R G B WH GR BL Grey Scale #13 C M Y K

A 1 2 3 4 5 6 M 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 B 17 18 19

Colour Chart #13

Blue Cyan Green Yellow Red Magenta White 3/Color Black

Inches Centimetres

THE RUSSIAN CAMPAIGNS OF 1944–45

BY W. E. D. ALLEN AND PAUL MURATOFF

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BY

W. E. D. ALLEN AND
PAUL MURATOFF

WITH 26 MAPS

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CHAPTER I

THE RUSSIAN FRONT AT THE END OF 1943

At the end of 1943 the German *Ober-Kommando* was still dominated by Hitler's calculations and plans. It is difficult to gauge what the *Führer* was really thinking at that moment about the perspectives of the military situation for the year 1944. Any surmise would, however, be only of slight interest; it is more important to assess the view accepted by him and the small group of his confidential collaborators, since this official view determined the operational plans of the *Ober-Kommando.*

The idea which was then put forward—and was, as usual, developed by official propaganda—was that the year 1944 must be the year of defence of *Festung Europa.* Since even the successful defence of a fortress cannot be represented as a "victory" (for at best it implies only escape from defeat) a "psychological victory" which should open the way to a peace constituting a "moral victory" was the most which was promised to the Germans. The futility of the Allied attacks from the East and the South—and perhaps from the North and West—their "enormous losses," their disappointment and exhaustion, their involuntary recognition of German military "superiority"—all these factors were expected to produce the desired effect. Further, to depress the morale of the populations of enemy countries wherever it might be technically possible, some "new" and "secret" weapons, destructive and spectacular, were in preparati n—to the ultimate prejudice of the re-establishment of the depleted strength of the *Luftwaffe.*

In such "camouflaged" form was explained the decision —imposed on the Nazi Government by the unfavourable course of the war—to pass finally and irrevocably to a war of defence. The significance of this fact is clear enough when it is recalled that during the years 1939–41 the Germans were carrying on the war in its ultra-offensive form usually known under the name of *Blitzkrieg.* In

consequence of the first Russian campaign and of the events of the following winter the German offensive effort of 1942 proved to be only on a reduced scale: it was still, however, powerful and dangerous and the offensive initiative remained in German hands until it was brought to nought by the bad strategy of the *Ober-Kommando* under the influence of Hitler's intuition. But in 1943 the possibilities which were still available in 1942 existed no more. Then a "Frederician theory" was invented which implied that Hitler, like Frederick II during the Seven Years' War, although fighting a defensive war against a powerful coalition, would be able to produce a series of victorious counter-blows aimed at enemy groups which were being concentrated for offensive action. In this "Frederician spirit" were conceived the attempts in Tunisia and at Salerno—and, on a far greater scale, the Kursk battle. The fate of these abortive counter-blows is well-known: the *Afrika Korps* was destroyed and Kesselring had to take a strictly defensive attitude on the Garigliano line, while in consequence of the Kursk battle the Germans not only lost their great "bastions" on the Eastern Front—such as Orel, Bryansk, Smolensk and Gomel—but they forfeited all the territories to the east of the Dnieper and proved to be unable to prevent the Russians from forcing the passage of this mighty river and capturing Kiev and Dniepropetrovsk. The last "Frederician" episode of 1943 was Manstein's attacks in the direction of Kiev which, if aimed at first at the reconquest of the Dnieper line, gradually degenerated into attempts to reduce the Russian bridgehead at Kiev with the object of hampering the liberty of deployment of Vatutin's group in the anticipated Russian offensive.

Manstein's tank force proved inadequate to the original ambitious task of the reconquest of the Kiev bridgehead; and it was very significant that no simultaneous attempts were made on other Russian bridgeheads—on Malinovsky's at Dniepropetrovsk or on Konev's between that town and Kiev. The reason seems to have been the same in both cases: by the end of 1943 the gradual deterioration of the German Army had gone so far that no serious attempt at a counter-offensive on a grand scale having

not only tactical but also strategic importance could be made with any chance of success. The losses suffered in the Kursk battle and in the fighting retreat which followed it proved to be irretrievable. Apart from losses in material —which were grave but, at worst, replaceable—great numbers of fighting men were destroyed. In this respect the German Army suffered a blow which was even graver in respect of quality than of quantity. The constitution of the German Army, after the disastrous campaigns in Tunisia and particularly in Russia, became such that instead of any "Frederician manœuvres" it had to content itself with defensive action accompanied by only local and tactical counter-attacks.

New conscriptions—extended during the winter of 1943–44 to new age groups—had to fill up losses in men. But the doubtful fitness of these complements and the short time available for their training made them useless for any active operations even of a limited and local character. These new troops were, generally speaking, in the *Landwehr* category; during 1944 they came to constitute between 40 per cent and 50 per cent of total strength and the Army therefore became half a "*Landwehr* Army," lacking the homogeneity which it had possessed in the period 1939–42. This heterogeneous character of the German Army was accentuated by the expedient to which the Nazis had to resort in their search for conscripts. The inhabitants of occupied territories—Czechs, Poles, Alsatians and others (and sometimes even Russian prisoners of war working under the Todt Organization) were forcibly embodied into auxiliary formations, and it was not long before numbers of these unfortunates found themselves in units in the front line. This rather desperate expedient did not make up for the loss of many "satellite" Divisions (Rumanian, Italian, Hungarian) suffered during 1943.

With this *levée en masse* proclaimed for 1944 it was perhaps possible to gather up the human material necessary for the reconstruction of some 300 Divisions; but these Divisions were only at a reduced strength of between 6,000 and 10,000 men. The number of Divisions suitable for fighting other than strictly passive defence was clearly

limited. There were obvious difficulties in the way of the reconstruction of tank units. Despite some development of the S.S. Panzer units, we find during the winter campaign in Russia only three Tank Armies instead of the former four, while the fifth, in the West, appeared in action only after the landings in Normandy. Having met with some difficulty in the formation of 30 or 35 full strength Panzer Divisions, the enemy developed a unit which was regarded as more economical in material requirements—the Panzer Grenadier Divisions. The Panzer Grenadier Division was an intermediate formation between the old Panzer and the old motorized Divisions, and consisted of a tank regiment and two regiments of mobile infantry. Divisions of this type were used mostly on the Italian and (later) on the Western fronts. This was only one example of the complicated "dosage" with the aid of which the enemy tried to improve the fighting strength of his too numerous units. Into the Armies and Groups, side by side with the "passive" or "defensive" Divisions, a certain number of formations were introduced which might appear capable of an active defence: Panzer Grenadiers, ex-Parachutists and former ground personnel of the *Luftwaffe*—although these latter had had only a modest experience of fighting conditions. SS units appeared on the fronts in increasing numbers and were used as shock troops. There were, further, infantry Divisions (mostly on the Northern and Central zones of the Russian front) which had not suffered unduly in 1943 and which had retained a greater degree of cohesion. Their numbers and effectiveness were, however, reduced by "dosage" since battalions and companies were taken from them to strengthen the cadres of freshly formed "passive" Divisions. Many regiments of the German Army thus lost their traditional inner cohesion and old soldiers found themselves among inadequate conscripts and new and hastily trained officers.

Even with all these unavoidable defects, the planned reconstruction of many units—particularly of those considered "active"—could not proceed "according to plan" since heavy fighting had already started again on the Russian front in December 1943, and continued late into

the spring. During this fighting, as will be seen, the Germans again suffered very considerable losses. Not only were many Divisions written off, but whole Armies were destroyed as operational units. Losses in Italy and Normandy followed and, finally, the disastrous losses in the battles for France and Western Russia. The last and convulsive stage of the *levée en masse* was proclaimed by the Nazi Government. But even before this last stage came, even before the Allied summer campaigns, the freshly conscripted men, instead of forming new units, were used as complements for units which had suffered badly during the winter campaign on the Russian front. It may be assumed that there was not a single moment in 1944 when the enemy disposed of more than 240 or 250 Divisions, of which only 120 or 130 could be considered as fit for active defensive fighting. The Germans planned to organize nineteen Armies and six Tank Armies for the campaigns of 1944. Of these the 13th Army never existed, and the 20th was a group of Divisions on the Arctic coast of Finland. It does not seem that at any moment there were more than fifteen Armies and three Tank Armies—with a rough total of three million fighting men—simultaneously ready for action.

Three million fighting men is a considerable figure even if half this number are men unfit for active operations and useless for active defence. But it is evident that the strength of defensive lines depends not on the strength of the army defending them but on the relation which exists between the strength of the defending force and the extent of the territory to be defended. The garrison of a fortress has any chance of success only if it is adequate to the length of the perimeter of the fortress. Was the German Army of 1944 adequate to the defence of *Festung Europa*? The answer to this question is given by the events of that year, which are known to everyone.

By the end of 1943 the German *Ober-Kommando* could have had few doubts on the subject of the coming Allied offensives from East, South and West. Even before the Teheran Conference—where, clearly enough, concerted Allied action was discussed and agreed—the Germans

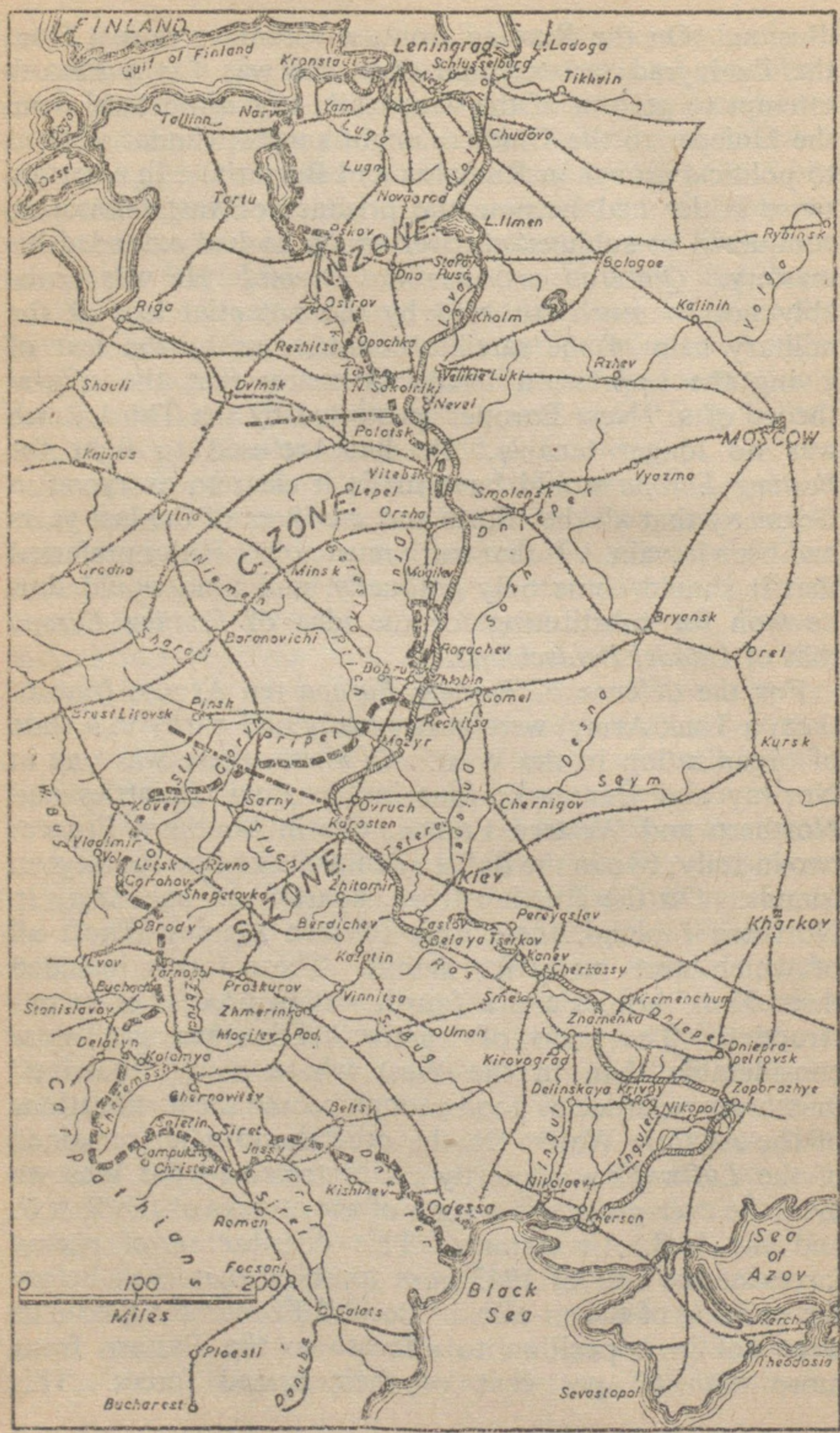
could not but be informed of full-scale preparations for an offensive in the West. Though the secret of pre-fabricated ports might be maintained, the enemy was certainly aware of the immense production in England and America of landing craft and the varied material suitable for a big overseas expedition. He must have known also of the great concentrations of British, American and Canadian troops in England—with which the U-boats had been unable effectively to interfere after their final defeat in the last months of 1943. Certainly preparations of such magnitude could not be interpreted as a "demonstration" and the Western Front became a real event long before its precise position and date could be known.

In such conditions it may be asked how it was that the *Ober-Kommando* made no attempt to bring to a better balance the relation between the available strength of their armed forces and the extension of territory which those forces had to defend. The western front of *Festung Europa* followed the coast from the North Cape to the Spanish frontier and along its whole extent it was everywhere subject to the initiative of Anglo-American sea-power. In the south, among the northern shores of the Mediterranean, the perimeter of *Festung Europa* covered Southern France, the greater part of Italy, all the Balkan Peninsula and the Aegean islands. In the east the Germans were still trying to maintain themselves on lines running along the Volkhov, the Lovat and the Dnieper. From the military point of view the intention to maintain these vastly extended fronts was sheer madness. But the decision lay with a man who was not mad: military considerations had only a secondary importance for Adolf Hitler. So long as the illusion of the defence of *Festung Europa* could be maintained the Germans might enjoy the illusion that the final collapse of their *Führer's* plans was not so near as they had begun to suspect after the surrender of Italy. In December 1943 the Italian situation could still be represented as a falling away of some "treacherous elements," while Mussolini— with the aid of German arms—might still re-establish his power. Voluntary retreat from Italy could not but destroy this particular

illusion. On the Russian front, a voluntary retreat from the Leningrad sector could open the way for a Finnish attempt to get out of the war, while any withdrawal from the Dnieper to the Dniester might suggest similar notions to political groups in Rumania and Bulgaria. In a certain sense Hitler had become the prisoner of vast territories, conquered or subjugated, over which he had extended his mastery. *Qui trop embrasse mal étreint!* He was probably not so much troubled by the potential loss of the military help of the satellite countries as by the fear of giving the impression inside Germany that the official theory of a "New Europe" protected by the Third Reich was no longer tenable. To have refused to fight for *Festung Europa* would have made it clear to everyone in Germany that all the efforts and sacrifices of the last years had been in vain. If that truth must come, Hitler preferred that it should come only gradually, and time would thus be won for substituting for the idea of *Festung Europa* that of *Citadel Deutschland.*

For the defence of *Festung Europa* ten Armies (one of them a Tank Army) were partly ready and partly in a state of organization in the West. Of these, there was one in Norway and Denmark; four in the Low Countries and Northern and Western France; one in Southern France; two in Italy; two in the Balkan Peninsula and on the Aegean islands. On the Russian front, apart from one Army in Northern Finland, there were thirteen Armies almost all of which were ready for action. These forces included three Tank Armies and a fourth was in process of reconstruction. The ratio of "active" Divisions was more considerable than in the West where many "passive" units were regarded as good enough behind the fortifications of the Atlantic Wall. On the other hand what remained of the *Luftwaffe* was mostly concentrated in the West to meet the ever-growing strength of the attacks of the R.A.F. and the U.S. Air Armies. This distribution of enemy forces at the end of 1943 goes to show that even before the opening of the so-called "Second Front" the Germans were not in a position to allocate to the Eastern front more than 60 per cent of their armed forces. This

MAP 1


FINLAND
Gulf of Finland
Leningrad
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Schlusselburg
Kronstadt
Tikhvin
Tallinn
Narva
Yam
Luga
Chudovo
Oesel
Tartu
Novgorod
L. Ilmen
Pskov
N. ZONE
Rybinsk
Staraya Russa
Dno
Cologoe
Riga
Ostrov
Kholm
Kalinin
Volga
Rezhitsa
Opochka
Rzhev
Shavli
Dvinsk
N. Sokolniki
Velikie Luki
Nevel
Polotsk
MOSCOW
Kaunas
Vitebsk
Vyazma
Lepel
Smolensk
Orsha
Vilna
C. ZONE
Dniepr
Grodno
Minsk
Mogilev
Niemen
Bryansk
Baranovichi
Rogachev
Orel
Bobruisk
Chechersk
Comel
Brest Litovsk
Pinsk
Rechitsa
Kursk
Desna
Mozyr
Pripet
Sejm
Kovel
Sarny
Ovruch
Chernigov
Korosten
Vladimir Vol.
Lutsk
Rovno
Gorohov
Shepetovka
Zhitomir
Kiev
Berdichev
Pereyaslav
Kharkov
Brody
Tarnopol
Belaya Tserkov
Kanev
Lvov
Kozatin
Cherkassy
Buchach
Proskurov
Vinnitsa
Smela
Kremenchug
Stanislavov
Zhmerinka
Znamenka
Dniepr
Uman
Delatyn
Mogilev Pod.
Kolomya
Kirovograd
Dniepro-petrovsk
Delinskaya
Krivoy Rog
Zaporozhye
Cernauti
Chernovitsy
Beltsy
Nikopol
Soleti
Siret
Jassy
Campulung
Christesti
Inguli
Inguleti
Nikolaev
Kishinev
Odessa
Roman
Prut
Dniester
Herson
Sea of Azov
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Miles
Black Sea
Galats
Kerch
Ploesti
Danube
Theodosia
Sevastopol
Bucharest

circumstance—so favourable to the Russians—was a direct consequence of Hitler's decision to defend all the vast territories regarded as being within *Festung Europa.*

Map No. 1. Following the summer and autumn campaigns of 1943 on the Russian front the German Armies there constituted three groups corresponding to the three zones into which the Russian theatre of operations was divided by natural conditions. In the Northern zone Field-Marshal Kühler commanded three Armies, and his area of operations extended from the approaches to Leningrad and Lake Ladoga to the sources of the Lovat and the neighbourhood of Novo-Sokolniki Junction. Further south, in the Central zone, four Armies, of which one was a Tank Army, occupied the territory between the fortified region of Vitebsk and the Pripet marshes. Field-Marshal von Busch was in command. The Southern zone, including the Crimea, was defended by six Armies (two of them Tank) under Field-Marshal Manstein. A certain number of satellite Divisions (Rumanian and Hungarian) were also employed in the Southern zone.

Different geographical and other conditions created different problems of defence in each of the three zones and made them operationally more or less independent. Lines of communication for the three zones were separate and distinct.

Northern zone: Leningrad–Pskov–Vilna.
Central zone: Orsha–Minsk–Brest-Litovsk.
Southern zone: Kazatin–Zhmerinka–Proskurov–Lvov, or
Kazatin–Shepetovka–Tarnopol–Lvov.

At the same time the Russian successes in the autumn of 1943 had made the north–south liaison running between the enemy groups behind the front line far less effective

MAP I

THE EASTERN FRONT IN DECEMBER, 1943, AND APRIL, 1944

Principal railways
Limits of Operational Zones
Front line by 15th December, 1943
Front line by 15th April, 1944

than it had been during the earlier campaigns in Russia. The principal north–south *rocade* (Leningrad–Dno–Novo-Sokolniki–Nevel–Vitebsk–Orsha–Zhlobin–Korosten) had been cut at three points: Nevel, to the south of Zhlobin, and to the north of Korosten. The line of communications between the Northern and Central zones nearest to the front now passed along the line Pskov–Polotsk and those between the Central and Southern zones ran over the line Minsk–Baranovichi–Luninets–Sarny–Rovno. Both these lines were of reduced capacity and in practice the liaison between the zones must have been maintained by roundabout routes further to the rear.

The officers commanding the three respective zones could hardly expect much support from their neighbours; in any case such help could not come with any rapidity. These limitations on communications were such as to prevent any concerted manœuvring on the part of the three groups of Armies and could not but impose on the commanders a strictly defensive attitude.

The defence of the front line occupied by the Germans in December 1943 was based on the strength of fortifications and on the natural conditions of climate and terrain. Where the fortifications seemed reliable and where natural conditions were particularly favourable a more or less passive defence offered good prospect of success. In this respect the Northern and Central zones had definite advantages over the Southern zone.

In the Northern zone the enemy lines covering "the siege of Leningrad" had been in a constant state of construction and improvement over a period of more than two years. The same could be said of the Volkhov front between its two "bastions"—Mga Junction in the north-east corner and Novgorod in the south. Marshy ground and extensive forests still further improved the defensive strength of the Volkhov front. To the south of Lake Ilmen in the region of Staraya Rusa swamps again presented great difficulties to the attack, and, in fact, this German "bastion" had twice resisted Russian assaults (in 1942 and 1943) and had finally been held in spite of a critical situation. Further to the south the line of the

Lovat also seemed favourable to the defence and a Russian offensive was unlikely in that sector where road communications were poor and local resources scarce. At the southern end of the Northern zone Novo-Sokolniki had been transformed into a real stronghold covering the approaches to the Latvian frontier.

At the northern end of the Central zone the Germans had lost their "bastion" of Nevel. Since then, they had turned their attention to the fortification of the Vitebsk "bastion" which became a strongly entrenched camp—well adapted to the terrain which is dotted with small lakes and covered with thick forest on the northern side of the Dvina. To the south the position was protected by the Dvina's marshy tributary, the Luchesa. Between Vitebsk and Orsha, which point was again organized as a solid "bastion," the fortified lines were among the strongest ever built by the Germans on Russian soil. They were known to the Germans as "the Fatherland Line," since they covered the gap between the Dvina and the Dnieper along which passed the natural route to the west. As for the valley of the middle Dnieper from Orsha to Rogachev and Zhlobin, its defence was provided by vast and impassable swamps and by a network of small rivers and streams. Even if the Russians succeeded in crossing the Dnieper they would find in front of them other difficult rivers such as the Berezina or the Drut, flowing through forests and swamps. The progress already made by Rokossovsky's troops had seemed, however, dangerous enough, and to secure "the gates of Polesia" a fortified triangle Bobruysk–Rogachev–Zhlobin had been prepared by the Germans.

Conditions in the Southern zone were quite different. In this zone the Germans had had neither the opportunity nor the time to organize the elaborate fortified lines and strongholds which existed further north. The Russians had succeeded in crossing the Dnieper at many points between Kiev and Dniepropetrovsk before the enemy had been able to create a system of fortifications defending the "Dnieper Line." Such defences as were thrown up were not to be compared with those of the "Fatherland Line" or of the Northern zone. Further ground conditions were

nowhere so favourable to the defence in the south as they were in the Northern and Central zones.

In the Krivoy Rog region in the extreme southern sector of the Southern zone the rather deep valleys of several rivers running north to south and the ravines known in this region as *balkas* might offer defensive positions. Another stretch of terrain adapted to the defence lay between Kremenchug and Cherkassy in the hills near Chigirin and along the marshy Tyasmin river. But between these two areas lay a gap—Znamenka–Kirovograd—offering good operational ground to a Russian offensive. The defence of the northern sector of the Southern zone seemed even more difficult. Here the Volynian tableland which gradually descends to the Dnieper is well adapted to the manœuvres of large armies, nor is it anywhere crossed by any natural defensive line which could offer a serious obstacle to an offensive directed from the region of Kiev towards the west.

These different conditions in respect to obstacles—natural and artificial—explain the distribution of enemy forces on the Eastern Front. The Northern zone did not require more than relatively passive defence, and consequently only two or three Panzer Divisions were left there; but their infantry support included some Divisions of quality and long fighting experience. Field-Marshal Kühler was aware that a Russian assault on his lines was highly probable during the winter months since frozen rivers and marshes could ease the task of the attackers. It seems that he expected a move on the Volkhov front aimed at the opening of railway communications with Leningrad rather than any wider and more general operation.

It seemed still more likely that the Russians would not allow the winter to pass without a serious offensive in the Central zone. The winter frosts might allow of a deep penetration through the swamps and forests of Polesia. Field-Marshal von Busch might definitely expect a Russian assault across the frozen lakes on Vitebsk and across the frozen swamps on Bobruysk. His armies got some reinforcements and he had six or seven Panzer Divisions

(part of them organized as a Tank Army) for eventual counter-attacks over the frozen ground.

Less definite perspectives seemed to prevail in the Southern zone. Fighting there had continued uninterruptedly; but in the Kiev sector the initiative belonged for the moment to the Germans while in the regions of Znamenka and Cherkassy Konev's offensive operations might prove to have only a local importance. With the winter conditions of the terrain stabilized it was natural to expect Russian crossings of the lower Dnieper and perhaps of the Sivash lagoons. But it was not possible for anyone to tell when the Dnieper or Sivash would become frozen, since winter in South-West Russia is usually very capricious. It might happen that a period of heavy frost would never come; but in any case the coldest weather was to be expected after mid-January.

In South-West Russia and particularly on the lower Dnieper when frost comes it is usually for a short period, and at any time it may be interrupted by a sudden thaw. Ground conditions in the winter months are appalling; mud is deep and the roads easily become impracticable. The Germans might well have some doubts about the possibility of a Russian offensive in the Krivoy Rog sector if the weather remained mild. Prospects were rather different in the region to the west of Kiev where the ground is sandy in places and where frost is more usual than round Krivoy Rog. On this sector, in the middle of November, Manstein had started a counter-offensive of considerable weight if only of local importance. He used seven Panzer Divisions supported by an equal number of infantry Divisions, and he had an initial success—recapturing Zhitomir, Korostyshev and Korosten. He seemed ready to continue his effort with the object of reducing the Russian bridgehead at Kiev so considerably as to hamper any winter offensive planned to take off from that base. Although Manstein's Panzers had suffered heavy losses, he was still in a position to reinforce his attack with other Panzer Divisions belonging to the Tank Army which had been organized for the active defence of the Znamenka–Kirovograd gap. Under Manstein's command fourteen

or fifteen Panzer Divisions had already been concentrated in the Southern zone—sufficient proof that the enemy considered the passive defence of the region as insufficient. At the same time the centre of gravity of the strategic situation was in this Southern zone. A big-scale Russian offensive directed across the Volynian tableland with a deep penetration towards Galicia and between the groups of armies concentrated in the Central and Southern zones might have appeared to the *Ober-Kommando* as a particularly dangerous contingency in the opening weeks of 1944.

CHAPTER II

THE THIRD RUSSIAN WINTER CAMPAIGN

BEGINNING OF DECEMBER 1943 TO MID-APRIL 1944

Map No. 1. The Russian Supreme Command could certainly not plan the third winter campaign as the decisive campaign of the war. There were two considerations against it. The decisive campaign of the present war needed the full co-operation of the Allied forces. Such co-operation, however, could not be expected before the spring of 1944. By the end of 1943 there was full co-operation on the sea (protection of valuable war supplies to Russia) and very effective co-operation in the air; but on land, the co-operation of Russia's Allies was still on a limited scale, slowly developing in the remote peninsular (Italian) theatre. More important land operations for the next summer could be planned only at the inter-Allied conferences at Moscow and Teheran.

On the other hand, the winter period is hardly favourable for any general offensive operations on the East European theatre, although winter conditions may give some local and limited advantages to the attacking force. Communications and supply are all-important in any general offensive, and winter conditions cannot but enormously

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increase the difficulties of the columns advancing across the undeveloped road systems of East European countries.

It must also be kept in view that even those winter conditions which had been favourable for the Russian counter-offensive of 1941–42 and 1942–43, might be absent in 1943–44. In 1941–42 severe frost undermined enemy morale and caused great losses in enemy men and material. In 1942–43 the Russians were able to force the icebound rivers—the Don, Donets, Sal and many others. In 1943–44 the operations, however, moved westwards; nowhere now, except in the region of the Volkhov, could the same winter conditions be expected. Winter at Vitebsk, for instance, may be more mild than winter at Kharkov; the lower Dnieper and the Southern Bug become frozen at varying dates and for varying periods; the south-western winter makes any operational planning subject to sudden revision.

Generally speaking, the objects of the third winter campaign were more or less clear. The German Armies were to be thrown back beyond the line which the Russian H.Q. determined as the line of strategic deployment before the decisive summer campaign of 1944. The Russian Armies on their advance to this line must clear the enemy out of Russian territory, particularly those parts of it which are economically or politically important. The latter considerations evidently indicated the Leningrad region (and its communications with Central Russia) in the north; the mining region (manganese at Nikopol, iron at Krivoy Rog), the ports of Odessa and Nikolaev and the Crimea, in the south.

The eastern bank of the Narova and Lake Peipus would at the same time be a natural line of strategic deployment in the north, as in the south might be the line of the Dniester, from its estuary up to the region of Kamenets-Podolsk. Between this region and the Pripet marshes the Russians could choose the line of the Zbruch and of one of the tributaries of the Pripet, while between the Pripet and the Dvina they might aim at the Berezina line, and further to the north, at the Polotsk–Pskov railway. As we now know, some points of this probable "Winter Programme" were

not reached, but in many other respects the achievements exceeded all expectations.

The winter conditions of 1943–44 proved so peculiar that they caused a series of surprises. In the south-west not only was winter late in coming, but it never reached its normal mild form. Even more extraordinary were the climatic "caprices" in the west, i.e. in Polesia and White Russia. There, after some weeks of light frost in December, changeable weather followed, with a tendency towards sudden and frequent thaw. These unusual conditions had unexpected effects on the operational development.

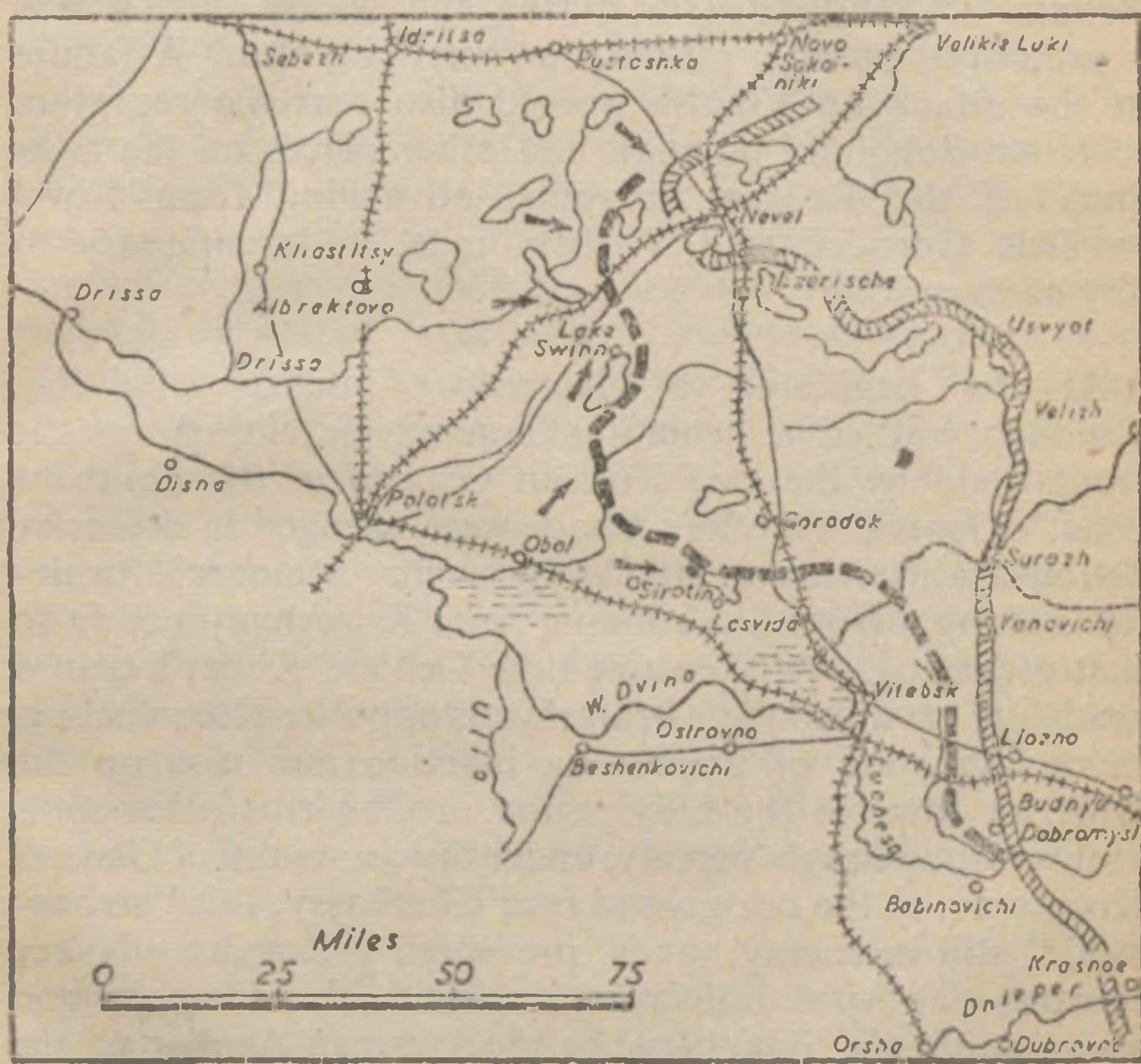
On the southern flank of the Central zone, after several attempts in the beginning of December, Rokossovsky's Group had to postpone any general action until the arrival of more normal winter weather, which, however, never arrived during the winter of 1943–44. On the northern flank of this zone, where the state of the terrain seemed less unfavourable, the First Baltic Group, under the command of General Bagramyan, started the offensive on 14 December from Nevel in the direction of the Dvina. After days of heavy fighting the enemy positions were broken on a 50-mile front and substantial progress in the direction of Vitebsk was realized. In the following days the Russian advance continued, but it was difficult and slow. The area between Nevel and Vitebsk is well adapted for defence: marshy streams and numerous small lakes form easily defended defiles when they are not frozen; and they were not frozen in December 1943—*Map No.* 2.

The Russians succeeded in capturing Gorodok, an advanced "bastion" of the Vitebsk stronghold; they cut the Vitebsk–Polotsk railway and approached Vitebsk along the northern bank of the Dvina. Simultaneously, on the southern side of the river, General Sokolovsky's troops took the offensive along the railway from Smolensk. The Germans everywhere resisted stubbornly; along the railway from Polotsk they counter-attacked in force and their counter-attacks soon extended to the north, as Novo-Sokolniki and Pustoshka were still in enemy hands. Soon the right flank of Bagramyan's Group was threatened along the Polotsk–Nevel road in the region of Lake Swinno.

On the southern side of the Dvina the enemy practically evacuated the town of Vitebsk, but his positions near the town, protected in the north by a swamp in the Dvina's bend, and in the south by the marshy river Luchesa, were

MAP 2

THE VITEBSK OPERATION, DECEMBER–JANUARY, 1943-1944



extremely strong in this exceptional weather. Sokolovsky's repeated attacks had no success. In such conditions, early in January, the Vitebsk operation was abandoned.

It had some positive results: the enemy, being in a hurry

to bring up reinforcements, took at least three active Divisions from the Leningrad area; their absence was felt by the Germans later, when the Russians started their Leningrad offensive. But generally speaking, the Russian Supreme Command, on account of uncertain climatic conditions, decided not to resume a major offensive in Polesia or White Russia during the winter, which was a prolonged autumn rather than anything else. A failure of the attack on Vitebsk proved also that the recapture of Novo-Sokolniki junction and other places on the right flank of the Russian columns, advancing from Nevel towards Gorodok and Vitebsk, must be preliminary to any such action.

* * * * *

At the beginning of December intensive fighting, although not of a general character, developed on the fronts held by the two Russian Groups in the Southern zone. General Vatutin's troops were engaged in defensive action against violent attacks by enemy armoured formations along a front line running from Korosten junction to that of Fastov. At the same time General Konev's troops gradually extended their bridgehead, opposite Kremenchug, in the direction of Znamenka junction and also up the Dnieper, towards the hilly region of Chigirin; other units of this Group fought fiercely, under the command of General Koroteyev, at the bridgehead near Cherkassy; this "stronghold," still in enemy hands, prevented a Russian advance towards the vital railway, parallel to the Dnieper and maintaining the link between the German Armies in the Western Ukraine. On Konev's left flank, General Malinovsky's Group was only skirmishing with the Germans on their front, protecting Nikopol, Krivoy Rog and the Znamenka–Nikolaev railway. Further to the south on the eastern bank of the Dnieper, General Tolbukhin's Group was perhaps awaiting the frost to cross the wide river to invade the Crimea across the shallow ice-bound lagoons of Sivash.

Map No. 3. If at first the connection between the operations of the First and Second Ukrainian Groups was not quite clear, it became more so as every day brought

some disappointment to the attacking German columns and some successes to the experienced "task forces" of Konev.

In November, after a fortnight of efforts and considerable sacrifice of men and material, the German Tank Army, specially reinforced for this operation, won some valuable ground and, along the Zhitomir main road, reached a point only 50 miles from Kiev. Then, however, followed a pause necessitated by great enemy losses. Early in December the attacks were resumed with the same fury, although there were signs that the German Divisions had not recovered their full strength. They attacked in rather narrow sectors with 200 or 300 tanks which represented perhaps an actual force of two Panzer Divisions out of a total of seven. In November the Germans had started their counter-offensive in the direction (most dangerous for the Russians) of Fastov, but soon switched towards Zhitomir and Korostyshev; and later Manstein received an order to recapture Korosten so as to open the railway connections with Polesia. Then the German attack was switched still more to the north, and finally developed in the 40-mile-wide sector on both sides of the Zhitomir–Kiev main road; it was not extended nearer to Fastov, and this was a mistake on the part of Manstein, for in the region of Fastov Vatutin was preparing, unhampered, a further and formidable blow.

Awaiting a propitious moment, this General, highly experienced in defensive battles, quietly met enemy assaults with his massed artillery in the successive "belts" where all the targets were ranged beforehand. The limit of German progress was reached on 12 December between the Teterev and the Zdvizh, near the line Radomysl–Brusilov. After this date the development of the operations by General Konev began to be felt on Vatutin's front.

Map No. 4. Using with remarkable skill a succession of short blows, Konev's units penetrated into the deep defensive system protecting the important junction of Znamenka. A few days of frost made possible the use of tanks by General Rotmistrov, and he succeeded in cutting the railways and roads running to this junction. Then

Znamenka was stormed and taken on 10 December and Rotmistrov's tanks moved towards Kirovograd (Elizavetgrad). This was an important success, hardly expected by the enemy. Simultaneously other columns of Konev, operating along the Dnieper and in the difficult region of Chigirin, rapidly overcame the resistance of some German Divisions (probably of the *Landwehr* type), captured Chigirin and established liaison with General Koroteyev's force at Belozerye near Cherkassy. By 10 December this "hedgehog" was completely invested. Here the garrison fought with the greatest determination; only after four days of house-to-house fighting did the German stronghold pass into Russian hands. At last, after a month of efforts, a new and important passage of the Dnieper was open to the Russians. The development of General Konev's offensive in the direction of Smela and Kirovograd could then be immediately expected, influencing the whole strategic situation in the Southern zone.

After 15 December the attacks of the Tank Army between the Teterev and the Zdvizh had almost ceased, as reinforcements were now moved towards Smela and Kirovograd. The latter town was to be defended with great determination: here, on the right flank of the German Eighth Army, a strong armoured corps was concentrated, and to gain time formations of the *Luftwaffe* were brought into the battle, attacking Rotmistrov's columns on their march to Kirovograd. As for the dangerous situation of the German troops inside the Belaya-Tserkov–Kanev–Smela triangle, it was completely disregarded; the units of the Eighth Army had to cling to the Dnieper despite the obvious risk of being surrounded.

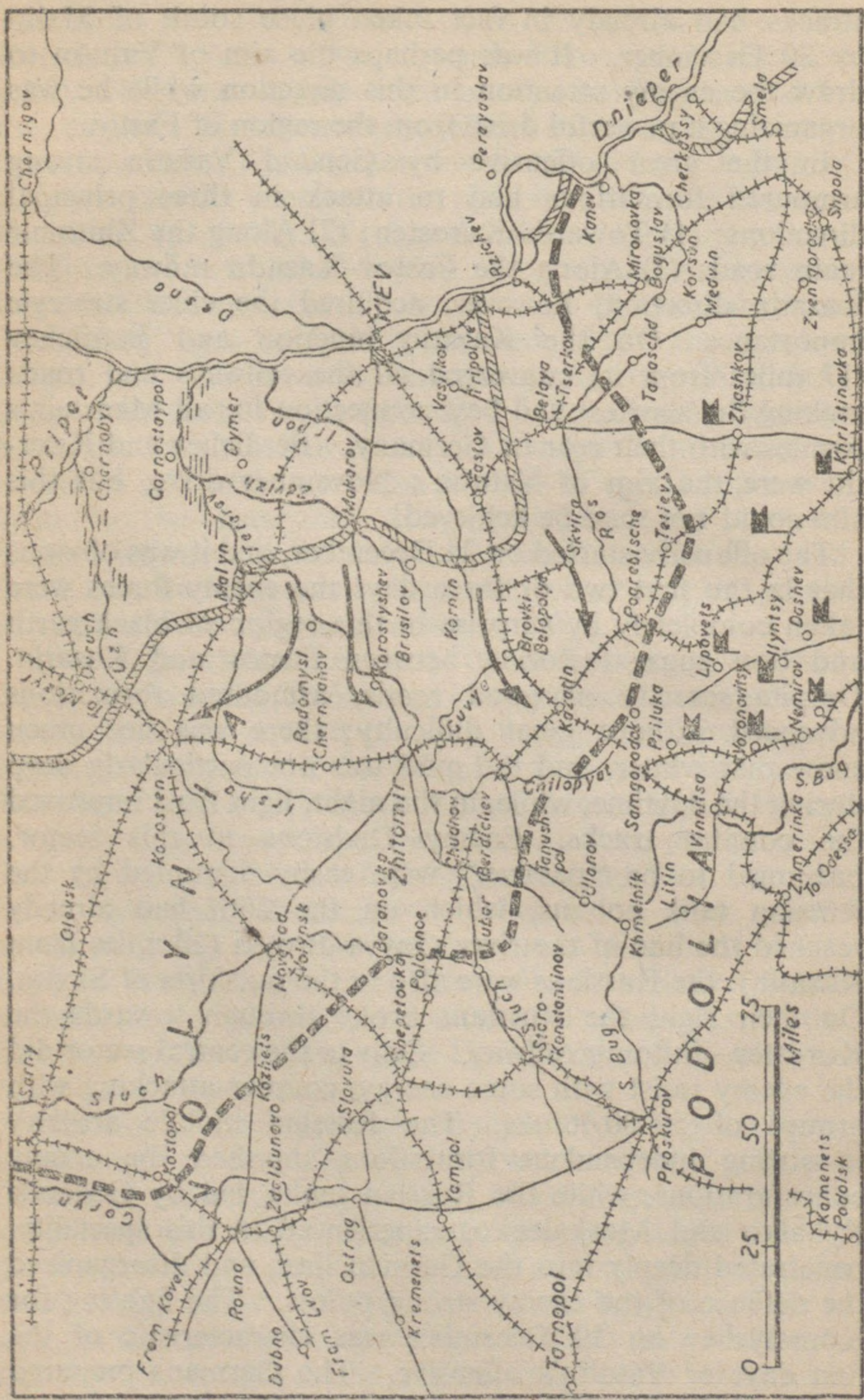
Map No. 3. The appropriate moment for the great blow, so patiently prepared by Vatutin, was now near. Before Christmas there were some days of frost and the ground conditions improved. They were not particularly bad in the north-western part of the Kiev region, where are the usual sandy lands and pine forests of Volynia. This is why the Germans maintained their assaults near Radomysl and Malin; in the same region they could expect an eventual counter-blow by Russian tanks. Several Russian

attacks had already in fact taken place south of Malin by 20 December. It was perhaps the aim of Vatutin to draw the enemy attention in this direction while he was organizing a powerful drive from the region of Fastov.

In the great offensive by General Vatutin strong armoured formations had to attack in three principal directions: (1) Towards Korosten; (2) Along the Zhitomir main road; (3) Along the Fastov–Kazatin railway. The Kazatin direction, however, acquired the chief strategic importance. On the Kazatin junction and Berdichev (17 miles from it) converged all the railways and roads making the shortest and best connection for all Manstein's Armies with their rear in Germany. Berdichev and Kazatin were the aim of Vatutin's November drive, but this aim could not then be achieved.

The offensive started on 24 December, and it was obvious that in the first two or three days the enemy forces were taken completely by surprise in this region of black earth and beet sugar factories, between Fastov and Kazatin. Despite scarcity of good roads, armoured formations advanced without great difficulty: there was not much snow that winter, and the mud was not particularly deep during the daytime, while, in the night, light frost improved the country tracks. Enemy Divisions in this sector, presumed to be "passive," were easily disrupted by the Russian tank colums, which on the 26th had already reached the line of the river Guyva–Brovki (20 miles from Kazatin); the Russians were also in the outskirts of Skvira. On their right the Russians broke through towards the Korosten–Zhitomir railway. Only in the central sector did the enemy resist with some energy, counter-attacking with groups of 50–80 tanks. The Russian mobile artillery in strong independent formations smashed the enemy concentrations, while the Russian tanks, led by Generals Rybalko and Moskalenko, experienced in this speciality, penetrated deeply into the German lines and disorganized the defence of the enemy strong points. The fighting for Korostyshev on 29 December was characteristic of the first days of Vatutin's offensive. The Germans prepared to defend this big village on the main Zhitomir road (where

MAP 3


Dnieper
Pereyaslav
Kanev
Cherkassy
Smela
Shpola
Mironovka
Boguslav
Korsun
Medvin
Zvenigorodka
Chernigov
Desna
KIEV
Rzischev
Vasilkov
Tripolye
Belaya Tserkov
Taraschd
Zhashkov
Khristinovka
Pripet
Chernobyl
Cornostaypol
Dymer
Irpen
Zdvizh
Makarov
Fastov
Skvira
Ros
Pogrebische
Tetiev
Malyn
Korosten
Radomysl
Chernyakhov
Korostyshev
Brusilov
Kornin
Brovki
Belopolye
Kazatin
Lipovets
Ilyintsy
Dashev
Nemirov
Uzh
Ovruch
Moziri
Cuvy
Samgorodok
Priluka
Vinnitsa
S. Bug
Zhmerinka
To Odessa
Chilopyat
Zhitomir
Chudnov
Berdichev
Tanushpol
Ullanov
Litin
Khmelnik
Olevsk
Novograd Volynsk
Baranovka
Shepetovka
Polonnoe
Lubar
Sluch
Sarny
Starokonstantinov
Kozhets
Slavuta
Yampol
Proskurov
Kamenets Podolsk
Gorin
Kozlopol
Zdolbunovo
Ostrog
Kremenets
Tarnopol
Frem Kovel
Rovno
Dubno
Lvov
Erem
POLYA
DOLA
0
25
50
75
Miles

it crosses the river Teterev) but they were outflanked before they were able to concentrate, and the Russian artillery dispersed their tanks before they could attack the Russian infantry which forded the river.

Manstein's defensive problem was now more complicated than it had been in December. Then as now his task was to keep in his hands the nodal points of primary importance—Berdichev and Kazatin. Zhitomir was then the defensive "bastion" on the approaches to them, and although the Russians had captured Zhitomir, Manstein was able to concentrate his reserves at Kazatin where he organized a counter-offensive and recaptured Zhitomir. It was different now: Kazatin itself was in direct danger by the third day of the new Russian offensive, and Zhitomir could not defend this junction; and, with the loss of Kazatin, the situation of Berdichev would become precarious. Moreover there was no time for concentrations which would be able to defend Kazatin.

On the 29th the Russians took Korosten junction and Chernyakhov; they were still advancing westwards, and Zhitomir was already outflanked from the north, while to the south the Russians cut the railway to Berdichev. Enemy resistance in this northern sector became fluctuating: Manstein was evidently more preoccupied with the situation near Kazatin and Berdichev. The same day the Russians had taken Belopolye, only 12 miles from Kazatin. On the 30th Stalin was able to announce the capture of this extremely important junction where three trunk lines meet: to Kiev (through Fastov). to Poland (through

MAP 3

THE VOLYNIA BATTLE, 27th DECEMBER–15th JANUARY, 1943–1944

Railways

Roads

Russian lines on 20th December

Vatutin's attacks, 27th–30th December

Vatutin's front stabilised by 15th January

Penetration of Vatutin's mobile columns

Marshes

Berdichev–Shepetovka–Rovno), and to Odessa (through Vinnitza–Zhmerinka). Zhitomir was left by the enemy on the 31st, almost without resistance, but Berdichev was defended by a strong garrison. It did not mean that the enemy had any hope of retaining this point for a long time. Nothing else was planned here as a delaying action in the hope of slowing down the Russian offensive in the westerly or south-westerly directions.

A radical change in the situation of the whole Southern zone was now an accomplished fact. In one week the Germans had lost the shortest and best railway and road connections with Germany in their Southern zone, as Kazatin and Zhitomir had already fallen and the fall of Berdichev was only a question of a few days. Of particular importance therefore was the only other well-developed liaison, represented by the Odessa–Zhmerinka–Proskurov–Lvov trunk line. From this trunk line ran several useful lateral lines: Proskurov–Shepetovka, Zhmerinka–Vinnitsa–Kazatin, Vapniarka–Khristinovka–Smela, Birzula–Pervomaisk–Kirovograd. The vital importance of the region Zhmerinka–Vinnitsa was clear; the Germans must hold it at all costs, if they planned to hold the Southern zone.

At the end of December the Germans launched a series of attacks on General Konev's units to the north and south of Kirovograd. Fighting here was of the same intensity, if not on the same scale, as at the beginning of this month on General Vatutin's front. And the result was the same: the enemy efforts proved to be in vain. Meanwhile Vatutin's columns advanced rapidly on a very wide front. On 4 January Novograd-Volynsk, on the road to Shepetovka, was taken with astonishing ease, despite its considerable importance and its topography which is favourable for stubborn defence. This was not the only place where recently formed enemy units failed to show fighting spirit, when lacking support of armoured units or by more experienced "active" Divisions. The German stronghold of Belaya Tserkov, although carefully fortified and provided with a considerable garrison, resisted only three days; on the fourth (4 January), when the Russians threatened its communications with the rear, it was aban-

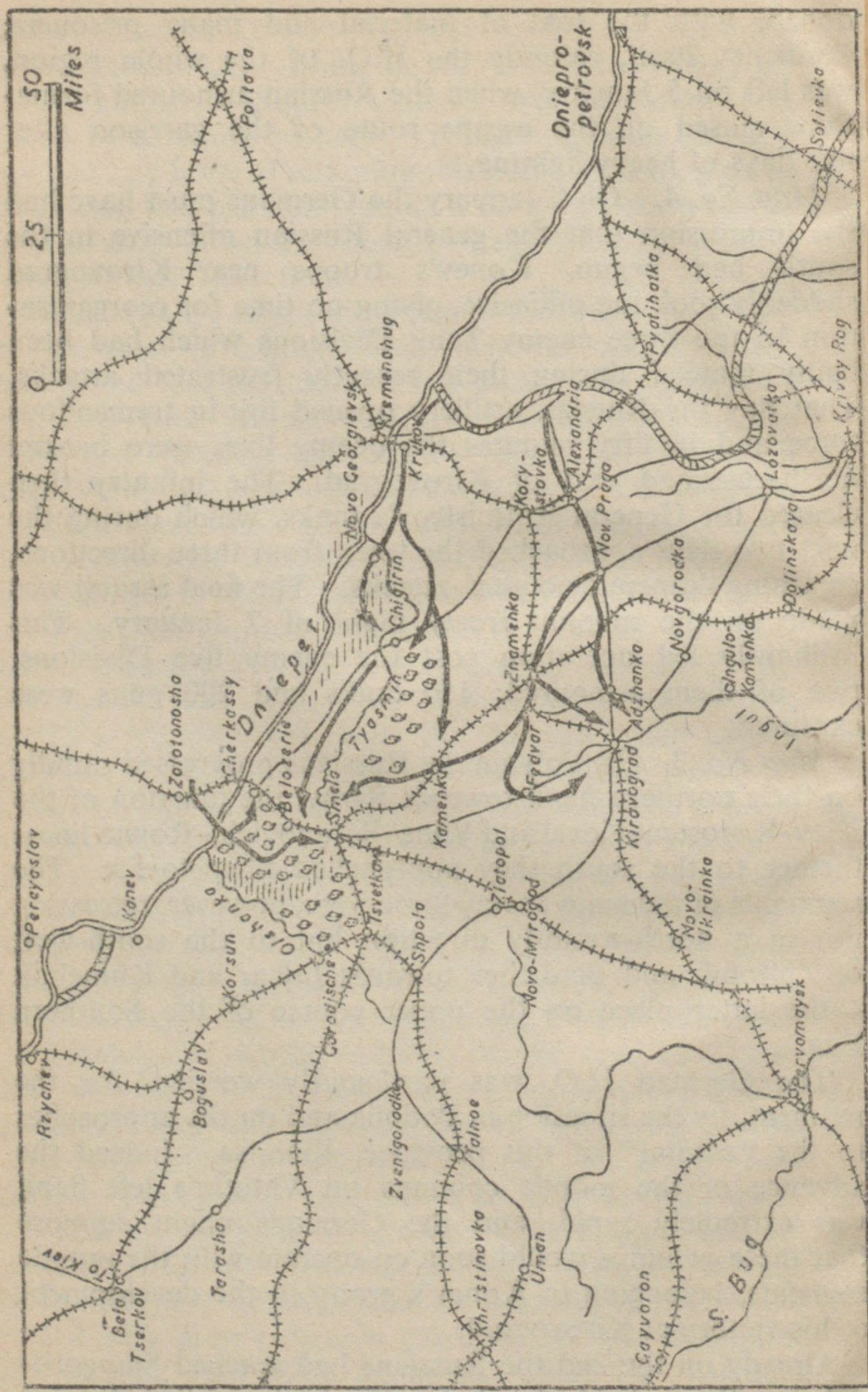
doned, with the loss of material and many prisoners. Berdichev itself, recently the H.Q. of the whole region, was left on 5 January, when the Russian armoured formations closed on the escape route of the garrison after five days of heavy fighting.

Map No. 4. On 5 January the Germans must have had the impression that the general Russian offensive in the south had begun. Konev's troops near Kirovograd suddenly took the offensive, giving no time for reorganisation to the three enemy Tank Divisions which had been badly mauled during their recently frustrated attacks. That day the Russian artillery opened fire in tremendous force and in fifty minutes the enemy lines were broken north-east and east of Kirovograd. The infantry then cleared for General Rotmistrov's tanks, which during the next two days approached the town from three directions, smashing desperate counter-attacks. The final assault was made on the moonlit frosty night of 7 January. This brilliantly led operation cost the enemy five Divisions, two of them armoured; 150 tanks and 200 guns were captured.

Map No. 3. In Volynia the Russians progressed rapidly on their northern flank towards Sarny, the junction of the Kiev–Korosten–Kovel and Vilna–Baranovichi–Rovno lines; further to the south they approached Shepetovka. The remnants of the main enemy force were, however, retreating not in a north-westerly direction but to the south-west of Zhitomir and Berdichev towards Lubar and Khmelnik —the latter place on the upper course of the Southern Bug.

The German H.Q. was particularly worried, for the moment, by the situation in Podolia and on the approaches to the "capital" of this province, Vinnitsa. Indeed the advance of the mobile columns on Vatutin's left flank was extremely rapid, and the Germans might suppose that these columns would soon co-operate with the mobile elements, belonging to Konev's group in the development of his victory at Kirovograd.

Already on the 2nd the Russians had reached Samgorodok, on the watershed between the basin of the Dnieper


0
25
50
Miles
Poltava
Dniepro-petrovsk
Solievka
Pyatihatka
Krivoy Rog
Lozovatka
Dolinskaya
Novgorodka
Adzhanka
Singulo-Kamenka
Inhul
Kirovograd
Novo-Ukrainka
Novo-Mirgorod
Zlatopol
Fedvar
Kamenka
Shela
Belozerka
Cherkassy
Zolotonosha
Tyasmin
Chigirin
Novo Georgievsk
Kremenchug
Kruto
Kory-stovka
Alexandria
Nov Praga
Znamenka
Shpola
Tsvetkovo
Olshanka
Korsun
Boguslav
Cherodische
Zvenigorodka
Talnoe
Khristinovka
Uman
Tarasha
Cayvoron
S. Bug
Pervomaysk
Opereyaslav
Kanev
Rzychev
Belaya Tserkov
To Kiev

and that of the Southern Bug; they captured the large village of Pogrebische, on the local railway running towards Zvenigorodka and Smela. Continuing their advance to the south, they were on 7 January at Lipovets, only 28 miles east of Vinnitsa; other Russian mobile elements approached Khristinovka, ready to cut the important lateral railway connecting Smela with the Zhmerinka–Odessa trunk line.

As enemy reserves began to arrive in the region of Vinnitsa-Zhmerinka, the Germans were able to organize the defence of the Podolian "capital" against the drive from the north, along the Kazatin road. But deep penetration by the Russians to the east of Vinnitsa and their appearance at Lipovets seemed to indicate their intention to outflank the Vinnitsa defences and to invade the valley of the Southern Bug. They captured Nemirov (a few miles from this river) on the 10th, and the next day they were at Voronovitsy—only 15 miles south-east of Vinnitsa and 10 miles from the Vinnitsa–Zhmerinka railway.

In this far from easy situation Manstein feverishly organized what might be called the strategic defence of Podolia. Would it not have been, in the circumstances, more reasonable for the enemy to start without further delay a general retreat to "the line of the Southern Bug"? Besides the considerations against any retreat mentioned in Chapter I, there was also the fact that anything like a natural "defensive line of the Southern Bug" existed only in the imagination of those unacquainted with the topography of the Western Ukraine. Starting from the

MAP 4

ZNAMENKA—CHERKASSY—KIROVOGRAD

Railways

Roads

Russian bridgeheads by 1st December, 1943

Konev's thrusts between beginning of December and 8th January

Marshes

Forests

phenomenon, according to which all Russian rivers running from north to south have their west bank commanding the east, they presumed that the same must be applied to the Southern Bug, but this river is an exception.

In its upper course it divides the hilly country of Southern Volynia from the Podolian plateau; here it flows from west to east, between Proskurov and the region of Vinnitsa. The Volynian hills (sometimes called "Avratyn mountains") are of considerable height near Dubno, Kremenets, Staro-Konstantinov (sometimes well over 1,000 feet); they become lower between Berdichev and Vinnitsa, but the hilly country continues even further to the east to the region of Uman, then to Zvenigorodka and to the banks of the Dnieper near Korsun and Kanev. Thus the defensive positions of a hilly country, with numerous ravines and some forests, are to be found not to the west of the Southern Bug, but to the east. Approaching the region of Vinnitsa this river turns sharply in a southerly direction, cutting in some places narrow channels 60 to 100 yards wide in the Podolian plateau; but in many places the eastern bank is higher than the western, and nowhere are there good defensive positions between the river and the strategic Zhmerinka–Odessa railway, which runs parallel to the Southern Bug and in some points only 20 miles west of it.

This may explain why Manstein took the somewhat desperate decision to defend the approaches towards the Zhmerinka–Odessa trunk line in an indirect way: by holding to the last moment those hilly regions well adapted for defence stretching from the Southern Bug eastwards to the Dnieper (Uman–Zvenigorodka–Korsun) on the flank and partly in the rear of Vatutin's columns which advanced towards the Southern Bug. The risk of such a decision for the enemy troops in the Smela–Zvenigorodka–Korsun area was considerable, and further events were soon to prove it.

The most urgent task of Manstein, however, was to prevent the immediate outflanking of Vinnitsa from the south by the Russian force at Voronovitsy–Nemirov and penetration by other Russian columns in the direction of Uman. Two active Groups were organized, one at Vinnitsa,

another at Uman; they were partly composed of elements from the general reserve and partly taken from the lower Dnieper. Manstein was able to start a new series of counter-attacks (in his usual "style") in the second half of January, as by the end of the third week of Vatutin's offensive there were signs that a pause was imminent and that it would not be developed into a general offensive by the four Russian Groups in the Southern zone. Before this pause, however, on his extreme right Vatutin had captured the important junction of Sarny, cutting one more line of communications between the enemy Central and Southern zones (13th January). Very opportunely Rokossovsky at the same time took Mozyr on the Pripet and Kalinkovichi junction north of it, opening for the Russians connections by rail between their troops in White Russia and the Western Ukraine. One of the reasons for the pause in the south was the need to organize the communications of the 1st Ukrainian Group: it was important that the junctions Kazatin, Zhitomir, Berdichev, Korosten, Sarny should be working again before the next stage of the offensive. On 16th January the Russians summed up the material results of the battles on General Vatutin's front since mid-November: 2,200 tanks disabled, 315 captured, more than 2,000 guns and mortars, 8,000 lorries, 6,000 laden trucks destroyed or captured. Enemy losses in men exceeded 100,000 (7,000 prisoners). On the previous day the Russians started another great offensive, on the Leningrad front, where winter conditions were much nearer to the normal.

* * * * *

Map No. 5. In their Northern zone the Germans had three Armies: one before Leningrad and Schlüsselburg (the Fifth), the Eighteenth (General Lindemann) on the Volkhov front to Lake Ilmen (with a small bridgehead on the east side of the river near Gruzino), the Sixteenth from Staraya Rusa along the Lovat to Novo-Sokolniki junction. These Armies were under the command of Field-Marshal Küchler. Since 1943 the three Armies of the Northern zone had been only of defensive importance; to supply them was not easy, and therefore their strength had been reduced

MAP 5

Gulf of Finland
Terioki
Leningrad
L. Ladoga
Volkhov
Schlusselburg
Senyavino
To Volkhov
Mga
Sablino
Tosno
Kirishi
Lyuban
Aproksin
Torosino
Lor
Chudovo
Kopory
Ust Luga
Krasnogvardeisk
Volosovo
Siverskaya
Tyritsa
Nard
Tom
Luga
Sabzko
Mshinskaya
Preobrazhenskaya
Orlovo
Luga
Orlovo
Kusory
L. Peipus
Serbino
Plussa
Bolotskaya
Novgorod
Volkhov
Vishera
Msta
Bronnitsy
To Mosco
Zapolye
Medved
L. Ilmeni
Strugi
Ludonia
Shimsk
Soltsy
Staraya-Russa
Sheloni
Pskov
ESTONIA
Porkhov
Dno
Pola
Velikaya
Ostrov
Knolm
Sorot
Novorzhev
Loknya
Lovat
LATVIA
Pustoshka
Teropets
Idritsa
Nova Sokolniki
Velikie Luki
Miles
0
25
50

to a minimum of some twenty Divisions to the north of Ilmen and less than ten to the south of the lake. The strategic significance of this Northern enemy Group was limited: to tie up some of the Russian forces and to prevent the re-establishment of the Leningrad war industries. The political aim was clear: to preserve German domination over Finland and maintain German "prestige" among the subjugated peoples, the Latvians, Estonians, Lithuanians. With the object of achieving this as "cheaply" as possible, the Germans not only reduced the number of troops in the Northern zone, but intended to hold its extremely strong fortifications in many places with second-rate Divisions, among which some more reliable units were mingled. On the Volkhov front, for instance, were used the Spanish volunteers and units freshly formed from the ground personnel of the *Luftwaffe*. The German idea of "prestige" was expressed by the concentration near Leningrad of several scores of heavy long-range guns which for weeks were firing at the streets and houses of the great city.

