Office]
R29721	Büro des Staatssekretärs [State Secretary's Office]
R29821	Büro des Staatssekretärs [State Secretary's Office]
Inland II g	Vorgänge zum Einsatz von Gestapo und SD [Procedures for deployment of Gestapo and SD]
	Gesandtschaftsakten Zagreb [Zagreb Embassy files], 66/4
	Nachlaß Blücher [Blücher papers]

#### 4. Hungarian Archives and Collections

*Hadtörténeti Levéltár (HL) [Military History Archives], Budapest*

Honvéd Vezérkar 1. osztály napi intézkedései [Orders of the Day of the First Department (Operations) of the General Staff]

Dokumente der deutschen 13. Panzerdivision [Documents of the German 13th Armoured Division]

Manuscript Archives of the Military History Museum:

TGY 535–89, Memoirs of Maj.-Gen. Géza Vidos

Darnóy collection, 3070

József Bíró collection, 3251, 3087

Fővezérség meghatalmazott táborkának hadinaplója és mellékletei [War diaries and annexed documents of the General of the Hungarian High Command]

VI Army Corps war diary

25th Infantry Division war diary, Nov. 1944, with annexes

10th Infantry Division war diary, Nov. 1944 to Feb. 1945, with annexes

7th Infantry Division war diary, March to Aug. 1944

Microfilms 627–32, 637, 876, 896–8,

Army Group South war diary, 1944–1945

Collection of Soviet files, 46th Army war diary (1945)]

Microfilm 1071, Winkelmann notes

*Magyar Országos Levéltár (MOL) [National Archives of Hungary], Budapest*

Z 12, 104/522, Reports 1944

*Magyar Országos Levéltári Óbuda (MOL-Ó) [National Archives of Hungary], Óbuda*

Microfilm I-72, K 69 (1944–2), Protest letters from non-Jewish spouses

#### 5. Italian Archives and Collections

*Archivio Centrale dello Stato (ACS), Rome*

Segretaria Particolare del Duce, R.S.I., Busta 41, Fascicolo 378, Sottofasciolo 7, Perdite di guerra (1943–1945)

*Archivio Storico, Ufficio Storico dello Stato Maggiore dell'Esercito (ASUSSME), Rome*

Roma (I-3), Busta 1509 B, Diari Storici dello Stato Maggiore del Regio Esercito, Dati statistici della forza (1932–1946)

#### 6. Romanian Archives and Collections

*Arhivele Ministerului Apărării Naționale (Arh.M.Ap.N.), Bucharest, Pitești*

Fond Marele Stat Major, Secția a 1-a

Fond Marele Stat Major, Secția a 2-a

Fond Marele Stat Major, Secția a 7-a

Fond Marele Stat Major, Secția operațiilor

Fond Armată a 3-a, Romanian 3rd Army, war diary  
 Fond Armată a 4-a, Romanian 4th Army, war diary  
 Fond Corpul 3 Armată, Romanian 3rd Army Corps, war diary  
 Fond Corpul 5 Teritorial, Romanian 5th Territorial Corps, war diary  
 Fond 948  
 Fond 1676  
 Fond 5418  
*Arhivele Ministerului Afacerilor Externe (Arb.M.A.E.), Bucharest*  
 Fond 7/1920–1944 Germania

## 7. Russian Archives and Collections

*Rossiyskii gosudarstvennyi voyennyyi arkhiv* (RGVA) [Russian State Military Archives], Moscow

Captured German files:

(a) Second Army

Fond 1275/op. 2, d. 125, War diaries 1 Apr.–9 July, 1 Sept.–31 Dec. 1944  
 126, 205, 270–280

Fond 1275/op. 2, d. 124, 128, Annexes to war diaries  
 130–138, 140–158, 160,  
 179, 183, 217, 256, 260,  
 264–269, 329, 350, 385

(b) Third Armoured Army

Fond 1275/op. 5, d. 444 Activity reports 1944

*Tsentralnyi arkhiv ministerstva oborony Rossiiskoi Federatsii (CAMO)* [Central Archives of the Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation], Podolsk

Captured German files:

(a) Army Group North

Fond 500/op. 12459, d. 73–81 War diaries July to December 1944

(b) Army Group Centre

Fond 500/op. 12450, d. 292 Situation maps February 1944

Fond 500/op. 12454 War diaries August to June 1944

(c) Files on the battle of Kursk:

Fond 15/op. 1160, d. 1424

Fond 38/op. 11353, d. 1169

Fond 332/op. 4948, d. 51, 82

Fond 3400/op. 1, d. 23

Fond. 3407/op. 1, d. 108

CAMO Collection, Documents on the Battle of Kursk:

At the 35th International Military History Conference of the MGFA, held in Ingolstadt in September 1993, the Russian delegation presented an exhibition of a set of hitherto unknown documents from CAMO, mainly concerning the battle of Kursk in 1943. The conference volume contains an essay by Viktor V. Mukhin in which the 38 documents in question are described, although without archive file references ('Vorstellung und Kommentar zu Exponaten und Dokumenten über die Schlachten von Charkov und Kursk', in *Gezeitenwechsel im Zweiten Weltkrieg?*, 241–53). The following is a list of the documents from that set which are quoted in the present volume by Karl-Heinz Frieser in his discussion of the battle of Kursk. Copies of the documents listed are contained in the MGFA's collections.

## Document 20

*Spravka o poteriakh tankov po deistvuyushchim frontam v boyakh s 5.7.43 g. po 20.7.43 g.* [Report on (Soviet) tank losses, broken down by front, in the battles from 5 to 20 July 1943]; date: 23 July 1943

## Document 21

*Spravka o poteriakh voisk frontov, poteriakh, nanesennykh imi protivniku, i vyvody o deistviach tankovykh voisk protivnika v operatsiakh s 5-go po 15-e iyulia 1943 goda* [Report on (tank) losses by front-line troops, losses suffered by the enemy, and conclusions regarding combat action by enemy armoured troops in operations from 5 to 15 July 1943]; date: 19 July 1943

## Document 22

*Po Glavnому upravleniu bt i mv ot 22.7.43 g.* [Report by the Commander of 1st Armoured Army, Gen. Mikhail E. Katukov, to the Main Administration of Armoured and Mechanized Troops on Enemy Losses (Voronezh Front)]; date: 22 July 1943

## Document 23

*Svedenia o bezvozvratnykh poteriakh tankov, imevshikhsya na vooruzhenii bt i mv Voronezhskogo fronta za period oboronitelnogo srazheniya Kurskoi bitvy (s 5.7.43 goda po 23.7.43 goda)* [Data on irreplaceable tank losses of the Voronezh Front in defensive operations during the battle of Kursk from 5 to 23 July 1943]. Source given: f. 203, op. 2843, d. 341, 11. 138–167; date according to Mukhin: July 1943 (manuscript archive copy of 12 Aug. 1993)

## Document 24

*Svedenia o bezvozvratnykh poteriakh tankov (vsech tipov), imevshikhsya na vooruzhenii 5. gvardeiskoi tankovoi armii, pridannoi iz rezerva Stavki VGK Voronezhskomu frontu za period oboronitelnogo srazheniya Kurskoi bitvy (5.7.43–23.7.43 gg.)* [Data on irreplaceable losses incurred by 5th Guards Armoured Army of tanks (all types) assigned to the Voronezh front from the Stavka reserve for the duration of the defensive operations in the battle of Kursk.] Source given: f. 203, op. 2843, d. 341, 138–167; also: f. 203, op. 2847, d. 5, 11. 1–2; date according to Mukhin: July 1943 (manuscript archive copy of 12 Aug. 1993)

## Document 30

*Iz otcheta o boevykh deistviakh 5-i Gvardeiskoi Tankovoi armii za period s 7 iyulia po 24 iyulia 1943 goda* [Report on combat action by 5th Guards Armoured Army in the period 7 to 24 July 1943, drawn up by Chief of Staff Maj.-Gen. of Armoured Troops Baskakov and Chief of Operations Division Col. Belozerov, ratified by C-in-C 5th Guards Armoured Army Lt.-Gen. Rotmistrov and Military Council Member Maj.-Gen. Grishin]; date: 30 July 1943

## Document 30a

*Svedenia o sostoyanii, poteriakh i trofeyakh czastei i soedinenii 5 gvardeiskoi tankovoi armii na 16.7.43 g.* [Data on the strength, losses and booty of 5th Guards Armoured Army on 6 July 1943]; handwritten date: 17 July 1943. It is unclear whether, according to Mukhin's listing, this document is to be classified as an annex to Document 30 or to Document 24.

## Document 33

*Boevye donezenia shtaba 18-go tankovogo korpusa za period s 11. iyulia po 15 iyulia 1943 goda* [Combat information from the staff of 18th Armoured Corps for the period 11 to 15 July 1943]; date: July 1943

## Document 35

*Otchet o boevykh deistviakh 29 tankovogo korpusa za period s 7.7. po 24.7.43 g.* [Report on combat action by 29th Armoured Corps for the period 7 to 24 July 1943; date: July 1943]

## 8. US Archives and Collection

*National Archives, College Park, MD*

Microfilm—Series T-175, Persönlicher Stab Reichsführer SS [Reich Leader SS personal staff]

ABC 381 Germany, Sec 1-A, Joint Intelligence Committee

## II. PUBLISHED SOURCES

*Abwehrkämpfe am Nordflügel der Ostfront 1944–1945*, ed. Hans Meier-Welcker, (Beiträge zur Militär- und Kriegsgeschichte 5; Stuttgart, 1963).

*Acta No. 13. Commission Internationale d'Histoire Militaire, Helsinki 31.5.–6.6.1988*, publ. Commission for Military History of the Republic of Finland (Helsinki, 1991).

*Actes du 2<sup>e</sup> Colloque International d'Histoire Militaire*. Stockholm, 12.–15.8.1973 = Records of the 2nd International Colloquy on Military History, publ. Commission Internationale d'Histoire Militaire (Brussels, 1975).

ADAIR, PAUL, *Hitler's Greatest Defeat. The Collapse of Army Group Centre, June 1944* (London, 2002).

ADAP, see *Akten zur deutschen auswärtigen Politik*.

ADONYI-NAREDY, FERENC, and NAGY, KÁLMÁN, *Magyar huszárrok a II. világháborúban* [Hungarian Hussars in the Second World War] (Sárvár, 1990).

ADONYI-NAREDY, FRANZ VON, *Ungarns Armee im Zweiten Weltkrieg. Deutschlands letzter Verbündeter* (Die Wehrmacht im Kampf 47; Neckargemünd, 1971).

*L'aeronautica italiana. Una storia del Novecento*, ed. Paolo Ferrari (Milan, 2004).

AGA ROSSI, ELENA, *Una nazione allo sbando. L'armistizio italiano del settembre 1943* (Collana di Storia Contemporanea; Bologna, 1993). [Trans. Harvey Fergusson II, *A Nation Collapses: The Italian Surrender of September 1943* (Cambridge, 2000)].

AGTE, PATRICK, *Michael Wittmann, erfolgreichster Panzerkommandant im Zweiten Weltkrieg und die Tiger der Leibstandarte SS Adolf Hitler* (Rosenheim, 1995). [Trans. Michael Wittman and the Tiger Commanders of the Leibstandarte (Winnipeg, 1996)].

AGTE, PATRICK, *Jochen Peiper: Kommandeur, Panzerregiment, Leibstandarte* (Berg am Starnberger See, 1998). [Trans. Robert E. Dohrenwend, *Jochen Peiper: Commander, Panzerregiment, Leibstandarte* (Winnipeg, 1999)].

AHTO, SAMPO, *Aseveljet vastakkain. Lapin sota, 1944–1945* [Brothers in Arms against Each Other: On the History of Fighting between German and Finnish Units in Lapland] (Helsinki, 1980).

*Akten zur deutschen auswärtigen Politik 1918–1945. Aus dem Archiv des Deutschen Auswärtigen Amtes*, Series C: 1933–37, 6 vols. (Göttingen 1971–81); Series D: 1937–41, 13 vols. (Baden-Baden, 1950–70); Series E: 1941–45, 8 vols. (Göttingen, 1969–79).

*Albanien*, ed. Klaus-Detlev Grothusen (Göttingen, 1993).

ALEKSEYEV, M., 'Nachalo boyev v Vostochnoi Prussii [The Start of the Battles in East Prussia]', *VIZh*, 1964, 10, 119–22.

ALEXANDER, HAROLD R. L. G., *The Alexander Memoirs 1940–1945*, ed. John North (London, 1962).

ALEXANDRESCU, ION, 'Romania's Economy during the War', MS, 1995.

- ALFIERI, DINO, *Due dittatori di fronte* (Milan, 1948). [Trans. David Moore, *Dictators Face to Face* (London and New York, 1954)].
- Alles was ich weiß. Aus unbekannten Geheimdienstprotokollen vom Sommer 1945*, ed. Ulrich Schlie (Munich, 1999).
- Allianz Hitler—Horthy—Mussolini. *Dokumente zur ungarischen Außenpolitik 1933–1944*, ed. Magda Ádám, Gyula Juhász, and Lajos Kerekes (Budapest, 1966).
- ALY, GÖTZ, and GERLACH, CHRISTIAN, *Das letzte Kapitel. Realpolitik, Ideologie und der Mord an den ungarischen Juden 1944/1945* (Stuttgart and Munich, 2002).
- AMBROSE, STEPHEN E., *Eisenhower: Soldier and President* (New York, etc., 1990).
- AMITTROW, A. S., ‘Die Zerschlagung des Südfügels des faschistischen Heeres’, in *Die wichtigsten Operationen*, 498–514.
- ANCEL, JEAN, ‘Stalingrad und Rumänien’, in *Stalingrad. Ereignis, Wirkung, Symbol*, 189–214.
- ANDERSON, TRUMAN O., ‘A Hungarian Vernichtungskrieg? Hungarian Troops and the Soviet Partisan War in Ukraine, 1942’, *MGM*, 58 (1999), 345–66.
- ANDOLF, GÖRAN, ‘Die Einschätzung der Wehrmacht aus schwedischer Sicht’, in *Die Wehrmacht. Mythos und Realität*, 147–71.
- ANDRAE, FRIEDRICH, *Auch gegen Frauen und Kinder. Der Krieg der deutschen Wehrmacht gegen die Zivilbevölkerung in Italien 1943–1945* (Munich and Zurich, 1995).
- ANDREYEV, CATHERINE, *Vlasov and the Russian Liberation Movement: Soviet Reality and Émigré Theories* (Soviet and East European studies; Cambridge, 1987).
- ANDRONIKOV, NIKOLAI G., ‘Gitlerovski “fakel” byl pogoshen na “ognennoi” duge [The Hitlerite “torch” was extinguished in the “Inferno”]’, *VIZh*, 1993, 7, 2–9; 1993, 8, 2–6.
- ANDRONIKOV, NIKOLAI G., and MOSTOVENKO, VLADIMIR D., *Die roten Panzer. Geschichte der sowjetischen Panzertruppen 1920–1960*, ed. Ferdinand M. von Senger und Etterlin (Munich, 1963).
- ANESCU, VASILE, BANTEA, EUGEN, and CUPŞA, ION, *Die Teilnahme der rumänischen Armee an Antihitlerkrieg* (Bucharest, 1966).
- ANNANPALO, HEIKKI, *Rovaniemi. 8000 Years of International History* (Jyväskylä, 1998).
- Archiv und Geschichte im Ostseeraum. Festschrift für Sten Körner*, ed. Robert Bohn (Frankfurt a.M., 1997).
- ARDELEANU, EFTIMIE, ET AL., *Şefii Marelui Stat Major Român 1941–1945. Destine la răscruce* [The Chiefs of the Romanian Great General Staff 1941–45: Destinies at the Turning Point] (Bucharest, 1995).
- ARETIN, KARL OTMAR VON, ‘Henning von Tresckow. Patriot im Opfergang’ in *Für Deutschland*, 287–310.
- Armata Română în al Doilea Război Mondial. The Romanian Army in World War II*, publ. Muzeul Militar Național, Institutul de Studio operative-strategic și Istorie Militară, Secția Arhive a Statului Major General [National Military Museum, Institute of Political and Defence Studies, Archive of the Great General Staff] (Bucharest, 1995).
- L'Armee roumaine dans la Deuxième Guerre Mondiale (1941–1945)*, publ. Institut d'Études Politiques de Défense et d'Histoire Militaire (Bucharest, 1999).
- ARMSTRONG, ANNE, *Unconditional Surrender: The Impact of the Casablanca Policy upon World War II* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1961).
- Atlas of the Second World War*, ed. PETER YOUNG, cartography by Richard Natkiel (London, 1973).
- Autoritäre Regime in Ostmittel- und Südosteuropa 1919–1944*, ed. Erwin Oberländer (Paderborn, etc., 2001).

- Az 1944. év históriaja* [History of the Year 1944], ed. Ferenc Glatz (Historia evkonyv; Budapest, 1984)
- BADOGLIO, PIETRO, *Italy in the Second World War: Memories and Documents*, trans. Muriel Currey (London, New York, and Toronto, 1948).
- BAGINSKI, EDELFRIED, ‘Übersicht über die Entwicklung deutscher Panzer vom A7V zum Leopard 2 bis 1989’, in *Sturmpanzerwagen A7V*, 311–45.
- BAGRAMYAN, IVAN, ‘Na zavershayushchem etape Shyaulyanskai operatsii [In the Last Stage of the Saule Operation]’, *VIZh*, 1976, 5, 51–61.
- BAGRAMYAN, IVAN, *So schritten wir zum Sieg*, 2nd edn. (East Berlin, 1989).
- BAGRAMYAN, IVAN, ‘Der Durchbruch zur Ostsee’, in *Sowjetische Marschälle*, 116–32.
- BALCK, HERMANN, *Ordnung im Chaos: Erinnerungen 1893–1948* (Osnabrück, 1981). [Trans. David Zabecki and Dieter Biederkarken, *Order in Chaos: The Memoirs of General of Panzer Troops Hermann Balck* (Lexington, KY, 2015)].
- BALFOUR, MICHAEL, *Propaganda in War 1939–1945: Organisations, Policies and Publics in Britain and Germany* (London and Boston, MA, 1979).
- BARBER, JOHN, and HARRISON, MARK, *The Soviet Home Front, 1941–1945: A Social and Economic History of the USSR in World War II* (London and New York, 1991).
- BARBIAN, JAN-PIETER, *Literaturpolitik im 'Dritten Reich': Institutionen, Kompetenzen, Betätigungsfelder*, rev. and updated edn. (Munich, 1995).
- BARTOV, OMER, ‘Von unten betrachtet. Überleben, Zusammenhalt und Brutalität an der Ostfront’, in *Zwei Wege nach Moskau*, 326–44.
- BASTIANINI, GIUSEPPE, *Uomini, cose, fatti. Memorie di un ambasciatore* (Milan, 1959).
- BATTISTELLI, PIER PAOLO, ‘Formationsgeschichte und Stellenbesetzung der Streitkräfte der Italienischen Sozialistischen Republik (R.S.I.) 1943–1945’, in Schmitz et al., *Die deutschen Divisionen*, i. 707–80.
- The Battle for Kursk 1943: The Soviet General Staff Study*, trans. and ed. David M. Glantz and Harold S. Orenstein (Cass Series on the Soviet [Russian] Study of War 10; London and Portland, Oreg., 1999).
- The Battle for L'vov, July 1944: The Soviet General Staff Study*, trans. and ed. David M. Glantz and Harold S. Orenstein (London and Portland, OR, 2002).
- The Battle of Kursk*, ed. Ivan Parotkin (Moscow, 1974).
- ‘The Battle of Kursk: Tank Forces in Defense of the Kursk Bridgehead’, *JSMS*, 7 (1994), 4, 82–134.
- BAUM, WALTER, and WEICHOOLD, EBERHARD, *Der Krieg der 'Achsenmächte' im Mittelmeerraum. Die 'Strategie' der Diktatoren* (Studien und Dokumente zur Geschichte des Zweiten Weltkrieges 14; Göttingen, Zurich, and Frankfurt a.M., 1973).
- BAYER, HANNS, *Kavalleriedivisionen der Waffen-SS* (Gailberg and Heidelberg, 1980).
- BEER, KLAUS, ‘Vorbereitung und Durchführung des Umsturzes vom 23. August 1944 in Rumänien’, *Südost-Forschungen*, 38 (1979), 88–138.
- BEHRENBECK, SABINE, *Der Kult um die toten Helden. Nationalsozialistische Mythen, Riten und Symbole* (Kölner Beiträge zur Nationsforschung 2; Vierow, 1996).
- BEHRENBECK, SABINE, ‘Heldenkult und Opfermythos. Mechanismen der Kriegsbegeisterung 1918–1945’, in *Kriegsbegeisterung*, 143–59.
- BEHRENDT, HANS OTTO, *Rommels Kenntnis vom Feind im Afrikafeldzug. Ein Bericht über die Feindnachrichtenarbeit, insbesondere die Funkaufklärung* (Einzelschriften zur militärischen Geschichte des Zweiten Weltkrieges 25; Freiburg, 1980). [Trans. *Rommel's Intelligence in the Desert Campaign: 1941–1943* (London, 1985)].
- BEKKER, CAJUS, *Angriffshöhe 4000. Ein Kriegstagebuch der deutschen Luftwaffe* (Oldenburg and Hamburg, 1964). [Trans. Frank Ziegler, *The Luftwaffe War Diaries* (London, 1972)].

- BELIKOV, A. M., ‘Transfert de l’industrie soviétique vers l’est (juin 1941–1942)’, *Revue d’histoire de la deuxième guerre mondiale*, 43 (1961), 35–50.
- BELKIN, ILYA M., *13 armia v Lutsko-Rovenskoi operacii 1944 g.* [13th Army in the Lutsk-Rovensk Operation 1944] (Moscow, 1960).
- BELL, PHILIP MICHAEL HETT, *John Bull and the Bear: British Public Opinion, Foreign Policy and the Soviet Union, 1941–1945* (London and New York, 1990).
- BELL, PHILIP MICHAEL HETT, ‘Großbritannien und die Schlacht von Stalingrad’, in Förster, *Stalingrad*, 350–72.
- ‘Belorusskaya operatsia v tsifrakh [The Belorussian Operation in Figures]’, *VIZh*, 1994, 6, 74–86.
- BELLOW, NICOLAUS VON, *Als Hitlers Adjutant 1937–45* (Mainz, 1980). [Trans. Geoffrey Brooks, *At Hitler’s Side: The Memoirs of Hitler’s Luftwaffe Adjutant, 1937–1945* (London, 2001)].
- BEN ARIE, KATRIEL, *Die Schlacht bei Monte Cassino 1944* (Einzelschriften zur militärischen Geschichte des Zweiten Weltkrieges 29; Freiburg, 1985).
- BENARY, ALBERT, *Die Berliner Bären-Division. Geschichte der 257. Infanterie-Division 1939–1945* (Bad Nauheim, 1955).
- BENE, JÁNOS, and SZABÓ, PÉTER, *Huszonnégyes honvédek a Kárpátokban. A m. kir. 24. gyalogadosztály története 1944–1945.* [The Twenty-Fourth Honvéd in the Carpathians: History of the Royal Hungarian 24th Infantry Division] (Nyíregyháza, 1997).
- BENNETT, RALPH, *Ultra and Mediterranean Strategy 1941–1945* (London, 1989).
- BERBER, FRIEDRICH, *Lehrbuch des Völkerrechts, Bd 2: Kriegsrecht* (Munich, 1962).
- BERNIG, JÖRG, *Eingekesselt. Die Schlacht um Stalingrad im deutschsprachigen Roman nach 1945* (German Life and Civilization 23; New York, etc., 1997).
- BERNOTTI, ROMEO, *Storia della guerra nel Mediterraneo (1940–43)* (Rome, Milan, and Naples, 1960).
- BERRY, R. MICHAEL, *American Foreign Policy and the Finnish Exception. Ideological Preferences and Wartime Realities* (Studia historica 24; Helsinki, 1987).
- BEZYMENSKY, LEV A., ‘Zur Frage des “Žukov-Plans” vom 15. Mai 1941’, *Forum für osteuropäische Ideen- und Zeitgeschichte*, 4 (2000), 1, 127–44.
- BEZYMENSKY, LEV A., ‘Der sowjetische Vorstoß auf die Weichsel’, in *Der Warschauer Aufstand 1944*, 90–9.
- BINION, RUDOLPH, *Hitler among the Germans* (New York and Oxford, 1976).
- BIOCIC, ANTE, ‘L’Opération de Mostar’, *Revue Internationale d’Histoire Militaire*, 64 (1986), 283–316.
- Bitva na Kurskoi duge (1943)* [The Battle in the Kursk Bend (1943)], ed. Kirille S. Moskalenko (Moscow, 1975).
- Bitva za Leningrad 1941–1944* [The Battle for Leningrad, 1941–4], ed. S. P. Platonov (Moscow, 1964).
- BLAICH, FRITZ, *Wirtschaft und Rüstung im ‘Dritten Reich’* (Düsseldorf, 1987).
- BLEYER, WOLFGANG, ‘Der geheime Bericht über die Rüstung des faschistischen Deutschlands vom 27. Januar 1945’, *Jahrbuch für Wirtschaftsgeschichte*, 2 (1969), 347–67.
- BLEYER, WOLFGANG, *Staat und Monopole im totalen Krieg. Der staatsmonopolistische Machtapparat und die totale Mobilisierung im 1. Halbjahr 1943* (Schriften des Zentralinstituts für Geschichte, 1st series, 34; East Berlin, 1970).
- BLOCH, MICHAEL, *Ribbentrop* (London, etc., 1992).
- Blockade. Leningrad 1941–1944. Dokumente und Essays von Russen und Deutschen*, ed. Antje Leetz (Reinbek bei Hamburg, 1992).
- BLÜCHER, WIPERT VON, *Gesandter zwischen Diktatur und Demokratie. Erinnerungen aus den Jahren 1935–1944* (Wiesbaden, 1951).

- BLUMENSON, MARTIN, *Sicily: Whose Victory?* (New York, 1969).
- BOBERACH, HEINZ, 'Stimmungsumschwung in der deutschen Bevölkerung', in *Stalingrad. Mythos und Wirklichkeit*, 61–6.
- BOCCA, GIORGIO, *Storia dell'Italia partigiana settembre 1943–maggio 1945* (Milan, 2002).
- BOELCKE, WILLI A., 'Goebbels und die Kundgebung im Berliner Sportpalast vom 18. Februar 1943. Vorgeschichte und Verlauf', *Jahrbuch für die Geschichte Mittel- und Ostdeutschlands* 19 (1970), 234–55.
- BOEPPEL, ERNST, *Adolf Hitlers Reden* (Munich, 1925).
- BÖHME, KLAUS-RICHARD, 'Stalingrad und Schweden' in *Stalingrad. Ereignis, Wirkung, Symbol*, 375–96.
- BÖHME, KLAUS-RICHARD, 'Vermutete sowjetische Ambitionen in Skandinavien', in *Kriegsende im Norden*, 217–31.
- BÖHME, KURT W., *Die deutschen Kriegsgefangenen in Jugoslawien* (Zur Geschichte der deutschen Kriegsgefangenen des Zweiten Weltkrieges 1/1; Bielefeld, 1976).
- BÖHME, KURT W., *Die deutschen Kriegsgefangenen in sowjetischer Hand. Eine Bilanz* (Zur Geschichte der deutschen Kriegsgefangenen des Zweiten Weltkrieges 7; Munich, 1966).
- BOHN, ROBERT, *Reichskommissariat Norwegen. 'Nationalsozialistische Neuordnung' und Kriegswirtschaft* (Beiträge zur Militärgeschichte 54; Munich, 2000).
- BOHN, ROBERT, 'Der Rückzug am Eismeer und die Zerstörung der Nordkalotte', in *Kriegsjahr 1944*, 105–24.
- BOHN, ROBERT, 'Schuld und Sühne. Die norwegische Abrechnung mit den deutschen Besatzern', in *Deutschland, Europa und der Norden*, 107–43.
- BOHRER, KARL HEINZ, *Die Ästhetik des Schreckens. Die pessimistische Romantik und Ernst Jüngers Frühwerk* (Munich, etc., 1978).
- BOLDT, GERHARD, *Die letzten zehn Tage in der Reichskanzlei* (Munich, 1976).
- BOLTIN, J. A., 'Die Zerschlagung der deutsch-faschistischen Truppen in der Moldau, in Rumänien und Bulgarien', in *Die wichtigsten Operationen*, 461–83.
- BONACINA, GIORGIO, *Obiettivo: Italia. I bombardamenti aerei delle città italiane dal 1940 al 1945* (Milan, 1972).
- BORMANN, MARTIN, and BORMANN, GERDA, *The Bormann Letters: The Private Correspondence between Martin Bormann and his Wife from January 1943 to April 1945*, ed. Hugh R. Trevor-Roper (London, 1954).
- BORODZIEJ, WŁODZIMIERZ, *Der Warschauer Aufstand 1944* (Frankfurt a.M., 2001). [Trans. Barbara Harshav, *The Warsaw Uprising of 1944* (Madison, WI, 2006)].
- BORODZIEJ, WŁODZIMIERZ, 'Der Warschauer Aufstand', in *Die polnische Heimatarmee*, 217–53.
- BORUS, JOSEF, 'Die Einschätzung der Lage Deutschlands aus ungarischer Sicht', in *Die Zukunft des Reiches*, 161–75.
- BORUS, JOSEF, 'Stalingrads Widerhall und Wirkung in Ungarn', in *Stalingrad. Ereignis, Wirkung, Symbol*, 215–28.
- BÖTTGER, PETER, *Winston Churchill und die Zweite Front (1941–1943). Ein Aspekt der britischen Strategie im Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Europäische Hochschulschriften, 3rd series, 172; Frankfurt a.M., etc., 1984).
- BOURGOIS, DANIEL, ‘“Barbarossa” und die Schweiz’, in *Zwei Wege nach Moskau*, 620–39.
- BRAHAM, RANDOLPH L., *The Politics of Genocide: The Holocaust in Hungary*, rev. and enlarged edn. (New York, 1994).
- BRAHAM, RANDOLPH L., *The Wartime System of Labor Service in Hungary: Varieties of Experiences* (New York, 1995).

- BREIT, GOTTHARD, *Das Staats- und Gesellschaftsbild deutscher Generale beider Weltkriege im Spiegel ihrer Memoiren* (Militärgeschichtliche Studien 17; Boppard a.Rh., 1973).
- BREITH, HERMANN, ‘Der Angriff des III. Panzerkorps bei “Zitadelle” im Juli 1943’, *Wehrkunde*, 7 (1958), 543–48.
- Briefwechsel Stalins mit Churchill, Attlee, Roosevelt und Truman 1941–1944, publ. Kommission für die Herausgabe diplomatischer Dokumente beim Ministerium für Auswärtige Angelegenheiten der UdSSR (East Berlin, 1961).
- Britain, *NATO and the Lessons of the Balkan Conflicts 1991–1999*, ed. Stephen Badsey and Paul Latawski (Sandhurst Conference, 4th series; London and New York, 2004).
- BROSZAT, MARTIN, ‘Hitler und die Genesis der “Endlösung”. Aus Anlaß der Thesen von David Irving’, *VfZ*, 25 (1977), 738–75; also repr. in Broszat, *Nach Hitler*, 187–29.
- BROSZAT, MARTIN, *Nach Hitler. Der schwierige Umgang mit unserer Geschichte*, ed. Hermann Graml and Klaus-Dietmar Henke (Munich and Vienna, 1986).
- BROWNING, CHRISTOPHER, *The Origins of the Final Solution: The Evolution of Nazi Jewish Policy, September 1939–March 1942* (London, 2005).
- BRÜGEL, JOHANN WOLFGANG, ‘Das sowjetische Ultimatum an Rumänien im Juni 1940’, *VfZ*, 11 (1963), 403–17.
- BUCHNER, ALEX, *Ostfront 1944. Tscherkassy, Tarnopol, Krim, Witebsk, Bobruisk, Brody, Jassy, Kischinew* (Friedberg, 1988). [Trans. David Johnson, *Ostfront 1944: The German Defensive Battles on the Russian Front, 1944* (West Chester, PA, 1991)].
- BÜNNING, HANS, ‘Das Schicksal der Verwundeten im Kessel von Tscherkassy’, *Der Freiwillige*, 1982, 11, 6–9; 1982, 12, 16–19; 1983, 1, 6–8.
- BULEI, ION, *Kurze Geschichte Rumäniens* (Bucharest, 1998).
- BULLOCK, ALAN, *Hitler and Stalin: Parallel Lives* (London, 1991).
- BURKHARDT, JOHANNES, ‘Kriegsgrund Geschichte? 1870, 1813, 1756—historische Argumente und Orientierungen bei Ausbruch des Ersten Weltkriegs’, in Burkhardt et al., *Lange und kurze Wege*, 9–86.
- BURKHARDT, JOHANNES ET AL., *Lange und kurze Wege in den Ersten Weltkrieg. Vier Augsburger Beiträge zur Kriegsursachenforschung* (Schriften der Philosophischen Fakultäten der Universität Augsburg, Historisch-sozialwissenschaftliche Reihe 49; Munich, 1996).
- BUTLER, JAMES RAMSAY MONTAGU, *Grand Strategy, June 1941 to August 1942, Part II* (London, 1964).
- BÜTTNER, RUTH, *Sowjetisierung oder Selbständigkeit? Die sowjetische Finnlandpolitik 1943–1948* (Hamburger Beiträge zur Geschichte des östlichen Europa 8; Hamburg, 2001).
- BUZATU, GHEORGHE, *România cu și fără Antonescu. Documente, studii, relatari și comentarii* [Romania with and without Antonescu: Documents, Studies, Reports, and Commentaries] (Iași, 1991).
- BUZATU, GHEORGHE, *România și Războiul Mondial din 1939–1945* [Romania and the World War 1939–45] (Iași, 1995).
- BYSTRICKÝ, JOZEF, ‘Rýchla (1. Pešia) divizia na Kryme a v bojoch na juh od Kacovky [The Rapid Division (1st Infantry Division) in Crimea and in the Battles South of Kakhovka]’, *Vojenská História*, 3 (2003), 54–74.
- CAIDIN, MARTIN, *The Tigers are Burning* (New York, 1974).
- Campagne de Tunisie novembre 1942–mai 1943. Actes du colloque international sur l’histoire de la 2<sup>e</sup> guerre mondiale, 12/13/14 octobre 1982, Tunis, publ. Comité national tunisien d’histoire de la 2<sup>e</sup> guerre mondiale (Tunis, 1982).

- CAPOBIANCO, GIUSEPPE, *Il recupero della memoria. Per una storia della Resistenza in Terra di Lavoro. Autunno 1943*, pref. Guido D'Agostino (Naples, 1995).
- CAPUS, ALEX, 'Zwischen allen Fronten die Schweiz. Wie der Soldat Max Waibel den Zweiten Weltkrieg verkürzte. Eine wahre Geschichte', *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 13/14 Mar. 2004, IV.
- CARELL, PAUL, *Die Wüstenfuchse. Mit Rommel in Afrika* (Hamburg, 1959; Stuttgart, 1974). [Trans. Mervyn Savill, *The Foxes of the Desert* (London, 1960)].
- CARELL, PAUL, *Verbrannte Erde. Schlacht zwischen Wolga und Weichsel (1943–44)*, 7th edn. (Frankfurt a.M., Berlin, and Vienna, 1966). [Trans. Ewald Osers, *Scorched Earth: The Russian–German War, 1943–1944* (Boston, MA 1970)].
- CARIUS, OTTO, *Tiger im Schlamm. Die 2./schw. Pz.Abt. 502 vor Narwa und Dünaburg* (Neckargemünd, 1960). [Trans. Robert J. Edwards, *Tigers in the Mud: The Combat Career of German Panzer Commander Otto Carius* (Winnipeg, 1992)].
- CARLGREN, WILHELM MAURITZ, *Swedish Foreign Policy during the Second World War* (London, 1977).
- CARLGREN, WILHELM MAURITZ, 'The Emergence of Sweden's Policy of Neutrality', *Revue Internationale d'Histoire Militaire*, 57 (1984), 11–33.
- CARLGREN, WILHELM MAURITZ, 'Die Einschätzung der Lage Deutschlands in der zweiten Kriegshälfte aus schwedischer Sicht', in *Die Zukunft des Reiches*, 177–93.
- CARLGREN, WILHELM MAURITZ, 'The Significance of the Intelligence Services for Political and Military Decision-Making in Sweden during World War II', *Acta No.13*, ii. 45–56.
- CARPI, DANIEL, *Between Mussolini and Hitler: The Jews and the Italian Authorities in France and Tunisia* (Hanover and London, 1994).
- CARR, WILLIAM, *Hitler: A Study in Personality and Politics* (London, 1978).
- CARTIER, RAYMOND, *Der Zweite Weltkrieg*, 2 vols. (Munich, 1967).
- CARVER, MICHAEL, *The War in Italy 1943–1945. The Campaign that Tipped the Balance in Europe* (London, 2001).
- CASAGRANDE, THOMAS, *Die volksdeutsche SS-Division 'Prinz Eugen'. Die Banater Schwaben und die nationalsozialistischen Kriegsverbrechen*, (Frankfurt a.M., etc., 2003).
- CHADAEV, YAKOV E., *Ekonomika SSSR v period Velikoi otechestvennoi voiny* [The Soviet Economy during the Great Patriotic War] (Moscow, 1965).
- CHAMBERLAIN, PETER, and DOYLE, HILARY L., *Encyclopedia of German Tanks of World War Two: A Complete Illustrated Directory of German Battle Tanks, Armoured Cars, Self-Propelled Guns and Semi-Tracked Vehicles 1933–1945*, 2nd edn. (London, 1993).
- CHIARI, BERNHARD, 'Die Heimatarmee als Spiegelbild polnischer nationaler Identität', in *Die polnische Heimatarmee*, 1–25.
- CHURCHILL, WINSTON, *The Second World War*, 6 vols. (London, 1948–54).
- CIANO, GALEAZZO, *Diario 1937–1943*, ed. Renzo De Felice (Milan, 1980). [Trans. *The Ciano Diaries, 1939–1943: The Complete, Unabridged Diaries of Count Galeazzo Ciano, Italian Minister for Foreign Affairs, 1936–1943*, ed. Hugh Gibson (New York, 1973).]
- CIECHANOWSKI, JAN, 'Die Genese des Aufstandes. Zum Entscheidungsprozeß und den Zielsetzungen auf polnischer Seite', in *Der Warschauer Aufstand 1944*, 100–17.
- CIOBANU, NICOLAE, 'The Defensive Operation of the 1st Romanian Army', in *Romania in World War II*, 234–6.
- CLAUSEWITZ, CARL VON, *Politische Schriften und Briefe*, ed. Hans Rothfels (Munich, 1922).
- CLAUSEWITZ, CARL VON, *Vom Kriege. Hinterlassenes Werk des Generals Carl von Clausewitz. Vollst. Ausg. im Urtext mit erneut erw. histor.-kritischer Würdigung*, ed. Werner Hahlweg, 19th edn. (Bonn, 1980).

- CLODFELTER, MICHEAL, *Warfare and Armed Conflicts: A Statistical Reference to Casualty and Other Figures, 1618–1991*, 2 vols. (Jefferson, N.C., and London, 1992).
- COAKLEY, ROBERT W., and LEIGHTON, RICHARD M., *Global Logistics and Strategy 1943–1945* (United States Army in World War II. The War Department; Washington, D.C., 1968).
- COHEN, JEROME B., *Japan's Economy in War and Reconstruction* (Westport, Conn., 1973).
- CONSTANTINIU, FLORIN, 'August 23, 1944—A Major Event of the War', in *Romania in World War II*, 205–6.
- CONSTANTINIU, FLORIN, 'Cairo and Stockholm Diplomatic Negotiations', in *Romania in World War II*, 187–90.
- CONSTANTINIU, FLORIN, 'The Last Days of Antonescu's Regime: The Diplomatic Activity', in *Romania in World War II*, 200–2.
- CONSTANTINIU, FLORIN, 'Marshal's Arresting', in *Romania in World War II*, 203–4.
- COOPER, MATTHEW, *The Phantom War: The German Struggle against Soviet Partisans 1941–1944* (London, 1979).
- COSPITO, NICOLA, and NEULEN, HANS WERNER, *Salò-Berlino: l'alleanza difficile. La Repubblica Sociale Italiana nei documenti segreti del Terzo Reich* (Milan, 1992).
- CREVELD, MARTIN VAN, *Fighting Power: German and U.S. Army Performance, 1939–1945* (London, 1983).
- CSIMA, JÁNOS, 'Magyarország katonai résvétele a második világháborúban [Hungary's Military Participation in the Second World War]', *Hadiörténeti közlemények*, 1966, 3, 635–65.
- CUZZI, MARCO, *L'occupazione italiana della Slovenia 1941–1943* (Rome, 1998).
- CZETTLER, ANTAL, *A mi kis élethaldál-kérdések. A magyar külpolitika a hadba lépéstől a német megszállásig* [Our Little Questions of Life and Death: Hungarian Foreign Policy from Entry into the War until the German Occupation] (Budapest, 2000).
- DAHL, HANS FREDERIK, *Quisling: A Study in Treachery* (Cambridge, 1999).
- DAINES, V. O., 'Srazhenie pod Leningradom i Novgorodom [The Battle at Leningrad and Novgorod]', in *Velikaya Otechestvennaya Voina 1941–1945*, iii. 20–32.
- DÁLNOKI VERESS, LAJOS, *Magyarország honvédelme a II. világháború előtt és alatt 1920–1945* [Hungary's National Defence before and during the Second World War], iii (Munich, 1972).
- DANILEVICH, A. A., 'Srazhenie za kubanskii platsdarm, Rostov i Maluyu Zemliu [The Battle for the Kuban Bridgehead, Rostov, and the Little Country]', in *Velikaya Otechestvennaya Voina 1941–1945*, iii. 127–47.
- DANILOW, WALERIJ (= Valeri Danilov), 'Hat der Generalstab der Roten Armee einen Präventivschlag gegen Deutschland vorbereitet?', *ÖMZ*, 31 (1993), 3–41.
- DAVIDSON, EUGENE, *The Trial of the Germans: An Account of the Twenty-Two Defendants before the International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg* (Columbia, MT, etc., 1966).
- DAVIES, NORMAN, *Rising '44: The Battle for Warsaw* (London, 2003).
- DDI, see *I Documenti Diplomatici Italiani*.
- DEAKIN, FREDERICK WILLIAM, *The Brutal Friendship: Mussolini, Hitler and the Fall of Italian Fascism* (London, 1962).
- DEDIJER, VLADIMIR, *The War Diaries of Vladimir Dedijer from April 6, 1941, to November 7, 1944*, 3 vols. (Ann Arbor, MI, 1989).
- 'The Defeat of the Germans in Belorussia (Summer 1944)', *JSMS*, 7 (1994), 4, 809–77; 8 (1995), 1, 164–228; 8 (1995), 3, 630–65.
- DE FELICE, RENZO, *Mussolini l'alleato 1940–1945, i: L'Italia in guerra 1940–1943. Dalla guerra 'breve' alla guerra lunga* (Biblioteca di cultura storica, 183/1; Turin, 1990).
- DEIST, WILHELM, 'Die Politik der Seekriegsleitung und die Rebellion der Flotte Ende Oktober 1918', *VfZ*, 14 (1966), 341–68.