The enemy guns did not prevent the concentration of Russian troops inside Leningrad's defensive perimeter. This work took many months, as communications between Russia's second capital and the rest of the country were still very difficult in 1943: an improvised railway had been

MAP 5

OPERATIONS IN THE NORTHERN ZONE, JANUARY–MARCH, 1944
THE LENINGRAD–NOVGOROD BATTLE

Railways

Roads

German lines, 15th January

Russian attacks, 15th–25th January

Russian columns

German rearguards and Russian columns by the end of January and the beginning of February

German lines at the beginning of March

State frontiers

Marshes

built along the shores of Lake Ladoga to Schlüsselburg, whence Leningrad could be reached by a local railway on the north side of the Neva. By the New Year, however, the great task was accomplished and General Govorov, commanding at Leningrad, was ready to attack. It remained only to wait for the stabilizing of winter conditions to make possible an offensive on the Volkhov front. There General Merezkov had to wait until the Volkhov and Lake Ilmen became ice-bound: his units, on 15 January, were able to cross both the river and the lake, and this was the signal for a general Russian offensive in the Northern zone.

There is no doubt that the Germans were expecting the Russians to attack in the Northern zone during the winter. They were confident, however, for the defensive works near Leningrad were powerfully built and the topography of the Volkhov region gave the defence many advantages which were not completely neutralized by winter conditions. It was afterwards reported that Field-Marshal Küchler had protested when three of his few active Divisions were suddenly taken for the defence of Vitebsk; in fact, as events proved, he had no forces ready for a serious counter-attack after the Russian break-through. The principal reason for General Govorov's brilliant success was, however, that the direction chosen by him for the main attack was a complete surprise to the Germans.

The Russian Supreme Command planned the Leningrad offensive on a wider strategic scale than the enemy could guess. Küchler expected the Russian effort to be directed against the German salient which from the east covered that part of the Leningrad–Moscow line still in German hands (between Kolpino and Chudovo). Other Russian attacks seemed perhaps to have only diversionary significance. Meanwhile the Russian H.Q. prepared a deep enveloping manœuvre based on a double and decisive break-through near the extremities of the German lines: south-west of Leningrad and in the area of Novgorod. If it were successful this manœuvre promised the destruction of the two enemy Armies in the Northern zone.

General Govorov organized, in his turn, a double assault

on the enemy positions at their strongest points. He concentrated powerful artillery near Pulkovo (10 miles south of Leningrad), disposed in a V shape; his guns were to smash the enemy fort at Finskoie Koirovo defending the approaches to Krasnoe Selo and prevent any German counter-attack from Pushkino (formerly Tsarskoe Selo) on the left flank of the advancing Russian infantry. Another thrust Govorov prepared in a remarkably bold way. Contrary to German expectations, he utilized a small beach-head at Oranienbaum, opposite the isle of Kotlin near Kronstadt. This strip of coast, four miles wide and three deep, was captured by Russian marines in 1942 and held, as it was covered by the long-range guns of the Russian warships in the Kronstadt harbour (10 miles from Oranienbaum). With the Gulf frozen and long winter nights coming it was possible to concentrate secretly in the Oranienbaum beachhead a striking force well provided with guns, mortars and even tanks.

On 15 January the Russians suddenly started an attack from Oranienbaum in the direction of Peterhof (to the east) while the batteries massed at Pulkovo opened a tremendous fire concentrated on a very narrow sector of the enemy defences. The fort at Finskoe Koirovo was smashed, despite its steel and concrete, the breach was opened, and the next day infantry and tanks widened the gap, while Peterhof was already in the hands of troops attacking from Oranienbaum. These troops were now rapidly advancing in two columns, one along the high road Peterhof–Ropsha (the latter point 7 miles west of Krasnoe Selo), the other along the coast, towards Strelna and Ligovo, where at the point of the nearest German approach to Leningrad (7 miles) were enemy guns which for several months had been firing on the streets and houses of the city. The German counter-attacks proved to be disorganized and completely ineffective. On 17–18 January Ropsha and Krasnoe Selo were captured, and the next day, in capturing Strelna and Ligovo, the Russians had the great satisfaction of taking several scores of enemy long-range guns which only recently had been sending shells into Leningrad. And as, three or four days later,

Pushkino and Pavlovsk were successfully stormed, the victory of General Govorov was not only a moral one: the forces of the left flank and the centre of Küchler's Army (six Divisions) were involved in the defeat.

In the meantime General Lindemann's Army on the Volkhov was also defeated by General Merezkov's troops, if not in so spectacular a way. General Merezkov skilfully took advantage of winter conditions which opened up the possibility of the attack on Novgorod from the south where the ancient town is otherwise unapproachable, being protected by the lake, rivers and marshes. Merezkov's units, advancing over ice and deep snow, outflanked the Novgorod positions from the south and paralysed the strong defensive fronts facing east and north. Russian troops which crossed the Volkhov were able to enter the town by 19 January, before the enemy had time to complete his usual destruction of historical and artistic monuments.

Thus the initial double break-through of the enemy strongly fortified lines was achieved, perhaps even more easily than it had been planned. By 20 January Küchler must have lost all hope of being able to stem the Russian advance. In a few days the communications of his army with the Estonian frontier were cut to the west of Krasnogvardeisk (Gatchina), and this important junction was in imminent danger. It fell on 25 January. The losses of the Northern Army during ten days of fighting amounted to 40,000; it was obvious that this Army had not enough good quality troops for a serious counter-action. In such circumstances the best that Küchler could hope for was an orderly retreat by the two Armies to the river Luga, with its source 30 miles west of Novgorod and its mouth in the Gulf of Finland, near the Estonian border.

The German salient beyond the Leningrad–Moscow railway was in great danger, so already by the 20th the enemy was abandoning the region of Mga Junction which he had held so stubbornly for two years. It is almost 100 miles as the crow flies from there to the town of Luga on the main line of retreat towards Pskov (the road to Estonia was already cut); it is only 55 miles from Novgorod

to Luga by the direct road. The advance of Merezkov's troops to the west of Novgorod therefore seemed to the Germans the most dangerous. To delay this advance strong rearguards were left on Merezkov's right flank, near Chudovo: their task was to attract a part of Merezkov's forces and in this way to diminish his pressure and speed in the direction of Luga. On the 28th and 29th these rearguards at Lyuban and Chudovo were liquidated (and the trunk line finally cleared), but perhaps Lindemann had gained several days' precious time for organizing resistance at Batetskaya Junction (on the Novgorod–Luga and Leningrad–Dno lines). Some fresh troops reached him from the Sixteenth Army, and at the end of January the Germans were fighting at Batetskaya with vigour, counter-attacking many times.

It must be kept in view that during the critical week, 20–28 January, the enemy still had the advantage, at least partially, of two well-developed railway lines, one running south-west to Pskov, the other running south to Dno and Novo–Sokolniki. The Germans were able to retreat more rapidly than the Russians could advance: the snow-covered, densely forested area made cross-country moves impossible. By the end of January there was only slight probability of encircling any considerable part of the two German Armies. On the other hand Küchler was obliged to abandon any hopes of stabilizing the front on the line of the Luga: the Russians crossed the lower Luga and were a few miles from Estonia, and although Batetskaya still held out, the Russians progressed in the direction of Luga from a point south of Batetskaya. The railway to Dno was cut, while further to the south the important junction of Novo-Sokolniki, on this trunk line, was taken by the troops of the Second Baltic Group (now under the command of General Popov). An offensive of this Group from the Ilmen—the Lovat–Novo-Sokolniki front was imminent.

It may therefore be said that the strategic decision of the "Leningrad–Novgorod battle" was already accomplished early in February. Nothing further could be done by the Germans in the Northern zone but to order the retreat of their three Armies (the Sixteenth included) towards rear

positions in the region Pskov–Ostrov and along the railway Pskov–Polotsk. The Russians could do nothing but pursue the beaten enemy, who was obliged to evacuate all his Northern zone; the significance of their victory, achieved in less than twenty days, is clear. The strength of the defeated German Armies was diminished by at least 30 per cent; several Divisions had to be moved as reinforcements from the sector of the Sixteenth Army, but hardly any from the general reserves, as new and important developments took place again in the Southern zone.

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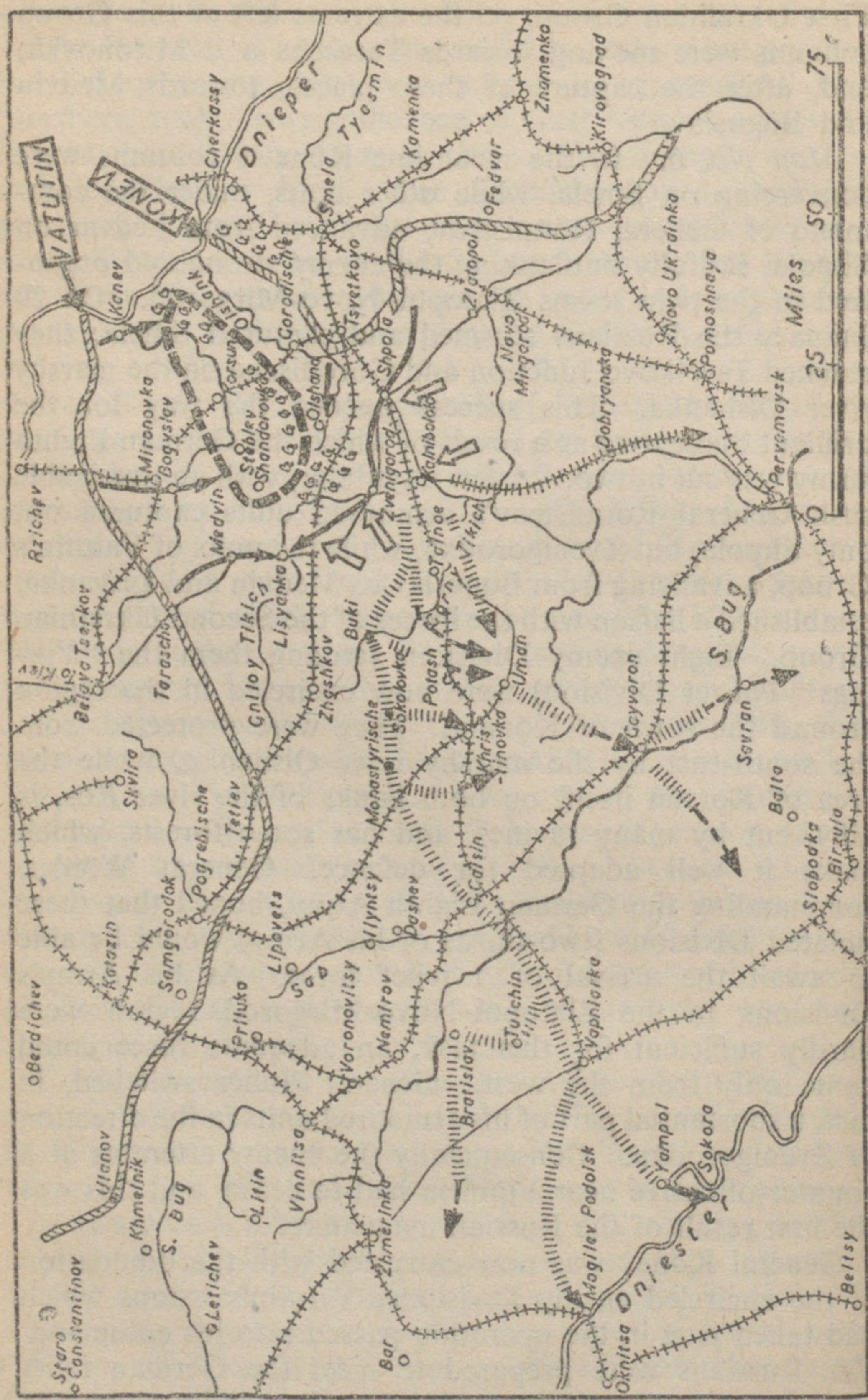
Map No. 6. In the second half of January the initiative on General Vatutin's front seemed to be temporarily in enemy hands, as a pause in the Russian advance was necessitated by adjustment of the supply lines. Manstein succeeded in concentrating at Vinnitsa and Uman a new active force, a new Tank Army under General Huber, the elements of which were ready for attack by 18 January. The first clashes with the Russian advanced mobile units took place at Voronovitsy and Nemirov (near Vinnitsa) and at Khristinovka (near Uman). After the 20th, the Russian vanguards moved back towards the Samgorodok–Pogrebische–Tetiev–Zhashkov line, chosen by Vatutin as a temporary defensive line. Columns of enemy tanks advanced on a broad front of 60 miles. Between 23 and 28 January there was fighting of considerable intensity to the south of Pogrebische and at Zhashkov; General Huber claimed a big success (thousands of prisoners and hundreds of Russian tanks destroyed), which however was not confirmed by the capture of Pogrebische.

Further to the east Vatutin's forces were regrouping; his extreme left flank was considerably reinforced and extended in the direction of the Dnieper. It followed a decision taken by the Russian Supreme Command in mid-January. The liquidation of the enemy Group, still clinging to the triangle Kanev–Smela–Zvenigorodka, was then planned. In this operation the principal part was played by General Konev, but a concerted action was expected from some Divisions on Vatutin's left flank. While Huber's armoured formations were deploying against the left centre of the

First Ukrainian Group, on the extreme left of this Group columns were moving towards Tarascha and Mironovka, and, after the capture of these places, towards Medvin and Boguslav.

Map No. 6. In the meantime Konev's columns were converging on Smela, while other units, under the command of General Rotmistrov, advanced from Fedvar on Shpola, skilfully outflanking the enemy stronghold organized in the twin towns Zlatopol–Novo-Mirgorod. On 29 January the Russians stormed and captured Smela; they reached Tsvetkovo Junction and Gorodische on the marshy river Olshanka. This success opened the way for the brilliant manœuvre as a result of which the German Eighth Army was cut in two. A few days later, with an irresistible rush General Rotmistrov's armoured units captured not only Shpola, but Zvenigorodka, while the units of Vatutin's Group, advancing from Boguslav to Medvin and Lisyanka, established a liaison with the forces of the Second Ukrainian Group. Eight enemy Divisions (among them the "Vikings" Panzer Division) were now encircled in the region around the town of Korsun. They were protected from the south-east by the marshy river Olshanka, while the area of Korsun itself, on both banks of the river Ros, is hilly, cut by many ravines, and has some forests, which make it well adapted for defence. General Wöhler, commanding the German Eighth Army, hoped that these isolated Divisions (two-thirds of his Army) would be able to await the arrival of a relief force. As his Army's Divisions in the Zlatopol–Novo-Mirgorod region were hardly sufficient for this task, an adequate force could come only from the west. General Huber switched, in fact, a substantial part of his armoured units in the direction of Zvenigorodka. Consequently the enemy attempts at a counter-offensive near Vinnitsa had to cease, and this was the first result of the Russian manœuvre.

General Konev was now entrusted with the liquidation of the encircled enemy Divisions; Vatutin's troops which had taken part in the operation passed into his command. The Russians were prepared to meet the German relief force on the upper course of a small marshy river, the


VATUTIN
KONEV
Dniepr
Cherkassy
Smela
Tyasmin
Kamenka
Znamenko
Kirovograd
Fedvar
Zlatopol
Novo Ukrainka
Pomoshnaya
Miles
75
50
25
Kanev
Shpola
Tsvetkovo
Korodischte
Olshanka
Korsun
Stablev
Shandorovka
Olshana
Mironovka
Bogyslav
Rzichev
Medvin
Vanigorod
Kalnibolotov
Nova Mirgorod
Dobryanka
Pervomaysk
Tikich
Otatnoe
Lisyanka
Gnilloy Tikich
Buki
Zhashkov
Taraschcha
Belgyo Tsarkov
Uman
Potash
Skolovke
Khristinovka
Gayvoron
S. Bug
Savran
Balta
Slobodka
Birzula
Skvira
Tetiev
Pogrebische
Monastyrische
Gatsin
Samgorodok
Katazin
Lipovets
Ollyntsy
Dashev
Oberdichev
Priluka
Voronovitsy
Nemirov
Tulchin
Vapniarka
Bratslav
Ulanov
Khmelnik
Vinnitsa
Olitin
Zhmerinka
Tampol
Sokora
Podolsk
Mogilev
Stara Constantinov
Letichev
Bar
Okntsa
Dniester
Beltsy

Gniloy Tikich (on which Zvenigorodka stands) some 20 miles from the encircled enemy Group.

Map No. 3. If the German H.Q. was preoccupied with the fate of some 70,000 troops isolated near Korsun, there were yet other reasons to be anxious as the Russians suddenly stormed and captured Rovno: on 3rd February the Germans declared that they "evacuated" not only Rovno but Lutsk, 60 miles north-west of Rovno. Both these Volynian towns are of considerable strategic and political importance, and their capture was in fact an astonishing achievement by the Russian mobile forces (light tanks, lorried infantry and cavalry). The Russians made a bold outflanking move from the Sarny region in the southerly direction. They crossed the wide river Goryn, covered with only thin ice, and then advanced up its west bank towards Rovno. From a point to the west of Rovno one Russian column moved to Lutsk and stormed the town during the night, ejecting the Hungarian garrison in wild confusion; another column attacked Rovno from the west. Taken by surprise, the enemy garrison ceased to fight and abandoned the town. Soon after this exceptional performance the Russians consolidated their hold on Rovno and Lutsk, extending their occupation in the directions of Dubno and Kovel. Manstein was compelled to strengthen his front in the western sector in order to cover the approaches to Galicia. One week after the capture of Rovno Vatutin's troops suddenly

MAP 6

BATTLE OF KORSUN AND KONEV'S DRIVE TO THE DNIESTER, FEBRUARY, 1944

Railways

Roads

Konev's and Vatutin's lines on the 1st February

The Germans encircled near Korsun

Manœuvre of encirclement

Attacks of the relief force

Konev's columns driving to Uman and to the Dniester

Forests

stormed and took Shepetovka Junction—a point of particular importance for the plans of the Russian H.Q.

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Map No. 7. General Malinovsky's troops were in contact with the enemy positions which protected the regions of Nikopol and Krivoy Rog and two important junctions, Apostolovo to the east of Krivoy Rog and Dolinskaya to the west. On the eastern side of the Dnieper the Germans still held a bridgehead in the curve formed by the river. Units of the Fourth Ukrainian Group, under General Tolbukhin, held the positions in the bridgehead sector. In January Malinovsky's troops reached a point only 15 miles from Nikopol, and to the north-east of Krivoy Rog they were near Sofievka, 25 miles from this industrial centre. The Germans in this sector (the Tenth Army became the "Sixth" when the new Tenth Army was constituted under the command of Kesselring in Italy) had several armoured Divisions, as a Russian assault here might start sooner or later. The weather, however, seemed very unfavourable for an offensive action: light frost gave way to thaw, while wet snow mixed with rain was incessantly falling. Nevertheless Malinovsky attacked on 2 February, when the terrain was in the worst possible condition.

The attack started on a front of 60 miles, between Sofievka and the Dnieper; as the enemy concentrated stronger forces on two extremities of this line, nearer to Krivoy Rog and Nikopol, his centre at the railway running to Apostolovo and Kherson was smashed on the second day of the fighting. With quick decision Malinovsky threw in his reserves here, quite understanding the importance of breaking through the deep and elaborate enemy defences at any point. On the fourth day of the operation the central storming columns, timely reinforced, rushed through the fortified belt and captured Apostolovo Junction, 35 miles from their starting-point. The German forces in this sector were cut in two: several Divisions were pushed towards Krivoy Rog, others into Nikopol; counter-attacks by Panzers proved ineffective, and only increased enemy losses; in Apostolovo rich booty was taken, a great number

of railway trucks, several scores of locomotives and 3,000 lorries. By this bold and skilful move the Krivoy Rog positions and those of Nikopol were practically outflanked.

General Malinovsky had now to develop his success; the direction of his next manœuvre was indicated by an order of the Supreme Command given to General Tolbukhin the day the Apostolovo break-through was achieved: the troops of the Fourth Ukrainian Group were to liquidate the enemy bridgehead opposite Nikopol. Thus began the second stage of the Dnieper bend offensive aimed at the capture of the Nikopol manganese centre with co-ordinated attacks by Malinovsky and Tolbukhin against seven German Divisions now concentrated round Nikopol, on both banks of the Dnieper.

The situation of these Divisions became precarious after Malinovsky's move on 6 February, when his mobile force occupied Novo-Vorontsovka, 12 miles west of Nikopol, where the river Buzuluk falls into the broad swamp of the Dnieper. By this move the way of escape from Nikopol westwards was closed. However, if precarious, the situation of the Nikopol garrison was not yet hopeless, so long as the bridgehead on the east bank of the Dnieper was held by the Germans.

This bridgehead had been organized by Manstein's engineers in the autumn of 1943 with great skill. Not only were its fortifications built with particular care, but they were very ingeniously adapted to the peculiar topography of this area. The lower Dnieper in many points forms broad stretches of swamp, intersected by ramifications of the main river and joined by many channels—like the "bayous" in the lower Mississippi swamps (the Russian name for such areas is "plavni," famous for fishing and shooting in the time of the Zaporozhian Cossacks). The German bridgehead was established in the (westward turning) curve of the river, between two areas of swamps; the chord of this "arc" (60 miles long) was strongly fortified, and the depth of the bridgehead reached 30 miles opposite Nikopol. It was of particular significance that the principal communications of the bridgehead went, not through Nikopol, but through pontoon bridges built

near the village of Lepetikha, in the western part of the bridgehead; they might remain safe even if Nikopol fell; the route of escape of the troops on the east bank remained practicable even after the occupation of Novo-Vorontsovka by the Russians. As for the troops within Nikopol itself, they had to look for escape through the swamp between Novo-Vorontsovka and the Dnieper or through the bridgehead and its Lepetikha bridges. In either case it was not a comfortable business.

On 6 February, under artillery fire and growing pressure by Tolbukhin's infantry, the Germans began a gradual evacuation of the bridgehead, sacrificing their picked rear-guards in this delicate operation. On the 7th there was already fighting in the streets of Nikopol, and its defenders were ordered to escape in small parties across the swamp. The western part of the bridgehead still resisted, covering the passage at Lepetikha, while the units which had already crossed the river were fighting against Malinovsky's men near Ivanovka on the road towards the river Ingulets. Next day all was over at Nikopol; the town and the manganese mines were in the hands of the Russians; the bridgehead, built and kept with such efforts, ceased to exist. In the Nikopol region the enemy lost considerable material: 600 guns, 300 mortars, nearly 3,000 lorries, 20 ammunition dumps, etc. His losses in men during one week of fighting exceeded 50,000 (6,000 prisoners), mostly good and experienced troops. Originally the Nikopol operation was to have been deferred until the moment when Tolbukhin's forces would be able to cross the ice-bound Dnieper further downstream, but such conditions did not arise. The Russian H.Q. then decided on a frontal blow, despite rain and deep mud; and this decision was fully justified by the action of the daring and always optimistic General Malinovsky.

His troops, after the capture of Novo-Vorontsovka, progressed in a westerly direction and reached the Ingul at Novo-Pavlovka, 30 miles south of Krivoy Rog. This important centre of resistance could now be attacked from three sides; but a regrouping of Malinovsky's forces was necessary, and this took more than a week. During

that week the liquidation of the German Divisions encircled near Korsun was completed.

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Map No. 6. This operation on a smaller scale repeated what had happened to the Sixth and the Fourth Tank Armies at the beginning of 1943 near Stalingrad. Among the encircled troops there were units belonging to seven infantry Divisions, the Viking S.S. Panzer Division and various auxiliary troops—hardly more than 70,000, as the Divisions of two Army Corps (11th and 42nd) had suffered considerably in the previous fighting and some of their units remained outside the "ring." The senior of the two corps commanders, General Stemmermann, was left in command after the departure of General Wöhler by plane.

General Konev's troops were gradually reducing the perimeter occupied by the enemy. His particular attention was given to the position where the attacks of the relief force were met. Fortunately these attacks were badly organized: in December 1942 Manstein preferred to start his attack from Kotelnikovo only when all available forces were concentrated: near Zvenigorodka and Shpola, on the contrary, the enemy employed the relief Divisions in groups of two or three at a time, bringing new units when others had failed and were crippled and dispirited. The Russians registered in these "relief attacks," during a fortnight, nine Divisions, some of them belonging to the Eighth Army and others to Huber's Armoured Group.

Within the perimeter held by the encircled German Divisions the situation was rapidly deteriorating—more rapidly than it had a year before at Stalingrad. The reason was that von Paulus' forces had then been resisting in a well-organized area in the rear of two Armies. The defence of the Korsun region, on the contrary, had to be improvised, having neither appropriate dumps of ammunition, nor even food stores. The surrounded Germans occupied territory on both sides of the railway line running through Korsun, some 10 miles to the north of this picturesque town on the river Ros and 20 to the south of it. The width of this strip of land nowhere exceeded 20 miles. During the first week of the "siege," several Russian

columns maintained a pressure aimed at reducing the area held by the enemy. On its southern end it was necessary to eject the Germans from the marshy banks of the Olshanka near Gorodische, thus increasing the distance between the "besieged" and the relief force which was then attacking (with no results) south of Zvenigorodka and Shpola. On the north side of the perimeter the Russian attacks converged on Korsun, this town being the enemy regional base, with airfields, dumps, stores, etc.

While the airfields were still usable the Germans were able to evacuate a considerable number of their officers; this was in contradiction to their costly relief attempts which would have had better results if co-ordinated with a simultaneous strong attack from within the "ring." Left with an inadequate number of officers, the enemy troops were unable to make any serious effort. The following week the airfields could not be used, as they were destroyed by bombs or gun-fire; enemy planes dropped food or munitions, but many of them were shot down by Russian airmen.

On 8 February capitulation was offered to the "besieged," but was declined by General Stemmermann. On the 10th, however, the situation became even more critical: the Russians were 6 miles from Korsun in the south-east and less in the north. The weather was appalling, wet snow and rain, day and night; the number of killed and sick increased; many troopers left the ranks and hid in the forests and ruined villages. On the 12th it was clear that the final crisis was at hand. The next day the enemy lost Korsun, the bulk of his forces concentrated in a narrow space, near Shandorovka and Steblev. In this, practically the last, moment the enemy made his major, but belated, attempt to rescue the remnants of the encircled divisions.

On 14 and 15 February four Divisions concentrated by Huber at Buki attacked in the direction of Lisyanka, and some armoured units reached the river Gniloy Tikich between Lisyanka and Zvenigorodka. During these days General Stemmermann made a desperate attempt to organize an attack with some 15,000 of his troops in the direction of Komarovka—only 10 miles north-east of

Lisyanka. Russian artillery, massed in the forests east of the Gniloy Tikich, smashed these columns, while the efforts of Huber's tanks failed to pierce the defences organized by Rotmistrov. On 17 February Stalin was able to announce the final liquidation of the Korsun group; 52,000 dead Germans were counted in the region, 14,000 officers and men were taken prisoners; among the dead was General Stemmermann. According to the Russians the relief force lost 20,000 men and 600 tanks. General Rotmistrov's counter-blows (from the 18th to the 20th) at Lisyanka and Kalniboloto added to this 7,000 men and 300 tanks.

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With the sacrifice of almost 100,000 men and a large quantity of material in and around the Korsun "ring," the Germans delayed the general Russian offensive in the Southern zone for a fortnight, perhaps even for a month. Why did this month seem so important that they accepted the risk of losses inevitably heavy in the circumstances? The answer is simple. The German H.Q., judging by the experience of the two previous winter campaigns, presumed that any general offensive was impossible in the Southern zone later than January–February. To postpone it till March seemed equivalent to a complete abrogation of the Russian general offensive until the summer. Unfortunately for the enemy these calculations, based on the notion of more or less normal climatic conditions, were completely upset by the extraordinary winter of 1943–44. March of 1944 could not possibly be worse than January and February, as the exceptional winter did not store much snow for the usual March thaw, and in consequence the fields of Southern Ukraine were more rapidly dried up by the spring sun and the rivers did not overflow as much as usual. The Russian H.Q. might postpone the decisive moment of the winter campaign, but even if postponed, it had to take place in March, if not in January or February. And the Germans were to see it in the very first days of that month.

Map No. 5. While the preparations for a powerful blow were going on in the south, there was only limited develop-

ment of operations in the Northern zone, and they were even more limited in Polesia. From Leningrad to Luga the Russian progress could not but be slow, and to the west of Novgorod even slower. Luga was captured on 12 February and Gdov on Lake Peipus on the same day; but on his left General Merezkov met with stubborn enemy resistance at Shimsk, near the south-west corner of Lake Ilmen. Soon however the Russian advance south of Luga compelled the Germans to start evacuating their stronghold of Staraya Rusa, and this had to be followed by a general withdrawal of the German Sixteenth Army from the Lovat sector. Kholm and many other places fell; after 20 February the Russians were converging from the north and from the south on the very important junction of Dno. It was taken on the 23rd.

During the last week of February Russian columns advanced towards Pskov from three directions: along the shores of the lake, by the high road from Luga, and along the Dno-Porkhov railway. The Second Baltic Group of General Popov also advanced westwards on the whole front, capturing on the left the strong point of Pustoshka and, on the right, approaching Opochka and Ostrov. The latter town was the key point of the fortified region of Pskov. In the first days of March the Russians reached the outer positions of the Pskov–Ostrov–Opochka region. They fought in difficult conditions, soon made still more difficult by premature thaw which flooded the area where snowfall was considerable in February. The Pskov-Opochka positions organized by General M del proved then particularly well protected by a lake, the big river Velikaya and the network of small marshy rivulets. It was necessary to postpone the attack on Pskov till the end of spring.

Map No. 1. For the same reason an offensive attempt by General Rokossovsky in the Central zone could be only of short duration and gave but limited results. A sudden frost here, as in the Ukraine, in the second half of February seemed to open for Rokossovsky a possibility of action even in this terrible "wet" section. On the 22nd he attacked towards the enemy stronghold of

Rogachev. The Dnieper was crossed, and there were three days of very intense fighting; Rogachev was captured, as well as Novy Bykhov in the direction of Mogilev. But after the 25th the mild weather returned, thaw set in and made difficult any crossing of the treacherous swampy river Drut, which falls into the Dnieper just south of Rogachev and crosses the roads to Zhlobin and Bobruisk; the Mogilev direction was also covered by extensive marshes between the Drut and the Dnieper. Brilliantly started, the operation could not be developed.

Map No. 7. In the Southern zone there was one important episode in the second half of February: General Malinovsky captured Krivoy Rog—the "citadel" of the vast enemy defensive system in the Dnieper bend. The Russians were in close contact with carefully prepared enemy positions which were disposed in a semicircle with a radius of 15 to 20 miles. The enemy attention was apparently diverted on 20 February by the attack on Shirokoe, a strong point to the south of Krivoy Rog, on the river Ingulets. The principal blow came, however, from the north, where on the 21st the Russians crossed the Saksagan and the next day stormed the town. Shirokoe was taken only five days later and then the whole of the richest iron ore mining region in European Russia, with a yearly output of more than ten million tons of high grade ore, was once more in Russian hands.

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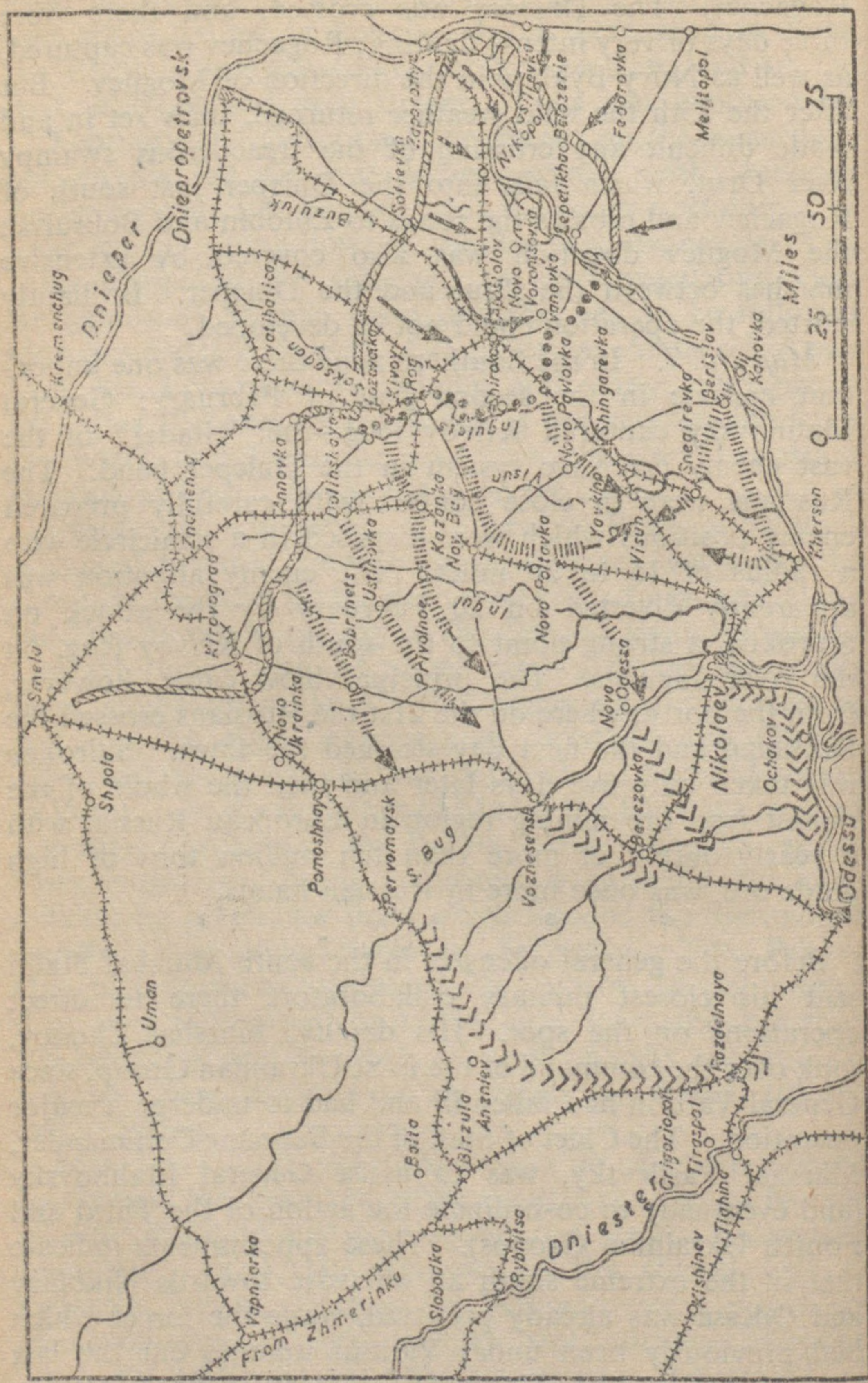
Before the general offensive in the south Marshal Stalin sent his closest military collaborators there to direct operations on the spot. His deputy, Marshal Zhukov, took over the command of the First Ukrainian Group, since General Vatutin had fallen ill and had to undergo a major operation. The Chief of Staff of the Supreme Commander, Marshal Vasilevsky, was to assist General Malinovsky (and eventually to co-ordinate the action of the Third and Fourth Ukrainian Groups). These appointments indicate that in the extreme south an offensive towards Nikolaev and Odessa was already prepared, while the forces which had previously been under Vatutin were to cut the last trunk line in the German Southern zone: Odessa–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Visun
Snegirevka
Znamenka
Annovka
Dolinskaya
Ustinovka
Kazanka
Novo Bug
Novo Poltavka
Yaykina
Kirovograd
Gobrinets
Pavlovka
Novo Odessa
Nikolaev
Ochakov
Odessa
Smela
Novo Ukrainka
Shpola
Pomoshnaya
Berezovka
Voznesensk
S. Bug
Uman
Bolta
Birzula
Anzirev
Grigoriopol
Tiraspol
Kazdelnaya
Dniester
Tighina
Kishinev
Rybnitsa
Slobodka
Vapniarka
From Zhmerinka

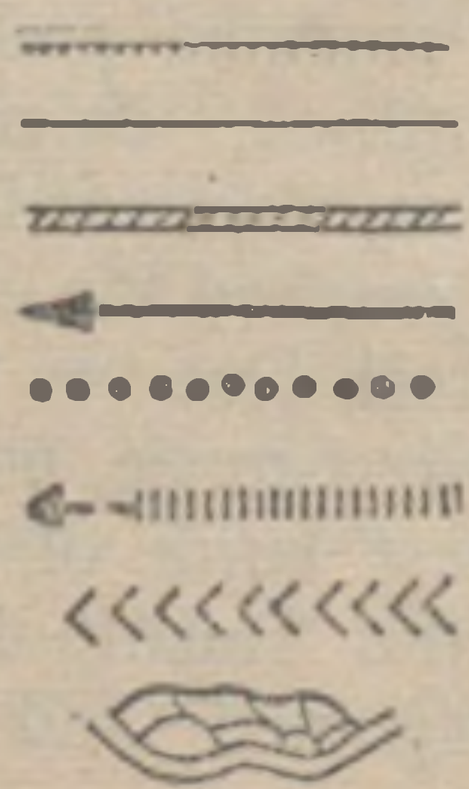
Zhmerinka–Proskurov–Lvov. The Second Ukrainian Group was to maintain operational liaison between Zhukov and Malinovsky, advancing up to and beyond the Southern Bug on a broad front.

Map No. 8. The most interesting strategic problem was that of Marshal Zhukov. During the preparatory period the First Ukrainian Group was considerably strengthened. The troops, now under the command of Zhukov, occupied a front 250 miles long—from the outskirts of Kovel to Pogrebische, north-east of Vinnitsa. On this long line, following the Kovel–Rovno–Shepetovka–Berdichev railway, Zhukov had to choose the sector from which his main force would start the offensive. Three possibilities had to be kept in view: the direction Shepetovka–Proskurov (or Shepetovka–Tarnopol); the direction Rovno (or Lutsk)–Dubno–Brody–Lvov; the direction Berdichev (or Kazatin)–Vinnitsa–Zhmerinka. As the aim of the offensive was the Odessa–Lvov railway line, the third direction had the advantage of being the shortest. However the Lvov and Tarnopol (or Proskurov) directions, if more dangerous in the case of failure, promised, if successful, a more complete outflanking of the enemy troops in the Southern zone. The difficult topography of the Dubno region and its longer communications with the Russian bases made Zhukov choose Shepetovka as his starting-point.

The troops of the First Ukrainian Group took the offensive on 4 March and developed it more rapidly

MAP 7

BATTLES OF NIKOPOL AND NOVOROSSIA



than had been seen even in the most successful Russian operations. Zhukov's divisions moved on a wide front of 110 miles, between Ostrog in the west and the river Sluch in the east, with Shepetovka and the railway to Tarnopol in the centre. Along this railway and the high road parallel to it the strongest blow was directed: Guard Tank formations, supported by mobile infantry and artillery, dispersed German units opposed to them, and in the first two days made a penetration almost 40 miles deep. Some of these formations switched from Yampol southwards, and in the evening of the 5th they were only 7 miles from the trunk line, the cutting of which had been the initial aim of the operation. On the 6th the full significance of the Russian victory became clear. Volochisk, the station on the Odessa–Lvov line (the former frontier station between Russia and Austro-Hungary) was captured; eight infantry and three tank Divisions were defeated, losing 40,000 killed and 6,000 prisoners.

A wide gap was made where two of Manstein's Armies held a liaison; in order to close it he hurriedly moved several infantry and tank Divisions from east to west. The Germans, however, were far from successful in their use of the muddy country tracks and lanes; their infantry ("over-mechanized") were not in training for marching, their artillery and supply columns took wrong directions and crossed each other; and there was a considerable confusion in the whole area to the east of the frontier river Zbruch on which Volochisk stands. This helped Marshal Zhukov to extend his break-through to the east, and transform his tactical victory into a major strategic success. On 9 March his troops stormed and captured the "bastion" of Staro-Konstantinov, defending the direct approaches to Proskurov from the north, and the same day his vanguard on the right reached the outskirts of Tarnopol. Here with the aid of fresh reserves the enemy was able to organize more effective resistance, using strong artillery on the heights of the west bank of the Seret. Zhukov manœuvred to outflank the Tarnopol positions from the south, when an unexpected and fortunate

development of the offensive on Marshal Konev's front (he was promoted Marshal after his victory at Korsun) opened up the possibility of a new and very important strategic move on his own front.

* * * * *

Simultaneously with Zhukov's attack Malinovsky took the offensive in the Krivoy Rog region. A quick advance could not be expected here, as his troops had to force three rivers, the Ingulets, Visun and Ingul, and conquer a well-fortified belt in an area crossed by many deep ravines.

Map No. 6. The first successes of the Third Ukrainian Group were considerable, but they could not influence the general strategic development as did the offensive of Marshal Konev. This imaginative military leader started his attack from the region north and south of Zvenigorodka, two days later than Marshal Zhukov. Whether intentionally or not, it proved of great significance, as in consequence of Zhukov's rapid advance the enemy H.Q. decided to concentrate Huber's Tank Army in the region not to the east but to the west of Uman. Those of his Divisions which had participated in the "relief force," near Zvenigorodka, were on the move westwards. On 6 and 7 March most of them were placed in échelons along the railway running to Uman at the stations of Talnoe, Potash, Khristinovka. On these days the German communiqué mentioned the Russian attacks south-west of Zvenigorodka as something not unexpected. The great surprise came, however, on the next two days.

While a part of Konev's forces were attacking south-west of Zvenigorodka, strong armoured formations, led by Tank-Marshal Rotmistrov (promoted after Korsun) moved (north-west of Zvenigorodka) from Lisyanka to Buki and further westwards to Sokolovka and Monasterische, almost parallel to the railway, but 10 to 15 miles from it to the north. Having smashed the enemy flank cover on the Gorny Tikich, Rotmistrov's armoured units switched to the stations of Talnoe, Potash, Khristinovka, where enemy Panzers and infantry were caught completely unawares. On 10 March the great enemy base of Uman was suddenly captured, almost without resistance by its

garrison. This was a catastrophic rout for Huber's Army with its remnants of six Panzer Divisions and a number of mobile and infantry units. A large amount of booty was taken by Konev's men: more than 500 tanks (among them 200 Tigers and Panthers) and self-propelled guns, 600 field guns, 12,000 lorries, 50 dumps of munitions and food. The state of panic in which the Germans fled from Uman and the adjacent stations is described by a war correspondent in the following words:

"The morale of some of the German tank crews has completely cracked in some sectors. Tanks have been left on the roads with their whole tracks sunk in mud, and with fuel and ammunition in them. The German radio station was left intact. At the village of Potash, in a space of less than three-quarters of a mile, 630 abandoned lorries were counted, crammed with food, shells and so forth. Uman was full of dumps and the airfield was undamaged."

The disaster suffered by the enemy at Uman radically changed the situation in the whole German Southern zone. Disorganized and demoralized, Huber's Tank Army (together with the remnants of the Eighth Army) could not stop the advance of Konev's forces to the Southern Bug or even beyond this river. Rearguards left by the Germans in the villages between Uman and the Southern Bug, showed but poor fighting spirit, and the Russians progressed relentlessly. On 12 March they were already at Gayvoron on the Southern Bug; it took them only two days to cross this river on a broad front. On 15 March Rotmistrov captured the very important Vapniarka Junction on the Odessa–Zhmerinka trunk line, only 30 miles from the Dniester. Others of Konev's columns beyond the Southern Bug switched in the directions of Vinnitsa and Zhmerinka while his left flank units captured Zlatopol and Novo-Mirgorod, advancing on Novo-Ukrainka.

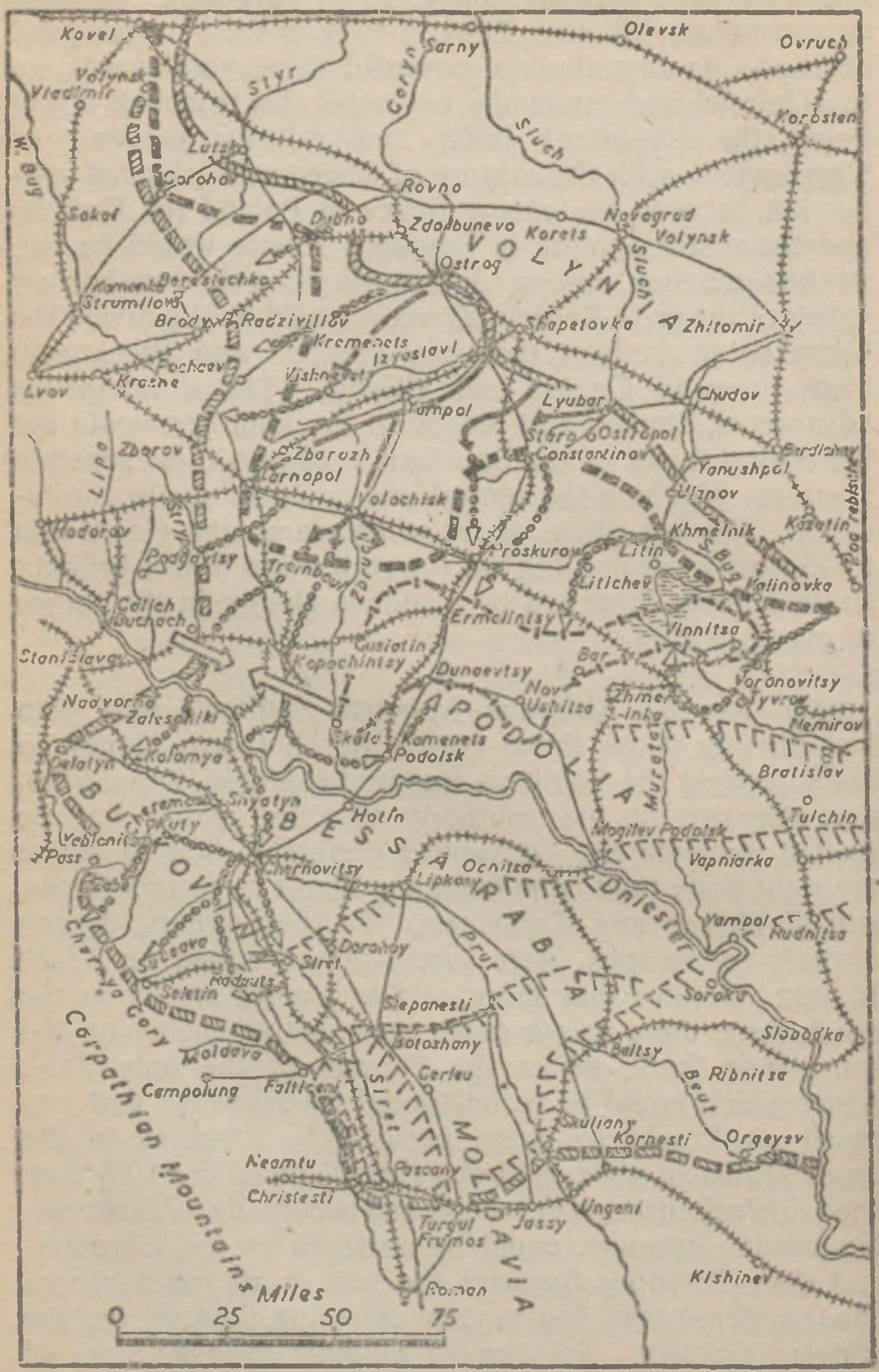
There was now no particular urgency for Zhukov to deal with the enemy forces based on Proskurov, for the further advance of Konev would make their plight desperate. On the other hand the extension of his own operations westwards could be but slow, as the German reserves

might easily be brought from Lvov to Tarnopol. In these circumstances Marshal Zhukov took a fresh operational decision: he organized a powerful drive southwards, to the Dniester and eventually beyond it, his principal object being the important town and railway junction of Chernovitsy; with the capture of Chernovitsy the last connection between the enemy forces in Poland (or Galicia) and those still fighting in Southern Russia would be cut. At the same time, driving southwards along the deep narrow valley of the river Zbruch, Zhukov would finally divide the Germans in Podolia (between Vinnitsa and Proskurov) from those in Galicia and Volynia. The simultaneous advance of Zhukov and Konev to the Dniester would cut the enemy forces of the Southern zone into three separate portions, of which the central one could be easily annihilated. The last phase of the winter campaign (15 March to 15 April) was nothing but the realization of this brilliant strategic idea, suggested by a sudden change in the course of events.

* * * * *

Map No. 8. Although Marshal Zhukov's new plan had already taken shape by 15 March (when Konev so easily crossed the Southern Bug and captured Vapniarka), the offensive in the southerly direction could not be started immediately. It seemed preferable first to secure the right flank (and rear) from any threat by enemy forces, still at Dubno and Kremenets. So these points, despite difficult topography, were successfully stormed on 17–19 March. Besides that more or less passive enemy in the north-west, there was a much more active enemy on the south-west flank, where the Panzers of the only Tank Army which could be reconstituted by Manstein and was based on Proskurov, were persistently attacking in the usual Manstein style; between the 15th and the 19th they tried to break through Volochisk and eventually to Tarnopol. No results, however, could be obtained by the Germans, and their Divisions (perhaps the best in all the Southern zone) suffered very heavy, even crippling, losses from the Russian artillery. As soon as Zhukov observed signs of exhaustion in the enemy, his own picked armoured and

MAP 8


Kovel
Volynsk
Vladimir
Styr
Goryn
Sarny
Olevsk
Ovruch
Korosten
Sluch
Lutsk
Sarnov
Rovno
Sokal
Dubno
Zdolbunovo
Korets
Novograd Volynsk
Ostrog
VOLYN
Kamenka
Berestechko
Strumilov
Brody
Radzivillov
Shepetovka
Zhitomir
Kremenets
Izyaslavl
Lvov
Krasne
Vishnevets
Lyubar
Chudov
Tarnopol
Starokonstantinov
Ostropol
Zbarazh
Zborov
Ternopol
Berdichev
Yanushpol
Volochisk
Ulanov
Khmelnik
Kazatin
Troskurov
Litin
Litichev
Kalinovka
Podgaytsy
Tremboul
Gusiatin
Ermolintsy
Vinnitsa
Stanislavov
Kopychintsy
Dunaevtsy
Bar
Voronovitsy
Nadvorna
Zaleschiki
Nov Ushitsa
Zhmerinka
Tyvrov
Nemirov
Kolomya
Okna
Kamenets
Podolsk
Bratislav
Delatyn
Snyatyn
Tulchin
Kuty
Hotin
Mogilev Podolsk
Vashkovtsy
Pass
Chernovitsy
Ocnitsa
Lipkany
Vapniarka
Dniester
Yampol
Hudnitsa
Sulsava
Darabany
Siret
Prut
Sereth
Sieponesti
Soroka
Slobodka
Solotshany
Baltsy
Moldova
Cerlau
Ribnitsa
Campolung
Falticeni
Beut
Skuliany
Kornesti
Orgeyev
Neamtu
Pascany
Christesti
Vingeni
Turgul Frumos
Jassy
Kishinev
Roman
Carpathian Mountains
Miles
0
25
50
75

mobile Divisions rushed southwards along the western side of the Zbruch valley.

In four days (21st to 24th) these remarkable troops smashed the enemy resistance everywhere between the Zbruch and the Seret: they captured Trembovla, Gusiatin, Kopachintsy, Chortkov, and at last reached and crossed the Dniester at Zaleschiki. So extraordinarily rapid was their advance (60 miles in the first four days) that the Germans had no time to organize even a serious rearguard action. Nothing was now ahead of the Russian drive except here and there some dispersed enemy garrisons. On the 25th the Dniester was reached on a front of 50 miles and crossed at many points; two days later the Russians were 5 miles from their principal object—the town of Chernovitsy. They widened their break-through on the north and south sides of the Dniester and captured Kolomya on the upper Pruth. On 30 March Chernovitsy, the "capital" of Bukovina, was entered by Russian troops on the tenth day of their new offensive and 115 miles from their starting point.

No serious obstacles were met on Zhukov's southward drive to Chernovitsy, but he was well aware that the enemy presence was still too near his own lines of communication

MAP 8

BATTLE OF PODOLIA AND DRIVE TO THE PRUT, MARCH AND APRIL, 1944

Railways

Roads

Zhukov's front line, 1st March, 1944

Zhukov's offensive, 4th–10th March

New German front after the Russian break-through

Zhukov's drive to the Dniester and to the Pr (second half of March)

Konev's drive to the Dniester and across the Fru (March–April)

The Germans encircled in Podolia

German columns between Skala and Buchach (first half of April)

Front stabilised by 15th April, 1944

Marshes

in the west and in the east. In the west Tarnopol had already been outflanked from the south by the capture of Podgaytsy; and on 24 March this German freshly organized stronghold was even more decisively outflanked from the north when the upper Seret was crossed and the railway to Lvov cut. This state of things lasted, however, for more than a fortnight, when Tarnopol finally fell after fierce street fighting.

In the east it was high time to finish with Proskurov. Already the road connecting this German base with the valley of the Dniester had been cut by a bold move by Lelushenko across the Zbruch, towards Kamenets Podolsk, perched high on an "inaccessible" rock. On the 25th Proskurov was attacked from west and east, and the garrison, leaving the town, retired to the south; but it was too late. Kamenets Podolsk fell on the 26th, while beyond the Dniester Konev's columns penetrated deeply into the northern corner of Bessarabia. The remnants of the German Army in Podolia, now encircled by the First and the Second Ukrainian Groups, were facing extermination.

The moves by the two Russian Marshals were in complete strategical co-ordination, while their troops co-operated tactically in the battle for Podolia. When Konev's right flank column had crossed the Southern Bug near Bratislav (where two enemy Divisions were routed), Zhukov's extreme left wing closed on Vinnitsa on a broad front between the Khmelnik–Litin road and Voronovitsy. One of his columns pushed across the Southern Bug at Tyrov, towards Zhmerinka. This large junction was captured on 18 March, i.e. before Vinnitsa fell, although the defences of Vinnitsa were specially organized to protect Zhmerinka. Now the enemy force at Vinnitsa, almost encircled, had either to flee towards Bar or to fight. They chose to fight, being well covered in the west by the marshes of the river Zgar. Finally three more German Divisions were annihilated here, but it took four days, and Vinnitsa fell only on the 22nd. A special Artillery Division (more than 200 heavy howitzers and guns), which had been formed by Manstein for the defence of Berdichev, was captured.

The liquidation of the enemy forces at Vinnitsa might have been achieved more rapidly with the help of Konev's units, liaison with which had been established on the river Murafa, south of Zhmerinka. These units had, however, a strategic task of much greater importance than any tactical problem. They were ordered to advance relentlessly to the Dniester crossings at Mogilev-Podolsk and to capture them. This was accomplished on 20 March, while on the previous day other units of Konev's Group had crossed the river at the Bessarabian town of Soroka. This double performance was the signal to Marshal Zhukov to start his powerful drive to the south.

The state of the German forces on the Dniester may be judged from the fact that even the railway and high road bridges at Mogilev-Podolsk and Soroka had not been destroyed by the demoralized enemy. Without difficulty and in two days Konev brought over this large river strong formations with all necessary equipment. On 24 March, when Zhukov crossed the Dniester at Zaleschiki, Konev already deployed his Divisions along the railway Oknitsa–Beltsy, roughly speaking midway between the Dniester and the Pruth. And on the 27th he reached the latter river on a front of 80 miles, between Skuliany (12 miles north of Jassy) and Lipkany (40 miles east of Chernovitsy). In the last days of March the principal objects of "the great manœuvre by the two Marshals" were achieved: their troops were on the Pruth, ready to cross it at any time.

During the advance of Konev's right columns, the units of his centre occupied, between the Pruth and the Dneister, the line Skuliany–Rybnitsa. His left wing, between the Dniester and the Southern Bug, captured the town of Balta and two junctions, Slobodka and Birzula, on the Odessa trunk railway. On the extreme left liaison with Malinovsky's Group was established at Pervomaisk (taken on the 22nd). From Pervomaisk to Lipkany Marshal Konev's front became 300 miles long, but on most of it only negligible enemy forces were met with after 20 March. Abnormally long, Konev's front could soon be shortened, as the region between the Southern Bug and the Dniester passed to General Malinovsky's Group.

Map No. 7. Simultaneously with the First and the Second Ukrainian Groups, the Third Ukrainian Group under the command of General Malinovsky (with the assistance of Marshal Vasilevsky who represented the Supreme Command) took the offensive in the western direction. One after another several rivers flowing from north to south, the Ingulets, Visun, Ingul and Southern Bug, had to be forced by Malinovsky's troops. After four days of heavy fighting (6 to 9 March) both the Ingulets and the Visun were forced, the enemy defensive system between these rivers was broken, and Malinovsky's troops captured Kazanka and Novy Bug on the Dolinskaya-Nikolaev railway. In the following days the advance was extended to the right flank of the Third Ukrainian Group. Dolinskaya fell, the Ingul was reached at Privolnoe and Ustinovka and crossed on 12 March; at Bobrinets liaison had been established with the left flank of the Second Ukrainian Group.

In the meantime other columns were advancing on Shingarevka Junction and Novo-Pavlovka, and on the Dnieper the Russians captured Berislav, whence they rapidly moved on Kherson. This important town was occupied on 13 March, and between the 14th and 16th Malinovsky and Vasilevsky completed their brilliant victory by the encirclement and annihilation of several German Divisions trapped in the Shingarevka–Visun–Yavkino region. The Sixth German Army (General Kolitz), reinforced to the strength of twenty Divisions by units taken from the Seventeenth Army (in Crimea) or concentrated previously for a Tank Army, suffered a heavy defeat in this "battle for Novorossia." The enemy losses exceeded 38,000 killed, 14,000 prisoners, 1,200 guns, 275 tanks, 200 self-propelled guns, 16,000 motor vehicles.

Despite this great success the capture of Nikolaev was not an easy task, as this town is situated between the lower Ingul and the broad estuary of the Southern Bug. The enemy was able to organize strong defensive lines here in a narrow sector, The Russians reached Nova-Odessa on the Southern Bug on 16 March, and on 24th the town of Voznesensk was already in their hands, open-

ing them a road towards Odessa, but the Germans were still able to hold Nikolaev. This Black Sea port was occupied only on 28 March, when the Russians threatened to cut the enemy retreat across the estuary of the Southern Bug.

Malinovsky's columns were advancing on Odessa from several directions—from Pervomaisk through Ananiev, from Voznesensk through Berezovka, and from Nikolaev along the Black Sea coast. There were some sharp clashes with the enemy rearguards, and near Razdelnaya Junction a fortunate manœuvre resulted in a complete rout of five German and Rumanian Divisions. Odessa was not defended; the Russian troops entered into the "capital of Novorossia" on 10 April. A few days later the Third Ukrainian Group reached the Dniester on a wide front, between Rybnitsa and the estuary.

Map No. 1. On Marshal Zhukov's and Marshal Konev's fronts the line was stabilized by 15 April. On its right, the First Ukrainian Group held the line running from the approaches to Kovel and Vladimir Volynsk towards Gorokhov and Radzivillov on the Galician border. In Galicia the Russian positions followed the east side of the river Strypa. There were several days of intensive fighting on the Strypa and the Zbruch when the remnants of the two German Tank Armies encircled in Podolia (and put under the command of General Nehring, ex-Commander of the Afrika Korps) tried to break through from Skala in a westerly direction and join near Buchach the relief force attacking there from the west. This time some part of the encircled enemy force succeeded in escaping, but only with heavy loss of material and men; the temporary gap near Buchach was closed again.

Beyond the Dniester, on the left flank of Zhukov's Group, Russian vanguards attacked by several Hungarian Divisions still remained near Stanislavov but left Delatyn. In Bukovina the occupation was extended to the south of Chernovitsy, along the valleys of the Cheremosh and upper Sereth. Patrols reached the sources of the Cheremosh and the summit of the high Carpathian ridge Chernya Gory on the frontier of Sub-Carpathian Rus—the eastern

part of the Czechoslovak Republic. On the upper Sereth liaison was established with the units of Marshal Konev.

In the meantime Konev's right flank columns crossed the Prut on a front of 100 miles; on 7 April Dorohoy and Botoshany were captured, then the upper Sereth was reached and forced, the important cross-roads of northern Moldavia, Falticeni and Kristesti fell into the Russian hands. From here the front line ran through Targul-Frumos to the northern outskirts of Jassy. Konev's left flank positions stretched across Bessarabia, from Skuliany, on the Prut, to the forests between Orgyev and Kishinev, and further eastwards to the Dniester where at Dubossary and Grigoriopol a liaison with Malinovsky's units had been established.

* * * * *

As a brief resumé of the third Russian winter campaign it may be said that probably only in the Northern zone had the Russian achievements corresponded exactly with the possible initial plans. In the Central zone the peculiar weather conditions had prevented any development beyond purely local, if appreciable successes. In the Southern zone, however, the results of the Russian offensive had certainly exceeded the most optimistic calculations of the Russian Supreme Command.

The reason was not only the remarkable leadership of Zhukov, Vasilevsky, Vatutin, Konev, Malinovsky and their subordinate commanders—not even the high efficiency of the troops and their unlimited capacity for endurance. The enemy again facilitated the task of the Russian Armies, completely miscalculating the influence of weather conditions on Russian operational plans and the actual development of these plans. Conditions unfavourable for any offensive were too readily interpreted as an additional argument for the strategy suggested by political considerations—"the strategy of delaying action" practised everywhere and for as long as possible.

For the sake of this curious strategy a very considerable number of good troops were sacrificed (sometimes even whole Armies) with only negative results. The weather conditions alone could not bring to a standstill Russian

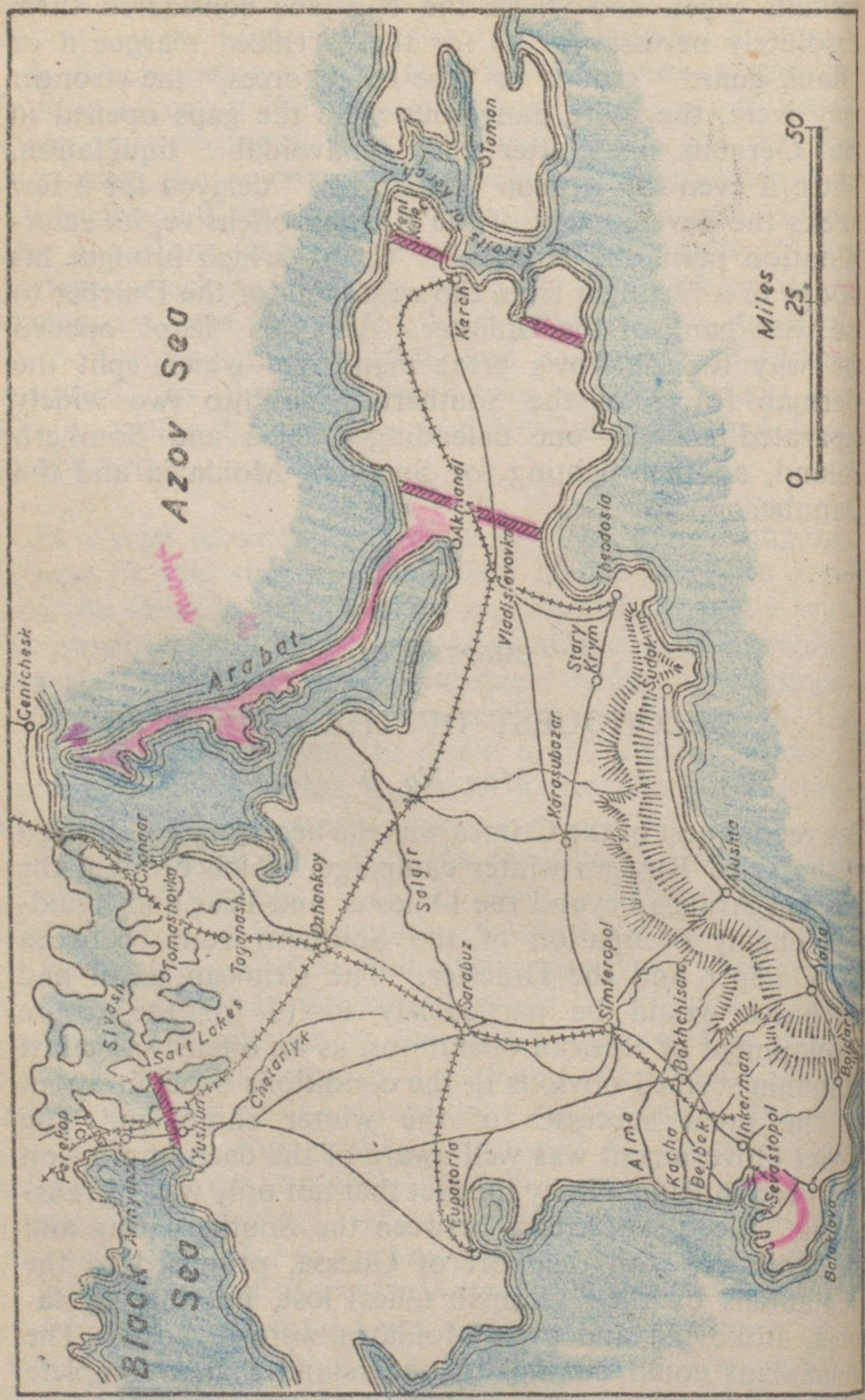
assaults when and where the Russians considered them absolutely necessary. As for the sacrificed rearguard or "flank-guard" groups or "the relief forces," the stronger they were, the more dangerous were the gaps opened in the German lines after their unavoidable liquidation. Thus, if even the Korsun "flankguard" delayed for a few weeks the development of the Russian offensive, its extermination permitted Konev his "leap" which brought his troops in a fortnight from the west bank of the Dnieper to the west bank of the Dniester. And this "leap" opened the way for Zhukov's great manœuvre which split the German forces of the Southern zone into two widely separated groups—one defending Galicia and Southern Poland, another fighting for Southern Moldavia and the Danube.