- DELBRÜCK, HANS, *Ludendorff's Selbstporträt*, 9th edn. (Berlin, 1922).
- DERİNGİL, SELİM, *Turkish Foreign Policy during the Second World War: An 'Active' Neutrality* (LSE Monographs in International Relations; Cambridge, 1989).
- Der deutsche Angriff auf die Sowjetunion 1941. Die Kontroverse um die Präventivkriegsthese*, ed. Gerd R. Ueberschär (Darmstadt, 1998).
- Deutsche Geschichte seit dem Ersten Weltkrieg*, 3 vols. (Stuttgart, 1973).
- Deutsche, Juden, Völkermord. Der Holocaust als Geschichte und Gegenwart*, ed. Jürgen Matthäus and Klaus-Michael Mallmann (Veröffentlichungen der Forschungsstelle Ludwigsburg der Universität Stuttgart 7; Darmstadt, 2006).
- Das Deutsche Reich und der Zweite Weltkrieg* (Stuttgart and Munich, 1979–2005):
- i. *Ursachen und Voraussetzungen der deutschen Kriegspolitik*, by Wilhelm Deist, Manfred Messerschmidt, Hans-Erich Volkmann, and Wolfram Wette (Stuttgart, 1979). [Trans. P. S. Falla, E. Osers, and Dean S. McMurray, *Germany and the Second World War*, i: *The Build-Up of German Aggression* (Oxford, 1992)];
  - ii. *Der Errichtung der Hegemonie auf dem europäischen Kontinent*, by Klaus A. Maier, Horst Rohde, Bernd Stegemann, and Hans Umbreit (Stuttgart, 1979). [Trans. P. S. Falla, E. Osers, and Dean S. McMurray, *Germany's Initial Victories in Europe* (Oxford, 1992)];
  - iii. *Der Mittelmeerraum und Südosteuropa*, by Gerhard Schreiber, Bernd Stegemann, and Detlef Vogel (Stuttgart, 1984). [Trans. P. S. Falla, Dean S. McMurray, E. Osers, and L. Willmot, *The Mediterranean, South-East Europe, and North Africa 1939–1941* (Oxford, 1994)];
  - iv. *Der Angriff auf die Sowjetunion*, by Horst Boog, Jürgen Förster, Joachim Hoffmann, Ernst Klink, Rolf-Dieter Müller, and Gerd R. Ueberschär (Stuttgart, 1983). [Trans. Dean S. McMurray, E. Osers, and L. Willmot, *The Attack on the Soviet Union* (Oxford, 1995)];
  - v/I. *Organisation und Mobilisierung des deutschen Machtbereichs: Kriegsverwaltung, Wirtschaft und personelle Ressourcen 1939 bis 1941*, by Bernhard R. Kroener, Rolf-Dieter Müller, and Hans Umbreit (Stuttgart, 1988). [Trans. J. Brownjohn, P. Crampton, E. Osers, and L. Willmot, *Organization and Mobilization of the German Sphere of Power: Wartime Administration, Economy and Manpower Resources 1939–1941* (Oxford, 2000)];
  - v/II. *Organisation und Mobilisierung des deutschen Machtbereichs: Kriegsverwaltung, Wirtschaft und personelle Ressourcen 1942 bis 1944/5*, by Bernhard R. Kroener, Rolf-Dieter Müller, and Hans Umbreit (Stuttgart, 1999). [Trans. D. Cook-Radmore, E. Osers, B. Smerin, and B. Wilson, *Organization and Mobilization of the German Sphere of Power: Wartime Administration, Economy and Manpower Resources 1942–1944/5* (Oxford, 2003)];
  - vi. *Der globale Krieg. Die Ausweitung zum Weltkrieg und der Wechsel der Initiative*, by Horst Boog, Werner Rahn, Reinhard Stumpf, and Bernd Wegner (Stuttgart, 1990). [Trans. J. Brownjohn, P. Crampton, E. Osers, and L. Willmot, *The Global War* (Oxford, 2001)];
  - vii. *Das Deutsche Reich in der Defensive. Strategischer Luftkrieg in Europa, Krieg im Westen und in Ostasien 1943 bis 1944/5*, by Horst Boog, Gerhard Krebs, and Detlef Vogel (Stuttgart and Munich, 2001). [Trans. D. Cook-Radmore, F. Garvie, E. Osers, B. Smerin, and B. Wilson, *The Strategic Air War in Europe and the War in the West and East Asia 1943–1944/5* (Oxford, 2006)];
  - ix/I. *Die Deutsche Kriegsgesellschaft 1939 bis 1945: Politisierung, Vernichtung, Überleben*, by Ralf Blank, Jörg Echternamp, Karola Fings, Jürgen Förster, Winfried Heinemann, Tobias Jersak, Armin Nolzen, and Christoph Rass (Munich, 2004). [Trans. D. Cook-Radmore, E. Osers, B. Smerin, and B. Wilson, *German Wartime Society 1939–1945: Politicization, Disintegration, and the Struggle for Survival* (Oxford, 2008)];

- ix/II. *Die Deutsche Kriegsgesellschaft 1939 bis 1945: Ausbeutung, Deutungen, Ausgrenzung*, by Bernhard Chiari, Jeffrey Herf, Ela Hornung, Ernst Langthaler, Aristotle A. Kallis, Katrin A. Kilian, Birthe Kundrus, Sven Oliver Müller, Rüdiger Overmans, Oliver Rathkolb, Sabine Schweitzer, Mark Spoerer, Hans-Ulrich Thamer, Georg Wagner-Kyora, and Rafael A. Zagovec (Munich, 2005). [Trans. D. Cook-Radmore, B. Smerin, J. Stoker, and B. Wilson, *German Wartime Society 1939–1945: Exploitation, Interpretations, Exclusion* (Oxford, 2014)].
- Die deutsche Wirtschaftspolitik in den besetzten sowjetischen Gebieten 1941 bis 1943. Der Abschlußbericht des Wirtschaftsstabes Ost und Aufzeichnungen eines Angehörigen des Wirtschaftskommandos Kiew*, ed. and intr. Rolf-Dieter Müller, (Deutsche Geschichtsquellen des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts 57; Boppard a.Rh., 1991).
- Deutschland, Europa und der Norden. Ausgewählte Probleme der nord-europäischen Geschichte im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. Robert Bohn (Historische Mitteilungen, Suppl. 6; Stuttgart, 1993).
- Deutschland im zweiten Weltkrieg*, 6 vols., ed. by an authors' collective headed by Wolfgang Schumann (East Berlin, 1974–85; licensed edn., Cologne, 1974–85).
- Deutschland—Italien 1943–1945. Aspekte einer Entzweigung*, ed. Rudolf Lill (Villa Vigoni, 3rd series; Tübingen, 1992).
- Deutschland—Japan in der Zwischenkriegszeit*, ed. Josef Kreiner and Regine Mathias (Studium Universale 12; Bonn, 1990).
- Deutschlands Rüstung im Zweiten Weltkrieg. Hitlers Konferenzen mit Albert Speer 1942–1945*, ed. and intr. Willi A. Boelcke (Frankfurt a.M., 1969).
- Deutschland und Finnland im 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. Edgar Hösch, Jorma Kalela, and Hermann Beyer-Thoma (Wiesbaden, 1999).
- DIECKERT, KURT, and GROSSMANN, HORST, *Der Kampf um Ostpreußen. Der umfassende Dokumentarbericht über das Kriegsgeschehen in Ostpreußen* (Stuttgart, 1976).
- Dienst für die Geschichte. Gedenkschrift für Walther Hubatsch, 17. Mai 1915 bis 29. Dezember 1984*, ed. Michael Salewski and Josef Schröder (Göttingen and Zürich, 1985).
- DILAS (= DJILAS), MILOVAN, *Találkozások Sztálinnal* [Meetings with Stalin] (Budapest, 1989).
- DIMITROFF, GEORGI, *Tagebücher 1933–1943, i: Tagebücher; ii: Kommentare und Materialien*, ed. Bernhard H. Bayerlein (Berlin, 2000).
- DiNARDO, RICHARD L., and HUGHES, DANIEL J., ‘Germany and Coalition Warfare in the World Wars: A Comparative Study’, *WIH*, 8 (2001), 2, 166–90.
- DJILAS, MILOVAN, *Conversations with Stalin* (New York, 1962).
- DJILAS, MILOVAN, *Der Krieg der Partisanen. Memoiren 1941–1945* (Vienna, 1977).
- DJILAS, MILOVAN, *Wartime* (New York, 1977).
- DOBRE, FLORICA, ‘Memoriul generalului Potopeanu. Administrația militară a Transnistriei’, *Buletinul Arhivelor Militare Române*, Nos. 2–3, I/1998, 79–82.
- DOBRINESCU, VALERIU, and HLIHOR, CONSTANTIN, ‘Der Waffenstillstand zwischen Rumänen und den Vereinten Nationen (Moskau, 12.9.1944)’, *Südost-Forschungen*, 45 (1985), 139–66.
- DOBRINESCU, VALERIU, and HLIHOR, CONSTANTIN, ‘23 august: act favorabil Aliaților sau României? [The 23rd of August: A Favour to the Allies or Romania?]’, *Revista de istorie militară*, 1994, 6, 4–11.
- I Documenti Diplomatici Italiani*, publ. Ministro degli Affari Esteri, 9th series: 1939–43, vol. 10 (7 Feb.–8 Sept. 1943) (Rome, 1990).
- Documents on the History of European Integration*, i.: *Continental Plans for European Union 1939–1945*, ed. Walter Lipgens (European University Institute, Series B; Berlin and New York, 1985).

- 'Doklad Komissii GKO [Report of the Commission of the State Defence Committee to Comrade Stalin, 11 Apr. 1944]', in *Velikaya Otechestvennaya Voina 1941–1945*, iii. 441–8.
- Dokumentation der Vertreibung der Deutschen aus Ost-Mitteleuropa*, 5 vols., ed. Theodor Schieder, publ. Federal Ministry for Displaced Persons, Refugees and War Victims (Bonn 1953–62).
- DOLLMANN, EUGEN, *Dolmetscher der Diktatoren* (Bayreuth, 1963). [Trans. J. Maxwell Brownjohn, *The Interpreter: Memoirs of Doktor Eugen Dollmann* (London, 1967)].
- DOMARUS, MAX, *Hitler. Reden und Proklamationen 1932–1945. Kommentiert von einem deutschen Zeitgenossen*, 2 vols. (Würzburg 1962–3; new edn., Munich, 1965; 3rd edn., Wiesbaden, 1973). [Trans. Mary Fran Golbert, *Hitler: Speeches and Proclamations 1932–1945: The Chronicle of a Dictatorship* (London, 1989)].
- DOMBRÁDY, LORÁND, *A magyar gazdaság és hadfelszerelés 1938–1944* [The Hungarian Economy and War Munitions] (Budapest, 1981).
- DOMBRÁDY, LORÁND, and TÓTH, SÁNDOR, *A magyar királyi honvédség 1919–1945* [The Royal Hungarian Army] (Budapest, 1987).
- DONAT, GERHARD, *Der Munitionsverbrauch im Zweiten Weltkrieg im operativen und taktischen Rahmen (Beispiele und Folgerungen)* (Studien zur Militärgeschichte, Militärwissenschaft und Konfliktforschung 36; Osnabrück 1992).
- DOOR, ROCHUS, 'Zur Vorgeschichte der deutschen Besetzung Ungarns am 19. März 1944', *Jahrbuch für Geschichte der UdSSR und der volksdemokratischen Länder Europas*, 10 (1967), 107–31.
- DRĂGAN, IOSIF CONSTANTIN, *Antonescu: Marshal and Ruler of Romania (1940–1944)* (Bucharest, 1995).
- DRECHSLER, KARL, DRESS, HANS, and HASS, GERHART, 'Europapläne des deutschen Imperialismus im zweiten Weltkrieg', *ZfG*, 19 (1971), 916–31.
- DRESS, HANS, 'Der Slowakische Nationalaufstand', *Militärgeschichte*, 1974, 530–45.
- DUFAY, FRANÇOIS, *Le Voyage d'automne: octobre 1941, des écrivains français en Allemagne* (Paris, 2000).
- DÜLFFER, JOST, *Deutsche Geschichte 1933–1945. Führerglaube und Vernichtungskrieg* (Stuttgart, 1992). [Trans. *Nazi Germany 1933–1945: Faith and Annihilation* (London and New York, 1996).]
- DÜLFFER, JOST, THIES, JOCHEN, and HENKE, JOSEF, *Hitlers Städte. Baupolitik im Dritten Reich. Eine Dokumentation* (Cologne and Vienna, 1978).
- DULLES, ALLEN W., *The Secret Surrender* (New York, 1966).
- DUNN, WALTER S., *Kursk. Hitler's Gamble 1943* (Westport, CT and London, 1997).
- DUNN, WALTER S., *Soviet Blitzkrieg: The Battle for White Russia, 1944* (London, 2000).
- DUPUY, TREVOR NEVITT, and MARTELL, PAUL, *Great Battles on the Eastern Front: The Soviet-German War, 1941–1945* (Indianapolis, IN and New York, 1982).
- DUȚU, ALEANDRU, *Între Wehrmacht și Armata Rosie. Relații de comandament româno-germane și româno-sovietice (1941–1945)* [Between the Wehrmacht and the Red Army. Romanian–German and Romanian–Soviet Relations between Commanders (1941–5)] (Bucharest, 2000).
- DUȚU, ALEANDRU, 'A Command Crisis on the Moldavian Front', in *Romania in World War II*, 194–9.
- DUȚU, ALEANDRU, 'A Difficult Situation on the Moldavian Front', in *Romania in World War II*, 180–3.
- DUȚU, ALEANDRU, 'Relații de comandament româno-germane în primăvara anului 1944 [Relations between Romanian and German Commanders in the Spring of 1944]', in *Anuar 1997. Studii de politică de apărare teorie, stărihă, arată și istorie militară*, 261–71.

- DUȚU, ALESANDRU, ‘Szolnok—Truth and Mystification’, in *Romania in World War II*, 261–3.
- DUȚU, ALESANDRU, DOBRE, FLORICA, and LOGHIN, LEONIDA, *Armata Română în al Doilea Război Mondial 1941–1945* [The Romanian Army in the Second World War 1941–5] (Bucharest, 1999).
- The Effects of Strategic Bombing on the German War Economy*, publ. US Strategic Bombing Survey (Washington, D.C., 31 Oct. 1945).
- EHRHARDT, HERMANN, *Die Ratifikationsbedürftigkeit völkerrechtlicher Verträge* (Hamburg, 1941).
- EHRISMANN, OTFRID, ‘Siegfried. Studie über Heldentum, Liebe und Tod; mittelalterliche Nibelungen, Hebbel, Wagner’, *Hebbel-Jahrbuch*, 1981, 11–48.
- EICHHOLTZ, DIETRICH, *Geschichte der deutschen Kriegswirtschaft*, 3 vols. (Forschungen zur Wirtschaftsgeschichte 1; Berlin, 1969–96).
- EINSIEDEL, HEINRICH GRAF VON, *Tagebuch der Versuchung* (Berlin and Stuttgart, 1950). [Trans. *I Joined the Russians: A Captured German Flier's Diary of the Communist Temptation* (New Haven, CT, 1953)].
- EINSIEDEL, HEINRICH GRAF VON, ‘Bridge mit Madame Kollontaj. Suchte Stalin 1943 einen Sonderfrieden mit Hitler? Fragen zu den Stockholmer Gesprächen’, *Die Zeit*, No. 40, 30 Sept. 1983.
- EKMAN, STIG, ‘Schweden, Deutschland und der Holocaust. Historische Anmerkungen zur Außenpolitik der schwedischen Regierung während des Zweiten Weltkrieges’, *Nordeuropa-forum* (2001), 2, 5–26.
- ELISEYEV, V. T., and MIKHALEV, S. N., ‘Osvobozhdenie Pravoberezhnoi Ukrayiny i Kryma [The Liberation of Right-Bank Ukraine and Crimea]’, in *Velikaya Otechestvennaya Voina 1941–1945*, iii. 33–52.
- ELLIS, JOHN, *Cassino: The Hollow Victory. The Battle for Rome, January to June 1944* (London, 1984).
- ELLWOOD, DAVID, ‘Gli inglesi e l’8 settembre 1943’, in *Otto settembre 1943*, 289–314.
- ELTZ, ERWEIN KARL GRAF ZU, *Mit den Kosaken. Kriegstagebuch 1943–1945* (Donaueschingen, 1970).
- Enciclopedia dell’antifascismo e della Resistenza*, vol. 1: A–C (Milan, 1968).
- Ende des Dritten Reiches—Ende des Zweiten Weltkriegs. Eine perspektivische Rückschau*, ed. for the MGFA by Hans-Erich Volkmann (Piper Series 2056; Munich, 1995).
- ENGEL, GERHARD, *Heeresadjutant bei Hitler 1938–1943. Aufzeichnungen des Majors Engel*, ed. and comm. by Hildegard von Kotze (Schriftenreihe der Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte 29; Stuttgart, 1975).
- ENGELMANN, JOACHIM, *Zitadelle. Die größte Panzerschlacht im Osten 1943* (Friedberg, 1980).
- Entscheidungsschlachten des zweiten Weltkrieges*, ed. for the Arbeitskreis für Wehrforschung by Hans-Adolf Jacobsen and Jürgen Rohwer (Frankfurt a.M, 1960).
- ERCOLANI, ANTONELLA, *Gli ultimi giorni di Mussolini nei documenti inglesi e francesi*, pref. Francesco Leoni (Rome, 1989).
- ERFURTH, WALDEMAR, *Der Finnische Krieg 1941–1944*, 2nd rev. edn. (Wiesbaden, 1977). [Trans. *The Last Finnish War* (Washington, D.C., 1979).]
- ERICKSON, JOHN, *Stalin’s War with Germany*, i: *The Road to Stalingrad* (London, 1975); ii: *The Road to Berlin* (London, 1983).
- Erinnerungen an die Tigerabteilung 503 1942–1945*, ed. Alfred Rubbel et al. (Bassum, 1990).
- ERSHOV, A. G., *Osvobozhdenie Donbassa* [The Liberation of the Donbas] (Moscow, 1973).
1. [Erste] Panzer-Division. *Chronik einer der drei Stamm-Divisionen der deutschen Panzerwaffe*, ed. and annot. Rolf O. G. Stoves, compiled by veterans of the former 1st Armoured Division, their families, friends, and comrades (Bad Nauheim, 1961).

- Expansionsrichtung Nordeuropa. Dokumente zur Nordeuropapolitik des faschistischen deutschen Imperialismus 1939 bis 1945*, ed. and intr. Manfred Menger, Fritz Petrick, and Wolfgang Wilhelmus (East Berlin, 1987).
- Facing the Nazi Genocide: Non-Jews and Jews in Europe*, ed. Beate Kosmala and Feliks Tych (Berlin, 2004).
- Faschismus in Italien und Deutschland. Studien zu Transfer und Vergleich*, ed. Sven Reichardt and Armin Nolzen (Beiträge zur Geschichte des Nationalsozialismus 21; Göttingen, 2005).
- Die faschistische Okkupationspolitik in den zeitweilig besetzten Gebieten der Sowjetunion (1941–1944)*, selection and introduction by Norbert Müller (Europa unterm Hakenkreuz 7; Berlin, etc., 1991).
- Felder und Vorfelder russischer Geschichte. Studien zu Ehren von Peter Scheibert*, ed. Inge Auerbach, Andreas Hillgruber, and Gottfried Schramm (Freiburg, 1985).
- FENYO, MARIO D., *Hitler, Horthy, and Hungary: German–Hungarian Relations, 1941–1944* (Yale Russian and East European Studies 11; New Haven, CT and London, 1972).
- FERRARI, PAOLO, ‘Un’arma versatile. I bombardamenti strategici angloamericani e l’industria italiana’, in *L’aeronautica italiana*, 391–431.
- FEST, JOACHIM, *Hitler. Eine Biographie* (Frankfurt a.M., Berlin, and Vienna, 1974). [Trans. Richard and Clara Winston, *Hitler* (London, 1974)].
- FEST, JOACHIM, *Fremdheit und Nähe. Von der Gegenwart des Gewesenen* (Stuttgart, 1996).
- FEST, JOACHIM, *Der Untergang. Hitler und das Ende des Dritten Reiches* (Berlin, 2002). [Trans. Margot Bettauer Dembo, *Inside Hitler’s Bunker: The Last Days of the Third Reich* (London, 2002)].
- FEUERSENGER, MARIANNE, *Mein Kriegstagebuch. Zwischen Führerhauptquartier und Berliner Wirklichkeit* (Freiburg, etc., 1982).
- Finnish–Soviet Relations 1944–1948*, ed. Jukka Nevakivi (Helsinki, 1994).
- Finnland-Studien II*, ed. Edgar Hösch and Hermann Beyer-Thoma, (Veröffentlichungen des Osteuropa-Institutes München. Reihe: Geschichte 63; Wiesbaden, 1993).
- ‘1st [First] Ukrainian Front’s Lvov–Peremyshl Operation (July to August 1944)’, *JSMS*, 9 (1996), 198–252, 617–64.
- FISCH, BERNHARD, *Nemmersdorf, Oktober 1944. Was in Ostpreußen tatsächlich geschah* (Berlin, 1997).
- FISCHER, ALEXANDER, *Sowjetische Deutschlandpolitik im Zweiten Weltkrieg, 1941–1945* (Stuttgart, 1975).
- FLEISCHHAUER, INGEBORG, *Die Chance des Sonderfriedens. Deutsch-sowjetische Geheimgespräche 1941–1945* (Berlin, 1986).
- FLEX, WALTER, *Im Felde zwischen Nacht und Tag. Gedichte*, 6th edn. (Munich, 1918).
- Foreign Relations of the United States. Diplomatic Papers, 1943*, iii (Washington, D.C., 1963).
- FÖRSTER, GERHARD, ‘Die Operation von Iasi–Kischinjow und ihre Bedeutung für die Befreiung der Völker Südosteuropas’, *Militärgeschichte*, 19 (1980), 517–29.
- FÖRSTER, JÜRGEN, ‘Strategische Überlegungen des Wehrmachtführungsstabes für das Jahr 1943’, *MGM*, 13 (1973), 95–107.
- FÖRSTER, JÜRGEN, *Stalingrad—Risse im Bündnis 1942/43* (Einzelschriften zur militärischen Geschichte des Zweiten Weltkrieges 16; Freiburg, 1975).
- FÖRSTER, JÜRGEN, ‘Rumäniens Weg in die deutsche Abhängigkeit. Zur Rolle der deutschen Militärmision 1940/41’, *MGM*, 25 (1979), 47–77.
- FÖRSTER, JÜRGEN, ‘Hitlers Wendung nach Osten. Die deutsche Kriegspolitik 1940–1941’, in *Zwei Wege nach Moskau*, 113–32.

- FORSTMEIER, FRIEDRICH, ‘Die sowjetische Landung im Hafen von Noworossisk und der Kampf um Stadt und Hafen vom 10.–15.9.1943’, *Marine-Rundschau*, 57 (1960), 321–44.
- FORSTMEIER, FRIEDRICH, *Die Räumung des Kuban-Brückenkopfes im Herbst 1943* (Beiträge zur Wehrforschung 43; Darmstadt, 1964).
- FORWICK, HELMUTH, ‘Der Rückzug der Heeresgruppe Nord nach Kurland’, in *Abwehrkämpfe am Nordflügel der Ostfront*, 99–214.
- FOSS, CHRISTOPHER F., *An Illustrated Guide to World War II Tanks and Fighting Vehicles* (New York, 1980).
- FRASER, DAVID, *Knight’s Cross: A Life of Field Marshal Erwin Rommel* (London and New York, 1993).
- FRETTNER-PICO, MAXIMILIAN, ‘... verlassen von des Sieges Göttern’ (*Mißbrauchte Infanterie*), 2nd edn. (Wiesbaden, 1969).
- FREY, ALBERT, *Ich wollte die Freiheit. Erinnerungen des Kommandeurs des 1. Panzergrenadierregiments der ehemaligen Waffen-SS* (Osnabrück, 1990).
- FRICKE, GERT, *Fester Platz’ Tarnopol 1944* (Einzelschriften zur militärischen Geschichte des Zweiten Weltkrieges 4; Freiburg, 1969; 2nd edn., 1986).
- FRIEDRICH, JÖRG, *Das Gesetz des Krieges. Das deutsche Heer in Russland 1941–1945. Der Prozeß gegen das Oberkommando der Wehrmacht*, 3rd edn. (Munich and Zurich, 1995).
- FRIEDRICH, JÖRG, *Der Brand. Deutschland im Bombenkrieg 1940–1945* (Munich, 2002). [Trans. Allison Brown, *The Fire: The Bombing of Germany, 1940–1945* (New York and Chichester, 2008)].
- FRIESER, KARL-HEINZ, *Krieg hinter Stacheldraht. Die deutschen Kriegsgefangenen in der Sowjetunion und das Nationalkomitee ‘Freies Deutschland’* (Mainz, 1981).
- FRIESER, KARL-HEINZ, *Blitzkrieg-Legende. Der Westfeldzug 1940*, 2nd edn. (Operationen des Zweiten Weltkrieges 2; Munich, 1996). [Trans. John T. Greenwood, *The Blitzkrieg Legend: The 1940 Campaign in the West* (Annapolis, MD, 2005)].
- FRIESER, KARL-HEINZ, *Ardennen—Sedan. Militärhistorischer Führer durch eine europäische Schicksalslandschaft*, publ. MGFA (Bonn, 2000).
- FRIESER, KARL-HEINZ, ‘Die Schlacht um die Seelower Höhen im April 1945’, in *Seelower Höhen 1945*, 129–43.
- FRIESSNER, HANS, *Verratene Schlachten. Die Tragödie der deutschen Wehrmacht in Rumänien und Ungarn* (Hamburg, 1956).
- FRITZ, MARTIN, ‘A Question of Practical Politics: Economic Neutrality during the Second World War’, *Revue Internationale d’Histoire Militaire*, 57 (1984), 95–118.
- FRITZ, STEPHEN G., ‘“We are trying... to change the face of the world”: Ideology and Motivation in the Wehrmacht on the Eastern Front. The View from Below’, *JMilH*, 60 (1996), 683–710.
- From Hitler’s Doorstep: The Wartime Intelligence Reports of Allen Dulles, 1942–1945*, ed. Neal H. Petersen (University Park, PA, 1996).
- FROMM, ERICH, *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness* (New York, 1973).
- Führer-Erlasse’ 1939–1945. Edition sämtl. überliefelter, nicht im Reichsgesetzblatt abgedr., von Hitler während des Zweiten Weltkrieges schriftl. erteilter Direktiven aus den Bereichen Staat, Partei, Wirtschaft, Besatzungspolitik und Militärverwaltung*, compiled and intr. Martin Moll (Stuttgart, 1997).
- Für Deutschland’. Die Männer des 20. Juli*, ed. Klemens von Klemperer, Enrico Syring, and Rainer Zitelmann (Frankfurt a.M., 1993).
- GABRIEL, RICHARD A., and SAVAGE, PAUL L., *Crisis in Command: Mismanagement in the Army* (New York, 1978).

- GACKENHOLZ, HERMANN, 'Der Zusammenbruch der Heeresgruppe Mitte 1944', in *Entscheidungsschlachten des zweiten Weltkrieges*, 445–78.
- GALITSKY, K. N., *V boyakh za Vostokhnuyu Prussiu. Zapiski Kommanduyushchego 11-i gвардейской армии* [In the Battle for East Prussia. Notes by the Commander of 11th Guards Army] (Moscow, 1970).
- GALITSKY, V. P., 'Vrazheskie voyennoplennye v SSSR, 1941–1945 [Enemy Prisoners of War in the USSR, 1941–5]', *VIZh*, 1990, 9, 39–46.
- GANZENMÜLLER, JÖRG, *Das belagerte Leningrad 1941–1944. Eine Stadt in den Strategien von Angreifern und Verteidigern*, publ. with support from MGFA Potsdam (Krieg in der Geschichte 22; Paderborn, etc., 2005).
- GAREYEV, MAKHMUT A., 'Neudakhi na zapadnom napravlenii [Failures in the West]', in *Velikaya Otechestvennaya Vojna 1941–1945*, iii. 10–19.
- GARLAND, ALBERT N., and McGAW SMYTH, HOWARD, *Sicily and the Surrender of Italy* (United States Army in World War II. The Mediterranean Theater of Operations 2; Washington, D.C., 1965).
- GEBAUER, OTTO, *Gumbinnen. Stadt-Kreis, Regierungsbezirk*, publ. Kreisgemeinschaft Gumbinnen in der Landsmannschaft Ostpreußen e.V. (Heide, 1958).
- Geheimdienstkrieg gegen Deutschland. Subversion, Propaganda und politische Planungen des amerikanischen Geheimdienstes im Zweiten Weltkrieg*, ed. Jürgen Heideking and Christoph Mauch (Göttingen, 1993).
- Die geheimen Tagesberichte der deutschen Wehrmachtführung im Zweiten Weltkrieg 1939–1945*, 12 vols., ed. Kurt Mehner, (Veröffentlichung deutschen Quellenmaterials zum Zweiten Weltkrieg, 3rd series; Osnabrück, 1984–95).
- Genocide and Rescue: The Holocaust in Hungary 1944*, ed. David Cesarani (Oxford, etc., 1997).
- Geopolitics and History at the Crossroad between Millennia*, publ. Institute for Political Studies of Defense and Military History et al. (Bucharest, 2000).
- GERLACH, CHRISTIAN, 'Die Wannsee-Konferenz, das Schicksal der deutschen Juden und Hitlers politische Grundsatzentscheidung, alle Juden Europas zu ermorden', *Werkstatt Geschichte*, 6 (1997), 18, 7–44.
- GERLACH, CHRISTIAN, *Krieg, Ernährung, Völkermord. Forschungen zur deutschen Vernichtungspolitik im Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Hamburg, 1998).
- GERLACH, CHRISTIAN, *Kalkulierte Morde. Die deutsche Wirtschafts- und Vernichtungspolitik im Weißrussland 1941 bis 1944* (Hamburg, 1999).
- GERLACH, CHRISTIAN, 'Die Ausweitung der deutschen Massenmorde in den besetzten sowjetischen Gebieten im Herbst 1941. Überlegungen zur Vernichtungspolitik gegen Juden und sowjetische Kriegsgefangene', in Gerlach, *Krieg, Ernährung, Völkermord*, 10–84.
- GERLACH, CHRISTIAN, 'Verbrechen deutscher Frontruppen in Weißrussland 1941–1944', in *Wehrmacht und Vernichtungspolitik*, 89–115.
- German Antiguerrilla Operations in the Balkans (1941–1945)*, publ. US Army Center of Military History, facs. ed. (Washington, D.C., 1989).
- Germany and the Second World War*, see *Das Deutsche Reich und der Zweite Weltkrieg*.
- GERSDORFF, RUDOLF-CHRISTOPH FREIHERR VON, *Soldat im Untergang* (Frankfurt a.M., etc., 1977). [Trans. Anthony Pearsall, *Soldier in the Downfall: A Wehrmacht Cavalryman in Russia, Normandy, and the Plot to Kill Hitler* (Bedford, PA, 2012).]
- GERSDORFF, URSULA VON, 'Der Operationsplan "Tanne"', in *Abwehrkämpfe am Nordflügel der Ostfront*, 141–82.
- Die Geschichte der 8. (oberschlesisch-sudetendeutschen) Infanterie-/Jäger-Division 1935–1945* (Wiesbaden, 1979).

- Geschichte der 96. Infanterie-Division 1939–1945*, ed. Hartwig Pohlmann for Traditionsverbandes der ehem. 96. Infanterie-Division, Kameradenhilfswerk 96 e. V. (Bad Nauheim, 1959).
- Geschichte der Tschechoslowakischen Republik 1918–1948*, ed. Victor S. Mamatey and Radomír Luža (Forschungen zur Geschichte des Donauraumes 3; Vienna, Cologne, and Graz, 1980).
- Geschichte des Großen Vaterländischen Krieges der Sowjetunion*, publ. Institute for Marxism-Leninism of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union [English version = *History of the Great Patriotic War of the Soviet Union, 1941–1945*]: iii. *Der grundlegende Umschwung im Verlauf des Großen Vaterländischen Krieges* (East Berlin, 1965); iv. *Die Vertreibung des Gegners vom Territorium der Sowjetunion und der Beginn der Befreiung Europas vom faschistischen Joch* (East Berlin, 1965); v. *Die siegreiche Beendigung des Krieges mit dem faschistischen Deutschland. Die Niederlage des imperialistischen Japans* (East Berlin, 1967).
- Die Geschichte des Panzerkorps Großdeutschland*, 3 vols., ed. Helmuth Spaeter, (Duisburg-Ruhrort, 1958).
- Geschichte des Zweiten Weltkrieges*, ed. Percy Ernst Schramm and Karl Ploetz, 2nd edn. (Würzburg, 1960).
- Geschichte des zweiten Weltkrieges 1939–1945 in zwölf Bänden*, ed. by a collective headed by Heinz Hoffmann (East Berlin, 1975–85).
- GESELL-PAYER, ANDREAS VON, *Armati Hungarorum* (Munich, 1985).
- Gezeitenwechsel im Zweiten Weltkrieg? Die Schlachten von Char'kov und Kursk im Frühjahr und Sommer 1943 in operativer Anlage, Verlauf und politischer Bedeutung*, ed. for the MGFA by Roland G. Foerster (Vorträge zur Militärgeschichte 15; Hamburg 1996).
- GIBBONS, ROBERT JOSEPH, ‘Soviet Industry and the German War Effort: 1939–1945’, phil. diss., Yale University (1972).
- GLAISE VON HORSTENAU, EDMUND, *Ein General im Zwielicht. Die Erinnerungen Edmund Glaises von Horstenau*, ed. Peter Broucek: i. *K.u.k. Generalstabsoffizier und Historiker*; ii. *Minister im Ständestaat und General im OKW*; iii. *Deutscher Bevollmächtigter General in Kroatien und Zeuge des Untergangs des 'Tausendjährigen Reiche'* (Veröffentlichungen der Kommission für Neuere Geschichte Österreichs 67, 70, 76 (Vienna, etc., 1980–8)).
- GLANTZ, DAVID M., *The Soviet Airborne Experience* (Combat Studies Institute, Research Survey 4; Fort Leavenworth, KS, 1984).
- GLANTZ, DAVID M., *Soviet Military Deception in the Second World War* (London, 1989).
- GLANTZ, DAVID M., *The Role of Intelligence in Soviet Military Strategy in World War II* (Novato, CA, 1990).
- GLANTZ, DAVID M., *From the Don to the Dnepr: Soviet Offensive Operations, December 1942 to August 1943* (Cass Series on Soviet [Russian] Military Experience 1; London, 1991).
- GLANTZ, DAVID M., ‘The Failures of Historiography: Forgotten Battles of the German–Soviet War (1941–1945)’, *JSMS*, 8 (1995), 4, 768–808.
- GLANTZ, DAVID M., *The Siege of Leningrad 1941–1944: 900 Days of Terror* (London, etc., 2001).
- GLANTZ, DAVID M., *The Battle for Leningrad, 1941–1944* (Modern War Studies; Lawrence, KS, 2002).
- GLANTZ, DAVID M., ‘Die strategische Operation in Weißrussland 22. Juni bis 13. Juli 1944’, in 1985 *Art of War Symposium*, 289–329.
- GLANTZ, DAVID M., ‘Soviet Operational Intelligence in the Kursk Operation (July 1943)’, in *Die operative Idee*, 53–77.

- GLANTZ, DAVID M., and HOUSE, JONATHAN M., *When Titans Clashed: How the Red Army Stopped Hitler* (Lawrence, KS, 1995).
- GLANTZ, DAVID M., and HOUSE, JONATHAN M., *The Battle of Kursk* (Lawrence, KS, 1999).
- GLANTZ, DAVID M., and ORENSTEIN, HAROLD S. (eds. and trans.), *The Battle for Kursk 1943: The Soviet General Staff Study* (London, 1999).
- GLANTZ, DAVID M., and ORENSTEIN, HAROLD S. (eds. and trans.), *The Battle for the Ukraine. The Red Army's Korsun-Shevchenkovskii Operation: The Soviet General Staff Study* (London, 2003).
- GLÄSER, STEFAN, 'Die Schlacht um Kursk 1943. Logistik und Versorgung des deutschen Heeres', mag. diss., Free University of Berlin (1991).
- GLEBOV, I., 'Manevr voisk v Chernigovsko-Pripyatskoi i Gomelsko-Rechitskoi nastupatelnykh operatsiakh [Manoeuvre of Forces in the Chernigov-Pripet and Gomel-Rechitsa offensive operations]', *VIZh*, 1976, 1.
- GLIŠIĆ, VENCESLAV, MITROVSKI, BORO, and RISTOVSKI, TOMO, *Das bulgarische Heer in Jugoslawien 1941–1945. Das bulgarische Okkupationsheer (April 1941 bis 9. September 1944) – Die Zusammenarbeit zwischen der Volksbefreiungsbewegung Jugoslawiens und der antifaschistischen Widerstandsbewegung Bulgarien – Die Beteiligung der Einheiten des Bulgarien der vaterländischen Front an den Kämpfen auf dem Boden Jugoslawiens gegen Kriegsende* (Belgrade, 1971).
- GOEBBELS, JOSEPH, *Goebbels-Reden 1932–1945*, 2 vols., ed. Helmut Heiber (Düsseldorf, 1971–2).
- GOEBBELS, JOSEPH, *Tagebücher 1945. Die letzten Aufzeichnungen* (Hamburg, 1977).
- GOEBBELS, JOSEPH, *Die Tagebücher von Joseph Goebbels. Sämtliche Fragmente*, ed. Elke Fröhlich for the Institut für Zeitgeschichte in connection with the Federal Archives, I: *Aufzeichnungen 1924–1941*, 4 vols. (Munich, New York, London, and Paris, 1987).
- GOEBBELS, JOSEPH, *Die Tagebücher von Joseph Goebbels*, ed. Elke Fröhlich for the Institut für Zeitgeschichte with support from the Russian State Archives Service: I: *Aufzeichnungen 1923–1941* [10 vols. to date] (Munich, etc., 1998–2004), II: *Diktate 1941–1945*, 15 vols. (Munich, etc., 1993–6).
- GOETZINGER, BETTINA, 'Italien zwischen dem Sturz Mussolinis und der Errichtung der faschistischen Republik in der NS-Propaganda', in *Deutschland—Italien*, 151–76.
- GOLDSMITH, RAYMOND W., 'The Power of Victory: Munitions Output in World War II', *Military Affairs*, 10 (Spring 1946), 1, 69–80.
- GÖRLITZ, WALTER, *Der Zweite Weltkrieg 1939–1945* (Stuttgart, 1952).
- GÖRLITZ, WALTER, *Model. Strategie der Defensive*, 2nd edn. (Wiesbaden, 1975).
- GÖRLITZ, WALTER, *Model. Der Feldmarschall und sein Endkampf an der Ruhr* (Berlin and Frankfurt a.M., 1992).
- GOSZTONY, PETER, 'Der Krieg zwischen Bulgarien und Deutschland 1944/45', *WWR*, 17 (1967), 22–38, 89–99, 163–76.
- GOSZTONY, PETER, *Endkampf an der Donau 1944/45* (Vienna, Munich, and Zurich, 1969).
- GOSZTONY, PETER, 'Das private Kriegstagebuch des Chefs des ungarischen Generalstabes vom Jahre 1944', *WWR*, 20 (1970), 634–59, 703–32.
- GOSZTONY, PETER, *Hitlers Fremde Heere. Das Schicksal der nichtdeutschen Armeen im Ostfeldzug* (Düsseldorf and Vienna, 1976).
- GOSZTONY, PETER, 'Rumänien im August 1944', *ÖMZ*, 18, No. 1 (1980), 48–54.
- GOSZTONY, PETER, 'Ungarns militärische Rolle im Zweiten Weltkrieg, T. 4', *WWR*, 31 (1982), 5, 157–64.
- GOSZTONY, PETER, *Légiveszély Budapest* [Air Danger Budapest] (Budapest, 1989).
- GOSZTONY, PETER, *A magyar honvédség a második világháborúban* [The Hungarian Honvéd Army in the Second World War] (Budapest, 1992).