CHAPTER III

RECONQUEST OF THE CRIMEA

Map No. 9

THE reconquest of the Crimea was the necessary completion of the third Russian winter campaign, which brought the Russian Armies beyond the Dniester and Prut and liquidated enemy occupation of the Southern zone, between the Dnieper and the Dniester. The Crimean naval and air bases would be particularly useful for the future development of Russian operations, as an offensive against Rumania seemed obvious in the conditions brought about by the great successes of the winter campaign. The Soviet Government was well aware of the deep impression produced in Rumania by the fact that not only was "Transistria" (i.e. the territory between the Southern Bug and the Dniester, with the port of Odessa, promised to the Rumanians by their German allies) lost, but that Bessarabia, Bukovina and even Moldavia were invaded. The Rumanians could not fail to understand that a complete collapse of their country could not be prevented by their


Azov Sea
Black Sea
Arabat
Genichesk
Perekop
Armyansk
Salt Lakes
Sivash
Tomashovka
Chonagar
Taganash
Dzhankoy
Chatarlyk
Yushun
Salgir
Sarabuz
Eupatoria
Simferopol
Karasubazar
Stary Krym
Sudak
Alushta
Yalta
Bakhchisarai
Alma
Kacha
Belbek
Inkerman
Sevastopol
Balaklava
Baidar
Feodosia
Vladislavovka
Akmonai
Karch
Strait of Karch
Kerch
Taman
Miles
0
25
50

own efforts, and they obviously began to doubt whether this could be avoided even with German help. The re-appearance of Russian land, sea and air forces on the Crimean coast would be another and severe blow to Rumanian morale, already low among civilians as well as among the troops.

It was precisely these considerations which decided the German H.Q. to defend the Crimea. The peninsula was occupied by the Seventeenth German Army (General Jänecke) which had fought in the Caucasus and had been evacuated from the Taman peninsula. That Army suffered heavy losses in 1943, and although some fresh troops arrived, Jänecke's Army remained rather weak, as he had on several occasions to send some of his Divisions to other Armies, when the latter were in difficulties. This occurred during the Melitopol battle in 1943 and again in 1944 after Malinovsky's break-through at Apostolovo. There was a moment when Jänecke had at his disposal only three German infantry Divisions; but in March, when the Sixth Army was finally defeated and the evacuation of Nikolaev had begun, two Divisions of that Army were transported by sea to the Crimea, and in April Jänecke had again five German infantry Divisions, besides a number of special units, tank battalions, positional and mobile artillery, naval commands, engineers, signallers, etc.—a total of 100,000 Germans, all of whom might be used in case of emergency. Moreover there came from the Caucasus to the Crimea with the Seventeenth Army seven Rumanian Divisions—two cavalry, two infantry and three Alpine; the last were considered to be among the best in the Rumanian Army. With reduced effectives (particularly in

MAP 9

CRIMEA IN MARCH, 1944

Railways

Roads

German fortified lines

Mountains

cavalry) the satellite troops added some 60,000 to the German contingents.

These forces, provided with strong positional artillery, seemed sufficient under normal conditions to man the three fortified areas on the defence of which the security of the Crimea was based. In the east the narrowest part of the Kerch peninsula was covered by the Akmanal positions near those which had been so stubbornly defended by the Russians in 1942. To the east of them the town of Kerch was transformed into a "bastion" and other fortifications were built on the sea-coast and inside the peninsula. Still stronger were several fortified lines which barred the Perekop isthmus between the small town of the same name and the village of Yushun near the southern end of the isthmus. The third fortified area was that of Sevastopol. Some of the works destroyed during the siege of 1941–42 were rebuilt, others could be used as they were; at many points the Germans dug new lines of deep trenches in the rocks. It seems however that they did not try to restore the full strength of the fortress, for their principal care was the organization of the Perekop lines.

Under normal conditions these lines constituted a formidable obstacle against any attempt to penetrate into the Crimea by land. Provided with powerful artillery, strengthened by a system of anti-tank ditches, they had among the Germans the reputation of being "impregnable." These "normal" conditions were however limited by the months during which the Perekop isthmus remained the only way by which any land force could penetrate into the Crimea. But during the winter there was usually a period of several weeks (three to six) when the shallow lagoon called Sivash, dividing the Crimea from the mainland, became frozen and so opened a passage on the ice from the mainland to the peninsula at many points, some of them 20 or 30 miles to the east of the Perekop isthmus. This possibility radically changed the whole defensive problem.

On the coast-line of the Sivash there were no serious defensive works, except the point where the railway from Kharkov and Melitopol entered the Crimea, after crossing

the Sivash by a bridge several miles long; this Chongar bridge was of course destroyed by the enemy. During the winter the Sivash coast could be considered a weak spot in the defence of the peninsula. It was consequently under observation by two Rumanian infantry and two cavalry Divisions, while their three Alpine Divisions constituted a reserve for this group at Dzhankoy Junction. Three German Divisions manned the fortifications of the Perekop isthmus and another two garrisoned the fortified part of the Kerch peninsula. It seemed sufficient perhaps on paper, but in reality, by the end of the winter, all the Rumanian troops, influenced by Russian successes, had become unreliable and had lost the will to fight. The winter, however, passed quietly, as fortunately for the enemy Seventeenth Army the weather continued exceptionally mild, the Sivash lagoons remained unfrozen, and in March the spring seemed to diminish considerably the danger of a Russian assault. If such were the enemy's hopes, they were not justified by events.

* * * * *

The reconquest of the Crimea was the principal objective of the Fourth Ukrainian Group under the command of General Tolbukhin. This particular task was well suited to the Commander, who became famous by his breakthrough of a strong enemy defensive system on the Mius in 1943 and repeated the achievement at Melitopol later in the same year. Among his troops were units with Stalingrad experience, and his infantry and gunners had proved their efficiency recently at the Nikopol bridgehead. Directed (as was General Malinovsky) by Marshal Vasilevsky, General Tolbukhin had among his subordinates an excellent organizer in the person of General Zakharov. The attack of the Fourth Ukrainian Group was also to be supported by a special Combined Corps, entrusted to General Eremenko and based on the Taman peninsula. The idea of this special unit, where the land troops were trained to act in particularly close co-operation with the Air Force and large and small craft of the Black Sea Navy, originated from two small-scale combined operations, which during the winter resulted in the capture of two

narrow beachheads on the Kerch peninsula—one in its north-east corner and another to the south-east of Kerch. They could not be extended at the time, but on the other hand enemy attempts to wipe them out failed, thanks to the Russian Air Force and naval artillery. These strips of land might be very useful in an operation on a bigger scale under General Eremenko.

In recent wars the problem of penetration into the Crimea by a land army had twice been resolved. In 1920, during the Russian Civil War, the "Whites" under the command of General Wrangel had concentrated their defensive effort on the Perekop isthmus. They organized fairly strong field fortifications near Yushun at the south end of the isthmus, and it was a serious obstacle for the "Reds" whose artillery was not sufficiently powerful. The "Whites", however, had in November 1920 only a reduced force at their disposal—a total of about 30,000 in the whole peninsula against some 130,000 under the "Red" Commander Frunze. Not only the defence, but even observation of the Sivash coast, could not be adequately organized by Wrangel, and this was obviously a vulnerable point of the "White" front. Frunze understood this, but his difficulty was having at his disposal scarcely any means of making the passage across the lagoons. He took advantage, however, very skilfully, of a November day of exceptionally strong west wind, which made the shallow places of the Sivash still shallower. The "Red" infantry then was able to ford the lagoons at several points, and once they were on the peninsula coast Frunze's problem was solved. The Yushun positions were outflanked and further resistance by the "Whites" was impossible, as they were at great numerical disadvantage in the field. And Sevastopol was at that time only a naval fortress, almost defenceless from the land.

In 1941 the Crimean defensive problem was of quite a different character. Then Sevastopol was defended by solid fortifications, not only from the sea, but also from the land, several lines of defence having been carefully prepared before the war and in its first months. The fortifications of the Perekop isthmus, on the contrary,

were improvised only when the course of events threatened the security of the Crimea. Troops available for the defence of the peninsula were far less numerous than the enemy army marching towards it, and heavy artillery, needed for the defence of Perekop, could be taken only from the Sevastopol front with the risk of weakening its defensive capacity. The Russian H.Q. had to choose where the principal defensive effort was to be concentrated. Sevastopol was chosen, and this decision proved to be right as, despite the fall (after a very courageous defence) of the Perekop lines, Sevastopol resisted *for eight months* and cost the Germans many efforts and sacrifices.

General Tolbukhin's task was far from being easy, as this time the Crimea was defended by an army at least 150,000 strong, fully equipped and well protected by three fortified regions prepared in advance. The numerical strength of the enemy seemed sufficient for the defence of these regions and also for the defence of the Sivash coast. It was clear anyhow that the Russian operation had to be planned as a threefold attack directed simultaneously against the Perekop isthmus, the passages across the Sivash and the Kerch region. A success at one of these points would immediately endanger the defence of the other two. And this explains why the operation was originally planned for a period of frost, which would greatly facilitate the crossing of the Sivash. Such a period might be expected between mid-January and the end of February, but as has been said, no sufficient frost ever came and the lagoon remained ice-free. By March this state of things could not but be clear, and General Tolbukhin was forced to make a change in his preparations, which, however, by no means showed that he dismissed the idea of crossing the lagoon. The idea was the same, but the technique of the crossing must be different. It was undoubtedly a complication, but on the other hand it promised to take the enemy by surprise, as he would hardly expect a passage by Russian troops in some force across an ice-free Sivash.

During the month of March a large number of flat-bottomed craft and many rafts were concentrated with all possible secrecy in the small port of Genichesk and other

places on the north coast of the Sivash; pontoons, no longer needed on the Dnieper, were also collected and adapted for the transport of guns and even of light tanks. General Kreiser's men, to whom the crossing was entrusted, were trained in fording the shallow places of the lagoon and Russian patrols studied all the details of this particular region. On several "islands" between the mainland and the peninsula secret posts were established and maintained. At the same time other units, under the command of General Zakharov, were trained for the attack on the Perekop isthmus. A large number of batteries (many of them of heavy and long-range guns) were ready to take up their battle positions. The Air Force discovered the enemy artillery's emplacements, and several times before the attack Russian guns started a bombardment to which the Germans replied, and the flashes of their positional guns were then carefully located. On the Taman peninsula General Eremenko, in his turn, concentrated his Combined Corps, ready to launch it across the straits.

All these preparations did not seem to attract any particular attention from the enemy, who was more preoccupied by 1 April with the general situation than with a possible threat to his Crimean sector. The Commander of the German Seventeenth Army admitted certainly some probability of the Russian assault at Perekop and Kerch, but he trusted to the strength of the fortifications. As for the crossing of the Sivash, he obviously thought it impracticable under spring or summer conditions. Three Rumanian Alpine Divisions, which during the winter were stationed near Dzhankoy Junction, as a reserve for other Divisions on the Sivash front, were moved to Sevastopol and prepared in accordance with an order from H.Q. to go by sea to Rumania.

* * * * *

On 8 April at eight in the morning, quite unexpectedly for the enemy, many hundreds of Russian guns opened concentrated fire on the defences of the isthmus, smashing works and silencing batteries. The first line of enemy fortifications (to the south of Perekop which was in "no man's land")—followed an old Turkish earthen wall,

only 6 or 7 miles long at this narrow part of the isthmus. The effect of the Russian fire in so restricted a space proved to be very considerable. The infantry advanced without difficulty and one after another the enemy pill-boxes were captured and anti-tank ditches crossed beyond the first line. The next day (9 April) the Russians entered Armyansk and cleared the wider part of the isthmus before its "southern neck" (near the village of Yushun) where several salt lakes make it again narrow. Beyond Yushun the Chetarlysk ravine and some relatively high ground make convenient defensive positions, and following the lesson of the Russian Civil War, the Germans here organized their main centre of resistance. The Russian artillery could not deploy against Yushun as at Perekop, and the organization of this second stage of the attack on the isthmus required some time—perhaps several days. However, news came that the passage of the Sivash had already been accomplished with great success, and this completely changed the whole situation on the northern shores of the Crimea.

During the night of 7–8 April and the following day small parties of Russian infantry forded shallow parts of the Sivash and appeared on the south coast of this "putrid sea." They were immediately followed by flat-bottomed craft and rafts bringing guns, munitions, light cars and even horses (as the horses refused to go into water so strongly saturated with salt). The southern shores of the Sivash, between the region of salt lakes (near a poor village called Tomashovka) and Akmanal on the north coast of the Kerch peninsula, was under the observation of four Rumanian Divisions, two of them cavalry. The Rumanians also occupied the curious Arabat sand-bank, which is nowhere more than two miles wide, but fifty miles long; it starts from the Kerch peninsula at Akmanal and on its northern end approaches Genichesk at a distance of only two miles. This small port was under fire from a few German guns on the "natural breakwater" of Arabat.

During the first day of the Sivash operation the Russians met with only slight opposition: it seems that the Rumanians held only posts in the coastal area, while the bulk of their Divisions stayed in more comfortable quarters at

Dzhankoy Junction, some 20 miles to the south. Bold Russian scouts were able to land from small craft on the Crimean side of the destroyed Chongar bridge as well as on the sand-bank of Arabat. This caused confusion and even panic among the surprised enemy. However, the infantry's task was still arduous during the second day (9 April) as working in water the troops had sometimes to draw heavy rafts two or three miles, their feet deep in the sticky sea-ooze.

There was some shelling and machine-gun fire from the coast, but the Rumanians were in a state of bewilderment and their commander thought perhaps that it was only a diversion and did not concentrate his forces at a definite point of the coast. By the morning of the third day General Kreiser was able to consider his troops as established on the coast, between Tomashovka and Taganash station (on the south end of the Chongar bridge). On 10 April pontoons were moved across the lagoon, partly for the transport of guns and light tanks and partly for the construction of bridges; the latter work proceeded in very unfavourable conditions, as that day a fresh wind caused a considerable swell in the shallow waters of the lagoon. With an "all out" effort the Russians succeeded at last in concentrating on the Crimean coast a certain number of guns, tanks and lorries. And the enemy was still slow to join battle: some advanced Rumanian units surrendered, others fled in disorder from Arabat sand-bank. On the Kerch peninsula General Eremenko's forces opened the attack on 9 April and the next day the storming of the town itself began.

On the night of 10–11 April the situation seemed so serious to General Jänecke that he ordered the evacuation of Kerch and the concentration of his right-flank troops on the Akmanal lines. Meanwhile the Rumanians were to defend Dzhankoy. On the fourth day (11 April), however, the fate of the operation was decided. That day Tolbukhin, taking account of the obvious confusion of the Rumanians, gave a bold order to his troops who had crossed the Sivash: without delay all tanks, mobile guns, lorried infantry units and cavalry detachments

which were available on the coast were to advance resolutely on Dzhankoy. And this was the signal for victory: the same day Dzhankoy Junction was captured and two Rumanian infantry Divisions fled in disorder, leaving some 10,000 prisoners.

When this news reached General Jänecke he ordered a general retreat of all his troops in the northern Crimea to start on the night of 11–12 April. It seems that in these critical circumstances he planned to concentrate his German and Rumanian Alpine Divisions at Simferopol for a counter-attack against the advancing Russian columns before the latter could collect heavier guns and tanks and full-strength infantry. But it meant a sacrifice of the elaborately prepared defensive lines at Yushun and Akmanal! Moreover the Commander of the German Seventeenth Army still did not rightly estimate the determined character of the Russian drive and its speed. On 12 April Kreiser's columns from Dzhankoy advanced directly on Simferopol; the next day after short fighting at Sarabuz this "capital" of the Crimea was captured. On 12 and 13 April three German Divisions retreating from the Yushun lines on Simferopol met with Russian columns and were badly mauled between Dzhankoy and Sarabuz; they could consider themselves fortunate even to reach the region of Sevastopol (by a secondary road through Bakhchisarai). In two days all the Jänecke plans crumbled; his reserve, three Rumanian Alpine Divisions, had no time to concentrate at Simferopol, while two German Divisions from the Akmanal lines on 13 April found their road to the Crimean "capital" already cut and had to turn to the southern coast road through Alushta and Yalta. As for the Rumanians, one of their cavalry Divisions surrendered intact and three other Divisions were completely disrupted and dispersed.

The first phase of the operation was over and complete success was achieved in five days. The Russian losses were negligible—less than 5,000 of Tolbukhin's and Eremenko's troops. The enemy lost almost 40,000 prisoners of whom only 10,000 were Germans; but the Germans lost some 15,000 killed. Considerable booty was

captured by the Russians, as the enemy had no time to remove his positional artillery either from the Yushun or from the Akmanal lines. In a few days and without resistance the Crimean ports of Feodosia, Eupatoria and Yalta fell to the Russians.

There were several reasons for this astonishing victory. The first was the perseverance and fertility in expedients of the troops who accomplished the passage across the Sivash. Not less important was the perfect preparedness of units and batteries, which were able in less than twenty-four hours to smash the very strong line at the northern end of the Perekop peninsula. Eremenko's operations also went quite smoothly and the Soviet Air Force proved here as well as at Perekop and on the Sivash its high efficiency.

That the Rumanians did not fight stubbornly was certainly of great importance. It may be said that Tolbukhin's success on the Sivash had been "morally" prepared by the troops of Malinovsky, Konev and Zhukov in their drive towards Rumanian territory. The German units on the Perekop and Kerch isthmus fought fairly well, but their commanders were obviously impressed by the power of the Russian assault. Their reports to General Jänecke could not be very optimistic, and these circumstances, together with the news of panic among the Rumanian troops, caused him to evacuate the Akmanal and Yushun lines. He did not even try to organize any serious rearguard action beyond the Chetarlyk ravine, between Yushun and the sea. His thoughts at that moment were already directed to the defence of Sevastopol, where a new concentration of troops was urgently needed.

Thus General Jänecke proved unable to deal with the double task which had been given him. As we have seen from previous examples of defence of the Crimea, either access to the peninsula or its principal stronghold of Sevastopol should have been defended, as the defenders were numerically and materially too weak for the double task. Jänecke thought himself strong enough to fight at Perekop, at Kerch, on the Sivash and later around Sevastopol. But this proved to be a short-lived illusion.

Map No. 10. Whatever the losses and moral shock suffered by the enemy troops, the topographical conditions of the Sevastopol region and its powerful defences excluded any possibility of its capture by a sudden drive of those forces, which General Tolbukhin by 15 April had near Simferopol and Bakhchisarai. Once the enemy had decided to defend the Sevastopol fortifications (and this was soon verified by Russian patrols, who reached the valley of the Kacha) at least three weeks were needed to concentrate heavy artillery and other means of attack, without which a decisive action would have been impossible.

The Commander of the German Seventeenth Army was in fact ordered to defend Sevastopol; and he might count on several weeks during which he would be able to make his preparations. The order of the German H.Q. seemed, however, less categorical than might have been expected in the circumstances. General Jänecke was, for instance, allowed to ship away three Rumanian Alpine Divisions. Whether it was because of their doubtful will to fight, or because they were needed for mountain war in their own country, it resulted in a serious reduction of Jänecke's forces. He remained with five German infantry Divisions, already depleted, to which sappers, gunners, small tank units and naval commands might be added—some 60,000 men and a little more if the Rumanian stragglers from the Sivash could be used. Besides the Rumanian Alpine troops, Jänecke had to evacuate many convalescents, who had succeeded in escaping to Sevastopol from the German hospitals on the south coast of the Crimea. He was told also to ship away all "unnecessary" war material, which accordingly was concentrated near the places where it might be embarked. It is difficult to say how much of this material managed to cross the sea, which was already under control of the Russian Air Force. But such a suggestion could not but show the Army Commander that even his superiors were not certain of holding Sevastopol for long.

If the orders which General Jänecke received did not contribute to increase his confidence, they influenced the measures he took to carry out his defensive task. As the

material to be shipped was gradually concentrated at the main railway station in the docks of the South bay or on the sidings of the Inkerman station, at the eastern end of the harbour, it seemed important to protect first of all the northern front of the defensive lines, for if the Russians pierced it, they would have all the harbour and the South bay under their fire. Consequently Jänecke concentrated in the northern sector, besides positional batteries, most of his mobile artillery; three Divisions were to defend the high ground, on the south side of the Belbek, and Mackenzie Heights, while only two occupied the eastern front, between the Chernaya valley and Balaklava, although it was longer and had fewer fortifications and batteries. By the end of April Russian air reconnaissance and infantry patrols had discovered the distribution of the enemy forces, and this information aided Tolbukhin's plans for attack.

Before the attack started, General Jänecke was replaced by General Almedingen. It seems that the former Commander of the Seventeenth Army reported to the H.Q. that the forces at his disposal were not sufficient for the defence of a front line some 25 miles long. His intention was to shorten it in the northern sector and in the region of Balaklava, but this was not approved, and the new Commander (after 3 May) left things as they were.

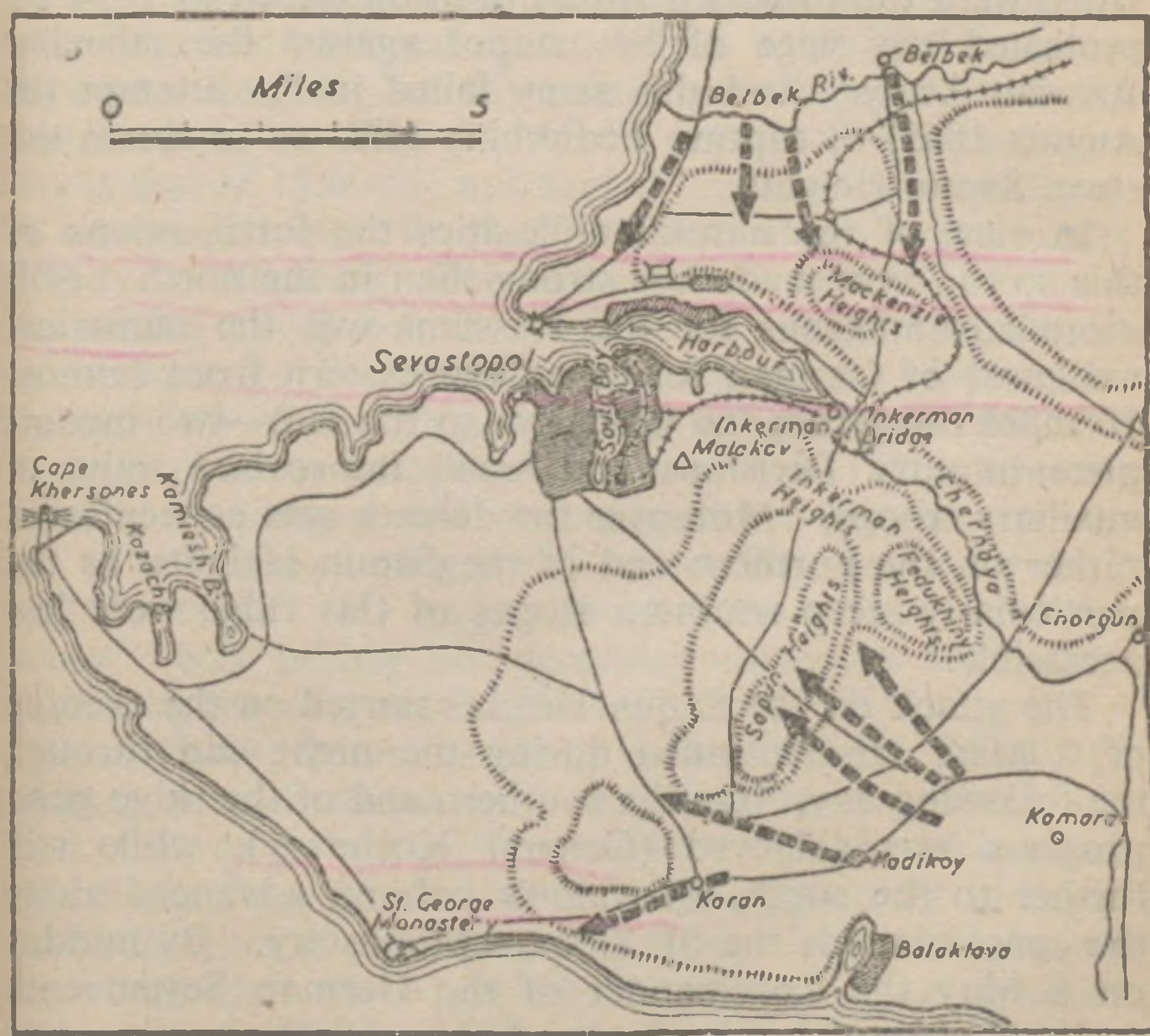
Tolbukhin opened his attack on 6 May, less than a month after the beginning of his Crimean operation. He planned two main assaults, one from the north (General Zakharov) the other from the east (General Kreiser), but the latter attack must be decisive; it was to start only when the enemy were fully engaged in the northern sector. The strength of the eastern attack must remain secret from the Germans. Kreiser's troops, moving by night from Bakhchisarai across the mountains, were gradually concentrated between Baydary and Chorgun. On Kreiser's extreme left a detachment (General Provalov) captured Balaklava after sharp fighting. This was thought by the enemy to be a diversion aimed at distracting attention from the main attack, which was expected to come from the north.

On 6 May Zakharov's troops met with very strong

resistance on the high ground beyond the Belbek and on Mackenzie Heights. Enemy minefields were extensive on this sector, while 300 guns maintained fire against the Russian assault units. Zakharov's artillery was smashing enemy fortifications which, however, were so solidly built

MAP 10

SEVASTOPOL IN MAY, 1944



that it could not be done in a single day. The Russian attack progressed but slowly the first day, but on 7 May, towards the evening, some high ground was captured near the coast and on the northern slopes of Mackenzie Heights. This moment, when enemy attention was entirely

directed to the northern sector, was chosen by Tolbukhin for the really decisive attack from the east.

The task of Kreiser's troops was far from easy, as they had to storm the long ridge of the Sapun Heights with a steep descent into the valley where the charge of the Light Brigade had taken place in 1854. The Sapun Heights and their eastern branch up the Chernaya valley, the Fedukhiny Hills, were the principal Allied position which in 1854–55 protected the siege of Sevastopol against the relieving Russian Army. And this army failed in the attempt (in August 1855) to capture Fedukhiny Hills or to storm the steep Sapun Heights.

In view of the natural difficulties the fortifications of this sector were made less strong than in the north. Still more advantageous for the Russians was the numerical weakness of German forces on the eastern front (almost 10 miles long from the Chernaya to the sea)—two incomplete infantry Divisions and small improvised units of auxiliary troops. Moreover the defence was concentrated rather on the northern end of the Sapun Heights, as the particularly steep southern slopes of this ridge were less accessible.

The attack on the Sapun Heights started on the evening of 7 May. It continued during the night and through the following day. On the southern end of the ridge good progress was achieved (General Koshevoy), while still further to the south, Provalov's column advanced along the coast towards the St. George Monastery. By midday on 8 May the Commander of the German Seventeenth Army could not but understand the critical situation east and south of Sevastopol and the dangerous position of his troops in the northern sector, separated from Sevastopol by the width of the harbour, and beyond them the only route of escape—a road through the bottleneck of the Inkerman bridge.

Even before 8 May was over the German troops in the northern sector started to retreat towards the ferries of the harbour or to the Inkerman bridge. The rearguards had to fight on Mackenzie Heights, and the troops on Sapun Heights were ordered to hold their positions "to

the bitter end." During the night, evacuation of the northern sector went on hastily, but still with some order. However the hope of holding the Sapun Heights for some time proved vain: the first rays of the sun on 9 May showed the Russian troops already in complete possession of the whole Sapun ridge. Then the Russian infantry began to descend from the captured heights to the suburbs near the docks of the South bay and the main railway station. Only minefields delayed their advance here, as also on the Inkerman Heights; but any possibility of enemy resistance organized on the inner line of the defence (following more or less that of 1854–55) was denied to General Almedingen, as on the extreme Russian left Provalov's column was already outflanking Sevastopol from the south and threatening it with complete encirclement. But Almedingen was anxious to keep open a way of escape towards the southern tip of the Crimean peninsula, as on 9 May he received an order (supposed to come from Hitler himself) to leave Sevastopol and concentrate his troops near the two bays known during the Crimean War as "Kamiesh" and "Kazakh." He had to promise the troops that "the *Führer*" was taking all necessary measures for safely evacuating them from the Crimea. . . .

These foolish promises could hardly reassure the troops passing through Sevastopol and further on, along the coast: they might see with their own eyes how the harbour and all the bays around were being relentlessly attacked by the Russian Air Force. Some ships were sunk before they could start their journey, others at a short distance from the coast. So what remained of the German Seventeenth Army was blocked during 10 and 11 May on a promontory, narrow and dented by the sea, on the tip of which stands the Khersones lighthouse. Any resistance on the territory covered by the Russian guns was impossible and the chances of escaping by sea were but slight. Under pressure from his own troops the commanding officer (Almedingen had disappeared somehow or other), General Böhme, had no alternative but to surrender on 12 May. And this was the end of the brilliant Crimean campaign.

Twenty-five thousand troops (almost all Germans) surrendered near Cape Khersones; some 5,000 were captured during the storm and 40,000 more registered in the first phase of the campaign. The German Seventeenth Army (Rumanian divisions included) was practically annihilated; only about 50,000 left the Crimea, and except for some 25,000 of the Rumanian Alpine troops, it is not known how many arrived safely at a port. The booty captured in the peninsula was enormous; particularly high figures were reached for guns (3,000) and lorries (7,000), while 578 aircraft and 300 tanks were destroyed.

CHAPTER IV

BETWEEN THE WINTER AND SUMMER CAMPAIGNS

MID-APRIL—MID-JUNE 1944

THE results of the first four months of the defence of *Festung Europa* seemed to indicate that it would not be long before the struggle would be transformed into a fight for *Citadel Deutschland.* Only on one front had the *Ober-Kommando* been able to score some definite defensive successes: in Italy the Monte Cassino sector held, and the Allied landing at Anzio had brought no immediate change in the situation. The Italian front was, however, the least important in the enemy defensive system, and success there might be considered as having been too dearly bought if its effect was to divert two Armies from other fronts[1].

Meanwhile on the Western Front, where Allied activity was still limited to air action, this form of offensive had grown so rapidly and attained such a scale that its repercussions were felt over the whole range of the enemy defensive organization. Strategic air attacks by day and night were systematically reducing the German industrial

[1] The Tenth and Fourteenth.

potential and, when the *Luftwaffe* tried to interfere, a series of air battles against the R.A.F. and the U.S.A.F. resulted in such enemy losses that his fighters proved unable to co-operate with his land forces in the critical period of the summer campaigns in western and eastern Europe.

On the Eastern Front, as we have already seen, despite weather conditions which had proved extremely—and unusually—favourable to them, the Germans had failed to prevent the development of the Russian offensive in the most important Southern zone, while in the Northern zone they had been pushed back to the frontiers of the Baltic countries and, in some places, beyond them. Russian gains in valuable territory were substantial, but still more important for operational developments in the future were (1) the imminent political repercussions of the Russian victories on the now directly menaced satellite states; (2) The new and difficult problems which were presented to the *Ober-Kommando* as a result of the unexpectedly deep Russian penetration into Moldavia, Bukovina and South-East Galicia; and (3) The very heavy losses which the enemy had suffered in his attempts to stop or delay the Russian advance.

These losses were equally significant for the Eastern and for the coming Western Fronts. During the four months of fighting between mid-December and mid-April the enemy had lost approximately a million men, of whom 200,000 were prisoners.[1] This figure approached that of

[1] The figures given by the Russian Groups for the different periods of the Winter Campaigns are: *Vatutin's Group*, 24 December to 13 January, "killed," 100,000; prisoners, 7,000; tanks, 2,500; guns, 2,000; motor vehicles, 7,800. *The same Group under Zhukov's command*, 4 March to 31 March, "killed," 183,000; prisoners, 25,000; tanks or self-propelled guns, 2,200; guns, 4,700; motor vehicles, 54,000—and from 1 April to 10 April, "killed," 26,000; prisoners, 7,000. 16,000 more "killed" at Tarnopol.

Konev's Group, at Korsun, "killed," 72,000; prisoners, 11,000; tanks and s.p. guns, 625; guns, 580 ("Relief Force" included). After Korsun, 6 March to 2 April, "killed," 118,000; prisoners, 27,000; tanks and s.p. guns, 1,400; guns, 2,800; motor vehicles, 40,000. In addition, at Kirovograd in January, "killed," 15,000; prisoners, 3,000; tanks, 440; guns, 480.

Footnote continued on page 88.

the winter campaign of 1942–43 (the "Campaign of Stalingrad") during which enemy losses reached the 1,200,000 mark, including 350,000 prisoners. There was a difference, however, between the two campaigns, since in 1943–44 hardly more than 15 per cent of the losses fell on the satellite troops, while in the previous year the Rumanians, Italians and Hungarians lost at least 35 per cent of the total. Losses in material proved almost equal to those of the previous year, except in aircraft, which the Germans were using on a reduced scale. In each period some 9,000 tanks had been lost and losses in guns remained about level (at 18,000 to 20,000). The figures for all kinds of motor vehicles lost in 1943–44 far exceeded those of 1942–43, since they reached something like 160,000. These heavy losses in motor vehicles may be explained by the headlong flight of the Germans to the Dniester and the Prut and by several cases of complete encirclement.

It is significant that at least 80 per cent of the enemy losses had been suffered in the Southern zone, where more than half of the enemy forces in Russia were engaged (three or four reinforced Armies and units sufficient to form three complete Tank Armies). The Divisions in the south contained the great majority of the enemy's "active" formations. The losses on the Southern front were clearly increased by the character which operations in that area assumed. The enemy clung to the idea of "delaying action" at any cost. In several cases this conception led to the encirclement of his Groups. "Relief

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Malinovsky's Group, at Nikopol, "killed," 44,000; prisoners, 6,000; tanks, 350; guns, 600; motor vehicles, 3,000. Battle of Novo-Rossia, 6 to 16 March, "killed," 37,000; prisoners, 14,000; tanks or s.p. guns, 470; guns, 1,200; motor vehicles, 16,000. Drive on Odessa, 25 March to 12 April, "killed," 27,000; prisoners, 11,000; tanks, 400; guns, 750; motor vehicles, 17,000. German losses at Krivoy Rog must be added to this estimate.

Tolbukhin's Group, reconquest of the Crimea, "killed," 50,000; prisoners, 70,000; tanks, 400; guns, 3,100; motor vehicles, 7,000.

Losses suffered by the enemy in the Central and Northern zones must be added. If reports from the battlefields usually exaggerate the numbers "killed," the figures for wounded who could be finally invalided are not known. So the figures "killed" may represent the number of men written off for further service.

Forces" were organized, which undertook costly attacks with no success (except in the case of a semi-success in April near Skala and Buchach). It may be safely assumed that in these counter-attacks the best "active" Divisions were involved, and that it was these Divisions which suffered particularly heavy losses. When, in 1943, in a fortnight's fighting at Kursk, von Kluge had lost 100,000 picked men and 2,000 tanks, the Germans ceased their attacks, which had been conceived as the first move in a decisive counter-offensive: they had found themselves unwilling to lose their best men and their choicest material at this rate. Now, in a campaign of four months, they had lost between 300,000 and 400,000 men belonging to armoured, motorized and other "active" units. Out of eighteen or twenty Tank Divisions and eight or ten mobile Divisions concentrated on the Southern front to form the First, Second and Fourth Tank Armies only a small remnant of men and a minor part of their material had escaped destruction. By 15 April 1944 nothing like a single Tank Army existed anywhere on the enemy's Eastern Front. And this was not all: the once strong Seventeenth Army had completely disappeared, while the Sixth and Eighth Armies with their thirty Divisions containing many excellent infantry formations had practically disintegrated as strategic units with their débris scattered over Bessarabia and Moldavia. In the Northern zone the campaign which had started with three Armies ended with only two, since the losses suffered in front of the Leningrad positions made necessary a reorganization of troops between the Eighteenth and Sixteenth Armies. Such were the conditions in which the *Ober-Kommando* had now to solve the new problems created by the new strategic outlines of the Eastern Front. The significance of the enemy losses was so great that repercussions were felt, as will be seen, in the German preparations to meet the Allied threat from the West.

The policy—for it was a policy rather than a strategy—of "delaying action" had failed to bring the results by which it was supposed to be justified. Instead of a retreat in their own time from Leningrad the Germans had preferred

to await the day when they were beaten and thrown back beyond the Estonian border. And the political effect of this defeat was exactly that which the Germans had hoped to avoid by maintaining "the siege of Leningrad." Already in mid-February the Finnish Government had made the first approaches towards negotiations with the Soviets with the object of securing peace terms. Actual negotiations began in March and, as is known, they were long and interrupted by a short renewal of Russo-Finnish military operations. It was clear, however, from the start that the Third Reich had lost one of its political and military Allies. The like happened at the other end of *Festung Europa.* It is now known that immediately after the end of the victorious Russian campaign in the Southern zone the Rumanians undertook the first secret steps towards the re-establishment of peace with the Soviets (second half of April). Here the stage of approaches which remained secret from the Germans occupied nearly four months, but during this period the ground of agreement was so well prepared that when action passed to an open stage it developed with a rapidity and decision absolutely catastrophic to the political and military situation of the enemy.

The Germans can have had few illusions in regard to Finland, but they must still have hoped to retain Rumania —with its rich petroleum and agricultural resources— under their control, and they were urgently concerned to re-establish their defensive front in the south. The Southern zone no longer existed as a single defensive area. After the capture by the Russians of Chernovitsy and the greater part of the Bukovina the Rumanian front was cut off from the Galician sector: communications between the two areas could only be maintained by railway and road running through Hungary, and this situation was not only technically complicated but also politically inconvenient, since relations between the Rumanians and Magyars were bad and rapidly becoming worse.

For immediate purposes the Germans had to be satisfied with the forces which they had at hand. The remnants of the Sixth Army which had succeeded in crossing the

Dniester represented some six or seven Divisions with scanty equipment and a hundred tanks (of the 23rd and 24th Tank Divisions). With five or six Rumanian Divisions this "new model" of the Sixth Army defended the lower Dniester and that part of Bessarabia lying to the north of Kishinev.

The remnants of the Eighth Army were in somewhat better state, since the four infantry Divisions which had fled from Novo-Mirgorod had escaped destruction and had been joined by units of Huber's defeated Tank Army which had scattered from Uman across Bessarabia.[1] It thus became possible to constitute a "new" Eighth Army —mainly out of Rumanian Divisions, but with several German armoured units possessing rather reduced equipment. This Army defended Jassy and the region to the west of the Moldavian capital where the valley of the Siret invited Russian penetration into southern Moldavia. The Germans made all possible use of Rumanian forces for the defence of this part of the front—although they preferred to mix the Rumanian Divisions with their own under German command. The Germans never succeeded, however, in concentrating all Rumanian Divisions against the Russians, since even Marshal Antonescu, pressed by his own politicians and military men, persisted in keeping at least one-fourth of the Rumanian Army in Transylvania in observation of the Hungarians. With the extreme mistrust and tension existing between the two satellite countries a complicated situation had arisen in southern Bukovina. Here the strategically important region of Campolung and Dorna Vatra, covering the ways into the upper valleys of the Tisza and Maros, was held by the Rumanians; but in their rear, beyond the Carpathians, Hungarian troops occupied the districts taken from Rumania and given to Hungary by the so-called Vienna Arbitration (1940). Entrusted to such a fragile "Magyar-Rumanian combination" the defence of this area could not be reliable, but the Germans had not themselves the troops available to hold it. They were even in difficulties

[1] Other units of Huber's Army had fled to Vinnitza where they had been again encircled.

in organizing the defence of Galicia, which was still more important to them.

Here the participation of Hungarian troops was badly needed, and pressure was put on the Hungarian Government to increase the participation of the Hungarian Army in operations which might be deemed to cover their own territory. Up to that time the Magyars had shown themselves unwilling to participate in the war against Russia on a scale corresponding to their own maximum potential. They had limited their co-operation to the maintenance on the Russian front of ten Divisions—at times reduced to six, on the pretext that substantial forces were being employed against Tito's partisans or immobilized in Transylvania on account of the unfriendly attitude of the Rumanians. Now, however, with Russian vanguards approaching the passes over the Carpathians, the Government of Admiral Horthy seemed ready for a more effective co-operation with the Germans. A Hungarian Army of several infantry and Tank Divisions was formed, and was before the middle of April already showing itself active in the region between Stanislavov and the Yablonitsa Pass. The Germans received the promise of the formation of a second Army of similar strength. By contrast with the Rumanian forces these Hungarian Armies were allowed to operate under Hungarian command and staffs—since the tradition of the German alliance remained strong among officers who had served in the old Austro-Hungarian Army.

It is not yet clear whether the Sixth and Eighth Armies, defending respectively Bessarabia and Moldavia, were united in a single operational group or whether they were fighting independently under direct orders from the *Ober-Kommando*, as was the case with the Hungarian Army in Galicia. The Southern zone had ceased to exist as a strategic complex, and Field-Marshal Manstein himself, who had for so many months been responsible for operations in South Russia, finally disappeared from the battlefield. A new military leader, General Model, was entrusted with the defence of Galicia—which task seemed in the circumstances to be one of particular importance. General

Model had acquired his good "defensive reputation" by the skilful organization of fortified lines in the Ostrov-Opochka region, where, however, he was helped by the topography and where a defensive success early in March had been ensured by a premature thaw swamping the Russian lines in marshy terrain. Conditions could not be so favourable to the defence during the coming summer over the greater part of the Galician sector which had been entrusted to Model. First of all troops were needed, and it was not easy to provide them after the series of defeats suffered by the German Armies in Volhynia and Podolia.

During the winter campaign of 1943–44 Field-Marshal Manstein had relied for the most part on his Tank Armies for the active defence of Volhynia and Podolia. Among his Tank Divisions were some of the best Panzer units of the German Army, supported by excellent mobile Divisions and a certain number of S.S. units, which, if not always experienced, were ready to fight to the bitter end. These Tank Armies, attacking towards Kiev and Korosten, and later on from Vinnitsa, Uman, Proskurov and Skala, included infantry Divisions; other infantry Divisions constituted "Divisional Groups" used on more or less passive sectors. But as a whole Manstein's infantry in Volhynia and Podolia was, as a rule, neither numerous nor of good quality. This defect must necessarily be felt after the shattering losses suffered by Manstein's Panzers: a defence of Galicia could hardly be organized as an active defence in Manstein's style and at the same time available infantry Divisions were insufficient for a new defensive front between Kovel and Stanislavov.

Some twenty infantry Divisions were routed by Marshal Zhukov in his March offensive, and it is significant that among them were formations belonging to the so-called General Government of Poland (i.e. troops which were reserved for action against Polish and Russian partisans) and the "Security Divisions" normally used as police. Such units might be employed in a quiet sector such as that between Kovel and Berestechko, but it was clear that that sector might cease to be "quiet" in the coming

summer and become important during a new Russian offensive.

Out of the remnants of sixteen Tank Divisions utterly defeated and thrown back into Galicia it was still possible to organize a Tank Army complete with new equipment, and this Army could defend the lines of the Dniester's tributaries and the region of Lvov itself. There was, however, a dangerous gap to the north of Lvov and to the south of Kovel. The defence of this area required the transfer there of one of the Armies defending the Central zone; and during the spring the Second Army was moved from the southern flank of the Central zone to the northern flank of General Model's Group defending Galicia.

In the Central zone there remained the Ninth and Fourth Armies and the Third Tank Army—the latter the only enemy Tank Army in the East which was still up to strength. Here Field-Marshal von Busch was still in command, and although his forces were now reduced the summer conditions of his "wet" zone promised him better security than during a normal winter.

In the zone which had once been designated as "Northern" and which could now be better defined as "Baltic," General Lindemann commanded the Eighteenth and Sixteenth Armies—the latter with a Divisional Group in the Narva region. This defensive front was particularly strong with the Pskov–Ostrov fortifications on the left and the "Panther Line," organized by Model, from Ostrov to Opochka and further southward to Idritsa.

Thus before the summer campaign of 1944, instead of the thirteen Armies (four of them Tank Armies) which had stood ready for the defence of the Eastern Front at the end of 1943, there were now only ten Armies, of which two were Tank. Of these ten Armies one was Hungarian and two were Rumano-German. There were also "Divisional Groups"[1]—the total of which might be equal to another Army. There was the possibility of a not distant reorganization of another Tank Army with equipment and S.S. troops arriving from Germany. But with

[1] At Narva, in the Pripet region, between Kovel and Pinsk and round Stanislavov.

two Armies including a large proportion of Rumanians who were in the existing circumstances unreliable; with a whole sector depending on the Magyars; with the morale of many units shaken by the winter defeats; with a deficiency of artillery and motor transport everywhere to the south of the Pripet—the defensive strength of the new front in June represented hardly more than 60 per cent of what it had been six months before.

It is important to note, too, that this reduction in strength was not compensated by any shortening of the front line. At 1 January it had been a line running from Lake Ladoga to the Dnieper estuary; in June it was a line running from the Gulf of Finland to the lower Danube. Further, the "outer belt" of the European Fortress was now dangerously reduced in depth. While the depth of the Northern zone had been measured by the distance between the Baltic Sea and the river Volkhov, it was now limited to the territory of Latvia and Estonia; in the south any Russian advance of 100 miles could be far more dangerous to the vital points of the enemy defensive system than an equal advance in space from the middle Dnieper. A reduced space for manœuvre in depth called for a denser concentration of troops on the front line, which the Germans, however, could not now afford.

In June 1944, as in December 1943, true to their doctrine of *Festung Europa*, the Germans prepared to defend the territories of the Baltic countries, Poland, Hungary, Rumania. They did not move their forces—equivalent to two Armies—from the Balkans or the Aegean Islands, even despite the determinate defeat of their two Armies in Italy. The offensive success of the Allies in Italy could not be understood otherwise than as a first step in a general Allied attack in the West. Allied air attacks of unprecedented strength concentrated during April and May not only on vital strategic points in France and on communications in adjacent countries but also on targets of immediate tactical importance near the Atlantic coast. The *Ober-Kommando* was prepared to fight in France with four Armies (the Fifteenth, Seventh, First and Nineteenth) and with one Tank Army (the Fifth). There seems to

have been an idea of organizing another Tank Army in France (the Sixth), but the development of the Russian summer offensive probably made it necessary to postpone this formation, and the Sixth Tank Army did not appear in the West before Rundstedt's counter-offensive in December 1944.

But even before the development of the Russian summer offensive the losses suffered by the Germans during the winter campaign had had their repercussions on the organization of the enemy on the Western Front. During the brilliant Anglo-American campaign in France a greater proportion of secondary and "passive" Divisions was encountered than might have been expected. This phenomenon may be explained by an exaggerated German confidence with regard to the efficacy of their Atlantic Wall. German propaganda had worked for months so insistently in this direction that in the end it had become a sort of auto-suggestion. Further the masterful work of the Allied Air Forces directed against all forms of communications made the transfer of reinforcements from other theatres of war both difficult and costly. It would seem, however, that the losses of the winter campaign had reduced to a minimum the number of "active" Divisions which could be utilized as a reserve for the Western Front. If there were some Divisions of this type available in Germany during April they were in all probability directed to the Eastern Front—the southern part of which seemed shattered and in imminent danger. It is significant that even the Fifth Tank Army appeared in action on the Western Front only early in August (the attempted break-through to Avranches). It does not seem that the organization of this Tank Army can have been completed before the middle of July, and this circumstance may perhaps be explained by the enormous losses in equipment and men suffered by enemy tank units in the costly operations under Manstein on the Russian front.

The new situation on the Eastern Front excluded, at least for several months, any possibility of active defence even of a local character and on a reduced scale. A strictly defensive attitude and economy in the use of force

was prescribed by all the circumstances. It seemed preferable to the Germans to offer battle on strongly built and carefully prepared positions—such as the Fatherland and Panther Lines. The enemy evidently hoped to fight a delaying action in the Central zone for a period sufficient to allow of the organization of a new defensive system somewhere along the line of the Niemen–Narev–Vistula. On the left the positions of the Central zone were protected by the Panther Line from Ostrov to Opochka and Idritsa. In the event of this line being pierced, the Latvian countryside—with its numerous marshy streams, dense forests and, in some places, considerable hills—was well adapted for defensive and delaying action. In this struggle on the territories of the two Baltic nations, some Latvian and Estonian formations might be used, and the necessity for a maximum economy of forces could make such help appreciable even if it amounted only to the strength of five or six Divisions.

On Model's sector the prospects of defensive and delaying action seemed less favourable. It was no easy task to improvise defensive positions between Kovel and the upper Dniester, and time was short because the first—and rather early—assault of the opening summer campaign of the Russians was presumed to be aimed at Lvov. Since only one Russian Group (the First Ukrainian) was holding rather a long front line—from Bukovina to the neighbourhood of Kovel—the Germans not only concentrated a new Army on the northern end of this line, but developed a diversionary activity at the southern end—particularly between the upper Dniester and the Carpathians—where the Hungarians, with several German Divisions in support, were put into battle. The enemy intended to create the impression of a serious counter-offensive against the left flank of the First Ukrainian Group and thus prevent Russian concentration in the direction of Lvov. At the same time it seemed useful to involve the Hungarians in more serious operations than they had been engaged in before. During the second half of April a series of attacks took place between the Dniester and the upper waters of the Prut. The Hungarians fought with energy

and the Russians abandoned Nadvorna; Delatyn and some places to the south-east of Stanislavov. They did not, however, take the threat seriously and held firmly between Kolomya and Gorodenka.

It seemed also absolutely certain that the Russians would start a big offensive on the Rumanian front as soon as the ground became dry enough and their lines of communication improved. A double Russian drive was expected: against the Sixth Army through Bessarabia and against the Eighth along the Siret. It was anticipated that the Russians would try to force the Galats–Focsany gap and march on the Ploesti oilfields—a major economic objective in view of the importance of their production to the Germans. The lack of enemy reserves—which was the result alike of their losses during the winter, of their recent defeats in Italy and of their preoccupation with pending Allied operations in the West—had no better confirmation than in the German failure to strengthen the defence of an area of the importance of Ploesti. It does not seem that the Sixth Army got many reinforcements; and in Bessarabia the Germano-Rumanians could rely only on the defensive possibilities of the difficult terrain on the approaches to Kishinev. In Moldavia even a favourable terrain was lacking along the broad valley of the Siret. On this sector the Eighth Army got some reinforcements; new equipment arrived from Germany and at least four Tank Divisions were reconstituted on the positions covering Jassy. By the end of May it was decided to raise Rumanian morale—which had fallen dangerously low. A series of attacks were organized round Jassy with the object of disengaging the Moldavian capital from the immediate threat of a Russian occupation. It was intended also to free the railway Jassy–Pascany and to establish direct communication with the forces beyond the Siret and in the Carpathians. This local operation had to be carried out by Rumanian infantry with the support of German tanks and mobile guns. It was presumed that this collaboration would prove to the Rumanian soldiers how effective their German allies could be in the defence of the national territory.

Between 30 May and 8 June there were some days of fierce fighting to the north, north-west and west of Jassy. The Russians ceded some high ground, but the enemy attacks could not endanger the Russian bridgeheads over the Prut; on the railway running west from Jassy the enemy succeeded in taking Targul Frumos. These results were only of slight importance, but they cost the enemy some 10,000 casualties and 315 tanks. The *Luftwaffe* was used for moral effect, but at the expense of some 400 aircraft. Even more important in this political battle—Rumanian morale was not improved, but fell still lower, and there were episodes of skirmishing between the Germans and Rumanian troops who were reluctant to attack under the heavy fire of the Russian artillery.

Thus, generally speaking, German policy in the east amounted to the defence of a territory which might possibly prove to be of sufficient depth to avoid the rapid transformation of the battle for *Festung Europa* into a battle for *Citadel Deutschland.* A delaying action of this character —on a scale vast as it was—could not bring any positive results for the enemy. Some results were indeed optimistically expected (and even promised) on the Western Front. Here the Allied operation in France *must* collapse, and the psychological effect of this failure would be increased by the opening of an attack against England in the form of "terrible" and "secret" weapons. Preparations for the launching of flying bombs and rockets were proceeding feverishly—to the disadvantage of any serious work on the depleted *Luftwaffe.* The idea of "secret" weapons seems to have taken possession of the imagination of the *Führer.* Skilfully enough this "great hope of the *Führer*" was being "revealed" to the Germans, and perhaps many of them preferred to believe in something when there was really nothing left to believe in. The weakness of this new move in psychological warfare was, however, the necessity of combining the effect of the "secret" weapons with the military failure of the Allied landings in the West. But if the *Führer* was able to launch his flying bombs and rockets he proved unable to prevent the British and Americans from carrying through their

military plans. On the contrary their success was so complete and so rapid that it far exceeded their own most optimistic expectations.

At the Teheran Conference a date had been fixed for the great Allied operation in the West—at the end of May or the beginning of June. This decision made the Russian summer offensive the first to be planned in operational liaison with the Allies. As has already been stated in Chapter I, the winter campaign of 1943–44 was initially conceived as a preliminary action during which the Russians had to conquer a line from which the great summer offensive could start. Between the Teheran Conference (in December) and the middle of April several months passed, and during those months the development of the winter campaign proved essentially different from what might have been expected. If in the Northern zone the new line of pre-offensive deployment was reached, this was not the case in the Central zone, while in the South Russian successes had been of a much more decisive character and had brought the Russian Armies deep into Galicia and still deeper into Rumania.

The operational consequences of such a situation are clear. The Russian Armies in the south now had behind them exceptionally long lines of communication. Even if the railways running from the Prut and the upper Dniester to the Dnieper had not been too seriously damaged by an enemy in rapid retreat, it must be recalled that these railways belonged in part to the Polish and Rumanian railway systems with gauges different from the Russian. There was no real possibility of re-establishing, even in part, the communications in the rear of the southern sectors in the short period between mid-April and the date fixed for the Allied offensive in the West. On the other hand, in the Northern zone, where the fighting had ceased one month earlier, where lines of communication with the rear were much shorter and where they belonged to the pre-war Russian system, such a possibility might exist. As for the Central zone the situation with regard to communications was better than it had been at any earlier time. It was therefore possible to start an offensive

in the East—more or less simultaneous with that to be undertaken in the West—first of all in the Central zone and then, with only slight delay, in the Baltic zone.

Another new factor in the development of the situation resulting from the winter campaign was the size of the losses suffered by the enemy in the Southern zone. The extent of these losses in men and material was well known to the Russian Supreme Command, By the end of April the Germans obviously lacked reserves in the Southern zone and their adequately organized forces could be found only in the Central zone and on the border of the Baltic countries. As the first aim of any offensive must be the annihilation of the organized enemy force, this consideration weighed in favour of an attack against the Central zone or the Baltic sector.

The extent of enemy losses during the winter campaign could not but contribute to the success of the coming Allied offensives. Soon General Alexander's brilliant victory in Italy and the almost complete disappearance of the *Luftwaffe* from the skies dominated by the Allied Air Forces gave new support to optimistic appreciations of events to come. Even estimates of the duration of the war might be markedly reduced by the concerted offensives from West and East. Post-war problems loomed nearer than they had six months before. Political considerations which earlier had been put aside now acquired a natural significance which had an influence on operational planning.

The most simple of these considerations was the desire of the Soviet Government to free from enemy occupation the whole of the territory of the U.S.S.R. It must not however be forgotten that the western frontiers of the Soviet Union were conceived as those existing in June 1941—at the moment of the German aggression. The whole of White Russia was included, as well as the territories of the three Baltic Republics and those regions of Poland which had been occupied by the Russians in 1939. In Bukovina the Russians had already re-established the 1941 frontier, but they had not yet taken the whole of Bessarabia; and in Finland they claimed to return to the frontier agreed after the Russo-Finnish Winter War of

1939–40. While the frontiers in Bessarabia and Finland could be restored by the peace negotiations—already under way with the Finns and in view with the Rumanians—the return to the *status quo ante* June 1941 in Poland and the Baltic Republics called for their liberation from the Germans and their reoccupation by the Russians. From the point of view of the Soviet Government the future of these territories had been finally determined by the events of 1939–40 and—except for some local rectifications—was not to be discussed at the Peace Conference at the end of the war with Germany. Such considerations alone recommended the opening of an offensive campaign at the earliest possible date to recover the territories still in occupation of the Germans.

In accordance with all these conditions, the Russian Supreme Command began a general regrouping of the Russian Armies as soon as active operations on the southern sectors of the front had come to an end. The front opposed to the German Central zone—which had been weakened during the winter by the transfer of units to Zukhov's First Ukrainian Group—was reinforced and provided with the material necessary for a break-through on a large scale. While General Popov took over command of the troops directed against Ostrov and Opochka, the Groups of Generals Rokossovsky and Sokolovsky occupied the front between the Pripet and the Dvina. Their forces were deemed insufficient for a decisive offensive, and consequently Rokossovsky's Group was concentrated for action in the Bobruisk direction (with responsibility also for the whole region of the Pripet marshes, including its southern fringe). A strong new group was formed under General Zakharov and inserted between Rokossovsky and the Group which had been under Sokolovsky and which now—reinforced by tank formations of Tank-Marshal Rotmistrov—passed under the command of General Chernyakovsky. Both new Group commanders had had distinguished careers during the war. Chernyakovsky had served under Rokossovsky and, in 1943, had led the mechanized corps which had achieved the strategic break-through of the enemy front by a rapid and bold

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drive on Gluhov and Konotop. Zakharov had been a close collaborator of General Tolbukhin in all his brilliant operations. The presence of two leaders like Rokossovsky and Chernyakovsky—known for their imaginative and skilful manœuvres—promised a far-reaching development of the operations in the Central zone.

At the northern end of this zone Bagramyan's Group had again to operate in the Vitebsk region. Eremenko resumed command of the troops which during his operations in the Crimea had fought under Popov; and General Maslennikov (who had commanded in the Caucasus in 1942–43) replaced General Merezkov at the head of the troops on the Volkhov front who were now facing the enemy lines from Ostrov to Pskov. The men of the Leningrad Group, still under the command of General Govorov, were concentrated on the positions on the Karelian Isthmus —with a corps detached to the Estonian border near Narva. In May there was less hope of a favourable outcome of the negotiations with the Finns, and while Govorov's powerful artillery was moved north of Leningrad the section between Lake Ladoga and the Murman coast was strengthened and reorganized by General Merezkov, who had had previous experience of the Finnish war.

Including Merezkov's troops there were eight Groups between the Pripet marshes and the Arctic Ocean; and there were only four Groups between the Pripet and the Black Sea. Such a distribution of Russian strategic units at 1 June 1944 was, generally speaking, unexpected outside Russia—and unexpected by the enemy it proved to be. It was, however, determined by the facts already described and by the considerations mentioned above.

On the Rumanian front General Tolbukhin was given command of the Third Ukrainian Group and General Malinovsky was posted to the Second Ukrainian Group. Transported from the Crimea, the troops formerly commanded by General Tolbukhin were distributed between the Second and Third Ukrainian Groups, while the new Fourth Ukrainian Group must be formed between the Second and First. Expected to operate in the mountainous Carpathian region, the Group included troops with experience of

mountain warfare, and its commander was the hero of Sevastopol—General Petrov, who had also fought at Novorossisk and on the Taman Peninsula. In Galicia in the Lvov direction the First Ukrainian Group under Marshal Konev had to operate in close connection with the offensive aimed at the Central zone. Great results might be expected from a combined effort of Konev and Rokossovsky. Marshal Zhukov returned to his post of Deputy Supreme Commander with Marshal Vasilevsky as Chief of Staff.

Before the summer offensive started there was a brief episode of renewed hostilities between the Russians and the Finns. Since under German pressure the negotiations had seemed to take an unfavourable turn, the Soviet Government was ready to support its claims by force of arms. On 10 June Govorov's batteries on the Karelian Isthmus opened fire and on the same day the first Finnish fortified line was broken. The Russians advanced and on 18 June pierced the main line of the Finnish defensive system—the so-called Mannerheim Line. Two days later Viborg was captured (General Govorov being promoted Marshal) and this brought the operational decision in the short Finnish campaign, although the final political agreement was reached only three months later. Almost simultaneously with Govorov's success the summer offensive in the Central zone began.

CHAPTER V

THE RUSSIAN SUMMER OFFENSIVE

23rd June—end of August

Map No. 11. On June 23rd the First Baltic Group (General Bagramyan) started a decisive attack on Vitebsk from the north, while south of the Dvina the Third White Russian Group (General Chernyakovsky) assaulted the

enemy positions on the whole front between the Dvina and the bend of the Dnieper. Exceptionally strong artillery concentrations prepared the attack on both sectors, and the tremendous power of the Russian gunfire was felt particularly in the enemy lines covering the Vitebsk–Orsha railway. The Russian Air Force was active over the battle, unhampered by enemy aircraft. Assaulting infantry units were able to advance the very first day of the offensive and on Bagramyan's sector the Vitebsk–Polotsk railway was crossed at Sirotino and Yazvino; at the same time Chernyakovsky's troops reached the Vitebsk–Orsha railway at Bogushevsk, while further to the south they were at Osinovka, 12 miles from Orsha. The local centre of resistance on the "Fatherland Line," Babinovichi, was already outflanked by these two columns.

The morning of 24 June Bagramyan's infantry reached the northern bank of the Dvina at a point 20 miles west of Vitebsk, and during the day the river was crossed and the Russian vanguard cut the main road, running from Vitebsk along the left bank of the Dvina towards Beshenkovichi and Lepel. A decisive success was achieved by Chernyakovsky's columns, which broke through a deep enemy defensive belt between Bogushevsk and a point 10 miles north of Orsha; tanks were now in action, advancing westwards in the direction of Senno.

During the night of 24–25 June the Russian manœuvre must have been clear to the enemy—to encircle Vitebsk; and this plan would be realized in a day or two, as soon as the forces advancing on Senno could link up near Beshenkovichi with those which had crossed the Dvina from the north. The German forces in the Vitebsk region were seriously threatened. It seemed, however, that they would be able to defend themselves actively, for on the Vitebsk sector of his Central zone Field-Marshal von Busch had the strongest of the three Armies under his command, the Third Tank Army. But a different decision was taken on 25 June, when it suddenly became known that the Russian attacks near Vitebsk and Orsha were only part of a general Russian offensive against the whole of the Central zone.

L. Drisvyaty
Dvina
Polotsk
Polota
Corodok
Dvina
Sharkovschisna
Vetsino
Obol
Sirotino
Losvida
Bürazh
Yanovichi
Bobynichi
Ushachi
Yazvino
Vitebsk
Glubokoe
Krulevschisna
Ostrovno
Liozno
L. Naroch
Beshenkovichi
Dokshitsy
Berezina
Lepel
Choshniki
Senno
Dobrovnya
Lucheso
Bogushevsk
Bogom
Lukoml
Staiki
Babinovichi
Osinovka
Vileyka
L. Pelik
Chereya
Smolyany
Molopenichi
Orsha
Pleschenitsy
Molodechno
Zambin
Bobr
Kozhanovo
Borisov
Krupki
Dnieper
Kopys
Lapoysk
Radoshkovichi
Sellik
Shklov
Kodino
Smolevichi
Esmony
Belnichi
Zaslavl
Plisa
Minsk
Usha
Mogilev
Smilovichi
Berezino
Koydanov
Minskovichi
Cherven
Swislach
Negorelye
Grodzyanka
Klichev
Drut
Stolbtsy
Urda
Puhovichi
Stary Byhov
Shatsk
Novoselki
Lapichi
Svisloch
Chechevichi
Niemen
Ptich
Veleytsy
Ozipovichi
Novy Byhov
Kruchinka
Gresk
Kopyl
Grozov
Bobruysk
Timkovichi
Slutsk
Pogochev
Semezhevo
Starobin
Starya Dorogi
Zhlobin
Glusk
Moroch
Luban
Parichi
Mikulai
Dnieper
Berezina
Oressa
Schotsilki
Kudobelka
Gorval
Lake Knyaz
Ptich
0
25
50
Miles
Lunineets
Zhitkovichi
Kopisevichi
Ptich
Kozirkovichi
Rechitsa

The Russians assaulted the positions of the German Fourth Army on the river Pronya (the Second White Russian Group under the command of General Zakharov) and took the offensive in the Zhlobin–Rogachev region (the First White Russian Group under the command of General Rokossovsky). The latter attack seemed particularly dangerous, as the first reports indicated the strength of Rokossovsky's effort, and von Busch could not but know that the German Ninth Army was hardly able to resist it.

While the Fourth Army along the Pronya had behind it the main defensive line, the line of the Dnieper, the Ninth Army had to oppose those Russians already on the west side of the Dnieper, between Novy Byhov and Rogachev, and south of the Zhlobin "hedgehog." They could advance on Bobruysk along both banks of the Berezina. The Ninth Army had to defend three sectors, separated by wide and deep rivers (between the Dnieper and the Drut, between the Drut and the Berezina, between the Berezina and the Ptich). It had also to guard the vast region of the Pripet marshes further to the west, as Russian patrols from Volynia had already appeared near Turov and got into touch wlth the local partisans who were always active among the swamps and forests. For this task the forces of the Ninth Army were hardly sufficient, in spite of the recent arrival of the Forty-first "Panzer Corps" which included one tank and two infantry Divisions. Von Busch's subordinates more than once represented to him

MAP 11

THE BATTLE OF WHITE RUSSIA

Railways

Roads

German fortified lines

Russian attacks on Vitebsk, Orsha, Mogilev, Bobruysk and Polotsk

Russian columns advancing on Minsk, Molodechno and Slutsk

German divisions encircled near Bobruysk and east of Minsk

Marshes

Lakes

the necessity of shortening the lines held by the Ninth Army (six Divisions between the Dnieper and the Berezina, one Division on the west bank of the Berezina, a Tank Division at Bobruysk and one Division on the march from Slutsk to Bobruysk). His answer was that "the *Führer* wishes no change of the front line." We may however see how this "firm" principle of Hitler's policy became less "rigid" when a strong Allied front was formed in Normandy and the Russian offensive in the Central zone began. As it might be followed by attacks on other sectors, reserves were badly needed, and reserves were scarce, particularly those which could be used for active defence. This was obviously not a moment to spend "precious" Tank Divisions in futile counter-attacks. . . . Such considerations explain why all tank units and some infantry Divisions belonging to the Third Tank Army were moved westwards from the now dangerous Vitebsk pocket, before it was too late. Four infantry and one airborne Divisions were left there to fight a "delaying action" to the end.

This end was, however, not long in coming. During the 26th the encirclement of Vitebsk was complete and street fighting began in the town itself. On 27 June the remnants of five enemy Divisions surrendered (10,000 prisoners, and the killed exceeded 20,000). The fall of Vitebsk was closely followed by that of Orsha. This central point in the fortified system known as the "Fatherland Line" (with a chain of airfields round it) became threatened on the 26th by Chernyakovsky's mobile columns which reached Senno and Smolyany, cutting the railway to Lepel and approaching the main railway and the Orsha–Borisov road. On the 27th Chernyakovsky's infantry was able to enter Orsha almost unopposed from the north, as the garrison (the left flank of the German Fourth Army) was in full flight to the south-west and south.

The situation of this Army became more dangerous every hour with Chernyakovsky's tanks and mobile infantry on 27 June already at Chashniki (20 miles east of Lepel) and Chereya (the same distance from the Minsk road) and strong pressure by Zakharov's troops in the direction of Mogilev. A frontal assault by Zakharov against the Fourth Army

on the Pronya began on 25 June, and the same day the enemy's carefully prepared defences were broken and the river Pronya crossed on a broad front. On the 26th Zakharov's Divisions advanced across the extremely difficult terrain (forested and marshy) between that river and the Dnieper. Here on the west bank a second fortified line was prepared with the towns of Shklov, Mogilev and Stary Byhov as centres of resistance. The task before Zakharov's troops would have been difficult but for the great successes of Chernyakovsky on the right and of Rokossovsky on the left. On the 27th the Germans between Orsha and Stary Byhov were already concerned with the possibility of a retreat; they were fighting only a rearguard action on the Dnieper, and Zakharov's men succeeded the same day in crossing the river at several points. On 28 June Mogilev fell.

Still more important events took place on the southern sector of the Central zone, where Rokossovsky in five days' fighting completely defeated the Ninth German Army. For this brilliant success and his masterly manœuvring he was deservedly promoted Marshal of the Soviet Union. In accordance with the topography of the region and distribution of the enemy forces, General Rokossovsky organized his offensive in three strong columns converging on Bobruysk. On his right the river Drut was to be forced to the north of Rogachev (General Gorbatov); in the centre the enemy "hedgehog" position Zhlobin–Mormal was to be attacked by General Romanenko; on the left—Parichi (on the west bank of the Berezina) was the first objective of the troops under General Batov. Besides these three columns other troops were holding the "belt" position between Novy Byhov and the Drut on the extreme right, while light mobile units (including cavalry) were to force the river Ptich and advance towards the main road leading from Bobruysk to the west.

All Rokossovsky's columns met with considerable difficulties of terrain and defence, but Gorbatov's units were faced with the particularly hard task of fording the Drut. Even among the many marshy rivers of Polessia the Drut was considered one of the most difficult to cross:

indeed the Russian attempt to cross it during the winter campaign had failed. A wide stretch of marshy low ground had to be passed before assaulting the enemy fortified lines on the heights of the west bank. With remarkable *élan*, however, Gorbatov's troops overcame all obstacles, and even before the end of the first day the enemy positions beyond the Drut were stormed and captured. Meanwhile in the centre enemy reserves were immobilized by a furious bombardment of Zhlobin, where a Russian attack seemed imminent. It developed, however, first on the Russian left in the belt of forests, streams and marshes covering Parichi on the west bank of the Berezina.

On the second day Rokossovsky's troops advancing south-west from the Drut outflanked Zhlobin; on their left the Russians captured Parichi and further to the west they reached the Ptich near Glusk. Then the Commander of the German Ninth Army, General Jordan, decided that the defence of Zhlobin had become impossible. He ordered the evacuation of this famous "hedgehog," and it was entered at night by Romanenko's patrols. It was, however, too late for the safe retreat of the German Divisions, which had fought on the Drut or occupied positions at Zhlobin and Mormal. They moved towards Bobruysk, but the tanks supporting Gorbatov's column already on the 27th approached the east bank of the Berezina, opposite the town, and the bridges were under Russian fire. The Commander of the Ninth Army, General Weidling (General Jordan had been dismissed), ordered the Twentieth Panzer Division (then at Bobruysk, in reserve) to free the bridges and open the road for the retreating troops. This attempt, however, failed completely, and the Division lost almost all its tanks and the crews could only escape to Bobruysk. Thus five enemy Divisions, retreating on Bobruysk, were cut off from this town and were encircled in a forest south of it. But even Bobruysk itself was soon surrounded. General Batov, attacking on the west bank of the Berezina, captured Parichi and routed two German Divisions; his troops reached the western suburbs of the town and cut the roads of escape leading westwards.

On 28 June a highly dramatic situation developed immediately to the south of Bobruysk, between the main road and the Berezina. Here in a large forest five German Divisions were crowded, cut off from the approaches to the town by Gorbatov's mobile artillery, tanks and infantry. At the same time they were pressed from the south by Romanenko's columns and fired on by the guns of Batov's column from the west bank of the Berezina. Enemy confusion was increased by the fact that the new Commander of the Ninth Army lost his head and gave contradictory orders to the remnants of three Divisions inside Bobruysk. On the evening of 28 June a large number of Germans, encircled in the forest, surrendered, while those inside Bobruysk fought there desperately (on the 29th) against Russian troops, who entered the town from the west. On the 30th the number of prisoners was 18,000, but in two days it grew to 32,000; the killed in and near Bobruysk were 16,000. Only small parties escaped through the forests and swamps. Beyond Bobruysk Russian mobile columns captured Osipovichi (on the Minsk railway). This was a great victory for Rokossovsky.

The fall of Vitebsk, Orsha, Mogilev and Bobruysk meant that the German defensive system in the Central zone had completely crumbled. By 30 June the first phase of the battle of White Russia was over. The balance-sheet of enemy losses was impressive:[1] prisoners, 66,000 (6 Generals); killed, 132,000; tanks captured and destroyed, 940; guns, more than 5,000; motor vehicles, about 30,000. The enemy Ninth Army was reduced to some three or four dispersed and demoralized Divisions, and the Fourth was obviously in danger of "being cut to pieces" during a

[1] *Bagramyan's Group:* "killed," 20,000; prisoners, 5,000; tanks and s.p. guns, 300; guns, 626; motor vehicles, 2,450. *Chernyakovsky's Group:* "killed," 32,000; prisoners, 20,000; tanks and s.p. guns, 195; guns, 1,448; motor vehicles, 5,140. *Zakharov's Group:* "killed," 30,000; prisoners, 3,000; tanks and s.p. guns, 80; guns, 410; motor vehicles, 6,150. *Rokossovsky's Group:* "killed," 50,000; prisoners, 24,000; tanks and s.p. guns, 366; guns, 2,664; motor vehicles, 15,920. From this it may be seen that the enemy left behind all the valuable material accumulated in such important "fortresses" as Vitebsk, Orsha, Zhlobin and Bobruysk.

long retreat: the Third Tank Army lost most of its infantry, but saved its tank units (although not without some losses in men and material). The next phase of the operation was naturally determined by the Russian drives to annihilate the retreating enemy columns and prevent Field-Marshal von Busch from organizing elsewhere (perhaps behind the Berezina) a new defensive line. This task was to be carried out by troops of Chernyakovsky's and Rokossovsky's commands, as specially provided with armoured and mobile units and having before them better conditions of road and terrain than those before Zakharov's troops.

The drive to the west of Chernyakovsky's powerful mobile forces was directed by Tank-Marshal Paul Rotmistrov of Korsun and Uman fame. His double aim was, as soon as possible, to force the Berezina on its upper course (to the north of Borisov) and t cut the main Orsha-Minsk road on which some columns of the enemy Fourth Army might hope to make a speedy retreat. Serious difficulties had to be expected by the Russians in the Lepel region, which has great possibilities for defence, being "wet" and densely forested. (Between Lepel and the Berezina vast forests are preserved intact). Fortunately for the Russians their penetration into this natural fortress was facilitated by a long spell of dry and hot weather, just as in 1941, when it had favoured the German invasion.

On 28 June four Russian columns were on the move: (1) Bagramyan's left flank column from Beshenkovichi forced the Ulla and continued to advance on Kamen and Ushachi; (2) Chernyakovsky's right column attacked Lepel; (3) His central columns from Chereya fanned towards the Berezina; (4) His left column advanced to Krupki on the main railway and road to Minsk. Enemy resistance in the Lepel region was ineffective, as perhaps the Germans were confused by the simultaneous appearance of several Russian columns from different directions (or were ordered to spare their tank units). The fact remains that in one day the Russians captured Kamen and Lepel after little fighting and reached points on the Berezina and Krupki on the Minsk main road. This easy success brought Chernyakovsky's columns on 29 June to the

east bank of the Berezina from a point a few miles north of Borisov to the Polish 1939 frontier. Bagramyan's column occupied Ushachi and cut the Polotsk–Molodechno railway.

The second phase of the battle of White Russia began on 30 June with the crossing of the Berezina, the opening of an attack on Polotsk, and Rokossovsky's first moves which aimed at outflanking Minsk from the south-west. Enemy forces available at that moment were scarce and widely dispersed. The remnants of the Ninth Army (at least eight Divisions of it were written off) could not effectively oppose Rokossovsky's manœuvre. The Fourth Army was on a difficult retreat across the Drut and the Berezina; a few units had succeeded in crossing the latter river by the main road, but others were still in danger of being cut off and encircled. Units of the Third Tank Army which had escaped from the Vitebsk pocket were still fighting a rearguard action. One tank Division (Fifth Panzer) defended Borisov together with improvised infantry—S.S. and police detachments. Another Panzer Division was beyond the Berezina (in the Dokshitsy region), but the *Ober-Kommando* was apparently particularly concerned with the defence of Polotsk, since the loss of this stronghold would open the flank of the Baltic Group. In consequence, two tank and two infantry Divisions were concentrated for the defence of the Polotsk positions on the south side of the Dvina, while the town itself, on the north side, had a garrison of two Divisions. Such a distribution of forces helped to hold Polotsk a few days longer, but it opened a large gap in the German front between the Dvina and the Vilia. The Russians lost no time in penetrating this gap with strong mobile forces.

The Berezina was crossed on the 30th on a wide front to the west of Lepel. Then Tank Marshal Rotmistrov switched his columns in a south-westerly direction. On 1 July they were at Pleschenitsy, Begoml and Zembin. Other tank units, supported by infantry, attacked Borisov on the 30th and met with desperate resistance. But the next day this important strategic point fell to the Russians, who by a move towards Smolevichi were able to cut the

road to Minsk. Chernyakovsky's Group was at the same time carrying out a vast manœuvre outflanking Minsk from the north-west: on 2 July tank columns broke into Vileyka and approached Molodechno Junction on the Minsk-Vilna railway.

Meanwhile Rokossovsky with the same rapidity moved his columns which had to outflank Minsk from the south-west. Even before the fall of Bobruysk his cavalry and light tanks under the command of the Caucasian (Ossetian) General Pliev fought 40 miles west of this town, at Starya Dorogi on the high road to Baranovichi. On 30 June Pliev captured Slutsk and reached the sources of the Niemen near the Slutsk–Minsk road. Pliev's bold drive westwards reached Stolbtsy (Polish frontier before 1939) and the town of Nesvizh on 2 July. Batov's tanks and mobile infantry were on 2 July between Puhovichi and Novoselki; his vanguard the next day reached Smilovichi and Mihonovichi, 16 and 12 miles from Minsk. Informed of a simultaneous Russian advance on Minsk from several directions, the enemy High Command on 3 July decided to fight only a rearguard action for the "capital" of White Russia.

At this moment the Germans were much more interested in the fate of their retreating Divisions than in the possible loss of Minsk. In fact only three or perhaps four Divisions of the Fourth Army had been able to cross the Berezina before Borisov was captured by the Russians. More than two-thirds of that army by 1 July were still near Berezino, or near Cherven (some 20 miles to the west). Rokossovsky's right flank columns were already beyond Svisloch near Lapichi, while Zakharov's vanguard was pressing hard towards Berezino. Some enemy Divisions on 2 July fought a rearguard action at Berezino against Zakharov's troops, while others tried to hold Rokossovsky's advance. The enemy here resisted with considerable energy, but the road to Minsk was cut by the Russians at Smilovichi (on 3 July) and the same day Minsk was suddenly entered by Rotmistrov's tanks, which appeared from the east, the north, and even the north-west. During the night these units of Chernyakovsky's Group were joined in

Minsk by Rokossovsky's mobile column which arrived from the south-west. 4 July was a day of utter confusion in the White Russian capital. There was no organized resistance, only sporadic street fighting; leaving behind them large quantities of material, the enemy troops still in Minsk fled from the town by secondary roads in the direction of Lida and Novogrudok. The escape route was cut for eight Divisions of the enemy Fourth Army, and they remained in the forests to the east of Minsk between huge forces of three Russian Groups.

Polotsk fell almost simultaneously with Minsk, but the struggle here had a different character from that at the gates of the White Russian capital. Here the enemy forces were better concentrated and fought with determination. The town of Polotsk, an important cross-roads and junction, is well defended by nature on the north bank of the Dvina. Approaches to it from the east and north are hampered by many marshy streams and small lakes, between which fortifications had been built and forests adapted to defence. On the south side of the Dvina the suburbs are more easily reached, but here a defensive line was organized on the river Ushacha and along the chain of small lakes between this river and the Ulla. However, as has been said, Bagramyan's column, operating across the Ulla, had been able (on 28 June) to penetrate these outer defences of Polotsk and the next day to cut the railway running to Molodechno. On 1 July its advanced elements reached Disna on the Dvina, some 30 miles west of Polotsk.

General Bagramyan considerably reinforced those of his troops already on the south side of the Dvina: a decisive attack on Polotsk from this direction was to be started by General Chistyakov's tanks and infantry. The enemy organized an inner defensive line covering the southern suburbs of the town and held by four Divisions, two of them Panzer. Heavy fighting took place on 2 July on the small river Turovlya, 10 miles from the town, but the Russians had the best of it, and the next day they entered the suburbs near the Dvina bridge. Enemy tanks scarcely had time to make use of this bridge; Russian tanks followed

them immediately, but only three had time to cross before the bridge was blown up! Then the Russian infantry improvised the passage of the river, and by nightfall there was street fighting in Polotsk. On 4 July the town was stormed by other columns of Bagramyan from the east. The Germans, who suffered considerable losses, had still a safe route for retreat to the north in the direction of Osveya or Sebezh. This made the gap in the enemy's front between Drissa and Molodechno 120 miles wide. Mobile columns of Chernyakovsky and Bagramyan moved into it; during 3 and 4 July the latter occupied Sharkovschisna, Glubokoe, Dokshitsy—all these points beyond the Polish frontier of 1939.

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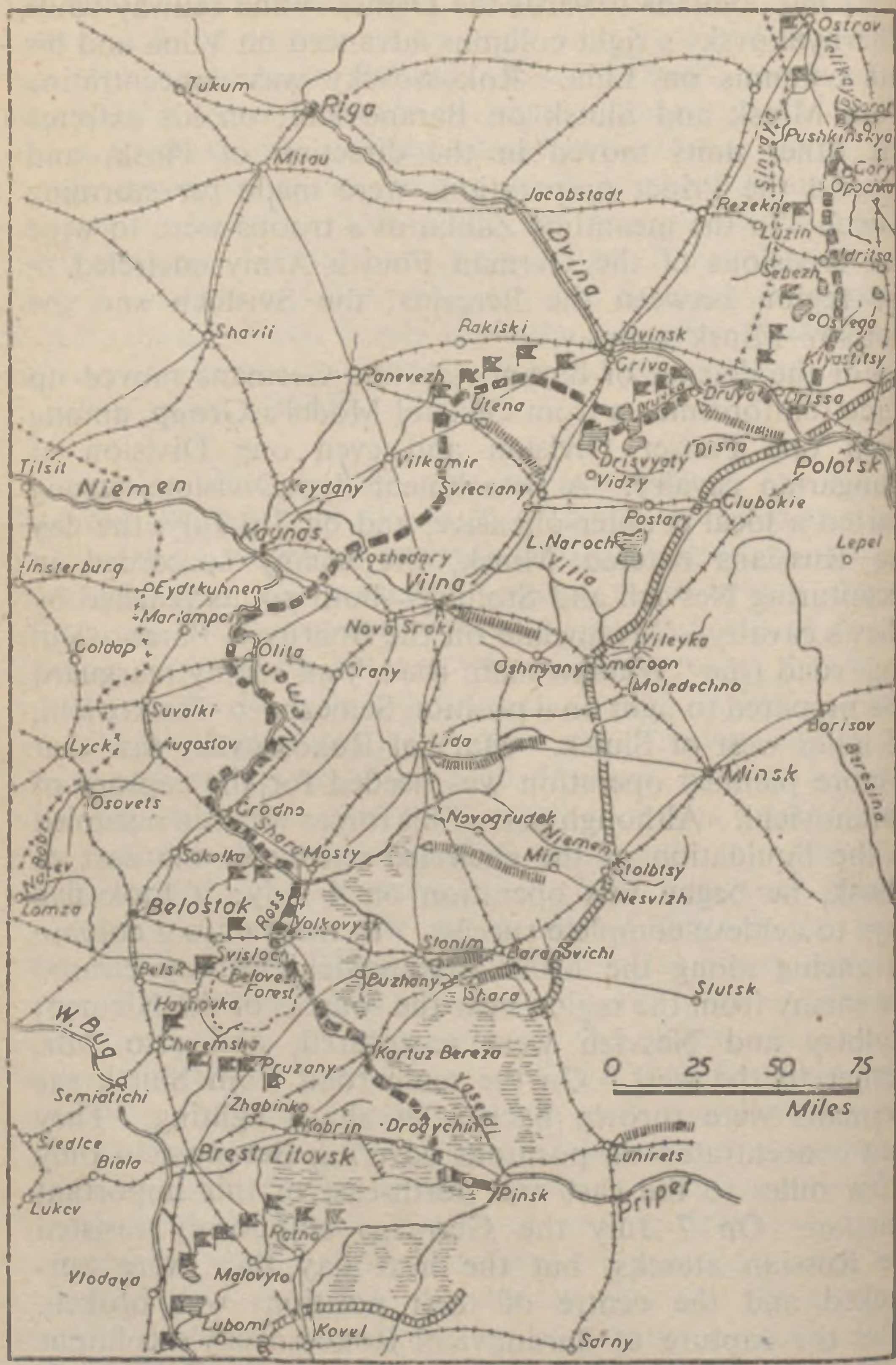
Map No. 12. 4 July may be accepted as the final date for the battle of White Russia, which lasted twelve days. Its development was exceptionally rapid, and the victorious end was achieved perhaps eight or ten days earlier than was expected. On the right and left of four Russian Groups which took the offensive other Groups would only be ready to attack by the middle of July. For the four Groups already in action the Russian Supreme Command maintained the same directive as was issued when the enemy front in the Central zone was broken: to pursue and destroy the retreating enemy units and prevent the Germans from organizing a new defensive front further to the west. The geography of the area to the west of Polotsk and Minsk suggested that the enemy would try to build a new defensive line on the Niemen, from Kaunas (Kovno) up this river to the point where the Shara joins it, then up the Shara and to a short line between this river and the Pripet. Forests and marshes would facilitate the defence of this front; forests, lakes and swamps could also help in the defence of the region between the Niemen and the Dvina, but there was no defensive river line, and the vital Dvinsk–Vilna trunk line could hardly be protected effectively. It was obvious also that the enemy would try to slow down the Russian advance by rearguard fighting for important cross-roads and junctions such as Vilna, Lida and Baranovichi.

These considerations determined the advance of Bagramyan's left columns towards the Dvinsk–Vilna railway while Chernyakovsky's right columns advanced on Vilna and his left columns on Lida. Rokossovsky was concentrating from Minsk and Slutsk on Baranovichi; on his extreme left other units moved in the direction of Pinsk, and beyond the Pripet preparations were made for storming Kovel. In the meantime Zakharov's troops were to wipe out Divisions of the German Fourth Army encircled in the region between the Berezina, the Svisloch and the Borisov–Minsk railway.

For the defence of Baranovichi the Germans moved up some reinforcements from General Model's Group, among them one Panzer Division and even one Division of Hungarian cavalry. A detachment five Divisions strong started a local counter-offensive, and on 3rd July, the day the Russians entered Minsk, the enemy succeeded in recapturing Nesvizh and Stolbtsy—both points reached by Pliev's cavalry. Meanwhile on the Bobruysk–Baranovichi high road (the "Warsaw main road") an enemy rearguard was prepared to fight on a position Semezhevo–Timkovichi, 25 miles west of Slutsk. Marshal Rokossovsky saw that a more planned operation was needed for the capture of Baranovichi. Although part of his forces was still occupied in the liquidation of the encircled enemy to the east of Minsk, he began this operation on 4 July; it took five days to achieve complete success. In three days a column advancing along the Minsk–Baranovichi railway cleared the enemy from the region near the sources of the Niemen; Stolbtsy and Nesvizh were recaptured, and also Mir, further to the west. On the main road from Slutsk the Germans were thrown back after sharp fighting. They then concentrated on positions covering Baranovichi only a few miles to the east and north-east of this important junction. On 7 July the Germans stubbornly resisted the Russian attacks, but the next day they were outflanked and the centre of their positions was broken. After the capture of Baranovichi Rokossovsky's columns continued the advance to the south-west. Zakharov's Group had to operate between the Upper Niemen and


Ostrov
Velikaya
Pusinkinskyo
Gory
Opochka
Tukum
Riga
Mitau
Jacobstadt
Rezekne
Luzin
Idritsa
Sebezh
Dvina
Shavli
Rakiski
Dvinsk
Osvega
Kiyastitsy
Ponevezh
Griva
Druya
Ulena
Drissa
Disna
Tilsit
Vilkomir
Drisvyaty
Polotsk
Niemen
Keydany
Svieciany
Vidzy
Clubokie
Postavy
Kaunas
L. Naroch
Lepel
Insterburg
Koshedary
Vilia
Eydtkuhnen
Vilna
Mariampol
Nova Sroki
Vileyka
Goldap
Olita
Oshmyany
Smorgon
Orany
Molodechno
Suvalki
Borisov
Lyck
Augustov
Lida
Minsk
Osovets
Grodno
Novogrudok
Sharo
Mosty
Niemen
Mir
Sokolka
Stolbtsy
Nesvizh
Lomza
Belostok
Ross
Volkovy
Slonim
Baranovichi
Svisloch
Belsk
Belove Forest
Puzhany
Sharo
Slutsk
Haynovka
W. Bug
Cheremsha
Kartuz Bereza
Pruzany
Semiatichi
Zhabinka
Kobrin
Drogychin
Siedlce
Biala
Brest Litovsk
Lunirets
Pinsk
Pripet
Lukov
Ratno
Vlodava
Malovyto
Luboml
Kovel
Sarny
0 25 50 75
Miles

the Shara after clearing the Germans from the area east of Minsk..

This mopping-up task was completed in eight days (from 4 to 11 July). At first some of Rokossovsky's units took part in the operation, but later it was under Zakharov, who had his H.Q. at Minsk, and his troops searched the forests between those marshy rivers, the Velma, Usha and Plissa. In this region (30 miles north to south and more than 40 west to east) not only small parties of enemy stragglers but whole units with artillery and even a few tanks found refuge. Some of them fought well, others only made a show of fighting before surrendering; many capitulated as soon as discovered. The Russian communiqués almost every day, between the 5th and the 11th, gave the number of captured Germans "east of Minsk." In the first three days 28,000 Germans were killed, 15,000 taken prisoner; in the last five days prisoners only were mentioned, and their total for this operation grew to 27,000. This loss of some 60,000 men meant the destruction of at least eight Divisions belonging to the Fourth Army (the 12th, 27th and the 39th Panzer Corps). A large number of commanding officers were taken prisoner: the Generals commanding the 57th, 78th, 60th motorized, 260th Divisions, the Generals commanding the 12th and 27th Corps (the latter was acting Commander of the Fourth Army). The fate of these Generals of the Fourth Army was shared by

MAP 12

DRIVE TO THE NIEMEN AND WESTERN BUG

Railways

Canals

Roads

Frontiers

Russian front line on 6th July

Columns advancing on 10th July

Front line on 16th July

Points reached on 21st July

Marshes

Lakes

several Generals of the Ninth Army, who lost their units at Bobruysk and tried to escape with small parties; the Commanders of the 35th and the 41st Panzer Corps were among them. Zakharov's troops were ready on 12 June to advance westward and replace Rokossovsky's right flank columns which switched from Slonim towards Ruzhany.

On Chernyakovsky's front the advance of the mobile columns towards Vilna and Lida was developed rapidly after the capture of Minsk. On 5 July they were at Oshmyany, 48 miles from Vilna. On the 8th Rotmistrov's tanks were in view of the historic capital of Lithuania, while another mobile column approached the important junction of Lida. In both these towns there was street fighting the next day, but, while Lida fell easily, a strong German rearguard at Vilna made the struggle there particularly fierce. On the 10th Vilna was completely surrounded; some Russian columns by-passed it, but fighting in the centre of the town still continued and even grew in violence. It took five days to overcome enemy resistance, and not until 13 July could General Krylov report that Vilna was cleared of the Germans. One of their Divisions, supported by a tank regiment and special units, fought with great courage (8,000 killed, 5,000 prisoners). But this did not delay Russian progress beyond Vilna, which continued as soon as the town was surrounded: on 12 July Chernyakovsky's vanguard was already at Novo-Troki.

In connection with Chernyakovsky's drive towards the line of the Niemen, Bagramyan extended his offensive between the Niemen and the Dvina. Postavy and Vidzy were reached, and Sventsyany was occupied soon after without any enemy resistance; thus the Dvinsk–Vilna trunk railway was cut three days before the fall of Vilna. Developing this success of his mobile column, Bagramyan moved it further to the north-west towards Utena, where the Dvinsk–Kaunas (Kovno) main road was cut and the railway connecting Dvinsk through Shavli with Tilsit seriously threatened. Simultaneously with these operations on the south side of the Dvina, other units of

Bagramyan's troops met with stubborn resistance on the north side of the river, where the defensive line of the Drissa was connected with the right flank of General Lindemann's Baltic sector. When on 12 July General Eremenko's Second Baltic Group took the offensive, Bagramyan's units co-operated with it on its extreme left.

Before this new Russian offensive in the northern part of the front started, Marshal Rokossovsky developed his operations at the southern end of the Central zone. To his command belonged the units on the south side of the Pripet, including those which, since the early spring, had occupied positions a few miles from Kovel, and so prevented the Germans from using this important junction. Suddenly on 5 July Kovel was stormed and taken, the enemy retreated to the north and west occupying tactically stronger positions behind the marshes at the headwaters of the Pripet. This Russian move was the southernmost of three concentric advances on Brest-Litovsk, the northernmost being that from Baranovichi, and the central was opened by an attack in the direction of Pinsk.

Here, in the heart of the Pripet marshes, General Belov was operating on both sides of the river. On the south side only patrols and partisans were able to act, but on the north side, along the railway running to Luninets and Pinsk, movement by large columns was possible if not easy. On 6 July Belov's troops were at Zhitkovichi; the next day they reached the frontier of 1939 on the river Sluch; the advance on Luninets continued, and this junction was captured on 9 July. Belov's troops were supported by the Dnieper flotilla, which entered the Pripet. The flotilla's help was particularly valuable during the attack on Pinsk, which was protected not only by the Pripet, but by its large tributary the Yaselda. Pinsk was captured on 14 July, and this was the final success of Belov's strange, almost amphibious operation against the small "capital of the swamps."

By 15 July Chernyakovsky's columns were rapidly approaching the Niemen on a wide front between the region west of Vilna and the outskirts of Grodno. Further to the south Zakharov's Group, now in the line, captured

on 14 July the town of Volkovysk after sharp fighting (with the remnants of the Forty-Fifth Division—perhaps last in the field of the destroyed Ninth Army). It was a decisive break through the Shara positions and also a breach in the centre of the new defensive line. Lack of reserves, the impossibility of moving Divisions from Lindemann's Group, already attacked, or from Model's Group awaiting an attack, resulted in a serious crisis on the Eastern front which helped to produce the events inside Germany officially called there "The Conspiracy of 20th July."

General Eremenko's Group on the night of 11–12 July attacked on a front of 100 miles, between the region of the sources of the Velikaya (to the north of Pustoshka) and the Drissa. Bagramyan's units joined in this attack and forced the lower Drissa between Volyntsy and the Dvina. The fortified belt attacked by Eremenko was an extension to the south of Opochka of the "Panther Line," organized by General Model at the end of the winter campaign. It had a particularly strong double "bastion," the junction Idritsa and the town of Sebezh. In many points the enemy line, well adapted to a difficult terrain, required a major effort from Eremenko's troops. The Russian artillery, however, proved as usual most efficient and opened for the infantry gaps in the enemy fortifications. Units of the German Sixteenth Army, which suffered relatively less than others during the winter, resisted strongly; but after two days' fighting the enemy lost Idritsa and several other strong points to the south of this junction. The next day Eremenko's offensive was extended northwards between Idritsa and the Sorot. Near the point (Pushkinskaya Gory) where the latter river joins the Velikaya the Russians liberated Mikhaylovskoe, the historic country house of the great Russian poet, Pushkin. Unfortunately it had been plundered and partly destroyed by the Germans. Simultaneously with these operations on the north side of the Dvina, Bagramyan opened, on the south side, an attack in the direction of Dvinsk along the main road connecting this town with Vilna and Kaunas: fighting was in progress some 25 miles south-west of Dvinsk.

On 15 July Eremenko was able to score a major success.

One of the chief points of the "Panther Line," stubbornly defended by the enemy, the town of Opochka (on the Velikaya), was captured by the Russians. This represented a breach in the whole German defensive system covering the frontier of Latvia. The other enemy "bastions," Ostrov in the north and Sebezh in the south, could now be outflanked. The retreat of both Lindemann's armies, the Sixteenth and Eighteenth, into the Baltic States might now be expected. In fact Sebezh fell on 17 July, and the same day Bagramyan's troops captured a strong point nearer to the Dvina—Osveya. Still more important events took place on other sectors. Chernyakovsky's mobile columns broke into Grodno on 16 July, and the same day they captured Olita (Alytus), where the Niemen was immediately crossed and a small bridgehead established. To the north-west of Vilna one column occupied Koshedary Junction (25 miles from Kaunas). Zakharov's troops were co-operating with Chernyakovsky's column in the attack on Grodno. The main direction of his advance was towards Bielostok, while on his left he was divided by the Belovezh forest from Rokossovsky's right flank column which captured Pruzhany. General Belov's troops were on the march to Kobrin, and on the extreme left of Rokossovsky's sector units under General Chuykov began to advance towards the Western Bug, which had already been forced by some of Konev's units when he started his offensive the day before.

* * * * *

By 15 July, after three weeks of the Russian offensive, the enemy had found no solution to the problems of the Eastern front. The idea of the "Niemen defensive line" must certainly be dismissed. And this indicated the existence of a real danger to East Prussia. Once at Grodno, Olita, and Kaunas, the Russians would be able to advance on a broad front towards the East Prussian border. Beyond the Niemen, the topography favoured defence in the Augustov–Suvalki region, and if not to the north of it, there were solid fortifications on the frontier of the Reich. But topography or fortifications, both needed

troops to make any defence effective. In consequence a concentration of troops in East Prussia seemed urgent.

The simplest solution would be to transfer to that region several Divisions from Lindemann's Baltic sector. It meant a decision not seriously to defend Latvia and Estonia. However, in accordance perhaps with the considerations discussed in Chapter IV, a different decision was made and publicly affirmed in a Government statement. Of the armies defeated by the Russians the Ninth was completely disintegrated, but the Fourth could still be reconstituted with the help of the expected reinforcements. Divisions of this Army, still available, concentrated at Bielostok, and Divisions freshly formed in the rear or transported from Denmark and Norway were directed to East Prussia. At the beginning of August elements of this new Fourth Army could be used for the defence of East Prussian territory.

Something had to be done for the defence of a vast region between the Niemen and the Dvina. As it was easy to foresee the approaching fall of Dvinsk, the defensive organization must be centred on Shavli—a point well connected with East Prussia (through Tilsit) and Latvia. An Army or a strong Divisional Group having at its core the Panzers of the depleted Third Tank Army was to be built up in Courland and Northern Lithuania.

Generally speaking, the enemy was able—between the Dvina and the upper Narev—to organize some defensive forces in the hope of opposing further penetration by the Russian mobile columns.

The situation between Bielostok and Brest-Litovsk was more difficult for the Germans. Here a new "gap" was open, into which all Zakharov's Group and part of Rokossovsky's columns were of course directed, threatening to split the German defensive front in two. An extension to the north of the left flank of Model's Group (i.e. of the German Second Army) would not be sufficient; besides, Model himself was expecting a Russian offensive, which was in fact launched on 16 July. New formations were needed, and it seems that the *Ober-Kommando* realized this after the fall of Bobruysk and Minsk. A new Tank

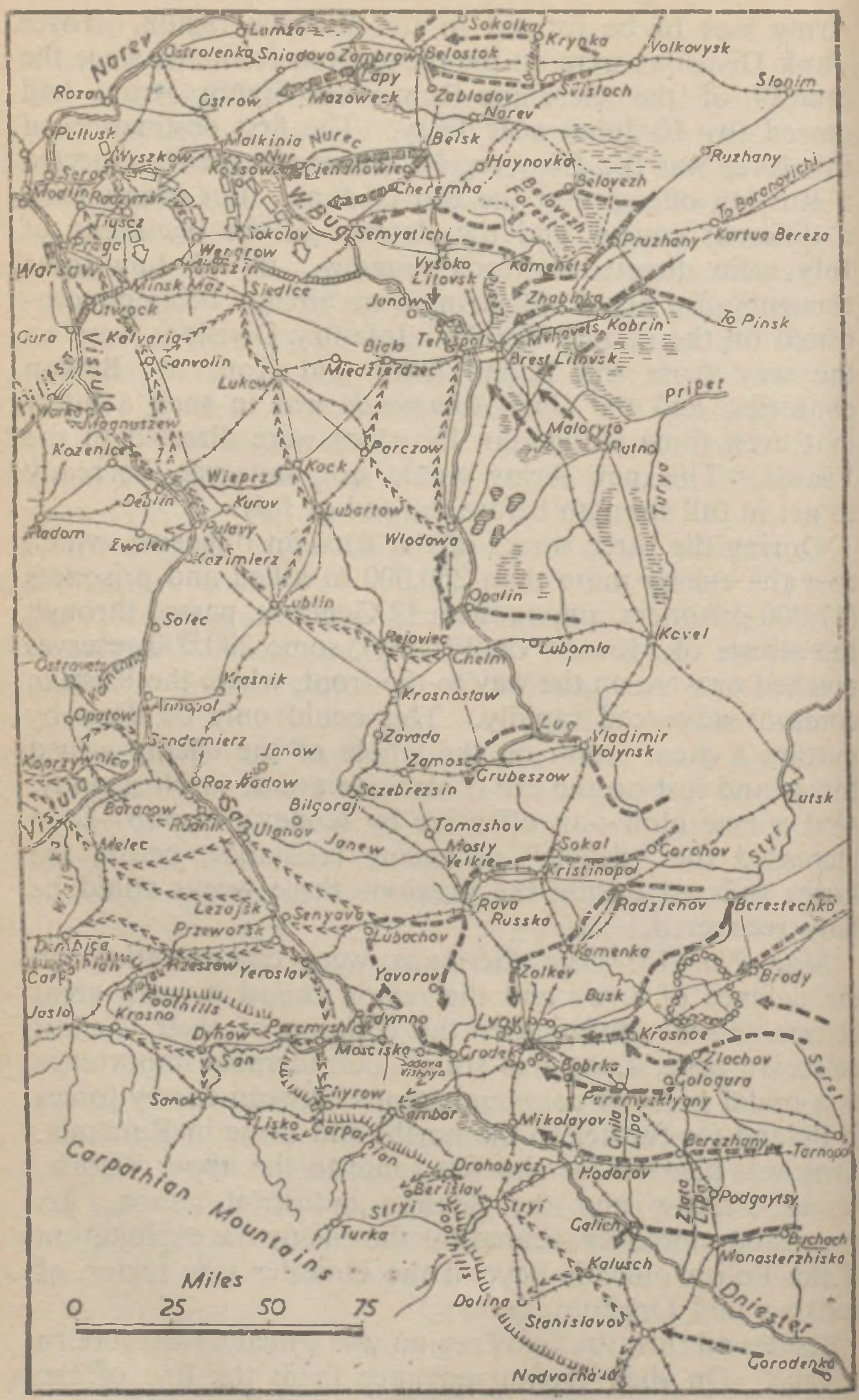
Army was to be formed in the Warsaw region. Three Tank Divisions were on the move from Rumania since the attacks of the Germano-Rumanian Eighth Army had ceased (by 10 June) near Jassy. The first destination of this force was the Lvov region, where the enemy expected a Russian offensive at the end of June. But events took a different course, and the Panzers at the beginning of July were directed towards Warsaw. By 15 July some elements of a new Tank Army were already being concentrated on the middle Vistula. Infantry Divisions were on the way from the Italian front and from the Balkan countries, and the *Ober-Kommando* was in such a hurry that even three Hungarian Divisions were directed to the Vistula. This new Army would not, however, be ready to act in full strength before the end of July.

During the three weeks of the Russian offensive, which cost the enemy more than 250,000 in killed and prisoners (57,000 prisoners, among them 12 Generals, passed through the streets of Moscow on 17 July), some 200,000 reserves reached or were on the way to the front, where the Russian columns advanced rapidly. This could only be done by putting a great strain on the whole of the enemy armed forces and just on the eve of decisive events in Normandy. And a new blow—an offensive by Konev's Group—soon increased the "deficit" of enemy resistance, before the losses suffered during the previous three weeks could be fully recovered.

Map No. 13. The Germans were concentrating on the defence of Lvov and the region round it, with great determination. Even after the collapse of their Central defensive zone, Lvov was still of considerable importance as a nodal point of communications between enemy forces in Poland (or further to the north) and those in Rumania. Lvov was also on the shortest route to the upper Vistula, i.e. to Cracow and the Silesian industrial region. Its possession moreover secured for the enemy the exploitation of the Polish oilfields beyond the Dniester (the region of Berislaw and Drohobycz).

Besides all this, the Lvov region was suited to a stubborn defence. On their frontal advance from the line of the

MAP 13


Lomza
Sokolka
Kryoka
Volkovysk
Norev
Ostrolenka
Sniadovo
Zombrow
Belostok
Lapy
Slonim
Rozan
Ostrow
Mazowieck
Zabiodov
Svisloch
Norev
Pultusk
Malkinia
Nurec
Belsk
Haynovka
Ruzhany
Vyszkow
Nur
Kossow
Cienanowiec
Cheremha
Belovezh
Forest
Modlin
Radzymin
Tluszcz
Sokolov
Semyatichi
To Baranovichi
Prage
Wengrow
Pruzhany
Kartuz Bereza
Warsaw
Mlinsk Maz
Siedlce
Vysoko Litovsk
Kamenets
Otwock
Janow
Zhabinka
To Pinsk
Gura
Kalvaria
Biala
Terespol
Kobrin
Ganvolin
Miedzyrzdzec
Brest Litovsk
Lukow
Pripet
Magnuszew
Malocyto
Kozenice
Parczow
Putno
Kock
Wieprz
Deblin
Kurov
Lubartow
Turya
Radom
Pulavy
Ewelin
Wlodowa
Kazimierz
Opalin
Lublin
Solec
Rejoviec
Chelm
Lubomla
Kovel
Ostrovets
Krasnik
Krasnostaw
Opatow
Irmagol
Sandomierz
Janow
Zavado
Zamosc
Vladimir Volynsk
Kozyrynica
Rozadow
Grubeszow
Sczebrzesin
Lutsk
Bilgoraj
Baranow
Rudnik
Ulanov
Janew
Tomashov
Mosty Velkie
Sokal
Gorohov
Melec
Kristinopol
Lezajsk
Senyavo
Rava Russko
Radzlchov
Berestechko
Przeworsk
Lubochov
Komenka
Dembice
Rzeszow
Yeroslav
Yavorov
Zolkev
Brody
Jasio
Krosno
Foothills
Radymno
Busk
Dynow
Peremyshl
Lvov
Krasnoe
Mosciska
Grodek
Bobrka
Zlochov
San
Sadova Vishnya
Gologura
Sanok
Chyrow
Peremyshlyany
Lisko
Sambor
Mikolayov
Carpathian
Drohobycz
Hodorov
Berezhany
Tarnopol
Carpathian Mountains
Berislav
Stryi
Podgaytsy
Turka
Galich
Bychach
Kalusch
Monasterzhisko
Miles
0 25 50 75
Dolina
Stanislavov
Dniester
Nadvorna
Gorodenka

Strypa, the Russians would come up against, one after another, several natural defensive lines along the tributaries of the Dniester, running north to south. Although even the most important of them, Zlata Lipa and Gnila Lipa, were not in themselves considerable obstacles, they made the configuration of the terrain advantageous for defence: stretches of high ground divided their parallel valleys. These rivers could be certainly outflanked from the north by an army advancing along the Dubno–Brody–Busk–Lvov road. Here, however, other obstacles could be created, as the region between Brody and Zlochov was that of a definitely marked watershed, between the tributaries of the Dniester and the upper course of the Western Bug and Styr. There were heights which could be made use of for defence, and the enemy built there a powerful system of trenches and pillboxes, protected with extensive minefields. Both Brody and Zloch v were organized as centres of resistance. From Brody the German fortified belt stretched through Radziehov to Vladimir Volynsk. The latter town stands on the river Lug (a tributary of the Western Bug), on both sides of which there are heights suitable for defence works. And the valley of the Western Bug, from Busk through Kamenka and Sokal to Grubeshov, might be the second defensive line of the northern sector of Lvov's defences.

MAP 13

BATTLES OF LVOV, BELOSTOK, BREST LITOVSK AND SIEDLCE, DRIVE TO THE VISTULA AND BEYOND THE DNIESTER

Railways

Roads

Russian attacks between 16th–28th July

Zakharov's advance

Rokossovsky's, Konev's and Petrov's columns advancing between 28th July and 12th August

Model attacking

Battle of Siedlce, 1st—12th August, Rokossovsky's defensive front

German divisions encircled

The Carpathian foothills

Marshes

In 1914 the fate of Lvov had been decided by two battles, one on the Zlata Lipa, the other on the Gnila Lipa, in which the Austro-Hungarian Army had been defeated. The decisive part had then been played by the Eighth Army, under the command of General Brussilov, on the Russian left. The Russian right flank was near Busk, and later, in Russian military literature, the Commander of the right wing Army, General Ruzsky, was criticized for not having extended his extreme right flank to the region of Kamenka and Mosty Velikie. Moving from these points in the direction of Rava Russka, forces of this Russian Army (the Third) could have got into touch with the Russian Fifth Army, then near Tomashov, and encircled the Third and Fourth Austro-Hungarian Armies in the region of Lvov. As this had not been done, the Austro-Hungarians, although defeated to the east of Lvov, were able to fight again on an excellent natural position to the west of Lvov, with their right flank on the marshy river Vereschitsa and their left at Rava Russka. This historic lesson was taken into account by the Russian Command in 1944.

The problem before Marshal Konev was now more complicated, and that not only because the German defences in 1944 were incomparably stronger than the Austro-Hungarian field works of 1914. In 1944 the enemy positions were on the east side of the Western Bug, everywhere between Brody and Vladimir Volynsk. First of all this fortified German front was to be pierced. The lessons of the past, however, made Marshal Konev plan a double breach of the enemy lines—the tactical breach in the region of Zlochov, the strategic one in the direction of Kamenka (or Mosty Velikie) and Rava Russka. This manœuvre resulted not only in the capture of Lvov and the San crossings, but opened for Rokossovsky's Group the road to Lublin.

Appreciating the element of surprise, Konev started his attack in the early hours of 16 July by infantry battle groups without any artillery preparation, and only at points where close contact with the enemy defences was maintained. Only when the first trenches and strong points were captured did the guns move rapidly forward

and open fire, concentrating where deep breaches were to be made. This assault was initially made on the front line between Brody and Zlochov; while the enemy expected it to develop further to the south, towards Zlata Lipa, it was extended, the next morning, to the north. A strong attack was launched along the left bank of the Styr, and other units stormed positions to the south of Gorohov where the enemy line proved to be inadequately held. Radziehov was captured, and Russian tanks moved towards Busk, while the cavalry reached Kamenka and succeeded in crossing the Western Bug. The same day, 17 July, the Zlochov "bastion" fell and was held by the Russians despite furious counter-attacks. Two Tank Divisions (of the First Tank Army) were used in battles with the Russian tanks, which continued on 18 July. The Germans concentrated four infantry Divisions at Brody, but they were unable either to recapture Zlochov or to hold Brody: the latter town fell on 18 July. Meanwhile a rapid advance by Russian columns on the upper Styr soon endangered enemy Divisions concentrated in the Brody region.

On 18 July Konev's units captured not only Busk but the junction and cross-roads of Krasnoe beyond the Western Bug, 30 miles south-west of Brody and the same distance east of Lvov. On the 19th enemy Tank Divisions escaped encirclement by moving through Gologura to Peremyshlyany, but not so the infantry, around whom the Russian ring was closed the same day. Four infantry and one "security" Divisions were encircled between the Brody region and the head-waters of the Styr. In the northern sector Konev extended still further the front of his attack: Sokal and Mosty Velikie were taken. On 20 July by a surprise move a mobile column captured Rava Russka; the same day, on his extreme right, Konev stormed Vladimir Volynsk. On the nearest approaches to Lvov his troops firmly held the Kamenka–Busk–Krasnoe–Gologura–Peremyshlyany line, beating off all enemy counter-attacks aimed at the relief of the Divisions encircled west of Brody. These Divisions tried in vain to break through and suffered heavy losses. On that day, the fifth of Konev's offensive, it was clear that a wide outflanking manœuvre through the

Rava Russka region was even more important than a frontal attack on Lvov. The directives given to Marshal Konev by the Russian Supreme Command were probably influenced by the rapid developments on the south flank of Marshal Rokossovsky's Group.

Maps Nos. 12 *and* 13. The German troops which after the loss of Kovel occupied positions in the region of marshy streams forming the Pripet belonged to the German Second Army, and so marked the extreme left of Model's Group. As the same Army held the front line through Vladimir Volynsk to the region of Brody, more than 100 miles long, this line was, particularly in its northern part, only thinly held. Those Divisions which defended the positions running parallel to the Western Bug, only a few miles from the river behind them, were in a precarious situation. A break-through on this sector was obviously not a difficult task, and the results might be very important. Advancing on both sides of the railway which runs westwards from Kovel and crosses the Western Bug, the Russians might reach Kholm and move on to Lublin. They could drive a deep wedge between the enemy forces in Poland and those in Galicia. In preparation for this manœuvre, Rokossovsky considerably strengthened his troops in the region of Kovel. They were placed under the command of General Chuykov, a hero of the defence of Stalingrad, and the mobile columns under General Kolpakchi included Cossacks and cavalry units.

The attack which started on 18 July took the units of the German Second Army completely by surprise. On the first day an assault was opened in the direction of Brest-Litovsk. But on 19 July the decisive attack was suddenly switched westwards, towards the Western Bug. Lubomlya was captured, and the next day Chuykov's troops reached the Western Bug on a front of 40 miles. On 21 July General Kolpakchi crossed the river at Opalin. Three German Divisions were thrown back after the fighting of 18 July towards Brest-Litovsk, and remnants of the other two were now the only enemy force defending Kholm—a point of great strategic importance. No wonder that it was captured by Kolpakchi's column on 22 July.

And he continued to advance without a pause towards Lublin.

Map No. 13. Thus the battle of Lvov gave as its first and somewhat unexpected result the capture of Lublin, more than 110 miles to the north-west (on 23 July). In the meantime Marshal Konev took advantage of the wide gap which developed on the front of the enemy's Second Army. After the capture of Rava Russka his right-flank mobile columns increased the tempo of their manœuvre, outflanking Lvov. One column entered Tomashov, another reached Lubachov on the same day (22 July). As Lubachov is some 45 miles east-north-east from Lvov and only 23 miles from Yaroslav on the San, directly connected with Cracow, the significance of this Russian move was clear. Simultaneously with the drive by Konev's mobile columns, other units maintained a strong pressure on the enemy positions covering the capital of Galicia from the east; liquidation of the German Divisions which were surrounded west of Brody proceeded during several days and was completed on the 23rd. Fifteen thousand prisoners were taken and the enemy lost double this number in killed; booty included 68 tanks, 500 guns and 3,500 lorries.

The losses suffered by the Germans and the danger of Konev's deep outflanking manœuvre to the north of Lvov made General Model move back those of his troops which still occupied positions between the Lvov region and the point where the Strypa falls into the Dniester. On 20 July the Russians crossed the Strypa and occupied Buchach, meeting only enemy rearguards. During the next two days the Zlata Lipa was crossed between Berezhany and Podgaytsy. On the 23rd and 24th the Russians reached the line of the Gnila Lipa, forced the river and captured Galich. The German retreat was obviously accelerated, but it was not rapid enough to avoid a new encirclement of two Divisions. Russian columns in the Tomashov–Rava-Russka and Lubachov triangle not only continued their drive towards the San (which was reached on the 23rd and crossed the next day at Sinvaya), but some of them switched southwards, captured Zolkev and Yavorov,

and on the 24th cut the main Lvov–Peremyshl road at Sadova Vishnya. Soon Grodek Yagellonsky fell to the Russians, and on 25 July the encirclement of Lvov along the line of its outskirts was completed.

* * * * *

The capture of Lublin, the encirclement of Lvov, the crossing of the San, all these events which had taken place by 25 July, produced a deep impression everywhere, on the enemy and in the Allied countries. At this date the Soviet Government published three documents. The first was a summing-up of the losses suffered by the Germans during the first month of the Russian offensive. The enemy had lost 158,000 prisoners (among them 22 Generals), 381,000 "killed," 2,735 tanks and s.p. guns, 8,702 guns, 57,000 motor vehicles. This showed that the "tempo" at which the enemy army and its material were destroyed during one month of the summer offensive was even greater than during the winter offensive. And this account did not mention the losses inflicted on the Germans by the troops under the command of Konev and Eremenko. In connection with these official figures another document was published by the Soviet Government—an appeal by 16 German Generals, taken prisoner by the Russians, to the Generals and officers of the *Wehrmacht*. All these 16 Generals (Corps or Divisional Commanders) belonged to the units of "Heeres Gruppe Mitte." They wished to disclose to their colleagues and comrades the truth, which had never been disclosed by the Nazi Government: thirty Divisions of the Central zone had been annihilated and the old "Heeres Gruppe Mitte" had ceased to exist. They said that the political and military leadership of Adolf Hitler was responsible for this, and that the only means to avoid new disasters and the final catastrophe would be to disobey Hitler's orders and cease the senseless bloodshed.

The third document was of a different character. The Soviet Government declared that the military operations on the territory of Poland were considered as taking place "on the territory of an independent, friendly and Allied State." Having no diplomatic relations with the Polish Government in London, the Soviet Government had

decided to come to an agreement with the Polish Committee of National Liberation, constituted in Kholm on 22 July. According to the declaration, the agreement established relations between the Soviet Military Command and the Polish Administration for liberated territories. As the Committee chose Lublin for its residence, it soon became known as the "Lublin Committee."

This political act was explained first of all by urgent military considerations. The troops now operating on Polish territory (and among them were Polish units formed in the U.S.S.R. by the "Union of Polish Patriots") expected to find there full support from the population, for the organization of which an administration recognized by the Soviet authorities was necessary. The particular conditions of the present war, however, created one special problem, which promised some difficulties for the Committee's administration and consequently for the Russian Military Command. Polish partisans and patriotic "resisters" were active in the territory already liberated, but they were even more numerous in the territory still firmly held by the enemy. To all these courageous men the Committee addressed a manifesto "to the Polish People," dated 22 July 1944, in the long text of which, together with the description of the Committee's administrative structure and its leading political principles, an appeal was included to rise for the struggle against the enemy and to fight him by all possible means. This struggle the Committee hoped to help and organize in co-operation with the activities of the Red Army, but on Polish territory there already existed partisans' and "resisters'" groups, having their own organizations and maintaining liaison (if only sporadic and difficult) with the Polish Government in London. According to the attitude of that Government, they (generally speaking) could not have any connection either with the Soviet Government or with the Committee formed in the U.S.S.R. before its transfer to Poland.

However, the situation about 25 July (heads of strong Russian columns were already on the San and approaching the Vistula) was such that the idea of a general insurrection

of Polish patriots inside the still occupied parts of Poland might seem urgent, even quite independently of the Committee's manifesto. The appeal for a rising was made on 22 July by the Committee only in general terms, but the connections of the Committee with the Soviet authorities seemed to suggest that such a rising might be in the immediate operative plans of the Russian Military Command, as aimed not only at the territory east of the Vistula, but even at the territory beyond the Vistula, Warsaw included. That such an interpretation would have been completely erroneous was proved by the fact that the manifesto was issued at Kholm when this town was reached by the Russian vanguard, and when the further development of operations was far from clear. It was a misunderstanding, a tragic misunderstanding unfortunately, as later events showed.

A significant exposé of Polish feelings at this moment may be found in a note by a Polish correspondent of *The Times*, dated 26 July. "The German Armies in the east," he wrote, "are facing a complete collapse and are abandoning Warsaw, according to information reaching this country from Poland. A detailed report by the Commander-in-Chief of the Polish Underground Army, General Bor, dated July 21st, and received in London, says: 'On the eastern front the Germans have suffered a complete defeat. Three armies of the central front have been completely routed, and the German High Command was unable to put new forces into action in enough strength to check the Russian advance.'

"Further reports from Poland," says the correspondent of *The Times*, "received in London yesterday indicate that the Germans, overwhelmed by the speed of the Russian advance, are abandoning the plan to defend Warsaw. Fortification works in and around Warsaw which for the past few weeks have been hurriedly constructed have suddenly been stopped. Instead of that a speedy and chaotic evacuation of Warsaw, Deblin and other towns on the Vistula is taking place. Archives and documents are being burnt in the German offices at Warsaw. Wild rumours are spreading among the German soldiers."

This picture is the psychological background of the unfortunate Warsaw rising. . . .

Map No. 13. It may be presumed that the leaders of the Polish "Underground Army," if able to observe symptoms of great anxiety among the Germans at Warsaw and other places, could hardly have any exact information with regard to the general situation of the enemy armies on the Eastern Front. Still less could they know of the operational plans of the Russian Command. By 25 July the real facts were somewhat different from the conclusions which might be drawn from the "wild rumours" spreading among the German soldiers and Polish civilians, the latter so impatiently awaiting the day of their liberation.

It is true that three Armies of the enemy Central zone were routed and that some thirty German Divisions were annihilated or dispersed. But the remnants of the defeated Armies (approximately twelve or fourteen Divisions) during their fighting retreat were joined by reinforcements, moved from Model's and Lindemann's Groups. Other units soon arrived from the rear or from the Scandinavian countries, Holland, Italy and the Balkans. These reinforcements by the end of July numbered at least fifteen Divisions, and a considerable proportion of them were armoured units. On the other hand, even if Model's Armies (the First Tank and the Second) were severely defeated in the battle for Lvov and Lublin, at least twenty Divisions of his two Armies and one Divisional Group could still be used to organize a new defensive "barrier." Before the Russian summer offensive there were under the command of von Busch and Model some seventy-five German Divisions (apart from the Hungarian) on a front line between the Vitebsk region and the Carpathians, more than 600 miles long. Now some fifty Divisions (and ten more to come) had to defend the territory marked in the east by the shortened line of about 500 miles between the Dvina and the Carpathians (as the Carpathians run from south-east to north-west). The task was not easy, but it was not impossible, as the Russian Armies in their rapid advance were now in some places 300 miles from their starting-point and much more from their bases.

Certainly the Heeres Gruppe Mitte and Model's troops had been fighting their battles on carefully and thoroughly prepared fortified lines, while any "new line" would be perforce an improvisation. However, several sectors of an eventual front between the Dvina and the Carpathians had their own defensive advantages. In the "Niemen sector" not only was this wide river an obstacle, but even if it seemed too late to hold the "Niemen line" firmly, there were behind it solid fortifications on the border of East Prussia. Further to the south the borderland with its dense Augustov forests and the lines of the marshy rivers Bobr and Narev was in itself a good defensive country. And everywhere between the frontier near Suvalki and the Narev near Lomza there were German fortifications, constructed before 1941 to serve as starting-points for the enemy invasion of Russia. The line of Narev, lower Western Bug and Vistula was a natural defensive line further to the south. And although the San had already been forced by Konev, defence still could be organized on the tributaries of the upper Vistula running parallel to the San—the Wisloka, Dunaets and others—up to their head-waters in the Carpathian foothills.

This relative security of certain sectors of the "new line" was due to natural obstacles or earlier-built fortifications, and so passive defence could be organized there with the help of "static" Divisions. "Dynamic" units, in particular the Tank Divisions, must be spared for other sectors where the probability of the Russian break-through seemed greater. One of these sectors was a "gap" between the Dvina and the Niemen (in the direction of Shavli). Another "dangerous corner" seemed that between the San and the upper Vistula. The long stretch of the middle Vistula, between Warsaw and the point where the San joins it, also needed not only a "static" defence, but a mobile active reserve, which could be easily moved. All the area between the Niemen and the Carpathians constituted a strategic whole, something like a new "Central zone," and as Field-Marshal von Busch disappeared without leaving any trace among the enemy high military personnel, General Model was entrusted to organize the

defence of this vital part of the Eastern Front. He acted with undoubted energy and some skill, and this soon brought him to France, to organize the German forces there, after their crushing defeat in Normandy.

Model needed some time for the regrouping of available forces, and the time was to be won by rearguard fighting on the principal approaches to the line of defensive concentrations. Not everywhere, however, were fresh or reorganized units able to fight the Russian columns and thus slow down their speedy advance. Wide "gaps" existed, through which the Russian vanguards could penetrate deeply almost unhindered. This explains why between 20 July and the end of the month the fighting on the front between the Dvina and the Carpathians took on a "patchy" character: in some places the Germans resisted with vigour, but in others important strategic points were lost after only a slight resistance.

Map No. 12. In the region between the Dvina and the lower Niemen rapid successes were gained by Bagramyan's mobile columns. On the 22nd a long stretch of the Dvinsk–Shavli railway, with the town of Ponevezh, was already in Russian hands; two days later Bagramyan's left flank was at Vilkomir, on the strategic Dvinsk–Kaunas chaussée, 45 miles from the latter. On 27 July General Obukhov's tanks scored a decisive success by capturing Shavli. But a different situation could be observed on the western side of the middle Niemen, where Chernyakovsky's troops met with serious resistance. Worried by a threat to East Prussia the *Ober-Kommando* took particular care to reconstitute the Fourth Army, in which were several "active" Divisions. Some of them were already in action a few days after Chernyakovsky's bridgehead was established at Olita (Alytus). Since 20 July the Germans had attacked here many times and in some strength. Their attempts failed, but no serious Russian operations in the direction of the East Prussian border could be started until these enemy counter-attacks were exhausted by 27 July.

Map No. 13. Zakharov's troops met with stubborn resistance on their way to Belostok: the enemy rearguards

tried to slow down the progress of the Russian column advancing westwards from Volkovysk. There were several days of fighting on the river Svisloch (a tributary of the Niemen) and the Russians only captured the strong point of Krynki on 19 July. The importance of Belostok was obvious to both sides: the Germans concentrated four Divisions for the defence of this nodal point of five railways and many roads. They proved insufficient against Zakharov's columns, advancing on the town, one from Grodno through Sokolka, others from Krynki and along the Volkovysk road. The Belostok operation developed throughout a whole week, from 20 to 27 July. It was quite different from the speedy drives of mobile columns on other sectors: here heavy fighting took place, particularly during the last three days before the Russians entered the town (and when they were within a few miles to the south-east, north-east and even north-west). Model exhausted his available reserves at that moment and preferred to make use of his freshly arrived Panzers elsewhere.