- GOSZTONY, PETER, ‘Planung, Stellenwert und Ablauf der “Wiener Angriffsoperation” der Roten Armee 1945’, in *Österreich 1945*, 131–43.
- GRANDI, DINO, *25 luglio. Quarant’anni dopo*, ed. Renzo De Felice (Bologna, 1983).
- Grand Strategy* (History of the Second World War. United Kingdom Military Series, London, 1956–76):
- iii/II. *June 1941–August 1942*, by James Ramsay Montagu Butler (London, 1964);
  - iv. *August 1942 to September 1943*, by Michael Howard (London, 1972);
  - v. *August 1943 to September 1944*, by John Ehrman (London, 1956);
  - vi. *October 1944 to August 1945*, by John Ehrman (London, 1956).
- The Greenhill Dictionary of Military Quotations*, ed. Peter G. Tsouras (London and Mechanicsburg, PA, 2000).
- GREINER, BERND, *Die Morgenthau-Legende. Zur Geschichte eines umstrittenen Plans* (Hamburg, 1995).
- GREINER, HELMUTH, *Die oberste Wehrmachtführung 1939–1943* (Wiesbaden, 1951).
- GREISELIS, WALDIS, *Das Ringen um den Brückenkopf Tunesien 1942/43. Strategie der ‘Achse’ und Innenpolitik im Protektorat* (Europäische Hochschulschriften, 3rd series, 67; Frankfurt a.M. and Berne, 1976).
- GRENKEVICH, LEONID, *The Soviet Partisan Movement 1941–1944*, ed. with a foreword by David M. Glantz (Cass Series on Soviet [Russian] Military Experience 4; London and Portland, OR, 1999).
- GRIEHL, MANFRED, *Junkers Ju 87 ‘Stuka’. Sturzkampfbomber, Schlachtflugzeug, Panzerjäger* (Stuttgart, 1998).
- GRIER, HOWARD D., ‘Hitler’s Baltic Strategy 1944–1945’, phil. diss., University of North Carolina (1991) [Howard D. Grier, *Hitler, Dönitz, and the Baltic Sea: The Third Reich’s Last Hope, 1944–1945* (Annapolis, MD, 2007)].
- GRIESSER-PEČAR, TAMARA, *Das zerrißene Volk. Slowenien 1941–1946. Okkupation, Kollaboration, Bürgerkrieg, Revolution* (Vienna, 2004).
- Grif sekretnosti sniat: Poteri Vooruzhennykh Sil SSSR v voinakh, boevykh deistviiaakh i voyennyykh konfliktakh. Statisticheskoe issledovanie* [Airing the Secret: Losses of USSR Forces in Wars, Hostilities, and Military Conflicts], ed. G. F. Krivosheyev (Moscow, 1993).
- GROEHLER, OLAF, *Geschichte des Luftkrieges 1910–1980* (East Berlin, 1981).
- GRUCHMANN, LOTHAR, *Nationalsozialistische Großraumordnung. Die Konstruktion einer ‘deutschen Monroe-Doktrin’* (Schriftenreihe der Vierteljahrsshefte für Zeitgeschichte 4; Stuttgart, 1962).
- GRUCHMANN, LOTHAR, *Der Zweite Weltkrieg. Kriegsführung und Politik* (dtv-Weltgeschichte des 20. Jahrhunderts 10; Munich, 1967).
- GRUCHMANN, LOTHAR, *Totaler Krieg. Vom Blitzkrieg zur bedingungslosen Kapitulation* (Munich, 1991).
- GRUCHMANN, LOTHAR, ‘Der Zweite Weltkrieg’, in *Deutsche Geschichte*, ii. 8–383.
- GRYLEV, ANATOLY N., *Dnepr—Karpaty—Krym. Osvoboždenie pravoberežnoi Ukrainy i Kryma v 1944 godu* [Dnieper—Carpathians—Crimea. The Liberation of Right-Bank Ukraine and Crimea 1944] (Vtoraya Mirovaya Voina u isledovaniakh, vospominaniakh, dokumentakh; Moscow, 1970).
- GRYLEV, ANATOLY N., ‘Die Zerschlagung der faschistischen Truppen in der Ukraine westlich des Dnepf’, in *Die wichtigsten Operationen*, 349–77.
- GUDERIAN, HEINZ, *Erinnerungen eines Soldaten*, 4th edn. (Heidelberg, 1951). [Trans. Constantine Fitzgibbon, *Panzer Leader* (New York, 1952)].
- La guerra sul Sangro. Eserciti e popolazione in Abruzzo 1943–1944*, ed. Costantino Felice (Milan, 1994).

- GUMZ, JONATHAN E., ‘Wehrmacht Perceptions of Mass Violence in Croatia, 1941–1942’, *HJ*, 44 (2001), 1015–38.
- GUNDELACH, KARL, *Die deutsche Luftwaffe im Mittelmeer 1940–1945*, 2 vols., (Europäische Hochschulschriften, 3rd series, 136; Frankfurt a.M., Berne, and Cirencester, 1981).
- GUNTER, GEORG, *Die deutschen Skijäger. Von den Anfängen bis 1945* (Friedberg, 1993).
- GURKIN, V. V., ‘Dokumenty i materialy. Podgotovka k Kurskom bitve [Documents and materials. Preparation for the Battle of Kursk]’, *VIZh*, 1983, 6, 63–71.
- GURKIN, V. V., ‘Liudskie poteri Sovetskikh Vooruzhennykh Sil v 1941–1945 gg. Novye aspekty [Human Losses of the Soviet Forces 1941–45: New Aspects]’, *VIZh*, 1999, 2, 2–13.
- Die Haager Landkriegsordnung (Das Übereinkommen über die Gesetze und Bräuche des Landkriegs)*, ed. and intr. Rudolf Laun, 5th rev. and exp. edn. (Hanover, 1950).
- HACHTMANN, RÜDIGER, ‘Industriearbeiterinnen 1936–1944/45’, *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 19 (1993), 332–66.
- A hadművészeti története. A szovjet csapatok Magyarország felszabadításáért vívott hadműveleteinek hadművészeti sajátosságai [History of the Art of War: Characteristics of Soviet Army Operations during the Liberation of Hungary], ed. Balázs Szabó and Péter Száva (Budapest, 1971).
- HAFFNER, SEBASTIAN, *Anmerkungen zu Hitler* (Munich, 1978).
- HAHN, FRITZ, *Waffen und Geheimwaffen des deutschen Heeres 1933–1945*, 2 vols., 3rd edn. (Bonn, 1998).
- HAKE, FRIEDRICH VON, *Das waren wir! Das erlebten wir! Der Schicksalsweg der 13. Panzer-Division* (Munich, 1971).
- HALDER, FRANZ, *Kriegstagebuch. Tägliche Aufzeichnungen des Chefs des Generalstabes des Heeres, 1939–1942*, 3 vols., publ. Arbeitskreis für Wehrforschung, ed. Hans-Adolf Jacobsen (Stuttgart, 1962–4).
- HAMANN, BRIGITTE, *Hitlers Wien. Lehrjahre eines Diktators* (Munich etc., 1996). [Trans. Thomas Thornton, *Hitler's Vienna: A Dictator's Apprenticeship* (New York, 1999)].
- HAMILTON, NIGEL, *Monty: Master of the Battlefield 1942–1944* (London, 1988).
- HAMMERMANN, GABRIELE, *Zwangarbeit für den Verbündeten. Die Arbeits- und Lebensbedingungen der italienischen Militärinternierten in Deutschland 1943 bis 1945* (Bibliothek des Deutschen Historischen Instituts in Rom 99; Tübingen, 2002).
- Handbuch der Europäischen Geschichte*, viii/II. *Europa im Zeitalter der Weltmächte*, ed. Theodor Schieder (Stuttgart, 1979).
- Handbuch der neuzeitlichen Wehrwissenschaften*, i. *Wehrpolitik und Kriegsführung*, ed. for Deutsche Gesellschaft für Wehrpolitik und Wehrwissenschaften by Hermann Franke (Berlin, 1936).
- Handbuch zur deutschen Militärgeschichte 1648 bis 1939*, ed. for MGFA by Friedrich Forstmeier et al., 5 vols. and index (Bonn, 1979–81).
- HANSEN, REIMER, *Das Ende des Dritten Reiches. Die deutsche Kapitulation 1945* (Kieler historische Studien 2; Stuttgart, 1966).
- HARRISON, MARK, ‘Resource Mobilization for World War II: The USA, UK, USSR, and Germany, 1938–1945’, *Economic History Review*, 41 (1988), 171–92.
- HARRISON, MARK, *Accounting for War: Soviet Production, Employment, and the Defence Burden, 1940–1945* (Cambridge Russian, Soviet and Post-Soviet Studies 99; Cambridge, etc., 1996).
- HARTLAUB, FELIX, *Im Sperrkreis. Aufzeichnungen aus dem Zweiten Weltkrieg*, ed. with a postscript by Geno Hartlaub (Frankfurt a.M., 1984).
- HARTMANN, CHRISTIAN, ‘Massensterben oder Massenvernichtung? Sowjetische Kriegsgefangene im “Unternehmen Barbarossa”. Aus dem Tagebuch eines deutschen Lagerkommandanten’, *VfZ*, 49 (2001), 97–158.

- HASSELL, ULRICH VON, *Die Hassell-Tagebücher 1938–1944*, ed. Friedrich Freiherr Hiller von Gaertringen, rev. and exp. edn. (Berlin, 1988). [Trans. *The Von Hassell Diaries, 1938–1944: The Story of the Forces against Hitler inside Germany as Recorded by Ambassador Ulrich von Hassell, a Leader of the Movement*, ed. Hugh Gibson (London, 1948)].
- HASSELL, ULRICH VON, *Vom andern Deutschland. Aus den nachgelassenen Tagebüchern 1938–1940. Mit einem Geleitwort von Hans Rothfels*, (Frankfurt a.M., etc., 1964).
- HAUPT, WERNER, *Kurland. Die letzte Front—Schicksal für zwei Armeen* (Bad Nauheim, 1959).
- HAUPT, WERNER, *Heeresgruppe Nord 1941–1945*, 2nd edn. (Bad Nauheim, 1967). [Trans. Joseph G. Welsh, *Army Group North: The Wehrmacht in Russia 1941–1945* (Atglen, PA, 1998)].
- HAUPT, WERNER, *Heeresgruppe Mitte 1941–1945* (Dorheim, 1968). [Trans. Joseph G. Welsh, *Army Group Center: The Wehrmacht in Russia 1941–1945* (Atglen, PA, 1998)].
- HAUPT, WERNER, *Leningrad. Die 900-Tage-Schlacht 1941–1944* (Friedberg, 1980).
- HAUPT, WERNER, *Die Schlachten der Heeresgruppe Mitte. Aus der Sicht der Divisionen* (Friedberg, 1983).
- HAUPT, WERNER, *Die Schlachten der Heeresgruppe Süd. Aus der Sicht der Divisionen* (Friedberg, 1985).
- HAUPT, WERNER, *Das war Kurland. Die sechs Kurlandschlachten aus der Sicht der Divisionen* (Friedberg, 1987).
- HAUPT, WERNER, *Die 8. Panzer-Division im Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Friedberg, 1987).
- HAUSMANN, FRANK-RUTGER, 'Dichte, Dichter, tage nicht!' *Die Europäische Schriftstellervereinigung in Weimar 1941–1948* (Frankfurt a.M., 2004).
- HAUSSER, PAUL, *Waffen-SS im Einsatz*, 5th edn. (Göttingen, 1953).
- Hazánk felszabadulása 1944–1945* [The Liberation of Our Homeland], ed. Péter Száva (Budapest, 1970).
- HEALY, MARK, *Kursk 1943: The Tide Turns in the East* (London, 1992).
- HEIBER, HELMUT, *Joseph Goebbels* (Berlin, 1962). [Trans. John K. Dickinson, *Goebbels* (London, 1972)].
- HEIDER, PAUL, 'Reaktionen in der Wehrmacht auf Gründung und Tätigkeit des Nationalkomitees "Freies Deutschland" und des Bundes Deutscher Offiziere', in *Die Wehrmacht. Mythos und Realität*, 614–34.
- HEIDER, PAUL, 'Zum Einfluß falscher Lagebeurteilung der deutschen militärischen Führung auf den Zusammenbruch der Heeresgruppe Mitte an der deutsch-sowjetischen Front im Sommer 1944', *Acta No. 13*, 206–20.
- HEIDKÄMPFER, OTTO, *Witebsk. Kampf und Untergang der 3. Panzerarmee (1943/44)* (Heidelberg, 1954).
- HEINEMANN, WINFRIED, 'Eduard Dietl—Lieblingsgeneral des "Führers"', in *Die Militärelite des Dritten Reiches*, 99–112.
- HEINEN, ARMIN, *Die Legion 'Erzengel Michael' in Rumänien. Soziale Bewegung und politische Organisation. Ein Beitrag zum Problem des internationalen Faschismus* (Südosteuropäische Arbeiten 83; Munich, 1986).
- HEINRICI, GOTTHARD, and HAUCK, FRIEDRICH WILHELM, 'Zitadelle. Der Angriff auf den russischen Stellungsvorsprung bei Kursk', *WWR*, 8 (1965), 463–86; 9 (1965), 529–44; 10 (1965), 582–604.
- HEINSOHN, GUNNAR, *Lexikon der Völkermorde* (Reinbek bei Hamburg, 1999).
- HEISKANEN, RAIMO, 'The Effect of Finnish Military Intelligence. Information and Assessments on World War II Decision-Making in Finland', *Acta No. 13*, ii. 276–97.

- HELMERT, HEINZ, and OTTO, HELMUT, 'Zur Koalitionskriegsführung Hitler-Deutschlands im zweiten Weltkrieg am Beispiel des Einsatzes der ungarischen 2. Armee', *Zeitschrift für Militärgeschichte*, 3 (1963), 320–39.
- HENNING, FRIEDRICH-WILHELM, *Das industrialisierte Deutschland 1914 bis 1972* (Paderborn, 1974).
- HERBERT, ULRICH, *Fremdarbeiter. Politik und Praxis des 'Ausländer-Einsatzes' in der Kriegswirtschaft des Dritten Reiches* (Berlin, 1985).
- HERBERT, ULRICH, *Best: Biographische Studien über Radikalismus, Weltanschauung und Vernunft, 1903 bis 1989* (Bonn, 1996).
- HERBST, LUDOLF, *Der Totale Krieg und die Ordnung der Wirtschaft* (Stuttgart, 1982).
- HERINGTON, JOHN, *Air War against Germany and Italy, 1939–1945* (Australia in the War of 1939–1945, 3rd series, 3; Canberra, 1954).
- HERZOG, ROBERT, *Besatzungsverwaltung in den besetzten Ostgebieten—Abteilung Jugend—insbesondere: Heuaktion und SS-Helfer-Aktion* (Tübingen, 1960).
- HESSE, FRITZ, *Das Spiel um Deutschland* (Munich, 1953). [Trans. Frederick Augustus Voigt, *Hitler and the English* (London, 1954)].
- HEUSINGER, ADOLF, *Befehl im Widerstreit. Schicksalstunden der deutschen Armee 1923–1945* (Tübingen, 1950).
- HILBERG, RAUL, *The Destruction of the European Jews* (Chicago, 1961).
- HILDEBRAND, KLAUS, *Deutsche Außenpolitik 1933–1945. Kalkül oder Dogma?* (Stuttgart, etc., 1970; 4th exp. edn. 1980). [Trans. Anthony Fothergill, *The Foreign Policy of the Third Reich* (London and Berkeley, Calif., 1973)].
- HILGER, ANDREAS, *Deutsche Kriegsgefangene in der Sowjetunion 1941–1956. Kriegsgefangenenpolitik, Lageralltag und Erinnerungen* (Essen, 2000).
- HILLGRUBER, ANDREAS, 'Die Krise in den deutsch-rumänischen Beziehungen im Herbst 1943 im Zusammenhang mit dem Problem der Räumung der Krim und der Benutzung Transnistriens als rückwärtiges Heeresgebiet', *WWR*, 6 (1956), 663–72.
- HILLGRUBER, ANDREAS, 'Die letzten Monate der deutsch-rumänischen Waffenbrüderschaft', *WWR*, 7 (1957), 377–97.
- HILLGRUBER, ANDREAS, *Die Räumung der Krim 1944. Eine Studie zur Entstehung der deutschen Führungsentschlüsse* (Beiheft 9 der Wehrwissenschaftlichen Rundschau; Berlin and Frankfurt a.M., 1959).
- HILLGRUBER, ANDREAS, 'Das deutsch-ungarische Verhältnis im letzten Kriegsjahr. Vom Unternehmen "Margarethe I" (19. März 1944) bis zur Räumung Ungarns durch die deutsche Truppen (4. April 1945)', *WWR*, 10 (1960), 78–104.
- HILLGRUBER, ANDREAS, *Hitler, König Carol und Marschall Antonescu. Die deutsch-rumänischen Beziehungen 1938–1944* (Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für Europäische Geschichte 5; Wiesbaden, 1954; 2nd edn. 1965).
- HILLGRUBER, ANDREAS, *Hitlers Strategie. Politik und Kriegsführung 1940–1941*, 2nd edn. (Frankfurt a.M. and Munich, 1982).
- HILLGRUBER, ANDREAS, *Der Zweite Weltkrieg 1939–1945. Kriegsziele und Strategie der großen Mächte* (Stuttgart, etc., 1982).
- HILLGRUBER, ANDREAS, 'Das Russlandbild der führenden deutschen Militärs vor Beginn des Angriffs auf die Sowjetunion', in *Die Zerstörung Europas*, 256–72.
- HIMMLER, HEINRICH, *Geheimreden 1933 bis 1945 und andere Ansprachen*, ed. Agnes F. Petersen and Bradley F. Smith, intr. Joachim C. Fest (Frankfurt a.M., Berlin, and Vienna, 1974).
- HINSLEY, FRANCIS HARRY, *British Intelligence in the Second World War: Its Influence on Strategy and Operations*, 4 vols. (History of the Second World War. United Kingdom Military Series; London, 1979–88).

- HINZE, ROLF, *Der Zusammenbruch der Heeresgruppe Mitte im Osten 1944* (Stuttgart, 1980).
- HINZE, ROLF, *Hitze, Frost und Pulverdampf. Der Schicksalsweg der 20. Panzerdivision* (Bochum, 1981).
- HINZE, ROLF, *Das Ostfront-Drama 1944. Rückzugskämpfe Heeresgruppe Mitte* (Stuttgart, 1987). [Trans. and ed. Joseph G. Welsh, *East Front Drama—1944: The Withdrawal Battle of Army Group Center* (Winnipeg, 1996)].
- HINZE, ROLF, *Rückkämpfer 1944. Eine Studie* (Neustadt, 1988).
- HINZE, ROLF, *19. Infanterie- und Panzer-Division. Divisionsgeschichte aus der Sicht eines Artilleristen* (Meerbusch, 1991).
- HINZE, ROLF, *Mit dem Mut der Verzweiflung. Das Schicksal der Heeresgruppen Nordukraine, Südukraine, Süd-/Ostmark 1944/45* (Meerbusch, 1993). [Trans. Frederick P. Steinhardt, *With the Courage of Desperation: Germany's Defence of the Southern Sector of the Eastern Front* (Newbury, 2013)].
- HINZE, ROLF, 'Der Zusammenbruch der Heeresgruppe Mitte', in *Kriegsjahr 1944*, 75–103.
- Historical Atlas of the Liberation War of the Peoples of Yugoslavia 1941–1945*, publ. Military Historical Institute of the Yugoslav People's Army (Belgrade, 1957).
- Historische Debatten und Kontroversen im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. Jürgen Elvert and Susanne Krauss (Stuttgart, 2003).
- History of the Great Patriotic War of the Soviet Union, 1941–1945*, see *Geschichte des Großen Vaterländischen Krieges der Sowjetunion*.
- HITLER, ADOLF, *Mein Kampf*, i: *Eine Abrechnung*, ii: *Die nationalsozialistische Bewegung*, 220th edn. (Munich, 1939). [Trans. James Murphy, *Mein Kampf*, i: *A Retrospect*, ii: *The National Socialist Movement* (London, 1939)].
- HITLER, ADOLF, *Hitlers zweites Buch. Ein Dokument aus dem Jahr 1928*, intr. and comm. Gerhard L. Weinberg, with a preface by Hans Rothfels (Quellen und Darstellungen zur Zeitgeschichte 7; Stuttgart, 1961). [Trans. Salvator Attanasio, *Hitler's Secret Book* (New York, 1962)].
- HITLER, ADOLF, *Hitler. Sämtliche Aufzeichnungen 1905–1924*, ed. Eberhard Jäckel and Axel Kuhn (Stuttgart, 1980).
- HITLER, ADOLF, *Monologe im Führerhauptquartier 1941–1944. Die Aufzeichnungen Heinrich Heims*, ed. Werner Jochmann (Hamburg, 1980).
- HITLER, ADOLF, *Hitlers politisches Testament. Die Bormann-Diktate vom Februar und April 1945*, with an essay by Hugh R. Trevor-Roper and a postscript by André François-Poncet (Hamburg, 1981).
- HITLER, ADOLF, *Reden, Schriften, Anordnungen, i. Die Wiedergründung der NSDAP, Februar 1925–Juni 1926*, ed. and comm. Clemens Vollnhals (Munich, 1992).
- HITLER, ADOLF, *Reden, Schriften, Anordnungen. Februar 1925 bis Januar 1933, iv. Von der Reichstagswahl bis zur Reichspräsidentenwahl Oktober 1930–März 1932, T. 1: Oktober 1930–Juni 1931*, ed. and comm. Constantin Goschler (Munich, 1994).
- Hitler hat vannyolc tárgyalása 1939–1944: Hitler Adolf tárgyalásai kelet-európai államfőfiakkal [Hitler's Sixty-eight Talks, 1939–1944: Adolf Hitler's Talks with East European Statesmen], ed. György Ránki (Budapest, 1983).
- Hitlers Lagebesprechungen. Die Protokollfragmente seiner militärischen Konferenzen 1942–1945, ed. Helmut Heiber (Quellen und Darstellungen zur Zeitgeschichte 10; Stuttgart, 1962). [Trans. R. Winter et al., *Hitler and his Generals: Military Conferences 1942–1945* (London, 2002)].
- Hitlers militärische Elite, i: *Von den Anfängen des Regimes bis Kriegsbeginn*, ii: *Vom Kriegsbeginn bis zum Weltkriegsende*, ed. Gerd R. Ueberschär (Darmstadt, 1998).
- Hitlers Weisungen für die Kriegsführung 1939–1945. Dokumente des Oberkommandos der Wehrmacht, ed. Walther Hubatsch (Frankfurt a.M., 1962; 2nd rev. and enl. edn.

- Koblenz, 1983). [Trans. (from orig. 1962 edn.) with comments by H. R. Trevor-Roper, *Hitler's War Directives 1939–1945* (London, 1964)].
- HNLICKA, KARL, *Das Ende auf dem Balkan 1944/45. Die militärische Räumung Jugoslawiens durch die deutsche Wehrmacht* (Göttingen, Zurich, and Frankfurt a.M., 1970).
- HOARE, MARKO ATTILA, 'Whose is the Partisan Movement? Serbs, Croats and the Legacy of a Shared Resistance', *JSMS*, 15 (2002), 4, 24–41.
- HOENSCH, JÖRG K., 'Die Slowakische Republik 1939–1945', in *Geschichte der Tschechoslowakischen Republik*, 292–313.
- HOENSCH, JÖRG K., 'Grundzüge und Phasen der deutschen Slowakei-Politik im Zweiten Weltkrieg', in *Der Weg in die Katastrophe*, 215–39.
- HOFFMANN, HANS, *Rückzug aus Griechenland. Die letzte Phase des Krieges* (Bad Harzburg, 1994).
- HOFFMANN, JOACHIM, *Die Ostlegionen 1941 bis 1943. Turkotataren, Kaukasier und Wolgafinnen im deutschen Heer* (Einzelschriften zur militärischen Geschichte des Zweiten Weltkrieges 19; Freiburg, 1976; 2nd edn. 1981; 3rd edn. 1986).
- HOFFMANN, JOACHIM, *Die Geschichte der Wlassow-Armee* (Einzelschriften zur militärischen Geschichte des Zweiten Weltkrieges 27; Freiburg, 1984).
- HOFFMANN, PETER, *Claus Schenk Graf von Stauffenberg und seine Brüder* (Stuttgart, 1992). [Trans. (by the author) *Stauffenberg: A Family History 1905–1944* (Cambridge and New York, 1995)].
- HOFFMANN, PETER, *Stauffenberg und der 20. Juli 1944* (Munich, 1998).
- HÖHNE, HEINZ, *Canaris. Patriot im Zwielicht* (Munich, 1976). [Trans. J. Maxwell Brownjohn, *Canaris* (London, 1979)].
- HOLMES, RICHARD, *Battlefields of the Second World War* (London, 2001).
- HÖLTER, HERMANN, *Armee in der Arktis. Die Operationen der deutschen Lappland-Armee*, 2nd rev. and exp. edn. (Munich, 1977).
- HOPPE, HANS-JOACHIM, *Bulgarien. Hitlers eigenwilliger Verbündeter. Eine Fallstudie zur nationalsozialistischen Südosteuropapolitik* (Studien zur Zeitgeschichte 15; Stuttgart, 1979).
- HÖSCH, EDGAR, *Geschichte der Balkanländer. Von der Frühzeit bis zur Gegenwart* (Munich, 1999). [Trans. Tania Alexander, *The Balkans: A Short History from Greek Times to the Present Day* (London and New York, 1972)].
- Hősök. *A Szovjetunió hősei a magyarországi felszabadító harcokban 1944–1945* [Heroes: The Heroes of the Soviet Union in the Liberation Battles in Hungary], ed. Ervin Liptai and A. I. Babin, (Budapest, 1981).
- HOSSBACH, FRIEDRICH, *Die Schlacht um Ostpreußen. Aus den Kämpfen der deutschen 4. Armee um Ostpreußen vom 19.7.1944–30.1.1945* (Überlingen, 1951).
- 'Hostage Case', Case 7, *United States against Wilhelm List et al., Nuernberg Oct. 1946–April 1949* (Trials of War Criminals before the Nuremberg Military Tribunals under Control Law No. 10, vol. 11).
- HOWARD, MICHAEL, *Strategic Deception* (British Intelligence in the Second World War 5; London, 1990).
- HUBATSCH, WALTER, 'Das Kriegstagebuch als Geschichtsquelle', *WWR*, 15 (1965), 615–23.
- HÜMMELCHEN, GERHARD, 'Balkanräumung 1944', *WWR*, 9 (1959), 565–83.
- IMT, see *Der Prozeß gegen die Hauptkriegsverbrecher vor dem Internationalen Militärgerichtshof, Nürnberg*.
- Internationale Beziehungen im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert. Festschrift für Winfried Baumgart zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Wolfgang Elz and Sönke Neitzel (Paderborn, 2003).
- Invasion 1944*, ed. for the MGFA by Hans Umbreit (Vorträge zur Militärgeschichte 16; Hamburg, Bonn, and Berlin, 1998).

- IONESCU, MIHAIL, 'The Romanian Revolution of August 1944: The Crowning of the Romanian People's Struggle for Social and National Liberation', *Revue Internationale d'Histoire Militaire*, 66 (1987), 135–44.
- IRVING, DAVID, *Hitler's War* (London, 1977).
- IRVING, DAVID, *The Trail of the Fox: The Life of Field-Marshal Erwin Rommel* (London, 1977).
- IRVING, DAVID (ed.), *The Secret Diaries of Hitler's Doctor* (New York, 1983).
- Istoria Statului Major General Român. Documente 1859–1947* [History of the Romanian Great General Staff. Documents 1859–1947], publ. Romanian Commission for Military History, Military Archives, Institute of Military History and Theory (Bucharest, 1994).
- L'Italia in guerra: il quinto anno—1944: L'Italia nella 2a Guerra Mondiale; aspetti e problemi (1944–1994)*, ed. Romain H. Rainero (Gaeto, 1995).
- Italien und die Großmächte 1943–1949*, ed. Hans Woller (Schriftenreihe der Vierteljahrsshefte für Zeitgeschichte 57; Munich, 1988).
- JACZYŃSKI, STANISŁAW, 'Die Rote Armee an der Weichsel: Politischer oder militärischer Attentismus?', in *Der Warschauer Aufstand 1944*, 195–209.
- JAGGI, O., 'Der Ausbruch aus Kesseln', *ASMZ*, 130 (1964), 224–31, 295–302.
- JAHNKE, GÜNTER, *Der Kessel von Tscherkassy 1944. Analyse und Dokumentation* (Donauwörth, 1996).
- JAKOBSON, MAX, *The Diplomacy of the Winter War: An Account of the Russo-Finnish War, 1939–1940* (Cambridge, MA, 1961).
- JAKUS, JÁNOS, *A magyar királyi honvédség IV. önálló hadteste és a belőle kifejlesztett 3. magyar hadsereg működése 1944 szeptember 2-től október 5-ig terjedő időszak-ban*. [The Activity of the Royal Hungarian 4th Independent Army Corps and the 3rd Hungarian Army Formed from it, 2 Sept. to 5 Oct. 1945] (Budapest, 1997).
- JANOWITZ, MORRIS, and SHILS, EDWARD A., 'Cohesion and Disintegration in the Wehrmacht in World War II', in *Military Conflict*, 177–221.
- JANSSEN, GREGOR, *Das Ministerium Speer. Deutschlands Rüstung im Krieg*, 2nd edn. (Frankfurt a.M., Berlin, and Vienna, 1969).
- Jatkosodan historia, 2: Hyökkäys Itä-Karjalaa ja Karjalan kannakselle* [History of the Continuation War, 2: The Offensive in Eastern Karelia and the Karelian Isthmus] (Sotatieteen laitoksen julkaisuja 25/2; Porvoo, 1989).
- Jatkosodan historia, 4: Saksalaisarmeijan hyökkäys Pohjois-Suomesta—aemasota—vetätyminen Karjalan Kannakselta* [History of the Continuation War, 4: The German Army's offensive in northern Finland] (Sotatieteen laitoksen julkaisuja, 25/4; Porvoo, 1993).
- Jatkosodan historia, 5: Vetätyminen Itä-Karjalasta, torjuntataistelut, sota läpissä* [History of the Continuation War, 5: The Withdrawal from Eastern Karelia, Defensive Battles, the War in Lapland] (Sotatieteen laitoksen julkaisuja 25/5; Porvoo, 1992).
- JENTZ, THOMAS L., *Der Panther. Entwicklung, Ausführungen, Abarten, seltene Varianten, charakteristische Merkmale, Kampfwert* (Wölfersheim-Berstadt, 1997). [Trans. *Germany's Panther Tank: The Quest for Combat Supremacy: Development, Modifications, Rare Variants, Characteristics, Combat Accounts* (Atglen, PA, 1995)].
- JENTZ, THOMAS L., *Die deutsche Panzertruppe. Gliederungen, Organisation, Taktik, Gefechtsberichte, Verbandsstärken, Statistiken 1933–1945*, 2 vols. (Wölfersheim-Berstadt, 1998–9). [Trans. *Panzertruppen: The Complete Guide to the Creation and Combat Employment of Germany's Tank Force* (Atglen, PA, 1996)].
- JOHN, ANTONIUS, *Kursk '43. Szenen einer Entscheidungsschlacht* (Bonn, 1993).
- JOKIPII, MAUNO, *Panttipataljoona. Suomalaisen SS-pataljoonan historia* [The Pawn Battalion: The History of the Finnish SS Battalion] (Helsinki, 1968).

- JOKISIPILÄ, MARKKU, *Aseveljiä vai liittolaisia? Suomi, Saksan liittosopimusvaatimukset ja Rytin-Ribbentropin-sopimus* [Brothers in Arms or Allies? Finland, the German Demands for a Treaty of Alliance, and the Ryti–Ribbentrop Treaty] (Bibliotheca Historica 84; Helsinki, 2004).
- JOKISIPILÄ, MARKKU, ‘Die Sonderkriegsthese als Havarie oder Meisterstück eines außenpolitischen Täuschungsmanövers? Finnland und Deutschlands Bündnisvertragsforderungen 1943–1944’, in *Deutschland und Finnland*, 45–63.
- JONES, ROBERT HUHN, *The Roads to Russia: United States Lend-Lease to the Soviet Union* (Norman, OK, 1969).
- JUDAH, TIM, *The Serbs: History, Myth and the Destruction of Yugoslavia*, 2nd edn. (New Haven, CT and London, 2000).
- JUHÁSZ, GYULA, *Hungary Foreign Policy 1919–1945* (Budapest, 1979).
- JKUSES, GEOFFREY, *Kursk: The Clash of Armour* (London, 1969).
- JUNG, HERMANN, *Die Ardennen-Offensive 1944/45. Ein Beispiel für die Kriegsführung Hitlers* (Studien und Dokumente zur Geschichte des Zweiten Weltkrieges 12; Göttingen, etc., 1971).
- JÜNGER, ERNST, *Der Arbeiter: Herrschaft und Gestalt* (Hamburg, 1932).
- JÜNGER, ERNST, *Der Friede* (n.p., 1948; Stuttgart, 1965). [Trans. Stuart O. Hood, *The Peace* (Hinsdale, IL, 1948)].
- JUSSILA, OSMO, HENTILÄ, SEppo, and NEVAKIVI, JUKKA, *From Grand Duchy to Modern State: A Political History of Finland since 1809* (Trans. David Arter; London, 1999).
- JUTIKKALA, EINO, ‘Mielialojen kirjo jatkosodan aikana [The Mood Spectrum during the Continuation War]’, in *Studia Historica*, 123–47.
- KABATH, RUDOLF, ‘Die Rolle der Seebrückenköpfe beim Kampf um Ostpreußen 1944–1945’, in *Abwehrkämpfe am Nordflügel der Ostfront*, 215–451.
- KÁDÁR, GYULA, *A Ludovikától Sopronkőhöz*, 2 vols. [From the Ludovica Military Academy to Sopronkohida] (Budapest, 1978).
- KEAHLER, SIEGFRIED A., *Zur Beurteilung Ludendorffs im Sommer 1918* (Nachrichten der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen. 1. Philologisch-historische Klasse, Jg. 1953, 1; Göttingen, 1958).
- KEAHLER, SIEGFRIED A., *Vier quellenkritische Untersuchungen zum Kriegsende 1918* (Nachrichten der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen. 1. Philologisch-historische Klasse, Jg. 1960, 8; Göttingen, 1961).
- KAGENECK, AUGUST VON, *Zwischen Eid und Gewissen. Roland von Hößlin. Ein deutscher Offizier* (Berlin, 1991).
- KALLIS toveri Stalin! Komintern ja Suomi ['Dear Comrade Stalin!' The Comintern and Finland], ed. Natalia Lebedeva, Kimmo Rentola, and Tauno Saarela (Helsinki, 2002).
- KALTENEGGER, ROLAND, *Die Stammdivision der deutschen Gebirgsstruppe. Weg und Kampf der 1. Gebirgs-Division 1935–1945* (Graz, 1981).
- KALTENEGGER, ROLAND, *Schörner. Feldmarschall der letzten Stunde* (Munich and Berlin, 1994).
- KALTENEGGER, ROLAND, *Krieg in der Arktis. Die Operationen der Lappland-Armee 1942–1945* (Graz and Stuttgart, 2003).
- KARCHMAR, LUCIEN, *Draža Mihailović and the Rise of the Četnik Movement, 1941–1942*, 2 vols. (New York, etc., 1987).
- KATUKOV, MICHAEL E., *An der Spitze des Hauptstoßes* (East Berlin, 1979).
- KAUFMANN, FRIEDRICH, *Die vergessene Pilz-Division (282. InfDiv)*, publ. Kameradschaft ehemaliger Angehöriger der 282. Infanterie-Division, 4 vols. (Völklingen-Wehrden, 1985).

- KEHRL, HANS, *Krisenmanager im Dritten Reich. 6 Jahre Frieden–6 Jahre Krieg. Erinnerungen*, 2nd corr. edn. (Düsseldorf, 1973).
- KEMNADE, FRIEDRICH, *Die Afrika-Flottille. Chronik und Bilanz* (Stuttgart, 1978).
- KERSHAW, IAN, *The Hitler Myth: Image and Reality in the Third Reich* (Oxford and New York, 1987).
- KERSHAW, IAN, *Hitler 1889–1936: Hubris* (London and New York, 1998).
- KERSHAW, IAN, *Hitler 1936–1945: Nemesis* (London and New York, 2000).
- Der Kessel von Tschekassy. 5. SS-Panzer-Division 'Wiking'. Die Flut verschlang sich selbst, nicht uns*, publ. Truppenkameradschaft 'Wiking', Hannover (Osnabrück, 1969).
- KESSELRING, AGILOLF, *Des Kaisers 'finnische Legion'. Die finnische Jägerbewegung im Ersten Weltkrieg im Kontext der deutschen Finnlandpolitik*, (Schriftenreihe der Deutsch-Finnischen Gesellschaft e.V. 5; Berlin, 2005).
- KESSELRING, ALBERT, *Soldat bis zum letzten Tag* (Bonn, 1953). [Trans. Kesselring: *A Soldier's Record* (New York, 1954)].
- KETTENACKER, LOTHAR, ‘‘Unconditional Surrender’ als Grundlage der angelsächsischen Nachkriegsplanung’, in *Der Zweite Weltkrieg. Analysen*, 174–88.
- KHRUSHCHEV, NIKITA S., *Khrushchev Remembers*, with an Introduction, Commentary, and Notes by Edward Crankshaw, ed. and trans. [from the Russian] by Strobe Talbott (London, 1971).
- KIELMANSEGG, JOHANN ADOLF GRAF VON, ‘Bemerkungen eines Zeitzeugen zu den Schlachten von Char'kov und Kursk aus der Sicht des damaligen Generalstabsoffiziers Ia in der Operationsabteilung des Generalstabs des Heeres’, in *Gezeitenwechsel*, 137–50.
- KIELMANSEGG, JOHANN ADOLF GRAF VON, ‘Einige Anmerkungen zu deutschen Verteidigungskonzeptionen im Jahre 1944’, in *1985 Art of War Symposium*, 575–80.
- KIMBALL, WARREN F., ‘Aus der Sicht Washingtons. Die Aussichten Deutschlands in den Jahren 1943–1945’, in *Die Zukunft des Reiches*, 57–78.
- KIMBALL, WARREN F., ‘Stalingrad und das Dilemma der amerikanisch-sowjetischen Beziehungen’, in *Stalingrad. Ereignis, Wirkung, Symbol*, 327–49.
- KISSEL, HANS, *Die Panzerschlachten in der Pussta im Oktober 1944. Ein Beitrag zum Problem 'Beweglich geführte Verteidigung' und 'Verteidigung aus Stellungen'* (Neckargemünd, 1960).
- KISSEL, HANS, *Der Deutsche Volkssturm 1944/45. Eine territoriale Miliz im Rahmen der Landesverteidigung* (Berlin and Frankfurt a.M., 1962). [Trans. C. F. Colton, *Hitler's Last Levy: The Volkssturm, 1944–45* (Solihull, 2005)].
- KISSEL, HANS, *Die Katastrophe in Rumänien 1944* (Beiträge zur Wehrforschung 5/6; Darmstadt, 1964).
- KITCHEN, MARTIN, *The Silent Dictatorship: The Politics of the German High Command under Hindenburg and Ludendorff, 1916–1918* (New York, 1976).
- KLATT, PAUL, *Die 3. Gebirgs-Division 1939–1945* (Bad Nauheim, 1958).
- KLAUSCH, HANS-PETER, *Die 999er. Von der Brigade Z' zur Afrika-Division 999. Die Bewährungsbaillone und ihr Anteil am antifaschistischen Widerstand* (Frankfurt a.M., 1986).
- KLEIN, FRIEDEMEL, and FRIESER, KARL-HEINZ, ‘Mansteins Gegenschlag am Donec. Operative Analyse des Gegenangriffs der Heeresgruppe Süd im Februar/März 1943’, *Militärgeschichte*, 1 (1999), 12–18.
- KLEIN, GÜNTER, ‘Im Lichte sowjetischer Quellen. Die Deportation Deutscher aus Rumänien zur Zwangsarbeit in die UdSSR 1945’, *Südostdeutsche Vierteljahresblätter*, 2 (1998), 153–62.
- KLEINE, EGON, and KÜHN, VOLKMAR, *Tiger. Die Geschichte einer legendären Waffe 1942–45*, 6th edn. (Stuttgart, 1993). [Trans. David Johnston, *Tiger: The History of a Legendary Weapon* (Winnipeg, 1989)].