The concentration of Zakharov's Group between the region of Grodno and that of Belostok (100 miles) was necessary to secure the area between the upper Niemen and the upper Narev. But any advance westwards from the line Grodno–Belostok was impossible, as enemy concentrations were known to exist between the Narev and the Western Bug. Model there prepared a counter-manœuvre directed against Rokossovsky's columns, which were dispersed by 25 July on an enormous semicircle more than 250 miles long. Soon, instead of co-operating with Chernyakovsky on the East Prussian border, Zakharov had to co-operate with Rokossovsky on the lower Western Bug, not far from the point where this river joins the Vistula.

A semicircle formed by Rokossovsky's columns resulted from two events. The first was Model's decision to hold Brest-Litovsk as long as possible, and the other the rapid and easy Russian advance on Lublin and, further on, towards the Vistula. When the German commander took this decision, he reinforced the garrison of Brest-Litovsk with some tanks, sent from Warsaw. It consisted of units which had retired there from Baranovichi, Pinsk and the

region of Kovel. There were remnants of at least eight Divisions (formerly in the Ninth and Second Armies), and, although their actual strength was reduced by more than fifty per cent, serious resistance could still be organized. In fact, even if the pre-war fortifications were of little help, Brest-Litovsk still remained a natural fortress defended by extensive marshes along the Western Bug and its tributaries, the Muhavets and the Lesna. Railways and roads to the town passed through numerous and easily-defended causeways and bridges.

Making some of his columns converge directly on Brest-Litovsk, Rokossovsky moved others for a vast encircling movement to cut all communications with Belostok and Warsaw. By 25 July his columns were: (1) General Batov's troops, which captured Kamenets Litovsk on the river Lesna, beating off furious counter-attacks (the enemy made use of tank formations); (2) Batov's cavalry and lorried infantry, which passed through the famous Belovezh forest and cut the Brest–Belostok railway between Cheremsha and Vysokolitovsk, with patrols reaching the Western Bug at Semiatichi; (3) General Belov's troops, which progressed only slowly from Kobrin and Zhabinka, meeting with strong enemy resistance nearer to Brest-Litovsk; (4) General Popov's force (part of Chuykov's troops, left on the eastern side of the Western Bug), which fought in the marshes of the Muhavets, covering Brest-Litovsk from the south; (5) In contrast to these difficulties, natural or created by the enemy, to the east of the Western Bug, General Chuykov's troops advanced easily to the west of this river, where the mobile formations under General Kolpakchi fanned towards the Vistula at full speed. The Russians were in Lublin and beyond it, near Pulavy and Lubartov.

The next four days (26–29 July) saw Rokossovsky advance still further along the Vistula; at the same time the moment came when the absence of balance between his right and left wings was not strategically justified. Brest-Litovsk fell only on 28 July, when at least two-thirds of Rokossovsky's units were still engaged in or near this stronghold. Meanwhile, meeting with only slight resistance (by remnants

of two Divisions which fled from Kholm) Chuykov's and Kolpakchi's columns captured (on the 26th) Deblin (formerly Ivangorod). On the 27th the Russians were at Garwolin, and there was a considerable gap between Chuykov's main force at Garwolin and Rokossovsky's other units, which entered Brest-Litovsk. Three enemy Divisions tried to escape from there towards Siedlce, but they were surrounded between Biala and the river and destroyed on 29 and 30 July (15,000 killed, 2,000 prisoners). During those days, some 60 miles to the north-west, Chuykov's mobile columns made a bold raid across the railways connecting Warsaw with Siedlce and Belostok. They captured Minsk Mazovecki, and on the 31st Russian light tanks and lorried infantry suddenly appeared at Otwock and Radzimin, only 10 to 12 miles from Warsaw. This move was understood by the Polish "Underground Army" as a signal for insurrection; the order to start it was given by General Bor-Komorowski the next day, 1 August.

* * * * *

It is difficult to imagine the Polish "Underground Army" as anything more than a combination of small but resolute and active partisan groups, dispersed in the forested parts of the country, with a number of sympathizers among the population of the large towns; the latter could co-operate with the partisan groups only when the partisans became strong enough to attack the town from the outside. The concentration of partisans inside a large town and the making use of them for a rising could be justified only by a concerted attack on the town from outside by a powerful and friendly regular army. Otherwise there was little chance of success against an enemy force of occupation and great risk of uselessly sacrificing many courageous and experienced fighters, whose activities would have been incomparably more effective outside the town and on the enemy communications.

That the rising in Warsaw could not greatly influence the operations on the eastern side of the Vistula is clear from the position held on 1 August in that region by the Russians and the Germans respectively. Warsaw at that

moment was not in the rear of the enemy lines, but on their right flank. The fighting between the Russians and the Germans took place on a line not parallel to the Vistula, but forming a right angle with it. The initiative was temporarily not in Russian but in German hands. The enemy deployed his active Divisions along the lower course of the Western Bug, between Modlin, Wyszkow and Malkin, and attacked in a general direction from north-west to south-east, concentrating his principal effort against Siedlce. Rokossovsky's units, engaged in offensive battles some 40 to 50 miles east of the Vistula, had not the slightest possibility of marching on Warsaw even if that had been the intention of the Russian Command.

This situation was created by the counter-manœuvre, which General Model had skilfully planned during the last week of July. Small wonder indeed that the leaders of the Warsaw rising did not suspect the truth, as the enemy kept his preparations secret; we do not even know how much of his moves was discovered by Russian air reconnaissance. It was of tragic significance for the Warsaw patriots that Model firmly established his communications across the Vistula, not through the Warsaw bridges, but through those which were protected by the solid fortifications of Modlin. The fundamental idea of this fortress (formerly Novogeorgievsk) was to secure the crossings of the Vistula and Western Bug and to keep safe the communications between the western and eastern provinces of Poland. If the Warsaw rising was aimed at dislocation of the central point of the enemy communications across the Vistula, this did not correspond with the real facts as they were by 1 August 1944.

In transferring his principal crossings from Warsaw to Modlin, was Model taking precautions, suggested by some knowledge of preparations for a rising in Warsaw? This is, of course, not impossible, but a simple "deduction" could have the same result. It seems, however, that Modlin was chosen first of all in accordance with Model's plan to prevent the development of Russian operations on the Vistula by a counter-offensive, directed against the flank of Rokossovsky's Vistula front, threatening at the same

time his main line of communications which had to pass through Siedlce and Brest-Litovsk.

The latter point was already in Russian hands, but Siedlce could still be contested when Model moved his active Divisions across the Western Bug, in the direction of Wengrow and Sokolow. A Russian mobile column from Lublin had already reached Lukow and Siedlce by 27 July. But the Germans reoccupied these important points with strong vanguards two days later, when Model started his counter-offensive between the Livec and the Western Bug. He had no time to consolidate his possession of Siedlce and Lukow, as the fall of Brest-Litovsk (on 28 July) at last freed the bulk of Rokossovsky's Group. The latter's Divisions marched on Lukow and Siedlce and on 31 July took both towns by storm. Model's main force appeared on the battlefield the next day, but it was too late. The Russians held Siedlce, which became the central point of their defensive front—from Minsk Mazovecki through Kaluszin and Siedlce to the Western Bug, where it is crossed by the railway to Volkovysk. Furious clashes of tanks and infantry continued for several days to the south of Wengrow and Sokolow.

An interesting feature of Model's manœuvre is his understanding of the great advantages presented by the so-called "Bug–Narev theatre," carefully prepared by the Russians before World War I. Then the territory behind the defensive line of the Narev and its tributary the Bobr (the line of fortresses and forts, Novogeorgievsk–Zegrze–Pultusk–Rozan–Ostrolenka–Lonza–Ossovets) was organized as a vast *place d'armes* for concentrations of troops. A network of strategic roads was built there, as well as the triangle of strategic railways connecting Ostrolenka with Warsaw, Siedlce and Belostok, while crossings of the Western Bug were secured at Wyszkow and Malkin. During the German–Polish war a special Polish "Narev Army" was concentrated here, but it was not strong enough for a successful defence, and the German Third Army advanced first on Ostrolenka, then on Wyszkow, and finally on Siedlce to complete the encirclement of Warsaw. All this was evidently taken into account by

Model, who organized his concentrations between Modlin (Novogeorgievsk), Ostrolenka and Wyszkow, leaving Warsaw aside.

General Zimiersky (who joined the Lublin Committee and took part in the organization of the Polish troops fighting with the Red Army) calculated the enemy force, concentrated by 1 August against Rokossovsky's Group, at twenty-two Divisions. This is not an exaggeration if he took into consideration some four "security" Divisions (in the Warsaw suburbs), three Hungarian Divisions (on the Vistula to the south of Warsaw) and remnants of six or seven Divisions, which escaped from Belostok or Brest-Litovsk and could be used between the Narev (at Lapy) and the Western Bug (near Semyatichi). The fresh active Divisions, concentrated by Model for his counter-manœuvre, were far fewer, but still at least eight Divisions were identified during the fighting to the north of Siedlce, among them two Panzers and three S.S. Panzers or "Panzer-Grenadiers," the latter used for the first time on the Russian front, the "Royal Tigers"—the latest version of the enemy heavy tank.

Under such conditions the Siedlce battle was not an easy task for Rokossovsky's units, some of which were fighting without pause after a march from Garwolin or Brest-Litovsk and without any defensive line prepared in advance. But the Russian infantry and artillery once more showed their skill in defensive fighting: despite all their efforts the Germans made no progress towards Siedlce and Kaluszin between 1 and 10 August, and soon their withdrawal became necessary as the Russian counter-measures developed.

The weak point of Model's deployment was on his left, so against his left the Russian counter-measures were directed. In theory his left flank was protected by the two rivers, the Narev and Western Bug. But he had few troops to contest the passage of these rivers by strong concentrations of Zakharov's Group near Belostok. In fact, one of Zakharov's columns had already on 30 July captured Belsk. Advancing along the Nurzec on 2 August it reached Ciehanowec, only 10 miles from the

Western Bug. In the meantime Zakharov moved strong columns from Belostok towards the Narev; on 6 August the river was crossed and the important junction of Lapy captured. During the following days Mazoveck was occupied and then Zambrow; this meant that Ostrow, which was a vital point in the rear of Model's front to the north of Siedlce, was threatened. The Germans left Sokolow while the Russian troops at Nur crossed the Western Bug and captured Kossow, on 12 August. Model was retreating for a defensive action against Rokossovsky's and Zakharov's troops on the line Lomza–Malkin–Praga. As the Russians on their left approached a point only 6 miles from Praga, Model started here on 15 August a series of local counter-attacks, which won some ground but had no strategic importance.

It was sometimes assumed in connection with the tragic end of the Warsaw rising that the Russians were "checked" on their way to Praga, and that this was the reason why they did not help the patriots who fought inside the Polish capital. But a purely local withdrawal which took place in the middle of August near Praga (one village was lost and the enemy advance stopped the same day) was of no consequence whatever. Other explanations must be found by those who were disappointed in their hopes. What kind of help did they expect from the Russians? Certainly the only effective help would have been an attack on Warsaw and the crossing of the Vistula by a Russian Army in full strength. There is, however, absolutely nothing in the development of the Russian summer offensive that would suggest the possibility of such an operation in August–September 1944. A sudden Warsaw rising could not change the Russian military plans which, like all reasonable military plans, were based on strategic considerations above all others. And an operation of such magnitude must be prepared for a long time ahead and cannot be improvised in a few days. Neither a local "rebuff" near Praga nor the incomparably more important counter-offensive by Model were able to check the real operational plans of the Russian Supreme Command. For Rokossovsky's and Zakharov's Groups the object of the summer

offensive was firm possession of the great rivers line—Vistula–Narev–Bobr, with the whole Bug–Narev triangle behind it. And Model perhaps had no illusions about his adversary's intentions and never assumed that the Russians would try to attack Warsaw before having in their hands the Bug–Narev theatre. With only a limited force at his disposal he could scarcely hope to prevent two strong Russian Groups from achieving a final success on the Western Bug and Narev. His ambition did not go so far, his counter-manœuvre being only a determined form of delaying action. The counter-manœuvre must be judged from this point of view, and it must be recognized that he scored an undoubted success; the limits were, however, indicated beforehand by the limits of his concentrations. If unopposed, Rokossovsky's troops might cross the lower Western Bug during the first half of August (his patrols appeared at Radzymin on 31 July) and Zakharov's mobile columns would advance much more rapidly between the Narev and Western Bug. The Bug–Narev theatre would in that case have been occupied by 15 August, instead of 15 September, as actually happened.

Model won something like a month by his delaying action, which proved more effective than simple "passive" resistance by the sacrificed rearguards. He was helped in this by the Russians' great difficulties in re-establishing their supply lines after their long and speedy advance in July. These difficulties were particularly felt by Rokossovsky. His natural communications passed through Brest-Litovsk, but this important cross-roads and junction, with innumerable bridges over large and small rivers, suffered complete destruction during many days of fighting and by the systematic work of the enemy garrison. Brest-Litovsk was just as stubbornly held by the Germans because that was the first "stage" of Model's delaying action. As a matter of fact, Rokossovsky's communications in August passed by a roundabout way through Lublin and Kholm to Kovel and Kiev, instead of by his normal supply line—Brest-Litovsk–Baranovichi–Gomel. Zakharov's troops were in a somewhat better position, served by Volkovysk Junction, which was connected with Minsk through Molo-

dechno or Baranovichi. These considerations are, by the way, sufficient to explain why Rokossovsky could not plan any assault on Warsaw in August.

Local German counter-attacks continued for some time to the east of Praga, but more intensive fighting was renewed after 20 August, when Rokossovsky's units advanced towards the Praga–Tluscz–Malkin railway and crossed it. For several days Model's Panzers tried to hold the important Wyszkow–Radzymin–Praga high road. (One more S.S. Panzer Division had recently arrived in this sector.) However, the Russians captured Tluscz, and the menace of Zakharov's advance spread beyond the Western Bug; on the 27th he captured Ostrow. Two days later Rokossovsky's units took Radzymin (a month earlier this town had been occupied by the Russian patrols, which left when the Siedlce battle began). At the beginning of September Zakharov launched a decisive attack against the Ostrolenka–Wyszkow line. With Rokossovsky's units co-operating on the south side of the Western Bug, Zakharov's troops captured Wyszkow on 3 September. For this last defence of the Bugo–Narev triangle, Model made use of four infantry Divisions, each of them supported by thirty tanks. On 5 September they were thrown beyond the Narev, and Ostrolenka was captured. Zakharov completed his Narev operations by the storming of Lomza (on the 12th), while Rokossovsky was mopping up the last enemy units in the narrow space between the Vistula and the last few miles of the Western Bug. The enemy only held points covered by the guns of Modlin, but he left the Warsaw suburb of Praga occupied by the Polish troops of Rokossovsky's command (15 September). For his Group and for that of Zakharov, the summer campaign was over.

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So early as July, when Rokossovsky's troops reached the Vistula between the regions of Deblin and Garwolin, they had immediately established two small bridgeheads across the river, taking advantage of the scarcity of enemy troops there. The first bridgehead was established near Pulawy (Novo Alexandria) and Kazimierz (where the Vistula was crossed by the Russians in 1914). It was a

measure of local importance: the Warsaw–Lublin railway at Pulawy runs very near to the river, and could be kept under enemy fire from the opposite bank. Another bridgehead was established 50 miles down stream, near Magnuszew (where again the Vistula was crossed in 1914). Here the idea was to develop the bridgehead in the direction of Radom, so that the Pulawy bridgehead could also be extended. As the Russian Supreme Command planned a large bridgehead on the upper Vistula (by Marshal Konev), Rokossovsky's bridgeheads in the Pulawy–Radom–Magnuszew triangle would promise an operational link for the two Marshals in future operations. But the bridgehead near Magnuszew had no relation to any plans concerning Warsaw. The proof is that the crossing was chosen to the south of the point where a considerable tributary of the Vistula, the Pilica, joins it. The Pilica was to cover the bridgehead against a possible attack by enemy concentrations near Warsaw. And in fact the enemy several times tried to eliminate this "Russian bridgehead south of Warka." Model made use, for the defence of the Vistula here and further upstream, of three Hungarian Divisions, to which he added a few "security" troops. This was not sufficient; the Russians held both small bridgeheads, without however developing them. With the return of the Hungarian Divisions to their country the Germans had no available troops here, and they preferred to consider the Magnuszew and Pulawy bridgeheads as "unimportant." How wrong they were was demonstrated by the events of January 1945.

It may be asked why the Russian Command did not try to establish a bridgehead at Warsaw if at the same time bridgeheads were established at Magnuszew, Pulawy and on the upper Vistula, near Sandomierz. To form a bridgehead at Warsaw would be a far more difficult task than in the Radom region; but this is not the only reason: the Russians made a serious effort, suffering considerable losses, for the possession of the bridgehead near Sandomierz. The real reason was that they considered Warsaw as "strategically connected" with the enemy defensive line on the Narev and Bobr, which in its turn was strate-

gically connected with the Germans' most powerful advanced "bastion" on the Eastern Front—East Prussia. The experience of World War I had proved that any offensive, directed from Warsaw westwards, towards the German frontier, is pratically impossible if the enemy firmly holds East Prussia, whence he can organize a dangerous blow against the flank and the rear of the Russian Armies advancing beyond the Vistula. Warsaw is "too near" to East Prussia (this was confirmed once more by the German-Polish war of 1939) to serve as a starting-point for an offensive in the "Berlin direction." An offensive in the direction of Silesia (through Cracow and Czenstochowa) may seem less hazardous; there were in Russia military writers who thought that in 1914 "the right way to Berlin" was through Vienna. Or on the border of East Prussia a situation must be created which would exclude any possibility of an enemy counter-offensive from that quarter. But at the beginning of August 1944 the operations against East Prussia were still in their initial phase.

Map No. 14. On 28 July Chernyakovsky's troops, strongly reinforced at their Niemen bridgehead near Olita (Alytus), attacked the enemy, who had already shown symptoms of exhaustion after his numerous but vain attempts to wipe out this bridgehead. Simultaneously other units crossed the river near Preny and in the bend of the Niemen east of Kaunas, while yet others, moving from small bridgeheads at Druskeniki and Gozha, penetrated into the Avgustov forests. In liaison with Chernyakovsky, Zakharov's troops from the Grodno region were already moving along both banks of the Bobr, towards Lipsk and Dombrov. In Kaunas itself there was sharp fighting in the northern and southern suburbs.

In the first two days of the operation good progress was achieved: Simno, Seree, Lodzee were captured and in the Avgustov forests the line Giby–Sopotskin was reached; Kaunas was cleared of the Germans. On the 31st, tanks were in action along the main road to Suvalki, and Mariampol was taken, while further to the south the Russians were at Seyny. On 2 August the Russians crossed

MAP 14

OPERATIONS ON THE EAST PRUSSIAN BORDER IN JULY–AUGUST AND OCTOBER–NOVEMBER, 1944

Railways

Roads

Canals

East Prussian frontier

Russian advance, 28th July–15th August

Front stabilised by 17th August

Russian advance 17th October–1st November

Front stabilised by 5th November

Forests of Avgustov and Rominten

Marshes

Lakes

the Sheshupe; they captured Vilkovishki and Kalvaria; patrols appeared near Virballis, and at one point the frontier was reached.

Beyond the frontier, however, there were solid fortifications, and the Russian spearhead could not hope for an easy and rapid penetration. Besides, enemy units still occupied the region to the west of Kaunas, between the Niemen and the Sheshupe. Those forces must be thrown back to the west to make possible any development of the advance along the Kaunas–Eydtkuhnen railway. The Germans were resisting stubbornly and organized a strong defensive line to the east of Shaki. In the central sector they counter-attacked at Vilkovishki (on 9 August) and with some success. There followed a week of fierce tank clashes (though not on a great scale) near the river Sheshupe, which was several times crossed and re-crossed by the Germans and Russians. Finally by 17 August the front line was stabilized there; the Germans held Vladislavov, the Russians Mariampol and, further to the south, Kalvaria and Seyny.

The results of this operation disappointed those who had expected an immediate invasion of East Prussia. But this was certainly not the object of the Russian Command. It was only the first step in an operation against East Prussia; the conquest of a necessary *place d'armes* beyond the Niemen, in which the forces of Chernyakovsky's Group could deploy and organize their base for the offensive. The co-operation of Zakharov's troops was very useful. They were lucky to capture by surprise (from a direction unexpected by the enemy) Ossovets—a small fortress extremely well protected by the swamps of the Bobr. Ossovets fell to the Russians in one day (14 August). In 1914, under the courageous Commandant, General Brzosovski, this small fortress had for several weeks defied German assaults and heavy bombardment by the famous 16-inch mortars.

The enemy reacted to the Russian approach to the East Prussian border with some energy. His "new" Fourth Army was evidently reorganized and reinforced by tank units, including two Panzer Divisions. Here, as well as

on other sectors of the Eastern Front, the month of August showed a certain amount of enemy "recovery" after the disasters of June and July. The same might be observed in the development of operations in the Baltic zone.

Map No. 15. By the end of July the enemy front in this sector seemed rapidly nearing collapse. The destruction of the "Panther line" at Idritsa, Sebezh and Opochka, by the Second Baltic Group (General Eremenko), was quickly followed by the fall of Ostrov. This strongly fortified town was stormed by troops of the Third Baltic Group (General Maslennikov) on 21 July. Two days later Maslennikov's troops liberated the historic town of Pskov. Eremenko in the meantime penetrated into Latvia, captured Ludza and reached the main Ostrov–Dvinsk road. His advance on Dvinsk was in progress: on the 25th the railways and roads connecting this town with Rezekne (Rezhitsa) and Riga were cut. And on the 26th and 27th came news of the almost simultaneous fall of Dvinsk, Rezekne (Rezhitsa), Shavli and Narva. The first two towns (both Latvian) fell to Eremenko, the third (Lithuanian) to Bagramyan, and the Estonian Narva was captured by the troops of the Leningrad Group (Marshal Govorov), some of whom were still engaged in Finland.

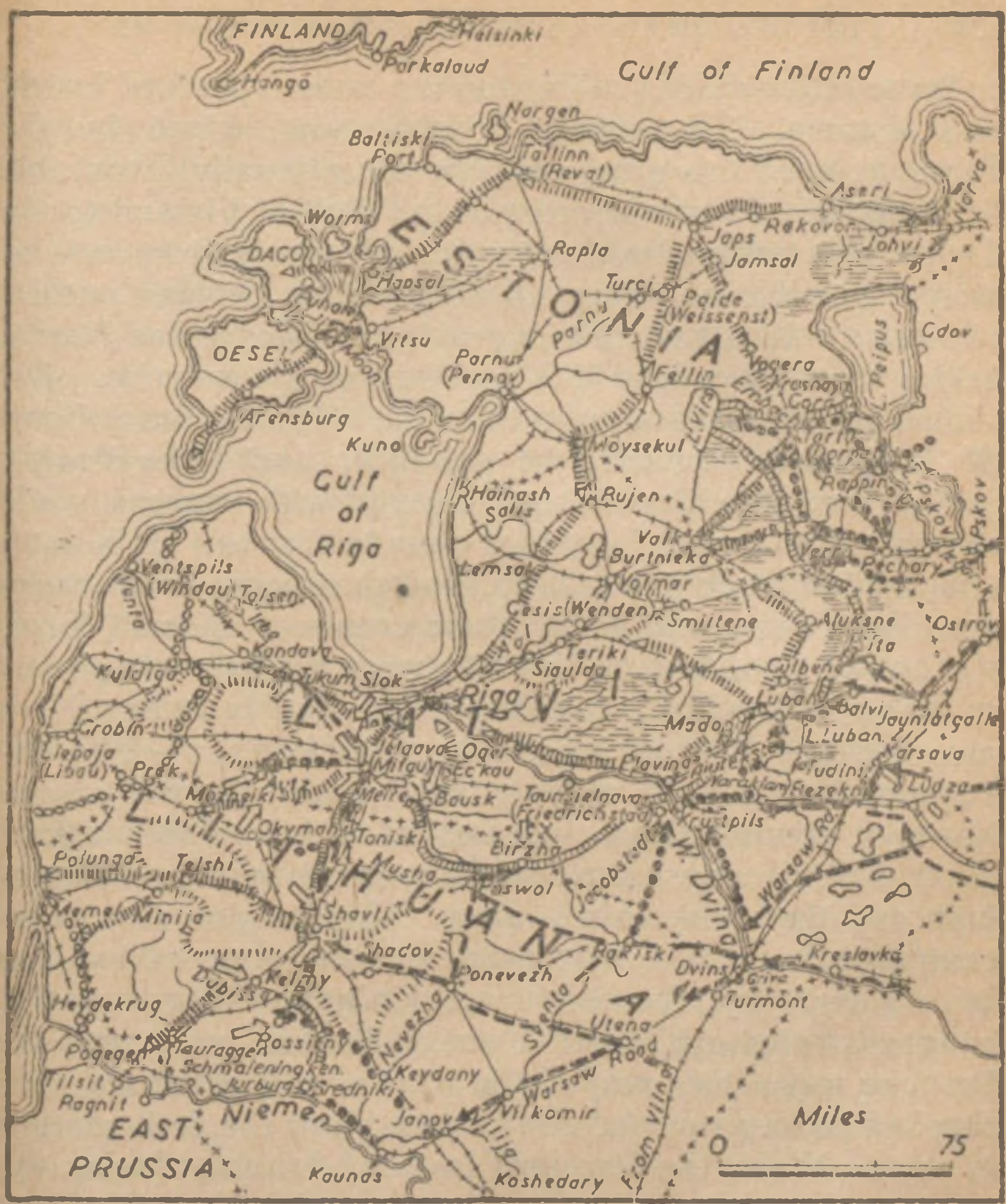
The most important of all these Russian successes was the capture of Shavli. And its full significance became clear sooner than had been expected. General Obukhov, who had captured Shavli, suddenly moved his tanks, and after a night march appeared early on the 31st at Mitau (Jelgava). The Germans were completely surprised there, and Obukhov not only took possession of this most important junction and cross-roads, but immediately exploited his success: on 1 August he occupied Tukum. With Mitau and Tukum in Russian hands, direct communications by road and rail were cut between Lindemann's Group and Germany. At the same time Bagramyan extended his wedge to the east, as other mobile columns captured Bausk and Birzha.

During this sensational drive, Bagramyan's columns met with only slight resistance. The German C. in C. in the Baltic countries obviously did not expect so rapid a Russian

move on Shavli (and certainly still less on Mitau and Tukum). It may be asked what use he made of the forces which were at his disposal to the south of the Dvina. Among these were elements of tank and infantry Divisions of the former Third Tank Army, but Lindemann seemed so impressed by the Russian invasion of Latvia and the critical situation at Dvinsk, that he concentrated his forces on the south side of the Dvina, near Jakobstadt, where they could either make use of the Dvina bridges or move against Bagramyan's columns, then presumed to be between Ponevezh and Shavli. In fact, by the end of July he already moved two Panzer Divisions and some infantry in the direction of Birzha, but this manœuvre proved late, as the Russians were already in Mitau and Tukum.

Russian successes in the Baltic countries broke the military career of General Lindemann, who was replaced by General Schörner—like Model one of the "new hopes" of the Nazi Army. As a matter of fact Schörner in August 1944 showed himself more efficient than Lindemann had been in July. This was however not so much his personal merit as the result of a new policy of the *Ober-Kommando* in relation to the Baltic zone. Despite the solemn promise to "protect" the Baltic countries "to the end" it was realized that German interests must first of all prevent by every means the isolation of the German Armies beyond the Dvina. So Schörner was given *carte blanche* with regard to the distribution of his forces. He might, if he found it necessary, transfer a considerable part of the Sixteenth Army to the territory between the Dvina and the Niemen, where a strong active group could be formed, with the object of reopening communications between Riga and Tilsit through Mitau and Shavli. And it was admitted that if this transfer should weaken the defence of Livonia and Estonia, the latter country might be evacuated after a period of rearguard fighting. The occupation of Estonia now seemed less vital, as political developments in Finland indicated that this satellite country was on the eve of surrender.

A regrouping of Schörner's forces required some time, during which it was of course necessary to avoid a rapid



MAP 15

OPERATIONS IN THE BALTIC STATES

- Railways
- Roads
- Russian advances to 1st August
- Operations in August—Russian advance
- Front line stabilised by 1st September
- German counter attacks
- Operations in September and October—Russian advance
- Hills
- Territory occupied by the Germans at the end of October
- Frontiers of the States
- Marshes

collapse of the defensive front in the eastern parts of Latvia and Estonia. The enemy however was helped by the topography of this area, which is exceptionally favourable for defence. From the coast of the Gulf of Finland to the Dvina penetration by the Armies advancing from east to west is possible only through a few defiles between natural obstacles. In the north Govorov's troops captured Narva, taking the "Westland" S.S. Division by surprise. But difficulties began further to the west. There is an isthmus 30 miles wide between the sea-shore and Lake Peipus, and at least 20 miles of it are covered with swamps, while the only road and railway pass close to the sea. It is not a country for quick penetration, and the enemy could easily organize a rearguard action there even with a small force.

Another "bottle-neck" was between the southern shores of Lake Pskov and the Latvian–Estonian frontier. Here movement by an army is possible along the Pskov–Izborsk–Pechory–Verro–Valk railway and road. Several rivers, however, running from the marshes to Lake Pskov afford good defensive positions, as the ground between them is high and the valleys are swampy. This region saw many campaigns in the old days: it was the usual route of invasion into Russia by the Livonian Knights. Pskov was a historic stronghold, Izborsk was a Russian castle and the Pechory monastery played the part of a frontier fortress: Stephen Batory stormed and besieged it in the 16th century in vain. When the Russians invaded Livonia during the wars of the 16th–17th century they too made use of this route. Reaching Verro they proceeded to Valk or switched northwards to Dorpat (now Tartu), and from there they turned westwards to Fellin and marched through better ground on to the rich Livonian towns and castles, Wolmar, Wenden and Riga.

The reason for such a vast outflanking move remains valid even nowadays. There is no practicable direct route from the Pskov–Ostrov region to Riga across central Latvia. To the north-west of Rezekne (Rezhitsa) Lake Luban and the plain round it may be reached without difficulty. But further to the north-west, near Madona, the river Ewst (Aidikste) forms a natural defensive line,

and behind it there is a wilderness of forests and swamps near the head-waters of that capricious river the Livonian Aa. Still further the ground suddenly rises to hilly country between Wolmar and Sigulda (Segewold), which is called by local enthusiasts the Livonian Switzerland.

It is difficult to imagine a better defensive complex. There remains an alternative, also well known to the Russian campaigners of the 16th–17th centuries. This is the route along the Dvina, which, however, nearer to Riga also becomes a defile, between the Dvina and its marshy tributaries, the Oger and Egel. This brief description helps to explain how Schörner could be optimistic about his defensive possibilities and why Maslennikov's and Eremenko's progress was, in fact, difficult and slow.

Izborsk was captured on 30 July, but it took more than a week of heavy fighting to capture Pechory (10 August). On the 13th Maslennikov was at Verro, where his offensive was switched towards Dorpat (Tartu). There as in the Valk direction the Russians met enemy forces resisting stubbornly in good natural positions. One of Maslennikov's columns was advanced astride the Verro–Dorpat road, another moved along the shores of Lake Peipus. The latter was helped by a detachment which crossed the straits between Lake Pskov and Lake Peipus near Rappin. The Russians progressed slowly but steadily, and on 25 August took the ancient town of Yuriev, which had been built by Yaroslav the Wise in the 11th century; it afterwards became the Livonian Dorpat, and was renamed Tartu under the Estonian Republic.

Simultaneously with the advance on Dorpat one Russian column turned southwards along the Dorpat–Valk road. In co-operation with forces advancing on Valk from Verro many attacks were launched against the positions defending this important nodal centre of Estonia and Latvia. The Germans, however, concentrated here at least four Divisions; their positions were skilfully adapted to the terrain, marshy to the north of Valk (near Lake Virts Jarvi) and perhaps still worse on both sides of the Livonian Aa. On the extreme right of Eremenko's Group one column captured Aluksne (Marienburg), but could not

overcome the natural obstacles on the way to Valk. By the end of August fighting ceased near Valk, although this central point of the Estonian–Latvian theatre was still in enemy hands.

Hardly less disappointing was the result of many days' fighting in central Latvia. After the capture of Rezekne (Rezhitsa), Eremenko's central columns reached Varklyany and Lake Luban. By 6 August the river Ewst (Aidikste) was forced and very heavy fighting began in the triangle Luban–Madona–Gulbene. It continued for ten days, with attacks, counter-attacks and tank clashes in the Luban plain; losses were considerable on both sides. Madona was captured by the Russians, but they were unable to develop this success either to the west or north. The second half of August brought no change in the situation here. On his left Eremenko on 7 August captured the junction of Krustpils (Kreuzburg) and succeeded in crossing the Dvina to Jacobstadt (taken on the 10th). But all his efforts to force the Ewst (Aidikste), near the point where it joins the Dvina, proved vain. Enemy resistance was exceptionally strong near the town of Plavinas (Stockmanshof) which, like Valk, became a defensive "bastion" and, like Valk, was firmly held.

Schörner could certainly claim a defensive success between Valk and Plavinas; but it was only the success of a delaying action. Some time was gained to the north of the Dvina, but to judge Schörner's achievements it must be seen what he was able to do during that time in Courland and Northern Lithuania where German communications had been cut by a bold drive of Bagramyan's. We shall see that he failed to make a radical change in the situation there, although he improved it and temporarily prevented the Russians from making it worse.

His task was, of course, not an easy one. He had to organize an attack against the Russian salient, the east side of which was marked by the line Tukum–Mitau–Bausk–Birzha, and the west side ran from Tukum on Autz (west of Mitau) and Shavli. An attack on the east side did not promise much, since the most dangerous Russian expansion seemed that to the west. Besides, the

Mitau–Birzha line was protected by the difficult river, which the Latvians call the Lielupe, and which is better known as the Courland Aa. An attack on Birzha, organized by Schörner's predecessor, failed completely after three days of fighting (4–6 August). It was not difficult to concentrate at Riga sufficient forces for the recapture of Tukum and an assault on Mitau. But Schörner had a more ambitious plan, perhaps strategically right, but hardly realizable in the circumstances. He was preparing a decisive blow on Shavli from the west, and this would require concentrations of troops somewhere to the west of the Russian salient. Could East Prussia send him several Divisions through Tilsit? But East Prussia was at that moment attacked by Chernyakovsky. Was Schörner able to transfer several Divisions by sea, from Riga to Windau, Libau or Memel? The operation was not impossible, as the enemy had the necessary tonnage, but it would take several weeks. As a matter of fact the Germans on 16 August opened an attack on Shavli by three Panzer and one infantry Divisions, while three or four other Divisions were operating against Tukum and Mitau. How Schörner managed it remains somewhat of a mystery. Probably he made use of the gap (15 miles wide), between Tukum and Shlok, where a coastal road runs.

Bagramyan's troops, which were somewhat dispersed over a vast territory, between Tukum, Shavli, Rossieny and Birzha, had to fight at Shavli under difficult conditions. Their disadvantage was increased by difficulties of supply. From this point of view Bagramyan's troops were in no better position than Rokossovsky's. With their spearhead at Tukum and Mitau they had their nearest base (and that not yet in order) at Polotsk, some 250 miles as the crow flies, and no direct roads or working railways behind them. There were six or seven days of intensive fighting near Shavli (16–22 August), sometimes in the suburbs of the town. More than once the fate of Shavli was in the balance. But finally the enemy armoured Divisions were seriously crippled (on the 17th 100 tanks were lost and 78 more on the 18th) and were obliged to cease the attacks. The necessity of concentrating his

troops forced Bagramyan to leave Tukum. If only secondary, the German connection with the rear was re-established. Mitau was held by the Russians, thanks to its strong natural position between a large river and its tributaries, but they left Bausk, and the Mitau salient became only a narrow pocket. On Bagramyan's left the column which captured Rossieny on 10 August returned after stiff fighting to the east side of the Dubissa.

The general situation in Courland and Northern Lithuania may be described as an uneasy pause. For the moment the threat of isolation to the enemy Baltic Group was averted. Schörner had not, however, a sufficient force to stabilize such a situation, and less and less could he hope for fresh reinforcements. The evacuation of Estonia and Latvia could not be avoided, and had to be begun without further delay, since it was not an easy task when only a secondary roundabout land route through Tukum could be used.

* * * * *

The Germans announced on 1 September that the Russian summer offensive had been "held" along a continuous front from the Carpathians to the Gulf of Finland. The Russian Armies which had started their attack on 23 June (Rokossovsky's, Zakharov's, Chernyakovsky's and Bagramyan's Groups) had, however, reached the natural line beyond which the advance could not continue until their long lines of communication had been reorganized. Rokossovsky was on the Vistula (having two small bridge-heads across the river); Zakharov was completing his occupation of the Narev–Bobr line; Chernyakovsky had conquered the territory between the Niemen and the German frontier, where an offensive against East Prussia could be prepared; Bagramyan had not only reached the line Sredniki–(on the Niemen)–Shavli—Birzha–Jacobstadt, but had made a sharp thrust towards Mitau. If the offensive of these Groups came to a standstill it was as the result of circumstances which had certainly been taken into account by the Russian Command.

Only the Armies which began their offensive in mid-July (Eremenko's and Maslennikov's Groups) had not by the

end of August got so far as might have been expected: they had captured Dorpat, but two Latvian defiles at Valk and at Plavinas were still in enemy hands when the Russian offensive paused. Natural obstacles in Estonia and Latvia proved more formidable than the fortifications of the "Panther line" and the troops of the German Eighteenth and Sixteenth Armies included some good and experienced infantry Divisions.

But the Armies which started their offensive in eastern Galicia and Volynia on 16 July (Konev's Group) had had an overwhelming and rather easy success, despite the fact that the enemy troops opposed to them were from the beginning under the command of Model. Model's skill during the Lvov battle went no further than promptness in extricating as many as possible of his Divisions from the encirclement with which they were threatened by Konev's brilliant manœuvre. Having lost five Divisions surrounded near Brody, Model thought himself fortunate to lose only two, wiped out in Lvov when the capital of Galicia fell on 27 July, after two days' fighting. Lvov with its garrison was sacrificed as a simple rearguard position. Two days were won for Model's columns on the run across the San as Konev's renowned tank commanders, Lelushenko and Rybalko, were engaged with their units at Lvov. But the situation of the retreating German First Tank Army still remained delicate: the San had already been crossed by the Russians at Senvaya (20 miles north of Yaroslav) on 24 July. A bridgehead was organized there, and on the 26th Katukov's tanks appeared on the west bank. The next day the Russians attacked the tail of the retreating German columns between Przeworsk and Yaroslav. The latter town was captured on 28 July, and the same day Katukov's tanks operated against Peremyshl, joined by Rybalko, who in one night (27th–28th) brought his tank units from Lvov to Radymno. One Panzer Division (the Twenty-Fourth) was forced to fight near Radymno, but Model realized that resistance on the San was already impossible and that only a speedy retreat to the west could save what still remained of this First Tank Army. *Map No.* 13.

Model's rearguard was met on the river Wislok, near Rzeszow, the river was crossed after two days' fighting and Rzeszow was taken on 2 August. Konev's operations, however, extended not so much to the west as to the north and south of the Peremyshl–Yaroslav–Rzeszow triangle. To the south Dynow and Sanok (both on the upper San) were occupied; Chyrow and Sambor were captured, and at the latter point liaison was established with the units operating south of the Dniester, which now formed part of the Fourth Ukrainian Group, under the command of the defender of Sevastopol, General Petrov.

Before the beginning of the Russian summer offensive several German Divisions were in the line with the Hungarian troops which defended the approaches to the Yablonitsa Pass in the Carpathians. But as soon as the battle of Lvov turned badly for the Germans, Model transferred all the German Divisions to the north side of the Dniester where they replaced units already lost or routed. The defence of Galicia beyond the Dniester became the task of the Hungarian Army, on the pretext that this territory was vital for the security of the Carpathian passes leading to Hungary. When Galich was taken by the Russians (24 July) they immediately crossed the Dniester and developed an outflanking manœuvre from the north against Stanislavov. During the next two days a frontal attack began on the line held by the Hungarians: Tysmenitsa–Nadvorna–Delatyn. As Stanislavov was turned, the Hungarians left it on 27 July and marched towards Dolina. Units which were at Delatyn retreated to a position nearer to the Yablonitsa Pass. The Hungarians did not show much fighting spirit, or any *élan* during their operations in Galicia. On 29 July the Russians occupied Dolina and advanced on Stryi, already threatened by another column which had crossed the Dniester at Zhidachev. On 5 August Stryi was captured, and this was a prelude to the occupation of two oilfields towns, Drohobycz and Borislav (on the 7th and 8th) which was the first object of the Russian offensive beyond the Dniester. Satisfied with this, General Petrov sent only patrols to Turka and Skole, which reported that the Hungarians held

positions near the Carpathian passes, Uzhok and Verechka, leading to Uzhgorod and Mukachev. The Hungarians however became more anxious when further to the west one Russian column, in the middle of August, moved from Sanok to Rymanov towards the Dukla Pass. The enemy counter-attacked here several times with some energy but with little result. The Russians held Rymanov and Krosno; they made no attempt to reach the Dukla Pass.

A more interesting development took place to the north of Yaroslav, in the triangular space between the San and the Vistula. On the right flank of Konev's Group the columns which had crossed the Western Bug near Vladimir Volynsk and Sokal (20 July) continued to advance towards the San on a broad front, on both sides of Zamosce. They reached the river on 25 July and crossed it the next day near Lezajsk and Rudnik. Then General Gordov, who was in command here, moved his troops down the San and captured Rozwadow. By 1 August the Russians occupied the triangle between the San and the Vistula, and their patrols appeared on the right bank of the Vistula, between a point opposite Sandomierz and the mouth of the Wisloka. Gordov's troops were reinforced by other units; he had also strong tank formations under General Novikov.

These Russian concentrations on the upper Vistula were certainly observed by the enemy, and three infantry Divisions were moved to defend the crossings and the town of Sandomierz, which became a point of resistance. Model had perhaps some doubts as to Russian intentions: they might force the Vistula, but they might prefer to cross the Wisloka near its mouth, and outflank the positions of the First Tank Army behind this river, which defended the direct road to Cracow. It may be also that Model at that moment was too busy with his counter-manœuvre at Siedlce. Anyhow the Russian infantry on 2 and 3 August crossed the Vistula by their usual improvised methods and met with only slight resistance on the north bank. The point chosen for the crossing was at Baranow, some 20 miles upstream from Sandomierz.

The Russians immediately extended their bridgehead, making it 25 miles wide and 20 deep. They threw back the

German infantry and reached the tributary of the Vistula, the Koprziwnica, which covered the bridgehead to the north. In the west its limit was another small river, the Czarna. On this tributary of the Vistula two towns were captured—Staszow and Polanec. And Russian patrols penetrated even as far up the Vistula as Novy Korczyn at the mouth of the Nida. This was the first week of the Baranow bridgehead; during the second week the enemy was ready to react.

On 10 August the First Tank Army started a strong counter-attack, for which two Panzer and two fresh infantry Divisions were used. Violent fighting took place on the Czarna and the Koprziwnica. The Germans made a serious effort; they recaptured Staszow, Polanec and the whole line of the Czarna. But the Russians firmly held the high ground between the Koprziwnica and the Vistula, which secured their crossings. And at the mouth of the Czarna the enemy was stopped by the fire of Russian guns from the south bank of the Vistula. As the German losses were severe the enemy counter-attack ceased on 14 August. And then a new stage was opened in the bridgehead's history.

While repelling the German attacks General Gordov was preparing his own assault on Sandomierz. The action was organized as a simultaneous attack by the forces on the Koprziwnica and by a task force which crossed the Vistula downstream from Sandomierz, near the mouth of the San. On 16 August the Russians broke into the town from two directions. Street fighting continued till the 18th, when Sandomierz was finally cleared of the Germans. Remnants of the garrison (elements of three Divisions) were surrounded in the deep valley of the Opatovka and wiped out there on 20 August.

Even before this new blow Konev's Group inflicted heavy losses on the enemy; killed 140,000, prisoners 32,000, tanks and s.p. guns 1,900, guns 3,600, motor vehicles 12,000. The conquest of the Baranow bridgehead (which became the Sandomierz bridgehead) crowned the success of his excellent troops. From this point the winter offensive started in January 1945. Added to the disaster of the

Heeres Gruppe Mitte, the defeat of Model's Group in Galicia produced a great effect in Rumania. New developments might be expected there, so already in the first half of August the attention of the Russian Supreme Command was directed to that country more than elsewhere.

CHAPTER VI

CATASTROPHE IN RUMANIA

20 August–3 September

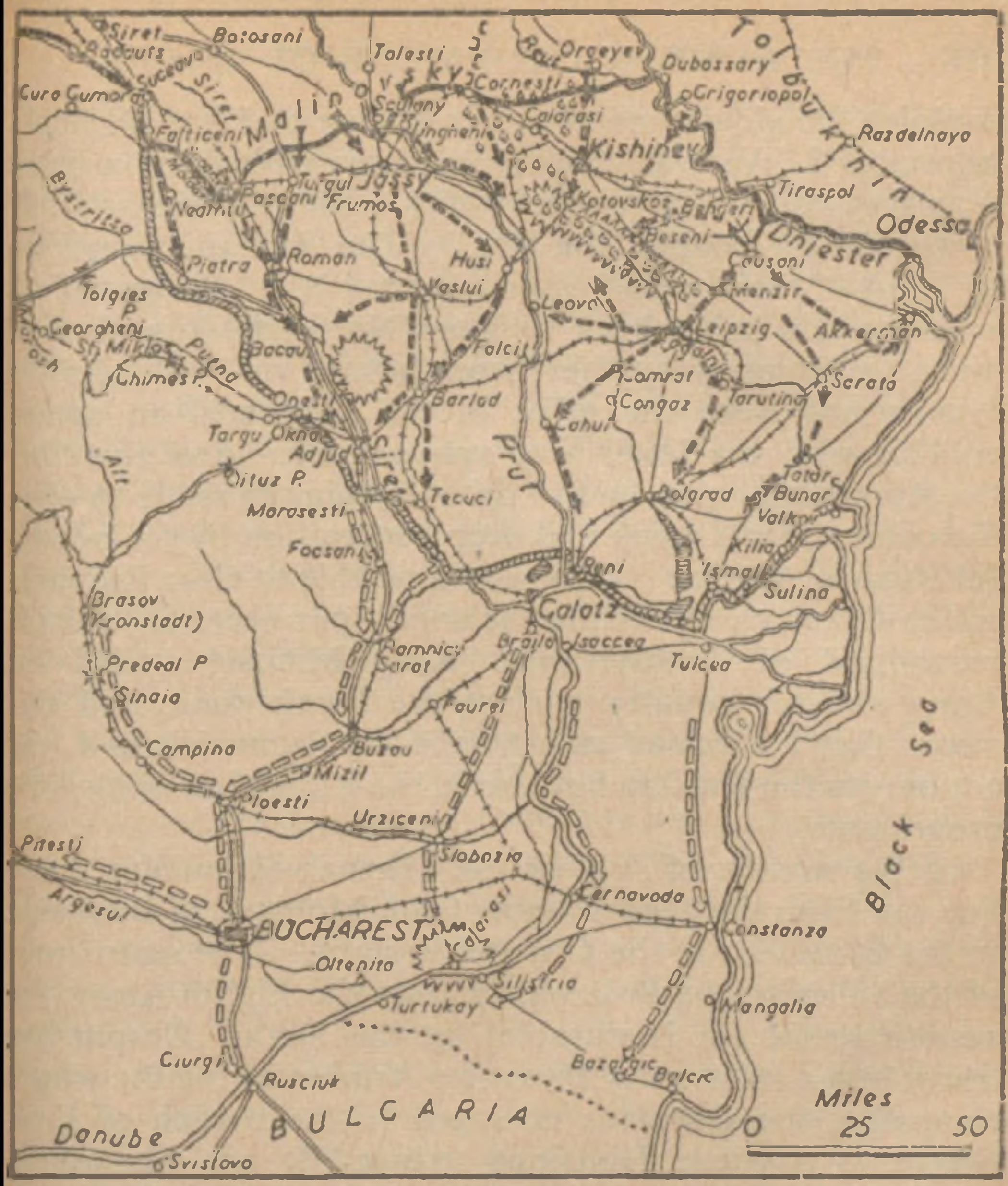
Map No. 16. After their abortive attempt to raise Rumanian morale by a local success (see Chapter IV), the Germans could scarcely have any illusions as to the stability of the front in Moldavia and Bessarabia. On the other hand the numerous German officials and agents in Bucharest and Ploesti could not fail to realize that Rumanians, military and civilian alike, were in favour of an agreement with Germany's enemies. The success of the Allied landing in France had made them jubilant, while the crushing defeat of the Heeres Gruppe Mitte and the fall of Lvov showed them that some new development must be just "round the corner" in Rumania. Nor were Prince Stirbey's approaches to the Allied representatives in the Middle East unobserved by the Nazi Government, as also were those of other negotiators by the German agents in Rumania. The political atmosphere there was such, early in August, that Antonescu himself was known to be inclining towards an "armistice" with Russia, provided that the Soviet Government would recognize "Rumanian rights" in Bessarabia. The dictator was even summoned to appear before Hitler, but when he came back he found that events were moving faster than he had ever expected.

The catastrophe to the German Armies in Rumania was then rapidly approaching, and it may seem strange that no attempt was made to improve their ever more precarious

situation. We must not forget, however, that in the first half of August enemy attention was completely absorbed by the quick development of the Allied victory in France. With the Allied columns moving on Paris, with the Russians on the Vistula and at the gate of East Prussia, no reinforcements were available for Rumania where, at least for the moment, everything seemed quiet. The Eighth and Sixth German–Rumanian Armies still held their fortified lines across Moldavia and Bessarabia. Rumanian units were still inserted in many sectors between the German Divisions, and, if the danger of this mingling was fairly obvious in the case of a Russian assault, it seemed still more dangerous to start a withdrawal to a shorter line which could be held by German troops. A Russian attack during such a delicate manœuvre would certainly lead to complete confusion. Thus the German units in their well-organized strongholds were, even before the Russian offensive started, the "eventual prisoners" between the Russians ready to attack them and the Rumanians ready to let them down.

The *Ober-Kommando* evidently preferred a more optimistic idea of the situation on the Rumanian front. That Jassy and Kishinev could be lost as a result of Malinovsky's and Tolbukhin's offensive was certainly admitted. But then something like an orderly retreat to a second defensive line in the Focsani–Galatz gap would be possible, and time could be gained for organizing the defence of the Ploesti region. The Germans, if expecting some adverse political development in Rumania, still imagined it would be on the "Finnish pattern": a series of contradictory moves, divergencies between the "loyal" and "treacherous" groups, and the Army, although reluctant to fight, yet practically neutral. And they believed that there would be plenty of time for "energetic" German intervention. They failed to take into account two all-important circumstances.

The first was the personal part played by young King Michael. His action, three days after the beginning of the Russian offensive, made a rallying point for the Army and the nation, with the instantaneous and complete eclipse of the "dictator" Antonescu. Another circumstance



MAP 16

CATASTROPHE IN RUMANIA, 20th AUGUST–3rd SEPTEMBER, 1944

Railways

Roads

Motor-roads

Front line before 20th August
Malinovsky] [Tolbukhin

The initial break through, 20th–21st August

Front line on 26th August

Russian columns advancing 26th August–3rd September

Frontiers of Bulgaria

German units encircled

Initial successes exploited

Forests

explains the almost unanimous response to King Michael's appeal of 23 August. The Rumanians wished for a peace with Russia and her Western Allies. But this was not only a wish to be "out of the war." The Rumanians wished to start "their own" war—against the Hungarians—which would bring back to them Northern Transylvania, given to Hungary by the Vienna award of 1940. As the Hungarians were the allies of the Germans, an armed conflict with the latter was unavoidable. And therefore the Rumanian Army had to do everything possible to open the country for a quick and deep penetration by the powerful Russian Armies. They would be able to clear Rumania of the Germans and create the conditions necessary for the reconquest of Transylvania. King Michael rallied his Army and his country against the Hungarians, and this meant that a German catastrophe on Rumanian soil was not only in the Russian but also in the Rumanian immediate programme.

In the middle of August the German–Rumanian front line ran from the head-waters of the Moldava in Bukovina to the Black Sea at the Dniester estuary. The sector west of the valley of the Prut was held by the Eighth Army, the eastern sector (in Bessarabia) by the Sixth. Despite the heavy losses suffered by these two Armies during the winter campaign, the Germans managed to make each of them twelve to fourteen Divisions strong. It was however a figure impressive only "on paper," as the Divisional contingents were weak (6,000 to 8,000) and the majority of them (almost three-quarters) came from the *levée en masse* proclaimed in the spring. Their equipment was incomplete: the artillery below normal level. Up to the middle of June these purely "passive" units had the support of a group of Tank Divisions and motorised infantry, but after that the "active" units were transferred to Model and only one Panzer (the 20th) and two mobile Divisions remained in the Eighth Army (there were besides the usual tank battalions in infantry Divisions).

To these twenty-five or twenty-seven German Divisions, fifteen or sixteen Rumanian Divisions were added, but this was not all that the Rumanians could then put in

the field. On the pretext of security and maintenance of order they succeeded in keeping several units partly in the region of the capital or on the Danube and the Black Sea coast, but chiefly on the new Hungarian border which crossed Transylvania from west to east. And this proved later to be of considerable importance. On the "common" front the Rumanians had their own sector only in Bukovina. In the valley of the Siret and between the Siret and the Prut Rumanian units were inserted among the Divisions of the German Eighth Army, and also in Bessarabia where the German Sixth Army held the front between the Prut and the Dniester and along the Dniester; the Russian bridgeheads near Grigoriopol and Tiraspol seemed to be effectively compressed. A mixed German–Rumanian force occupied Akkerman, to observe the estuary of the Dniester.

The most important strategic direction was certainly that of the valley of the Siret through which passed the shortest and best routes (a railway trunk-line and a motor-road) to the Focsani–Galatz gap and to Ploesti and Bucharest. A Russian break-through in this direction (on the left flank of the Eighth Army) would moreover be dangerous for the German forces near Jassy and in Bessarabia, cut off by this move from the Focsani–Galatz gap. Such considerations explain why the Germans concentrated in the valley of the Siret and on both sides of it the seven best Divisions of the Eighth Army, with three Rumanian Divisions between Targul Frumos and another German group to the north of Jassy. But it was not so much the enemy concentrations and solid defensive works in the valley of the Siret as the topography of this valley which made the Russians plan their break-through elsewhere. Being insufficiently wide, this valley made it impossible for the Russian tanks to fan out after an initial break-through. And the enemy would be able to organize an orderly fighting retreat down the valley, making use of the consecutive defensive lines of the Siret's right-bank tributaries—the Moldava, Bystritsa, Trotus and Putna.

On the heights to the north-west of Jassy the enemy fortified lines were not less "formidable," but a breach in the Rumanian sector, between those positions and Targul

Frumos, would out flank the German Divisions entrenched on the river Jijia to the north of the Moldavian capital. Malinovsky planned his blow as decisively as possible, and aimed at the capture of Jassy in the first two days of the offensive. He prepared a second break-through in the valley of the Prut where two German and two Rumanian Divisions were in touch with the left flank of the Sixth Army (at Cornesti). He planned a rapid conquest of Jassy, but not only for the moral effect. As the valley of the Siret presented many natural obstacles and was too narrow for his armour, he needed another strategic route to the south which could be exploited by fast tank columns. Such a route was indicated by the valley of the Barlad, midway between the Siret and the Prut. The head-waters of the Barlad were near Jassy, so, once this town was captured, the road would be open for Malinovsky's mobile columns down the Barlad to Vaslui, the town of Barlad and Tecuci, the latter place being only 15 miles from Focsani. The enemy defensive lines in the Siret valley would be completely outflanked by such a move and, at the same time, being on the Barlad only 25 miles from the lower Prut, Malinovsky could make contact with Tolbukhin who planned a break-through to the Prut, so as to encircle the enemy's Sixth Army.

Tolbukhin's intention was to make the enemy pay dearly for the obstinacy with which he tried to hold the larger half of Bessarabia, including its capital Kishinev. The initial reason of this obstinacy was a wish "to impress the Rumanians" and to prove to them that all their "conquests" were not lost. In August such considerations were hardly effective, but "the Kishinev bastion" was thought necessary for the defence of the north-eastern approaches to the Galatz gap. The positions of the Sixth German Army in the Kishinev region seemed secure enough, being covered from the east by the Dniester. The Russians, however, managed to establish two small bridgeheads on the west side of this river, one at Grigoriopol to the east of Kishinev, another immediately to the south of Bendery, opposite the Russian town of Tiraspol. As both bridge-heads were only small, and that near Tiraspol on a swampy

bank dominated by enemy positions on the hills near Bendery, the German Command saw no danger from this quarter. The defence of the Dniester was entrusted to the Rumanian Divisions (six or seven, co-operating with the Sixth Army). There had been some fighting at the bridge-heads in May and the Germans then were satisfied with the resistance shown by their allies. Only one German Division kept a garrison at Bendery; two others supported the Rumanians in the Akkerman region. But the bulk of the Sixth Army occupied the carefully fortified positions in the hilly region between Cornesti and the river Reut. This is a good defensive region with deep ravines and many woods—the only wooded country in all Bessarabia.

Maintaining a pressure of a rather demonstrative character against the enemy lines to the north of Kishinev, Tolbukhin prepared his decisive blow from the Tiraspol bridgehead. This blow was conceived as a break-through by the Russian armoured units, and so it may be imagined what a miracle of organization was needed for a crossing of the wide river by a sufficient number of tanks, mobile guns and troop-carriers. This was really an astonishing achievement by Tolbukhin, comparable only with his crossing of the Sivash during the reconquest of the Crimea. Patient and thorough in every detail, preparations were being made, and when the day of the battle came they produced striking results.

On 20 August, supported by numerous batteries secretly concentrated on the east bank, the Russian infantry started a sudden assault on the heights south of Bendery. While this "stronghold" still resisted, the Rumanian positions were pierced in the direction of Causani—an important cross-roads which was captured the same day. There during the night the Russians were able to concentrate mobile forces sufficient to fan simultaneously in three directions. Rumanian resistance ceased almost completely west of Causani on 21 August, and Tolbukhin's columns moved to the south, south-east and north-west, practically unopposed. Although Bendery was still held by a German garrison, "the line of the Dniester" was already turned. On the 22nd the Russians were reinforced by fresh tank

units; they were simultaneously on the roads to Akkerman and to Kishinev (at Reseni). Still more striking progress was achieved by the column moving directly southwards: Leipzig and Tarutino[1] were reached, the latter village 50 miles from the Dniester and only 75 from Galatz. The outlines of the German rout became already clear as Malinovsky's offensive was proceeding with no less *élan*.

There, on the front of the German Eighth Army, the Rumanian positions between Jassy and Targul Frumos crumbled on 20 and 21 August, and at the same time, in the valley of the Prut, the Russians captured Ungheni, the Rumanian Divisions being in full retreat southwards and the Germans being pushed eastwards into the sector of the Sixth Army. The Jassy positions were outflanked from west and east and the Germans started a hasty evacuation of the Moldavian capital on the night of 21–22 August. The next day the Russians entered Jassy.

If during the first three days the Rumanians showed no will to fight and in many cases surrendered by thousands, it was not the result of a "conspiracy." The troops were ready to lay down arms at the first opportunity; as for the decisions already taken by the young King and his trusted advisers, they could have been known only to a few senior officers in the Army. But on 23 August the King's appeal proclaimed the end of the war against Russia and her Allies, Antonescu's Government was abolished and all its orders were nullified. This changed the situation for the Rumanian troops, as their surrender now became a proof of their loyalty to the King and of their patriotism. So

[1] Such names of Bessarabian villages as "Leipzig," "Kulm," "Tarutino," "Brienne" and others need explanation. This fertile province became part of the Russian Empire after the Peace of Bucharest in 1812. Having constantly been the theatre of Russo-Turkish wars in the 18th century, Bessarabia was only thinly populated. The Russian Government started to colonize it with various nationalities—Russians, Germans, Bulgarians, Greeks, etc. Vast estates were granted to the Russian nobles, and among them were many who had taken part in the Napoleonic wars of 1812–14. They gave the new villages the names of battles in which they had fought. One of these landowners, Prince Vorontsov, who was known as an anglophile, christened his Bessarabian village "Waterloo."

in the next few days whole Rumanian units were surrendering with all their officers, staffs and material—five Divisions on the 25th (among them the 1st Guards and the 1st Tank Division) and three or four more on the following days. Other Rumanian units, marching southwards, quickly disintegrated, their ranks were deserted and their equipment was left on the roads.

Many German units retreated in anything but orderly fashion. Only the Divisions on the left flank of the Eighth Army, in the valley of the Siret, maintained good order. Those in the Jassy region were in a state of confusion, with the Russian columns on both sides of them. On 22–23 August they were in precipitous retreat towards the Siret, but their hope of re-establishing contact with other Divisions of the Eighth Army there proved vain, and many Germans were taken prisoner, while several units dispersed before they reached the Siret, near Bacau. In the meantime the road into the valley of the Barlad was open to Malinovsky's mobile columns. They were at Vaslui on 23 August and the next day at Barlad.

This development in the central sector made the German retreat in the valley of the Siret most urgent. All the enemy defensive system, covering Roman, was left on 23 August and this important strategic point was occupied by the Russians. On the 24th their mobile columns were already at Bacau, and the Bystritsa was easily crossed as the Germans continued their retreat towards Focsani. But on 24 August Malinovsky's spearhead at Barlad was only 40 miles from the "gap," while the Germans had still to cover almost double this distance.

In the valley of the Prut Malinovsky's left flank columns reached Husi, cutting off the Germans from a possible retreat from the Kishinev region, across the Prut. At Leovo liaison was established with Tolbukhin's units, and this meant that on 25 August the bulk of the German Sixth Army was encircled by the Russians in the region of Kishinev. The danger was quite clear after the fall of Jassy and Bendery and with Tolbukhin's vanguards everywhere between Bendery on the Dniester and Leovo on the Prut. The German Command of the sector decided on

23 August to fight their way through the Russians in the direction of Leovo and Galatz. But the Russian moves were so rapid that it was too late.

Tolbukhin's frontal pressure on the Kishinev positions increased, as soon as the enemy retreat was observed. The rearguards were unable to hold the lines, which on the 24th were pierced at many points; and Russian tanks penetrated into Kishinev. Utter confusion now prevailed among the Divisions of the Sixth Army. On the 25th some of them (together with two Divisions of the Eighth Army, which had been cut off from it on the second day of Malinovsky's attack) tried to break through to the Prut, but only small parties succeeded in escaping through the Russian ring, to be captured later. Elements of at least ten Divisions took cover in the woods to the south of Kishinev, where in the following days they were cut by the Russians into several smaller groups and gradually "liquidated."

This elimination of the German Sixth Army as a fighting force was achieved by the swift action of Tolbukhin's columns. In the Akkerman region, on 23 August, the Rumanian units did not fight and one of the two German Divisions was routed, while another fled to take cover at Izmail. However, this historic fortress on the Danube was stormed three days later, and by this date (26 August) all Southern Bessarabia, with the towns of Bolgrad, Kilia and Reni, was conquered by tank columns, led by General Shlemin. The Black Sea flotillas, specially prepared for a campaign on the Danube, entered the delta of the great river. As on 26 August Malinovsky's columns reached Tecuci (15 miles north-east of Focsani) and forced the Siret at Adjud Nou (25 miles north of Focsani), before the enemy had time to organize any defence of the "gap," this day completed the Russian manœuvre. The decisive development of Malinovsky's and Tolbukhin's plans was accomplished in a single week.