- KLEIST, PETER, *Zwischen Hitler und Stalin, 1939–1945. Aufzeichnungen* (Bonn, 1950). [Trans. *The European Tragedy* (London and Douglas, I. of. M., 1965)].
- KLEMPERER, VICTOR, *LTI: Notizbuch eines Philologen*, 19th edn. (Leipzig, 2010).
- KLEY, STEFAN, *Hitler, Ribbentrop und die Entfesselung des Zweiten Weltkriegs* (Paderborn, 1996).
- KLINGENBERG, MARGARETE, ‘Strategie und Politik der “Verbrannten Erde”. Die Rückzugsbewegungen der H.Gr. Mitte im Sommer/Herbst 1943, untersucht auf Divisions-ebene’, mag. diss, University of Freiburg (1994).
- KLINK, ERNST, *Das Gesetz des Handelns. Die Operation ‘Zitadelle’ 1943* (Beiträge zur Militär- und Kriegsgeschichte 7; Stuttgart, 1966).
- KLINKHAMMER, LUTZ, ‘Die Abteilung “Kunstschutz” der deutschen Militärverwaltung in Italien 1943–1945’, *QFIAB*, 72 (1992), 483–549.
- KNAB, JAKOB, ‘Generaloberst Eduard Dietl’, in *Hitlers militärische Elite*, ii. 28–36.
- KNESEBECK, KLAUS PARIDAM VON DEM, *Zeiten des Übergangs. Lebensberichte aus den Jahren 1905 bis 1988* (Grünwald, 1989).
- KOBRIN, N. I., and ABATUROV, V. V., ‘Sokrushenie vostochnogo vala [The Destruction of the East Wall]’, in *Velikaya Otechestvennaya Voina 1941–1945*, ii. 291–326.
- KOCH, HANSJOACHIM W., ‘The Spectre of a Separate Peace in the East: Russo-German “peace feelers”’, *JCH*, 10 (1975), 531–49.
- KOGELFRANZ, SIEGFRIED, *Das Erbe von Jalta. Die Opfer und die Davongekommenen* (Hamburg, 1985).
- KÖHLER, JOACHIM, *Wagners Hitler. Der Prophet und sein Vollstrecker* (Munich, 1997). [Trans. Ronald Taylor, *Wagner’s Hitler: The Prophet and his Disciple* (Cambridge, 2001)].
- KÖHLER, KARL, ‘Der Einsatz der Luftwaffe im Bereich der Heeresgruppe Nord von Ende Juni bis Mitte Oktober 1944’, in *Abwehrkämpfe am Nordflügel der Ostfront*, 15–98.
- KOLOMIETS MAKSIM, and MOSCHCHANSKY, ILYA, *Tanki lend-liza 1941–1945* [Lend-Lease Tanks 1941–5] (Moscow, 2000).
- KOLSRUD, OLE, ‘The Treason Trials in Norway after the German Occupation: Harsh, Just or Lenient?’, in *Kriegsende im Norden*, 133–41.
- KOLTUNOV, GRIGORI A., ‘Kurskaya bitva v tsifrakh [The Battle of Kursk in Figures]’, *VIZh*, 1968, 6, 58–68; 1968, 7, 77–92.
- KOLTUNOV, GRIGORI A., and SOLOVEV, BORIS G., *Kurskaya bitva* [The Battle of Kursk] (Moscow, 1983).
- KOLTUNOV, GRIGORI A., ‘Die Befreiung der Krim und Odessas’, in *Die wichtigsten Operationen*, 378–95.
- KOMAROV, ALEXEI, ‘Finland’s Withdrawal from the Second World War’, in *Finnish–Soviet Relations*, 20–35.
- KONEV, IVAN S., *Aufzeichnungen eines Front-Oberbefehlshabers 1943/44*, East Berlin, 1978.
- KONEV, IVAN S., ‘Die Kesselschlacht von Korsun-Schewtschenko’, in *Sowjetische Marschälle*, 77–88.
- KOROL, V. E., ‘The Price of Victory: Myths and Reality’, *JSMS*, 9 (1996), 2, 417–26.
- Korsun-Shevchenkovskaya Bitva* [Battle of the Korsun-Cherkassy Pocket], ed. Y. A. Bortniak et al. (Kiev, 1968).
- KOVALCHUK, VALENTIN M., ‘Die Verteidigung Leningrads durch die Rote Armee’, in *Blockade. Leningrad 1941–1944*, 112–23.
- KRAINUKOV, KONSTANTIN V., *Vom Dnepr zur Weichsel* (East Berlin, 1977).
- KRAMER, HANS, *Geschichte Italiens*, i: *Von der Völkerwanderung bis 1494*; ii: *Von 1494 bis zur Gegenwart* (Stuttgart, etc., 1968).

- KRAUSE, ANDREAS, *Scapa Flow. Die Selbstversenkung der wilhelminischen Flotte* (Berlin, 1999).
- KRAUSNICK, HELMUT, ‘Zu Hitlers Ostpolitik im Sommer 1943’, *VfZ*, 2 (1954), 305–12.
- KRAUSSE, HELMUT K., ‘Zur Darstellung des Todes im Nibelungenlied’, *Neophilologus*, 61 (1977), 2, 245–57.
- KREBS, GERHARD, ‘Gibraltar oder Bosphorus? Japans Empfehlungen für eine deutsche Mittelmeerstrategie im Jahr 1943’, *MGM*, 58 (1999), 65–85.
- KREBS, GERHARD, ‘Japan und der deutsch-sowjetische Krieg 1941’, in *Zwei Wege nach Moskau*, 564–83.
- KREBS, GERHARD, ‘Japanische Vermittlungsversuche im Deutsch-Sowjetischen Krieg 1941–1945’, in *Deutschland–Japan*, 239–88.
- KRECHEL, MARIO, ‘Die Bewertung der Kriegsniederlage durch die deutsche Generalität im Spiegel autobiographischer Aufzeichnungen’, mag. diss., Bundeswehr University (1996).
- KRECKER, LOTHAR, *Deutschland und die Türkei im Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Frankfurter wissenschaftliche Beiträge. Kulturwissenschaftliche Reihe 12; Frankfurt a.M., 1964).
- KREIS, GEORG, ‘Das Kriegsende in Norditalien 1945’, *Schweizer Monatshefte*, 65 (1985), 6, 507–21.
- KREUTER, SIEGBERT, ‘Der Rückzug der Heeresgruppe E aus Griechenland’, *ÖMZ*, 20 (1982), 111–16.
- KREUTER, SIEGBERT, ‘Die Slowakei 1918–1944’, *ÖMZ*, 27 (1989), 483–91.
- Kriegsbegeisterung und mentale Kriegsvorbereitung. Interdisziplinäre Studien*, ed. Marcel van der Linden and Gottfried Mergner (Beiträge zur Politischen Wissenschaft 6; Berlin, 1991).
- Kriegsende im Norden. Vom heißen zum kalten Krieg*, ed. Robert Bohn and Jürgen Elvert (Historische Mitteilungen der Ranke-Gesellschaft, Suppl. 14; Stuttgart, 1995).
- Kriegsende in Europa. Vom Beginn des deutschen Machtzerfalls bis zur Stabilisierung der Nachkriegsordnung 1944–1948*, ed. Ulrich Herbert and Axel Schildt (Essen, 1998).
- Kriegsende 1945 in Deutschland*, ed. for the MGFA by Jörg Hillmann and John Zimmermann (Beiträge zur Militärgeschichte 55; Munich, 2002).
- Kriegsjahr 1944. Im Großen und im Kleinen*, ed. Michael Salewski and Guntram Schulze-Wegener (Historische Mitteilungen, Suppl. 12; Stuttgart, 1995).
- Kriegstagebuch der Seekriegsleitung 1939 bis 1945. T. A*, 68 vols., ed. for the MGFA, together with the Federal Archives, Military Archives, and the Marine-Offizier-Vereinigung, by Werner Rahn and Gerhard Schreiber in cooperation with Hansjoseph Maierhöfer (Hamburg, Berlin, and Bonn, 1988–97).
- Kriegstagebuch des Oberkommandos der Wehrmacht (Wehrmachtführungsstab) 1940–1945: Geführt von Helmuth Greiner und Percy Ernst Schramm*, 4 vols., ed. for the Arbeitskreis für Wehrforschung by Percy Ernst Schramm (Frankfurt a.M., 1961–5; repr. Hersching, 1982; Augsburg 2003).
- Krieg und Krieger*, ed. Ernst Jünger (Berlin, 1930).
- KRIKUNOV, V. P., ‘Razgrom gruppy armii “Yuznaya Ukraina” [Defeat of Army Group South Ukraine]’, *VIZh*, 1989, 10, 7–19.
- KRIVOSHEYEV, GRIGORI, ‘Military Casualties during 70 Years’, *Military News Bulletin*, 1992, 6, 1–3.
- KROENER, BERNHARD R., *Der starke Mann im Heimatkriegsgebiet—Generaloberst Friedrich Fromm. Eine Biographie* (Paderborn, 2005).
- KROENER, BERNHARD R., ‘Der „erfrorene“ Blitzkrieg. Strategische Planungen der deutschen Führung gegen die Sowjetunion und die Ursachen ihres Scheiterns’, in *Zwei Wege nach Moskau*, 133–48.

- KROENER, BERNHARD R., ‘Der Kampf um den “Sparstoff Mensch”. Forschungskontroversen über die Mobilisierung der deutschen Kriegswirtschaft 1939–1942’, in *Der Zweite Weltkrieg. Analysen*, 402–17.
- KROENER, BERNHARD R., ‘“Nun Volk, steh auf...!” Stalingrad und der “totale” Krieg 1942–1943’, in *Stalingrad. Ereignis, Wirkung, Symbol*, 151–70.
- KROENER, BERNHARD R., ‘Zwischen Blitzsieg und Verhandlungsfrieden. Der Chef der Heeresrüstung und Befehlshaber des Ersatzheeres fordert im Herbst 1941 die Beendigung des Krieges’, in *Internationale Beziehungen im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, 341–60.
- KRÖKER, THOMAS, *Fehleinschätzung der sowjetischen Operationsabsichten im Sommer 1944. Der Zusammenbruch der Heeresgruppe Mitte* (Karlsruhe, 1984).
- KROLL, FRANK-LOTHAR, ‘Geschichte und Politik im Weltbild Hitlers’, *VfZ*, 44 (1996), 3, 327–54.
- KRÜGER, PETER, ‘Etzels Halle und Stalingrad. Die Rede Görings vom 30.1.1943’, in *Die Nibelungen. Ein deutscher Wahnsinn*, 151–90.
- KRÜGER, PETER, ‘Rückkehr zum internationalen Faustrecht. Außenpolitik als Herrschaftsinstrument des Nationalsozialismus’, in *Der Nationalsozialismus an der Macht*, 166–91.
- KRUMPELT, IHNO, *Das Material und die Kriegsführung* (Frankfurt a.M., 1968).
- KTB OKW*, see *Kriegstagebuch des Oberkommandos der Wehrmacht*.
- KUBY, ERICH, *Verrat auf deutsch. Wie das Dritte Reich Italien ruinerte* (Hamburg, 1982).
- KUMM, OTTO, *Vorwärts, Prinz Eugen! Geschichte der 7. SS-Freiwilligen-Division ‘Prinz Eugen’* (Osnabrück, 1978). [Trans. Joseph G. Welsh, *Prinz Eugen: The History of the 7. SS-Mountain Division ‘Prinz Eugen’* (Winnipeg, 1995)].
- KUMPFMÜLLER, MICHAEL, *Die Schlacht von Stalingrad. Metamorphosen eines deutschen Mythos* (Munich, 1995).
- KUNZ, ANDREAS, ‘Die Wehrmacht in der Agonie der nationalsozialistischen Herrschaft 1944/45. Eine Gedankenskizze’, in *Kriegsende 1945*, 97–114.
- KUROWSKI, FRANZ, *Brückenkopf Tunesien* (Herford and Bonn, 1967).
- Kurskaya Bitva. Vospominania uchastnikov (1943–1968)* [The Battle of Kursk. Memoirs of Participants], ed. Z. N. Alekseyev et al. (Voronezh, 1968).
- Küzdelem az igazságért. Tanulmányok Randolph L. Braham 80. születésnapjára* [Battle for Justice: Essays on the 80th Birthday of Randolph L. Braham] (Budapest, 2002).
- KUZNETSOV, PAVEL G., *Marshal Tolbukhin* (Moscow, 1966).
- Lagebesprechungen im Führerhauptquartier. Protokollfragmente aus Hitlers militärischen Konferenzen 1942–1945*, ed. Helmut Heiber (Munich, 1964).
- Lagevorträge des Oberbefehlshabers der Kriegsmarine vor Hitler 1939–1945*, ed. for the Arbeitskreis für Wehrforschung by Gerhard Wagner (Munich, 1972).
- LÄHTEENMÄKI, MARIA, *Jänkäjääkäreitä ja parakkipiikoja. Lappilaisten sotakokemuksia 1939–1945* (Histoiallisio tutkimuksia 203; Helsinki, 1999).
- LAINE, ANTTI, *Suur-Suomen kahdet kasvot. Itä-Karjalan siviiliväestön asema suomalaisessa miehityshallinnossa 1941–1944* [The Two Faces of Greater Finland: The Situation of the East Karelian Civil Population under Finnish Occupational Rule 1941–4] (Keuruu, 1982).
- LAKATOS, GÉZA, *Ahogyan én láttam* (Budapest, 1992). [Trans. Mario D. Fenyo, *As I Saw It: The Tragedy of Hungary* (Englewood, NJ, 1993)].
- LAKOWSKI, RICHARD, ‘Die Ostseebrückenköpfe in den politischen und strategischen Plänen des faschistischen deutschen Imperialismus’, *Militärgeschichte* [GDR] 24 (1985), 30–8.
- Landsknechte, Soldatenfrauen und Nationalkrieger. Militär, Krieg und Geschlechterordnung im historischen Wandel*, ed. Karen Hagemann and Ralf Pröve (Frankfurt and New York, 1998).

- LANG, ARNIM, ‘‘Operation Nordlicht’’. Die Zerstörung Nordnorwegens durch deutsche Truppen beim Rückzug aus Finnland im Spätjahr 1944’, in *Kriegsende im Norden*, 25–41.
- LANG, KARL, *Geschichte der 384. Infanterie-Division 1942–1944. Zur Erinnerung an die gefallenen und vermissten Kameraden* (Rodenkirchen bei Köln, 1965).
- LANGE, WOLFGANG, *Korpsabteilung C vom Dnepr bis nach Polen* (Die Wehrmacht im Kampf 28; Neckargemünd, 1961).
- LANZ, HUBERT, *Gebirgsjäger. Die 1. Gebirgsdivision 1935–1945* (Bad Nauheim, 1954).
- LARGE, DAVID CLAY, *Where Ghosts Walked: Munich’s Road to the Third Reich* (New York, 1997).
- LASCH, OTTO, *So fiel Königsberg. Kampf und Untergang von Ostpreußens Hauptstadt* (Munich, 1958).
- LATZEL, KLAUS, *Vom Sterben im Krieg. Wandlungen in der Einstellung zum Soldatentod vom Siebenjährigen Krieg bis zum II. Weltkrieg* (Warendorf, 1988).
- LATZEL, KLAUS, *Deutsche Soldaten, nationalsozialistischer Krieg? Kriegserlebnis—Kriegserfahrung 1939–1945*, 2nd edn. (Paderborn, 2000).
- LATZEL, KLAUS, ‘Tourismus und Gewalt. Kriegswahrnehmungen in Feldpostbriefen’, in *Vernichtungskrieg*, 447–547.
- LEHMANN, HANS GEORG, ‘Unternehmen Panzerfaust’, *Ungarn Jahrbuch*, 5 (1973) 215–31.
- LEHMANN, RUDOLF, *Die Leibstandarte*, iii (Osnabrück, 1982). [Trans. Nick Olcott, *The Leibstandarte* (Winnipeg, 1987)].
- LEIGHTON, RICHARD M., and COAKLEY, ROBERT W., *Global Logistics and Strategy 1940–1943* (Washington, D.C., 1955).
- LEKOVIĆ, MIŠO, *Martovski pregovori 1943* [The March 1943 Negotiations] (Belgrade, 1985).
- LEMM, HEINZ-GEORG, ‘Die Verteidigung Mogilevs durch die 12. Infanteriedivision’, in *1985 Art of War Symposium*, 352–70.
- LENGYEL, BÉLA VON, ‘Die ungarische Verteidigung der Karpaten 1944’, *ASMZ*, 3 (1956), 110–26, 191–210, 273–91.
- LEPRE, AURELIO, *La storia della Repubblica di Mussolini. Salò: il tempo dell’odio e della violenza* (Milan, 1999).
- LEPRE, GEORGE, *Himmler’s Bosnian Division: The Waffen-SS Handschar Division* (Atglen, PA, 1997).
- LESNJAK, T. P., ‘Die Operation von Lublin-Brest’, in *Die wichtigsten Operationen*, 431–44.
- LÉVAI, JENŐ, *Zsidósors Magyarországon* [The Fate of the Jews in Hungary] (Budapest, 1948).
- LEVINE, ALAN J., ‘Was World War II a Near-Run Thing?’, *JSS*, 8 (1985), 1, 38–63.
- LEVISSE-TOUZÉ, CHRISTINE, *L’Afrique du Nord dans la guerre 1939–1945* (Paris, 1998).
- LEWIN, RONALD, *Rommel as Military Commander* (London and New York, 1969).
- LIDDELL HART, Basil Henry, *The German Generals Talk* (New York, 1948).
- LIDDELL HART, Basil Henry, *History of the Second World War* (London, 1970).
- LIEB, PETER, ‘Täter aus Überzeugung? Oberst Carl von Adrian und die Judenmorde der 707. Infanteriedivision 1941/42’, *VfZ*, 50 (2002), 523–57.
- LIEB, PETER, *Konventioneller Krieg oder NS-Weltanschauungskrieg? Kriegsführung und Partisanenbekämpfung in Frankreich 1943/44* (Munich, 2006).
- LILL, RUDOLF, *Geschichte Italiens in der Neuzeit* (Darmstadt, 1988).
- Linea Gotica 1944. Eserciti, popolazione, partigiani, ed. Giorgio Rochat, Enzo Santarelli, and Paolo Sorcinelli (Milan, 1986).
- LINGE, HEINZ, *Bis zum Untergang. Als Chef des persönlichen Dienstes bei Hitler*, 2nd edn. (Munich and Berlin, 1980). [Trans. Geoffrey Brooks, *With Hitler to the End: The Memoirs of Adolf Hitler’s Valet* (London and New York, 2009)].

- LINGEN, KERSTIN VON, ‘Conspiracy of Silence: How the “Old Boys” of American Intelligence Shielded SS General Karl Wolff from Prosecution’, *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, 22, 1 (2008).
- LINGEN, KERSTIN VON, *SS und Secret Service: Verschwörung des Schweigens: die Akte Karl Wolff* (Paderborn, 2010).
- LINKOMIES, EDWIN, *Vaikeaa aika. Suomen pääministerinä sotavuosina 1943–44* [A Difficult Time: As Finland’s Prime Minister in the War Years 1943–4] (Keuruu, 1980).
- LIPTÁK, LUBOMÍR, ‘Das politische System der slowakischen Republik 1939–1945’, in *Autoritäre Regime*, 299–33.
- LOCH, HERBERT, ‘The Defensive Battle of the Eighteenth Army in the Panther Line from 4 March to 28 June 1944’, in Newton, *Retreat from Leningrad*, 89–121.
- LOI, SALVATORE, *Le operazioni delle unità in Jugoslavia (1941–1943)*, publ. Ministero della difesa, Stato maggiore dell’esercito, Ufficio storico (Rome, 1978).
- LONGERICH, PETER, ‘Vom Massenmord zur “Endlösung”. Die Erschießungen von jüdischen Zivilisten in den ersten Monaten des Ostfeldzuges im Kontext des nationalsozialistischen Judenmords’, in *Zwei Wege nach Moskau*, 251–74.
- LONGO, LUIGI, *Viva l’Italia libera. Der Kampf des italienischen Volkes für seine Befreiung vom Joch des italienischen und deutschen Faschismus* (East Berlin, 1963).
- LÖSER, JOCHEN, *Bittere Pflicht. Kampf und Untergang der 76. Berlin-Brandenburgischen Infanterie-Division* (Osnabrück, 1986).
- LUDENDORFF, ERICH, *Meine Kriegserinnerungen 1914–1918* (Berlin, 1919). [Trans. Ludendorff’s Own Story, August 1914–November 1918 (New York, 1919)].
- LUDEWIG, JOACHIM, ‘Stationen eines Soldatenschicksals: Generalfeldmarschall Walter Model’, *Militärgeschichte*, 1 (1991), 69–75.
- LUDLOW, PETER, ‘Britain and Northern Europe, 1940–1945’, *SJH*, 4 (1979), 123–62.
- Luftkriegsführung im Zweiten Weltkrieg. Ein internationaler Vergleich*, ed. for the MGFA by Horst Boog (Vorträge zur Militärgeschichte 12; Herford and Bonn, 1993).
- LUKACS, JOHN, *The Hitler of History* (London and New York, 1997).
- ‘Lvov–Peremyshl Operation’, see ‘1st [First] Ukrainian Front’s Lvov–Peremyshl Operation (July to August 1944)’.
- MACARTNEY, CARLILE A., *October Fifteenth: A History of Modern Hungary 1929–1945*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh, 1961).
- MC CONVILLE, MICHAEL, *A Small War in the Balkans: British Military Involvement in Wartime Yugoslavia, 1941–1945* (London, 1986).
- MACKSEY, KENNETH, *Deutsche Panzertruppen* (Munich and Rastatt, 1968).
- MACKSEY, KENNETH, *Crucible of Power: The fight for Tunisia 1942–1943* (London, 1969).
- MACKSEY, KENNETH, *Guderian Panzer General* (London, 2003).
- MACKSEY, KENNETH, ‘Generaloberst Alfred Jodl’, in *Hitlers militärische Elite*, i. 102–9.
- MACMILLAN, HAROLD, *War Diaries: Politics and War in the Mediterranean, January 1943 to May 1945* (London and Basingstoke, 1984).
- MACULENKO, VIKTOR A., *Die Zerschlagung der Heeresgruppe Südukraine, August bis September 1944* (Berlin, 1959).
- MAGENHEIMER, HEINZ, *Die Militärstrategie Deutschlands 1940–1945. Führungsentschlüsse, Hintergründe, Alternativen*, 2nd exp. and rev. edn. (Munich, 1997).
- Magyarország a második világháborúban. Lexikon A–Zs* [Hungary in the Second World War: A Lexicon A–Z], ed. Péter Sipos and István Ravasz (Budapest, 1997).
- Magyarország története. 1918–1919, 1919–1945* [A History of Hungary], ed. Zsigmond Pál Pach (Budapest, 1976).

- MAHNCKE, DIETER, *Vertrauensbildende Maßnahmen als Instrument der Sicherheitspolitik. Ursprung, Entwicklung, Perspektiven* (Melle, 1982).
- MAIER, GEORG, *Drama zwischen Budapest und Wien. Der Endkampf der 6. Panzerarmee 1945* (Osnabrück, 1985).
- MALAKHOV, MIKHAIL M., *Ot Balatona do Veny* [From the Balaton to Vienna] (Moscow, 1959).
- MALCOLM, NOEL, *Kosovo: A Short History* (New York, 1998).
- MALLMANN, KLAUS-MICHAEL, and CÜPPERS, MARTIN, “‘Beseitigung der jüdisch-nationalen Heimstätte in Palästina’. Das Einsatzkommando bei der Panzerarmee Afrika 1942”, in *Deutsche Juden, Völkermord*, 153–76.
- MANNERHEIM, CARL GUSTAV EMIL (FRIHERRE), *The Memoirs of Marshall Mannerheim*, trans. from the Swedish by Count Eric Lewenhaupt (London, 1953).
- MANNINEN, OHTO, *The Soviet Plans for the North Western Theatre of Operations in 1939–1944* (Finnish Defence Studies 16; Helsinki, 2004).
- MANOSCHEK, WALTER, ‘Serbien ist judenfrei’: *Militärische Besatzungspolitik und Judenvernichtung in Serbien 1941/42* (Beiträge zur Militärgeschichte 38; Munich, 1993).
- MANSTEIN, ERICH VON, *Verlorene Siege* (Bonn, 1955; Frankfurt a.M., 1966). [Trans. Anthony G. Powell, *Lost Victories* (London and Novato, CA, 1982)].
- La Marina Italiana nella seconda guerra mondiale*, publ. Ufficio Storico della Marina Militare, i: Giuseppe Fioravanzo, *Dati statistici*; viii: Giuseppe Fioravanzo, *La difesa del traffico con l’Africa Settentrionale. Dal 1 ottobre 1942 alla caduta della Tunisia* (Rome, 1964; 2nd edn., 1972).
- MARKIN, ILYA I., *Na beregakh Dunaya* [On the Banks of the Danube] (Moscow, 1953).
- MARKIN, ILYA I., *Die Kursker Schlacht* (East Berlin, 1960).
- MARTIN, BERND, *Deutschland und Japan im Zweiten Weltkrieg. Vom Angriff auf Pearl Harbor bis zur deutschen Kapitulation* (Göttingen, Zurich, and Frankfurt a.M., 1969).
- MARTIN, BERND, *Friedensinitiativen und Machtpolitik im Zweiten Weltkrieg 1939–1942* (Düsseldorf, 1974).
- MARTIN, BERND, ‘Verhandlungen über separate Friedensschlüsse 1942–1945. Ein Beitrag zur Entstehung des Kalten Krieges’, *MGM*, 20 (1976), 95–113.
- MARTIN, BERND, ‘Deutsch-sowjetische Sondierungen über einen separaten Friedensschluß im Zweiten Weltkrieg. Bericht und Dokumentation’, in *Felder und Vorfelder russischer Geschichte*, 280–308.
- MARTIN, BERND, ‘Die Einschätzung der Lage Deutschlands aus japanischer Sicht: Japans Abkehr vom Bündnis und seine Hinwendung auf Ostasien (1943–1945)’, in *Die Zukunft des Reiches*, 127–46.
- MARTIN, BERND, ‘Die politischen Rückwirkungen der militärischen Situation 1943 auf das Bündnis der Dreierpaktstaaten’, in *Gezeitenwechsel*, 185–210.
- MARTIN, BERND, ‘Japan und Stalingrad. Umorientierung vom Bündnis mit Deutschland auf „Großostasien“’, in *Stalingrad. Ereignis, Wirkung, Symbol*, 229–49.
- MASER, WERNER, *Adolf Hitler. Legende, Mythos, Wirklichkeit*, 2nd edn. (Munich, 1971). [Trans. Peter Ross and Betty Ross, *Hitler: Legend, Myth and Reality* (New York, 1973)].
- MAWDSLEY, EVAN, *Thunder in the East: The Nazi–Soviet War 1941–1945* (London, 2005).
- MAYER, ARNO J., *Der Krieg als Kreuzzug. Das Deutsche Reich, Hitlers Wehrmacht und die Endlösung*’ (Reinbek bei Hamburg, 1989).
- The Mediterranean and Middle East* (History of the Second World War. United Kingdom Military Series):
- iv: Ian S. Playfair and J. C. Molony, *The Destruction of the Axis Forces in Africa* (London, 1966);

- v: J. C. Molony et al., *The Campaign in Sicily 1943 and the Campaign in Italy: 3rd September 1943 to 31st March 1944* (London, 1973);  
 vi/I: J. C. Molony, *Victory in the Mediterranean: 1st April to 4th June 1944* (London, 1986);  
 vi/II: William Jackson, *Victory in the Mediterranean: June to October 1944* (London, 1987);  
 vi/III: William Jackson, *Victory in the Mediterranean: November 1944 to May 1945* (London, 1988).
- MEGARTEE, GEOFFREY P., *Inside Hitler's High Command* (Lawrence KS, 2000).
- Meldungen aus dem Reich. *Auswahl aus den geheimen Lageberichten des Sicherheitsdienstes der SS 1939–1944*, ed. Heinz Boberach (Neuwied and Berlin, 1965).
- Meldungen aus dem Reich 1938–1945. *Die geheimen Lageberichte des Sicherheitsdienstes der SS*, ed. and intr. Heinz Boberach, 17 vols. and index (Herrsching, 1984–5).
- MELLENTHIN, FRIEDRICH WILHELM VON, *Panzerschlachten. Eine Studie über den Einsatz von Panzerverbänden im Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Neckargemünd, 1963). [Trans. H. Betzler, *Panzer Battles: A Study of the Employment of Armour in the Second World War* (London, 1955)].
- MELNIKOV, SEMEN I., *Marshal Rybalko. Vospominania byushego chlena Voyennogo soveta 3-i gвардейской танковой армии* [Marshall Rybalko. Memoirs of a Member of the Military Soviet of 3rd Guards Armoured Army] (Kiev, 1980).
- MELZER, WALther, *Kampf um die Baltischen Inseln 1917, 1941, 1944. Eine Studie zur triphibischen Kampfführung* (Die Wehrmacht im Kampf 24; Neckargemünd, 1960).
- MENGER, MANFRED, 'Das militärpolitische Verhältnis zwischen Deutschland und Finnland im Herbst 1944', *Militärgeschichte*, 18 (1979), 297–309.
- MENGER, MANFRED, *Deutschland und Finnland im zweiten Weltkrieg. Genesis und Scheitern einer Militärrallianz* (Militärhistorische Studien 26; East Berlin, 1988).
- MENGER, MANFRED, 'Finnland—Der Weg in den Frieden', in *Kriegsende in Europa*, 279–300.
- MENNEL, RAINER, *Der nordafrikanisch-italienische Kampfraum 1943–1945. Eine wehrgeographische Studie* (Osnabrück, 1983).
- MENNEL, RAINER, *Der Balkan. Einfluss- und Interessensphären. Eine Studie zur Geostrategie und politischen Geographie eines alten Konflikttraumes* (Osnabrück, 1999).
- MERETSKOV, KIRILL A., *Serving the People* (Moscow, 1971).
- MESSINGER, CHARLES, *The Blitzkrieg Story* (London and New York, 1976).
- MESSERSCHMIDT, MANFRED, 'Militärische Motive zur Durchführung des Umsturzes', in *Der Widerstand gegen den Nationalsozialismus*, 1021–36.
- MESSERSCHMIDT, MANFRED, 'Die Wehrmacht. Vom Realitätsverlust zum Selbstbetrug', in *Ende des Dritten Reiches—Ende des Zweiten Weltkriegs*, 223–57.
- METZGER, CHANTAL, *L'Empire colonial français dans la stratégie du troisième Reich (1936–1945)*, 2 vols. (Brussels, etc., 2002).
- METZSCH, FRIEDRICH-AUGUST VON, *Die Geschichte der 22. Infanteriedivision 1939–1945* (Kiel, 1952).
- MEYER, AHLRICH, *Die deutsche Besatzung in Frankreich. Widerstandsbekämpfung und Judenverfolgung* (Darmstadt, 2000).
- MEYER, GEORG, *Adolf Heusinger. Dienst eines deutschen Soldaten 1915 bis 1964*, publ. with support from the Clausewitz-Gesellschaft and the MGFA (Hamburg, 2001).
- MEYER, KURT, *Kriegsgefangener in Stalingrad. Ein langer Weg wird es sein* (Frankfurt a.M., 1996).
- Mezzogiorno 1943. La scelta, la lotta, la speranza*, ed. Gloria Chianese (Naples, 1996).
- MICHALKA, WOLFGANG, ‘‘Vom Motor zum Getriebe’’. Das Auswärtige Amt und die Degradierung einer traditionsreichen Behörde 1933–1945’, in *Der Zweite Weltkrieg. Analysen*, 249–59.

- MIKSCHE, FERDINAND OTTO, *Vom Kriegsbild* (Stuttgart, 1976).
- Die Militärelite des Dritten Reiches. 27 biographische Skizzen*, ed. Ronald Smelser and Enrico Syring (Berlin and Frankfurt a.M., 1995).
- Militärgeographischer Überblick über Südost-Europa (Donauraum und Balkanhalbinsel)*, publ. Generalstab des Heeres (Berlin, 1940).
- Military Conflict: Essays in the Institutional Analysis of War and Peace*, ed. Morris Janowitz (Beverly Hills, CA, 1975).
- MILLER, JAMES EDWARD, 'Der Weg zu einer "special relationship". Italien und die Vereinigten Staaten 1943–1947', in *Italien und die Großmächte*, 49–68.
- MILWARD, ALAN S., 'The End of the Blitzkrieg', *Economic History Review*, 16 (1964), 3, 499–518.
- MILWARD, ALAN S., *The German Economy at War* (London, 1965).
- MINASIAN, MUSHEG M., *Osvobozhdenie narodov Yugo-vostochnoi Evropy. Boyevye deistvia Krasnoi Armii na territorii Rumynii, Bulgarii, Vengrii i Jugoslavii v 1944–1945 gg.* [The Liberation of the Peoples of South-East Europe: The Red Army in Romania, Bulgaria, Hungary, and Yugoslavia in 1944–5] (Moscow, 1967).
- MISSORI, MARIO, *Governi, alte cariche dello Stato, alti magistrati e prefetti del Regno d'Italia* (Rome, 1989).
- MITCHAM, SAMUEL W., 'Generalfeldmarschall Ernst Busch', in *Hitlers militärische Elite*, ii. 20–7.
- MITCHAM, SAMUEL W., 'Generalfeldmarschall Wilhelm Keitel', in *Hitlers militärische Elite*, i. 112–20.
- MITCHAM, SAMUEL W., and MUELLER, GENE, 'Generalfeldmarschall Walter Model', in *Hitlers militärische Elite*, ii. 153–60.
- Mítoszok, legendák, tévhitek a 20. századi Magyar történelemről* [Myths, Legends and Errors in the History of Hungary in the 20th Century], ed. Ignác Romsics (Budapest, 1998).
- MITTERMAIER, KARL, *Mussolinis Ende. Die Republik von Salò 1943–1945* (Munich, 1995).
- MOELLHAUSEN, EITEL FRIEDRICH, *Il giuoco è fatto* (Florence, 1951).
- MOHLER, ARMIN, *Die Konservative Revolution in Deutschland 1918–1932. Ein Handbuch*, 2nd. rev. and exp. edn. (Darmstadt, 1972).
- MOLL, MARTIN, 'Kapitulation oder heroischer Endkampf in der "Festung Norwegen"? Die Entscheidung für ein friedliches Ende der deutschen Okkupation Dänemarks und Norwegens im Frühjahr 1945', in *Kriegsende im Norden*, 43–83.
- MOLTMANN, GÜNTER, 'Goebbels Rede zum totalen Krieg am 18. Februar 1943', *VfZ*, 12 (1964), 13–43.
- MONTAGU, EWEN EDWARD SAMUEL, *The Man Who Never Was*, foreword by Hastings Lionel Ismay (London, 1965).
- MONTANARI, MARIO, *Le operazioni in Africa Settentrionale*, iv: *Enfidaville (novembre 1942–maggio 1943)* (Rome, 1993).
- MONTGOMERY, BERNARD LAW, *The Memoirs of Field Marshall the Viscount Montgomery of Alamein* (London and Cleveland, OH, 1958).
- MORRIS, ERIC, *Salerno: A Military Fiasco* (London, etc., 1983).
- MORROW, JOHN H., 'Die deutsche Flugzeugindustrie im Ersten und Zweiten Weltkrieg. Ein Vergleich', in *Luftkriegsführung im Zweiten Weltkrieg*, 51–80.
- MOSKALENKO, KYRILL S., *In der Südwestrichtung. Erinnerungen eines Oberbefehlshabers*, 2 vols. (East Berlin, 1978–9).
- MOSKALENKO, R., 'Karpatsko-Duklinskaya Operatsiya [The Carpathian Dukla Operation]', *VIZh*, 1965, 7, 16–23.

- MOTTER, THOMAS HUBBARD VAIL, *The Persian Corridor and Aid to Russia* (United States Army in World War II. The Middle East Theater 1 (Washington, D.C., 1952).
- MOURRUT, JEAN-LOUIS, 'La campagna d'Italia: i francesi', in *L'Italia in guerra*, 45–59.
- MOYZISCH, LUDWIG C., *Der Fall Cicero (Es geschah in Ankara...). Die sensationellste Spionageaffäre des Zweiten Weltkrieges* (Frankfurt a.M., etc., 1950). [Trans. Constantine FitzGibbon and Heinrich Fraenkel, *Operation Cicero* (London and New York, 1969)].
- MUELLER, GENE, 'Wilhelm Keitel—Der gehorsame Soldat', in *Die Militärelite des Dritten Reiches*, 251–69.
- MÜLLER, KLAUS-JÜRGEN, 'Nationalkonservative Eliten zwischen Kooperation und Widerstand', in *Der Widerstand gegen den Nationalsozialismus*, 24–49.
- MÜLLER, KLAUS-JÜRGEN, 'Strategische und operationelle Aspekte des Feldzuges in Tunis 1942/43', in *Campagne de Tunisie*, 55–77.
- MULLER, RICHARD R., *The German Air War in Russia* (Baltimore, MD, 1992).
- MÜLLER, ROLF-DIETER, *The Politics of Illusion and Empire: German Occupation Policy in the Soviet Union, 1942–1943* (New York, etc., 1988).
- MÜLLER, ROLF-DIETER, 'Menschenjagd. Die Rekrutierung von Zwangsarbeitern in der besetzten Sowjetunion', in *Vernichtungskrieg*, 92–102.
- MÜLLER, ROLF-DIETER, and UEBERSCHÄR, GERD R., *Hitlers Krieg im Osten 1941–1945. Ein Forschungsbericht* (Darmstadt, 2000). [Trans. Bruce Little, *Hitler's War in the East: A Critical Assessment*, 2nd rev. edn. (New York, 2002).]
- MÜLLER, VINCENZ, *Ich fand das wahre Vaterland. Erinnerungen*, ed. Klaus Mammach (East Berlin, 1963).
- MÜLLER-HILLEBRAND, BURKHART, *Das Heer 1933–1945. Entwicklung des organisatorischen Aufbaus*, i: *Das Heer bis zum Kriegsbeginn*; ii: *Die Blitzfeldzüge 1939–1941. Das Heer im Kriege bis zum Beginn des Feldzuges gegen die Sowjetunion im Juni 1941*; iii: *Der Zweifrontenkrieg. Das Heer vom Beginn des Feldzuges gegen die Sowjetunion bis zum Kriegsende* (Darmstadt and Frankfurt a.M., 1954–69).
- MULLIGAN, TIMOTHY PATRICK, 'Reckoning the Cost of People's War: The German Experience in the Central USSR', *Russian History*, 9 (1982), 1, 27–48.
- MÜNCH, KARLHEINZ, *Einsatzgeschichte der schweren Panzerjäger-Abteilung 653 1943 bis 1945: ehemalige Sturmgeschütz-Abteilung 197 1940–1943* (Schwetzingen, 1996). [Trans. Bo Friesen, *Combat History of Schwere Panzerjäger Abteilung 653: Formerly the Sturmgeschütz Abteilung 197, 1940–1943* (Winnipeg, 1997)].
- MÜNKLER, HERFRIED, and STORCH, WOLFGANG, *Siegfrieden: Politik mit einem deutschen Mythos* (Berlin, 1988).
- MURIEV, D., 'Nekotorye kharakternye cherty frontovykh i armejskikh operatsii, prowedenyykh v Pribaltiyskoi strategicheskoi operatsii 1944 gg. [Some Characteristic Features of Front and Army Operations Conducted in the Baltic Strategic Operation of 1944] (on the 40th anniversary of the liberation of the Soviet Baltic)', *VIZh*, 1984, 9, 22–8.
- MURRAY, WILLIAMSON, *Strategy for Defeat: The Luftwaffe 1933–1945* (Secaucus, N.J., 1983).
- MUTTERLOSE, H., 'Artillerie im Einsatz in der Panzerschlacht bei Prochorowka im Juli 1943', *Der Freiwillige*, 1999, 7, 25–6.
- Nagy Képes Millenniumi Hadtörténet. 1000 év a hadak útján [Grand Illustrated Millennium of Military History. 1000 Years of the Army], ed. Árpád Rácz (Budapest, 2000).
- NAGY-TALAVERA, NICHOLAS M., *The Green Shirts and the Others: A History of Fascism in Hungary and Rumania* (Hoover Institution Publications 85; Stanford, Calif., 1970).
- NASH, DOUGLAS E., 'No Stalingrad on the Dnieper: The Korsun–Shevchenkovsky Operation January to February 1944', diss. (Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, Kan., 1995).

- Das Nationalkomitee 'Freies Deutschland' und der Bund Deutscher Offiziere*, ed. Gerd R. Ueberschär (Frankfurt a.M., 1995).
- Der Nationalsozialismus an der Macht. Aspekte nationalsozialistischer Politik und Herrschaft*, ed. Klaus Malettke (Göttingen, 1984).
- NATTA, ALESSANDRO, *L'altra Resistenza. I militari italiani internati in Germania*, intr. Enzo Collotti (Gli struzzi 483; Turin, 1997).
- NAZAREWICZ, RYSZARD, *Varshavskoe vosstanie 1944 god. Politicheskie aspekty* [The Warsaw Uprising 1944: Political Aspects] (Moscow, 1989).
- The Nazis' Last Victims: The Holocaust in Hungary*, ed. Randolph L. Braham (Detroit, MI, 1998).
- NEIDHARDT, HANNS, *Mit Tanne und Eichenlaub. Kriegschronik der 100. Jäger-Division, vormals 100. leichte Infanterie-Division* (Graz, 1981).
- NEITZEL, SÖNKE, 'Der Kampf um die deutschen Atlantik- und Kanalfestungen und sein Einfluß auf den alliierten Nachschub während der Befreiung Frankreichs 1944/45', *MGM*, 55 (1996), 381–430.
- NES, H. VAN, "Bagration". Studie über die Vernichtung der Heeresgruppe Mitte im Sommer 1944 unter dem Blickwinkel der Feindaufklärung', in *1985 Art of War Symposium*, 232–75.
- NEUBACHER, HERMANN, *Sonderauftrag Südost 1940–1945. Bericht eines fliegenden Diplomaten*, 2nd rev. edn. (Berlin, Frankfurt a.M., and Göttingen, 1957).
- NEULEN, HANS WERNER, *Europa und das 3. Reich. Einigungsbestrebungen im deutschen Machtbereich 1939–45* (Munich, 1987).
- NEULEN, HANS WERNER, *Am Himmel Europas. Luftstreitkräfte an deutscher Seite 1939–1945* (Munich, 1998). [Trans. Alex Vanags-Baginskis, *In the Skies of Europe: Air Forces Allied to the Luftwaffe 1939–1945* (Marlborough, 2000)].
- NEUMANN, JOACHIM, *Die 4. Panzerdivision 1943–1945. Bericht und Betrachtung zu den zwei letzten Kriegsjahren im Osten* (Bonn, 1989).
- Neutralität und totalitäre Aggression. Nordeuropa und die Großmächte im Zweiten Weltkrieg*, ed. Robert Bohn et al. (Historische Mitteilungen, Suppl. 1; Stuttgart, 1991).
- NEVAKIVI, JUKKA, 'A Decisive Armistice, 1944–1947: Why Was Finland Not Sovietized?', *SJH*, 19 (1994), 91–115.
- NEWTON, STEVEN H., *German Battle Tactics on the Russian Front 1941–1945* (Atglen, PA, 1994).
- NEWTON, STEVEN H., *Retreat from Leningrad: Army Group North 1944/1945* (Atglen, PA, 1995).
- Die Nibelungen. Ein deutscher Wahn, ein deutscher Alpträum. Studien und Dokumente zur Rezeption des Nibelungenstoffes im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. Joachim Heinzle and Anneliese Waldschmidt (Frankfurt a.M., 1991).
- NICHOLSON, G. W. L., *The Canadians in Italy 1943–1945*, 2nd edn. (Official History of the Canadian Army in the Second World War 2; Ottawa, 1957).
- NICOLSON, NIGEL, *Alex: The Life of Field Marshal Earl Alexander of Tunis* (London, 1973).
- NIEPOLD, GERD, *Von Minsk bis Lyck. Die 12. PzDiv in den Rückzugsgefechten im Sommer 1944* (Koblenz, 1979).
- NIEPOLD, GERD, *Mittlere Ostfront. Juni '44. Darstellung, Beurteilung, Lehren* (Herford and Bonn, 1985). [Trans. Richard Simpkin, *Battle for White Russia: The Destruction of Army Group Centre June 1944* (London and Washington, D.C., 1987)].
- NIEPOLD, GERD, *Panzeroperationen 'Doppelkopf' und 'Caesar': Kurland—Sommer '44* (Herford and Bonn, 1987).
- NIEPOLD, GERD, 'Der Abwehrkampf der 12. Panzerdivision', in *1985 Art of War Symposium*, 422–38.

- NIEPOLD, GERD, 'Die Führung der Heeresgruppe Mitte von Juni bis August', in *Kriegsjahr 1944*, 61–73.
- NIKOLOV, RUMEN, *Balgarsko-germanskite voyenno-ikonomicheski otnoshenia 1941–1944 g.* [Bulgaro-German Military Economic Relations] (Sofia, 1991).
- 1985 Art of War Symposium: From the Dnepr to the Vistula. Soviet Offensive Operations, November 1943 to August 1944, transcript of proceedings*, publ. Center for Land Warfare, US Army War College (Carlisle, PA, 1985).
- NIPE, GEORGE M., *Decision in the Ukraine: Summer 1943, II. SS- and III. Panzerkorps* (Winnipeg, 1996).
- NITZ, GÜNTHER, *Die 292. Infanterie-Division. Mit Plänen, Skizzen und Bildern* (Berlin, 1957).
- NOBLE, ALASTAIR, 'The Phantom Barrier: Ostwallbau 1944–1945', *WIH*, 8 (2001), 4, 442–67.
- NORBERG, ERIK, 'Die Ostsee zwischen Weltkrieg und Kaltem Krieg', in *Archiv und Geschichte im Ostseeraum*, 231–44.
- NORDIN, SVANTE, 'Das Verhältnis Schwedens zum nationalsozialistischen Deutschland. Gedanken zur Notwendigkeit einer innen- und außenpolitischen Kontextualisierung', *Nordeuropa-forum*, (2001), 2, 47–54.
- OBERMAIER, ERNST, *Die Ritterkreuzträger der Luftwaffe. Jagdflieger 1939–1945* (Mainz, 1989).
- Öffentliche Festkultur. Politische Feste in Deutschland von der Aufklärung bis zum Ersten Weltkrieg*, ed. Dieter Düding, Peter Friedemann, and Paul Münch (Reinbek bei Hamburg, 1988).
- ÖLVEDI, IGNÁC, *A Budai Vár és a debreceni csata* [Buda Castle and the Battle of Debrecen] (Budapest, 1974).
- ÖLVEDI, IGNÁC, *Az 1. magyar hadsereg története 1944 január 6-tól október 16-ig* [History of the 1st Hungarian Army from 6 Jan. to 16 Oct. 1944] (Budapest, 1989).
- ÖNDER, ZEHRA, *Die türkische Außenpolitik im Zweiten Weltkrieg*, (Südosteuropäische Arbeiten 73; Munich, 1977).
- Operationsgebiet östliche Ostsee und der finnisch-baltische Raum 1944* (Beiträge zur Militär- und Kriegsgeschichte 2; Stuttgart, 1961).
- Die operative Idee und ihre Grundlagen. Ausgewählte Operationen des Zweiten Weltkrieges*, publ. MGFA (Vorträge zur Militärgeschichte 10; Herford and Bonn, 1989).
- Operazioni italo-tedesche in Tunisia (11 novembre 1942–13 maggio 1943), i: La 1a armata italiana in Tunisia*, ed. Giovanni Messe (Rome, 1950).
- Österreich 1945. Ein Ende und viele Anfänge*, ed. Manfried Rauchensteiner and Wolfgang Etschmann (Forschungen zur Militärgeschichte 4; Graz, Vienna, and Cologne, 1997).
- OSTERTAG, HEIGER, 'Die größte Panzerschlacht der Weltgeschichte. Juli 1943: Das Scheitern des Unternehmens "Zitadelle" im Kursker Bogen bedeutete die endgültige Niederlage der deutschen Wehrmacht im Osten', *Truppenpraxis*, 37 (1993), 420–24.
- Ottobre settembre 1943. L'armistizio italiano 40 anni dopo. Atti del convegno internazionale (Milano 7–8 settembre 1983)*, ed. Aldo A. Mola and Romain H. Rainero (Rome, 1985).
- OTU, PETRE, 'The Defensive Operations of the 4th Romanian Army', in *Romania in World War II*, 237–39.
- Ot volzkyh stepei do austriih alp. Boevo put 4.ii gвардейской Армии* [From the Volga Steppes to the Austrian Alps: The Combat Operations of 4th Guards Army], ed. T. F. Vorontsov et al. (Moscow, 1971).
- OVEN, WILFRED VON, *Mit Goebbels bis zum Ende*, 2 vols. (Buenos Aires, 1949–50).
- OVERMANS, RÜDIGER, *Deutsche militärische Verluste im Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Beiträge zur Militärgeschichte 46; Munich, 1999).

- OVERMANS, RÜDIGER, 'Das andere Gesicht des Krieges. Leben und Sterben der 6. Armee', in *Stalingrad. Ereignis, Wirkung, Symbol*, 419–55.
- OVERY, RICHARD JAMES, *Why the Allies Won* (London, 1995).
- OVERY, RICHARD JAMES, *Russia's War* (London and New York, 1998).
- OVERY, RICHARD JAMES, *Interrogations: The Nazi Elite in Allied Hands, 1945* (London and New York, 2001).
- The Oxford Companion to the Second World War*, ed. Ian C. B. Dear and M. R. D. Foot (Oxford and New York, 1995).
- PAASIKIVI, JUHO, *J.K. Paasikiven Päiväkirjat 1944–1956. Osa 1: 28.6.1944–24.4.1949* [The Diaries of J. K. Paasikivi 1944–56, I: 28 June 1944–24 Apr. 1949], ed. Yrjö Blomstedt and Matti Klinge (Juva, 1985).
- PAASIKIVI, JUHO, *Jatkosodan päiväkirjat 11.3.1941–27.6.1944* [Diaries from the Continuation War], ed. Kauho I. Rumpunen (Juva, 1991).
- PALM, THEDE, and ENCKELL, GEORG, *The Finnish–Soviet Armistice Negotiations of 1944* (Acta Academiae Regiae Scientiarum Upsaliensis 14; Stockholm, 1971).
- PANDEA, ADRIAN, and ARDELEANU, EFTIMIE, *România în Crimeea 1941–1944* [Romania in the Crimea] (Bucharest, 1995).
- PAUL, WOLFGANG, *Brennpunkte. Die Geschichte der 6. Panzerdivision (1. leichte) 1937–1945* (Osnabrück, 1984).
- PAUL, WOLFGANG, *Geschichte der 18. Panzer-Division 1940–1943. Mit Geschichte der 18. Artillerie-Division 1943–1944, Anhang Heeresartillerie-Brigade 88 1944–1945* (Reutlingen, 1989).
- PAULI, FRANK, 'Der Zusammenbruch der Heeresgruppe Mitte. Eine Analyse der operativen und taktischen Entscheidungsprozesse auf deutscher Seite im Sommer 1944', mag. diss., Bundeswehr University (1996).
- PAULSEN, HELGE, 'Reichskommissar vs. Wehrmachtbefehlshaber', in *Neutralität und totalitäre Aggression*, 149–68.
- PAVALESCU, SERBAN, and MOLDOVEAN, CERALSELA, 'Generalul Gheorghe Avramescu', *Revista de istorie militară*, 1995, 3, 35–7.
- PAVONE, CLAUDIO, *Una guerra civile. Saggio storico sulla moralità nella Resistenza* (Nuova Cultura 28; Turin, 1991). [Trans. Peter Levy, *A Civil War: A History of the Italian Resistance* (London, 2011)].
- PELTOVUORI, RISTO, *Sankarikansa ja kavaltajat. Suomi komannen valtakunnan lehdistössä 1940–1944* [Heroic Nation and Traitors: Finland in the Press of the Third Reich 1940–4] (Historiallisia tutkimuksia 208; Helsinki, 2000).
- PESONEN, AAKE, *Helsinki sodassa* [Helsinki at War] (Helsinki, 1985).
- PETERSEN, JENS, 'Sommer 1943', in *Italien und die Großmächte*, 23–48.
- PETRICK, FRITZ, *Norwegen. Von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart* (Regensburg, 2002).
- PETRICK, FRITZ, 'Die Bedeutung der Rohstoffe Nordeuropas für die deutsche Kriegswirtschaft', in *Neutralität und totalitäre Aggression*, 285–99.
- PETRICK, FRITZ, and PUTENSEN, DÖRTE, *Pro Finlandia 2001. Festschrift für Manfred Menger* (Reinbek bei Hamburg, 2001).
- PETROV, B., 'O sozdaniii udarnoi gruppirovki voisk v Liublisko-Brestkoi nastupatelnoi operatsii [On the Creation of a Strike Force in the Lublin-Brest Offensive]', *VIZh*, 1978, 3, 83–9.
- PHILIPPI, ALFRED, and HEIM, FERDINAND, *Der Feldzug gegen Sowjetrussland 1941–1945. Ein operativer Überblick*, publ. Arbeitskreis für Wehrforschung (Stuttgart, 1962).
- PICKER, HENRY, *Hitlers Tischgespräche im Führerhauptquartier 1941–42*, ed. for the Deutsches Institut für Geschichte der nationalsozialistischen Zeit by Gerhard Ritter

- (Bonn, 1951; 3rd fully rev. and exp. edn. Stuttgart, 1976; unchanged new edn. (Bibliothek der Zeitgeschichte) Frankfurt a.M. and Berlin, 1989).
- PIEKALKIEWICZ, JANUSZ, *Unternehmen Zitadelle. Kursk und Orel: Die größte Panzerschlacht des 2. Weltkrieges* (Bergisch Gladbach, 1983). [Trans. Michaela Nierhaus, *Operation 'Citadel': Kursk and Orel: The Greatest Tank Battle of the Second World War* (Tunbridge Wells, 1985)].
- PIEKALKIEWICZ, JANUSZ, *Krieg auf dem Balkan. 1940–1945* (Munich, 1984).
- PIEKALKIEWICZ, JANUSZ, *Krieg der Panzer 1939–1945* (Gütersloh, 1989). [Trans. Jan van Heurck, *Tank War 1939–1945* (Harrisburg, PA, 1986)].
- PLACK, ARNO, *Wie oft wird Hitler noch besiegt?* (Düsseldorf, etc., 1982).
- PLATO, ANTON DETLEV VON, *Die Geschichte der 5. Panzerdivision 1938–1945* (Regensburg, 1978).
- PLATO, ANTON DETLEV VON, 'Der Abwehrkampf der 5. Panzerdivision', in *1985 Art of War Symposium*, 376–411.
- PLEHWE, FRIEDRICH-KARL VON, *Schicksalsstunden in Rom. Ende eines Bündnisses. Mit einem Nachw. von Gustav René Hocke* (Berlin, 1967). [Trans. Eric Mosbacher, *The End of an Alliance: Rome's Defection from the Axis in 1943*. With a foreword by F. W. D. Deakin (London, etc., 1971)].
- Ploetz Geschichte der Weltkriege. Mächte, Ereignisse, Entwicklungen 1900–1945*, ed. Andreas Hillgruber and Jost Dülffer (Freiburg, 1981).
- POHLMANN, HARTWIG, *Wolchow: 900 Tage Kampf um Leningrad 1941–1944* (Bad Nauheim, 1962).
- POLIKARPOV, MIKHAIL, 'Krushenie "Citadeli". Pochemu my proigrali srazhenie pod Prokhorovkoi, no vyigrali Kurskuyu bitvu? [The Failure of 'Citadel': Why Did We Lose the Battle of Prokhorovka but Win the Battle of Kursk?]', *Novoye Vremya*, 27 (2003), 32–4.
- Politischer Wandel, organisierte Gewalt und nationale Sicherheit. Beiträge zur neueren Geschichte Deutschlands und Frankreich*, ed. E. W. Hansen et al. (Munich, 1995).
- Die polnische Heimatarmee. Geschichte und Mythos der Armia Krajowa seit dem Zweiten Weltkrieg*, ed. for the MGFA by Bernhard Chiari in cooperation with Jerzy Kochanowski (Beiträge zur Militärgeschichte 57; Munich, 2003).
- POLVINEN, TUOMO, *Barbarossasta Teheraniin* [From Barbarossa to Teheran] (Suomi kansainvälistessä politikassa 1; Porvoo, Helsinki, and Juva, 1979).
- POLVINEN, TUOMO, *Teheranista Jaltaan* [From Teheran to Yalta] (Suomi kansainvälistessä politikassa 2; Porvoo, Helsinki, and Juva, 1980).
- POLVINEN, TUOMO, 'Finnland und die Westmächte am Wendepunkt des zweiten Weltkrieges', *Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift der Ernst-Moritz-Arndt-Universität Greifswald, Gesellschafts- und sprachwissenschaftliche Reihe*, 30 (1981), 67.
- POLVINEN, TUOMO, *Between East and West: Finland in International Politics, 1944–1947* (The Nordic Series 13; Minneapolis, MN, 1986).
- POLVINEN, TUOMO, 'Die Alliierten und die finnische Friedensfrage im Herbst 1943', in *Felder und Vorfelder russischer Geschichte*, 309–21.
- POLVINEN, TUOMO, HEIKLÄ, HANNU, and IMMONEN, HANNU, *J. K. Paasikivi. Valtiomiehen elämäntöö 1870–1956* [Juho Kusti Paasikivi: Life and Work], 5 vols. (Porvoo, etc., 1989–2003).
- PORTMANN-TINGUELY, ALBERT, *Romantik und Krieg. Eine Untersuchung zum Bild des Krieges bei deutschen Romantikern und 'Freiheitsängern': Adam Müller, Joseph Görres, Friedrich Schlege, Achim von Arnim, Max von Schenkendorf und Theodor Körner* (Freiburg, 1989).
- PORTUGALSKII, R. M., DOMANIK, A., and KOVALENKO, A. P., *Marshal S. K. Timoshenko. Zhizn i deyatelnost* [Marshal S. K. Timoshenko. Life and Work] (Moscow, 1994).
- POSNJAK, W. G., 'Die Schlacht bei Kursk', in *Die wichtigsten Operationen*, 257–76.

- POTTER, ELMER B., and NIMITZ, CHESTER W., *Sea Power: A Naval History* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1960).
- POVAŽSKY, JOZEF, *Koniec legendy o misii generála Paula von Otta* [The End of the Legend of the Mission of General Paul von Otto] (Martin, 1996).
- PRAUSER, STEFFEN, ‘Mord in Rom? Der Anschlag in der Via Rasella und die deutsche Vergeltung in den Fosse Ardeatine im März 1944’, *VfZ*, 50 (2002), 269–301.
- Präventivkrieg? *Der deutsche Angriff auf die Sowjetunion*, ed. Bianka Pietrow-Ennker (Frankfurt a.M., 2000).
- Procesul Maresalului Antonescu. *Documente* [The Trial of Marshall Antonescu. Documents], ed. Marcel-Dumitru Ciucă, 2 vols. (Bucharest, 1995).
- PROCOPÉ, HJALMAR JOHAN, *Sowjetjustiz über Finnland. Prozeßakten aus dem Verfahren gegen die Kriegsverantwortlichen in Finnland* (Zurich, 1947).
- PRONKO, VALENTIN A., ‘Die sowjetische Strategie im Jahre 1943’, in *Stalingrad. Ereignis, Wirkung, Symbol*, 313–26.
- Der Prozeß gegen die Hauptkriegsverbrecher vor dem Internationalen Militärgerichtshof, Nürnberg, 14. November 1945 bis 1. Oktober 1946, 42 vols. (Nuremberg, 1947–9).
- PUTENSEN, DÖRTE, *Im Konfliktfeld zwischen Ost und West. Finnland, der kalte Krieg und die deutsche Frage (1947–1973)* (Schriftenreihe der Deutsch-Finnischen Gesellschaft 3; Berlin, 2000).
- QUINLAN, PAUL D., *Clash over Romania: British and American Policies towards Romania, 1938–1947* (Oakland, CA, 1977).
- RADOWITZ, SVEN, *Schweden und das 'Dritte Reich' 1939–1945* (Hamburg, 2005).
- RADZIEVSKY, A., ‘Na puti k Varshave [On the Road to Warsaw]’, *VIZh*, 1971, 10, 68–77.
- RAHN, RUDOLF, *Ruheloses Leben. Aufzeichnungen und Erinnerungen* (Düsseldorf, 1949).
- RAINERO, ROMAIN H., *La rivendicazione fascista sulla Tunisia* (Milan, 1978).
- RAINERO, ROMAIN H., ‘Gli armistizi di settembre’, in *Ottobre settembre 1943*, 27–64.
- RAMANICHEV, NIKOLAI M., ‘Die Schlachten bei Kursk. Vorgeschichte, Verlauf und Ausgang’, in *Gezeitenwechsel*, 57–67.
- RÁNKI, GYÖRGY, *Unternehmen Margarethe. Die deutsche Besetzung Ungarns* (Vienna, etc., 1984).
- RÁNKI, GYÖRGY, *The Economics of the Second World War* (Böhlau's zeitgeschichtliche Bibliothek 21; Vienna, etc., 1993).
- RASS, CHRISTOPH, ‘Menschenmaterial: Deutsche Soldaten an der Ostfront’ (Paderborn, 2003).
- RASS, CHRISTOPH, ‘Verbrecherische Kriegsführung an der Front. Eine Infanteriedivision und ihre Soldaten’, in *Verbrennen der Wehrmacht. Bilanz einer Debatte*, 80–90.
- RATSCHEW, STOJA, ‘Bulgarien im Zweiten Weltkrieg’, in *Bulgarische Militärrundschau, Sonderausgabe*, 2 (1994), 85–127.
- RAUCHENSTEINER, MANFRIED, ‘Kriegsende und Besatzungszeit in Wien 1945–1955’, in *Wiener Geschichtsblätter*, Vol. 30 (1975).
- RAUS, EBERHARD, ‘Die Schlacht bei Lemberg’, in *ASMZ*, 121 (1955), 833–44.
- RAUTIO, ERKKI, *Pohjoiset pakolaiset. Lapin väestön evakuointi Ruotsiin Lapin sodan aikana 1944–1946* [Nordic Refugees. Evacuation of Lapland's Population to Sweden during the Lapland War] (n.p., 1995).
- RAVASZ, ISTVÁN, *Erdély mint hadszíntér* [Transsylvania as a Theatre of War] (Budapest, 1997).
- RAVASZ, ISTVÁN, ‘Az Erdély hadmveletek 1944 kés nyarán koraszén [The Hostilities in Transylvania from Late Summer to Early Autumn 1944]’, *Hadiörténelmi Közlemények*, 111 (1998), 2, 384–423.
- REBENTISCH, DIETER, *Führerstaat und Verwaltung im Zweiten Weltkrieg. Verfassungsentwicklung und Verwaltungspolitik 1939–1945* (Stuttgart, 1989).

- REBENTISCH, ERNST, *Zum Kaukasus und zu den Tauern. Die Geschichte der 23. Panzer-Division 1941–1945* (Esslingen, 1963; Stuttgart, 1982). [Trans. Robert Edwards, *The Combat History of the 23rd Panzer Division in World War II* (Mechanicsburg, PA, 2012)].
- RECKER, MARIE-LUISE, *Die Außenpolitik des Dritten Reiches*, (Enzyklopädie Deutscher Geschichte 8; Munich 1990).
- REDŽIĆ, ENVER, *The Second World War in Bosnia and Herzegovina, 1941–1945* (London, 2001).
- REDŽIĆ, ENVER, *Bosnia and Herzegovina in the Second World War* (New York, 2005).
- REHM, WALTER, *Jassy. Schicksal einer Division oder einer Armee?* (Die Wehrmacht im Kampf 21; Neckargemünd, 1959).
- REICHEL, PETER, *Der schöne Schein des Dritten Reiches. Faszination und Gewalt des Faschismus* (Munich, 1991; Frankfurt a.M., 1993).
- REICHELT, PAUL, ‘The Battles of Armeeabteilung Narva, 2 February–31 May 1944’, in Newton, *Retreat from Leningrad*, 123–39.
- REINHARDT, KLAUS, *Die Wende vor Moskau* (Beiträge zur Militär- und Kriegsgeschichte 13; Stuttgart, 1972). [Trans. Karl B. Keenan, *Moscow—The Turning Point: The Failure of Hitler's Strategy in the Winter of 1941–42* (Oxford and New York, 1992)].
- REMY, MAURICE PHILIP, *Mythos Rommel* (Munich, 2002).
- RENDULIC, LOTHAR, *Gekämpft, gesiegt, geschlagen* (Wels, 1952; 4th edn. 1957).
- RENDULIC, LOTHAR, ‘Die Schlacht von Orel Juli 1943. Wahl und Bildung des Schwerpunktes’, *ÖMZ*, 3 (1963), 130–8.
- RENDULIC, LOTHAR, *Soldat in stürzenden Reichen* (Munich, 1965).
- Repression und Kriegsverbrechen. Die Bekämpfung der Widerstands- und Partisanenbewegungen gegen die deutsche Besatzung in West- und Südeuropa*, ed. Ahlrich Meyer (Beiträge zur nationalsozialistischen Gesundheits- und Sozialpolitik 14; Berlin and Göttingen, 1997).
- RESHIN, LEONID E., *General zwischen den Fronten. Walter von Seydlitz in sowjetischer Kriegsgefangenschaft und Haft 1943–1955* (Berlin, 1995).
- RESZNEKI, ZÁKÓ ANDRÁS, *Őszi harcok* [Autumn Combat] (Budapest, 1991).
- REUTH, RALF GEORG, *Entscheidung im Mittelmeer. Die südliche Peripherie Europas in der deutschen Strategie des Zweiten Weltkrieges 1940–1942* (Koblenz, 1985).
- REUTH, RALF GEORG, *Erwin Rommel. Des Führers General* (Munich, 1987).
- REUTH, RALF GEORG, *Goebbels* (Munich and Zurich, 1990). [Trans. Krishna Winton, *Goebbels* (London, 1993)].
- RHODE, GOTTHOLD, ‘Albanien 1918–1968’, in *Handbuch der Europäischen Geschichte*, vii/II. 1269–90.
- RHODE, GOTTHOLD, ‘Bulgarien 1918–1968’, in *Handbuch der Europäischen Geschichte*, vii/II. 1241–68.
- RHODE, GOTTHOLD, ‘Rumänien 1918–1968’, in *Handbuch der Europäischen Geschichte*, vii/II. 1134–68.
- RIBBENTROP, JOACHIM VON, *Zwischen London und Moskau. Erinnerungen und letzte Aufzeichnungen*, ed. Annelies von Ribbentrop (Leoni, 1953). [Trans. Oliver Watson, *The Ribbentrop Memoirs* (London, 1954)].
- RIBBENTROP, R. VON, ‘Neu geboren—bei Prochorowka’, *Der Freiwillige*, 33 (1989), 7/8, 52–6.
- RIEKER, KARLHEINRICH, *Ein Mann verliert einen Weltkrieg. Die entscheidenden Monate des deutsch-russischen Krieges 1942/43* (Frankfurt a.M., 1955).
- RINTELEN, ENNO VON, *Mussolini als Bundesgenosse. Erinnerungen des deutschen Militärattachés in Rom 1936–1943* (Tübingen and Stuttgart, 1951).
- RISTE, OLAV, ‘German Coastal Defence and British Invasion Plans in Norway, 1941’, in *Actes du 2<sup>e</sup> Colloque International d'Histoire Militaire*.

- RITTER, GERHARD, *Der Schlieffenplan. Kritik eines Mythos. Mit erstmaliger Veröffentlichung der Texte und 6 Kartenskizzen* (Munich, 1956). [Trans. Andrew Wilson and Eva Wilson, *The Schlieffen Plan: Critique of a Myth* (London and New York, 1958)].
- RITTER, HARRY RAY, 'Hermann Neubacher and the German Occupation of the Balkans, 1940–1945', phil. diss., Ann Arbor University (1970).
- ROATTA, MARIO, *Otto milioni di baionette. L'Esercito italiano in guerra dal 1940 al 1944* (Milan, 1946).
- ROCHAT, GIORGIO, and MASSOBRI, GIULIO, *Breve storia dell'esercito italiano dal 1861 al 1943* (Piccola Biblioteca Einaudi 348; Turin, 1978).
- ROCHAT, GIORGIO, and MASSOBRI, GIULIO, *Le guerre italiane 1935–1943. Dall'impero d'Etiopia alla disfatta* (Einaudi storia 5; Turin, 2005).
- RÖHRICHT, EDGAR, *Probleme der Kesselschlacht, dargestellt an Einkreisungs-Operationen im zweiten Weltkrieg. Mit einem Geleitwort von Generaloberst a.D. Franz Halder* (Deutsche Truppenführung im 2. Weltkrieg. Studien; Karlsruhe, 1958).
- RÖHRICHT, EDGAR, 'Die Entwicklung auf dem Balkan 1943–45', *WWR*, 12 (1962), 391–406.
- ROKOSOVSKY, KONSTANTIN K., *A Soldier's Duty* (Moscow, 1970).
- ROMAN, VIOREL, *Rumänien im Spannungsfeld der Großmächte*, i: 1774–1878. *Die Donaufürstentümer vom osmanischen Vasallentum zur europäischen Peripherie*; ii: 1878–1944. *Von der okzidentalischen Peripherie zum orientalischen Sozialismus*; iii: 1944–1991. *Probleme eines Entwicklungslandes am Rande Europas* (Offenbach, 1987–91).
- ROMANESCU, GHEORGHE, 'The 4th Romanian Army in the Transylvanian Plateau', in *Romania in World War II*, 246–7.
- România în anii celui de-al Doilea Război Mondial* [Romania in the Years of the Second World War], ii., publ. Comisia Română de Istorie Militară, Centrul de Studii și Cercetări de Istorie și Teorie Militară (Bucharest, 1989).
- România în Războiul Antihitlerist. 23 august 1944–9 mai 1945* [Romania in the Anti-Hitler War], publ. Institutul de Studii Iсторice și Socialpolitice de pe Lîngă C.C. al P.C.R. (Bucharest, 1967).
- Romania in World War II 1941–1945*, publ. Institute for Operative-Strategic Studies and Military History (Bucharest, 1997).
- ROMMEL, ERWIN, *Krieg ohne Hass*, ed. Lucie-Maria Rommel and Lt.-Gen. Fritz Bayerlein, former Chief of Staff of Panzer Army Africa, 2nd edn. (Heidenheim, 1950). [Trans. Paul Findlay, *The Rommel Papers*, ed. Basil H. Liddell Hart with the assistance of Lucie-Maria Rommel, Manfred Rommel, and General Fritz Bayerlein (London, 1953)].
- RONEN, AVIHU, *Harc az életért. Cionista ellenállás Budapesten—1944* [Fight for Life: Zionist Resistance in Budapest—1944] (Budapest, 1998).
- ROON, GER VAN, 'Hermann Kaiser und der deutsche Widerstand', *VfZ*, 24 (1976), 259–86.
- ROON, GER VAN, 'Widerstand und Krieg', *Der Widerstand gegen den Nationalsozialismus*, 50–69.
- ROSKILL, STEPHEN W., *The War at Sea 1939–1945*, 4 vols. (History of the Second World War. United Kingdom Military Series; London, 1954–61).
- ROTMISTROV, PAVEL A., *Tankovoye srazhenie pod Prokhorovkoi* [The Tank Battle of Prokhorovka] (Moscow, 1960).
- ROTMISTROV, PAVEL A., 'Bronetankovye i mekhanizirovannye voiska v bitve pod Kurskom [Armoured and Motorized Troops in the Battle of Kursk]', *VIZh*, 1 (1970), 12–22.
- ROTMISTROV, PAVEL A., *Stalnaya guardia* [The Steel Guard] (Moscow, 1984).
- ROTMISTROV, PAVEL A., 'The Role of Armoured Forces in the Battle of Kursk', in *The Battle of Kursk*, 169–75.

- ROZSNYÓI, ÁGNES, 'October Fifteenth 1944', *Acta Historica Academiae Scientiarum Hungariae*, 7 (1961).
- RUBBEL, ALFRED, *Erinnerungen an die Tiger-Abteilung 503 1942–1945* (Bassum, 1990).
- RUDEL, HANS-ULRICH, *Mein Kriegstagebuch. Aufzeichnungen eines Stukafliegers* (Wiesbaden and Munich, 1984). [Trans. Lynton Hudson, *Stuka Pilot* (Tiptree, 2006)].
- RUSCONI, GIAN ENRICO, *Deutschland—Italien, Italien—Deutschland. Geschichte einer schwierigen Beziehung von Bismarck bis zu Berlusconi*, trans. from the Italian by Antje Peter (Paderborn, etc., 2006).
- RUSI, ALPO, *Lehdistösensuuri jatkosodassa: sanan valvonta sodankäynnin välineenä 1941–1944* [Press Censorship in the Continuation War: Word Control as a Weapon] (Historiallisia tutkimuksia 118; Helsinki, 1982).
- Russkii Arkhiv: Velikaya Otechestvennaya: Kurskaya bitva: Dokumenty i materialy, 27 marta–23 avgusta 1943 g.* [Russian Archive. The Great Patriotic War: The Battle of Kursk. Documents and Materials, 27 March to 23 August 1943], xv. (Moscow, 1997).
- RYAZANSKI, A., 'Prokhorovka, iyul 1943-go ... [Prokhorovka, July 1943 ...]', *Voyenny Vestnik*, 6 (1973), 107–10.
- SALEWSKI, MICHAEL, *Die deutsche Seekriegsleitung 1935–1945*, i: 1935–1941; ii: 1942–1945; iii: *Denkschriften und Lagebetrachtungen 1938–1944* (Frankfurt a.M. and Munich, 1970–5).
- SALEWSKI, MICHAEL, 'Von Raeder zu Dönitz. Der Wechsel im Oberbefehl der Kriegsmarine 1943', *MGM*, 14 (1973), 101–46.
- SALEWSKI, MICHAEL, *Deutschland und der Zweite Weltkrieg* (Paderborn, 2005).
- SALEWSKI, MICHAEL, '1944—Nach fünfzig Jahren', in *Kriegsjahr 1944*, 15–28.
- SALEWSKI, MICHAEL, 'Die Abwehr der Invasion als Schlüssel zum "Endsieg"?' in *Die Wehrmacht. Mythos und Realität*, 210–23.
- SALEWSKI, MICHAEL, 'Ideas of the National Socialist Government and Party', in *Documents on the History of European Integration*, i. 37–178.
- SALOMON, ERNST VON, 'Der verlorene Haufe', in *Krieg und Krieger*, 103–26.
- SALOMON, W., 'Die Panzerabwehrschlacht südlich Gumbinnen, 21.–23. Oktober 1944', in *Gumbinnen*, 303–10.
- SAMCHUK, IVAN A. et al., *Ot Volgi do Elby i Pragi. Kratkii ocherk o boevom puti 5-i Gvardeiskoi Armii* [From the Volga to the Elbe and Prague: A Brief Outline of the Operations of 5th Guards Army] (Moscow, 1970).
- SÄNGER, HANS, *Die 79. Infanterie-Division* (Friedberg, 1979).
- SANTONI, ALBERTO, *Le operazioni in Sicilia e in Calabria (luglio–settembre 1943)* (Rome, 1983).
- SANTONI, ALBERTO, *Ultra siegt im Mittelmeer. Die entscheidende Rolle der britischen Funkaufklärung beim Kampf um den Nachschub für Nordafrika von 1940 bis 1943* (Rome, 1985).
- SANTONI, ALBERTO, and MATTESINI, FRANCESCO, *La partecipazione tedesca alla guerra aerea navale nel Mediterraneo: 1940–1945* (Rome, 1980).
- SAVIC, DRAGAN, and CIGLIC, BORIS, *Croatian Aces of World War 2* (Osprey Aircraft of the Aces 49; London, 1999).
- SAWICKI, TADEUSZ, 'Strategie, Kampfhandlungen und Verluste auf polnischer Seite', in *Der Warschauer Aufstand 1944*, 124–40.
- SAWJALOW, A. S., and KALJADIN, T. J., 'Die Schlacht um den Kaukasus (1942–1943)', in *Die wichtigsten Operationen*, 198–232.
- SCHADEWITZ, MICHAEL, *Panzerregiment 11, Panzerabteilung 65 1937–1945. Panzerersatz- und Ausbildungsabteilung 11 1939–1945* (Lünen, 1987).

- SCHEIBERT, HORST, *Die Gespenster-Division. Eine deutsche Panzer-Division (7.) im Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Friedberg, 1981).
- SCHELLENBERG, WALTER, *Aufzeichnungen. Die Memoiren des letzten Geheimdienstchefs unter Hitler*, ed. Gita Petersen (Wiesbaden and Munich, 1979). [Trans. Louis Hagan, *The Labyrinth: Memoirs of Walter Schellenberg, Hitler's Chief of Counterintelligence* (New York, 2000)].
- SCHENCK, ERNST GÜNTHER, *Patient Hitler. Eine medizinische Biographie* (Düsseldorf, 1989).
- SCHERF, WALTER, 'Die Tigerabteilung 503 im schweren Panzer-Regiment Dr. Bäke', in *Erinnerungen an die Tigerabteilung 503*, 203–35.
- SCHEURIG, BODO, *Alfred Jodl. Gehorsam und Verhängnis: Biographie* (Berlin, etc., 1991).
- SCHEURIG, BODO, *Henning von Tresckow. Ein Preuße gegen Hitler: Biographie*, new edn. based on rev. edn. 1987 (Frankfurt a.M., etc., 1997).
- Das Schicksal der Deutschen in Jugoslawien*, 5 vols., publ. Federal Ministry for Displaced Persons, Refugees and War Victims (Augsburg, 1994).
- SCHIEBOLD, KURT, *Opfergang in Rumänien* (Tübingen, 1952).
- SCHIEMANN, CATHERINE, 'Der Geheimdienst beendet den Krieg. "Operation Sunrise" und die deutsche Kapitulation in Italien', in *Geheimdienstkrieg gegen Deutschland*, 142–65.
- SCHILLING, RENÉ, *'Kriegshelden': Deutungsmuster heroischer Männlichkeit in Deutschland 1813–1945* (Paderborn, 2002).
- SCHILLING, RENÉ, 'Die "Helden der Wehrmacht". Konstruktion und Rezeption', in *Die Wehrmacht. Mythos und Realität*, 550–72.
- SCHILLING, RENÉ, 'Die soziale Konstruktion heroischer Männlichkeit im 19. Jahrhundert. Das Beispiel Theodor Körner', in *Landsknechte, Soldatenfrauen und Nationalkrieger*, 121–44.
- SCHLABRENDORFF, FABIAN VON, *Offiziere gegen Hitler*, new rev. and exp. edn. (Deutscher Widerstand 1933–1945. Zeitzeugnisse und Analysen; Berlin, 1984). [Trans. *Revolt against Hitler: The Personal Account of Fabian von Schlabrendorff*, prepared and edited by Gero v. S. Gaevernitz (London, 1948)].
- SCHLAUCH, WOLFGANG, *Rüstungshilfe der USA an die Verbündeten im Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Beiträge zur Wehrforschung 13; Darmstadt, 1967).
- SCHLEMMER, THOMAS, 'Das königlich-italienische Heer im Vernichtungskrieg gegen die Sowjetunion. Kriegsführung und Besatzung einer vergessenen Armee 1941–1943', in *Faschismus in Italien und Deutschland*, 148–75.
- SCHLIEFFEN, ALFRED VON, *Cannae. Mit einer Auswahl von Aufsätzen und Reden des Feldmarschalls sowie einer Einführung und Lebensbeschreibung von General der Infanterie Freiherrn von Freytag-Loringhoven* (Berlin, 1925).
- SCHMIDER, KLAUS, *Partisanenkrieg in Jugoslawien 1941–1944. Mit einem Geleitwort von Gerhard L. Weinberg* (Hamburg, 2002).
- SCHMIDER, KLAUS, 'Wehrmacht's Yugoslav Quagmire', in *Britain, NATO and the Lessons of the Balkan Conflicts*, 14–24.
- SCHMIDT, AUGUST, *Geschichte der 10. Division. 10. Infanterie-Division (mot), 10. Panzer-Grenadier-Division. 1933–1945* (Bad Nauheim, 1963).
- SCHMIDT, MARIA, 'Provincial Police Reports: New Insights into Hungarian Jewish History, 1941–1944', in *Yad Vashem Studies*, 19 (1988), 233–67.
- SCHMIDT, PAUL, *Statist auf diplomatischer Bühne 1923–45. Erlebnisse des Chefdiplomaten im Auswärtigen Amt mit den Staatsmännern Europas*, 12th edn. (Wiesbaden, 1983). [Trans. R. H. C. Steed, *Hitler's Interpreter* (London and New York, 1951)].
- SCHMIDT, WOLFGANG, '“Maler an der Front”. Zur Rolle der Kriegsmaler und Pressezeichner der Wehrmacht im Zweiten Weltkrieg', in *Die Wehrmacht. Mythos und Realität*, 635–84.

- SCHMIDT-NEKE, MICHAEL, 'Geschichtliche Grundlagen', in *Albanien*, 26–56.
- SCHMIDT-RICHBERG, ERICH, *Der Endkampf auf dem Balkan. Die Operationen der Heeresgruppe E von Griechenland bis zu den Alpen* (Die Wehrmacht im Kampf 5; Heidelberg, 1955).
- SCHMITZ, PETER, THIES, KLAUS-JÜRGEN, WEGMANN, GÜNTHER, and ZWENG, CHRISTIAN, *Die deutschen Divisionen 1939–1945: Heer, landgestützte Kriegsmarine, Luftwaffe, Waffen-SS*, i: *Die Divisionen 1–5. Mit Anhang: Pier Paolo Battistelli, Formationsgeschichte und Stellenbesetzung der Italienischen Sozialistischen Republik (R.S.I.) 1943–1945* (Osnabrück, 1993).
- SCHMOECKEL, MATHIAS, *Die Großraumtheorie. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Völkerrechtswissenschaft im Dritten Reich, insbesondere der Kriegszeit* (Schriften zum Völkerrecht 112; Berlin, 1994).
- SCHMUNDT, RUDOLF, *Tätigkeitsbericht des Chefs des Heerespersonalamtes, General der Infanterie Rudolf Schmundt, fortgeführt von Wilhelm Burgdorf. 1.10.1942 bis 29.10.1944*, ed. Dermot Bradley and Richard Schulze-Kossens (Osnabrück, 1984).
- SCHNEIDER, RICHARD, *Aus der Hölle, in die Hölle. In sowjetischer Kriegsgefangenschaft* (Sankt Michael, 1983).
- SCHNEIDER, WOLFGANG, *Tiger im Kampf* (Uelzen, 2000). [Trans. *Tigers in Combat*, 2 vols. (Mechanicsburg, PA, 1998–2000)].
- SCHOFIELD, BRIAN B., *The Arctic Convoys* (London, 1977).
- SCHOLL, INGE, *Die Weiße Rose*, 4th corr., rev., and exp. edn. (Frankfurt a.M., 1983). [Trans. Arthur R. Schultz, *The White Rose: Munich 1942–1943* (Middletown, CT, 2011)].
- SCHÖN, HEINZ, *Tragödie Ostpreußen 1944–1948* (Kiel, 1999).
- SCHÖNFELD, ROLAND, *Slowakei. Vom Mittelalter bis zur Gegenwart* (Regensburg, 2000).
- SCHÖNHERR, KLAUS, 'Relații româno-germane. 23 august 1944. Ultima zi de alianță—prima zi de război [Romanian–German Relations. 23 August 1944. Last Day of the Alliance—First Day of the War]', *Magazin Istorici*, 31 (1997), 8, 9–14.
- SCHÖNHERR, KLAUS, 'Die Auswirkungen der militärischen Situation 1944 auf die deutsch-rumänischen Beziehungen', *Revue Roumaine d'Histoire*, 38 (1999), 1–4, 151–81.
- SCHÖNHERR, KLAUS, 'Problemă bilaterală a aprovisionării Grupului de Armate "Ucraina de Sud", aprilie–august 1944 [The Bilateral Problem of Supplying Army Group South Ukraine, April–August 1944]', *Revista istorică*, 10 (1999), 3/4, 333–46.
- SCHÖNHERR, KLAUS, 'Înfluența Wehrmacht ului asupra politicii interne a României în ianuarie 1941 [The Influence of the Wehrmacht on Internal Relations in Romania in January 1941]', *Document. Buletinul Arhivelor Militare Române*, 4 (2001), 2–4, S. 46–53.
- SCHÖNHERR, KLAUS, 'Die Niederschlagung des Slowakischen Nationalaufstandes im Kontext der deutschen militärischen Operationen, Herbst 1944', *Bohemia*, 42 (2001), 1, 39–61.
- SCHÖNHERR, KLAUS, 'Obranné operácie armádnej skupiny Heinrich v Duklianskom priesmyku a v Beskydách na jesen 1944 [The Combat Operations of Army Detachment Heinrich at the Dukla Pass and in the Beskid Mountains, Autumn 1944]', *Vojenská História*, 5 (2001), 2, 85–93.
- SCHÖNHERR, KLAUS, 'Prípravy skupiny Armád Severá Ukrajina na odzbrojenie Slovenskej Armády v operačnom priestore východného slovenska v auguste 1944. [The Preparations of Army Group North Ukraine for Disarming the Slovakian Army in the Eastern Slovakia Operational Area]', *Vojenská História*, 6 (2002), 2, 93–103.
- SCHÖNHERR, KLAUS, *Luptele Wehrmachtului în România 1944* [The Wehrmacht's Battles in Romania 1944] (Bucharest, 2004).