Not all the units of the left flank group of the German Eighth Army (in the valley of the Siret) were able to reach Focsani, before the motor road, running along the Siret, was cut by Malinovsky at Adjud Nou. One division was

left on the Bystritsa to defend the important motor road, leading through the Tolgies Pass into Transylvania. One Panzer and one Mountain Division were left to organize a rearguard action on the Trotus, but they were swept aside by the Russian columns at Adjud Nou and withdrew to Onesti and Targul Okna, on the way to the Oituz Pass. Only four German Divisions succeeded in concentrating near Focsani, but it was already too late to fight on the line of the Putna (where in 1917 the Russians and Rumanians held the German attacks in the Battle of Marasesti); and then such news came from Bucharest on 25 August that two mobile Divisions were ordered to proceed towards Buzeu and Ploesti to protect the Germans, threatened by Rumanian "aggression." Only two infantry Divisions were to fight a delaying action on the river Rymnik (known for Suvorov's victory) to the south of Focsani. They were, of course, easily dispersed by the Russians (who passed by Focsani on 27 August), and lost a great number of prisoners. The same day Tolbukhin occupied Galatz.

Events in the Rumanian capital took a bad turn for the Germans. The Rumanians united round their king and were eager to settle accounts with the Hungarians. An attempt to form a pro-German Government did not have the slightest success, and the tactless attempt to "terrorize" the Rumanians by an air attack on Bucharest and the Royal Palace only gave King Michael an excellent pretext for declaring war on the Germans on 25 August. On the 26th Rumanian troops were already in action in the capital and at the seaport of Constanza, rounding up numerous Germans there, belonging to different technical and rear services. This development was of military importance. With two or three Rumanian Divisions prepared to fight them in the rear, how could the Germans organize anything like serious resistance to cover Ploesti? They had numerous "security" elements and technical groups between Ploesti and Bucharest, but could not now make use of them.

On 27 and 28 August Malinovsky consolidated his right flank, having extended it in the direction of the chief Carpathian passes. The Germans were defeated in the

region of Piatra (on the Bystritsa) and, with a loss of 2,000 prisoners, thrown back to the Tolgies Pass. In the Trotus valley the 20th Panzer and the Mountain Rifles were routed and lost 5,000 prisoners. The Russians captured the important Oituz Pass and occupied the town of Breccu, beyond the Hungarian frontier. On 29 August the Russians reached the oilfields region at Buzeu. The next day Malinovsky made the last effort (but by no means a big one!) of his Rumanian campaign. The town of Ploesti with the adjacent oilfields region was captured, after fighting in which the elements of three or four German Divisions were encircled by Russian tank units. The Germans surrendered by thousands—15,000 prisoners were taken, including several Divisional and two Corps commanders. On 31 August Malinovsky's troops entered Bucharest.

In the meantime Tolbukhin completed (on the 28th) the liquidation of the encircled German Divisions in the woods to the south of Kishinev. Nearly 30,000 prisoners were taken there, and the number of killed exceeded this figure. He now operated on the Danube and beyond it, without meeting any organized resistance. After Galatz, Braila was occupied. Moving southwards to Slobozia and Kalarasi, the Russians enveloped several thousand more Germans. With the help of the Danube Russian flotilla the great river was crossed. Constanza, already cleared of Germans by the Rumanians, was occupied on 29 August. A few days later Tolbukhin's troops reached the frontier of the Bulgarian Dobrudja.

By 1st September there was no organized German force in Rumania. And this is understandable: the enemy losses published by the Russian Supreme Command were for the period 20–31 August 98,000 prisoners (42,000 taken by Malinovsky and 56,000 by Tolbukhin) and more than 100,000 killed. As some 20,000 stragglers and rear-service men surrendered to the Rumanians, the total was probably near 225,000. But there were hardly more than 275,000 Germans in Rumania in all, and a certain cohesion preserved only those 30,000 (elements of three or four Divisions) who fled beyond the Carpathian passes.

Some 20,000 in small groups succeeded perhaps in escaping beyond the Danube. Between 1 and 3 September Malinovsky's columns occupied Giurgiu and other Danubian towns. His light tanks extended the zone of occupation towards Pitesti and—what was of great strategic importance —towards Brasov (Kronstadt) in Southern Transylvania, where the Rumanian garrison prevented any Hungarian attempt at invasion from beyond the "new" border.

The significance of the German catastrophe in Rumania is so obvious that it does not need any long explanation. In the economy of the *Festung Europa*, Rumania occupied perhaps the foremost place: all the aggressive plans of the Third Reich included full exploitation of Rumanian resources. Supplies of Rumanian food were of such importance to the Germans that they left all the Rumanian man-power on the spot so as to avoid any decrease in agricultural production. And this production provided them not only with food, but with the vegetable oil and alcohol for war industries. As to the oilfields, their production remained highly valuable even when reduced by Allied air attacks.

But the loss of Rumanian resources was evidently only a first step to other grave losses in that economic hinterland of the Third Reich which the Danubian countries—from Czechoslovakia and Hungary to Bulgaria and Yugoslavia —had become. The brilliant politico-military manœuvre caused the Germans to disappear from Rumania in ten days. Its politico-military repercussions were immediate. With the assistance of the Rumanian authorities and population the Russian troops were already on the Bulgarian and Hungarian border and in a few days they must reach that of Yugoslavia. The Bulgarians were not slow to react: on 26 August the Government announced the "withdrawal" of Bulgaria from the war and its readiness to start peace negotiations with Great Britain and the United States. The Germans had now no more illusions, and although they hoped to play some delaying "diplomatic game" in Bulgaria, they started an evacuation of Greece (except some of the Aegean islands). At last the

territory of *Festung Europa* began to shrink on all sides under military and political blows. . . .

The Germans began to evacuate Greece and left Bulgaria to its fate because they had no available force to fight there. There was not sufficient force for fighting even in Hungary—and Hungary was the doorstep to Austria, i.e. to the boundaries of the Greater Reich. What happened in Rumania was not only a military defeat, it was a politico-military catastrophe of the first magnitude, as two German Armies, defending the south-eastern approaches to Germany, were completely wiped out, while the Rumanian armed forces ceased to be German "satellites" and in full co-operation with the Russians were eager to open for them the route to the Hungarian plains.

CHAPTER VII

THE DANUBIAN–CARPATHIAN CAMPAIGN OF SEPTEMBER–NOVEMBER 1944

THE conditions of the German collapse in Rumania made immediately possible the Russian offensive for the liberation of Belgrade, the conquest of Budapest and the invasion of Czechoslovakia and Austria. The success of the operations on the Danube was assured by the inevitable desertion of the Bulgarians from the German alliance, while the co-operation of the Rumanians had already solved the most difficult Carpathian problem.

Transylvania, the mountainous salient enclosed by the high Carpathian ridge, had for centuries been the natural and impregnable south-eastern bastion of the Habsburg Empire. During their deepest penetration into Central Europe, the Turks, already in possession of Budapest and fighting under the walls of Vienna, did not even attempt to conquer the mountainous labyrinth of Transylvania and sought friendship with the Transylvanian princes. But the Turks came to the Hungarian plain from the south,

across Serbia, and as such a possibility did not exist for Imperial Russia, Austria-Hungary felt herself safe behind the Carpathian bulwark from any menace by her more recent eastern neighbour and rival. In 1914 the Austro-German front in the east was protected by two formidable bastions—East Prussia in the north, Transylvania in the south. Between them a Russian advance was hardly possible from the Polish salient towards the Oder.

When in 1916 Rumania joined the Anglo-French-Russian coalition, the Austro-Hungarians prepared to defend the principal passes leading from Moldavia to Transylvania—Borgo, Tolghies, Ghimes and Oituz. With the exception of Borgo, these Moldavian passes are neither high nor difficult, and, generally speaking, the Carpathian ridge, dividing Moldavia from Transylvania, is by no means inaccessible. So a Russo-Rumanian passage across the Moldavian Carpathians seemed probable; in which case they would penetrate the curious inner plain, where the head-waters of the two great Translyvanian rivers—the Maros (or Mures) and Alt (or Olta) almost meet. They run through this Gheorgheni plain, starting from points only a few miles apart, one to the north, the other to the south, and then, after breaking through the inner Transylvanian ridges, they turn sharply westwards. The Alt (Olta) flows near the principal towns of Southern Transylvania, Brasov (Kronstadt) and Sibiu (Hermannstadt), but it turns again to the south and by a deep gorge in the Transylvanian Alps descends into the Walachian plain. Of more strategic importance is the valley of the Maros (Mures), which becomes wide enough at the town of Maros-Vasarhely (Targul Mures) and becoming still wider continues westwards, cutting in two all the mountain system of Transylvania. Finally, near the town of Arad the Maros enters the great Hungarian plain and 50 miles to the west joins the Tisza at Szeged. The Maros and the Tisza represent the two possibilities of penetration into the Hungarian plain for armies advancing from the east.

It was therefore quite logical for the Austro-Hungarians in 1916 to expect a Russo-Rumanian effort to penetrate the valley of the Maros. To the west of the Gheorgheni

plain the high ridges of Mezohavas and Margitta presented a serious natural obstacle, but nevertheless the Austro-Hungarians thought it better to organize strong fortified lines between these ridges and the valley of the Maros, making use of the two tributaries, the Great and Little Kokel. "The Kokel lines," however, were never threatened, as the campaign of 1916 developed quite differently. As is well known, the German expeditionary force crossed the Transylvanian Alps before the Russians were able to support the Rumanians. Walachia was invaded and, helped by the German-Bulgarian Army which crossed the Danube, the enemy captured Bucharest. Soon, instead of invading Transylvania, the Russo-Rumanians had to fight for the defence of Moldavia.

The strategic importance of Transylvania and of the routes along the Maros and Tisza was not forgotten during the discussions of the Versailles Treaty. It was one of the reasons for the creation of Greater Rumania with its boundaries to the west of Arad and a few miles to the east of Debreczen. Such a frontier made Hungary vulnerable to a blow from the east such as might be necessitated by her partnership with a Germany attempting aggressive revival. Later events proved that Hungary indeed became a partner of the Third Reich at the first opportunity, and the weakness of this partner's geographical situation did not escape the attention of those who planned the Nazi domination of Eastern Europe.

After the destruction of the Czechoslovak State and by the Vienna award which followed, the entire valley of the Tisza was "granted" to Hungary. It was also decided to make not the Rumanians but the Hungarians responsible for the "security" of the Carpathian passes, leading into Transylvania.[1] To make this possible all the north-east corner of Transylvania was "returned" to Hungary. As "compensation," the Rumanians, already registered among the satellites, were promised vast acquisitions in Russia. The Germans, however, did not wish to exasperate their Rumanian "allies" by taking from them Southern

[1] W. E. D. Allen and Paul Muratoff, *The Russian Campaigns of 1941–43* (Penguin Books), Chapter II, Preliminary Strategic moves.

Transylvania. In this "redistribution" of Transylvanian land and population they were interested only in the better security of the Carpathian passes, leading into the eastern part of Czechoslovakia (the Sub-Carpathian Rus) and into Moldavia. As for the passes which lead from Southern Transylvania into Walachia, there was no objection to their being in Rumanian hands, because the Germans did not imagine any possibility of these passes being one day used by the Russians. And yet this was actually what happened.

Map No. 17. As the Germans were interested only in giving the Hungarians the Carpathian passes leading into Transylvania from Moldavia, the "new" Hungarian frontier, established by the Vienna award, turned sharply to the west almost immediately to the south of the southernmost Moldavian pass (the Oituz Pass). It crossed the Alt (Olta) leaving to the Rumanians the region of Brasov, ran north-west a certain distance from Sibiu, then crossed the Maros near Maros Vasarhely (Targul Mures) which remained, however, on the Hungarian side. But the valley of the Maros downstream from this town was left entirely to the Rumanians: the "new" Hungarian border, running north-west, was some 50 miles north of the Rumanian town of Arad at the point where the "new" frontier reached the old. Another important town, Timisoara (Temesvar), at the gates of Northern Yugoslavia, also remained in Rumanian possession. Had the Germans foreseen the future military-political development, they would never have allowed such a frontier for a country which suddenly ceased to be their ally and became that of the Russians.

The conditions of 1 September 1944 by no means required from the Russians difficult operations on the Carpathian passes as a preliminary step to their penetration into Transylvania. Instead of fighting in the mountains dividing Transylvania from Moldavia, the Russians could make use of excellent roads and even railways, which cross the Transylvanian Alps and connect Transylvania with Bucharest and other towns of Walachia; all these roads and railways were firmly held by the Rumanians. When

the Russians appeared at Brasov (Kronstadt) or at Sibiu (Hermannstadt) there were no particularly difficult natural obstacles to prevent them from quick penetration into the valley of the Maros, which would open the route to the West. The high and double natural barrier, protecting the valley of the Maros from the east, would be turned from the south. So the military-political manœuvre of the Nazis which "returned" Northern Transylvania to Hungary proved useless. And perhaps not only useless. The Vienna award created a fresh Rumanian irredentism. The loss of Northern Transylvania was not forgotten, and in August 1944 came a day when the hope of reconquering the lost territories made the Rumanians "change sides," with catastrophic consequences for the Germans. "Historical Nemesis" was fatal to them.

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Map No. 17. The Russian Supreme Command was well aware of the opportunities offered by the rapidly developing politico-military situation in Rumania. Great victories by Malinovsky and Tolbukhin (both were promoted Marshals of the Soviet Union) had to be exploited with the speed which was the chief reason for Russian success. The problem before Marshal Malinovsky was the invasion of Transylvania and the establishing there of a vast *place d'armes* where further operations, aiming at the extension of the war to the Middle and Upper Danube, could be organized. Marshal Tolbukhin had in the meantime to clarify the position in Bulgaria and to open across that country an operational connection with the Yugoslav Forces of Liberation. Both these tasks promised to be of great importance, but each had its particular difficulties.

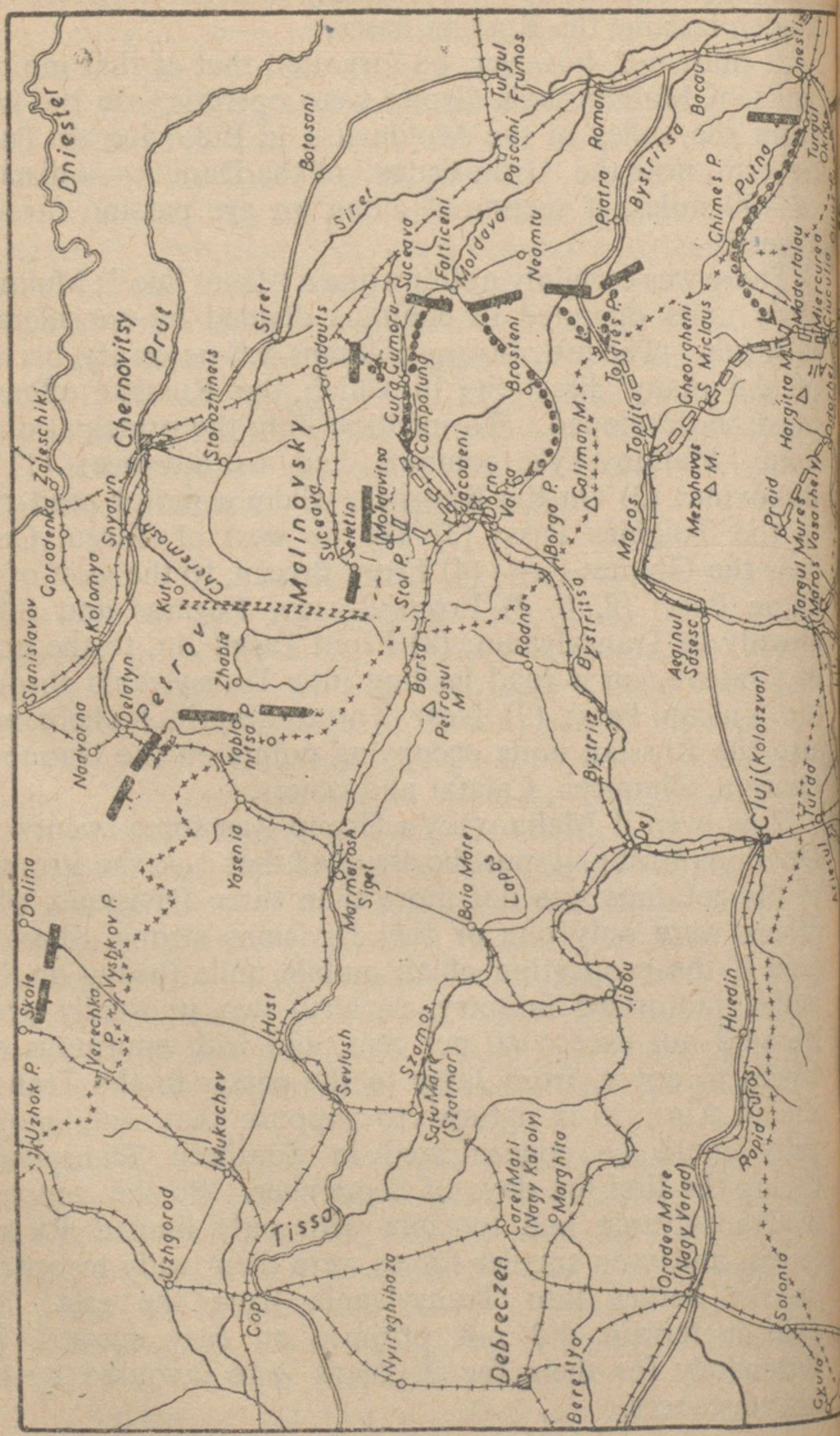
Malinovsky's mobile columns rapidly extended their occupation of Western Rumania: on 5 September Pitesti and Craiova were reached, and the next day the Russians entered Turnu Severin and Giurgiu (the chief Rumanian "oil ports" on the Danube). On 3 September they crossed the Transylvanian Alps at the Predeal Pass and two days later at the Rotenturm (Turnu Rosu) Pass. Between 4 and 6 September the two principal towns of Southern

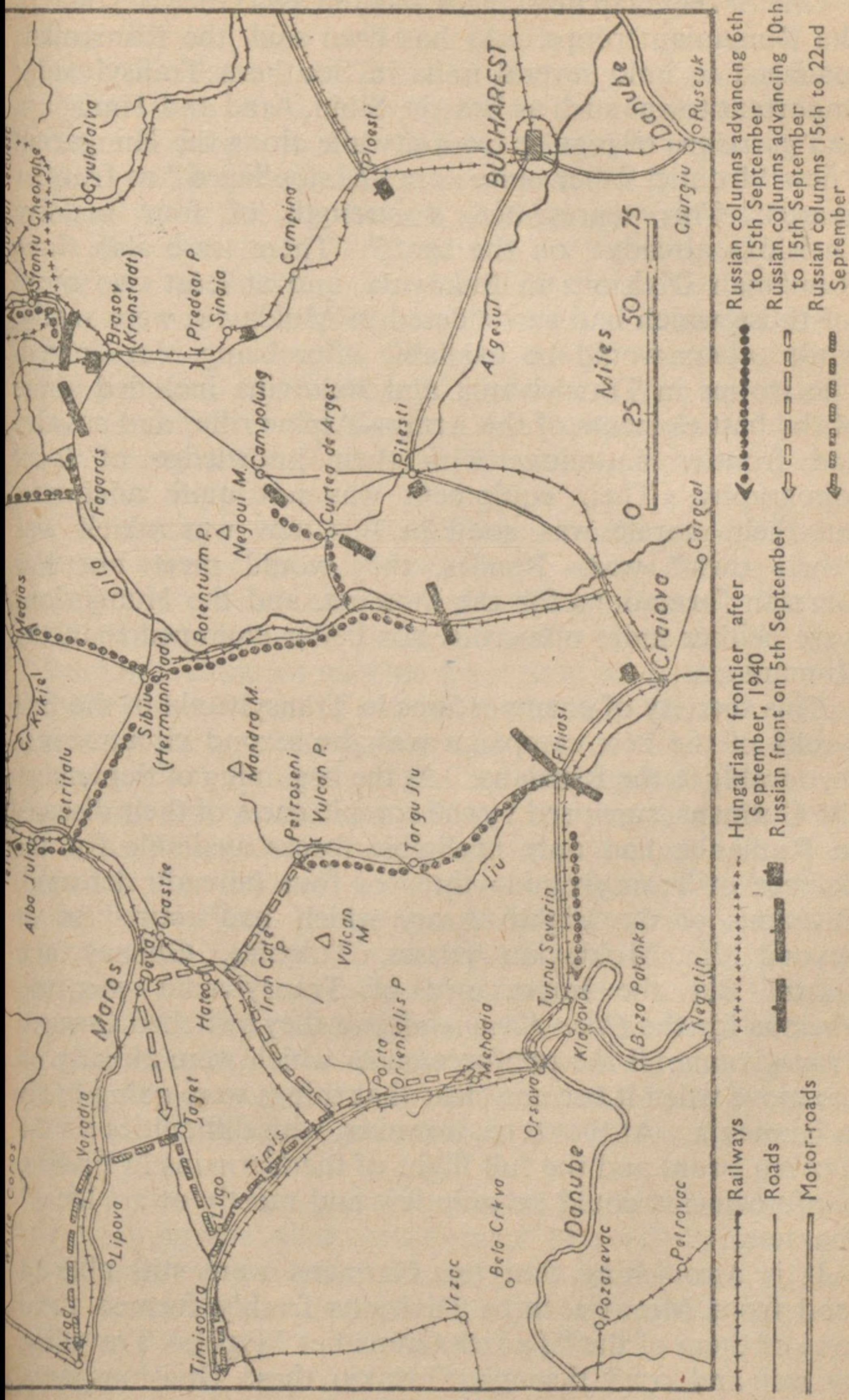
Transylvania, Brasov (Kronstadt) and Sibiu (Hermannstadt), became the Russian bases.

It must not, however, be forgotten that at that moment units of Malinovsky's Group were operating on the front from the valley of the Moldavitsa in Bukovina to Turnu Severin, near the "Iron Gates" of the Danube—a distance of 400 miles, if measured along an arc passing through Ploesti.

There was certainly nothing like a "front line"; Malinovsky's units operated in columns divided by considerable intervals. The use of many columns was necessary, because of the many directions in which the Russian offensive must be developed. To mention only the principal directions—Malinovsky's columns had to advance: (1) In Bukovina; (2) On the Bystritsa, where a motor road runs to the Tolghies Pass; (3) To the west of Targul Ocna, near the Ghimes Pass; (4) From Breccu, to the west of the Oituz Pass; (5, 6, 7) From Brasov, Fogaras and Sibiu, already in Transylvania; (8) From Targu Jiu, to the north of Craiova, on a road leading into Transylvania through the Vulcan Pass; (9) Near Turnu Severin. There were also the Russian units occupying points on the Danube—Giurgiu, Zimnicea, Calafat and others.

Now even if Malinovsky's Group was some twenty-five Divisions strong, it must be assumed that even the strongest of his columns was not more than three Divisions, while others were only one or two Divisions strong. Besides, even if the proportion of all mobile units (heavy or light tanks, motorized infantry, cavalry) was unusually great, it could not exceed 40 per cent, and with enormous distances to cover, from Jassy to the passes in the Transylvanian Alps, it is natural to suppose that only mobile units could be concentrated in Southern Transylvania during the first ten days of September. So the campaign in Transylvania had to start with only limited Russian forces, and even smaller forces were then ready to operate on the routes into Transylvania from the east. The difficult terrain did not promise an easy success, but fortunately for them the Russians were favoured by two circumstances.


Dniester
Botosani
Turgul Frumos
Pascani
Roman
Bacau
Onesti
Siret
Falticeni
Suceava
Moldava
Neamtu
Piatra
Bystritsa
Chimes P.
Putna
Turgul Ocna
Zaleschiki
Chernovitsy
Prut
Storozhinets
Radauts
Cumpolung
Brosteni
Jacobeni
Toplita
Cheorgheni
Miclaus
Madertalau
Miercurea Ciuculia
Hargita M.
Gorodenka
Shyatyn
Kolomya
Stanislavov
Nadvorna
Delatyn
Kuty
Cheremosh
Moldavitsa
Seletin
Stol P.
Ocna Valea
Borga P.
Caliman M.
Maros
Mezohavas M.
Praid
Targul Mures
Vasarhely
Rodna
Borsa
Petrosul M.
Zhabie
Yablonitsa P.
Yasenia
Marmarosh Siget
Baia Mare
Lados
Aeginul Sdsesc
Bystritsa
Bistritz
Cluj (Koloszvar)
Turda
Del
Jibou
Dolina
Skole
Uzhok P.
Vyshkov P.
Varechka P.
Hust
Mukachev
Sevlush
Szamos
Satu Mare (Szatmar)
Careimari (Nagy Karoly)
Morghita
Huedin
Rapid Cris
Uzhgorod
Tisso
Cop
Nyireghihaza
Debreczen
Berettyo
Oradea Mare (Nagy Varad)
Solonta
Gyula


Gyulafalva
Sfantu Gheorghe
Brasov (Kronstadt)
Predeal P
Sinaia
Campina
Ploesti
BUCHAREST
Danube
Giurgiu
Rusciuk
Argesul
Pitesti
Curtea de Arges
Campolung
Negoui M.
Rotenturm P.
Fagaras
Olt
Medias
Sibiu (Hermannstadt)
Cr. Kukiel
Petritalu
Alba Julia
Mandra M.
Petroseni
Vulcan P.
Torgu Jiu
Jiu
Filiasi
Craiova
Corgoal
Miles
0
25
50
75
Maros
Deva
Orastie
Hateg
Iron Gate P
Vulcan M
Porta Orientalis P
Mehadia
Turnu Severin
Kladovo
Orsova
Brza Palanka
Negotin
Varadia
Jagel
Timis
Lugo
Lipova
Arad
Timisoara
Vrzac
Bela Crkva
Pozarevac
Petrovac
Railways
Roads
Motor-roads
Hungarian frontier after September, 1940
Russian front on 5th September
Russian columns advancing 6th to 15th September
Russian columns advancing 10th to 15th September
Russian columns 15th to 22nd September

One of these circumstances was the assistance of some of the Rumanian troops. As has been said, the Rumanians managed to hold several units in Southern Transylvania; important towns such as Brasov, Sibiu, Arad and Timisoara had garrisons of regular troops, while along the Hungarian "new" frontier other units were "camouflaged" as frontier guards. This represented a strength of four or five Divisions already "on the spot." There were also three Rumanian Divisions in Bukovina, and at least two more (of those which had surrendered in Moldavia) were ready, while others would be available after being reorganized. The troops in Transylvania and Bukovina included some of the best elements of the Army—Alpine rifles and cavalry and frontier battalions with their knowledge of local topography. Their equipment was not quite adequate, but their morale was good in this new war which was "their own" war. Besides, they would meet but few German formations for the moment, and the Hungarians were neither more numerous nor better equipped than the Rumanians.

This scarcity of enemy troops in Transylvania in the first weeks of the new campaign was the second circumstance favourable to the Russians. At the beginning of September the Germans, surprised by the completeness of their disaster in Rumania, had only negligible forces available for the defence of Transylvania—three or four (already defeated) Divisions of the Eighth Army which had retired to or beyond the Moldavian passes, Tolghies, Ghimes and Oituz. But the importance of Transylvania was too obvious for the *Ober-Kommando*, so they switched towards Transylvania all the reinforcements which were already on the move when it became clear that things were going badly in Rumania. At that time, however, with difficulties on the Eastern Front and the full flight of the Germans in France, reinforcements could be only few and mostly of a "local" character.

It is astonishing that the Germans were still able to send from Moravia three Divisions freshly formed there (one of them of the "Panzer Grenadier" type). Travelling by rail and road through Slovakia these Divisions were

hampered in their movements by the rising of the Slovaks near Zvolen, and some elements of them could reach Cluj (Koloszvar) in Transylvania only by the middle of September. As a "local" source of reinforcements, the German forces in the Balkan countries might be used. The evacuation of Greece (the mainland and most of the islands) was already starting, although its progress depended on the attitude of Bulgaria and its results could not be felt in the Transylvanian theatre at the earliest before the second half of September. But two German Divisions were taken from von Weich's troops operating against the partisans in Northern Yugoslavia. With two Hungarian Divisions in the Banat a small group was constituted for operations in the Arad–Temesvar (Timisoara) region early in September.

Generally speaking the Germans were not able to give much support to the Hungarians, who were expected to make the principal effort to defend Transylvania. However, the Hungarians were hardly ready for this task. Events in Rumania came equally as a surprise to them, and found them still reluctant to expand their armed forces in proportion to their not inconsiderable man-power. Besides, the forces which had been organized and equipped were acting according to the German defensive arrangements in Galicia. As has been already mentioned, three Hungarian Divisions (one of them cavalry) were operating on the middle Vistula, while the First Hungarian Army had to defend the Carpathian passes from Dukla to Yablonitsa. The organization of a second Army, promised to the Germans, was proceeding rather slowly. Now of course all this had to be changed: the Hungarians saw imminent danger to their own territory, as the co-operation of the Rumanians with the Russians would result in the invasion of Northern Transylvania.

Everywhere along the Rumanian border the Hungarian frontier guards were concentrated as small fighting units, and three or four more or less ready Divisions of a second Army were urgently directed to the strategically important points. As that was hardly sufficient, the Germans "agreed" to return to Hungary the Divisions from the

Vistula and two from Yugoslav territory. The situation seemed very tense not only for the Budapest rulers but for their Nazi protectors, and at least three Divisions of the First Hungarian Army were moved from the Galician passes to those leading into Transylvania from Moldavia.

To sum up, during the first half of September the resistance in Transylvania amounted to three to five German and seven to eight Hungarian Divisions. There was no reason for Marshal Malinovsky to await fuller concentrations of his troops; his mobile forces, with some support from Rumanian units, were sufficient for the preliminary phase of the Danubian–Carpathian offensive. Operations on a greater scale must be opened only later and simultaneously by the Groups under the command of Malinovsky, Tolbukhin and Petrov. In September the organization of Petrov's Group was still incomplete and Tolbukhin's Group had its own particular task—to open the way across Bulgaria. Malinovsky's operations in Transylvania had therefore a limited object: the conquest of a *place d'armes* for the future offensive. He had to act with maximum energy and speed in the direction of the Maros valley, extending his zone of occupation towards Arad and Temesvar (Timisoara) while his advance from Moldavia and Bukovina was of less importance.

In Bukovina by the middle of September the extreme right wing of Malinovsky's Group, advancing with the Rumanians, occupied the upper valley of the Moldava and the region Dorna-Vatra–Jacobeni. In the region of the Tolghies Pass there was some fighting between the Russian columns and the Germans and Hungarians defending the motor road descending to the head-waters of the Maros. In this difficult country the advance was slow, but nevertheless on 15 September Toplita at the eastern end of the upper Maros gorge was captured. Further advance through this gorge was practically impossible, but to the south liaison was made at Gheorgheni with another Russo-Rumanian column. The latter, advancing from Targul Ocna, captured the Ghimes Pass on 9 September and, after stiff fighting, descended into the upper valley of the Alt (Olta) where on the 12th Miercurea

Ciuculia (Csik Czereda) was reached. This town is the centre of railways and roads in the Gheorgheni plain. To the north of it contact was made with the force which had occupied Toplita, and to the south with the column which descended to the Alt from the Oituz Pass through Breccu. Thus by the middle of September a Russian front was formed beyond the barrier of the Carpathians, in the inner Transylvanian Gheorgheni plain on the upper course of the Maros and Alt. The second mountainous barrier, to the west of this plain, was in the meantime completely turned by other and stronger of Malinovsky's columns.

Brasov and Sibiu were the starting points of the manœuvre which gave the most important results during the September campaign. On the 10th the column marching from Brasov through Fogaras occupied Segesvar (on the Gr. Kokel) and at Medias established liaison with the column which advanced from Sibiu; to the east of Segesvar, Odorhei (Szekely Udvarhely) was captured two days later, securing connection with the forces on the upper Alt. The column advancing from Sibiu achieved a particularly rapid and deep penetration: its vanguard reached the valley of the Maros on 9 September. The next day the old town of Gyula Fehervar (Alba Julia of the Rumanians) was occupied, and further upstream Teius was reached. On 12 September the Russian tanks crossed the Little Kokel at many points, closing on the important town of Maros Vasarhely (Targul Mures) against only slight enemy resistance. On their right Praia was occupied (on the western slopes of the mountainous barrier dividing the Gheorgheni plain from that of Maros Vasarhely); on their left serious fighting took place at Turda (14 September) when the first German reinforcements arrived at Cluj (Koloszvar), 20 miles north of Turda.

Still more important progress was made in the valley of the Maros, downstream from Alba Julia. When this town was reached Malinovsky switched strong tank columns westwards, and by 12 September it was at Orastie and Deva, 80 miles east of Arad and Temesvar. The next day liaison was established at Hateg with another

Russian column advancing from the Craiova region up the river Jiu and through the Vulcan Pass in the Transylvanian Alps. By 15 September the Russians concentrated between Deva and Hateg for a decisive action in the direction of Arad and Temesvar. And it was time for such an action, as the Germans and Hungarians had succeeded in capturing these towns: the Rumanian garrisons retreated eastwards to join the advancing Russians. During the following week operations developed in the valleys of the Maros and Temes (into the latter the Russians penetrated through the Iron Gates Pass from Hateg). Temesvar was captured easily on 19 September, but to the east of Arad the Russo-Rumanian force met with strong resistance by the German-Hungarians near Lipova. After three days' fighting the enemy was defeated on 21 September and the next day Russian tanks entered Arad.

With the occupation of Arad and Temesvar—two bases for future operations—and with the valley of the Maros (except its gorge between Toplita and Reghinul) in Russian hands, the preliminary phase of Malinovsky's campaign was accomplished. It had taken less than three weeks, and this remarkable success was achieved with only limited forces in one of the most difficult mountain areas of Europe. Malinovsky concentrated his efforts in the valley of the Maros; for the time being he made no attempt to capture Cluj (Koloszvar) where the German reinforcements had arrived to organize a defensive line along the ridge which divides the valley of the Maros from the headwaters of the Szamos. The Russians occupied in that sector the line of the Ariesul (a tributary of the Maros) and the assault on Cluj was postponed to the next phase of the campaign when Northern Transylvania must be liberated by the joint action of Malinovsky's and Petrov's Groups.

* * * * *

Map No. 18. The Soviet Government were not satisfied with the Bulgarian announcement of neutrality and of "withdrawal from the war." Apart from political reasons, there were urgent military considerations which made the Bulgarian attitude unacceptable to the Allies. So on 5 September the Soviet Government declared war on Bulgaria

and ordered Marshal Tolbukhin to cross the Bulgarian frontier.

These urgent military considerations were connected with the continued movements of the German troops through Yugoslav territory occupied by the Bulgarians. The German Divisions which had evacuated Greece were concentrating from the valley of the Vardar towards Nish and Belgrade and might soon appear in Hungary. And even if the Bulgarian troops remained "neutral" towards Yugoslav partisans operating against the German lines of communication, this was not sufficient, as experience had shown that the partisans were able only to hamper and slow down German movements on railways and high roads and could not stop them altogether. Intervention by regular troops was necessary, and Bulgaria had to admit the Russian troops, and also use Bulgarian troops to prevent the enemy's strategic moves and concentrations.

Tolbukhin's troops entered Bulgaria, fast mobile columns occupied the Black Sea ports, Varna and Burgas, Ruschuk on the Danube and many other towns. "Hostilities" were, however, bloodless, and three days later they formally ceased, as Bulgaria declared war on the Germans and promised full co-operation with the Allies. For more effective control of the Bulgarian situation Marshal Tolbukhin and a certain number of Russian troops arrived in Sofia on 17 September. In the meantime units of his Group continued to concentrate for the coming Danubian operations. This could not but be a slow process: by the end of August many of Tolbukhin's units were still in the Kishinev region, some 500 miles by road from Craiova, which was the natural base in Rumania for any Trans-danubian campaign. In the second half of September some Russian mobile forces were already on the Bulgarian side of the river, at Plevna, Lom-Palanka and Vidin, but the bulk of Tolbukhin's troops were still on the roads or on the river where they made use of the Danubian transport. Every day, however, increased the German reinforcements arriving from the south to the Danube. The beginning of an operation in the direction of Belgrade could be no longer postponed. The Russian Command decided to start

with those forces which were already available at Turnu Severin and which might cross the Danube to the Yugoslav town of Kladovo.

In the last days of September a crossing was made at Kladovo and connection was established with small groups of partisans operating in the mountains of the Danube elbow. The Germans held only posts on the motor road running southwards, but one of their Divisions garrisoned Negotin, Zajecar and the mining region of Bor. Negotin was captured by the Russians on 1 October, fighting developed in the following days in the mining region, the Russians being helped by enthusiastic Yugoslav partisans. With the arrival of reinforcements Zajecar was taken on 5 October. This was only a modest beginning of the Transdanubian campaign by the troops under Tolbukhin's command. But a simultaneous operation on a bigger scale was started by Malinovsky's troops in the region between Temesvar and the Danube.

Here concentrations on both sides of the river Temes took place in the last week of September. The Yugoslav frontier was crossed by three columns, two of them advancing towards the lower Tisza and the third operating between the Temes and the Danube. In the direction of the Tisza one German and one Hungarian Division resisted, and fighting continued for several days at Vel. Kikinda which fell on 7 October. On the other hand rapid progress was made by the column advancing on Vrsac against only slight opposition. This column, on 5 October, reached Pancevo at the point where the Temes joins the Danube. On the other side of the great river and only 8 miles west of Pancevo stands Belgrade; although the crossing at Pancevo was for the moment impossible, this move facilitated Tolbukhin's operations beyond the Danube.

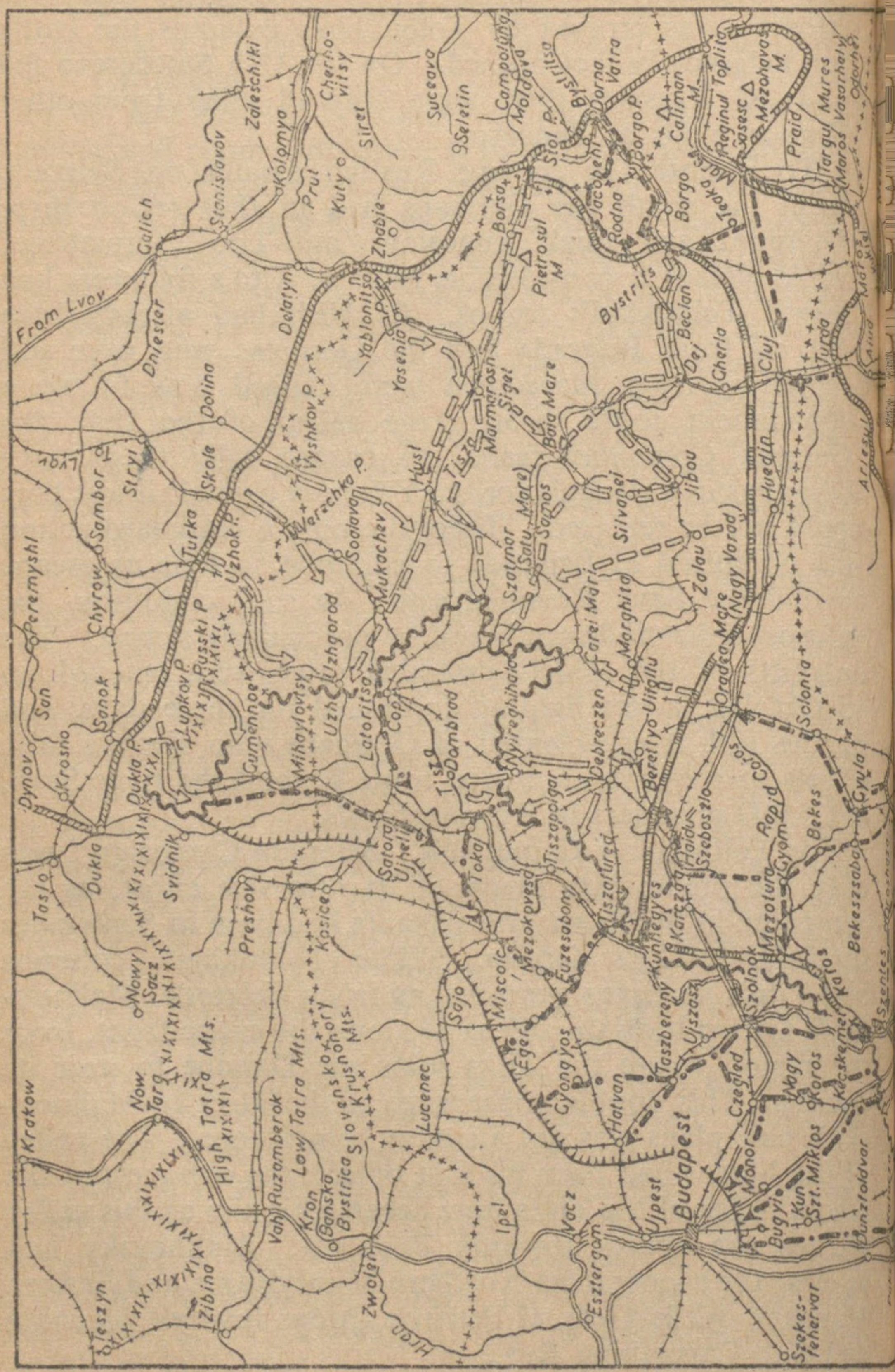
Tolbukhin's columns, now considerably reinforced, advanced on a broad front towards the valley of the Morava which was reached on 10 October at Vel. Plana where the Nish–Belgrade trunk railway line and motor road were cut. Co-operation with the Bulgarians started at last: their troops were on the move, encircling Nish (still held by the Germans) and establishing liaison with

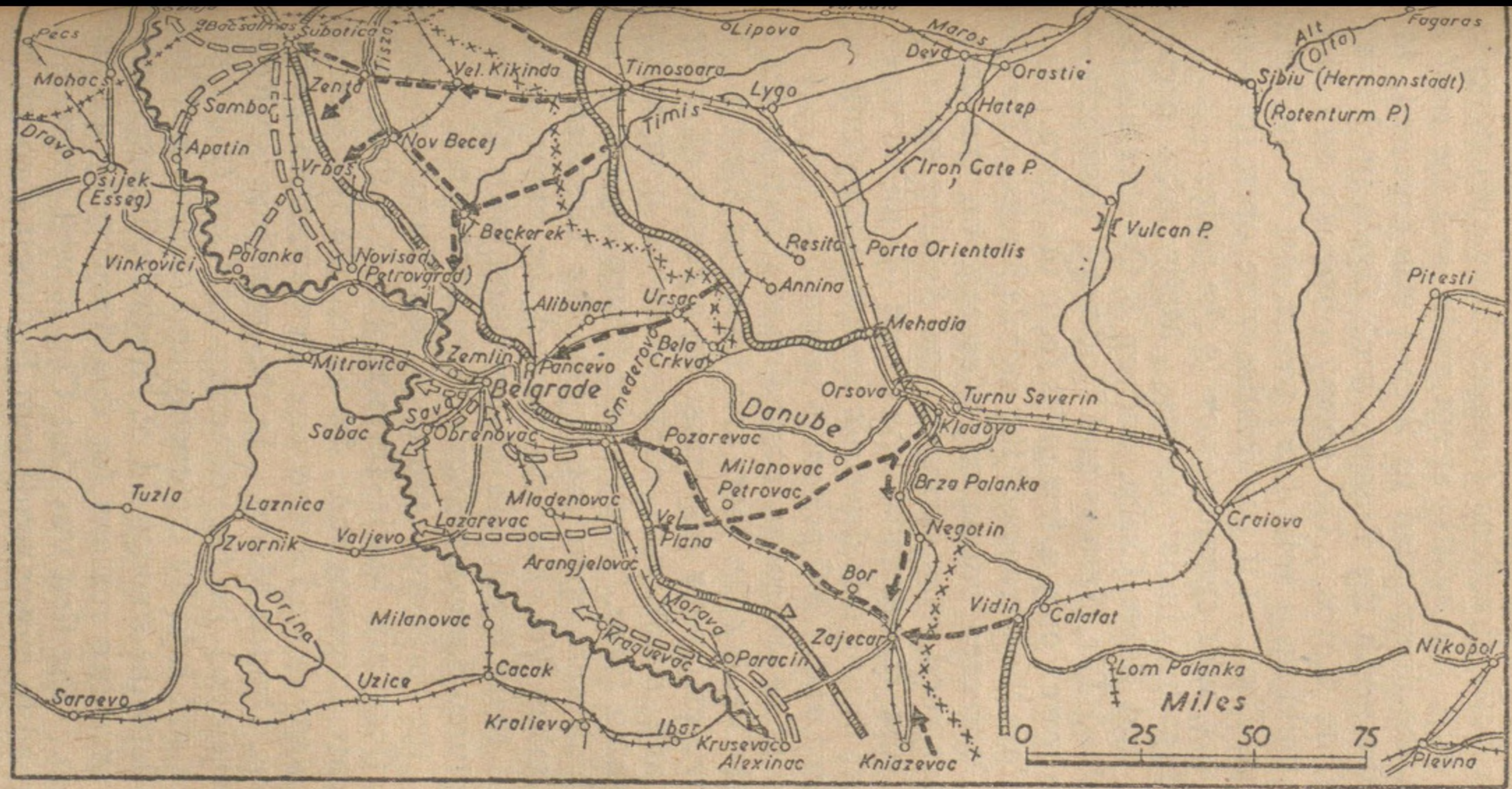
the Russians at Kniazevac (11 October). Once the Morava was crossed by Tolbukhin's columns the battle for Belgrade in fact opened. On the 12th Smederevo fell and the Russians there were only 18 miles from other Russian units at Pancevo.

To oppose the coming Russian assault on Belgrade from the south the Germans had in that region three Divisions and small Yugoslav "anti-Tito" formations, while already a considerable force of Tito's followers had joined Tolbukhin's troops. As Nish had already been cut off from Belgrade and the Germans who were still retreating from Macedonia were obliged now to use a roundabout route through the valley of the Ibar, the German Command feared to engage fully these three Divisions in a struggle for the Yugoslav capital: if lost they could not be replaced. Therefore only a rearguard action was organized at Belgrade to continue so long as escape beyond the Sava remained safe. In such conditions the defence of Belgrade could not be particularly strong. The outskirts of this widely extended town were reached on 15 October, street fighting continued for three days, and on the 19th it was cleared of Germans who, despite their efforts to preserve an escape route beyond the river Sava, left 5,000 prisoners in Russian hands.

For Tolbukhin's Group this "Belgrade Campaign" was only the preliminary phase of its offensive effort, as the campaign in Southern Transylvania had been in September for Malinovsky's Group. While Tolbukhin's columns and Tito's partisans were closing in on Belgrade, Malinovsky's Group took the offensive along the entire front, from the region where the Tisza joins the Danube to near its source. This double appearance of the Tisza in Malinovsky's new plans was not a simple coincidence. The valley of the Maros had been his first object; the conquest of the whole valley of the Tisza now became his aim as this valley crosses the routes towards Budapest. Malinovsky had to clear the enemy from Northern Transylvania and Eastern Hungary, while General Petrov's troops invaded Slovakia and Sub-Carpathian Rus.

Already by 5 October strong Russian columns had crossed


From Lvov
Galich
Stanislavov
Zaleschiki
Kolomya
Cherno-vitsy
Prut
Kuty
Siret
Suceava
Seletin
Campolung
Moldova
Stol Pietrosul
Borsa
Dorna Vatra
Borgo P.
Jacobeni
Rodna
Borgo
Calimon M.
Reginul Toplita
Gasesc
Mezohavas M.
Praid
Targul Mures
Maros Vasarhely
Odorhei
Delatyn
Zhabie
Yablonitsa P.
Yasenia
Pietrosul M.
Bistrits
Beclan
Dej
Cherla
Cluj
Turda
Marmarosh Siget
Baia Mare
Dolina
Dniester
Stryi
Skole
Vyshkov P.
Verachka P.
Turka
Uzhok P.
Sambor
Lvov
Chyrow
Peremyshl
San
Sanok
Dynow
Krosno
Dukla
Dukla P.
Lupkov P.
Russki P.
Cumenhoe
Mikhaylovtsy
Uzhgorod
Latoritsa
Mukachevo
Soata
Hust
Tisza
Szatmar
Satu Mare
Salnos
Carei Mari
Debreczen
Tiszafured
Tiszadomb
Tiszapolgar
Nyiregyhaza
Tiszakarad
Miskolc
Mezokovesd
Eger
Sajo
Eszesabony
Gyongyos
Hatvan
Taszbereny
Ujszasz
Karczag
Kunhegyes
Szolnok
Mezotur
Szeged
Orados
Oradea Mare (Nagy Varad)
Silvanei
Marghita
Zalau
Jibou
Berettyo Ujfalu
Haidu Szeboszlo
Gyoma
Rap. P.
Bekes
Gyula
Bekeszsaba
Kecskemet
Szentes
Solonta
Huedin
Arlesul
Krakow
Now Targ
Tatra Mts.
High Tatra
Ruzomberok
Low Tatra Mts.
Kron
Bansko Bystrica
Slovenskorudohorry Mts.
Krusnohorry Mts.
Lucenec
Ipel
Vacz
Eszlergom
Budapest
Ujpest
Czegled
Manor
Bugyi
Kun Szt. Miklos
Kecskemet
Bunzlodvar
Szekes-fehervar
Zwolen
Hron
Zibina
Tesszyn
Nowy Sacz
Tasslo
Preshov
Kosice



Railways

Roads

Motor-roads

The Hungarian frontier, 1940

The Yugoslav frontier, 1940

The Slovak frontier, 1940

Front line on 1st Oct.

Russian columns advancing from 1st–11th Oct.

Front line on 12th Oct.

Russian columns advancing from 12th–28th Oct.

Front line on 1st Nov.

The Russian offensive between the Tisza and the Danube in Nov.

The line reached by 1st Dec.

the Hungarian "old" frontier to the west and north of Arad. In both directions German-Hungarian opposition was met with, but swiftly swept aside, and the next day Mako on the direct road to Szeged was captured, while more to the north the Russians took Gyula in the valley of the White Koros. The enemy obviously still lacked forces to build up a solid front to the east of the Middle and Lower Tisza. All possibilities were open for strong Russian tank units operating now in the plain.

Exploiting his initial success, Malinovsky occupied Oroshaza and Bekes Csaba, and on 8 October his tanks were at Mezö Tür, Szentes and Hodmezö Vasarhely—the latter two towns only a few miles from the Tisza. In the next two days the advance of the mobile forces in the direction of Debreczen continued; Karczag, on the east to west motor road, was captured and fighting against the Germans and Hungarians took place 20 miles south of Debreczen; during this drive northwards enemy units were disorganized and 8,000 prisoners taken.

The extent of the enemy confusion is shown by the fact that on 11 October the Tisza was forced at Szeged. This great town, extremely important as a centre of strategic railways and roads, was captured by a comparatively small Russian force. Almost simultaneously the Russian troops which were operating beyond the Yugoslav border and had taken Vel. Kikinda crossed the lower Tisza at Zenta and Stari Becej.. In co-operation with the troops which captured Szeged, a column from Zenta on 12 October occupied the principal town of the Yugoslav Banat-Subotica (formerly Maria-Teresiapol). To these astonishingly easy successes must be added the fall (the same day) of Nagy Varad (otherwise Grosswardein and, for Rumanians, Oradea Mare). In the meantime the Russian attack developed in the direction of Cluj (Koloszvar), which was still held by the enemy and transformed by the Germans into the stronghold of Northern Transylvania.

There were two reasons for this decision by the *Ober-Kommando*. The first was that Cluj is well connected by rail and road (a motor road) with Budapest through Nagy Varad and with the upper Tisza valley through Szatmar

Satu Mare). The second was that the local topography was favourable for defence: a steep ridge which protects the town from the south links at the same time the Bihar mountains, west of Cluj, with other massifs to the east. This situation seemed to exclude the possibility of outflanking Cluj. The Russians, however, began outflanking operations by a move from Maros Vasarhely and Praia on Reghinul—a point where the motor road running along the upper Maros from Toplita leaves the narrow valley and turns westwards towards Cluj. On 4 October Reghinul was captured, but then the advance of the Russian columns in a westerly direction was but slow (the Rumanian Mountain troops proved very useful). Good progress could be observed only five days later when a frontal attack on the Cluj positions from Turda was combined with a move along the motor road from Reghinul. At last on 11 October the "capital" of Transylvania fell after days of sharp fighting. The Germans and Hungarians (they were in some force: five Divisions with tanks and s.p. guns) withdrew to the north along the valley of the Little Szamos: the motor road running westwards to Budapest was already cut at Karczag, and on the 12th again at Nagy Varad. There were yet other reasons for the German-Hungarians at Cluj to hasten their retreat.

The Russian and Rumanian units of Malinovsky's command started an offensive in the high part of the Carpathian mountains, dividing the region of Dorna Vatra from the upper valley of the Great Szamos (the Great and Little Szamos join each other at Dej, 35 miles north of Cluj). In the first week of October this force overcame great difficulties and reached the high Borgo Pass (nearly 5,000 feet). By 10 October the Russo-Rumanians were descending to the head-waters of the Great Szamos, near Rodna, and into the valley of its tributary, the Bystritsa. In the latter valley the small town of Borgo (the centre of this mountain region) was captured after a fight with the Hungarians (12 October). And in the next two days the advance of both columns became more rapid: they captured the town of Bystrits and many places in the valley of the Great Szamos. Meanwhile the Russians who pursued

the enemy columns retreating from Cluj reached Gherla (Szamos Ujvar) a few miles south of Dej. The situation of this considerable enemy group, already menaced from the east and the south, soon became yet more dangerous with the appearance of new threats from the north and the west.

To the north Malinovsky's units (the extreme right wing of the Marshal's command) advanced from Jacobeni towards the Stiol Pass where railway and road run along the northern slopes of the Petrosul mountains. The difficulties of terrain were less here than at the head-waters of the Szamos and enemy resistance was less, although the direction had a particular strategic importance. Easily overcoming the opposition, the Russo-Rumanians on 14 October were at Borsa and the next day they advanced into the twin valleys of the tributaries of the upper Tisza—the Iza and Vyshova. On 16 October Malinovsky's units were in sight of Marmarosh Siget in the valley of the upper Tisza, and this meant that all the Carpathian passes leading from Galicia into Sub-Carpathian Rus could be turned from the south one after another.

This important strategic development corresponded with the Russian plans for the Danubian–Carpathian offensive. Since 10 October General Petrov's Fourth Ukrainian Group had increased its pressure on the whole Carpathian front in Galicia, from a point to the south of Sanok to the Yablonitsa Pass. Assaulting troops were concentrated near the Carpathian passes—Lupkov, Russki, Uzhok, Verechka, Yablonitsa. On 15 October along the whole Carpathian front signs of the enemy withdrawal could be observed, as the *Ober-Kommando* decided to move the First Hungarian Army into Eastern Slovakia and the Miskolcz region. (This was one of the steps for building up the defences of Budapest.)

General Petrov's troops stormed the passes, and in the west enemy rearguards at Lupkov, Russki, Uzhok put up only slight opposition; the Russians easily penetrated into the upper valleys of the Laborets and Uzh. In contrast to this there was serious fighting in the eastern part of Sub-Carpathian Rus, particularly beyond the Yablonitsa Pass.

There, at the head-waters of the Tisza, the enemy fought stubbornly to the south of Yasina, as any rapid progress by the Russians along the upper Tisza gorge might endanger those units which still were in the Marmarosh Siget region. Even a German Alpine Division appeared here—the vanguard of considerable reinforcements which the *Ober-Kommando*, as will be explained later, decided to move towards the Tisza. Led by local Carpatho-Russian guides, one of Petrov's columns crossed the high Svidovets Mountains and successfully turned the Tisza gorge. Enemy resistance was broken within the elbow of this river and simultaneously, on the south side of the Tisza, Marmarosh Siget fell to Malinovsky's troops (18 October). While some of them continued to advance down the Tisza, a mobile column immediately switched southwards, towards Baia Mare on the Lapos—a few miles from the point where this mountain river joins the Szamos.

The significance of this move was clear, for at that moment enemy troops, in retreat from Cluj (and joined at Dej by others which had retired from the Rodna and Borgo mountains), were crossing the rugged country between the Szamos and the Lapos. The situation of this enemy group became more dangerous on 19 October when the Russians captured Baia Mare and cut off the direct road towards Szatmar (Satu Mare). An alternative was the road to Carei Mare (Nagy Karoly), but to this point the Russians also advanced from the motor road Cluj–Oradea-Mare, through Silvanei. Further to the west Malinovsky started a decisive attack on Debreczen; in the event of his success and a further advance northwards the entire enemy group, retreating through Northern Transylvania, would be encircled between Szatmar (Satu Mare) and Nagy Karoly (Carei Mare).

This was the reason for a furious but somewhat confused struggle which took place in the plain to the north of Debreczen, during the last ten days of October. Against that important town Malinovsky concentrated strong tank units, together with several Cossack and Cavalry Divisions led by the Caucasian General Pliev (who had fought under Marshal Rokossovsky in July). Although

Debreczen was fortified and held by a German-Hungarian garrison three Divisions strong, a skilful outflanking manœuvre by Russian tanks and cavalry made the enemy flee, partly westwards to the Tisza and partly to the north towards Nyiregyhaza (20 October). But tanks and Pilev's cavalry followed him to Nyiregyhaza and, giving him no pause, captured this town on 22 October; the next day they even reached the Tisza (at Dombrad) in its bend to northwards.

As all the enemy forces still to the east of Debreczen and on the south side of the Tisza now seemed to be cut off, the enemy reacted nervously but effectively. He was favoured by the fact that the German reinforcements were then just arriving in the Miskolcz region, so one Panzer and one mobile Division were thrown across the Tisza at Tokaj in support of what remained of the Debreczen garrison, now pushed to the river. The Russian tank units were somewhat unexpectedly attacked on their left flank and on the 25th the Germans re-took Nyiregyhaza, inflicting on the Russian mobile force some losses in material and taking several thousand prisoners. However, the same day the Russo-Rumanians captured both Satu Mare and Carei Mare, which meant the completion of their conquest of the whole of Transylvania—the Northern part now after the Southern. The enemy scored a success, as he avoided the encirclement of his "Szamos Group": with Nyiregyhaza recaptured the route of escape to the west was open again. But not for long: Pliev's cavalry and tanks were supported by infantry units and by other tanks, which counter-attacked from Haidu-Boszormeny and, after a sharp clash with the Germans, recaptured Nyiregyhaza on 30 October. While enemy attention was diverted to the Tisza bend, north of Debreczen, a more important development was in preparation on the lower course of this great river.

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The reconquest of Northern Transylvania completely satisfied the Rumanian claims. The participation of King Michael's troops in the September–October campaign proved useful to the Russians; ten or more Rumanian

Divisions took part in it, mostly in the mountain areas, and several Rumanian units were mentioned with the Russians in Marshal Stalin's orders of the day.

For the Russians possession of the valleys of the Szamos and upper Tisza was important: it gave security to the right flank of Malinovsky's Group during the coming operations in the Hungarian plain, between the middle Tisza and the Danube (the historic Great Alföld). The disposal of the Marshal's troops, now better concentrated than six weeks earlier, but still operating on too vast a territory, required that a task of the right flank-guard should be carried out by Petrov's troops, which appeared on the Czechoslovak side of the Tisza (where it flows from east to west). Petrov's Group (the Fourth Ukrainian) was however still not in full strength and had to fight in country (Sub-Carpathian Rus) giving the enemy excellent possibilities for defensive rearguard action. A dozen of the upper Tisza tributaries (among them several considerable rivers) cross the path of an army marching east to west, while their valleys are narrow and like gorges (although flanked by mountains of only moderate height). To add to General Petrov's difficulties, well-equipped German Divisions now appeared in this area.

The enemy move was connected with the events which took place in Hungary in the middle of October. At the beginning of that month some divergencies arose between Horthy's Government and the *Ober-Kommando* following Hitler's orders. The Germans insisted on an immediate and considerable extension of the Hungarian forces to at least thirty or even thirty-five Divisions, organized in three Armies. A *levée en masse* must be declared in Hungary and drastic measures taken against those reluctant to continue the war. But Regent Horthy knew that anti-war tendencies were widespread in the country. He may have been under the illusion that Hungary could adopt a neutral attitude with the tacit consent of the Germans themselves. Would not Hungary's neutrality sufficiently cover the approaches to Austria and might not the Western Allies of Russia persuade the latter to divert her offensive, leaving aside a "neutral Hungary"? If such were the illusions of

the old Admiral, they were completely shattered by the German intervention.

This time, taught by their Rumanian experience, the Nazis acted rapidly. On some pretext Horthy was isolated and could not be a rallying point of the movement, while a "palace revolution" was produced at Budapest. On 15 October an adventurer, Ferencz Szalasi (a local Nazi) was proclaimed head of the Government and his first step was the dismissal of the Hungarian C. in C. and the two Generals commanding the First and Second Hungarian Armies. There were some moves in opposition, but except for many cases of desertion from the Army, nothing happened and the Germans succeeded in subduing the "rebellious" elements. The situation in Hungary was quite different from that in Rumania: the local pro-Nazis were more numerous here and better organized, and in the Army there prevailed (among the officers) traditions of "brotherhood in arms" with the Germans. The appearance of the Rumanians, together with the Russians, in the Hungarian plains also contributed to a certain revival of the fighting spirit.

The Germans, however, thought it necessary to make concessions to their last remaining satellites. They gave permission for a transfer of the First Hungarian Army (from the Carpathian passes) nearer to the capital (see page 196), while considerable German reinforcements arrived in Slovakia and their vanguard soon appeared in Sub-Carpathian Rus. A formation of the "new" Eighth German Army (under General Friesner) was also promised in support of the Second Hungarian Army beyond the middle Tisza. This "third edition" of the Eighth Army included the units which escaped from Cluj and Northern Transylvania but with fresh reinforcements added. In October both the Russian and the Western fronts seemed to be more or less stabilized. New formations inside Germany (among them several S.S. Divisions) were directed to Hungary and Slovakia. During October and November fifteen German Divisions arrived on the "Budapest front"; among them, besides new formations, were three Panzer Divisions from the Vistula.

Enemy resistance to General Petrov's troops made progress slow in the valleys of the Uzh and Latoritsa (leading to Uzhgorod and Mukachev). But one of his columns which, as has been said, reached the upper Tisza, advanced along the right bank of the river and fought its way to Hust (24 October). From there it advanced on Mukachev and by combined action with another column, descending along the valley of the Latoritsa, captured this town after sharp fighting; the next day Russian tanks entered Uzhgorod. Now there were in Russian hands three railways and roads connecting the upper Tisza with Lvov and Stanislavov. This was of great importance, not only for Petrov's troops, but for Malinovsky's Armies which with great difficulty were supplied through the Moldavian passes, or by a roundabout way through Bucharest. The next move by Petrov was on the still more important Junction Cop (or Csop) situated in the narrow neck of land between the Tisza and the Latoritsa and regulating all the traffic in the valleys of the upper and middle Tisza. This junction was taken on the 28th but a few days later recaptured by freshly arrived German Divisions. The Russians secured firm possession of Cop only later and after intense fighting.

Preparing his blow in the plain between the Tisza and the Danube, Marshal Malinovsky secured not only his right but also his left flank. After his capture of Szeged, Zenta and Subotica, there was a short pause on the lower Tisza, but from 20 October the Russian columns were again on the move southwards and westwards. Two days later Baja and Sombor near the Danube were reached and on the 25th an attack was developed against the towns on the left bank of the Danube—Apatin, Palanka and Novi Sad (the latter opposite the old Austrian fortress of Peterwardein). The occupation of a *place d'armes* between the lower Tisza and the Danube (which changes direction here and turns eastwards) not only secured Malinovsky's future offensive, but made possible Tolbukhin's new concentrations which were already on the way.