- SCHÖNHERR, KLAUS, ‘Die Slowakei im militärischen Kalkül des Deutschen Reiches’, in *Slovensko a druhá svetová vojna*, 151–70.
- SCHÖNHERR, KLAUS, ‘Die Türkei im Schatten Stalingrads. Von der “aktiven Neutralität” zum Kriegseintritt’, in *Stalingrad. Ereignis, Wirkung, Symbol*, 397–415.
- SCHÖNHERR, KLAUS, ‘Ferdinand Schörner—Der idealtypische Nazi-General’, in *Die Militärelite des Dritten Reiches*, 497–509.
- SCHÖNHERR, KLAUS, ‘Potlacenie SNP Nemeckou risou na jesen 1944 [The Defeat of the Slovakian National Uprising by the German Reich in Autumn 1944]’, in *SNP 1944*, 191–202.
- SCHÖNHERR, KLAUS, ‘The Relations between the German Reich and the Kingdom of Romania from 1890 to 1944’, in *Geopolitics and History*, 226–40.
- SCHRAML, FRANZ, *Kriegsschauplatz Kroatien. Die deutsch-kroatischen Legions-Divisionen—369., 373., 392. Inf.-Div. (kroat.)—ihre Ausbildungs- und Ersatzformationen* (Neckargemünd, 1962).
- SCHRAMM, PERCY ERNST, *Hitler als militärischer Führer. Erkenntnisse und Erfahrungen aus dem Kriegstagebuch des Oberkommandos der Wehrmacht* (Frankfurt a.M., 1962). [Trans. Donald S. Detwiler, *Hitler: The Man and the Military Leader* (London and Chicago, 1971)].
- SCHRAMM, PERCY ERNST, ‘Über den Unterschied zwischen dem militärischen Denken Hitlers und dem des Generalstabs (Herbst 1945), mit Randnotizen des Generalobersten Jodl (April 1946)’, in *KTB OKW*, iv/II. 1705–12.
- SCHREIBER, GERHARD, *Revisionismus und Weltmachstreben. Marineführung und deutsch-italienische Beziehungen 1919 bis 1944* (Beiträge zur Militär- und Kriegsgeschichte 20; Stuttgart, 1978).
- SCHREIBER, GERHARD, *Die italienischen Militärinternierten im deutschen Machtbereich 1943 bis 1945. Verraten—Verachtet—Vergessen* (Beiträge zur Militärgeschichte 28; Munich, 1990).
- SCHREIBER, GERHARD, ‘La resistenza italiana nella sua fase iniziale: il punto di vista della Wehrmacht’, *Rivista di storia contemporanea*, 22 (1993), 4, 596–613.
- SCHREIBER, GERHARD, ‘Il settore occidentale della Linea Gotica’, *Storia e Memoria*, 3 (1994), 1, 51–75.
- SCHREIBER, GERHARD, *Deutsche Kriegsverbrechen in Italien. Täter, Opfer, Strafverfolgung* (Munich, 1996).
- SCHREIBER, GERHARD, *La vendetta tedesca 1943–1945: le rappresaglie naziste in Italia* (Le scie; Milan, 2000).
- SCHREIBER, GERHARD, *Der Zweite Weltkrieg* (Munich, 2002).
- SCHREIBER, GERHARD, ‘Die italienischen Militärinternierten—politische, humane und rassenideologische Gesichtspunkte einer besonderen Kriegsgefangenschaft’, in *Die Wehrmacht. Mythos und Realität*, 803–14.
- SCHREIBER, GERHARD, ‘Italiens Teilnahme am Krieg gegen die Sowjetunion. Motive, Fakten und Folgen’, in *Stalingrad. Ereignis, Wirkung, Symbol*, 250–92.
- SCHREIBER, GERHARD, ‘La linea Gotica nella strategia tedesca: obiettivi politici e compiti militari’, in *Linea Gotica 1944*, 25–67.
- SCHREIBER, GERHARD, ‘Militärinternierte—italienische Kriegsgefangene in Deutschland. Klaus-Jürgen Müller zum 60. Geburtstag’, in *Deutschland—Italien. Aspekte einer Entzweiung*, 95–138.
- SCHREIBER, GERHARD, ‘Partisanenkrieg und Kriegsverbrechen der Wehrmacht in Italien 1943 bis 1945’, in *Repression und Kriegsverbrechen*, 93–129.
- SCHREIBER, GERHARD, ‘La Wehrmacht nella battaglia sul fiume Sangro’, in *La guerra sul Sangro*, 115–94.

- SCHRÖDER, HANS JOACHIM, *Die gestohlenen Jahre. Erzählgeschichten und Geschichtserzählung im Interview. Der Zweite Weltkrieg aus der Sicht ehemaliger Mannschaftsoldaten* (Studien und Texte zur Sozialgeschichte der Literatur 37; Tübingen, 1991).
- SCHRÖDER, JOSEF, *Italiens Kriegsaustritt 1943. Die deutschen Gegenmaßnahmen im italienischen Raum: Fall 'Alarich' und 'Achse'* (Studien und Dokumente zur Geschichte des Zweiten Weltkrieges 10; Göttingen, Zurich, and Frankfurt a.M., 1969).
- SCHRÖDER, JOSEF, 'Bestrebungen zur Eliminierung der Ostfront, 1941–1943', in *Dienst für die Geschichte*, 187–217.
- SCHUSTEREIT, HARTMUT, *Vabanque. Hitlers Angriff auf die Sowjetunion 1941 als Versuch, durch den Sieg im Osten den Westen zu bezwingen* (Herford and Bonn, 1988).
- SCHWARZ, ANDREAS, *Chronik des Infanterie-Regiments 248*, 3 vols. (Bayreuth, 1975–81).
- SCHWARZ, EBERHARD, *Die Stabilisierung im Süden der Ostfront nach der Katastrophe von Stalingrad und dem Rückzug aus dem Kaukasus* (Cologne, 1981).
- SCHWARZ, EBERHARD, *Die Stabilisierung der Ostfront nach Stalingrad. Mansteins Gegenschlag zwischen Donez und Dnjepr im Frühjahr 1943* (Studien und Dokumente zur Geschichte des Zweiten Weltkrieges 17; Göttingen and Zurich, 1986).
- SCHWENDEMANN, HEINRICH, 'Die Kapitulation: Deutsche Vergeltungsmaßnahmen und deutsches Werben um eine antibolschewistische Front', in *Der Warschauer Aufstand 1944*, 234–53.
- SCHWENDEMANN, HEINRICH, 'Strategie der Selbstvernichtung: Die Wehrmachtführung im "Endkampf" um das "Dritte Reich"', in *Die Wehrmacht. Mythos und Realität*, 224–44.
- SCOTTI, GIACOMO, and VIAZZI, LUCIANO, *Le aquile delle montagne nere. Storia dell'occupazione e della guerra italiana in Montenegro, 1941–1943* (Milan, 1987).
- SCOTTI, GIACOMO, and VIAZZI, LUCIANO, *L'inutile vittoria. La tragica esperienza delle truppe italiane in Montenegro 1941–1942* (Testimonianze fra cronaca e storia 156; Milan, 1989).
- SEATON, ALBERT, *The Russo-German War 1941–45* (London and New York, 1971).
- SECHI, SALVATORE, 'Die neutralistische Versuchung. Italien und die Sowjetunion 1943–1948', in *Italien und die Großmächte*, 95–129.
- Seelower Höhen 1945, ed. for the MGFA by Roland G. Foerster (Vorträge zur Militärgeschichte, 17; Hamburg, Berlin, and Bonn, 1998).
- SEGBERS, KLAUS, *Die Sowjetunion im Zweiten Weltkrieg. Die Mobilisierung von Verwaltung, Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft im 'Großen Vaterländischen Krieg', 1941–1943* (Studien zur Zeitgeschichte 32; Munich, 1987).
- SEIDLER, FRANZ WILHELM, and ZEIGERT, DIETER, *Die Führerhauptquartiere. Anlagen und Planungen im Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Munich, 2000). [Trans. Geoffrey Brooks, *Hitler's Secret Headquarters: The Führer's Wartime Bases, from the Invasion of France to the Berlin Bunker* (London and Mechanicsburg, PA, 2004)].
- SEMERDSIEW, ATANAS, ET AL., *Geschichte der Bulgarischen Volksarmee* (East Berlin, 1977).
- SENGER UND ETTERLIN, FERDINAND M. VON, *Die 24. Panzer-Division vormals 1. Kavallerie-Division 1939–1945* (Neckargemünd, 1962).
- SEPPINEN, ILKKA, *Suomen ulkomaankaupan ehdot 1939–1944* [The Conditions of Finnish Foreign Trade] (Helsinki, 1983).
- SERENY, GITTA, *Albert Speer: His Battle with Truth* (New York, 1995).
- SETZEN, FLORIAN HENNING, *Neutralität im Zweiten Weltkrieg. Irland, Schweden und die Schweiz im Vergleich* (Studien zur Zeitgeschichte 14; Hamburg, 1997).
- SHEPARD, DAVID N., 'Death of a Fleet: Responsibility for the Scuttling of the German High Seas Fleet at Scapa Flow, June 21, 1919', diss., Fort Worth (1974).
- SHERWOOD, ROBERT E., *Roosevelt and Hopkins: An Intimate History* (New York, 1948).

- SHIGEMITSU MAMORU, *Japan and Her Destiny: My Struggle for Peace* (London and New York, 1958).
- SHTEMENKO, SERGEI M. (= STEMENKO), 'Kak planirovalas poslednaya kampania po razgromu gitlerskoi germanii? [What was the plan for the final campaign to defeat Nazi Germany?]', *VIZh*, 1965, 5, 56–72.
- SHTEMENKO, SERGEI M., *The Soviet General Staff at War*, 2 vols. (Moscow, 1985).
- SHUTOV, Z. A., and RAMANICHEV, N. M., 'Ognennaya duga [The Bulge of Fire]', in *Velikaya Otechestvennaya Voina 1941–1945*, ii. 249–89.
- SIEMANN, WOLFRAM, 'Krieg und Frieden in historischen Gedenkfeiern des Jahres 1913', in *Öffentliche Festkultur*, 298–320.
- SILAGI, DENIS, 'Ungarn seit 1918. Vom Ende des 1. Weltkriegs bis zur Ära Kádár', in *Handbuch der europäischen Geschichte*, vii/II. 882–919.
- SIMONOV, NIKOLAI SERGEYEVICH, *Voyenno-promyshlennii kompleks SSSR v 1920–1950-e gody. Tempy ekonomicheskogo rosta, struktura, organizatsiya proizvodstva i upravlenie* [The Military-Industrial Complex of the USSR, 1920–50. Economic Growth Rates, Structure, Organization of Production and Management] (Moscow, 1996).
- SLEPCOV, IGOR, 'Bojová činnost' sovietskej 8. Leteckej Armády na území východného Slovenska vo svetle operačných hlásení jej štábú (September–December 1944) [Combat Operations of the Soviet 8th Air Army in Eastern Slovakia in the Light of the Daily Operations Reports of its Staff]', *Vojenská história*, 6 (2002), 3/4, 155–60.
- 'Slovakia: Vosstanie, pomoshch SSSR, prichiny porazhenia [Slovakia: Uprising, Support by the USSR, Reasons for Defeat]', in *Velikaya Otechestvennaya Voina 1941–1945*, iii. 118–30.
- Slovensko a druhá svetová vojna* [Slovakia and the Second World War], publ. Institute of Military History (Bratislava, 2000).
- SMIRNOV, SERGEI S., *Stalingrad na Dnepre. Ocherk Korsun–Shevchenkovskoi bitvy* [Stalingrad on the Dnieper: The Battle of the Korsun–Cherkassy Pocket] (Moscow, 1954).
- SMITH, BRADLEY F., and ROSSI, ELENA AGA, *Operation Sunrise: The Secret Surrender* (London, 1979).
- SMITH, ELBERTON R., *The Army and Economic Mobilization* (United States Army in World War II. The War Department 5; Washington, D.C., 1959).
- SNP 1944—vstup Slovenska do demokratickej Európy [Slovakian National Uprising 1944—Slovakia's Accession to Democratic Europe] (Banská Bystrica, 1999).
- SOIKKANEN, HANNU, *Sota-ajan valtioneuvosto* [The Council of State in Wartime] (Valtioneuvoston historia 2; Helsinki, 1977).
- SOKOLOV, BORIS V., 'O Sootnoshenii poter v lyudach i boevoi tekhnike na sovetsko-germanskom fronte v chode Velikoi Otechestvennoi voiny [On the Relationship between Human Losses and Combat Technique on the Soviet–German Front in the Great Patriotic War]', *Voprosy istorii*, 9 (1988), 116–26.
- SOKOLOV, BORIS V., *Tsena pobedy. Velikaja Otechestvennaya: neizvestnoe ob izvestnom* [The Price of Victory. The Great Patriotic War: The Unknown about the Known] (Moscow, 1991).
- SOKOLOV, BORIS V., 'The Cost of War: Human Losses for the USSR and Germany, 1939–1945', *JSMS*, 9 (1996), 1, 152–93.
- SOKOLOV, BORIS V., 'The Battle for Kursk, Orel and Charkov: Strategic Intentions and Results. A Critical View of the Soviet Historiography', in *Gezeitenwechsel*, 69–88.
- SOKOLOV, V., and FETISOV, I., 'Byl i nebyl o tajnykh sovetsko-germanskih kontaktakh v Stokholme v period voiny [Truth and Untruth about Secret Soviet–German Contacts in Stockholm during the War]', *Mezhdunarodnaya Zhizn*, 1 (1992).

- Soldaten, Kämpfer, Kameraden. Marsch und Kämpfe der SS-Totenkopf-Division*, vol. 5a: *Verlegung in den Mittelabschnitt der Ostfront. Abwehrkämpfe bei Grodno und im Bereich der 2. Armee. Absetzbewegungen in den Raum ostw. Warschau. Abwehrschlachten nordostw. Warschau. Verlegung nach Ungarn*, ed. Wolfgang Vopersal for the Truppenkameradschaft der 3. SS-Panzerdivision (Bielefeld, 1990).
- SOLOVEV, BORIS G., *Wendepunkt des Zweiten Weltkrieges. Die Schlacht bei Kursk* (Cologne, 1984).
- SOLOVEV, BORIS G., “Kutuzov” i “Rumyantsev” protiv “Tsitadeli” [kUTUZOV and rUMYANTSEV versus CITADEL], *VIZh*, 1998, 4, 2–13.
- Sowjetische Marschälle über Schlachten des Zweiten Weltkrieges* (Moscow, 1985).
- SPANNENBERGER, NORBERT, *Der Volksbund der Deutschen in Ungarn 1938–1944 unter Horthy und Hitler* (Schriften des Bundesinstituts für Kultur und Geschichte der Deutschen im östlichen Europa 22; Munich, 2002).
- SPEER, ALBERT, *Erinnerungen* (Frankfurt a.M., 1969). [Trans. Clara Winston and Richard Winston, *Inside the Third Reich* (New York, 1970)].
- SPEER, ALBERT, *Spandauer Tagebücher* (Frankfurt a.M., Berlin, and Vienna, 1975). [Trans. Clara Winston and Richard Winston, *Spandau: The Secret Diaries* (New York and Tokyo, 2010)].
- SPEIDEL, HANS, *Aus unserer Zeit. Erinnerungen*, 2nd edn. (Berlin, etc., 1977).
- SPIELBERGER, WALTER J., *Der Panzerkampfwagen Tiger und seine Abarten* (Militärfahrzeuge 7; Stuttgart, 1975).
- SPIELBERGER, WALTER J., *Der Panzerkampfwagen IV und seine Abarten* (Militärfahrzeuge 5; Stuttgart, 1975).
- SPIELBERGER, WALTER J., *Der Panzerkampfwagen Panther und seine Abarten* (Militärfahrzeuge 9; Stuttgart, 1978).
- SPIELBERGER, WALTER J., DOYLE, HILARY L., and JENTZ, THOMAS L., *Schwere Jagdpanzer. Entwicklung—Fertigung—Einsatz* (Stuttgart, 1993). [Trans. Edward Force, *Heavy Jagdpanzer Development, Production, Operations* (Atglen, PA, 2007)].
- SPIVAK, MARCEL, and LEONI, ARMAND, *La Campagne de Tunisie 1942–1943*, (Les Forces françaises dans la lutte contre l’Axe en Afrique 2; Vincennes, 1985).
- Staatsmänner und Diplomaten bei Hitler. Vertrauliche Aufzeichnungen über Unterredungen mit Vertretern des Auslandes*, 2 vols., ed. Andreas Hillgruber (Frankfurt a.M., 1967–70).
- STADLER, SILVESTER, *Die Offensive gegen Kursk 1943. II. SS-Panzerkorps als Stoßkeil im Großkampf* (Osnabrück, 1980).
- STAHL, FRIEDRICH-CHRISTIAN, ‘Generaloberst Kurt Zeitzler’, in *Hitlers militärische Elite*, ii. 283–92.
- STAHLBERG, ALEXANDER, *Die verdammte Pflicht. Erinnerungen 1932 bis 1945* (Berlin, 1987). [Trans. Patricia Crampton, *Bounden Duty: The Memoirs of a German Officer 1932–45* (London, 1990)].
- Stalingrad. Ereignis, Wirkung, Symbol*, ed. for the MGFA by Jürgen Förster (Piper Series 1618; Munich and Zurich, 1992).
- Stalingrad. Mythos und Wirklichkeit einer Schlacht*, ed. Sabine Arnold, Wolfgang Ueberschär, and Wolfram Wette (Frankfurt a.M., 1992).
- STAMM, CHRISTOPH, ‘Zur deutschen Besetzung Albaniens 1943–1944’, *MGM*, 30 (1981), 99–120.
- STARK, TAMÁS, ‘Magyarország háborús emberveszesége [Hungary’s Human War Losses]’, in *Nagy Képes Millenniumi*, 433–8.
- STARON, JOACHIM, *Fosse Ardeatine und Marzabotto. Deutsche Kriegsverbrechen und Resistenza. Geschichte und nationale Mythenbildung in Deutschland und Italien (1944–1999)* (Paderborn, etc., 2002).

- STEFFAHN, HARALD, *Die Weiße Rose* (Reinbek bei Hamburg, 1992).
- STEIN, GEORGE HENRY, and KROSBY, H. PETER, 'Das finnische Freiwilligen-Bataillon der Waffen-SS. Eine Studie zur SS-Diplomatie und zur ausländischen Freiwilligen-Bewegung', *VfZ*, 14 (1966), 413–53.
- STEIN, KARL FREIHERR VOM UND ZUM, *Briefe und Amtliche Schriften*, iv: *Preußens Erhebung. Stein als Chef der Zentralverwaltung. Napoleons Sturz (Januar 1813–Juni 1814)*, new. rev. edn. Walther Hubatsch (Stuttgart, 1963).
- STEIN, MARCEL, *Generalfeldmarschall Walter Model. Legende und Wirklichkeit* (Bissendorf, 2001).
- STEINER, FELIX, *Die Freiwilligen. Idee und Opfergang* (Göttingen, 1958).
- STEINERT, MARLIS GERTRUD, *Hitlers Krieg und die Deutschen. Stimmung und Haltung der deutschen Bevölkerung im Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Düsseldorf and Vienna, 1970).
- STEINERT, MARLIS GERTRUD, 'Stalingrad und die deutsche Gesellschaft', in *Stalingrad. Ereignis, Wirkung, Symbol*, 171–85.
- STEINKAMP, PETER, 'Generalfeldmarschall Ferdinand Schörner', in *Hitlers militärische Elite*, ii. 236–44.
- STEMENKO, SERGEI M. (= SHTEMENKO), *A vezérkar a háború éveiben* [The General Staff during the War Years] (Budapest, 1973).
- STEMENKO, SERGEI M., *Im Generalstab*, 2 vols. (East Berlin, 1973).
- STOLPE, ELMAR, 'Wilde Freude, fürchterliche Schönheit. Die romantische Ästhetisierung des Krieges', in *Kriegsbegeisterung*, 37–53.
- STOVES, ROLF, *Die 1. Panzerdivision 1935–1945. Ihre Aufstellung, die Bewaffnung, der Einsatz ihrer Männer* (Die deutschen Panzerdivisionen im Bild; Dorheim, 1975).
- STOVES, ROLF, *Die gepanzerten und motorisierten deutschen Großverbände (Divisionen und selbständige Brigaden) 1935–1945* (Friedberg, 1986).
- STRASSNER, PETER, *Europäische Freiwillige. Die Geschichte der 5. SS-Panzerdivision Wiking* (Osnabrück, 1977). [Trans. David Johnston, *European Volunteers* (Winnipeg, 1988)].
- STREIT, CHRISTIAN, *Keine Kameraden. Die Wehrmacht und die sowjetischen Kriegsgefangenen 1941–1945* (Studien zur Zeitgeschichte 13; Stuttgart, 1978; 2nd edn. 1980; 3rd edn. 1991; 4th edn. 1997).
- STRUGAR, VLADO, *Der jugoslawische Volksbefreiungskrieg 1941 bis 1945*, 2 vols. (East Berlin, 1969).
- Studia historica in honorem Vilho Niitemaa. Hänen 70-vuotispäivänään 16.3.1987*, ed. Eero Kuparinen (Turun historiallinen arkisto 42; Turku, 1987).
- STUMPF, REINHARD, *Die Wehrmacht-Elite. Rang- und Herkunftsstruktur der deutschen Generale und Admirale 1933 bis 1945* (Militärgeschichtliche Studien 29; Boppard a.Rh., 1982).
- STUMPF, RICHARD, *Warum die Flotte zerbrach. Kriegstagebuch eines christlichen Arbeiters* (Berlin, 1927). [Trans. Daniel Horn, *War, Mutiny, and Revolution in the German Navy: The World War I Diary of Seaman Richard Stumpf* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1967)].
- Sturmpanzerwagen A7V. Vom Urpanzer zum Kampfpanzer Leopard 2. Ein Beitrag zur Militär- und Technikgeschichte*, ed. Heinrich Walle et al. for the Wehrtechnischen Studiensammlung des Bundesamtes für Wehrtechnik und Beschaffung, new exp. edn. (Wehrtechnik und wissenschaftliche Waffenkunde 15; Bonn, 2003).
- SUN TZU, *The Art of War*, trans. Samuel B. Griffith (Oxford, etc., 1963).
- SVIRIDOV, VLADIMIR P., YAKUTOVICH, VYACHESLAV P., and VASILENKO, VLADIMIR E., *Bitva za Leningrad 1941–1944* [The Battle of Leningrad 1941–4] (Leningrad, 1962).
- SVIRIN, M., *Boi u Ozera Balaton. Yanvar–Mart 1945* [Tank Battle on the Balaton: January–March 1945] (Moscow, 1999).

- SVIRIN, M., *Budapeszt-Balaton* (Warsaw, 2000).
- SWANTON, MICHAEL, 'Heroism and Heroic Literature', in *Essays and Studies* (1977).
- SYDNOR, CHARLES W., *Soldiers of Destruction: The SS Death's Head Division 1933–1945* (Princeton, N.J., 1977; with new pref. and postscript, 1990).
- SZÁMVÉBER, NORBERT, *Páncélosok a Tiszántúlon* [Panzers on the Tisa Plains] (Budapest, 2002).
- SZINAI, MIKLÓS, and SZÜCS, LÁSZLÓ, *Horthy Miklós titkos iratai* (Budapest, 1962). [Trans. *The Confidential Papers of Admiral Horthy* (Budapest, 1965)].
- SZOKOLL, CARL, *Die Rettung Wiens 1945. Mein Leben, mein Anteil an der Verschwörung gegen Hitler und an der Befreiung Österreichs* (Vienna, 2001).
- SZÖLLÖSI-JANZE, MARGIT, *Die Pfeilkreuzerbewegung in Ungarn. Historischer Kontext, Entwicklung und Herrschaft* (Studien zur Zeitgeschichte 35; Munich, 1989).
- TALLGREN, VAPPU, *Hitler und die Helden. Heroismus und Weltanschauung* (Annales Academiae Scientiarum Fenniae. Dissertationes Humanarum Litterarum 29; Helsinki, 1981).
- TALPO, ODDONE, *Dalmazia. Una cronaca per la storia, 1941* (Rome, 1985).
- TALVELA, PAAVO, *Sotilaan elämä. Muistelmat* [A Soldier's Life. Memoirs], 2 vols. (Jyväskylä, 1976–7).
- TARASOV, SERGEI PAVLOVICH, *Boi u uzera Balaton* [The Fighting at Lake Balaton] (Moscow, 1959).
- TELEKI, ÉVA, *Nyilas uralom Magyarországon* [Arrow Cross Rule in Hungary] (Budapest, 1974).
- TELPUKHOVSKY, BORIS S., *Die sowjetische Geschichte des Großen Vaterländischen Krieges 1941–1945*, ed. for the Arbeitskreis für Wehrforschung Stuttgart by Andreas Hillgruber and Hans-Adolf Jacobsen (Frankfurt a.M., 1961).
- Terra bruciata. Le stragi naziste sul fronte meridionale*, ed. Gabriella Gribaudi (Naples, 2003).
- TESKE, HERMANN, 'Die Bedeutung der Eisenbahn bei Aufmarsch, Verteidigung und Rückzug einer Heerestruppe. Dargestellt an der deutschen Operation "Zitadelle" gegen Kursk und ihre Auswirkungen im Sommer 1943', *ASMZ* (1955), 2, 120–35.
- TESSIN, GEORG, *Verbände und Truppen der deutschen Wehrmacht und Waffen-SS im Zweiten Weltkrieg 1939–1945*, 14 vols. (Osnabrück, 1977–80).
- THAER, ALBRECHT VON, *Generalstabsdienst an der Front und in der O.H.L. Aus Briefen und Tagebuchaufzeichnungen 1915–1919* (Abhandlungen der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen. Philologisch-historische Klasse, 3rd series, 40; Göttingen, 1958).
- THEIL, EDMUND, *Rommels verheizte Armee. Kampf und Ende der Heeresgruppe Afrika von El Alamein bis Tunis* (Vienna, Munich, Zurich, and Innsbruck, 1979).
- THEIL, EDMUND, *Kampf um Italien. Von Sizilien bis Tirol 1943–1945* (Munich and Vienna, 1982).
- THIES, JOCHEN, *Architekt der Weltherrschaft. Die 'Endziele' Hitlers* (Düsseldorf, 1976). [Trans. Ian Cooke and Mary-Beth Friedrich, *Hitler's Plans for Global Domination: Nazi Architecture and Ultimate War Aims* (New York, 2012)].
- THORBAN, FRIEDRICH W., *Der Abwehrkampf um Petsamo und Kirkenes 1944. Operationen 'Birke' und 'Nordlicht'. Die letzte Schlacht an der Eismeerfront im Oktober 1944, die Absetzbewegungen nach Nordnorwegen und das Kriegsende im Raum Lyngen-Narvik* (Friedberg, 1989).
- THUN-HOHENSTEIN, ROMEDIO GALEAZZO GRAF VON, *Der Verschwörer. General Oster und die Militäropposition*. Intr. Golo Mann (Berlin, 1982).
- TIEKE, WILHELM, *Im Feuersturm letzter Kriegsjahre. II. SS-Panzerkorps mit 9. und 10. SS-Division 'Hohenstaufen' und 'Frundsberg'* (Osnabrück, 1975).

- TIEKE, WILHELM, *Kampf um die Krim 1941–1944. Der deutsche Bericht über die Eroberung der Krim durch die 11. Armee (von Manstein) und die Verteidigung durch die 17. Armee (Jaenecke) bis zum bitteren Ende* (Gummersbach, 1975).
- TIEMANN, RALF, *7. Panzerkompanie. Chronik der Siebenten Panzerkompanie der 1. SS-Panzerdivision 'Leibstandarte'* (Neustadt an der Aisch, 1992). [Trans. Allen Brandt, *Chronicle of the 7. Panzerkompanie, I. SS-Panzer Division 'Leibstandarte'* (Atglen, PA, 1998)].
- TIMOKHOVICH, I. V., 'Operatsia Bagration', in *Velikaya Otechestvennaya Voina 1941–1945*, iii. 54–80.
- TINIĆA, GHEORGHE, 'Military Preparations', in *Romania in World War II*, 191–2.
- TIPPELSKIRCH, KURT VON, *Geschichte des Zweiten Weltkrieges*, 2nd rev. edn. (Bonn, 1956).
- TÖPPEL, ROMAN, *Die Offensive gegen Kursk 1943—Legenden, Mythen und Propaganda* (Dresden, 2001).
- TÖPPEL, ROMAN, 'Legendenbildung in der Geschichtsschreibung. Die Schlacht bei Kursk', *MGZ*, 61 (2002), 369–402.
- TOLAND, JOHN, *Adolf Hitler* (New York, 1976).
- TOMASEVICH, JOZO, *War and Revolution in Yugoslavia, 1941–1945*, i: *The Chetniks*; ii: *Occupation and Collaboration* (Stanford, CA, 2001).
- TORSIELLO, MARIO, *Le operazioni delle unità italiane nel settembre–ottobre 1943* (Rome, 1975).
- TRAKTUJEW, M. I., 'Die Zerschlagung der deutschen-faschistischen Truppen in der Westukraine', in *Die wichtigsten Operationen*, 445–83.
- TREW, SIMON, *Britain, Mihailović and the Chetniks 1941–42* (Basingstoke, etc., 1998).
- TROEBST, STEFAN, 'Warum wurde Finnland nicht sowjetisiert?', *Osteuropa*, 48 (1998), 178–91.
- Trofei v krasnoi armii 1941–1945* [Red Army Booty 1941–5], ed. Maksim Kolomyets and Ilya Moshchansky (Moscow, 2001).
- TSOURAS, PETER, *The Great Patriotic War* (London, 1992).
- TURTOLA, MARTTI, 'Finland's Path to the Armistice of 1944—Some Open Questions', in *Finnish–Soviet Relations*, 36–43.
- UEBERSCHÄR, GERD R., and VOGEL, WINFRIED, *Dienen und Verdienen. Hitlers Geschenke an seine Eliten* (Frankfurt a.M., 1999).
- ULLRICH, KARL, *Wie ein Fels im Meer. Kriegsgeschichte der 3. SS-Panzerdivision 'Totenkopf'*, ii (Osnabrück, 1987). [Trans. Jeffrey McMullen, *Like a Cliff in the Ocean: The History of the 3. SS-Panzer-Division 'Totenkopf'* (Winnipeg, 2002)].
- UMBREIT, HANS, 'Das unbewältigte Problem. Der Partisanenkrieg im Rücken der Ostfront', in *Stalingrad. Ereignis, Wirkung, Symbol*, 130–50.
- UMBREIT, HANS, 'Wehrmachtsverbände und Sondereinheiten im Kampf gegen die Aufständischen und die Zivilbevölkerung. Planloser Terror oder militärisches Kalkül?', in *Der Warschauer Aufstand 1944*, 141–52.
- Ungarn und der Holocaust. Kollaboration, Rettung und Trauma*, ed. Brigitte Mihok (Berlin, 2005).
- UNGVÁRY, KRISZTIÁN, 'Der Ausbruch der deutsch-ungarischen Verteidiger aus Budapest im Februar 1945. Rekonstruktion eines militärischen Zusammenbruchs', *MGM*, 57 (1998), 79–115.
- UNGVÁRY, KRISZTIÁN, *Die Schlacht um Budapest: Stalingrad an der Donau 1944/45* (Munich, 1999).
- UNGVÁRY, KRISZTIÁN, 'Nagy jelentőségű szociálpolitikai akció.' Adalékok a zsidó vagyon elosztásához 1944-ben ['Meaningful Socio-Political Action': Data on the Distribution of Jewish Property in 1944], in *1956-os Intézet évkönyve* (Budapest, 2002), 287–321.

- UNGVÁRY, KRISZTIÁN, *A magyar honvédség a második világháborúban* [The Hungarian Honvéd Army in the Second World War] (Budapest, 2005).
- UNGVÁRY, KRISZTIÁN, ‘Antiszemitizmus és németellenesség—a kétfrontos harc [Anti-Semitism and Anti-Germanism—A Fight on Two Fronts]’, in *Küzdelem az igazságért*, 731–50.
- UNGVÁRY, KRISZTIÁN, ‘Das Beispiel der ungarischen Armee. Ideologischer Vernichtungskrieg oder militärisches Kalkül?’, in *Verbrechen der Wehrmacht. Bilanz einer Debatte*, 98–106.
- UNGVÁRY, KRISZTIÁN, ‘Der Getriebene und der Treiber. Das Verhältnis zwischen ungarischer Politik und deutschen Deportationsplänen’, in *Ungarn und der Holocaust*, 41–54.
- UNGVÁRY, KRISZTIÁN, ‘Magyarország szovjetizálásának kérdései [Issues in the Sovietization of Hungary]’, in *Mítoszok, legendák, tévhitek*, 279–309.
- UNGVÁRY, KRISZTIÁN, ‘Robbing the Dead: The Hungarian Contribution to the Holocaust’, in *Facing the Nazi Genocide*, 231–62.
- UNGVÁRY, KRISZTIÁN, ‘Die ungarische Besatzungstruppe in der Sowjetunion 1941–1943’, in *Ungarn Jahrbuch 2002/2003*, 125–63.
- ‘Unternehmen Barbarossa’. Der deutsche Überfall auf die Sowjetunion 1941, ed. Gerd R. Ueberschär and Wolfram Wette (Paderborn, etc., 1984).
- Unterricht des Königs in Preußen an die Generals dero Armee von der Kriegskunst* (n.p., 1761).
- URSIN, MARTTI, *Pohjois-Suomen tuhot ja jälleenrakennus saksalaissodan 1944–1945 jälkeen* [War Damage and Reconstruction in Northern Finland after the Lapland War of 1944–5] (*Studia historica septentrionalia* 2; Rovaniemi, 1980).
- VARAKIN, P., ‘6-va gвардейская танковая армия в Дебреценской операции [6th Guards Armoured Army in the Debrecen Operation]’, *VIZh*, (1975), 11.
- VARSORI, ANTONIO, ‘Bestrafung oder Aussöhnung? Italien und Großbritannien 1943–1948’, in *Italien und die Großmächte*, 131–60.
- VASILEVSKY, ALEKSANDR M., *Sache des ganzen Lebens* (East Berlin, 1977).
- VASURIN, P. S., ‘Brosok v Karpaty [The Thrust in the Carpathians]’, *VIZh*, 1995, 3, 79–85.
- VECANSKI, ALEKSANDAR, ‘General Milan Dj. Nedić als serbischer Ministerpräsident (1941–1944)’, mag. diss., Munich (1996).
- VEHVILÄINEN, OLLI, ‘German Armed Forces and the Finnish Civilian Population 1941–44’, *SJH*, 12 (1988), 345–58.
- VEHVILÄINEN, OLLI, ‘Die Einschätzung der Lage Deutschlands aus finnischer Sicht’, in *Die Zukunft des Reiches*, 147–60.
- Velikaya Otechestvennaya Vojna Sovetskogo soyuzu 1941–1945: Kratkaya istoriya* [The Great Patriotic War of the Soviet Union: A Short History], ed. Boris S. Telpukhovsky, 3rd edn. (Moscow, 1984).
- Velikaya Otechestvennaya Vojna 1941–1945 gg. Voyenno-istoricheskiye ocherki. V chetyrekh knigakh* [The Great Patriotic War 1941–45. Outline of the Military History in Four Volumes] (Moscow, 1998–99).
- VENIAMINOV, V. V., ‘Narkotovskie grammy [A Few Grammes of Narcotics]’, *VIZh*, 1995, 5, 95–6.
- VENKOV, IGOR N., ‘Archivbestände in Rußland zu den Operationen im Frühjahr und Sommer 1943’, in *Gezeitenwechsel*, 231–9.
- VENOHR, WOLFGANG, *Aufstand der Slowaken. Der Freiheitskampf von 1944*, rev. edn. (Berlin and Frankfurt a.M., 1992).
- Verbrechen an den Deutschen in Jugoslawien 1944–1948. Die Stationen eines Völkermordes*, publ. Arbeitskreis Dokumentation der Donauschwäbischen Kulturstiftung (Munich, 1998).
- Verbrechen der Wehrmacht. Bilanz einer Debatte*, ed. Christian Hartmann, Johannes Hürter, and Ulrike Jureit (Munich, 2005).

- VERESS, D. CSABA, *A Dunántúl felszabadítása* [The Liberation of Transdanubia] (Budapest, 1984).
- VERNA, FRANK PHILIP, *Yugoslavia under Italian Rule, 1941–1943: Civil and Military Aspects of the Italian Occupation* (Ann Arbor, MI, 1992).
- ‘Die Vernehmung von Generaloberst Jodl durch die Sowjets. Übers. von Wilhelm Arenz’, *WWR*, 11 (1961), 534–42.
- Vernichtungskrieg. Verbrechen der Wehrmacht 1941–1944*, ed. Hannes Heer and Klaus Naumann (Hamburg, 1996; 3rd edn. Frankfurt a.M., 1997).
- Die Vertreibung der deutschen Bevölkerung aus den Gebieten östlich der Oder-Neiße*, ed. for the Federal Ministry for Displaced Persons, Refugees and War Victims by Theodor Schieder (Dokumentation der Vertreibung der Deutschen aus Ost-Mitteleuropa, 1/1, 2; Bonn, 1953).
- VIGH, KÁROLY, *Ugrás a sötétbe* [Leap in the Dark] (Budapest, 1984).
- VÖLKL, EKKEHARD, *Rumänien. Vom 19. Jahrhundert bis in die Gegenwart* (Regensburg, 1995).
- VÖLKL, EKKEHARD, *Transnistrien und Odessa (1941–1944)* (Schriftenreihe des Regensburger Osteuropainstituts 14; Regensburg, 1996).
- VORMANN, NIKOLAUS VON, *Tscherkassy* (Heidelberg, 1954). [Trans. William Byrne, *Cherkassy* (Madison, WI, 1997)].
- VUORISJÄRVI, ESKO, *Petsamon nikkel kansainvälisessä poliittikassa 1939–1944. Suomalainen teellisuus vastaan ulkomaiset myytiit* [Petsamo Nickel in International Politics 1939–44] (Helsinki, 1990).
- WAGENER, CARL, *Heeresgruppe Süd. Der Kampf im Süden der Ostfront 1941–1945* (Bad Nauheim, 1967).
- WAGENFÜHR, ROLF, *Die deutsche Industrie im Kriege 1939 bis 1945* (Berlin, 1954; 2nd edn., 1963).
- WAHLBÄCK, KRISTER, *The Roots of Swedish Neutrality*, trans. from the Swedish by Thomas Munch-Petersen (Stockholm, 1987).
- WAIBEL, MAX, 1945—*Kapitulation in Norditalien. Originalbericht des Vermittlers. Mit einem Komm. von Hans Rudolf Kurz*, ed. Eduard Preiswerk, Alfons Burckhardt, and Georg Kreis (Basel and Frankfurt a.M., 1981).
- WALLACH, JEHUDA LOTHAR, *Das Dogma der Vernichtungsschlacht. Die Lehren von Clausewitz und Schlieffen und ihre Wirkungen in zwei Weltkriegen* (Frankfurt a.M., 1967). [Trans. *The Dogma of the Battle of Annihilation: The Theories of Clausewitz and Schlieffen and Their Impact on the German Conduct of Two World Wars* (Westport, CT, 1985)].
- WALLACH, JEHUDA LOTHAR, *Kriegstheorien. Ihre Entwicklung im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Frankfurt a.M., 1972).
- WARLIMONT, WALTER, *Im Hauptquartier der deutschen Wehrmacht 1939–1945. Grundlagen, Formen, Gestalten* (Frankfurt a.M. and Bonn, 1962). [Trans. R. H. Barry, *Inside Hitler's Headquarters, 1939–45* (London and Novato, CA, 1964)].
- Der Warschauer Aufstand 1944*, ed. Bernd Martin and Stanisława Lewandowska (Warsaw, 1999).
- WEDEKIND, MICHAEL, *Nationalsozialistische Besetzungs- und Annexionspolitik in Norditalien 1943 bis 1945. Die Operationszonen 'Alpenvorland' und 'Adriatisches Küstenland'* (Militärgeschichtliche Studien 38; Munich, 2003).
- Der Weg in die Katastrophe. Deutsch-tschechoslowakische Beziehungen 1938–1947*, ed. for the Deutsch-tschechische und deutsch-slowakische Historikerkommission by Detlef Brandes and Václav Kural (Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für Kultur und Geschichte der Deutschen im östlichen Europa 3; Essen, 1994).