It is somewhat strange that the situation which existed near Warsaw in August–September 1944 became a subject

of so many discussions in the West, while a similar situation in Yugoslavia, a month or two later, did not attract any particular attention from European or American public opinion. There had been some criticism of the Russian decision not to throw across the Vistula a whole Army, able to liberate the Polish capital and give support to the patriots fighting within. Nobody however seemed to be astonished that Marshal Tolbukhin's troops, after the capture of Belgrade, instead of marching westwards, liberating vast territories of Yugoslavia and giving support to the bulk of Tito's partisans, occupied only a limited bridgehead beyond the Sava and then for a month disappeared from the communiqués, to appear again in the winter offensive across the Danube into the heart of Hungary. That Belgrade had been liberated made no difference: the greater and more densely-populated part of Yugoslavia still remained occupied by the enemy and Tito's partisans still had to fight there, as they had fought for years. Nor was there any hope that they would be able to clear the country of the enemy by their own effort, without support from a regular and properly-equipped Army. They had not been able to do this before, and five months after the liberation of Belgrade almost as much Yugoslav territory was still occupied by the Germans as a week after Tolbukhin's victory.

On the Danube in October, as on the Vistula in August, the Russian Supreme Command was influenced first of all by strategic considerations and operational plans. Marshal Tolbukhin's "Transdanubian Campaign" had as its foremost object to establish an operational link with the Yugoslav Forces of Liberation and, eventually, to co-operate with the Bulgarian regular Army. It was necessary and urgent: (1) To secure the left flank of Malinovsky's Group, fighting its way through Transylvania and later through the Great Alföld in the general direction of Budapest; (2) To prevent the German Divisions, previously in the southern parts of the Balkan Peninsula, from concentrating on the motor road and trunk railway Nish–Belgrade–Vincovci (or Osijek)–Budapest; (3) To open new lines of communications for Tolbukhin's and Malinovsky's

troops, by the Danube (at least up to the mouth of the Tisza), and by rail and road through Northern Bulgaria to Nish and Belgrade.

All this was achieved with the clearing of the enemy from the Morava and with the capture of Belgrade (middle of October). Then the Russians (with the help of the partisans) created a firmly held "security zone" covering Belgrade and the valley of the Morava with a perimeter running from Krusevac to Kragujevac, Lazarevac, Obrenovac and finally to a point on the right bank of the Danube beyond the Sava and near the mouth of the Tisza. In the meantime the Bulgarians cleared the enemy from the area to the south of Nish and obliged the retreating Germans (still at Skoplje which was taken only a month later) to make use of the local road and railway in the valley of the Ibar as a route of escape towards Sarajevo. But there was certainly not the slightest probability that after the capture of Belgrade Marshal Tolbukhin would advance westwards to liberate Bosnia and Croatia and support with his troops the Yugoslavs who operated in those areas. On the contrary, his troops were crossing the Danube near Belgrade and concentrating on the north side of the river. He even took with him several Yugoslav units, and later some Bulgarian Divisions joined him at the point where the Drava falls into the Danube. All the problems of the Danubian campaign, political as well as military (complete liberation of Yugoslavia included) were to be decided by a great offensive by Tolbukhin's and Malinovsky's Groups in the direction of Budapest, Bratislava and Vienna.

The day of this decisive offensive had not yet arrived: it did not come until the winter campaign of 1944–45. The concentrations of Tolbukhin's troops across Rumania, Bulgaria and Yugoslavia were so complicated that they were only realized by the last week of November. Only then (28 November) did Tolbukhin cross the Danube in force near Apatin and Mohacs, and this was the beginning of the winter campaign.

But a month earlier Malinovsky had started his attack between the Tisza and the Danube (the Great Alföld battle). His heavy tanks had at last arrived and he hoped

for a rapid penetration of the enemy positions between the two great rivers. These positions followed a curious stretch of sandy steppe, interspersed with woods and small lakes to the south of Kecskemet (60 miles to the south-west of Budapest). They were defended by four Hungarian Divisions (of the recently-organized Second Army) reinforced by the S.S. Panzer Grenadiers and one German infantry Division. Generally speaking, of the German reinforcements, already active near Miskolcz and Tokaj, there were still only a few in this south sector.

The first days of Malinovsky's attack brought a rapid success: on 29 October Russian tanks broke through the enemy positions, and the next day Kecskemet, where the S.S. tried to resist, was captured. The Russians advanced in two strong columns, one along the Subotica–Budapest railway, the other on the motor road Szeged–Kecskemet–Budapest. The Hungarians retreated in some disorder, and the Germans began to move their Divisions from the north sector towards Budapest, concentrating them between Jaszbereny and the capital, the defence of which was organized with all possible haste. Along the Danube the Russian advance was only slightly opposed, but the marshy ground here was unfavourable for mechanized columns. On their right flank the Russians on 1 November captured Nagy Koros and a day later Czegled, 40 miles from Budapest on the motor road from Szolnok to the capital. Such was the confusion of the Second Hungarian Army that a new Russian column crossed the Tisza at Szolnok, making use of a bridge which was left intact and meeting no resistance. On 4 November Malinovsky's vanguards reached the south and east suburbs of the Hungarian capital. The next day headlines appeared in some London newspapers: "Budapest is falling. Russian tanks break into suburbs." But this was only the first phase of the battle. . . .

The second phase began when German infantry and artillery reached the capital by the road from Miskolcz, while big concentrations of enemy armour (three Panzer and two Panzer Grenadier Divisions) deployed between Gödöllo and Jaszbereny, threatening the Russian right

flank in the Czegled–Szolnok area. Despite heavy rain and the deep mud of the Hungarian fields, there were for several days sharp tank clashes to the north of the Czegled motor road. The enemy attacks in the direction of Szolnok were beaten off and he suffered serious losses, but any assault on Budapest was still impossible while this strong German group pressed on the Russian right flank. An extension of Malinovsky's offensive to the north, towards Miskolcz, became necessary. He therefore ordered his mobile forces under the command of General Pliev, which had recently cleared the enemy from the region of Nyiregyhaza, to force the Tisza, and this they did at Tisza-fured and Tiszapolgar, 30–35 miles south-east of Miskolcz (9 November). Overcoming enemy resistance Pliev was able on 12 November to reach Mezökovesd on the railway and road connecting Budapest with Miskolcz. This new development at once changed the situation to the east of the capital. The German active group at Jaszbereny was now between Pliev's force and that under the command of General Shumilov in the Szolnok–Czegled region. The Russians here resumed the attack and on 14 November captured Jaszbereny; this may be considered as ending the second phase of the battle when its fate was in the balance.

The German active group now held a line Budapest–Gödöllo–Hatvan–Gyöngyös–Eger, against which the Russians deployed from the outskirts of Budapest to those of Miskolcz. The third phase of the battle aimed at cutting off the Miskolcz Group from Budapest. On 18 November Gyöngyös was taken, and three days later Eger. On the 25th Hatvan was captured, while Miskolcz was almost completely encircled; finally this enemy stronghold, maintaining a link between the fronts in Hungary and Slovakia, was "liquidated." The part which Miskolcz had played passed now to the Slovak junction of Lucenec, 60 miles to the west, but the railway connecting Lucenec with Budapest was also cut. The fall of Miskolcz made possible a liaison between the north flank of Malinovsky's Group and the south flank of Petrov's Group. The latter, having crossed one after another the Tisza's tributaries (the Laborets, Bodrog

and Ondava), slowly progressed in the direction of Kosice, the last German stronghold in Eastern Slovakia.

Thus the Hungarian plain between the Tisza and the Danube was cleared of the enemy except for a small bridgehead which he held to the east and north of Budapest, near Monor, Gödöllo and Vacz (the first two places only 20 and 15 miles from the capital). The Great Alföld battle was won, but the Budapest battle was still to be decided. It promised to be hard, as the operations between the Tisza and the Danube gradually attracted all the Divisions of two Hungarian Armies (at least fifteen Divisions still able to fight) and almost all the German Divisions in Hungary (the same number, with a considerable proportion of armoured or mechanized units) into the Budapest sector. A serious effort was required from the Russian troops under the command of Malinovsky and Tolbukhin.

CHAPTER VIII

AUTUMN OPERATIONS IN THE BALTIC COUNTRIES AND ON THE BORDER OF EAST PRUSSIA. THE BALANCE OF 1944

Map No. 15. From mid-September to the end of the year there was an almost complete lull on the fronts held by Konev's, Rokossovsky's and Zakharov's Groups (on the last a small bridgehead was established in October, near Pultusk, beyond the Narev). In the Baltic countries, however, operations developed over a period of many weeks and a short but fierce battle took place in the second half of October on the East Prussian border.

Since the end of August both sides had been busily re-grouping in the Baltic theatre and both had increased their concentrations in its southern half. The reasons were the same: Finland was out of the war; "cease fire" was sounded on 4 September, and this gave Schörner sufficient pretext for a complete evacuation of Estonia. For the Russians it opened up the possibility of reinforcing

Marshal Govorov's troops near Narva with other units, formerly in Finland, and he was able to clear the enemy rearguards from the whole of Estonia without much support from the Third Baltic Group (General Maslennikov).

Govorov started his operations after 15 September; there was some fighting in the initial phase as the Germans needed time to embark troops and material in the Estonian ports. But once Rakevere (60 miles east of Tallinn) was captured on 19 September, the Russian advance was opposed only slightly and was astonishingly rapid. Taps, then Tallinn (Reval) were taken on the 21st, and not only were the ports of Hapsal and Pernov occupied in the next two or three days, but operations against the islands developed at a quick tempo, thanks to the assistance of the Russian Air Force and Navy. On 1 October Govorov's troops were on Moon, the next day on Dago, and on 5 October they landed on Oesel, where some resistance was met with but soon overcome.

In the meantime Maslennikov's operations were in full swing. On 15 September he concentrated his troops for a converging assault on the enemy positions at Valk, which nature itself had made into a stronghold, protected by rivers, marshes and dense forests. A substantial part of the German Eighteenth Army fought there (while Schörner had already transferred units of the Sixteenth Army to the south side of the Dvina). After four days of heavy fighting Valk fell and the Germans retreated along the railway and road running to Riga. Simultaneously with Maslennikov's troops, units of Eremenko's command attacked to the north-west of Madona and near the Dvina at Plavinas. The latter town, transformed like Valk into an enemy "bastion," this time fell, as Eremenko's assault was combined with operations on the south side of the Dvina.

In the new offensive by the three Russian Groups the most strategically important part was that of Bagramyan's First Baltic Group. His troops holding the line along the Aa (Lielupe), from Mitau (Jelgava) upstream to a point east of Bausk, were reinforced and operated with the support

of those of Eremenko's units holding positions on the south bank of the Dvina to the west of Jacobstadt. The attack started on 15 September and during the next three days achieved great success: the Russians forced the Aa, captured Bausk, forced the Nemunek (tributary of the Aa) and advanced towards the Jacobstadt–Mitau railway on a broad front, capturing Friedrichstadt (Jaun Jelgava) on the Dvina and Eckau. They progressed in the direction of Riga and reached points only fifteen miles from its southern suburbs.

It is difficult, however, to capture Riga from this direction if the defenders hold the right bank of the Dvina and the stretch of sea-coast covered from the east by the lower course of the Aa. The situation was the same as in 1916 when the Russians defended Riga against the Germans. For more than a year the Germans could not advance from their positions some 20 miles from Riga; they were able to force the Dvina only further upstream when, in 1917, the Russian Army had disintegrated. Now Schörner combined a "static" defence of the Riga positions with strong attacks on the Russian left flank near Mitau. A group of Panzer Divisions, which in August had so insistently attacked Shavli, appeared again, reorganized and reinforced, to the west of Mitau. They maintained a series of attacks for five or six days, but failed to achieve any result, and lost 400 tanks (among them scores of "Tigers"). It was clear, however, that under cover of these desperate attacks Schörner was transferring a still greater part of his forces from the north side of the Dvina to Courland. With Maslennikov's columns advancing on Riga from the north-east and Eremenko's troops already near the point where the Oger joins the Dvina, the Germans could not hope to hold the Latvian capital for long. Schörner wished to get his troops safely through "the bottleneck" between Mitau and the sea, where only a single coast road was at his disposal. He pursued the decision taken at the end of August: to concentrate the entire German Baltic Group in Courland and Western Lithuania, maintaining a firmly established operational connection with the German forces in East Prussia.

The latter condition was just what the Russian Command did not wish to see realized. If Schörner succeeded, there would be between Mitau and Tilsit a strong enemy group (nearly thirty Divisions) based on the Baltic ports (Windau, Libau and Memel) and East Prussia, and able by a counter-offensive in the direction of Kaunas to endanger any Russian attempt to cross the East Prussian border. It was therefore decided that Riga should be taken by Maslennikov and Eremenko (they both advanced steadily, if somewhat slowly, being hampered by difficult terrain), while Bagramyan's forces were to strike in the direction of the sea-coast between Libau and the mouth of the Niemen. The sea-coast was to be reached and by this move all land communications between the German Baltic Group and East Prussia would be cut.

The idea was excellent, but time might not be lost as every day more German units passed the "bottleneck," concentrating in Courland and building up a new front line running from Tukum to Kelmy (south-west of Shavli). By 20 September Bagramyan's offensive in the direction of Riga came to an end and his troops started a wide re-grouping, extending their *positions de départ* from the Mitau region to those of Shavli and further south, along the Dubissa. A column of Chernyakovsky's Group was to co-operate, advancing from Sredniki along the north bank of the Niemen. The Russian troops had to cover considerable distances, but their roads were better than those which Schörner could use, and Bagramyan was not hampered by any "bottleneck." Schörner's tank attacks near Mitau proved to be premature: they had exhausted themselves just when they might have been dangerous for Bagramyan's regrouping. The Russians won "the race for a new battlefield" which was of their own choice. They finished their concentrations on 4 October while the bulk of Schörner's concentrations was still between the Gulf of Riga and the Shavli–Libau railway, with only a few Divisions between this railway and the Niemen.

Bagramyan's offensive began on 5 October, and in four days the Russians advanced easily, in some places as much as 60 miles, on a broad front of 120 miles. The junction

of Mozheiki, Telshi, Worny, Kelmy and a number of villages were captured in this hilly and forested country called Samogitia. (Two German infantry Divisions and one Panzer were routed.) On 9 and 10 October Bagramyan scored decisive successes in the direction of the sea-coast and the Niemen. The river Minija was reached, then the railway linking Memel with Libau, and finally the Russian spearhead captured the small Lithuanian port of Palanga (20 miles north of Memel). Another of Bagramyan's columns advancing in the direction of Tilsit, after fierce fighting captured Tauroggen, only a few miles from the German frontier. And this frontier was reached further east by Chernyakovsky's column which captured Jurburg on the Niemen. The Russian communiqué marked the importance of these achievements: "Our troops cut off the route of retreat towards East Prussia of the enemy group which is still in the region Riga–Windau–Libau."

Thus Bagramyan accomplished his task in a week. It remained for him to extend the occupation of the sea-coast, and this was carried out in the direction of Libau. The enemy groups at Libau and at Memel were separated by some 35 miles of coast in Russian hands. On the Niemen the occupation of the north bank was gradually extended to the estuary, and Tilsit by 20 October was under Russian artillery fire. Meanwhile in the direction of Riga Maslennikov on 7 October fought with enemy rearguards at Sigulda (Segewold). Other columns advanced along the coast of the Gulf, and Eremenko's troops captured Oger, where the river of the same name joins the Dvina (8 October). Although Riga, well protected from the north and the east by rivers, marshes and lakes, could still be stubbornly defended, enemy resistance weakened; Schörner was obviously worried by the Russian break-through towards Memel, and he accelerated the evacuation of the Latvian capital. On 12 October the German lines were pierced at many points; the next day Riga was entered and cleared after some street fighting. The following week the Russians occupied the littoral region to Shlok and then Tukum. The campaign in the Baltic States was ended.

During the last months of the year the Russians made no serious attempt to take Libau and still less Windau. The Germans counter-attacked two or three times in the neighbourhood of Libau, but with no success. Ten weeks after their first attempt, the Russians succeeded in cutting off the German Armies occupying the Baltic States from East Prussia. During this time the Germans, at first on account of political, and later military considerations, had missed the opportunity to prevent this. In August their forces in the Baltic countries had even been reinforced and Schörner had then under his command, besides the Sixteenth and Eighteenth Armies, a Tank Army (the almost reconstituted Third Tank Army) and five or six local formations of divisional strength [1]—a total approaching thirty-five Divisions (although many of them incomplete). Not all these units were cut off at the small Memel bridge-head and the larger one in Courland. A certain number were evacuated by sea, from Estonia and later from Riga, while several Divisions had time to escape to East Prussia through Tilsit or by the Niemen ferries. There were hardly more than twenty Divisions left at Memel and in Courland by the end of October; during the following months their number diminished as they had possibilities of sea transport in the ports which they held. This process was however slow, and it diminished the operational value of the troops; and they were no longer a promptly available reserve for other theatres.

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Map No. 14. The Russian High Command was anxious to isolate Schörner's forces and occupy the right bank of the Niemen, as this was considered a necessary preliminary

[1] Although there were the Latvian and Estonian units which had fought together with the Red Army against the Germans during and after the enemy invasion of their countries, there remained a possibility of raising some formations willing to fight on the German side, in spite of past accounts between German landowners and Latvian or Estonian peasants. This may be explained by the fact that these Baltic Republics in the period between the two wars, dominated by farmers devoted to individualist economy, objected to any form of collectivism.

to an offensive on the East Prussian border. However, the operations of the three Russian Baltic Groups were longer than had been expected after their rapid successes in July. The preliminary conditions for an East Prussian offensive had not been realized until the middle of October. And at this date the transition from autumn to winter was already near at hand. The weather might deteriorate in two or three weeks and put serious obstacles in the way of operations in a region of water courses, lakes and marshes.

The delay was felt the more that the coming offensive was planned in accordance with the operational advantages of that sector of the East Prussian front where the "wet areas" were particularly extensive. The strategic idea at the base of this decision was right. When in August 1914 the Russian First Army had invaded East Prussia and defeated the German Eighth Army at Gumbinnen, it was natural for the Russians to choose the shortest route into the province, which was the route through the so-called "Insterburg gap," an open space between the Pregel, covering the outer defences of Königsberg fortress and the fortified region of the Masurian Lakes. The Russians had then penetrated deep into the "gap": they had crossed the Angerapp, captured Insterburg and reached the Aller where, however, they had stopped, having on their right the Königsberg forts of Labiau, Tapiau and Wehlau. They had paid little attention then to the region between Insterburg and Tilsit where their cavalry had penetrated and were only slightly opposed by the *Landsturm*, as the Germans thought it useless to defend this north sector before the line of the Dehme on which Labiau and Tapiau stand. Such was the situation in 1914, but it was quite different in 1944.

The Versailles Treaty allowed not only the existence of the Königsberg fortress but also an extension of this fortified region to the south and to the east. The Germans had created a new fortified region to the south of Königsberg, near Wormdt and Heilsberg, while to the east, even before the Nazi régime, they began to fortify the "gap," where open spaces practically disappeared as steel and concrete

works were constructed from the river Angerapp to Gumbinnen and between this town and Pilkallen,[1] 18 miles to the north-east. With Hitler at the head of the State and an armed conflict with the U.S.S.R. near at hand, Gumbinnen and Pilkallen were made strongholds of this new line, and with the development of the war two more lines were organized, one running from the Masurian Lakes to Goldap–Rominten–Stallupoennen, the other along the frontier. But it is curious that again, as in 1914, the enemy paid little attention to the region on both banks of the Sheshupe, i.e. to the north sector of this front. The reason was that the area between Pilkallen and the Niemen (some 25 miles) is extremely marshy and crossed by many rivulets; it seemed unsuitable for modern warfare. There was however another reason for this "neglect": even after Chernyakovsky's attack in August the Germans held a considerable salient on the Lithuanian side of the Sheshupe to the line running from a point near Vladislavov (Naumiestis in Lithuanian) to Shaki and the Niemen opposite Sredniki.

The situation was carefully studied by the Russians, and they planned the new attack, strongly supported by massed artillery, in the direction of Gumbinnen, simultaneously with a manœuvre on their left in the direction of Goldap, and on their right, across the Sheshupe. The latter direction, which gave a possibility of surprising the enemy, seemed particularly promising. As at the time of the attack Bagramyan's troops were expected to be on the Niemen opposite Tilsit, their support might be of great importance. But as a preliminary move to the manœuvre on his right Chernyakovsky had to conquer the region of Shaki on the east side of Sheshupe, and this was done by a sudden attack on 9–10 October. The enemy must not suspect that this was only a first step in an important

[1] German nationalism of the last years changed the names of these East Prussian towns which testified to their Lithuanian origin. Thus Stallupoennen became "Ebenrode," Pilkallen—"Schlossberg," Schillehner—"Wetterau," Lasdehnen—"Haselberg" and so on. Even the river Sheshupe became the "Ost Fluss." In our text and on the accompanying maps we use the "old" names.

operation, so a pause of several days followed before the beginning of the real offensive.

This offensive started on 16 October with a terrific bombardment by massed Russian artillery of the enemy positions covering the frontier near Vilkovishki, Vladislavov and Vyshtinets. That day and the following, the Russian infantry attacked in force and pierced the enemy lines at several points: the frontier station of Eydtkuhnen was captured and the Sheshupe was forced to the north of Vladislavov, where Schirwindt, on the German side, was taken. Artillery fire was maintained along the whole East Prussian front and simultaneously Russian guns and patrols were active on adjoining sectors, near Suvalki, Avgustov and even on the Narev, between Lomza and Serock. The Germans had the impression that East Prussia would be attacked both from the east and the south; but Russian activity on the Narev had only a diversionary meaning and was not developed during the following days.

On 18–20 October the battle raged on a wide front between the Sheshupe and the Avgustov forests. On their right the Russians consolidated the bridgehead across the Sheshupe at Schirwindt where heavy street fighting continued for twenty-four hours. The second German defensive line was attacked at Stallupoennen, Tolmingen and Goldap. Fierce fighting took place inside the salient made by the frontier to the north-east of Goldap. Using their bayonets the Russians here captured the Rominten Heide—formerly the hunting forest of Wilhelm II. The capture of Goldap was a still more important success and to the south the enemy lost the important height 310, while yet further on, the Russians took Suvalki and crossed the river Rospuda. The German Command began to be worried by this development, particularly on the 21st when Chernyakovsky's troops took the strongly defended Stallupoennen by storm; the second defensive line was broken, and driving westwards from Goldap Russian tanks reached the river Angerapp between Angerburg and Darkehmen.

The Germans, however, had strong reserves, as East

Prussia was defended not only by the reorganized Fourth Army but by a new formation near in strength to a tank Army: five tank Divisions had been concentrated here (two of them S.S. Panzer) before the Russian assault started. Moreover, although two defensive lines were broken, the third and principal, running from the Angerapp to Gumbinnen and Pilkallen, was powerfully fortified. The Russians could not develop their tactical success from Goldap as not far away from their left flank were the works of the Masurian Lakes fortress of Loetzen. They had to pierce the centre of the enemy line at Gumbinnen or capture its left flank "bastion" of Pilkallen. Both these towns were fortified carefully and skilfully. Pilkallen, however, could be outflanked from the north by a Russian move from Schirwindt towards the head-waters of the Inster and the Gumbinnen–Tilsit road. It seems that the Russian plan combined a frontal assault on Gumbinnen with a manœuvre to turn Pilkallen and cut the Gumbinnen–Tilsit road. Such a manœuvre could be supported by a Russian advance between Schirwindt and the Niemen or even by a Russian force on the right bank of the Niemen, opposite Tilsit and Ragnit.

But at Gumbinnen, despite several days' efforts, the enemy resisted strongly and held his line. As for a manœuvre north of Pilkallen, its promising possibilities were frustrated by heavy rainfall which made the marshy ground to the north-west of Schirwindt impracticable for the movement of tanks. Meanwhile the German tanks counter-attacked in force on firmer ground towards the line of the Rominte and south-west of Goldap. Intensive fighting continued here on 22–24 October, with considerable losses to both sides, but without any definite results. By 25 October the Russian Command decided to stop the offensive as the conditions of the change from autumn to winter proved extremely unfavourable in the "wet" region, the only direction through which the strong fortifications of the Gumbinnen–Pilkallen line could be turned. Enemy Panzers continued their now more or less sporadic attacks to the end of October and even later, but the Russians held all the points they had captured during the first week of

the operation: Schirwindt, Stallupoennen, Rominten Heide and the heights near Goldap (which remained in "no man's land"). Further to the south, Suvalki and the valley of the Rospuda were also held by the Russians; they cleared the Germans from the Avgustov forests and took the town of Avgustov.

Chernyakovsky's assault broke two strong enemy lines, but the third and main line defending "the Insterburg gap" stood firm with its two bastions, Gumbinnen and Pilkallen. The difficulties of a frontal assault were not unexpected by the Russian Command, but, if an offensive was nevertheless decided, it was because the Gumbinnen–Pilkallen "bolt position" could be turned from the north by an advance towards the Gumbinnen–Tilsit road. However, such a manœuvre could not be realized in the weather conditions of late October and early November. The operation started too late, perhaps one month later than was desirable. And the reason for this was a delay in the development of the campaign in the Baltic countries which was brought to an end only in mid-October.

The strategic idea for the manœuvre which could not be realized in October was right; and the Russian Command realized it later, under winter conditions. When in January 1945 Chernyakovsky's march on Königsberg began, the first points taken by the Russians were Schiliehnen, Lasdehnen, Pilkallen, then the frozen marshes were passed and the Gumbinnen–Tilsit road was reached, Tilsit fell and the "bolt position" in the "gap" was turned.

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The year 1944 brought the strategic decision of the war against Germany. Once the concerted Allied offensive operations were decided and carried out, the enemy had nothing to oppose except delaying action. This delaying action had no strategic meaning whatever and its only reasons were purely political. The enemy wished to gain time not for strategic but for political manœuvring, which, however, had such slight chance of success that it was not even tried seriously. So the delaying action, being aimless, became an aim in itself.

It is significant that the principal factor in the enemy's delaying action was no longer the strength of his Armies. He relied now on the vast distances which the Russians had to cover or on the difficulties of the Allied landing in the West. He imagined himself defended by rivers—by the Dnieper, Rhine, Danube—or by the mountains—the Apennines, the Carpathians. Vast distances, sea communications, rivers and mountains could certainly increase the "logistic" difficulties of an offensive and so slow it down. The fortified defensive lines, particularly those which had been solidly built years before, as for instance, the "Siegfried line" or the defences of East Prussia, played their part also in the delaying action, not so much because they could be defended, but because of the long preparations to be made by an advancing adversary which their existence necessitated. From this point of view the quality of troops defending these lines was of only secondary importance; their mere presence behind the barbed wire, mine-fields and concrete pillboxes was already sufficient "proof" that the line really existed and needed a certain amount of preparation to be assaulted. But it is no less significant that the enemy, relying on all kinds of obstacles to delay the Allied advance, had not at his disposal the most effective weapon for increasing the "logistic" difficulties for huge hostile Armies crossing the sea or covering long distances over the land: the *Luftwaffe* was almost completely absent from the resources of which the enemy made use in his delaying action. And its "ersatz," the clumsy "secret weapons," were so ineffective that their use was justified only for "psychological warfare."

The deterioration of the *Luftwaffe* was the outstanding phenomenon of 1944. The deterioration of the German Army was less obvious but not less fatal. Of particular importance to the general course of the war were, as has already been described, the losses suffered by the enemy during the Russian winter campaign of 1943–44. Whole Armies disappeared as strategic units (the Eighth, Sixth, Seventeenth and one in the Northern zone), while three tank Armies were brought to such a state by the costly "Manstein's style" counter-attacks that, except the Third

Tank Army in the Central zone, not a single tank Group was of the full strength of the former tank Armies. Such a situation on the eve of the Allied landing prevented the Germans in the West from forming an active reserve there in due force and in due time. And the absence of this reserve, together with the complete domination of the Allies in the air, made the enemy retreat catastrophic and his losses in prisoners appalling. Thus with the losses suffered from June to November on the East Front (several Armies disappeared again), the total enemy deficit for 1944 (killed, disabled and prisoners, in Italy, in the West and during the Russian campaigns of the year) reached a record figure higher than 3,000,000.

The two waves of the *levée en masse*, one in the spring and the other at the end of the summer, could scarcely cover more than 70 per cent of this deficit in quantity, while the deterioration the *Reichsheere* suffered in quality may be easily understood. With such facts in mind how are we to explain a certain "recovery" of the German fighting capacity which could be observed on different theatres and at different dates, the earliest instance of which was Model's counter-attacks near Siedlce and the latest the Ardennes counter-offensive and the struggle for Budapest? Before replying to this question it must be stated that the "recovery" brought no strategic results and that its importance was only limited and short-lived, and still in the nature of a delaying action. Nevertheless these episodes of active resistance put up by an army in a state of complete decline need an explanation.

It was not certainly a result of the *levée en masse* which brought the *Reichsheere* for the most part only "recruits" of very doubtful value. But together with this last phase of German mobilization there proceeded in 1944 a mobilization of the armed forces of the Nazi party—the first general call-up of the S.S. for fighting in actual war.

It must never be forgotten that Hitler promised the Germans not only a victorious war but victory at small cost. This was the background of the response with which Hitler's appeal was met by the German masses. Therefore a general mobilization was intentionally avoided

in 1939–40. This corresponded, however, with the doctrine of the Blitzkrieg led by troops specially equipped and trained but limited in number. It is true that a certain number of the reserve Divisions were mobilized even for the Polish campaign. But they were supposed to be used as troops of occupation and to have no serious part in the battles. The prospects of a Russian campaign made Hitler considerably increase the number of his Divisions (with a great proportion of those which were to be used as troops of occupation in the West and in the "conquered" part of Russia). But still it was not a general mobilization and the burden of the war was not yet felt by the whole population. The first Russian campaign brought the Germans no easy victory, but great losses, which the winter of 1941–42 increased on a scale which seriously alarmed the *Ober-Kommando*. The reserve Divisions were used now as fighting units; and the war took on a different aspect from that which had been expected by the masses.

Among the Nazis there was probably a certain reluctance to recognize the facts as they really were, and mobilization was extended only cautiously. In the campaign of 1942 a large proportion of the satellite troops (Rumanians, Hungarians and Italians) were used on the Russian battlefield, while the number of the best German Divisions, if still considerable, was less in comparison with 1941. Despite a severe lesson the new offensive was planned again as a more or less easy adventure. And the result was Stalingrad and the winter retreat of 1942–43. . . . This terrible blow (the disappearance of whole Divisions, Army Corps and Armies) radically changed the situation. In spite of the risk to his "popularity" and "prestige," whether he liked it or not, Hitler had to make the mobilization really general and so disclose to the Germans the kind of war in which they were involved.

Though in 1942 (and even in 1941) several S.S. units were already fighting at the front, their performances had the character of a "voluntary sacrifice." It would have been strange, in fact, not to see on a battlefield the men who "personified" the Nazi ideology with its glorification of

war. It was necessary also to show an example to those foreign "enthusiasts" of the Nazi doctrine who were employed in the S.S. formations as "Greater Reich," "Westland," "Vikings" and others. But, generally speaking, Hitler would have preferred to spare the S.S. till the end of the war, the issue of which he regarded until 1943 with a certain optimism. He was obliged, however, to admit an extension of the S.S. formations. The operational plans already made use of them, grouping them as shock units during the battle of Kursk and during Manstein's counter-attacks near Kiev.

The same reasons which made the Nazi Government proclaim a *levée en masse* in 1944 created the situation when total mobilization of the S.S. could not be avoided. This process was further accelerated by the "events of 20 July" which proved that some units of the *Reichsheere* might be unreliable not only from a military but also from a political point of view. Soon it resulted in the creation of a separate S.S. Army, the units of which were for operational purposes inserted among the units of the German Army where and when the fighting was expected to be particularly stiff. The number of these units rapidly grew and reached a figure of between 30 and 40 (the foreign S.S. formations included). The number of the S.S. Panzer Divisions (fifteen or sixteen) perhaps equalled the number of old "Panzers" still available on the battlefields, and to them S.S. Panzer Grenadiers were added; there also appeared a few S.S. mobile Divisions, and even simple infantry and one or two cavalry units. The latest development on the same line was the formation of some ten divisions of "Parachutist troops" (without any parachutes or planes!) for which the "Hitler Youth" (boys fifteen or sixteen years old) were conscripted, enticed by "parachutists' glory" and perhaps by the promise of landing in England.

The campaigns of 1945 in the different theatres showed the futility of the efforts of a small "Desperadoes' army" to influence the course of military events. But the S.S. units which had reached Model on the Vistula, Schörner near Shavli and the Fourth Army on the border of East

Prussia (or later, in Hungary and some sectors of the Western Front) might contribute to a temporary "recovery." Any reinforcements in sufficient strength at that time would have produced the same effect. But the Army had no available reserves of good quality, while the S.S. Panzers, well equipped with tanks of the latest model, were, if not particularly skilful or experienced, at least ready to fight as a desperado fights—to the bitter end.

CHAPTER IX

THE GENERAL SITUATION ON THE EVE OF THE LAST WINTER CAMPAIGN

December 1944

In December 1944 the Budapest operation by Malinovsky's and Tolbukhin's Groups, in which Rumanian, Yugoslav and Bulgarian units took part, developed fully, supported on Czechoslovak territory by troops belonging to General Petrov's command. On all other sectors of the Russian front there was fighting, but only on a small scale and of a purely local character. In the meantime huge Russian forces everywhere between the Baltic and the Carpathians were regrouping in preparation for the winter offensive.

As has been described in Chapter IV (and for the reasons there indicated) the Russian Armies in the summer of 1944 were so distributed that their "centre of gravity" was somewhat nearer the Northern zone than could be explained by its importance for further operations towards the Reich. Between the Niemen and the Gulf of Finland, Bagramyan's, Eremenko's and Maslennikov's Groups operated with some units of Govorov's command, while others of Govorov's units, together with those of Meretskov's Group, were still between the Gulf of Finland and the Arctic Ocean. Meanwhile on the front between the Niemen and the Carpathians, i.e. nearer to the direct and

shortest route to Germany, were Chernyakovsky's, Zakharov's, Rokossovsky's and Konev's Groups, with Petrov's Group on their left (still uncompleted). Moreover Chernyakovsky's and part of Zakharov's Groups faced the strong fortress of East Prussia, to attack which would require a considerable concentration of troops and material. So long as such a distribution of Russian forces existed, there was no possibility of a decisive and final offensive in the direction of Germany by the shortest routes across Poland. For an operation of such magnitude there were needed not only reserves formed inside Russia, but also fully equipped and experienced troops liberated by the completion of all active operations between the Niemen and the Murman coast.

Peace with Finland and isolation in the Libau–Windau region of the last enemy group in the Baltic States at last permitted the movement of troops in the southerly direction, though not before November. While the First Baltic Group (perhaps somewhat reduced) remained to observe the Germans isolated in Courland, the Second and Third Baltic Groups, as well as the Leningrad Group, were disbanded, and the troops which had fought under the command of Eremenko, Maslennikov and Govorov joined the Armies deployed between the Niemen and the Carpathians. For these new concentrations approximately two and a half months were available and were hardly sufficient, having regard to the scarcity of railways in good working order. Roads were largely used, but only a few (except such principal ones as the Leningrad–Dvinsk–Kaunas road) were practicable in November and December. Fortunately Russian road transport had greatly improved during 1944, thanks to the considerable number of light and heavy auto-vehicles imported by the Allies.

Vital for the preparation of the new Russian offensive, and still more for its rapid course, this form of Allied co-operation must not be under-estimated.

General Chernyakovsky's Group, already strong, was however reinforced, particularly with heavy and long-range artillery. To its left the former Zakharov Group

deployed on the Bobr–Narev sector was almost doubled in strength, and put under the command of Marshal Rokossovsky. His own Group on the Vistula was handed over to Marshal Zhukov's command, being so reorganized and reinforced as to become the new "centre of gravity" of the whole Russian front. On its left many new units joined Marshal Konev's Group (his new Chief of Staff was General Sokolovsky, formerly Commander of the Group which had taken Smolensk). It is probable that each of these four Groups consisted of three Armies in the front line, with at least four Armies in reserve, behind the sectors held by Konev and Zhukov. Many units reached the regions of concentration only after the middle of January, when the great offensive had already started, and out of these units were mostly formed reserve Armies, which took part in the drive to the Oder.

As each Army might be ten or twelve Divisions strong, the Russian concentrations between the Niemen and the Carpathians reached possibly a total approaching 200 Divisions. When the offensive began the enemy claimed that some 300 Russian Divisions were in action, but this could be true only if, as well as the Divisions concentrated between the Niemen and the Carpathians, others, belonging to Petrov's, Malinovsky's Tolbukhin's and Bagramyan's Groups (the latter near Memel and in Courland) were taken into account. It does not seem that Malinovsky's and Tolbukhin's Groups, taken together, consisted of more than five Armies (including twelve Rumanian and four or six Yugoslav and Bulgarian Divisions), while Petrov's troops formed an Army on each side of the Carpathians. In these southern areas, the very long and difficult (particularly in winter) communications did not allow of massive concentrations and even limited the strength of Armies already in the field. It may be presumed that for the same reason Marshal Tolbukhin had not at hand by 1 December even all these units of his command which had been with him in Bessarabia in August. Difficulties of communications and supplies made the density of concentrations somewhat different to the north of the Carpathians from that between the Carpathians and the

Drava. Although the front line winding through Sub-Carpathian Rus, Slovakia and Hungary was only 25 per cent shorter than the distance between the Niemen and the Carpathians, the troops concentrated in the southern area represented something like 40 per cent of the numerical strength of concentrations in the northern area, and still less if heavy material be taken into account.

Logistic considerations could be neither avoided nor neglected, and such considerations determined the distribution of forces between the two areas separated by the Carpathians. And this, in its turn, predetermined the solution of the strategic problem faced by the Russian Supreme Command. It is possible that after the brilliant and rapid success of Malinovsky and Tolbukhin in August-September an idea of deep penetration into the territory of the Reich by the route passing through Budapest, Bratislava and Vienna was seriously considered. The enemy Armies in Rumania were completely destroyed, the German and Hungarian reserves seemed scarce, and any effective resistance on the way to Budapest unlikely. Besides, among the Russian staff officers there were always traditional supporters of the idea that "the route to Berlin passes through Vienna." However, the events of October-November proved that, if the enemy forces were in fact limited and arrived on that front by "small packets," the Russian advance was slowed down by difficult country on both sides of the Tisza's right tributaries, while Marshal Tolbukhin's troops were only gradually concentrating on the northern bank of the Danube. So in November Marshal Malinovsky's Group fought alone on the approaches to Budapest from the south-east and north-east, along a front line more than 350 miles long (from the region of Miskolcz to that of Subotica). Malinovsky still won the battle of the Great Alföld (see Chapter VII), but his forces were certainly not sufficient to storm Budapest. And as the enemy had time by 1 December to concentrate not inconsiderable reinforcements round this vital point, an easy and rapid advance "in the Vienna direction" could hardly be expected in the next two months.

The Russian Supreme Command then decided in favour

of a major effort on those sectors of the front where concentrations could be more easily realized and lines of communication with the rear were shorter and more efficient. At the same time the sector between the region to the south of Warsaw and the bend of the upper Vistula (near Sandomierz) in the case of success opened the shortest route to the Oder through Czestochowa. In a reverse direction the decisive manœuvre of the German Tenth Army (von Reichenau) during the campaign of 1939 might be repeated. As the enemy was presumed to understand the strategic importance of this direction, serious resistance and considerable forces must be expected in the area on both sides of the upper Vistula, well adapted for defence and protected by a system of fortified lines. But the Russian Command not only raised the strength of Konev's Group to four Armies with one in reserve: on his right, with the greatest secrecy, were concentrated three Armies (with one in reserve) under the command of Marshal Zhukov himself. These Armies would give the Russian attack an overwhelming strength and their action would promise a swift extension of the offensive in the direction of Radom–Tomaszow–Lodz, completely turning Warsaw from the south. With the great weight of Russian concentrations between the mouth of the Pilica and the main Rzeszow–Tarnow–Cracow road, the enemy defences in his "Vistula Front" must crumble and open wide breaches for a swift and deep penetration by Russian mobile columns.

In deciding on this manœuvre the Russian Command had need of a guarantee against any enemy action from East Prussia, directed on the right flank of Marshal Zhukov's advancing Armies. And what could be a better guarantee than an offensive on the largest possible scale against East Prussia, started by Chernyakovsky's and Rokossovsky's Groups simultaneously with Zhukov's and Konev's operations? Althought the forces of these Groups were now so considerable that even conquest of the whole of the "East Prussian fortress" might be considered, the primary strategic object of the Rokossovsky–Chernyakovsky offensive was to isolate East Prussia and all the enemy forces there. Once shut up in this "fortress" and cut off

from other regions of the Reich, they would not be able to interfere with the Russian march in "the Berlin direction."

Having regard to the circumstances and practical requirements of the situation the Russian operational plan was simple and precise in its general outlines. There was certainly nothing in it that might not have been guessed by the German *Ober-Kommando*. It will be seen, however, that what was in fact expected in the East by Hitler's H.Q. depended again on "his own" particular ideas concerning the last phase of the German war.

In November 1944 Hitler's military advisers believed (or seemed to believe) that they had taken precautions against any dangerous development of the Russian offensive, at least for a period of two or three months. Chernyakovsky's attacks on the border of East Prussia ceased (see Chapter VIII), Malinovsky's advance in the direction of Budapest brought no decisive results. Judged with an excessive optimism, the situation in the East seemed to favour some new and "bold" plans in the West. In fact preparations there started for what became known later as "Rundstedt's offensive." In the first half of December enemy attention was definitely directed to the West, where his secret concentrations continued, absorbing not only "picked troops" (which had to form the new Sixth Tank Army) but also a number of Divisions freshly constituted to replace troops of better quality, which entered the active Group under the command of Field-Marshal Model. And after some initial successes in the Ardennes, German hopes revived that in the West (and not in the East) "something must happen" and in a miraculous way would avert from the Reich the inevitable collapse.

Although these hopes were only short-lived and the failure in the Ardennes could not but be clear to the *Ober-Kommando* by the last days of December, it was still not the moment to pay more attention to the front in the East. The battle for Budapest was raging and on the eve of the New Year the Hungarian capital was completely encircled by the Russians (see Chapter X); but only very few Divisions were moved from the West (from Italy and Holland) to the East. Field-Marshal Guderian, now Hitler's

"representative" in the East, was ordered to move several more Divisions from the Vistula front to Hungary—an extraordinary decision, as the Russian concentrations on Konev's sector were already known to the enemy in December; early in January the German commentators discussed them, optimistically explaining to the public that a Russian attack in the direction of Cracow (simultaneous with the operations against Budapest) had been in preparation, but had not been realized because of unfavourable weather conditions. . . .

Curiously enough the same commentators admitted "some concentrations" at the Russian bridgeheads on the Vistula, at Pulavy-Kasimierz and Magnuszow, but in their opinion this was only a diversionary move. The Germans expected an attack by Konev's Group in the direction of Cracow, but they did not expect the existence of Zhukov's great concentrations, nor did they expect an attack on a big scale in the Radom region. *They had their own idea of possible Russian plans for the winter campaign.* The opening of a great offensive by Malinovsky and Tolbukhin in the direction of Budapest seemed to confirm this idea. The Russians obviously wished to march through Budapest on Bratislava and Vienna, and this seemed to be their principal effort. Combined with it, a strong attack by Konev in the direction of Cracow and further westwards to the "Moravian Gap" was expected, accompanied perhaps with some diversionary action on his right. Such was a firmly-established enemy conception of Russian plans for the winter offensive; it was suggested by an underestimate of the Russian forces simultaneously available to strike on different sectors of the front.

Working on this idea of the *Ober-Kommando*, enemy forces on the Eastern front were massed in three areas: (1) In Hungary and the adjacent part of Slovakia; (2) In western Galicia in the direction of Cracow and in the upper Vistula bend near Sandomierz; (3) in East Prussia. In Hungary and Slovakia were concentrated three Hungarian Armies and three German (the "reconstituted" Eighth and Sixth with the once more re-formed Second Tank); while one more, the Seventeenth Army, reconstituted after

the Crimean disaster, was forming in Austria. Although all these seven Armies were below normal strength, enemy concentrations here were not far below the numerical strength of the Armies under the command of Malinovsky and Tolbukhin, supported on their right by one of Petrov's Armies. The relation of forces here promised a serious struggle.

On both sides of the upper Vistula, the Germans had originally the First Tank and the Second Armies. As the menace of the Russian attack on this sector increased, the Fourth Tank Army, which had been formed in Model's times near Warsaw, was moved southwards to the region south of the Pilica, where it played the part of strategic reserve behind the left flank of the upper Vistula sector. This Army was, however, quite different from what it had been under Model: the S.S. Divisions had gone to the West in the new Sixth Tank Army, other Divisions were transported in November to Hungary. And by the New Year came an order to entrain at least two Divisions, again for Hungary. In the meantime, in the rear of this sector the Ninth Army (completely destroyed in July 1944) was being reconstituted. So the forces available by the middle of January were hardly sufficient to resist Konev's Armies alone, and were certainly insufficient if Konev's Armies were supported by one of Petrov's Armies on the left and two of Zhukov's Armies on the right.

In East Prussia the enemy was in greater strength, as both the Third Tank and the Fourth Armies were in good order, and elements of Schirner's two Armies, formerly in the Baltic States, succeeded in arriving there to form (with the reserves) a new Army. Facing these forces between the Baltic Sea and the Bobr (and they were behind solid fortifications), Chernyakovsky had a formidable task before him. But further to the south there was a strange gap in the enemy dispositions; the sector between the Bobr and the Pilica was held by a single Army—the freshly reconstituted Twelfth Army. At first this Army held Warsaw and the line of the Narev, but when the Fourth Tank Army was moved southwards, the Twelfth took over the sector between Warsaw and the Pilica. This Army,

moreover, was composed of units of rather doubtful fighting value. It was thought, perhaps, that its sector was an "easy" one, being covered by mighty rivers, the Vistula and Narev. In the rear a new Army, the Twenty-First, was to be formed, but it came into existence only when the German front was already hopelessly broken. It may be imagined what happened to this Twelfth Army, when on its right Zhukov's Armies outflanked Warsaw, while Rokossovsky's Armies took over the offensive across the Narev. . . .

An erroneous conception of the Russian operational plans was responsible for the disposition of the enemy Armies. There were, however, other powerful reasons, which made any enemy attempt to face coming events deficient. *The Germans simply had not adequate forces to carry on the war in the West and in the East.* The widely publicized "Rundstedt Offensive" could not be but an abortive effort. The *levée en masse*, ruthlessly practised by the end of 1944, seemed to give the enemy a large number of conscripts—something like three millions. In imagination or on paper a series of "new Armies" was planned to reach a total of thirty, besides the Hungarian units, contingents of Italian "Republican Fascists" and the like. But what could be the fighting value of these Armies, constituted or "reconstituted" from Divisions in which the battalions of *Volkssturm* amounted to 50 per cent and sometimes even 75 per cent?

As the *Volkssturm* men were mostly used locally, they were on the Russian front, at the beginning, less numerous than in the West; and the East Prussian *Volkssturm* fought better than their comrades elsewhere. There were still good fighting units, certainly in the tank Armies and among some infantry Divisions in Hungary, or in the Fourth Army, but not much fighting spirit was to be expected from freshly formed or "reconstituted" Armies, such as the Ninth, Twelfth, Seventeenth or Twenty-First, with their great percentage of raw and reluctant conscripts. To those who were able to see beyond the figures on paper, by the middle of January the enemy collapse seemed much nearer than was generally expected.

CHAPTER X

THE BUDAPEST OPERATION

29 November 1944—13 February 1945

Map No. 19. As has already been said, the enemy concentrations in Hungary must be explained by the *Ober-Kommando's* fear that the principal Russian effort would be at once directed towards Bratislava and Vienna. There were, however, other reasons which made vital for the enemy, not only the defence of Budapest, but also the protection of Hungarian territory to the north-east and south-west of the capital. Hungary, for centuries a "classical" agricultural country, had begun industrialisation in a mild form by 1900, and after the First World War the process was somewhat accelerated. The country lost a large part of its territory, but was still in possession of some areas which were favourable for industrial development.

The Hungarians showed remarkable energy in creating industrial installations in Budapest, in the towns of Western Hungary and in the Valley of the Sayo, near Miskolcz. In the latter region metallurgical works were developed, thanks to the coal mines nearby, in the Matra Hills, while other coal mines were exploited in the south, near Pecs (the Meczek Hills), and oilfields were opened in the Nagy Kanisza region. After 1930 all this industrial work proceeded with the help of German capital and German technicians; the course of political events soon made Hungarian industry a war industry of some importance. By transforming Hungary into a satellite country, the Third Reich obtained not only its rich agricultural potential but additional industrial possibilities. These were forcibly developed during the war when Miskolcz became an important centre of war industry (with factories extending into the valley of the Ipel, annexed by the Hungarians), while the western towns, Gyor, Sopron, Szombathely,

produced military equipment and the Nagy Kanisza oilfields raised their production to over one million tons a year. Hungarian installations were joined into one industrial system, with the factories, mines and oilfields considerably extended in neighbouring Austria. Their geographical situation made them less vulnerable to Anglo-American air attacks than any other industrial region supplying the enemy armed forces.

The geographical position of the industrial regions which he was to defend made the strategic problem particularly difficult for the Commander of the Eighth German Army, General Friesner, to whom had been entrusted all the operations in Hungary and Slovakia. His principal task was to defend Budapest on the shortest and most direct route to Vienna; but he was also responsible for the industrial region in the Sayo valley, near Miskolcz, some 100 miles to the north-east of the capital, and for that of Pecs and Nagy Kanisza, the same distance to the south-west. Moreover, he had to protect Košice in Slovakia, as General Petrov's columns, after capturing this town, could outflank the industrial area. And in the south he was expected to maintain liaison across the Drava with the German Divisions still in Croatia and Bosnia. Thus General Friesner had at the same time to concentrate his troops near Budapest and to extend their front along a line more than 200 miles long.

The *Ober-Kommando* with its usual "optimism" considered the German and Hungarian troops under Friesner's command sufficient. On paper these represented an impressive force: three German Armies, three Hungarian Armies, and one more German Army forming in Austria as the reserve. But all the German Armies, the Eighth, the Sixth and the Second Tank, were being reconstituted, and this process continued through November and December. Perhaps only the Eighth ever completed its reorganization. As for the Hungarian Armies, the First was sufficiently stable, but some of its Divisions were taken as "nuclei" round which the Second and the Third Armies were to be formed. And the Second, when still in process of formation, had to fight against Malinovsky in November,

Little Carpathians
Hory Inove
Vtačnik
Banska Bystrica
Zvolen
Hron
Slovenske Krusnohory
Krupina
Lucene
Bratislava
Vah
Nitra
Nitra
Levice
Ipel
Salgo Tarjan
Nove Zamki
Csola
Ipoly Sao
Balassa Gyarmata
Magyarszal
Ramhany
Tepkeh
Nograd
Tatoslovenska Nizina (Little Alfold)
From Vienna
Danube
Esztergom
Komarno
Vac
Szt. Andra
Gyor
Godollo
Uj Pest
Budapest
Bacony
Vertes H.
Bicske
Mor
Ercsi
Pape
Bacony Hills
Foherva
Veszprim
L. Velencze
Czegled
Kun-szt-Miklos
From Szombathely
Lepseny
Herszegfolva
Balaton
Kecskemet
Duna Foldvar
Fonyod
Bol. Sz Gyorgy
Tomosi
Paloe
Kis Koros
Kaloczo
Szekszard
Nagy Koniszo
Nagy Bajom
Kaposvar
Dombovar
Kapos
Kis Kun Halas
Bartoczek
Mecsek H.
Szigetvar
Pecs
Baja
Mohacs
Duna Szebeso
Suboticа
Barcs
Drava
Sombor
Apatin
From Zagreb
Osijek

was defeated and suffered heavy losses; several units practically ceased to exist.

Another difficulty for Friesner was created by Malinovsky's success in the November "Great Alföld" battle, his direct threat to Budapest and his capture of Miskolcz, Eger and the Matra Hills. The situation became so critical that the enemy command had to rush single Divisions from the German and Hungarian Armies to those points of the front where danger was imminent. As has been described, only the arrival of a Tank Group temporarily saved the enemy situation in the Budapest sector (see Chapter VII). In November and early in December some tank units still held the line near Budapest, while others were reorganizing in the rear, near Komarno, where further complements and material were expected. Other enemy Armies were in much the same situation; Divisions of the German Eighth and the Hungarian First were partly between Košice and the Matra region, partly near Budapest; Divisions of the German Sixth Army and of two other Hungarian Armies were partly near Budapest and partly on the line of the Danube. There were no "Army sectors" on that front: Friesner organized his Divisions not in "Armies"

MAP 19

THE BUDAPEST OPERATION, 29th NOVEMBER, 1944—13th FEBRUARY, 1945

Front line by the end of November

Advance of Tolbukhin's column (to 9th December)

Tolbukhin's and Malinovsky's columns advancing (9th December–30th December)

Front line of 1st January, 1945

German counter attacks in January

Front line to the north of Lake Balaton stabilised by 1st February

Motor roads

Railways

Hills

Marshes

Scale: 35 miles to 1 inch

but in detachments, the strength and constitution of which was variable.

The Russian attack in November and the piecemeal arrival of reserves were responsible for the concentration of some thirty Divisions (half of them German and half Hungarian) near Budapest, while twelve German and Hungarian Divisions held what remained of the north-eastern industrial region and six "observed" the long line of the Danube to the point where it is joined by the Drava. As long as Malinovsky was acting alone these forces were sufficient to oppose him. But when Tolbukhin finished his concentrations and took over the offensive, the situation was completely changed. It must be stated, however, that Friesner had several points in his favour. Although "reconstituted," his German Armies had a greater percentage of reliable units than some of the Armies on the Russian or the Western front. There were few *Volkssturm* battalions in Hungary; they were used to form the Seventeenth Army in Austria.

The Hungarian units showed a good fighting spirit now when defending their own capital and the areas of their own country still free from Russian and Rumanian occupation. But a far more important advantage to the German-Hungarians was the quite exceptional defensive strength of Budapest. This really "natural fortress" will be described later. Here it is sufficient to state that no other European capital, no other vast and modern town had topographical features so well adapted for resistance. And in fact the "Budapest Operation" which started on 29 November came to an end only on 13 February. After being completely invested, Budapest still resisted for more than six weeks.

On 29 November advanced parties of Tolbukhin's troops began to cross the Danube by their usual improvised means at several points to the north and south of Mohacs —a battlefield fatal for Hungary during the Turkish conquest of the 16th century. To the south of Mohacs an extremely difficult region had to be traversed—similar to those *plavni* of the Dnieper in which Tolbukhin had fought near Nikopol in February 1944 (see Chapter II). There is little doubt that some of Tolbukhin's men who now

crossed the Danube had behind them the experience of crossing the Sivash and the Dniester. The enemy organized defence of the high causeway parallel to the river, but during the next two days the Russians captured Battaczek, Duna Szekeso and Mohacs, all on the west side of the Danube. Tolbukhin was now able to act in accordance with the plans of the Russian Supreme Command.

These ingeniously conceived plans had as their first object not only the crossing of the Danube, but an impressive diversionary offensive towards Pecs and Kaposvar, so as to create a menace to the oilfields of Nagy Kanisza and suggest to the enemy that the Russians intended to march towards Austria through the gap between Lake Balaton and the Drava. Knowing well that the enemy had only very limited forces to defend this southern region, the Russian Command presumed that reinforcements would be immediately taken from the German–Hungarian concentrations near Budapest and that the defence of the capital would lose something in strength. Simultaneously with the advance of one of Tolbukhin's Armies to the west, another Army was to advance from the Danube crossings to the north, parallel to the river, and to reach Lake Velencze, midway between the northern end of Lake Balaton and the Danube, and only some 30 miles south-west of Budapest.

Repeating his manœuvre in the Crimea (after the crossing of the Sivash) Tolbukhin on 1 December sent on ahead all the mobile forces which could reach the west bank of the river. This small column of light tanks and lorried infantry surprised and captured the important industrial centre of Pecs, meeting with scarcely any resistance. Enemy confusion on this sector was great: two Hungarian Divisions holding the Danube line to the south of Battaczek were scattered and involved a German Division in their headlong flight. On 2 December the Russian mobile column from Pecs crossed the Meczek Hills, descending on Kaposvar (some 50 miles from the Danube). In the meantime another column of Russian light forces, moving from Battaczek, approached Dombovar, and a new group of light tanks which reached Pecs switched south-west to

Barcs on the Drava and to Szigetvar. On 3 December Kaposvar and Dombovar were in Russian hands.

Greatly alarmed, the enemy command threw into the battles all the reserves then available at Nagy Kanisza: one Hungarian Division and one German—the 71st, with a good fighting reputation, which had just arrived from Italy. On 4 and 5 December there was heavy fighting to the west and north of Kaposvar. But the Russians had been reinforced, and they took Szigetvar, Nagy Bajoma (only 20 miles from the oilfields), progressing also in the direction of Fonyod on Lake Balaton. A fresh Russian mobile column which passed through Tomasi had already reached the lake in that region. During the next three days the arrival of considerable enemy reserves (at least six Divisions) on the sector between Lake Balaton and the Drava was observed by the Russians. The German-Hungarians several times counter-attacked, but had no success, since one of Tolbukhin's Armies now in full strength held the Lake Balaton–Kaposvar–Szigetvar–Drava line. Further advance to the west was no part of the Russian plans, and the result of the diversionary thrust towards Kaposvar was fully obtained.

Although alarmed by this Russian move, the enemy command might be expected to understand its real meaning. In the very first days of December, simultaneously with the advance on Kaposvar and Dombovar, other mobile units were moved north along the Danube. They were the vanguard of Tolbukhin's second Army. Two Hungarian Divisions which held garrisons at different points were completely surprised by the appearance of Russian tanks and mobile artillery on their side of the river. Some of the Hungarian troops surrendered, others fled in disorder. On 2 December the Russians occupied Szekeszar and Paks; a day or two later Düna Földvar was taken, and Tolbukhin's units concentrated between this point and Paks. On the 5th strong Russian columns began their march, on the left towards Lepseny (near the northern end of Lake Balaton), in the centre towards Lake Velencze, on the right along the motor road leading to Buda. On 7 and 8 December the Russians captured Lepseny and a

point only 15 miles from the important town of Szekes Fehervar. They reached Lake Velencze and deployed between it and the Danube. Enemy resistance during this advance was only slight. Obviously the German Command did not expect this Russian manœuvre and did not understand that Tolbukhin's offensive had Budapest as the principal object. The preliminary part of the Russian operations ended on 8 December; further development started the next day with an attack by Malinovsky.

Marshal Malinovsky had planned this attack with his usual tactical skill. The object of his left flank army (General Shumilov) was sufficiently clear; to cross the Danube to the south of Budapest, establishing a connection with Tolbukhin's right flank Army on the western side of the river. Such an operation must, however, be well covered from eventual flank attack by strong enemy infantry and tanks concentrated between Monor and Gödöllo. So Kravchenko's tanks and infantry were ordered to attack from Hatvan on Gödöllo, creating the impression that the main Russian effort was in this direction. But at the same time tanks (Kurkin) and cavalry (Pliev), belonging to Malinovsky's central Army and concentrated between Hatvan and Paszto (in the valley dividing the Matra and Tepkeh Hills), were expected to advance directly on Vac—a point of great strategic importance at the elbow of the Danube. The capture of Vac, simultaneous with the Russian advance between the Danube and Lake Velencze, was the first step of an operation aimed at encircling Budapest. The central Army had to protect the conquest of Vac by occupying Nagyszal and the Tepkeh Hills which divided the Danube valley from that of the Ipel. The right flank Army was to engage the enemy forces on the whole front between the Matra Hills and the Sayo valley in order to prevent any move westwards.

This well co-ordinated plan was completely successful. As Malinovsky's patrols had earlier occupied the southern half of Csepel island and made preparations for the crossing, the passage of the Danube near Ercsi was accomplished without any particular difficulties as soon as Tolbukhin's troops appeared some 10 miles west of this

point. On 9 December the units of the two Groups joined up between Ercsi and Lake Velencze. Fierce fighting was going on in the forested Gödöllo region (the site of a hunting lodge belonging to the Regent Horthy) where Russian, German and Hungarian tanks were in action. But further to the north other Russian tanks, moving on Nograd, broke through the enemy fortified lines and advanced rapidly on Vac. This town was captured with several thousand prisoners, and the same day (9 December) Russian cavalry and light tanks switched along the motor-road to Romhany and reached the Ipel at Balassa Gyarmat.

This was a decisive success; the enemy situation at once became delicate, particularly on the western side of the Danube. There, protected by Shumilov's Divisions from any enemy counter-action centred on Buda, Tolbukhin's columns advanced towards Szekes Fehervar on their left, and towards the cross-roads and junction of Bicske on their right. Considerable enemy concentrations near Budapest were in danger as the Russians threatened their line of retreat westwards. From Vac, up the Danube, the Russians advanced to Czob, near the mouth of the Ipel. Instead of sending reserves to the Gödöllo region the enemy thought it better to move back his defensive line nearer to Budapest. On the 12th Gödöllo was entered by the Russians, and enemy tanks concentrated at Ujpest, on the outskirts of the capital. Two or three days later Malinovsky's troops captured Sahy on the Ipel, and not only reached this river on a broad front but crossed it at many points. Tolbukhin's units in the meantime captured Bicske and approached Szekes Fehervar, ready to attack this important centre. . Malinovsky's patrols (from Shumilov's Army) appeared near the southern outskirts of Buda. The enemy command could not afford to lose a single day, as the Budapest region was already outflanked from the south-west and north-east. At Bicske and on the lower Ipel the Russians were only 35 miles from Komarno—the principal base of the whole Hungarian front. An urgent regrouping of the German-Hungarian forces could not be delayed.

It is not clear if the decision taken in the middle of December followed some general directive by the *Ober-Kommando*, or if the idea belonged to General Friesner himself, and his plan was simply accepted by his superiors, at that moment more interested in the Ardennes offensive. Anyhow Friesner's orders showed a sensible appreciation of the strategic problem facing him. The idea was to profit by the exceptional defensive advantages of Budapest, now transformed into an independent fortified camp. In this camp a strong but well-balanced garrison of reliable units could resist for a long time and attract perhaps double the Russian force necessary to attack and invest a region with a radius of 6 miles. Friesner knew that neither Russian Marshal had unlimited forces at his disposal, and he rightly concluded that the necessity of maintaining a "siege" of Budapest would considerably reduce their manœuvring possibilities towards Vienna and Bratislava. In the meantime his own front line, the Drava–Lake Balaton –upper Danube, would be considerably shorter than the front line held at the end of November. With Budapest outside this short new front line, Friesner might concentrate one or two strong active groups between Komarno and Lake Balaton, to attack the Russian forces protecting the investment of Budapest. To the north of the upper Danube the river Hron, always difficult to cross and particularly difficult when swollen by the December rains, seemed adequate to stop the Russians.