- WEGENER, GÜNTHER S., ‘Die Normalität des Anormalen—Ein Essay’, in *Kriegsjahr 1944*, 187–95.
- WEGNER, BERND, ‘Auf dem Wege zur pangermanischen Armee. Dokumente zur Entstehungsgeschichte des III. (“germanischen”) SS-Panzerkorps’, *MGM*, 28 (1980), 101–36.
- WEGNER, BERND, *Hitlers Politische Soldaten. Die Waffen-SS 1933–1945. Studien zu Leitbild, Struktur und Funktion einer nationalsozialistischen Elite* (Paderborn, 1982; 3rd edn. 1988; 6th edn. 1999; 7th edn. 2006). [Trans. Ronald Webster, *The Waffen-SS: Organization, Ideology and Function* (Oxford, 1989)].
- WEGNER, BERND, ‘Hitlers Besuch in Finnland. Das geheime Tonprotokoll seiner Unterredung mit Mannerheim am 4. Juni 1942’, *VfZ*, 41 (1993), 117–37.
- WEGNER, BERND, ‘Hitler, der Zweite Weltkrieg und die Choreographie des Untergangs’, *GG*, 26 (2000), 493–518.
- WEGNER, BERND, ‘Defensive ohne Strategie. Die Wehrmacht und das Jahr 1943’, in *Die Wehrmacht. Mythos und Realität*, 197–209.
- WEGNER, BERND, ‘Das Ende der Strategie. Deutschlands politische und militärische Lage nach Stalingrad’, in *Gezeitenwechsel*, 211–28.
- WEGNER, BERND, ‘Erschriebene Siege. Franz Halder, die “Historical Division” und die Rekonstruktion des Zweiten Weltkrieges im Geiste des deutschen Generalstabes’, in *Politischer Wandel*, 287–302.
- WEGNER, BERND, ‘Im Schatten der “Zweiten Front”? Anmerkungen zum deutschen Zusammenbruch im Osten im Sommer 1944’, in *Invasion 1944*, 117–32.
- WEGNER, BERND, ‘Die Leningradfrage als Kernstück der deutsch-finnischen Beziehungen im Zweiten Weltkrieg’, in *Finnland-Studien II*, 136–51.
- WEGNER, BERND, ‘Präventivkrieg 1941? Zur Diskussion um ein militärhistorisches Scheinproblem’, in *Historische Debatten und Kontroversen*, 206–19.
- WEGNER, BERND, ‘The War Against the Soviet Union’, in *Germany and the Second World War*, vi. 841–1205.
- WEGNER, BERND, ‘Ein “Weg ins Chaos”? Deutschland und der finnische Kriegsaustritt 1944 im Spiegel der Goebbels-Tagebücher’, in Petrick and Putensen, *Pro Finlandia 2001*, 329–51.
- Die Wehrmacht. Mythos und Realität*, ed. for the MGFA by Rolf-Dieter Müller and Hans-Erich Volkmann (Munich, 1999).
- Die Wehrmachtberichte 1939–1945*, 3 vols. (Cologne, 1989).
- Wehrmacht und Vernichtungspolitik. Militär im nationalsozialistischen Staat*, ed. Karl Heinrich Pohl (Göttingen, 1999).
- WEIDINGER, OTTO, *Division Das Reich. Der Weg der 2. SS-Panzer-Division ‘Das Reich’. Die Geschichte der Stammdivision der Waffen-SS*, iv: 1943, 2nd edn. (Osnabrück, 1986).
- WEIDLEIN, JOHANN, *Geschichte der Ungarndeutschen in Dokumenten 1930–1950* (Schorndorf, 1958).
- WEINBERG, GERHARD L., *A World at Arms: A Global History of World War II* (Cambridge and New York, 1994).
- WEINBERG, GERHARD L., ‘Zur Frage eines Sonderfriedens im Osten’, in *Gezeitenwechsel*, 173–83.
- WEITERSHAUSEN, FREIHERR VON, ‘Die Verteidigung und Räumung von Sewastopol im Mai 1944’, *WWR*, 4 (1954), 209–16, 326–36.
- WEITZ, JOHN, *Hitler’s Diplomat: Joachim von Ribbentrop* (London, 1992).
- WEIZSÄCKER, ERNST VON, *Erinnerungen. Mein Leben*, ed. Richard von Weizsäcker (Munich, Leipzig, and Freiburg, 1950). [Trans. J. Andrews, *Memoirs of Ernst von Weizsäcker, Chief of the German Foreign Office, 1938–1943* (London, 1951)].

- WEIZSÄCKER, ERNST VON, *Die Weizsäcker-Papiere 1933–1950*, 2 vols., ed. Leonidas E. Hill (Frankfurt a.M., Berlin, and Vienna, 1974).
- WENDT, BERND JÜRGEN, *Deutschland 1933–1945: das Dritte Reich? Handbuch zur Geschichte* (Hanover, 1995).
- WENDT, W., *Tiger. 1. SS-Panzer-Division ‘Leibstandarte SS Adolf Hitler’, 4./schw. SS Pz.-Rgt. LAH, umbenannt in 13./schw. SS Pz.-Rgt. 1 LAH, von der Aufstellung im November 1942 bis zur Auflösung im März 1944* (Gütersloh, 1988).
- WERTH, ALEXANDER, *Russia at War* (London and New York, 1964).
- WEST, RICHARD, *Tito and the Rise and Fall of Yugoslavia* (London, etc., 1994).
- The West Point Atlas of American Wars*, ii: 1900–1953, ed. Vincent J. Esposito (New York, 1959).
- WETTE, WOLFRAM, ‘Das Massensterben als “Heldenepos”. Stalingrad in der NS-Propaganda’, in *Stalingrad. Mythos und Wirklichkeit*, 43–60.
- Die wichtigsten Operationen des Großen Vaterländischen Krieges 1941–1945*, ed. P. A. Shilin (East Berlin, 1958).
- Der Widerstand gegen den Nationalsozialismus. Die deutsche Gesellschaft und der Widerstand gegen Hitler*, ed. for the Historische Kommission zu Berlin by Jürgen Schmädeke and Peter Steinbach, in conjunction with the Gedenkstätte Deutscher Widerstand (Schriftenreihe der Historischen Kommission zu Berlin; Munich and Zurich, 1985).
- WILHELM, HANS-HEINRICH, ‘Heinz Guderian—“Panzerpapst” und Generalstabschef’, in *Die Militärelite des Dritten Reiches*, 187–208.
- WILHELM, HANS-HEINRICH, ‘Die Prognosen der Abteilung Fremde Heere Ost 1942–1945’, in Wilhelm and De Jong, *Zwei Legenden*, 7–75.
- WILHELM, HANS-HEINRICH, and DE JONG, LOUIS, *Zwei Legenden aus dem Dritten Reich. Quellenkritische Studien* (Schriftenreihe der Vierteljahrsshefte für Zeitgeschichte 28; Stuttgart, 1974).
- WILL, W., ‘Wo Panzer Geschichte schrieben’, *Berliner Morgenpost*, 20–1 July 1996, supplement, 2.
- WILLEMER, WILHELM, *Die 15. Infanterie-Division im Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Wiesbaden, 1968).
- WILLMOTT, HEDLEY P., *Empires in the Balance: Japanese and Allied Pacific Strategies to April 1942* (London, 1982).
- WILT, ALAN P., ‘Alfred Jodl—Hitlers Besprechungsstabschef’, in *Die Militärelite des Dritten Reiches*, 236–50.
- WIMPFEN, HANS, ‘Die zweite ungarische Armee im Feldzug gegen die Sowjetunion. Ein Beitrag zur Koalitionskriegsführung im zweiten Weltkrieg’, phil. diss., University of Würzburg (1972).
- WINKLER, DÖRTE, *Frauenarbeit im ‘Dritten Reich’* (Hamburg, 1977).
- WINKLER, RAINER, ‘Die Abwehrkämpfe der Heeresgruppe Mitte an der nordöstlichen Reichsgrenze zwischen Mitte August und Anfang November 1944 und deren Auswirkungen auf die ostdeutschen Grenzgaue’, diss., Düsseldorf (2001).
- WIRES, RICHARD, *The Cicero Spy Affair: German Access to British Secrets in World War II* (Perspectives on Intelligence History; Westport, CT, etc., 1999).
- WITTMANN, KLAUS, *Schwedens Wirtschaftsbeziehungen zum Dritten Reich 1933–1945* (Studien zur modernen Geschichte 23; Munich, 1978).
- WOHLFEIL, RAINER, ‘Heer und Republik’, in *Handbuch zur deutschen Militärgeschichte*, iii/VI. 5–303.
- WOLFF, KARL-DIETER, ‘Unternehmen “Rösselsprung”’, *VfZ*, 4 (1970), 479–501.
- WOKOGONOW, DIMITRI, *Stalin. Triumph und Tragödie. Ein politisches Portrait* (Düsseldorf, 1989).

- WOLLER, HANS, *Die Abrechnung mit dem Faschismus in Italien 1943 bis 1948* (Quellen und Darstellungen zur Zeitgeschichte 38; Munich, 1996).
- Wollt Ihr den totalen Krieg? *Die geheimen Goebbels-Konferenzen 1939–1943*, ed. Willi A. Boelcke (Munich, 1969; Herrsching, 1989; Stuttgart, 1967).
- WOODWARD, ERNEST LLEWLLYN, *British Foreign Policy in the Second World War*, ii. (History of the Second World War; London, 1971).
- World War II in Europe: An Encyclopedia*, ed. David T. Zabecki (London and New York, 1999).
- WOSNENKO, W. W., 'Die Schlacht um den Dnepr', in *Die wichtigsten Operationen*, 307–30.
- WROCHEM, OLIVER VON, *Manstein. Vernichtungskrieg und Nachkriegsgedächtnis* (Paderborn, etc., 2006).
- YAKUSHEVSKY, A., 'Stalingradskaya bitva i falsifikatory istorii [The Battle of Stalingrad and the Falsifiers of History]', *VIZh*, 1982, 12, 41–5.
- ZAKHAROV, M. V., *Délkelet- és Közép-Európa felszabadítása. A 2. és 3. Ukrán Front felszabadító hadmuveletei Délkelet- és Közép Európában 1944–1945* [The Liberation of South-East and Central Europe: Liberation Operations of the 2nd and 3rd Ukrainian Fronts in South-East and Central Europe] (Budapest, 1973).
- ZAMERCEV, IVAN TERENTEVIC, *Emlékek, gondolatok*, Budapest [Memoirs and Thoughts, Budapest] (Budapest, 1969).
- ZAMULIN, VALERI NIKOLAYEVICH, *Prokhorovka—neizvstnoe srazhenie velikoi voiny* (Moscow, 2005). [Trans. Stuart Britton, *Demolishing the Myth: The Tank Battle at Prokhorovka, Kursk, July 1943: An Operational Narrative* (Solihull, 2010)].
- ZAVIZION, G. T., and KORNYUSHIN, P. A., *I na Tikhom okeane* [And in the Pacific Ocean] (Moscow, 1967).
- ZEHNPENNIG, BARBARA, *Hitlers Mein Kampf. Eine Interpretation* (Munich, 2000).
- ZEIDLER, MANFRED, *Kriegsende im Osten. Die Rote Armee und die Besetzung Deutschlands östlich von Oder und Neiße 1944/45* (Munich, 1996).
- ZEITZLER, KURT, 'Die ersten beiden planmäßigen großen Rückzüge des deutschen Heeres an der Ostfront im Zweiten Weltkrieg', in *Wehrkunde*, 9 (1960), 109–17.
- Die Zerstörung Europas. Beiträge zur Weltkriegsepocha, 1914 bis 1945*, ed. Andreas Hillgruber (Frankfurt a.M., 1988).
- ZETTERLING, NIKLAS, 'Loss Rates on the Eastern Front during World War II', *JSMS*, 9 (1996), 4, 895–906.
- ZETTERLING, NIKLAS, and FRANKSON, ANDERS, 'Analyzing World War II Eastern Front Battles', *JSMS*, 11 (1998), 1, 176–203.
- ZETTERLING, NIKLAS, and FRANKSON, ANDERS, *Kursk 1943: A Statistical Analysis*, ed. David M. Glantz (Cass Series on the Soviet [Russian] Study of War 11; London and Portland, OR, 2000).
- ZHADOV, A. S., '5-ya gvardeiskaya armia v Kurskoi bitve [5th Guards Army in the Battle of Kursk]', *Voyennaya Mysl*, 8 (1973), 60–77.
- ZHUKOV, GEORGII K., *Erinnerungen und Gedanken*, 2 vols. (Stuttgart, 1969; 8th edn. East Berlin, 1987).
- ZIEMKE, EARL FREDERICK, *The German Northern Theatre of Operations 1940–1945* (Department of the Army pamphlet 20-271; Washington, D.C., 1960).
- ZIEMKE, EARL FREDERICK, *Stalingrad to Berlin: The German Defeat in the East* (Washington, D.C., 1968).
- ZIMMER, HASKO, *Auf dem Altar des Vaterlandes. Religion und Patriotismus in der deutschen Kriegslyrik des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Germanistik 3; Frankfurt a.M. 1971).

- ZIMMERN, KLAUS, 'Unternehmen Zitadelle Juli 1943. Die letzte deutsche Großoffensive an der Ostfront', in *Soldaten-Kameraden No. 87*, 304.
- ZINNER, TIBOR, and RÓNA, PÉTER, *Szálasiék bilincsben*, 2 vols. [The Szalasists in Handcuffs] (Budapest, 1984).
- ZINS, ALFRED, *Die Operation Zitadelle. Die militärgeschichtliche Diskussion und ihr Niederschlag im öffentlichen Bewußtsein als didaktisches Problem* (Frankfurt a.M., 1986).
- ZITELMANN, RAINER, *Hitler. Selbstverständnis eines Revolutionärs* (Hamburg, etc., 1987). [Trans. Helmut Bogler, *Hitler: The Policies of Seduction* (London, 1998)].
- ZOLOTAREV, VLADIMIR, ET AL., *Velikaya Otechestvennaya Voina 1941–1945 gg. Voyenno-istoricheskie ocherki. V chetyrekh knigakh* [The Great Patriotic War 1941–5. Outline of the Military History in Four Volumes] (Moscow, 1998–9).
- Die Zukunft des Reiches. Gegner, Verbündete und Neutrale (1943 bis 1945)*, ed. for the MGFA by Manfred Messerschmidt and Ekkehard Guth (Vorträge zur Militärgeschichte 13; Herford, etc., 1990).
- ZUMPE, K., 'Unternehmen Zitadelle', *Der Freiwillige*, 1993, 7/8, 54–5.
- ZWEIG, STEFAN, *Sternstunden der Menschheit* (Frankfurt a.M., 1964). [Trans. Eden and Cedar Paul, *The Tide of Fortune: Twelve Historical Miniatures* (London, 1940)].
- Der Zweite Weltkrieg. Analysen, Grundzüge, Forschungsbilanz*, ed. for the MGFA by Wolfgang Michalka (Piper Series 811; Munich and Zurich, 1989).
- Der zweite Weltkrieg. Dokumente*, selected and introduced by Gerhard Förster and Olaf Groehler (East Berlin, 1972).
- Die 62. Infanterie-Division 1938–1944, die 62. Volks-Grenadier-Division 1944–1945*, publ. Kameradenhilfswerk der ehemaligen 62. Division e.V. (Fulda, 1968).
- Zwei Wege nach Moskau. Vom Hitler–Stalin-Pakt bis zum 'Unternehmen Barbarossa'*, ed. for the MGFA by Bernd Wegner (Piper Series 1346; Munich, 1991).



## *Index of Persons*

- Abraham, Erich 803  
Agteleki, Béla 876  
Alexander, Sir Harold Rupert Leofric George (Alexander of Tunis) 1108  
Alexander I 253  
Alfieri, Dino 48 n. 19, 1115, 1116, 1116 n. 91, 1116 n. 93  
Allfrey, Charles Walter 1146  
Allmendinger, Karl 485  
Alquen, Günter d' 59 n. 91  
Ambrosio, Vittorio 1017, 1018, 1020 n. 35, 1022, 1024, 1024 n. 45, 1031, 1074, 1116  
Angelis, Maximilian de 926, 948, 949  
Antonescu, Ion 41, 46, 212 n. 11, 452, 461, 476, 480, 485, 735, 735 n. 24, 736, 739, 739 n. 36, 745, 745 n. 59, 748, 750, 751, 753–6, 758, 758 n. 102, 761, 765, 771–4, 773 n. 155, 774 n. 159, 775 n. 162, 776, 799, 800, 847  
Antonescu, Mihai 51, 51 nn. 41, 43–4, 773  
Antonov, Aleksei Innokentevich 343, 882  
Arndt, Ernst Moritz 1206  
Arnim, Hans-Jürgen von 1104–7  
Assmann, Heinz 626  
Avramescu, Gheorghe 736, 748, 751, 758, 759, 765, 766, 766 n. 122  
  
Bacharev (Major-General) 126  
Backe, Herbert 496  
Baden, Max von 1208  
Bader, Paul 1012, 1012 n. 12, 1013, 1014, 1028, 1035, 1035 n. 101, 1036, 1038 nn. 110, 113, 1039–41, 1073–7  
Badoglio, Pietro 217, 789, 1024, 1024 n. 45, 1117, 1118, 1122 n. 118, 1123  
Bagramyan, Ivan Khristoforovich 301, 301 n. 49, 313, 313 n. 80, 536 n. 40, 559, 559 n. 135, 586, 586 n. 191  
Bagryanov, Ivan Ivanov 815 n. 264  
Bakay, Szilárd 856, 875  
Bäke, Franz 394  
Balck, Hermann 370, 895, 895 n. 178, 898 n. 186, 905, 909, 910, 914, 915, 945, 949, 1130  
Balve, Hellmuth 539 n. 55  
Bárdossy, László von 846  
Baskakov (Major-General) 130 n. 145  
Bastianini, Giuseppe 1116, 1116 n. 93  
Bazna, Elyesa ('Cicero') 233 n. 18  
Beck, Ludwig 560  
Beelitz, Dietrich 1160 (Diagram)  
Behrends, Hermann 1043  
Below, Nikolaus von 1204  
Benzler, Felix 1037, 1040  
  
Beregy, Károly 878, 905  
Berger (Lieutenant-Colonel) 1149  
Berger, Gottlob 242, 718, 719, 721, 993  
Best, Werner 1003  
Bethlen, István 858  
Biryuzov, Sergei Semyonovich 1093  
Blaschke, Hanns 951  
Blücher, Wipert von 971, 972  
Blumroeder, Ferdinand 437 n. 476  
Bock, Fedor von 42 n. 172  
Bohemian, Erik 976  
Böhme, Franz 1000 n. 223, 1003, 1004, 1012 n. 12, 1035, 1074  
Bonin, Bogislaw von 654  
Bork, Max 382  
Bormann, Martin 18–20, 58, 59 n. 88, 231, 239, 1198, 1210  
Bourguiba, Habib 1103  
Brandt, Rudolf 69 n. 44, 218 n. 35  
Brătianu, Constantin 772–3  
Brauchitsch, Walther von 1174  
Bräuer, Johannes 125 n. 113  
Breith, Hermann 135, 884, 892, 907  
Brinkmann, Helmuth 813  
Brusilov, Aleksei Alekseyevich 370, 595  
Bülowius, Stephan 1160 (Diagram)  
Bulygin (Colonel) 61  
Bünau, Rudolf von 950–1  
Burdeinyi (Major-General) 618  
Bürker, Ulrich 1055, 1055 n. 190  
Busch, Ernst 267, 303, 313, 314, 328, 331, 499, 506, 513–17, 513 n. 111, 520, 536–40, 542–4, 555, 556, 560, 662, 1183, 1183 n. 79, 1216  
Buschenhagen, Erich 808 n. 242  
Busse, Theodor 380 n. 182  
  
Canaris, Wilhelm 59  
Carell, Paul (actually Paul K. Schmidt) 109 n. 29, 110 n. 34, 116 n. 63, 134, 135, 135 n. 167, 163 n. 66, 196 n. 85, 198 n. 98, 498 n. 51, 1106 n. 47  
Castellano, Giuseppe 1123  
Cavallero, Ugo 1017  
Charles XII 253  
Chernyakhovsky, Ivan Danilovich 532, 616  
Choltitz, Dietrich von 1185  
Chuikov, Vasily Ivanovich 569  
Churchill, Sir Winston Leonard Spencer 53, 58, 68, 214, 846, 882, 976, 1101, 1101 n. 10, 1101 n. 12, 1102, 1108, 1108 n. 58, 1117 n. 101, 1118 n. 105, 1123, 1123 nn. 122–3, 1131, 1131 n. 173, 1150 n. 230, 1154, 1178 n. 50, 1191

- Ciano, Count Gian Galeazzo 41 nn. 163, 169, 50 n. 34, 53, 53 n. 58, 54, 54 n. 62, 1012 n. 10, 1037 n. 106, 1115 n. 89
- Clark, Mark Wayne 1129, 1130, 1137, 1145, 1147, 1149, 1153, 1155, 1156
- Clausewitz, Carl von 72, 72 n. 64, 86, 86 n. 12, 212 n. 10, 228, 230, 253, 253 n. 44, 394, 489, 492 n. 17, 592, 592 n. 221, 600 n. 261, 672, 672 n. 214, 1206, 1207, 1207 n. 85, 1208, 1210
- Clodius, Carl August 237, 238 n. 42, 735 n. 23, 802
- Collee, Karl-Heinz 506 n. 75
- Cramer, Hans 1109
- Csatay, Lajos 866
- Cunningham, Sir Andrew Browne 1112
- Danckelmann, Heinrich 1012, 1012 n. 12
- Dangić, Jezdimir 1013, 1028, 1075
- Dawley, Ernest J. 1129
- Deichmann, Paul 87
- Delbrück, Hans 209 n. 1, 212 n. 10
- Dempsey, Miles 1128
- Derikonia, Savo 1027 n. 58
- Dessloch, Otto 91
- Dethleffsen, Erich 613 nn. 55–6
- Diatlov, V. 302
- Diel, Eduard 224, 225, 225 n. 72, 977, 979, 980, 982, 982 n. 114, 983, 992, 1183, 1183 n. 77
- Dietrich, Josef ‘Sepp’ 927
- Dimitrov, Georgi 1073
- Dirlewanger, Oskar 888
- Djilas, Milovan 408, 409 nn. 338, 343, 882 n. 135, 1018 n. 33, 1021 nn. 38–9, 1027 n. 59, 1042 n. 126, 1061 n. 209, 1065 n. 228, 1066 n. 231, 1087 n. 308
- Djordjević, Čeka 1044 n. 135
- Djurišić, Pavle 1074, 1083
- Döbert, Hans 549 n. 97
- Doebla, Heinrich 1119
- Dohrmann, Franz 1209
- Dollmann, Friedrich 1184 n. 83
- Dönitz, Karl 139 n. 197, 215, 227, 286, 462, 491, 491 n. 13, 626, 627, 667, 667 n. 184, 668, 926, 1004, 1109, 1198
- Dragomir Nicolae 751 n. 77, 758, 765, 766
- Dulles, Allen W. 53 n. 55, 1162 n. 277
- Dumitrescu, Petre 480, 729, 813
- Earle, George H. 53 n. 55
- Einsiedel, Count Heinrich von 619, 619 n. 80
- Eisenhower, Dwight D. 1024, 1105, 1112, 1118, 1122, 1123, 1137
- Elizabeth, Empress of Russia 492
- Enckell, Carl 978
- Erfurth, Waldemar 965, 965 nn. 27–8, 966, 966 n. 31, 974 nn. 66, 70, 72, 975 nn. 73–4, 979 n. 95, 982, 985 n. 132, 989 nn. 151, 153–4, 991 n. 165, 993, 993 n. 174, 995, 995 n. 192, 996, 996 n. 198, 997 n. 202, 998 n. 205
- Esteva, Jean-Pierre 1103
- Estor, Fritz 752
- Fagerholm, Karl-August 966, 974
- Fähndrich, Ernst 1158
- Falkenhayn, Erich von 85
- Falkenhorst, Nikolaus von 1000 n. 223
- Fehlis, Heinrich 1004
- Felber, Hans-Gustav 1040, 1043–7, 1048 n. 155, 1050, 1050 n. 165, 1073
- Fellgiebel, Erich 59, 59 n. 91, 219
- Feuersänger, Marianne 214 n. 9
- Feurstein, Valentin 1150
- Flex, Walter 1197 n. 23, 1204 n. 68
- Formella (Lance-Corporal) 104
- Fortner, Johann 1076
- Franco y Bahamonde, Francisco 1102
- Frederick the Great 3, 40 n. 160, 43, 43 n. 182, 212 n. 10, 490–2, 518, 672, 1197, 1202, 1202 n. 58
- Fretter-Pico, Maximilian 749, 750, 764, 768 n. 133, 806, 808, 808 n. 241, 810, 812 n. 256, 813, 828, 828 n. 324, 831, 832, 832 n. 339, 833, 835, 840, 845, 869, 889, 889 n. 158, 891, 892, 894, 895
- Freyberg, Sir Bernhard Cyril 1147
- Fricke (Captain) 618 n. 76
- Fribe, Werner 421
- Friessner, Johannes 559, 622 n. 7, 624 n. 15, 628–31, 629 nn. 35, 38, 630, 631, 633, 662, 733–6, 733 n. 16, 734 n. 17, 735 nn. 23, 25, 736 n. 29, 738–40, 739 n. 34, 745, 746, 746 n. 65, 750–6, 751 n. 78, 754 n. 88, 755 nn. 92–3, 756 n. 96, 758, 761, 762 n. 110, 763, 765 n. 120, 770, 770 n. 143, 771, 778, 783, 800, 800 n. 221, 801, 810, 812, 820–5, 825 nn. 306–8, 310, 828, 828 n. 324, 830, 831 nn. 334–5, 337, 832, 832 n. 340, 834 n. 349, 837, 837 n. 359, 838 n. 364, 839 nn. 365, 368, 840 n. 371, 841, 841 n. 374, 843, 845, 845 nn. 381–2, 867, 871, 875, 883, 884, 884 n. 145, 888, 890 n. 161, 893–5, 894 n. 176, 1184
- Fromm, Friedrich 17, 59, 60, 1174, 1184
- Gackenholz, Hermann 267 n. 115, 498 n. 51, 510, 510 nn. 100, 102, 513 n. 110, 514 n. 112, 515 n. 113, 537 n. 48
- Gäde, Heinrich 815
- Galitsky, Kuzma Nikitovich 611 n. 44, 613 n. 55, 616 n. 65
- Gareyev, Makhmut Akhmetovich 302, 318 nn. 109, 111, 319 n. 118, 323 n. 138, 325, 326, 326 nn. 153, 157, 326 n. 159
- Gariboldi, Italo 1015
- Gaulle, Charles de 1188

- Gehlen, Reinhard 15, 25, 25 n. 97, 75, 77, 78 n. 100, 99, 99 n. 67, 367, 416, 417, 498 n. 51, 506 n. 77, 509–11, 563, 599, 1169, 1177
- Gercke, Rudolf 219
- Gerstenberg, Alfred 736, 774, 775, 775 n. 162, 776–80, 782, 783 n. 189, 784, 785, 786 n. 206, 799, 799 n. 215
- Geyr von Schweppenburg, Baron Leo Dietrich Franz 1184 n. 83
- Gille, Herbert Otto 904
- Giordano, Ralph 618, 619 n. 79
- Glagolev, Vasily Vasilievich 952
- Glaise von Horstenau, Edmund 1008 n. 1, 1011, 1011 n. 8, 1014, 1016 n. 22, 1021 n. 36, 1027 n. 62, 1030 nn. 76, 78, 1031 n. 81, 1077, 1077 n. 279, 1079 n. 290, 1080, 1080 n. 293, 1082
- Glantz, David M. 75 n. 81, 77 nn. 97, 99, 93 n. 32, 97 n. 60, 98 nn. 63–4, 107 n. 11, 108 n. 21, 110 n. 34, 114 n. 57, 115 n. 61, 116 n. 63, 117 n. 68, 119 nn. 75–7, 122 nn. 97, 101, 123 n. 104, 124 n. 108, 127 nn. 125, 127, 128 n. 131, 132 n. 156, 134 n. 166, 135 n. 171, 137 n. 185, 138 n. 188, 143 n. 224, 144 n. 230, 152 n. 27, 158 n. 56, 162 n. 63, 173 n. 10, 184 n. 25, 185 n. 31, 187 n. 46, 189 n. 52, 190 nn. 67, 69, 192 n. 76, 195 n. 79, 198 n. 96, 205 n. 151, 278 nn. 13, 19, 284 n. 43, 286, 286 n. 52, 290 n. 77, 291 n. 82, 295 n. 13, 296 nn. 19, 21, 300 n. 43, 301 n. 48, 302, 302 nn. 50, 52, 339 n. 8, 359 nn. 77–8, 360 nn. 80, 82, 361 n. 87, 365 n. 99, 368 n. 119, 389 n. 228, 430 n. 445, 498 n. 51, 501 n. 59, 558 n. 132, 560 n. 144, 568 n. 171, 581 n. 177, 590 n. 212, 593, 593 n. 228, 595 n. 239, 596 n. 244, 597 n. 250, 612 n. 50, 613 n. 55, 616, 616 n. 64, 678 nn. 8–9, 679 n. 13, 684 nn. 32, 34, 685 n. 36, 687 n. 52, 688 n. 53, 692 n. 70, 700 n. 114, 701 n. 122, 703 n. 127, 704 n. 132, 705 n. 138, 707 n. 145, 708 n. 148, 711 nn. 157, 161, 984 n. 125
- Goebbels, Joseph 15 n. 46, 16 n. 47, 18, 24 n. 92, 32 nn. 123, 127, 39 nn. 148–51, 153, 40 n. 160, 41 nn. 161, 168, 42 nn. 171, 175, 177, 43 n. 179, 47, 47 nn. 9, 13, 48 nn. 18–19, 21, 23, 25–6, 30, 50, 50 n. 37, 51 n. 45, 53 nn. 54, 56, 54 nn. 60–1, 58, 58 nn. 84, 87, 60 n. 99, 63, 63 nn. 7, 10, 68, 68 nn. 31, 35, 37, 69 nn. 41, 45, 77, 77 nn. 95, 97, 79, 79 n. 111, 170 n. 93, 212 n. 13, 213, 213 n. 1, 215, 215 nn. 12, 15, 216, 216 n. 24, 218 n. 36, 219 n. 39, 220, 220 n. 47, 221, 221 nn. 51, 53, 223, 223 nn. 58, 62, 224, 224 nn. 65, 67–9, 225, 225 nn. 76–7, 228 n. 90, 231, 231 nn. 7–8, 10, 231 n. 11, 232 n. 16, 234–6, 236 n. 37, 237 n. 37, 239, 240 n. 54, 241 n. 59, 246 n. 12, 354, 354 n. 52, 432, 432 n. 452, 493, 619, 854, 854 n. 28, 864, 956, 965, 965 n. 29, 966 n. 31, 979 n. 96, 980, 980 n. 102, 981, 981 nn. 106–7, 983, 983 n. 117, 987 n. 143, 989, 989 nn. 150–1, 992, 992 n. 168, 994, 994 n. 181, 995, 995 nn. 188, 190–1, 1135, 1136 n. 203, 1173, 1173 nn. 18, 21, 1174, 1174 n. 28, 1177 n. 42, 1178, 1178 nn. 46, 48, 1179, 1179 n. 53, 1181, 1181 nn. 63, 65, 1182 nn. 72–3, 1183, 1183 nn. 74–5, 78, 1184 nn. 81, 85, 1185, 1185 nn. 93–4, 1186, 1186 nn. 98, 103, 1187 nn. 106, 109, 1188 n. 114, 1189 n. 123, 1190, 1190 nn. 130, 132, 1191 n. 139, 1192, 1192 nn. 144, 149, 1195 n. 9, 1196 nn. 14, 18, 20, 1197 nn. 26, 28, 1200, 1200 nn. 43, 45, 47, 1202, 1202 nn. 55, 59, 1203 n. 62, 1204 n. 67, 1205
- Goerdeler, Carl Friedrich 69 n. 40
- Golian, Jan 717
- Gollwitzer, Friedrich 317, 538, 594 n. 237
- Göring, Hermann 53, 231 nn. 6, 11, 262, 579, 580, 604, 614, 614 n. 57, 625, 659, 1105, 1110 n. 71, 1113, 1120, 1127, 1128 n. 151, 1130, 1146, 1147, 1149, 1150 n. 231, 1202
- Görlitz, Walter 68 n. 32, 172 n. 4, 302 n. 56, 373 n. 145, 557 n. 125, 670 nn. 202, 204, 1173 nn. 15, 22
- Gorskov, Sergei I. 870
- Govorov, Leonid Aleksandrovich 291–2, 985 n. 127
- Graziani, Rodolfo 1154
- Greiffenberg, Hans von 839, 879
- Greim, Robert Ritter von 87, 588 nn. 202–3, 602
- Gripenberg, Georg 966
- Grolman, Helmuth von 734, 734 n. 19, 740, 741, 752, 753, 761, 764, 770, 779, 798, 799, 831, 895, 1055 n. 190
- Grouchy, Emmanuel Marquis de 135
- Grün (Major) 506 n. 75
- Guariglia, Raffaele 1123
- Guderian, Heinz 68 n. 32, 69 nn. 40, 42, 70 n. 53, 76, 76 nn. 90, 93, 79, 79 n. 109, 84, 85 n. 6, 107 n. 10, 112, 114 n. 57, 140, 158, 164, 165, 266, 266 n. 112, 268 nn. 119, 121, 354, 369, 369 n. 122, 372, 372 n. 135, 443, 443 n. 512, 518, 519, 562, 565, 585, 587, 589, 604, 624, 631, 631 n. 42, 632, 634, 636, 638, 638 n. 78, 653, 653 n. 95, 658, 659, 659 nn. 142–3, 664–6, 665 n. 174, 668, 738, 761, 808, 821, 842, 844, 863, 864, 864 n. 73, 865 n. 78, 868, 870, 878, 878 n. 117, 884, 888, 890, 893–5, 896 n. 179, 904, 904 n. 209, 905, 908, 911, 925, 925 n. 273, 926, 926 n. 284, 944, 946–8, 956, 1174, 1174 n. 27, 1175 n. 29, 1184, 1185, 1185 nn. 89–91, 1186 nn. 99, 103, 1189 n. 122, 1190, 1190 n. 130, 1192, 1192 n. 147, 1203 n. 61
- Gühr, Erhard 124 n. 108
- Gutmann, Hermann 407 n. 332

- Guzzoni, Alfredo 1113, 1114  
 Gyldenfeldt, Heinz von 1055 n. 190
- Haakon VII 1004  
 Haase, Konrad 1160 (Diagram)  
 Hackzell, Antti 991  
 Hadermann, Ernst 224 n. 65  
 Halder, Franz 17, 40 n. 160, 68, 1174,  
   1199 n. 36  
 Hansen, Erik 735 n. 24, 736, 774  
 Hansson, Per Albin 962  
 Harpe, Josef 327, 328, 567, 683, 683 n. 28,  
   685–8, 691–4, 696, 699–706, 708–12, 715,  
   723–6, 728  
 Hartmann (First Lieutenant) 618 n. 76  
 Hartmann, Otto 1160 (Diagram)  
 Hassell, Ulrich von 7 n. 8, 8 n. 10, 48 n. 22,  
   59 n. 94, 61 n. 103, 225 n. 75  
 Hauck, Friedrich-Wilhelm 103 n. 83,  
   107 n. 14  
 Hauffe, Arthur 689  
 Haun, Heinrich 549 n. 96  
 Hausser, Paul 126, 128, 128 n. 133, 146, 196  
 Hedin, Sven 981 n. 106  
 Heidkämper, Otto 294 n. 4, 303 n. 58, 308 n.  
   75, 314 nn. 83, 85, 315, 315 nn. 90, 95,  
   316 nn. 98, 101, 317, 317 n. 106, 318 n. 108,  
   537 n. 43, 538 nn. 51, 54  
 Heinrichs, Erich 980, 982, 982 n. 113, 989  
 Heinrici, Gotthard 60 n. 102, 64 n. 14, 103 n.  
   83, 107 n. 14, 320, 324, 520, 532, 540, 594,  
   719 nn. 194, 198, 721 n. 201, 723, 723 nn.  
   206, 209–11, 213, 724 nn. 214–18, 725,  
   725 nn. 221–2  
 Hell, Ernst-Eberhard 206, 808 n. 242  
 Herr, Traugott 1131, 1156  
 Heszényi, Josef Vitez 839, 876  
 Heusinger, Adolf 28 n. 106, 35 n. 132, 36, 36 n.  
   138, 38 n. 144, 59 n. 95, 142, 205, 206 n.  
   152, 219, 219 n. 40, 221 n. 51, 226 n. 82,  
   269 n. 127, 279 n. 26, 298, 334, 355 nn.  
   54–5, 57, 443 n. 511, 444 n. 514, 489 n. 3,  
   493 n. 25, 498 nn. 51, 53, 504, 558, 558 n.  
   134, 559 n. 138, 561, 561 n. 148, 562, 562 n.  
   153, 624 n. 15, 625, 625 n. 16, 626, 627 n.  
   26, 1173 n. 23, 1174, 1174 n. 25, 1175 n. 30,  
   1176 n. 39, 1177 n. 41, 1178, 1178 nn. 46–7,  
   1183 n. 75, 1184, 1184 n. 81, 1185, 1185 nn.  
   91–2  
 Hewel, Walther 58 n. 87  
 Hilpert, Carl 660  
 Himmler, Heinrich 8, 59, 59 n. 88, 69 n. 44,  
   216, 216 n. 25, 231, 238 n. 46, 242, 264,  
   264 n. 102, 603, 671 n. 213, 721, 818, 837 n.  
   359, 864, 904, 911, 948, 982, 993, 993 n.  
   178, 1030, 1039 n. 117, 1043, 1136, 1184,  
   1210 n. 109  
 Hindenburg, Paul von 1209 n. 102  
 Hindy, Iván 896, 900
- Hinze, Rolf 110 n. 35, 336 n. 210, 369 n. 122,  
   370 nn. 127–8, 387 n. 211, 495 n. 39, 498 n.  
   51, 502 n. 61, 513 n. 108, 516 n. 121,  
   528 nn. 14, 18, 542 n. 65, 546 nn. 82, 84,  
   548 n. 94, 550 n. 101, 551 nn. 104–5, 553 n.  
   110, 554, 554 nn. 113–16, 561 n. 152, 581 n.  
   177, 746 n. 65, 757 n. 100, 770 n. 142,  
   815 n. 272, 842 n. 375  
 Hofer, Franz 1125 n. 134  
 Hoffmann, Paul 8 n. 8, 1106 n. 47, 1117 n. 98  
 Höfle, Hermann 721, 722  
 Hofmann, Rudolf 303  
 Hollidt, Karl Adolf 71 n. 62, 340, 457, 460,  
   474, 478  
 Höltér, Hermann 993, 998 n. 206  
 Horthy de Nagybánya, Miklós 838  
 Horváth, Sándor 896, 896 n. 183  
 Höss, Rudolf 880  
 Hossbach, Friedrich 335, 499, 611, 611 n. 46,  
   613 n. 55, 614, 616  
 Hösslin, Roland von 215 n. 14  
 Hoth, Hermann 70, 71, 87, 112, 258, 362, 369  
 Höttl, Wilhelm 855, 855 n. 31  
 House, Jonathan 75 n. 81, 77 nn. 97, 99, 93 n.  
   32, 97 n. 60, 98 nn. 63–4, 107 n. 11, 108 n.  
   21, 110 n. 34, 114 n. 57, 115 n. 61, 116 n.  
   63, 117 n. 68, 119 nn. 75–7, 122 nn. 97, 101,  
   123 n. 104, 124 n. 108, 127 nn. 125, 127,  
   128 n. 131, 132 n. 156, 134 n. 166, 135 n.  
   171, 137 n. 185, 138 n. 188, 143 n. 224,  
   144 n. 230, 152 n. 27, 158 n. 56, 162 n. 63,  
   173 n. 10, 184 n. 25, 185 n. 31, 187 n. 46,  
   189 n. 52, 190 nn. 67, 69, 192 n. 76, 195 n.  
   79, 198 n. 96, 205 n. 151, 278 nn. 13, 19,  
   284 n. 43, 286, 286 n. 52, 290 n. 77, 291 n.  
   82, 295 n. 13, 296 nn. 19, 21, 300 n. 43,  
   301 n. 48, 302, 302 nn. 50, 52, 339 n. 8,  
   359 nn. 77–8, 360 nn. 80, 82, 361 n. 87,  
   365 n. 99, 368 n. 119, 389 n. 228, 430 n.  
   445, 498 n. 51, 501 n. 59, 558 n. 132, 560 n.  
   144, 568 n. 171, 581 n. 177, 590 n. 212, 593,  
   593 n. 228, 595 n. 239, 596 n. 244, 597 n.  
   250, 612 n. 50, 613 n. 55, 616, 616 n. 64,  
   678 nn. 8–9, 679 n. 13, 684 nn. 32, 34,  
   685 n. 36, 687 n. 52, 688 n. 53, 692 n. 70,  
   700 n. 114, 701 n. 122, 703 n. 127, 704 n.  
   132, 705 n. 138, 707 n. 145, 708 n. 148,  
   711 n. 157, 161, 984 n. 125  
 Hube, Hans Valentin 379, 432, 435–7, 440,  
   1113, 1114, 1130, 1183, 1183 n. 77  
 Hull, Cordell 975  
 Hutter (General) 594 n. 237
- Imrédy, Béla 52, 856  
 Ionescu, Emanoil 751 n. 77
- Jaenecke, Erwin 222, 461, 464, 484, 485, 1176,  
   1176 n. 33  
 Jagow, Dietrich von 855

- Jány, Gustav von 47 n. 13  
Janza (Colonel) 910  
Jodl, Alfred 32 n. 123, 35, 38, 38 n. 144, 42 n.  
  177, 48, 63 n. 8, 68 n. 30, 79 n. 109, 138,  
  139, 214, 227, 227 nn. 85, 87, 228, 228 nn.  
  89, 90, 228 n. 92, 243, 243 n. 3, 245–7,  
  245 n. 10, 246 n. 17, 247 n. 19, 268, 268 n.  
  122, 490 n. 6, 491, 491 n. 12, 494 n. 33, 515,  
  671, 738, 778, 926, 926 n. 283, 975, 982,  
  1155 n. 258, 1177, 1180, 1186, 1186 nn.  
  102, 104, 1191, 1192, 1192 n. 150, 1196 n.  
  17, 1199, 1199 n. 37, 1200, 1207  
John, Antonius 109 nn. 26, 28, 184 n. 21, 206,  
  206 n. 154  
Jordan, Hans 532, 542  
Juin, Alphonse 1147  
Junge, Wolf 139 n. 197, 1115 n. 89  
Jünger, Ernst 237 n. 40, 1209, 1209 nn.  
  103, 109  
Jurcsék, Béla 857  
Jüttner, Hans 880  
  
Kaiser, Hermann 7 n. 8, 8 n. 10  
Kállay, Miklós 51, 51 n. 43, 848, 854, 858  
Kaltenbrunner, Ernst 1043, 1043 n. 129  
Kampov (Major) 408, 408 n. 336  
Kasche, Siegfried 1011  
Katukov, Mikhail Yefimovich 137, 386 n. 201,  
  430, 430 n. 442  
Kaufmann, Karl 1004  
Kehrl, Hans 1182, 1182 nn. 67, 69, 72  
Keidel (Sergeant) 1012 n. 10  
Keitel, Wilhelm 17, 18, 21 n. 73, 32 n. 123,  
  37 n. 139, 39 n. 148, 42 n. 172, 47 n. 17,  
  51 n. 45, 69, 69 n. 41, 139 n. 197, 214, 225,  
  225 nn. 76–7, 226, 227, 270 n. 129, 510 n.  
  100, 597, 738, 739, 977 n. 88, 982, 989,  
  1004, 1105, 1134, 1136, 1153, 1196 nn.  
  14–15, 1203 n. 66  
Kempf, Werner 87, 135, 196  
Keresztes-Fischer, Ferenc 846  
Kessel, Mortimer von 748  
Kesselring, Albert 140, 953, 1101, 1105,  
  1105 n. 47, 1106, 1113, 1114, 1120, 1128 n.  
  155, 1130–3, 1135–7, 1147, 1149, 1151–3,  
  1155, 1156, 1156 n. 261, 1162  
Keyes, Roger 1147  
Khrushchev, Nikita Sergeyevich 116, 205  
Kielmansegg, Count Johann Adolf von 72 n. 67,  
  74 n. 77, 78 n. 101, 79 n. 108, 138, 138 n.  
  191, 139 n. 200, 140 n. 209, 141 n. 216, 142,  
  142 nn. 219, 223, 196, 196 n. 84, 353, 353 n.  
  49, 356 n. 60, 401 nn. 294, 295, 508 n. 92,  
  519 n. 136, 560 n. 143, 562, 589, 589 n. 208,  
  593 n. 232, 594, 594 n. 238  
Killinger, Baron Manfred von 736, 774, 774 n.  
  158, 775, 799, 802  
Kinzel, Eberhard 287, 631  
Kirchner, Friedrich 753  
  
Kirichenko (Major-General) 125  
Kirkman, Sidney Chevalier 1146  
Kittel, Heinrich 421  
Klaus, Edgar 58 n. 85  
Kleist, Ewald 220, 377, 451, 730, 735, 1173,  
  1173 n. 16  
Kleist, Peter 58 n. 85  
Kluge, Hans Günther von 21, 87, 217, 297,  
  356, 1184  
Knesebeck, Wasmod von dem 811 n. 254,  
  1162 n. 277  
Knobelsdorff, Otto von 586  
Koch, Erich 414, 618 n. 77, 665  
Kohlermann, Otto 1160  
Kollontai, Alexandra 57 n. 82, 976, 978,  
  986 n. 134  
Konev, Ivan Stepanovich 95, 120, 120 n. 84,  
  157, 157 n. 45, 195, 387, 388 n. 215,  
  389–91, 391 n. 237, 399, 400, 400 n. 290,  
  401, 406, 406 nn. 323, 325, 408, 408 n. 335,  
  409, 409 nn. 343–4, 411, 412, 428 n. 432,  
  430, 430 n. 446, 431 n. 449, 476, 477, 480,  
  510, 563, 678, 679, 685, 688, 692, 693, 699,  
  700, 703, 705, 707–9, 711–13, 715, 723,  
  725, 957  
Konrad, Rudolf 1053  
Korfes, Otto 224 n. 65, 399  
Körner, Theodor 1206, 1206 n. 82  
Kosorić, Radivoj 1027  
Kovačević, Dušan 1027 n. 58  
Kovács, Gyula 905  
Kravchenko, Andrei Grigorevich 365, 827,  
  890, 891  
Krebs, Hans 334, 506  
Kreipe, Werner 799 n. 215  
Kruse, Kurt 408  
Kübler, Josef 1057  
Küchler, Georg von 21, 266, 275, 280, 282,  
  284–8, 291  
Kuderna, Julius 785, 786, 786 n. 206, 798  
Kuhlmey, Kurt 988 n. 144  
Kühlwein, Fritz 1053 n. 176  
Kumm, Otto 1030 n. 78, 1032 nn. 86, 90,  
  1048 n. 155, 1050 n. 162, 1058 n. 202,  
  1062 n. 212  
Kuntze, Walter 1075, 1076, 1082  
Kurochkin, Pavel Alekseyevich 335, 336  
  
Laatikainen, Taavetti 988 n. 144  
Lagus, Ernst Ruben 988 n. 144  
Lakatos, Géza 861, 862, 867 n. 85,  
  874, 876  
Lammers, Hans Heinrich 18, 19, 214  
Lasch, Otto 665 n. 175, 670, 670 n. 200  
Lattmann, Martin 224 n. 65  
Lauchert, Meinrad von 636  
Laval, Pierre 50, 50 n. 37  
Leese, Oliver William Hargreaves 1145, 1156  
Lemelsen, Joachim 88, 1160 (Diagram)

- Lemm, Heinz-Georg 504, 504 n. 65, 541 n. 63  
 Leyers, Hans 1160 (Diagram)  
 Lie, Jonas 1003  
 Lieb, Theobald 395 n. 262, 398, 402, 403 n.  
     308, 406, 406 n. 327, 495, 851 n. 21, 1034 n.  
     95, 1070 n. 250  
 Lindemann, Georg 512, 558, 559, 624, 627,  
     628, 662, 1004, 1184  
 Linkomies, Edwin 966, 971, 971 n. 52, 974,  
     985 n. 130, 986, 987 nn. 138, 140  
 List, Wilhelm 1013  
 Ljotić, Dimitrije V. 1035, 1044  
 Lloyd George, David 210  
 Löhr, Alexander 1016, 1016 n. 22, 1019, 1022 n.  
     40, 1023, 1028, 1028 n. 67, 1049, 1052,  
     1066–8, 1068 n. 243, 1076, 1077, 1077 nn.  
     279, 282, 1082, 1090, 1095, 1097, 1223  
 Lohse, Hinrich 1004  
 Lötzsch, Georg 127, 127 n. 124  
 Louis XIV 253  
 Löwisch, Werner 1160 (Diagram)  
 Lucas, John P. 1148, 1149, 1149 n. 226  
 Ludendorff, Erich 209, 209 n. 1, 211, 212,  
     212 n. 10, 674, 674 n. 225, 1208  
 Lüters, Rudolf 1014, 1016, 1016 n. 21, 1019,  
     1023, 1024 n. 47, 1077 n. 281, 1078  
 McClintock, Robert 977  
 McCreery, Richard Loudon 1129, 1147, 1156  
 Mackensen, Eberhard von 379, 821, 821 n.  
     291, 823, 825, 1103, 1117, 1136  
 Mackensen, Hans Georg von 379, 821, 821 n.  
     291, 823, 825, 1103, 1117, 1136  
 Malenkov, Georgii Maksimilianovich 324  
 Malinovsky, Rodion Yakovlevich 467, 468, 474,  
     475, 477, 481, 727, 743, 746, 756, 757, 763,  
     773, 816, 820, 822, 823, 826, 829, 834, 835,  
     840–5, 870–4, 882–91, 896, 901–3, 906,  
     908, 910, 916, 922, 923, 927, 943, 944,  
     949, 952  
 Maniu, Iuliu 772  
 Mannerheim, Baron Carl Gustav Emil 46, 964,  
     965, 965 n. 29, 966, 973, 977, 977 n. 88,  
     980, 982 n. 114, 985, 985 nn. 129, 132, 986,  
     988, 988 n. 149, 989, 989 n. 154, 990, 991,  
     991 n. 163, 993–6, 996 n. 198, 997, 1189 n.  
     123, 1198 n. 34  
 Manstein, Erich von 15 n. 46, 17, 30, 49, 57,  
     64 n. 15, 65, 65 nn. 18–19, 65 n. 22, 67, 68,  
     68 n. 33, 69, 69 nn. 40, 42–3, 70, 71, 73, 74,  
     76, 76 nn. 90, 92, 78, 78 n. 102, 79 n. 112,  
     83–5, 85 n. 8, 87, 91, 106, 112, 117, 118,  
     118 n. 74, 133, 138 n. 190, 140, 140 n. 207,  
     141, 141 nn. 211, 215, 142, 142 n. 221,  
     143–8, 148 n. 5, 165 n. 75, 167, 189, 196,  
     196 n. 83, 197, 201 n. 111, 219, 219 n. 43,  
     220, 220 nn. 44–6, 221, 221 nn. 51–2, 223,  
     224, 224 n. 68, 254 n. 47, 264, 265, 265 n.
- 104, 266, 267, 267 n. 116, 297, 298, 300,  
     334 n. 200, 338, 340, 340 n. 18, 341, 341 n.  
     21, 342, 342 n. 24, 351, 354, 355, 355 n. 58,  
     356, 356 n. 64, 357, 357 nn. 66–7, 69, 70,  
     361, 361 n. 90, 362, 362 nn. 92, 94, 366,  
     366 n. 105, 367, 367 nn. 111–12, 368, 368 n.  
     115–16, 369, 369 n. 122, 371, 372, 375,  
     375 n. 155, 376 n. 162, 377, 377 n. 170,  
     379 n. 174, 380–2, 382 n. 193, 385, 385 n.  
     199, 386, 386 n. 204, 387, 387 nn. 211–12,  
     390, 391 n. 242, 392, 392 n. 247, 393 n. 254,  
     396, 397, 401, 411 n. 356, 412–14, 414 nn.  
     374, 376, 415, 416, 420, 420 n. 390, 427 n.  
     428, 428, 428 n. 436, 429, 430, 433–6,  
     436 nn. 468, 471, 474, 438–40, 442–5, 453,  
     456 n. 42, 463, 464, 477, 477 n. 118, 478 n.  
     124, 480, 481 n. 130, 502, 518, 519, 519 n.  
     142, 558, 558 n. 128, 569, 569 n. 174, 579,  
     593, 594 n. 235, 600, 601, 673, 1172,  
     1172 n. 13, 1173, 1173 n. 16, 1174, 1175,  
     1184, 1215, 1216  
 Maslennikov, Ivan Ivanovich 449, 450  
 Mattenkrott, Franz 370, 391 n. 240, 407 n.  
     329, 409 n. 345, 410 n. 347  
 Mecke, Karl-Conrad 635  
 Meden, Karl-Friedrich von der 691,  
     691 n. 64, 692  
 Meendsen-Bohlken, Wilhelm 1136  
 Megerle, Karl 20 n. 70  
 Meier-Welcker, Hans 408  
 Meisel, Wilhelm 1167  
 Mekhlis, Lev Zakharovich 882  
 Mellenthin, Friedrich Wilhelm von 85, 85 nn.  
     7, 9, 102 n. 79, 144 n. 229, 145 n. 231,  
     154 n. 42, 302 n. 55, 358 n. 71, 365, 365 n.  
     101, 369 n. 122, 371, 371 nn. 133–4, 422,  
     440 n. 495, 595, 595 nn. 241, 243  
 Meretskov, Kirill A. (Marshal) 977, 977 n. 85,  
     985 n. 127  
 Messe, Giovanni 1104, 1109  
 Meyer, Bruno 35 n. 132, 36 n. 138, 38 n. 144,  
     163, 206 n. 152, 219 n. 40, 221 n. 51, 226 n.  
     82, 258 n. 70, 269 n. 127, 1070 n. 249,  
     1173 n. 23, 1174 n. 25, 1175 n. 30, 1176 n.  
     39, 1177 n. 41, 1178 nn. 46–7, 1183 n. 75,  
     1184 nn. 81, 87, 1185 nn. 89, 91–2  
 Meyszner, August Edler von 1037, 1039 n. 117,  
     1042, 1043, 1043 n. 129, 1087  
 Mieth, Friedrich 479, 737, 748, 750, 752, 766,  
     769, 770, 801, 803, 805–7, 809–11  
 Mihail, Gheorghe 800, 800 n. 218, 801  
 Mihailović, Draža 1011 n. 9, 1013, 1016, 1018,  
     1020, 1021, 1031, 1035, 1036, 1038, 1038 n.  
     111, 1039, 1039 n. 118, 1040–5, 1046 n.  
     144, 1048, 1070, 1072, 1082, 1083, 1083 n.  
     300, 1084, 1086, 1087  
 Miklós Dálnoki, Béla 839, 876  
 Milch, Erhard 59, 59 n. 89, 60 n. 101

- Mitrović, Golub 1027 n. 58  
 Model, Walter 73, 87, 185 n. 27, 221, 287,  
   327, 439, 498, 544, 624, 676, 861, 1173,  
   1173 n. 17, 1183  
 Molotov, Vyacheslav Mikhailovich 44 n. 2,  
   838, 969  
 Moltke, Count Helmuth von 229, 317, 666,  
   1219  
 Montgomery, Sir Bernard Law 1004, 1101,  
   1107, 1112, 1137, 1145, 1145 n. 214, 1181  
 Morgan, William D. 1161  
 Müller, Friedrich-Wilhelm 1048  
 Müller, Ludwig 808 n. 242  
 Müller, Vincenz 550  
 Müller-Hillebrand, Burkart 14 nn. 34, 40, 17 n.  
   51, 21 n. 76, 40 n. 156, 154 n. 43, 380 n.  
   180, 1204 n. 70  
 Munisif, Mohammed al 1103  
 Munteanu (Colonel) 751 n. 77  
 Mussolini, Benito 46, 50 n. 31, 51, 51 n. 41,  
   53, 54, 55 n. 72, 56, 59, 60, 60 nn. 98–9,  
   140, 215, 217, 227, 855, 856 n. 38, 971,  
   975, 1017, 1021, 1021 n. 36, 1022 n. 40,  
   1023, 1040, 1040 n. 121, 1081, 1101, 1102,  
   1102 n. 21, 1103, 1103 nn. 24, 31, 1108–10,  
   1110 n. 69, 1115, 1115 n. 89, 1116, 1117,  
   1117 n. 97, 1118, 1118 n. 110, 1125, 1135,  
   1156, 1159, 1159 n. 272
- Nádas, Lajos 861  
 Náday, István 875  
 Nagel, Walter 1160 (Diagram)  
 Nagy, Vilmos 14 n. 37, 52 n. 51, 857 n. 41,  
   859 n. 50  
 Napoleon I 253  
 Natzmer, Oldwig von 379, 380, 380 n.  
   178, 653  
 Nedić, Milan 1012, 1012 n. 13, 1035–7, 1039,  
   1040, 1041 n. 123, 1042, 1043, 1043 n.  
   132, 1044–6, 1073, 1079 n. 290, 1080 n.  
   297, 1087  
 Nehring, Walther 141, 359 n. 77, 360 n. 85,  
   691, 692, 695, 696  
 Neidhardt von Gneisenau, Count August 445,  
   707 n. 146, 708 n. 151  
 Neindorff, Egon von 423, 425  
 Németh, Dezső 896  
 Neubacher, Hermann 1040, 1041, 1041 n.  
   123, 1042, 1042 n. 128, 1043, 1044,  
   1044 nn. 135–6, 1045, 1045 n. 138,  
   1046, 1078  
 Neuhausen, Franz 1037, 1042  
 Ney, Károly 877, 906, 906 n. 215, 914,  
   948 n. 346  
 Niculescu-Buzăstă, Grigore 774, 777  
 Niepold, Gerd 102 n. 82, 498 n. 51, 505,  
   505 n. 72, 514 n. 112, 515 n. 118, 523, 527,  
   530 n. 26, 533 n. 30, 535 nn. 37, 39, 540 nn.  
   59–60, 546 n. 82, 551, 587 nn. 199, 201,
- 588 n. 204, 589 n. 206, 593 nn. 231,  
   233–4, 595 nn. 239–40, 596 nn. 245, 247,  
   598 n. 254, 638 n. 72, 662 n. 159,  
   853 n. 26  
 Nietzsche, Friedrich 1190  
 Nikolayev, Aleksandr 126, 463, 466, 468,  
   473–5, 477  
 Novikov, Nikolai V. 772 n. 151
- Oshima, Hiroshi 54 n. 60, 55, 496 n. 45  
 Österman (General) 982 n. 114, 993  
 Ott, Eugen 88, 1160 (Diagram)
- Paasikivi, Juho Kusti 969 n. 45, 978, 978 n. 93,  
   980, 987 n. 140  
 Paasonen, Aladar 964, 994 n. 186  
 Papandreu, Georgios 1094  
 Patton, George S. 203, 1112, 1114  
 Paulus, Friedrich 514, 1202 n. 59  
 Pavelić, Ante 1010, 1011, 1013, 1015, 1022,  
   1023 n. 41, 1025, 1027, 1060, 1071, 1072,  
   1076, 1081, 1082, 1085, 1088  
 Pećanac, Kosta 1013, 1036, 1082, 1083  
 Peiper, Joachim 'Jochen' 124, 124 n. 108,  
   125 n. 113, 953  
 Pemsel, Max 1161 n. 275  
 Peter the Great 253  
 Petrov, Ivan Yefimovich 451, 568 n. 170, 709,  
   727, 863  
 Pfeffer-Wildenbruch, Karl 892, 892 n. 167,  
   893, 894, 896, 896 n. 182, 897, 900–2, 911,  
   918, 919, 919 n. 259, 920, 921, 922 n. 263,  
   923  
 Pfeiffer, Hellmuth 1149, 1150  
 Philipp, Ernst 139 n. 196, 297 n. 31, 374 n.  
   152, 382 nn. 195, 197, 392 n. 244, 443 n.  
   509, 444 n. 518, 472, 476 n. 112, 486 nn.  
   156, 159, 496 nn. 46, 48, 498 n. 51, 586 n.  
   196, 589 n. 207, 613 n. 55, 676 n. 3, 742 n.  
   51, 770 n. 142, 828 n. 324, 829 n. 326,  
   842 n. 375, 909  
 Phleps, Arthur 818, 819 n. 284, 828, 1030,  
   1030 n. 80, 1032, 1033, 1079 n. 290  
 Piazzoni, Alessandro 1020  
 Piłsudski, Józef 584, 600  
 Pirzio-Biroli, Alessandro 1016, 1020, 1020 n.  
   35, 1074, 1074 n. 262  
 Pleiger, Paul 65  
 Plemić, Bozo 1027  
 Pliyev, Issa 841, 870, 870 n. 99, 871–3, 883,  
   886, 889, 927, 953  
 Pohl, Max Ritter von 1160 (Diagram)  
 Pokrovsky, Aleksandr Petrovich 325, 326  
 Polenov, Vitali Sergeyevich 336  
 Popov, Markian Mikhailovich 176  
 Porsche, Ferdinand 161  
 Postel, Georg 808 n. 242  
 Potopeanu, Gheorghe 476, 476 n. 115  
 Procopé, Hjalmar 966, 968 n. 38

- Quisling, Vidkun 1001, 1001 n. 224, 1003, 1007, 1080 n. 297
- Rabe von Pappenheim, Friedrich Carl 853
- Racoviță, Mihai 736, 736 n. 26
- Radzievsky, Aleksei Ivanovich 581 n. 177, 583, 584
- Rahn, Rudolf 232 n. 15, 237, 239 n. 50, 1123
- Rainer, Friedrich 1125 n. 134
- Ramanichev, Nikolai M. 83 n. 2, 108 n. 17, 110 n. 34, 115 nn. 59, 62, 116 n. 64, 119 n. 77, 131 n. 149, 133 n. 158, 150 n. 13, 153 n. 33, 163 n. 65, 168 n. 82, 184 nn. 23, 26, 188 n. 51, 190 n. 70, 191 nn. 70–1, 197 n. 90, 203, 204 nn. 137, 140, 326 n. 156
- Ramsay, Henrik 674, 966, 968, 968 nn. 38, 40, 969, 970, 975, 981
- Raus, Erhard 369, 414, 415, 421, 425, 587, 689, 689 n. 60, 690 n. 62, 707, 708, 708 n. 152, 709–11, 713, 713 n. 168
- Rediess, Friedrich Wilhelm 1004
- Reinhardt, Georg-Hans 307, 313, 314, 317, 506 n. 75, 516, 517, 517 n. 122, 520, 532, 536–9, 539 n. 57, 561, 561 n. 151, 587, 594 n. 237, 673
- Reinhardt, Hellmuth 742
- Reményi-Schneller, Lajos 857
- Rendulic, Lothar 162 n. 60, 176 n. 18, 658, 950, 996 n. 196, 998 n. 206, 1000, 1000 n. 223, 1024, 1024 n. 47, 1025, 1026, 1027 n. 58, 1028, 1028 n. 65, 1030–2, 1082
- Renthe-Fink, Cecil von 237
- Ribbentrop, Joachim von 231, 968, 1017
- Ribbentrop, Rudolf von 124 n. 107, 124 n. 109, 125 n. 114, 126 n. 118
- Richthofen, Baron Wolfram von 19 n. 64, 68 nn. 33–4, 74 n. 80, 1023 n. 44, 1112, 1129, 1191
- Riedweg, Franz 238, 238 n. 45
- Rintelen, Enno von 53, 1110, 1110 n. 69, 1111
- Ritter, Karl 994 n. 180
- Roatta, Mario 1014, 1016, 1017, 1023 n. 41, 1024, 1031, 1122 n. 118
- Robotti, Mario 1017, 1018, 1020 n. 35, 1022, 1022 n. 40
- Roddewig, August 407 n. 331
- Roethe, Gustav 1208
- Rokossovsky, Konstantin Konstantinovich 94, 104 n. 1, 108, 109 n. 22, 110, 110 nn. 30, 34, 187, 188 n. 47, 296, 329, 330, 330 n. 181, 501 n. 59, 505, 511, 532, 533 n. 31, 541, 541 n. 64, 542, 542 n. 66, 564, 565, 568 n. 172, 583, 584, 597, 601, 679, 680, 694, 694 n. 77, 698, 699, 709, 1172
- Rommel, Erwin 28 n. 106, 59, 59 n. 93, 443, 1100, 1101, 1101 n. 9, 1104, 1104 n. 39, 1105, 1105 n. 47, 1106, 1106 nn. 47–51, 1107, 1107 nn. 52, 54–5, 1116, 1116 n. 94, 1118, 1118 n. 106, 1119, 1135, 1135 n. 201, 1137, 1183, 1183 n. 77, 1184, 1191 n. 142, 1193
- Roncaglia, Ercole 1020
- Roosevelt, Franklin D. 53 n. 55, 233 n. 19, 976, 1101, 1102, 1117 n. 101, 1123, 1191, 1196 n. 21
- Rosen, Baron Richard von 102 n. 71
- Rosenberg, Alfred 20 n. 70, 231, 231 n. 7
- Rosi, Ezio 1024 n. 48
- Rost, Hans-Günther von 946
- Rotmistrov, Pavel Alekseyevich 114, 119 n. 77, 120, 120 nn. 82–3, 121, 121 n. 88, 122, 122 nn. 95, 99, 123, 123 n. 105, 124, 126 n. 122, 127 n. 128, 128, 130, 130 n. 141, 131, 131 nn. 148, 150, 132, 133, 133 n. 160, 134, 135, 135 nn. 171–2, 136, 136 n. 183, 137, 138, 146, 162, 184, 184 n. 22, 191, 191 n. 73, 198, 412 n. 359, 508 n. 92, 547, 595, 596
- Röttiger, Hans 463, 1159, 1162
- Rozin, Gheorghe 780, 782, 783
- Rudel, Hans-Ulrich 163, 163 n. 66, 633
- Ruge, Friedrich 626 n. 21, 668 nn. 189, 192, 195
- Rundstedt, Gerd von 59 n. 92, 224, 1184, 1184 nn. 82–3
- Runkel (Colonel) 1160 (Diagram)
- Rusev, Rusi 815
- Ruszkay, Jenő 856
- Ryti, Risto Heikki 964, 966, 967 n. 37, 969, 969 n. 45, 970 n. 47, 971, 971 n. 54, 974, 977 n. 90, 979 n. 96, 980, 986, 987, 987 n. 140, 988–90, 991 n. 161
- Sănătescu, Constantin 736 n. 26, 774, 774 n. 157, 777, 799, 800, 820
- Salomon, Ernst von 613 n. 55, 1209, 1209 n. 105
- Sauberzweig, Karl-Gustav 1030
- Saukel, Fritz 19 n. 64, 20, 20 n. 70, 1125 n. 134
- Saucken, Dietrich von 547 n. 85, 585
- Schacht, Hjalmar 220, 220 n. 47
- Schall (Major) 285 n. 49
- Scheidemann, Philipp 212 n. 10
- Schellenberg, Walter 53 n. 55, 59 n. 88, 855, 855 n. 30, 994 n. 180
- Schenkendorf, Max von 1206
- Scherff, Walter 76 n. 90, 975 n. 73
- Schirach, Baldur von 951
- Schlemm, Alfred 1149
- Schliffen, Count Alfred von 99, 119, 187, 494, 496, 500, 518, 593, 597, 597 n. 252, 1216, 1219
- Schmidhuber, Gerhard 900
- Schmidt-Hartung, Otto 1160 (Diagram)
- Schmundt, Rudolf 8 n. 10, 35 n. 132, 76 n. 90, 221 n. 52, 224, 224 n. 64, 225, 225 n. 73, 434, 493, 1109 n. 60, 1173 nn. 16, 21, 1174, 1175 n. 30
- Schneckenburger, Willi 1048, 1048 n. 154, 1049 n. 157

- Schneider, Erich 93 n. 30, 109 n. 24, 256 n. 60, 630 n. 39, 851, 904 n. 207  
 Schnurre, Karl 982  
 Scholl, Erwin 8 n. 9  
 Schönfeld, Carl August von 425, 717 nn. 182, 185–6, 718 n. 188  
 Schörner, Ferdinand 224, 225, 225 n. 71, 443, 467, 467 n. 92, 468, 473, 473 n. 101, 480, 481, 483, 485, 486, 631, 633, 636–8, 638 n. 78, 641, 654–8, 662, 662 n. 160, 663, 671, 730, 731, 731 n. 8, 732, 733, 733 n. 16, 735 n. 24, 771, 989, 989 n. 151, 1173, 1173 n. 17  
 Schramm, Percy Ernst 38 n. 146, 39 n. 148, 227, 227 n. 88, 490, 490 nn. 6, 8, 515 n. 117, 519, 1192 n. 150, 1195 n. 12, 1198 n. 31  
 Schrepfner, Hans 421  
 Schulz, Friedrich 711 n. 159, 1053  
 Schulze (Colonel) 402–3  
 Schweinitz, Victor von 1161  
 Schwerin von Krosigk, Count Johann Ludwig (Lutz) 672 n. 216  
 Seidemann, Hans 93, 105  
 Senger und Etterlin, Fridolin von 704 n. 132, 1113, 1113 n. 83, 1114 n. 86, 1145  
 Seydlitz-Kurzbach, Walther von 223  
 Shaposhnikov, Boris Mikhailovich 583  
 Shcherbakov, Aleksandr Sergeyevich 324  
 Shtemenko, Sergei Matveyevich 72 n. 65, 75 n. 82, 205, 324, 885, 903 n. 202, 923  
 Siilasvuo (Lieutenant-General) 997  
 Sima, Horia 52, 52 n. 53, 1189 n. 124  
 Sixt, Friedrich 666, 670 n. 203  
 Skorzeny, Otto 875, 876, 952  
 Skripkin (Captain) 126  
 Smend, Günther 218 n. 38  
 Sodenstern, Georg von 37, 59 n. 95  
 Sokolov, Boris V. 15 n. 45, 44 n. 3, 57 nn. 81–2, 75 nn. 83–4, 100 n. 70, 150 n. 14, 152 n. 23, 153 n. 31, 154 nn. 39–40, 166 n. 77, 176, 186 n. 38, 187 n. 43, 197 n. 91, 200, 200 nn. 104, 106, 201, 201 n. 114, 202 n. 126, 204, 204 nn. 138, 140, 142, 205, 205 n. 149, 302 n. 54, 325, 325 n. 147, 326, 590 n. 214  
 Sokolovsky, Vasily Danilovich 176, 325, 325 n. 147, 326  
 Spalcke, Karl 774  
 Speer, Albert 8 n. 10, 11 n. 27, 18, 19, 19 nn. 63, 67, 22, 22 n. 82, 24, 24 n. 88, 59 n. 89, 65, 68 n. 38, 76 n. 90, 158, 216, 216 n. 21, 225 nn. 76, 78, 238, 266 n. 110, 267 n. 114, 355, 490, 490 n. 4, 492, 492 n. 20, 672, 672 n. 218, 674 n. 226, 984 n. 121, 1125 n. 134, 1174, 1174 n. 28, 1180, 1180 n. 61, 1182, 1182 nn. 67–8, 71, 1183 n. 74, 1191 n. 140, 1197 n. 22, 1203 n. 63, 1205 nn. 72, 74, 1211 n. 117, 1216, 1218, 1225 n. 1  
 Speidel, Hans H. 59 n. 92, 405, 405 n. 319  
 Stahel, Rainer Joseph 560, 561, 782, 783, 783 n. 189, 798  
 Stahmer, Heinrich Georg 672 n. 216  
 Stanisić, Bajo 1083  
 Starck (Lieutenant-Colonel) 616, n. 69  
 Staudegger, Franz 116, 117  
 Stauffenberg, Count Claus Schenk von 8 n. 8, 69 n. 40, 229, 562, 1106 n. 47, 1117 n. 98  
 Steengracht van Moyland, Baron Gustav Adolf 1027 n. 61  
 Šteflea, Ilie 461, 740, 748, 751, 755, 758, 759, 766, 800, 801  
 Steiner, Felix 671 n. 213  
 Steininger (Lieutenant-Colonel) 48 n. 18  
 Stelzer, Hannes (Hans) 774, 775, 777  
 Stemmermann, Wilhelm 398, 402, 403, 405–6  
 Stettner, Walter, Ritter von Grabenhofen 1050, 1050 n. 165  
 Steiff, Hellmuth 219  
 Stirbey, Barbu 772  
 Strachwitz, Count Hyazinth 192, 588, 632  
 Strachwitz, Baron Mauritz von 314  
 Student, Kurt 1117, 1120  
 Sun Tzu 489, 489 n. 1  
 Szálasi, Ferenc 52, 838, 839, 857, 875, 876, 878–80, 893, 905, 906 n. 215, 949, 1189 n. 122  
 Szokoll, Carl 951, 952, 952 n. 357  
 Szombathelyi, Ferenc 52, 589, 853, 856, 861  
 Sztójay, Döme 856, 858, 860, 874  
 Szügyi, Zoltán 878  
 Talvela, Paavo 965, 965 n. 26, 993, 994 n. 180  
 Tanner, Väinö 964, 964 n. 20, 966  
 Tedder, Sir Arthur William 1112  
 Teleki, Pál 875, 892 n. 168, 893 n. 173  
 Teme, A. 59 n. 91  
 Teodorescu, Iosif 779, 780, 783  
 Terboven, Josef 1000, 1001, 1003, 1004  
 Teschner, Georg 798  
 Thiele, August 588  
 Thoma, András 955, 955 n. 365  
 Thomale, Wolfgang 76 n. 90, 659  
 Thomas, Georg 26  
 Tillessen, Werner 774  
 Timoshenko, Semyon Konstantinovich 606 n. 15, 762, 885, 886, 886 n. 153, 889, 916, 931 n. 304  
 Tippelskirch, Kurt von 202 n. 128, 294, 298 n. 36, 299, 304 n. 71, 315 n. 91, 328 n. 169, 331 n. 186, 333 nn. 197, 199, 336 n. 215, 374 n. 152, 389 n. 224, 413 n. 364, 416 n. 379, 509, 509 n. 96, 540, 541, 559 n. 137, 586 n. 196, 613 n. 55, 632, 632 n. 50, 653 n. 96, 670 nn. 202, 204

- Tito, Josip Broz 409, 775, 1009 n. 3, 1010 n. 5, 1012, 1014, 1017, 1018, 1018 n. 32, 1019–21, 1031, 1032, 1034, 1043, 1062 n. 211, 1065, 1073, 1073 n. 260, 1074, 1077, 1079, 1085, 1086, 1095, 1098, 1099, 1188
- Todt, Fritz 58, 59 n. 88, 432, 1136, 1154 n. 258, 1155
- Tolbukhin, Fedor Ivanovich 454–6, 477, 483, 485, 486, 743, 763, 766, 773, 870, 886–9, 891, 892, 901, 906–8, 915, 916, 918, 922, 928, 930, 931, 940, 940 n. 309, 941–6, 947 n. 341, 949–53, 1047, 1048, 1093, 1095
- Tolsdorff, Theodor 560, 561
- Tomescu (Colonel) 751 n. 77
- Torgalo (First Lieutenant) 130 n. 145
- Toussaint, Rudolf 1125 n. 134, 1136
- Tresckow, Henning von 8, 8 n. 10, 69 n. 40, 334, 334 n. 202, 504, 504 n. 63, 562, 562 n. 154, 1187
- Trifunović, Miroslav 1044
- Trotha, Ivo Thilo von 738, 739
- Truscott, Lucian K. 1149, 1156, 1158
- Tsygankov, P. 501 n. 59, 655 n. 116, 671 n. 208
- Turner, Harald 1012 n. 11, 1037, 1043
- Ullrich, Karl 128 n. 130, 946
- Uschdraweit (Landrat von Angerapp) 618 n. 76
- Vasilevsky, Aleksandr Mikhailovich 120 n. 80, 133, 523, 532, 568 n. 173, 584 n. 189, 597
- Vatutin, Nikolai Fedorovich 95, 100, 115–17, 119, 122, 132, 134, 197, 359, 365, 373, 381, 387, 389, 399–401, 426, 427
- Veesenmayer, Edmund 838, 855, 855 n. 34, 856, 875, 876
- Veress, Lajos Dálnoki 839, 866, 867 nn. 83, 87, 876, 892 n. 164, 907 n. 221, 912, 915 n. 246, 916 n. 248
- Victor Emmanuel III 1023, 1116, 1122
- Vietinghoff-Scheel, Heinrich von 659, 1131, 1133, 1148, 1150, 1152, 1156, 1158, 1161, 1162, 1162 n. 277, 1163
- Vlasov, Andrei Andreyevich 21, 21 n. 73
- Vormann, Nikolaus von 388, 388 nn. 215, 221, 390, 390 n. 232, 393, 395, 395 n. 263, 411 n. 356, 412, 412 n. 361, 427, 542
- Vörös, János 830, 831, 839, 859, 859 n. 51, 865 n. 78, 866, 868
- Wächter, Otto Gustav 1160 (Diagram)
- Wagener, Carl 86, 86 n. 10, 88, 338, 339 n. 3, 351 n. 36, 354, 354 n. 50, 392, 392 n. 245, 433 n. 457, 436 nn. 468, 472
- Wagner, Eduard 22, 25, 219
- Wagner, Richard 1205
- Wallenberg, Raoul 881, 900
- Warlimont, Walter 35 n. 132, 54 n. 61, 67 n. 28, 79 n. 110, 139, 139 n. 198, 154 n. 44, 369 n. 122, 493 n. 24, 1003 n. 234, 1017, 1104, 1105, 1105 n. 46, 1111 n. 73, 1114 n. 85, 1116 n. 94, 1118 n. 108, 1135 n. 198, 1137 n. 208, 1173 n. 23, 1186
- Weichold, Eberhard 112 n. 82, 1104
- Weichs an der Glon, Baron Maximilian von und zu 855, 1024, 1042, 1046, 1082, 1093
- Weiss, Walter 296, 532
- Weizsäcker, Baron Ernst von 37, 37 n. 142, 42 n. 171, 43, 43 n. 182, 50 n. 31, 54 n. 60, 58, 58 nn. 86–7, 216 n. 23, 240 n. 52, 967 n. 38, 1076 n. 277, 1117 n. 104, 1148, 1148 n. 223, 1185 n. 94, 1202, 1202 n. 58
- Wellington, Arthur Wellesley, Duke of 135, 1131
- Wenck, Walter 631, 631 n. 42, 732–4, 738, 761, 803, 831, 863, 905, 911
- Wenneker, Paul 55 n. 71
- Wenner, Eugen 1161
- Werth, Alexander 150, 408 n. 335, 619 n. 82
- Werth, Heinrich 52 n. 51, 102 n. 75, 150 nn. 8, 11
- Wetzel, Wilhelm 447
- Wilson, Woodrow 211
- Winkelmann, Otto 880, 893
- Withöft, Joachim 1119
- Witting, Rolf 966, 966 n. 30
- Wittmann, August 113 n. 51, 117 n. 66, 124 n. 108, 962 nn. 6, 11
- Wöhler, Otto 98, 196, 480, 481, 727, 730–2, 737, 738, 740–2, 747, 748, 750–2, 754, 757, 758, 761–4, 764 n. 116, 765, 766, 769, 770, 803, 834, 837, 839–44, 870, 873, 877, 895, 915, 926, 927, 929, 940, 945–8
- Wolff, Karl 1125 n. 134, 1136, 1161
- Yeremenko, Andrei Ivanovich 313, 484
- Zakharov, Georgii Fedorovich 532, 551, 870 n. 99, 882 n. 138, 896 n. 181, 913 n. 240, 917 n. 251, 927 n. 287, 928 nn. 291, 294, 931 n. 301, 303, 933, 937, 942 n. 321, 943 n. 322, 945 n. 337, 951 n. 356
- Zangen, Gustav-Adolf von 1154
- Zeitzler, Kurt 10 n. 25, 21 n. 73, 35, 38, 40 n. 157, 60, 60 n. 102, 64, 64 nn. 12, 14–15, 65 n. 22, 67 n. 28, 68, 68 n. 30, 69, 70 n. 53, 71, 71 n. 56–8, 72 n. 65, 75, 75 nn. 85, 88, 76, 76 n. 89–93, 78 n. 101, 79 n. 109, 142, 148, 161 n. 57, 218, 218 n. 38, 219 n. 39, 227, 266, 282, 285
- Zellner, Emil 823
- Zervas, Napoleon 1094
- Zetterling, Niklas 84, 87 n. 18, 91 nn. 22, 24, 93 nn. 26, 28, 33, 95 n. 45, 97 n. 56, 107 n. 12, 108 n. 20, 110 nn. 30–1, 113 n. 73, 114 nn. 57–8, 115 n. 59, 122 n. 98, 136 n. 175, 141 n. 213, 147 n. 4, 150 n. 15, 153 n.

35, 156, 158 nn. 54, 56, 161 n. 58, 164 n. 68, 168 n. 81, 200 nn. 105, 108, 285, 287, 290, 297, 331, 341, 354, 355, 355 nn. 53, 55–7, 372, 382, 416, 431, 434, 443, 446, 447 n. 2, 461, 462, 478, 510, 519, 520 n. 143, 524 n. 6, 536, 537, 557–60, 562, 566, 585, 596 n. 248, 598, 598 n. 259, 624, 624 n. 15, 625 n. 17, 631, 669, 669 n. 198, 732 n. 10, 1167, 1173, 1174, 1174 n. 28, 1175, 1178, 1179, 1183, 1184 nn. 80–1, 1204, 1204 n. 70

Zhadov, Aleksei Semenovich 128, 128 n. 132

Zhukov, Georgii Konstantinovich 64 n. 11, 72 n. 65, 75, 75 nn. 81–2, 100, 102, 102 n. 72, 105, 105 n. 5, 116, 188, 188 n. 48, 320, 343, 366 n. 102, 390, 399, 400, 400 n. 288, 401, 412, 412 n. 360, 426 n. 421, 429, 430, 437, 438, 438 nn. 483–4, 439, 441, 445, 449, 453, 505, 520, 523, 532, 556, 556 n. 123, 583, 583 n. 185, 584, 584 n. 187, 597, 601, 606, 606 nn. 15–16, 607, 619, 957, 1216

Zorn, Hans 88 (Diagram)