To defend Budapest nine Divisions were left in the fortified camp, five German (the 13th Tank Division, the S.S. Panzer Grenadier, Feldherrenhalle Division, the 271st Infantry and two Cavalry Divisions, with a mobile Artillery Brigade and many small specialized units) and four Hungarian (the 1st Tank and the 10th, 12th, 20th Infantry Divisions, with several regiments of police and frontier guards force). These 130,000 well-equipped men would be supported by volunteers from the Budapest population. Meanwhile Friesner, with the help of complements and freshly arrived reinforcements, worked to reconstitute the Second Tank Army in the region of Gyor–Komarno. It was supposed that this regrouping could be achieved

in time, protected by strong rearguards fighting between Szekes Fehervar and the historic town of Esztergom on the Danube, as the wooded Vertesz and Buda Hills formed a series of excellent natural defensive positions. Other concentrations were planned in the Bacony Hills, near Veszprim, and in the plain between Komarno and the river Hron. Well planned as they were, these dispositions did not correspond with the number of troops available for a rapid regrouping. Many German and Hungarian Divisions were still engaged in mountain war between the region south of Lučenec and that of the Sayo valley. Other Divisions had been moved towards Nagy Kanisza when Friesner had taken too seriously Tolbukhin's diversionary offensive in the south. With nine good Divisions earmarked for Budapest and others for reconstituting the Second Tank Army, there was scarcely sufficient force for a successful rearguard action in the wooded hills or for a stubborn resistance on the line of the Hron. And this was soon proved by the continued advance of the Russians.

By 20 December Tolbukhin and Malinovsky increased the number of their Divisions between the approaches to Buda and to Szekes Fehervar. The latter town was stormed and captured. Other columns of Tolbukhin's Group fanned out from Bicske, attacking enemy rearguards in the wooded Vertesz Hills and everywhere pushing them back to the west. With remarkable élan one Russian mobile column crossed the Buda Hills and captured (25 December) Esztergom on the Danube. This caused great confusion in Friesner's plans for an orderly concentration near Komarno. Tolbukhin's vanguards reached the western slopes of the Vertesz Hills, near Mor and Totis—the latter point only 15 miles from Komarno. The loss of Esztergom cut off one German Division from Komarno; it was cut off from the Budapest garrison by Malinovsky's column, switching round the northern outskirts of Buda towards Szt. Andra on the Danube. Encircled in the woods inside the Danube elbow, the remnants of this Division were mopped up, while at Szt. Andra Malinovsky's units on the west bank were joined by others which crossed

the Danube from the east bank. This happened on 27 December and on that day the ring round the Hungarian capital was sealed.

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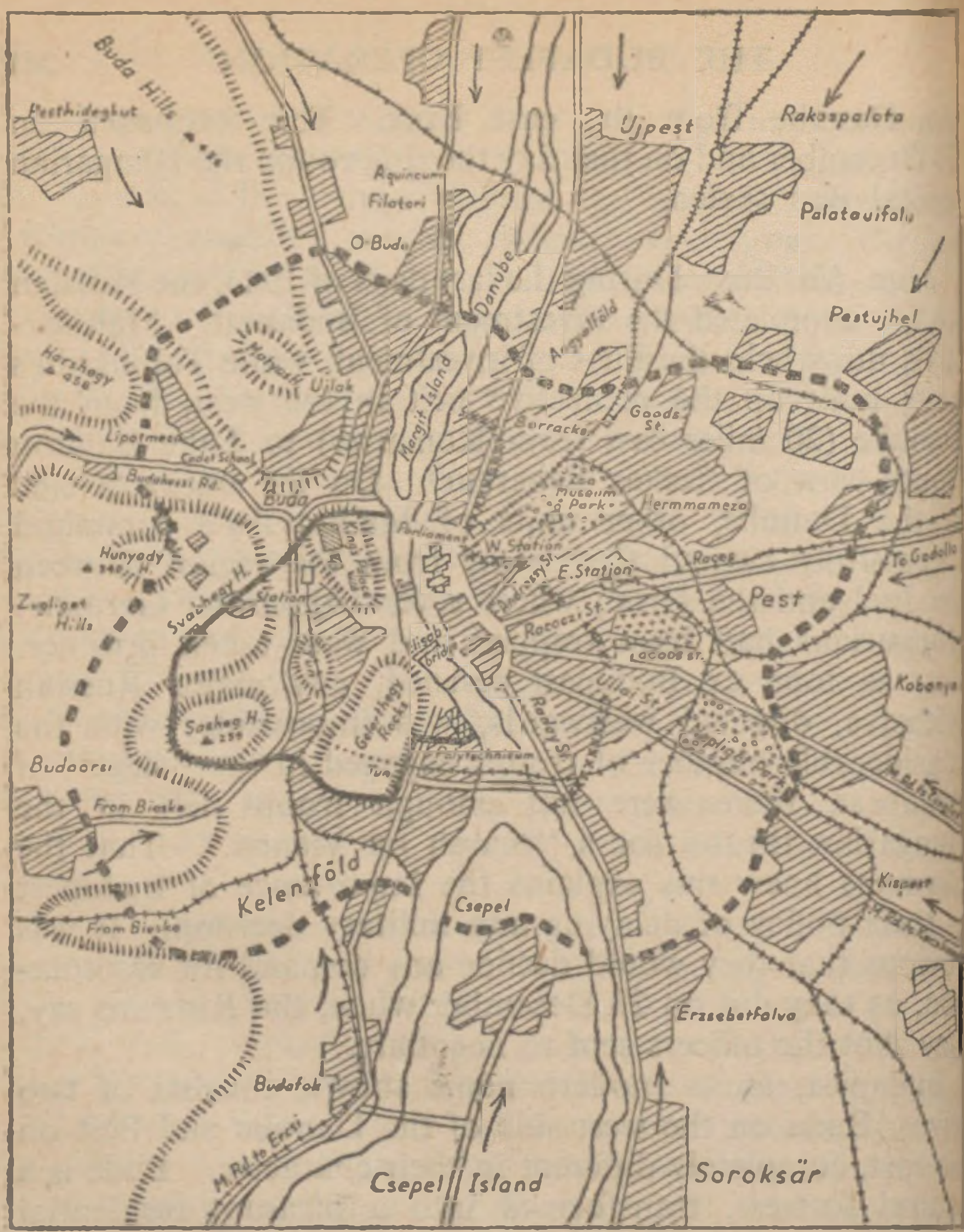
Map No. 20. During the last days of 1944, the Russian troops completed the investment of Budapest. Malinovsky's units held the lines of investment, while Tolbukhin's units built up the protective belt in the west, from the Danube (20 miles east from Komarno) to Lake Balaton (south-west of Szekes Fehervar). On the northern side of the Danube, other units of Malinovsky's command successfully cleared the enemy from the region between the Ipel and the Hron, where several thousand German-Hungarians had been trapped and were taken prisoner. But, as long as Budapest resisted, any major Russian offensive, directed westwards, was impossible: with the considerable number of troops engaged in the "siege" of Budapest, there were not enough troops left in the Hungarian theatre for a "march on Vienna." That the Germans knew this explains the importance of Budapest in their policy of delaying any military decision. It was obvious that they would decline any demand for capitulation, as they did on 29 December when, the Russians say, they shot the officers sent to negotiate.

Budapest, as its modern name shows, consists of two towns, Buda on the west side of the Danube and Pest on the east, completely different in their character. Buda is a natural fortress, transformed into a pleasant residential quarter around the Royal Palace, and with a few administrative buildings, while Pest is a vast agglomeration in the plain, with large avenues, an enormous mass of modern and pretentious business quarters and a belt of industrial suburbs. During their occupation of Hungary in the 16th and 17th centuries, the Turks were the first to appreciate the defensive strength of Buda. On the rocky (dolomite) hill of Gelerthegy (235 metres), which falls very steeply to the Danube and hardly less steeply on the other sides, they had built a fortress.

Its peculiar feature was a vast system of underground casemates, cellars and passages, cut in the rock; vast



MAP 20

STRUGGLE FOR BUDAPEST, 27th DECEMBER, 1944–13th FEBRUARY, 1945

- Encirclement of Budapest 27–31 December, 1944
- Russian ring on 10th January, 1945
- Russian penetration in Pest by 15th January, 1945
- Last defence of Buda 1st–13th February, 1945
- Railways
- Roads or Streets
- Tunnels
- Parks
- Cemeteries
- Hills (altitude in metres)

grottos with mineral springs exist in the flanks of Gelerthegy, and in modern times the rocky hill has been cut through by a railway tunnel. Less than a mile to the north of Gelerthegy and also on the bank of the Danube there is another hill of the same character and almost of the same height. On it stands the Royal Palace, together with a monumental church and several solid ministerial buildings; underground cellars and passages exist here, as on Gelerthegy. In 1854 the Palace Hill was pierced by a tunnel, over 300 yards long, the work of an English engineer, Clark, who also built the chain bridge over the Danube at the entrance of the tunnel, thus opening direct communication between the centre of Pest and the South railway station in Buda.

It may be imagined how adaptable to defence are these two high and rocky hills, with their system of tunnels and underground shelters. Their tactical importance comes also from their commanding position over a long stretch of the Danube, between the Margit Island and the industrial suburb of Gsepel. Dominating the plain of Pest, the Gelerthegy and Palace Hills serve as excellent points of observation from which artillery fire can be directed on the streets and roads of Pest. From the west both these hills are protected by other heights, belonging to the system of the Buda Hills. Sashegy, Suabhegy, Hunyady, Matyes Hills and many others are as high as Gelerthegy or even higher; they are covered with gardens or vineyards among which are numerous villas with solid stone enclosures. The winding and narrow streets and lanes of Buda, between the hills or on their slopes, could only be conquered by hand to hand fighting.

Thus Buda is a natural citadel of a vast fortified camp, extending on the east side of the river to the industrial suburbs of Ujpest, Pestujhel, Kobanya, Kispest and Erzsebetfalva. Passing through a ring railway, which joins the different lines, radiating from the capital, the main roads enter into Pest proper and become the principal thoroughfares of a heavily and pompously built city. Every public building (and they are numerous and "monumental"), every block of many-storied houses can become

a centre of resistance, keeping under their fire the adjacent streets, solidly barred or transformed into minefields. Such buildings as the Parliament, the West and East Stations, the Museum, Opera and University became small fortresses, organized beforehand and having their own garrisons.

Marshal Malinovsky's troops, which closed the ring round Budapest on 27 December, were on that day nowhere nearer to the centre of the capital than seven miles (and on the Pest side not so near). During the last days of December the Russian vanguards gradually reduced the ring of the investment; on the Buda side they were at Pesthidegkut, descending into the Lipotmezö valley, approached by another column from Budakeszi; further to the south they occupied the Budeorsi Hills and reached the outskirts of Kelenfold. On the Pest side, by 1 January the fringe of outer suburbs was approached at Ujpest, Rakospalota, Pestujhel, Kobanya, Kispest and Ezrsebet-falva. Malinovsky decided to begin his attack on the eastern side of the Danube (i.e. against Pest), as the flat country and excellent roads there helped a more rapid regrouping of his storming columns and concentrations of artillery and reserves at the points chosen for an assault. This would take several days. The attack was expected on the 5th, but it was postponed as during the first days of January the enemy outside Budapest suddenly started his own counter-manœuvre.

The German commander, General Friesner, again showed himself to be a nervous and impatient leader. As during Tolbukhin's diversionary offensive, between the Drava and Lake Balaton, he once more moved his reserves with execssive haste. Concentrations of the Second Tank Army at Komarno-Gyor were far from being completed and concentrations of the Hungarian Divisions near Vesz-prim were scarcely begun, but Friesner was so impressed by the appearance of Tolbukhin's vanguards on the Vertesz Hills and by the passage of the Hron by Pliev's mobile force, that he imagined Komarno to be in immediate danger. He suddenly moved forward those Tank Divisions which were ready to recapture the Vertesz Hills.

On 2 and 3 January Tolbukhin's units were violently attacked at several points between the Komarno–Esztergom and Komarno–Bicske–Buda roads. Enemy tanks, attacking by 80 to 100, on narrow sectors, were supported by a number of bombers and Focke-Wulf fighters which Friesner had specially collected for his counter-blow. On 4 and 5 January the fighting became particularly tense: the enemy succeeded in breaking through to Esztergom, which was recaptured; the Vertesz Hills were also lost by the Russians, who stubbornly resisted near Bicske. On the 6th the situation might have caused some anxiety, as the enemy, attacking Bicske junction, was only 15 miles from the Russian units which that day were repulsing strong enemy sorties from Buda. But Tolbukhin was still confident: he knew that the enemy forces were limited and that their losses increased at the rate of fifty to seventy tanks per day. Russian artillery, skilfully placed in the hills, prevented German progress beyond Esztergom and on the nearest approaches to Bicske. The situation to the west of Buda gradually became stabilized, although the enemy continued his attacks; his last tank reserves fought with particular energy on 10 and 11 January. No success was, however, achieved, and losses in tanks finally compelled Friesner to cut short an assault for which his Second Tank Army was sacrificed before it had been fully reconstituted. Tolbukhin's troops held vital positions, protecting Malinovsky's units near Buda, although this struggle outside "the ring" was difficult and costly not only for the enemy. Strangely enough, when Friesner's principal effort had already come to an end, he still ordered several Hungarian Divisions, belatedly concentrated near Veszprim, to attack in the direction of Szekes Fehervar. They had an initial success and took this ancient Hungarian town, but their performance (21 January) could not be further developed. The front line to the west of Budapest was stabilized, with Ezstergom and Szekes Fehervar in enemy hands, but with Bicske still held by the Russians.

While the struggle was raging to the west of the capital, Budapest itself was heavily attacked day after day by the Russian Air Force, which destroyed strong points organized

in the town and the suburbs. On the west side of the Danube, the Russian artillery gradually moved gun positions nearer to Buda. Soon the enemy defences on the hills Suabhegy, Sasshegy, Gelerthegy and even the Royal Palace Hills were under fire. To the north of Buda the Russians approached O-Buda and captured the Matyas Hill: from here their observers helped the artillery to keep under fire not only Buda, but the Margit Island and the central part of Pest beyond the river, the Parliament Building and West Station included. On 8 January the Russians occupied the Nagy Island and their patrols crossed the river when the action on the Pest side developed.

Friesner's efforts to the west of Budapest failed to bring relief to the defenders of the capital and delayed the storming of Pest hardly more than a few days. From 8 January Malinovsky's assaulting parties attacked the suburbs. In places they met with fierce resistance, in others penetration proved relatively easy. The enemy command did not risk engaging considerable forces all along the outer fringe of the suburbs, where they might be encircled in a quick penetration by Russian tanks and consequently lost. On 10 January Malinovsky was able to report the capture of Ujpest, Rakospalata, Palotaujfalu, Pestujhel, Kobanya, Kispest; on the island of Csepel an important industrial suburb of the same name was taken and on the Buda side the Russians occupied the whole of O-Buda. It meant that the struggle for Budapest proper was beginning: the suburbs had been captured, and the radius of the Russian ring in the east was reduced to four or five miles.

On 11 and 12 January very stiff fighting took place in the Varosliget Park, on the racecourse, near the East Station and in the Kerpesci cemetery. Making use of open spaces, German and Hungarian tanks many times counter-attacked the Russian Guard units, specially trained for street fighting. Everywhere the Russians advanced; the loss of the racecourse deprived the garrison of their last landing ground for aircraft bringing supplies. On the 13th the Russians captured the Nepliget Park and reached the hospitals quarter; soon they were at the Ferencz Station, near the railway bridge over the Danube.

During the next three days street fighting in Pest reached its climax, but it was obvious that the failure of the relief force was known to the garrison. While in the previous days the number of prisoners varied from 1,500 to 3,000 a day, on the 15th 5,000 were taken in the fighting which centred round the West Station. The next day the number of prisoners grew to 7,000; the Hungarian troops and some of the German units began to show signs of moral depression. The struggle moved now to the very centre of Pest, near the Parliament, Opera, National Museum and University. By 16 January four-fifths of the town were in Russian hands. As the bridges over the Danube had been previously destroyed, the fighting spirit of the enemy troops in Pest was undermined by their desperate situation: they were now struggling with their backs to the river—in places less than a mile from it. On the 17th their resistance obviously weakened and on the 18th they began to surrender in large parties. That day the Russians registered 20,000 prisoners in addition to the 40,000 taken since 1 January. Malinovsky was able to report that the whole of Pest (the Margit Island excepted) was clear of the enemy.

Up to 18 January the German–Hungarians in Budapest lost in killed and prisoners about 80,000; some 50,000 (or perhaps 60,000, as volunteers from the population joined the troops) were a sufficient garrison for Buda where, as has already been described, conditions for the defence are particularly advantageous. Malinovsky's action was also delayed by the necessity of organizing some order in such an enormous agglomeration as Pest, with more than a million inhabitants looking for shelter among ruined streets and with fires still raging. Friesner could hope that no further development of the Russian offensive beyond Budapest to the west would take place before another four or six weeks. His own "counter-manœuvre" contributed less to this delay than did the stubborn fighting of the defenders of Pest and Buda. He had started his tank attacks before having concentrated all the forces available for a counter-blow. Between 3 and 12 January he gradually spent all his active resources.

And although some reinforcements arrived from the rear he had to divert them to a fresh point of danger.

The Russians by the end of December established a bridgehead on the west bank of the Hron. When Friesner's attacks started in the direction of Esztergom and Bicske, on the south side of the upper Danube, Marshal Malinovsky skilfully planned a diversionary attack on the north side, menacing Komarno. He made use of General Pliev's light tanks and cavalry which operated from the bridgehead on the Hron, near Levice. On 7–9 January they suddenly advanced south-westward and reached the river Zitava. On the 10th this mobile force cut the railway running from Komarno to the north and took a thousand German prisoners at a point only 1½ miles from Komarno itself! Friesner's alarm may be imagined. He gathered together and threw on to the north bank of the Danube every battalion still at his disposal, and from now on his attention was directed more towards the plain between Komarno and the Hron than to his forces engaged in the last attacks on Bicske. A week later the Germans proclaimed that the Russian force which had reached the Nitra had been thrown back to the Hron. It was, however, a meagre success, for Malinovsky had neither the intention nor the forces at that moment to develop an offensive along the Danube towards Bratislava.

German plans in Hungary for delaying the Russian advance westwards, even by costly counter-attacks, were based on the idea of a major Russian offensive in the direction of Vienna and Bratislava. However, between 15 and 20 January it became obvious that the decisive Russian action had taken place in Poland where in a single week (12–19 January) Konev's Armies reached the Silesian frontier, while those under Zhukov's command opened the direct route to Poznan. In such circumstances the relative unimportance of the Hungarian theatre could not be but clear.

Both Malinovsky and Tolbukhin, knowing the general development, realized that the immediate capture of Buda was not necessary. Their "march" on Vienna was not for the immediate future, but would be planned and timed

in connection with other operations in the principal theatres of the war. So almost four weeks passed between the conquest of Pest and that of Buda, and during this period Tolbukhin's armies remained inactive, having a well-merited rest and regrouping. It is characteristic of the psychology of the *Ober-Kommando* during this final stage of the war that a "pause" in the Russian efforts in Hungary was taken as proof of Russian "exhaustion." And this "theory" resulted in an extraordinary move: the *Ober-Kommando* thought it necessary to have a success somewhere, and Hungary was now considered the only part of the Eastern front where some spectacular, if short-lived, achievement was still possible. So when the Sixth (S.S.) Tank Army was more or less reconstituted after the defeat in the Ardennes, these *troupes d'élite* were moved not to the Oder or to the Rhine where the fate of the Third Reich was sealed, but to the upper Danube where the laurels of a local *Sieg* seemed still possible. This astonishing decision made all the strategists of the world puzzle their brains as to what might be "behind it".

After 20 January Malinovsky's troops cleared the enemy from the Margit Island and made final preparations for storming the strong points in Buda. But this was not the only activity of Malinovsky's Armies. In accordance with the general situation and the future plans of the Russian G.H.Q. it was time to eliminate the enemy forces from Eastern Slovakia. It seems somewhat strange that the enemy had persisted in holding that area for so long. At first it might be explained by the importance of the industrial installations in the Miskolcz region, the northern flank of which was protected by the valley of the Hernad with its "stronghold" Košice. But by the end of November Miskolcz was taken by the Russians and only a few factories in the valley of the Sayo were still of use to the enemy. Then it seemed that the mountain region between the Sayo and the upper Ipel was held as a threat to the right flank of Malinovsky's Armies, preventing his central Army from advancing towards Pest. Certainly a number of Russian and Rumanian Divisions were diverted to the Slovakian border, instead of taking part in the Budapest

operation; but on the other hand the enemy himself kept some twelve Divisions of the German Eighth and Hungarian First Armies in this area of only secondary importance. This has sometimes been explained by the enemy's anxiety to hold Lučenec in order to protect the still more important junction of Zwolen, through which pass the trunk railway and the motor-road running to Ruzamberok (in the valley of the Vah) and, further on, through the Carpathians, to Cracow. This railway and road were for some time the principal connection between the enemy troops in Hungary and those in Poland. Such considerations, however, lost their value during the first half of December. Malinovsky's break-through to Vac and to the Ipel was followed by the cutting of the motor-road leading to Zwolen; Lučenec lost any importance when Budapest itself was isolated, as enemy communications with Poland and Germany now ran through Bratislava or Vienna. Besides, the sudden move towards the Ipel cut in half the enemy forces still clinging to the Slovakian border. Some garrisons, such as those in Kis Terenye and Salgotaryan, were surrounded and annihilated after sharp fighting, others fled to Lučenec; the Divisions of the eastern group were isolated from Friesner's main force, maintaining in the valleys of the Sayo and Bodva an uneasy liaison with the Divisions still in Košice. The retreat of all these units to the west became more and more perilous by way either of the valley of the Hron or that of the Vah, for Malinovsky's mobile forces had already crossed the Hron early in January, some elements advancing up the valley towards Krupina. And the upper valley of the Vah could soon be penetrated by General Petrov's troops.

Fortunately for the enemy Petrov's operations in Eastern Slovakia, in November and December developed but slowly and not very successfully. At this time of year the country is extremely difficult for fighting or marching: deep mud, few and bad roads, a network of rivers and streams swollen by rain and melting snow from the hills. Petrov reached the line of the Topola–Ondava, but the enemy (three or four Divisions) successfully organized resistance on the hills above Prešov and Košice. The

formidable obstacle of several swollen rivers must be crossed before any assault on Košice. Petrov erroneously concentrated his efforts to the south of Košice instead of first attacking Prešov. And when he at last crossed the difficult river Hernad (by 15 January) it was too late: having regard to events in Poland the Germans did not hesitate to evacuate Kosice. They marched on Prešov and from there into the upper valley of the Vah. Petrov occupied Košice and Prešov on 18–20 January; on the 26th his vanguard was at Propad (at the head-waters of the Vah), but the German column had plenty of time for an orderly retreat by the valley of the Vah.

In the meantime Malinovsky captured Lučenec (14 January) after some fighting and continued his advance on Zwolen from two directions. An enemy divisional group forced into the upper valleys of the Rimava and Sayo (here called the Slana) was in a precarious situation. It was attacked and decisively defeated on 22–23 January by concentrated Divisions of Malinovsky's right flank Army under the command of Generals Trofimenko and Kurkin. The Russians captured Rimavska Bana, Jelšava and Rožnava, and the enemy had no escape route except mountain paths, crossing the high massive of Slovenska Krušnohori (1,400 metres) and descending to the head-waters of the Hron. This was the end of enemy resistance in Eastern Slovakia. Out of twelve Divisions engaged in the operations between the Ipel and the Hernad hardly more than five could be used again. Such was the cost of the enemy's wish to keep something like a "flankguard" in the hope of hampering the Russian offensive against Budapest. Actually this "flankguard" had only a slight influence on the development of the main operation. (For the operations in Eastern Slovakia see *Maps Nos.* 18 and 24.)

In the first days of February Malinovsky's storm troops opened their attack on the last strong points in Buda. The Russian ring narrowed. It went from Ujlak to the Cadets' school in the Lipometzö valley and from there to Svacbhegy Hill, which was soon captured. A desperate struggle continued for four days (6–9 February) for such objects as the Sashegy Hill, the adjacent cemetery (Nemet-

völgy) and the military hospital near the South Station. The Germans and Hungarians fought with great courage and only on the 9th were Sashegy and the cemetery in Russian hands. Now it remained to capture the citadel of resistance—the Gelerthegy and Palace Hills with their tunnels and underground casemates. The Russians advanced literally step by step, fighting in the narrow and winding streets between these two natural bastions. On the 11th they penetrated the northern part of the Palace Hill and from different sides assaulted the rocks of Gelerthegy. Enemy resistance was at last broken on 12 February: in the last two days 20,000 prisoners, mostly wounded, were taken, and in the evening of that day the Gelerthegy and Palace Hills were finally captured. On the 13th the fighting in Buda ceased, the Russians taking 10,000 more prisoners. The remnants of some units tried to escape by the Lipotmezö valley, but were surrounded there.

So on 13 February ended the struggle for Budapest which had been started by Malinovsky in November, Tolbukhin joining him in December. Generally speaking this was the last dramatic episode in the military events of the Eastern front. Stubborn and desperate resistance like that of the Budapest garrison was met with again later by the Russians at different points in their advance, and sometimes their own efforts and sacrifices were again considerable. But never again did enemy resistance follow the lines of a reasoned plan and never again had resistance the slightest chance of even a temporary success. The situation near Budapest became delicate for the Russians when Friesner attacked and advanced in the direction of Esztergom and Bicske.

But as a commander he showed himself too nervous and consequently too hasty: he moved his tanks and reserves on 2 January and towards the 12th the effort was already spent—a week before the attack by a Hungarian Divisional Group on Szekes Fehervar. If he had started his counter-attack a week later he might have had better results. Certainly he could not have saved Pest, but there would have been a chance of piercing the Russian line at Bicske and establishing liaison with the defenders of

Buda. A new defensive front might have been formed, having on its eastern flank the powerful natural position of Buda and on the western flank Lake Balaton. It must be added, however, that even such a tactical success could not have influenced the strategic situation which, by 15–16 January, had been determined by the events in Poland and on the East Prussian border.

CHAPTER XI

THE BATTLES OF MALOPOLSKA (12 TO 19 JANUARY) AND OF EAST PRUSSIA (14 to 26 JANUARY). DRIVE TO THE ODER—NEISSE AND THE POMERANIAN COAST (21 JANUARY TO 5 MARCH)

Map No. 21. Malopolska is an old Polish land—perhaps the cradle of the kingdom of Poland; Cracow, the ancient capital of the Polish kings, is on its south-western border.* The Vistula, flowing first north-east and then north-west, and the Pilica, running first north and then east to join the Vistula, form the geographical frontiers of Malopolska. But to this quadrangular territory may be also added the region between the upper Pilica and the upper Warta, with the Cracow hills and the historical town of Czestochowa.

In the destinies of Poland the importance of Malopolska was soon eclipsed by that of other provinces, such as Wielikopolska, Galicia and Mazovia; the last gave the kingdom a new capital—Warsaw. These other provinces were much more favourable to an economic development, which for centuries remained purely agricultural, depending on the great trade route of the middle and lower Vistula. For Malopolska had only poor soil, mostly sandy, marshy and forested. During the first half of the 19th century it

* "Malopolska" means "Lesser Poland" as "Malorussia" means "Lesser Russia." Greece proper was called "Lesser" while Southern Italy and Sicily were "Magna Græcia."

Wloclawek
Plock
Gostynin
From Torun
Vistula
Rokitnowski
Wkra
Plonsk
Modlin
Norev
Pultusk
W. Bug
Warsaw
Prage
From Poznan
Sochaczew
Bzura
Ner
Zyrardow
Lowicz
Grodzisk
Piaseczno
Gora Kalvaria
Lęczica
Ozarkow
Sobiernewice
Maczonow
Grojec
Warka
Rawa
Magnuszew
Kaluszki
Pilica
Nowe Miasto
Biaobrzegi
Lask
Tomaszow
Inowlodz
Kozienice
Jedlinsk
Dublin
Widawa
Bielkatow
Sulerow
Opoczno
Radom
Zwolen
Pulawy
Kaminsk
Sczercow
Szydlowiec
Nzanka R.
Kazimierz
Dzialoszyn
Warta
Radomsko
Pozedbrze
Skarzisko
Ilza
Solec
Jozefow
Brzeznica
Plawno
Sienno
Suchedniow
Kamenna
Olsztyn
Często-chowa
Wieszczowa
Bodzentyn
Zawi-nost
Koniecpol
Zarki
Jedrzejow
Chmielnik
Szidlow
Stogzow
Sandomierz
Zarnowiec
Pinczow
Busko
Stopnica
Wodzi-slow
Dzigl-szice
Wolbrom
Pilica
Miechow
Nowy Korczin
Sczaczin
Mielec
Dabrowa Gorno
Olkusz
Skala
Slomniki
Dabrowa
Kolbuszowa
Cracow
Sandziszow
Rzeszow
Vistula
Oswiecim
Wadowice
Wel-iczka
Bochnia
Tarnow
Zakliczin
Mys-lenice
Carpathian Foothills
Jaslo

was a country of small *szlachta* and rather miserable peasants, with sleepy undeveloped towns—among them Kielce, Radom and Sandomierz, none of which achieved any importance.

The Russian Government up to 1880 looked on Malopolska chiefly as a frontier: Austria-Hungary was just beyond the upper Vistula and the German Empire a few miles from Czestochowa. Strategically Malopolska was territory which the Russians expected to be outflanked by these two eventual adversaries, and they had not at that time planned to defend it; they built a fortress (Ivangorod, now Deblin) only on the middle Vistula, and they did not try to improve the roads, since better roads might facilitate an Austro-German invasion.

In the second half of the 19th century there appeared a new aspect of economic life, which gradually increased the importance of Malopolska. Very rich coal mines were exploited in the Dabrova region, near the point where the frontiers of the three empires met. Railways crossed Malopolska and Dabrova coal was used in Warsaw, Lodz and other industrial centres of Poland and Russia. From this the idea arose (early in the 20th century) to create new industrial centres in Malopolska itself, and the first mechanical and metallurgical works were built south of Radom, at Szidlowiec, Ostrowiec and Ilxa.

Further developments were carried out later by the new

MAP 21

BATTLE OF MALOPOLSKA, 12th to 19th JANUARY, 1945

Enemy fortified line 12th January

Konev's initial breakthrough on 12th and 13th January

Zhukov's breakthrough. Zhukov's and Konev's advance 14th, 15th and 16th January

Enemy reserves

Zhukov's, Konev's and Petrov's advance 17th, 18th and 19th January

German Divisions surrounded

Motor roads

Railways

Densely forested areas.

Polish State, the industrialization of Malopolska being part of the vast plans for economic reconstruction. During the period between the two wars many changes were brought about in the old and somewhat neglected province. The population of the towns increased, new roads were built, among them the great "Pilsudski motor-road." This road was constructed with the help of German specialists, when there was a *rapprochement* between Pilsudski's Poland and the Reich; it joined Warsaw with Cracow, passing through Radom, Kielce and other towns in Malopolska. In the meantime works in Ostroviec and other places were developed, first by French capital and later by German technicians. War industries existed in Malopolska before the war of 1939; but after the country was occupied by the Germans many new factories appeared which produced tanks, aircraft, munitions etc., and which employed Polish slave labour.

This would explain why the Germans hoped to hold Malopolska and were prepared to fight for it. However, in their general view this territory was of only local importance. They missed completely its significance in the plans for the coming Russian offensive. At the beginning of 1945, the enemy had not the slightest doubt that such an offensive was very near. But, as has already been said (see Chapter IX), it was expected that the decisive effort would be made by Konev's powerful Armies in Western Galicia, on the shortest route to Cracow and further westwards, towards the Silesian industrial centres and the Moravian gap. The Russians would prepare a "pincer movement" on a grand scale, Tolbukhin's and Malinovsky's Armies marching on Bratislava from Hungary and Konev's troops driving to the same point through Moravska Ostrava and the Morava valley. In Malopolska nothing more important was expected than an auxiliary Russian attack from the bridgehead of Sandomierz, aimed at the industrial region of Ostrowiec.

Besides the erroneous idea of the Russian strategic plans, the *Ober-Kommando* obviously exaggerated the difficulties which a major Russian operation in Malopolska would meet. Instead of the open country of

Western Galicia where a wide plain facilitated the movement of mobile columns, the Russians advancing westwards from the bridgehead of Sandomierz would encounter hilly regions near Kielce, called Lysa Gora, rising to over 600 metres and cut by deep valleys of the Czorna Nida, Kamienna and many other rivulets and streams. Further to the west, beyond the valley of the Nida, the Cracow hills, just as high, but even more extensive (between Cracow and Czestochowa) formed a still more serious obstacle. This excellent and natural defensive position had, once before, stopped two Russian Armies marching towards the Silesian border—in November 1914. And to the north of these two hilly areas there stretched, along the Pilica, a densely forested belt, with but few roads and many marshes. The topographical *ensemble* of Malopolska seemed definitely unfavourable to any offensive manœuvring by mobile columns. And the Germans were far from guessing that not only Konev's but also Zhukov's Armies were preparing to develop their full effort in that region and to open here the shortest route to the Oder.

This being the view of his superiors, General Harpe, in command between the Pilica and the Carpathians (his previous career, like that of other German commanders, appointed during the last phase of the war, is unknown) gave chief attention to his lines south of the upper Vistula. Infantry Divisions of the First Tank Army held the carefully fortified lines along the west bank of the Wisloka and the heights between this river and the Wislok, to the north of Jaslo. There was a series of strongly-built concrete works and heavy artillery was massed on this sector. Beyond the first defensive belt there were a second, on the Dunajec, and a third on the Raba. Four Tank and two mobile (or Panzer Grenadier) Divisions formed a manœuvring reserve near Tarnow for an eventual counter-attack.

On the north side of the Vistula, the sector opposite the Russian bridgehead was held by the Second Army. Here the Germans had solid fortifications on the heights near Polanec and Staszow as well as on the hills beyond the Koprziwnica (where heavy fighting had taken place in

August 1944) and on both sides of the Opatowka, opposite Sandomierz. The enemy positions were strong, but not all the Divisions of the Second Army were of good fighting value; the reserves (one tank and three infantry Divisions) were near Pinczow and Chmielnik (both points specially fortified), but the idea prevailed that this would not be the direction of the principal Russian assault. Something like a "strategic reserve" for the whole of Harpe's Group was therefore constituted behind its northern flank. The Fourth Tank Army was chosen for this, despite its weakness and the dispersal of its units. Infantry Divisions (of fresh formation) occupied positions before the Russian bridgeheads of Magnuszow and Pulavy-Kazimierz, while others garrisoned Ostrowiec. A mobile force, reduced now to only two tank and two mobile Divisions, was at the crossroads of Skarzisko on the Pilsudski motor road. It was supposed that by using this road (or the Skarzisko-Ostrowiec-Opatow *chaussee*) the mobile reserve would be able to appear in time wherever it might be needed—at Radom or Kielce or opposite Sandomierz.

Marshal Konev did his best to maintain the enemy illusions with regard to the direction of the carefully prepared Russian blow. During the first ten days of January the Germans were allowed to observe the massing of Russian troops on the south side of the Vistula or near Sandomierz; dummy guns and wooden tanks were largely used and a net of new roads seemed to be built behind these sectors. In the meantime, during the hours of darkness and with the greatest secrecy, infantry, tanks and powerful artillery crossed the Vistula and remained hidden among the brushwood, covering the triangle of the "old" bridgehead, to the east of the Czarna and to the south of the Koprzywnica. In this narrow space were concentrated elements of three Armies and several tank units which were to carry out the initial break-through from east to west, towards the line of the Nida. Marshal Konev planned his offensive in the general direction of Czestochowa and the upper Warta. His first objects were the town of Kielce, on his right and crossing the Nida on a wide front by his centre and his left.

A fourth Army (under General Gordov's command) was to operate between Kielce and Opatow, engaging the enemy force in the Ostrowiec region and throwing it back towards Radom on the Zhukov columns which would operate from the Pulawy-Kasimierz bridgehead. No attacks were planned for the fifth of Konev's Armies (General Gusev's) which occupied positions on the south side of the Vistula, east of the Wisloka, i.e. where the enemy expected the principal Russian effort. But in order to tie up the enemy troops and reserves in that sector an Army of General Petrov's Group was to start an offensive between the Wislok and the Wisloka, towards Jaslo.

On 12 January visibility was poor, with low clouds and local fog. Flying conditions prevented the Russian air force from taking part in the assault, but the same conditions made the enemy air reconnaissance inactive. There was only a thin cover of snow on the ground and light frost favoured the movement of artillery and tanks. Tactically Marshal Konev organized his attack as he had done in July 1944, during the Lvov operation. It was again an "artillery attack" of the most powerful character, opened by some 300 or 350 batteries of different range and calibre (some of which were firing from the south bank of the Vistula). The violence of the gunfire was such that after two hours wide passages were made at several points across the two or three miles of the first fortified belt. By noon the infantry were already advancing; the moral impression was so great that at many points the Germans left their trenches without orders. Nor was stubborn resistance met with at the second fortified line which was pierced before nightfall. In the morning hours of the 13th the Russians assaulted the third line where many small villages and small towns had been transformed into strong points.

The direction of Konev's offensive became clear on the second day. On the right, units of Pukhov's Army advanced on Chmielnik, in the centre and on the left, elements of Koroteew's and Zhadov's Armies were beyond the Czarna, attacking Busko and Stopnica. All these points were captured on 13 January, the Nida was reached

and even crossed by Poluboyarov's tanks, which als captured Wislica on the west bank. On 14 January th Russian infantry reached the Nida on a large front Pinczow was taken after a sharp fight with a Germa Division, trying to defend this important cross-road But generally speaking the Second German Army was in state of complete confusion, most of its Divisions bein either destroyed or in disorderly retreat.

It was not only the troops who were bewildered by th strength and rapidity of the Russian offensive (a fortifie area 25 miles deep and 40 miles wide was lost in less tha two days). For the third day of the operation the Germa command on that part of the front was obviously still i doubt as to the measures to be taken. Concentrations o tanks and reserves on the south side of the Vistula wer still expecting a Russian attack which never took plac The only decision which General Harpe (or his successo was able to take was to fight for Kielce, since the loss o this principal cross-roads of the whole area would mean th loss of all Malopolska. So the "mobile reserve", i.e the Divisions of the Fourth Tank Army near Skarzisko were summoned on 14 January to move towards Kielc This order, however, could only be partially carried ou for on the same day units of the same Army had to oppos a violent attack started by Marshal Zhukov from his tw bridgeheads.

The fighting for Kielce on the 15th became the centr episode of the battle of Malopolska. The topography her was in fact favourable for stubborn defence; a particularl serious obstacle to the Russian advance was the rive Czorna Nida, winding eight miles south of the town in deep valley between the hills of the Lysa-Gora. Th enemy there concentrated three Divisions of his loca reserve, while later in the day the 17th Tank and one mobil Division arrived from Skarzisko. Marshal Konev, how ever, supported Pukhov's Army, advancing on Kielc from Chmielnik, with units of Gordov's Army whic marched on Bodzentyn from the Opatow region an assaulted Kielce from the east. In the meantim Lelushenko's Tank Corps outflanked Kielce from the wes

by a skilful move across the Nida to Jedrzejow and from there to the motor-road near Checiny. There was stiff fighting inside Kielce, the town was captured and held for a short time by the Russians and then recaptured by the German 17th Tank Division; then it passed again into Russian hands when the tank Division was destroyed. And this was not the only Russian success on 15 January: while the fighting for Kielce was going on, Koroteev's and Zhadov's vanguards were already far beyond the Nida. On their left, they approached the Cracow hills, near Wodzislaw, Miechow and Slomniki, and further to the north, in the plain, their tanks reached Komiecpol, near the head waters of the Pilica.

Surprised as he was by the direction, strength and rapidity of Konev's offensive, the enemy was still more surprised by the scale of the attack which started on 14 January from two Russian bridgeheads north-east and east of Radom. A diversionary attack had been expected there, and possibly the Germans understood that their six second-rate Divisions, opposed to the Russian bridgeheads, might be thrown back towards Radom. But any possibility of deploying powerful Russian Armies in the dense forests between the Pilica and the Radomka (and to the south of the Radomka) seemed unlikely. And in fact Marshal Zhukov had great initial difficulties in concentrating a sizable force into the narrow space of the two bridge-heads. Opposite Magnuszow the Russians held a triangle between a point near Warka (which stands on the north bank of the Pilica), the mouth of the Pilica and the mouth of the Radomka; nowhere were they more than 6 miles from the Vistula. Two German Divisions were entrenched here in the forests, while a third (belonging to the Twelfth Army) occupied Warka and observed the north bank of the Pilica. Another bridgehead was somewhat more extensive; it occupied a salient formed by the Vistula between Gnewozow and Kasimierz; the bridges at its centre, near Pulavy, were some 12 miles from the front line. Three enemy Divisions held this line, behind which were the strongly fortified points of Zwolen and Kozienice.

At each bridgehead Marshal Zhukov had concentrated elements of one army; they were organized as a "task force" to secure as soon as possible other crossings necessary for larger concentrations. On the 14th heavy fighting took place near Zwolen and Kozienice where the same day enemy units were supported by the 25th Tank and one mobile Division moved from the "strategic reserve" (near Skarzisko). Nevertheless the Russians captured Solec on the Vistula and advancing along the Solec-Radom road outflanked Zwolen. The next day Zwolen and Kozienice were taken by storm and new crossings of the Vistula were organized at Deblin and Solec. The Germans, however, still fought stubbornly on the approaches to Radom from the east.

Rapid development took place in the Magnuszow bridgehead, despite dense forest and marshy ground. The tactical surprise of the first assault forced the enemy units to withdraw in confusion. Already on the 14th the Russians made deep penetrations along the south bank of the Pilica and the north bank of the Radomka. Russian parties even crossed the Pilica, while the Germans suddenly left Warka in their headlong flight towards Warsaw. On 15 January the Russians, north of the Pilica, reached Gora Kalwaria where new crossings were in preparation. On the south bank of the Pilica, the Russians approached Bialobrzegy and Jedlinsk on the Radomka. Through both these points passes the Pilsudski motor-road, connecting Warsaw with Radom, Kielce and Cracow. The enemy's confusion became so great that even the bridge over the Pilica near Bialobrzegy was not destroyed, and Zhukov's tanks, moving northwards, captured the town and crossroads of Grojec, only 30 miles from the capital.

In the meantime the Russian force which captured Jedlinsk advanced on Radom from the north. Attacked on two sides, this important town fell on 16 January. Enemy units which fought there (the 25th Tank Division included) tried to escape beyond the Pilica by way of Nove-Miasto. But the Russians from Bialobrzegy succeeded in arriving there before the enemy columns. The 25th Tank Division was completely destroyed while trying to cross the river.

Dispersed infantry units tried to escape through the forests towards Tomaszow.

German commentators on 16 January admitted that the situation had become very serious, "although not catastrophic." But it was certainly catastrophic on 17 January, the sixth day of Konev's offensive and the fourth of Zhukov's. No resistance could be organized on the approaches to Warsaw from the south; during the night of the 16th-17th the hasty evacuation of the capital proceeded and the next day Zhukov's units entered it from the south and west; units of the Polish Army under General Zimierski joined them, having crossed the Vistula to the north of Praga. The same day Czestochowa fell as the result of a combined attack by Koroteev's and Zhadov's Armies and Rybalko's tank corps. The Russians had crossed the upper Pilica near Przedborz only the day before. Radomsko was then taken, and while the Germans were trying to organize some defence of Czestochowa from the east, the town was captured by a brilliant manœuvre from the north, tanks having crossed the Warta at Plawno.

The southern flank of Zhukov's Group established liaison with the northern flank of Konev's Armies near Ilza. The Ostrowiec region was cleared of the enemy, and some remnants of his Second and Fourth Tank Armies were almost encircled near Skarzisko and Konsk; thousands of prisoners were taken. Pukhov's Army, with Lelushenko's tanks, advanced rapidly from Kielce on to Piotrkow, and this important town was captured on 18 January.

The fall of Kielce on 15 January brought to an end the strange inactivity of the considerable enemy concentrations in the Wisloka sector, on the south side of the Vistula. On the same day they learned that on their Carpathian flank the Russians (an Army of General Petrov's Group) had taken the offensive in the direction of Jaslo. On the 16th the First Tank Army began a retreat from the Wisloka towards the second defensive belt behind the Dunajec and Biala. Koniev's left flank Army (under the command of General Gusev) made no frontal pressure, as the slower the enemy's retreat, the greater was the possibility of out-flanking him completely from the north and south

before he could reach the line Cracow-Myslenice-Novy Sacz.

But this danger was now appreciated by the German command: on the 17th the retreat was accelerated and Jaslo was evacuated. Tanks and mobile Divisions now concentrated near Bochnia. As the situation on the north side of the Vistula, near Cracow, seemed critical, two tank Divisions were moved across the river and two infantry Divisions were ordered to defend the Cracow Hills at Skala and Slomniki. On the 17th and 18th there was a series of German counter-attacks by tanks on the river Szreniawa (12 to 15 miles north-east of Cracow). These measures, however, taken *in extremis*, could not relieve Cracow: Zhadov's left flank corps was strengthened, and at the same time Gusev's Army advanced from the east (entering Tarnow on 18 January), while Petrov's troops approached Novy-Sacz. The *Ober-Kommando* then at last determined their policy with regard to the Cracow sector. Its first object was to avoid the complete destruction of the only Army still retaining something like a normal organization. The First Tank Army was ordered to concentrate in the hilly region south of Cracow, round Myslenice. During the night of the 18th-19th the Germans retired from the ancient Polish capital and from the defences on the north side of the Vistula. The Russians entered Cracow on 19 January; the victory of Malopolska was complete.

In the meantime Marshal Zhukov's columns rapidly crossed Mazovia to the west of Warsaw. There was practically no enemy resistance to the north of the Pilica or on the lines of the Bzura or the Rawka. When Warsaw fell, the bulk of the German Twelfth Army had already been severely defeated by Marshal Rokossovsky on the Narew. On the south side of the Vistula there were never more than three or four Divisions of this Army. Surprised now by Zhukov's manœuvre and dispersed over a considerable area, they were unable to fight a rearguard action; some units were taken prisoner by the mobile columns of General Belov's Army, before they could begin to fight. On the 18th the Russians captured Socha-

czow, Shiernewice, Lowicz; on the 19th they entered Lodz, Kutno, Gostynin. Another army under Zhukov's command, which had captured Radom, cleared the enemy from the bend of the Pilica, crossed the river, captured Tomaszow and advanced towards Lodz and Zdunska Wola. Two more Armies, also under Zhukov's command, made use of the many crossings of the Vistula to form a second strategic échelon.

On 19 January, the day on which Lodz and Cracow were occupied, a Russian mobile patrol, belonging to Konev's Group, entered Praszka on the Silesian frontier, to the south of Wielun. The Russians reached the gate of the Reich only a week after starting their offensive. This illustrated the meaning of the Battle of Malopolska, and there is no doubt that in importance this battle may be compared only with such decisive events of the war as the Battles of Stalingrad and Kursk. This time victory was more easily achieved, more rapid and far less costly; but this does not diminish its significance. On the contrary! The enemy forces opposed to the Russian effort, the object of which was to open a direct route for the invasion of Reich territory, proved to be astonishingly inadequate. And this was a proof of the deterioration which the enemy armed forces had suffered during previous stages of the war in the east and in the west. It was proof also, that, except for a small number of good quality troops (already more or less isolated in Hungary or East Prussia) the *Ober-Kommando* had nothing at their disposal for a reliable defence of German soil. The Battle of Malopolska left no doubts that in a few days the Oder would be reached and that, as a further development, in connection with the Allied offensive across the Rhine, it would later on be crossed.

Map No. 22. The operation which aimed at the conquest of East Prussia and the liquidation of enemy forces there, was planned as a co-ordinated offensive by the two powerful Groups under the command respectively of General Chernyakhovsky and Marshal Rokossovsky. The geography and topography of East Prussia and the enemy defences, adapted as they were to natural conditions, made

the only solution of this problem a concerted offensive action, from east and south on both sides of the fortified region of the Masurian Lakes. Although in different circumstances, Chernyakhovsky and Rokossovsky had to achieve in January 1945 a combined march-manœuvre similar to that which Rennenkampf and Samsonov had tried in August 1914, but which had failed.

MAP 22

Rennenkampf had then defeated the Eighth German Army at Gumbinnen, captured Insterburg and approached the outer forts of Königsberg; Samsonov had invade East Prussia from the south and had occupied Allenstein. Hindenburg, the new commander of the Eighth Army, had considered his situation very serious; but Ludendorff persuaded him to operate on "the inner lines" and to concentrate all available forces against the badly organized march of Samsonov's four columns. The result of this decision is well known, General Zhilinsky was responsible for the lack of co-ordination between the two Armies under his direction. Nevertheless General Rennenkampf was severely criticized for his inaction, which permitted the Germans to concentrate all their forces against General Samsonov. In an attempt to justify himself, however, he stated that, having approached the outer defences of Königsberg without means to attack or neutralize them, he feared a blow from the fortress on his right flank and rear, if he advanced southwards to join Samsonov.

The real reason for the failure of the operation was that it could not be adequately prepared: despite their slow mobilization, the Russian Armies had already fought

MAP 22

BATTLE OF EAST PRUSSIA

- Front line on 14th January, 1945
- Rokossovsky's and Chernyakhovsky's initial breakthrough 14–20 January
- The line reached 20th January
- Strategic development of the initial breakthrough, the line reached 23rd January.
- East Prussia cut off from Germany, fortified region in the East outflanked; the line reached 26th January
- German counterattacks (27th January–3rd February)
- Battle of East Prussia reduced to Battle for Königsberg (10th February)
- Railways (only principal)
- Motor roads
- Roads (only principal)
- Lakes
- Marshes

offensive battles several days *before* the battle of Charleroi. The premature offensive of the Russians was forced on them by the unfavourable developments on the French front. But in spite of the defeat of Samsonov's Army, the strategic idea of the operation had fully justified itself. The threat of a concerted offensive against East Prussia, simultaneously from east and south, forced the enemy to send to this province two and a half army corps, the absence of which from the Marne battlefield was fatal for the Germans. . . .

Profiting from the lessons of the past, the Wehrmacht of the period between two wars took measures to prevent the invasion of East Prussia from the east, through Insterburg, where Rennenkampf had marched, and from the south, through Allenstein, where Samsonov had made a deep penetration. Chapter VIII has described the effective system for defending the "Insterburg gap." As the Versailles Treaty not only allowed the existence of the fortress of Königsberg, but made no objection to an extension of its defences, the Germans were able quite "legally" to organize a new defensive system, covering the approaches from the south.

It must, however, be kept in view that the Versailles Treaty made some rectification of East Prussia's frontier in favour of Poland; its defensive problem was therefore different from that of 1914. It was not sufficient to fortify the "Allenstein Gap," for the Polish frontier was only a few miles from the important cross-roads and junctions of Osterode and Deutsch Eylau; if they were captured, the invader could completely turn the Allenstein position from the west. The Germans had therefore to organize a defensive system further inside East Prussia. They chose the high ground between the rivers Alle and Passarge, where a fortified camp was created between Wormditt on the Passarge and Heilsberg on the Alle. To the west of the Passarge, Mohrungen became an outpost of this system, linking it with the eventual defensive line of the Oberland canal; to the east a defensive line passed through Seeburg and Bischofsburg to the fortified region of the Masurian Lakes. As will be seen, the Wromditt fortifications played an important part in 1945.

With new defences practically all round East Prussia, did the enemy in 1945 reject the idea which had given him victory in 1914? Did he use his considerable forces only as garrisons of the fortified regions and strong points, without preparing a central striking force ready to operate on the "inner lines" against a menace from east or south? In January 1945 he still held the line of the Narev which continued the well-defended east frontier and acted as an advanced defensive belt, protecting the approaches to the south frontier. From the Niemen to the Vistula his front line ran for 200 miles, at first north-south and then (along the Narev) turned slightly south-west. This configuration of the front line and the considerable distances between the various sectors excluded any possibility of a manœuvre by the "inner line." Later when the Russians crossed the south frontier, the Germans, as will be seen, returned to this idea; but in January there was no mobile reserve to act either on the east frontier of East Prussia or on the Narev.

The enemy evidently counted on the strength of the Narev line, although his forces there were hardly sufficient to meet the offensive on a big scale. The Twelfth Army was responsible not only for the Narev line, but for the Warsaw region, on the south side of the Vistula, where four Divisions were retained. Six Divisions held the Narev line between the Vistula and the mouth of the Pissa. As General Reinhardt's troops were on both sides of the Vistula, the reserves (two armoured Divisions) were at Modlin bridge, behind the extreme right of the Narev line.

Further to the north, between the region of Lomza and that of Goldap-Gumbinnen, the Fourth Army held the front line, more than 120 miles long; its Divisions were, however, of better quality, and this sector had a series of solid fortifications, including the forts of the Masurian Lakes. From Gumbinnen to the Niemen was the sector of an Army, still in formation, but the Third Tank Army was concentrated at Insterburg, ready to reach any point on the East frontier. From these dispositions of the enemy forces it is clear that the *Ober-Kommando* did not expect a decisive Russian operation on the Narev sector, though

they did expect a strong attack in East Prussia, towards the line of the river Angerapp, on both sides of the Goldap-Darkehmen road. Not one of these forecasts was, however, justified by the event.

The Russians planned a decisive break-through on the Narev, to be carried out by such powerful forces that any enemy resistance in the area between the Narev and the south frontier of East Prussia would quickly be brushed aside. Rokossovsky's strong mobile columns would then penetrate into East Prussia, near Osterode and Deutsch Eylau, advancing towards Marienburg and Elbing, before the enemy had time to organize resistance. For immobilizing forces, which otherwise might be moved south or west from Insterburg, Chernyakhovsky was to start a large-scale attack simultaneously with Rokossovsky. This offensive, strategically speaking, was of secondary importance, and could be effective only if a definite success were obtained in the very first days. It was difficult to obtain rapid results of any importance by a frontal assault on the fortifications covering the Insterburg Gap. There was, however, a possibility of repeating the manœuvre, which had failed late in October (see Chapter VIII) in very unfavourable weather and ground conditions. With the frozen marshes north-east of Pilkallen, Chernyakhovsky might hope now to break through in the direction of Tilsit, turning from the north the strongest sector of the enemy defences.

Thus, the success of the Russian plans depended on the speed with which Rokossovsky's and Chernyakhovsky's offensive could be developed in the first four or five days. The Germans would certainly wait three days to see the Russian intentions; and if after this they decided on a serious regrouping of their forces in East Prussia, they would still need at least a week for this.

The need for a rapid success made the task of Rokossovsky's troops particularly difficult. The Narev is a big river, 250 to 300 yards wide, and 4 yards deep, between Pultusk and the Vistula. As the winter had come late, the Narev was covered with thin ice and men could only cross it singly in places; recent frosts, however, had helped

make passable the vast marshes on the Russian side of e river. On the German side were heights, commanding e approaches to Pultusk, where the enemy had built his rtified lines parallel to the river. The Russians succeeded capturing two narrow bridgeheads, one south of Pultusk, e other to the north, between that town and Rozan, hich they held for several weeks with some difficulty, e troops garrisoning them (two Divisions in one bridge-ad and one in the other) being under continual artillery e, in the same way as were the Allied troops in the nzio bridgehead. But while at Anzio only aircraft and val guns could reply, here, on the Narev, the strong illery from the Russian side was usually able to silence e enemy guns. These "artillery duels" were frequent n the Narev, and the enemy did not pay sufficient atten-on to the fresh Russian artillery concentrations, before e storm.

At 8 a.m. on 14 January the Russian guns, massed along e Narev, under the direction of Artillery-General Sokolsky pened fire and maintained it all day, concentrating chiefly n Pultusk and the lines covering it from the two bridge-eads. Enemy works were completely destroyed by the nd of the day, and the troops from the two bridgeheads oined forces among the ruins of Pultusk. All night fresh nits were poured into the extended bridgeheads; how onsiderable were these reinforcements may be judged by e fact that during the next two days units of four Russian rmies were fighting on the west side of the Narev. On e 15th, Makow on the Orzec was stormed, and to the outh of Pultusk, the Russians pierced three defensive nes and approached Naselsk. This town, for more than venty-four hours, was the centre of the fiercest fighting, or General Reinhardt here threw into battle his reserves, e S.S. Panzer Grenadier Division "Gross-Deutschland" nd the 7th Tank Division. On the 16th Russian tanks d mobile guns were in action near Naselsk—the newest nd heaviest Russian Tanks with 122 mm. guns against me "Royal Tigers" and improved "Ferdinands." The xt day the Russian infantry (General Popov's Army) ptured Naselsk and reached and crossed the river Wkra.

While the enemy reserves showed some fight on th Russian left and on their right, the Germans were organiz ing the defence of Przasnysz, in the centre, where th columns of General Feduninsky's Army advanced. Resis tance was only slight and the important cross-roads o Ciechanow (more than 30 miles west of the Narev), wa occupied on 16 January. On the 17th (the fourth day o the offensive) the picture of a complete break-throug became clear: Russian columns were already on the roa to Mlawa and had crossed the Wkra on a wide fron the enemy's Twelfth Army being disorganized and in fu flight. On 18 January Przasnysz was captured, and th same day the Germans left Modlin, while there was sti a possibility of escape by the motor road through Plons The next morning Plonsk was taken by the Russians an their tanks entered Mlawa and Soldau, a few miles fro the southern frontier of East Prussia.

In the meantime Chernyakhovsky's offensive started an developed also very successfully. On 14 January he open an intensive artillery fire against the enemy lines betwe Pilkallen and the river Goldap, which gradually increas in violence during the day. The Germans were certa that there would be an attack here the following mornin however, the night passed and the gun-fire continued, b no infantry attack took place. Meanwhile on the extre German left, between Pilkallen and Schillehnen, stro Russian formations took the offensive from Schirwin That day (15 January) the enemy still expected the ch attack to the south of Gumbinnen and thought the Russi assault north of Pilkallen was a diversionary move. B a great surprise awaited the Germans on 16 Janua Russian tanks (General Butkov's formation) crossed t frozen marshes between Schillehnen and the river Sheshu Schillehnen was turned and Butkov's tanks captu Lasdehnen on the Tilsit road; Schillehnen was then attack from three sides and, although strongly held, was taken storm. What the Germans thought a diversion was offensive by the whole of General Galitsky's Ar deploying between Pilkallen and the Niemen.

On the 17th the Russian manœuvre was at last un

stood by the enemy (all was still quiet where an attack had been expected), but valuable time was already lost; the Russians approached Ragnit, near Tilsit, their armour appeared in the region of Breitenstein, where the Inster is crossed by the Gumbinnen-Tilsit road, and Pilkallen was deeply outflanked. Two German tank Divisions were moved from Insterburg: they had sharp clashes with Russian tanks and s.-p. guns on the Inster, but this did not save the situation. On the 18th Pilkallen, the northern bastion of the chief enemy line, was attacked from three directions and fell (in October Pilkallen had resisted all frontal attacks). On 19 January Tilsit was entered by the Russians, and the next day their tanks were far beyond it, on the Königsberg road and also half-way to Insterburg. The "Insterburg Gap" was turned from the north, the fortifications defending it from the east lost their value and Gumbinnen was evacuated by the enemy on the 21st.

This brilliant campaign, so skilfully carried out by General Chernyakhovsky and his subordinates, surprised the enemy command at a moment when they had to consider a problem of a far more general character than the defence of the "Insterburg Gap." On 20 January Rokossovsky's armour had crossed the southern frontier of East Prussia, capturing Neidenburg and reaching the battlefield of Hindenburg's victory, called by the Germans "Tannenberg."*

Of still more general importance was the fact that Marshal Zhukov's troops were at Wloclawek on the Vistula, while the left flank of Rokossovsky's Army occupied Plock and Siezpec. The *Ober-Kommando* realized the urgency of organizing a defence against Zhukov's advance and of establishing, through the fortresses of Thorn (Torun)

* Tannenberg is some 15 miles from the site of the fatal battle of August 1914. A memorial was later built near Hohenstein, and this village should give its name to the battle. But the Germans preferred to make use of the name "Tannenberg", because in 1410 there had been a battle of Tannenberg, in which the Teutonic Knights were completely defeated by the Poles, Russo-Lithuanians and Czechs. The Tannenberg of 1914 was considered the revenge for that of 1410.

and Graudenz (Grudzialz), liaison with the considerable forces still in East Prussia. But troops, particularly good troops, were lacking; they were, moreover, the object of strong attacks by Russian aircraft as the weather improved and the sky cleared after 16 January.

These air attacks increased the disorder of the retreat of the defeated Twelfth Army. It was thought at first that this Army would be able to hold a defensive line along the river Drewenz, from the Thorn region to Deutsch Eylau and Osterode. But it was soon realized that what was left of it needed complete reorganization beyond the lower Vistula. There the Twenty-first Army was in process of being formed, but it was only capable of garrisoning Thorn and Graudenz, and moving two or three divisions towards Marienwerder. So East Prussia had to provide her own defence. Already by 20 January she was left to her fate, since other and more vital areas were endangered by Zhukov's and Konev's drive.

The regrouping started in East Prussia on the 19th or 20th. The units of the left flank Army, which had been defeated by General Galitsky, were to be concentrated in the Königsberg region, together with Volkssturm and various improvised formations (cadets of military and naval schools, marines, etc.). The Fourth Army was to defend the lines of the Angerapp and the Pregel, reducing the garrisons of the Masurian Lakes region and moving two or three Divisions to the defence of Allenstein. The Third Tank Army was to concentrate its main force in the "inner" stronghold of Wormditt-Heilsberg for a later, decisive counter-attack to the south or west. It was hoped that the vanguard of this Army would be able to reach the Osterode-Deutsch Eylau region in time to stop the dangerous Russian penetrations towards Marienburg and Elbing. All these measures corresponded with the urgent needs of the East Prussian situation. But they came too late.

On 22 January Rokossovsky scored a decisive success: units of his two central Armies (Feduninsky's and Gorbatov's) occupied Osterode, Deutsch Eylau and Allenstein, meeting only slight local opposition. The next day they extended their *place d'armes* to the east (to Ortelsburg and

Passenheim), while Feduninsky's armour quickly advanced to Mohrungen, which was captured after a sharp clash with the German reserves arriving there. Another tank column entered Saalfeld, only 30 miles south of Elbing. Then General Feduninsky and his chief tank commander, General Volsky, boldly moved their mobile columns (tanks and s.-p. guns followed by infantry in lorries) simultaneously towards Marienburg and the coastal area, east of Elbing. The left columns advanced between the Oberland Canal and the east branch (the Nogat) of the Vistula delta. They were at Riesenburg on the 24th, on the 25th at Stuhm, and on the 26th they captured the old capital of the Teutonic Order, Marienburg. In the meantime the right columns, advancing between the Oberland Canal and the river Passarge, on the 25th passed through Pr. Holland and switched to Mülhausen, where on the Königsberg-Elbing motor road they destroyed the enemy reserves, moving to the west.

On 26 January they crossed this motor road and reached the sea near Tolkemit. Strategically the battle of East Prussia was won: all the enemy forces east of the Passarge were now cut off from the Reich.

The enemy defence was disorganized by the daring and rapid Russian move. Units which had time to reach the western strip of East Prussia sought refuge in Elbing, which, being now garrisoned, and its communications with Danzig being still open, could resist for some time, but it was already outside the East Prussian defensive system. Rokossovsky's left flank Army (General Popov's), had crossed the Drewenz and was deploying in the "Kulmland," a region between the approaches to Thorn (Torun) and Graudenz (Grudziadz). The development in East Prussia freed Popov's Army for an attack on the Vistula fortresses and for operations on the west side of the river.

The regrouping of the enemy forces, decided suddenly, in such critical circumstances, led to confusion in the area vital for the defence of East Prussia: when the strategic reserve (the Third Tank Army) was moved from the Insterburg region south and west, this important town and cross-roads remained pratically undefended either by the Fourth Army or by the recently constituted "Königsberg

Army." General Galitsky's units, operating north of the Pregel, immediately seized this opportunity and on 22 January captured not only Insterburg, but the bridges over the Pregel, reaching the chief East Prussian motor road. Galitsky's armour, making use of this famous road, the next day captured Wehlau, on the river Alle, while other units of the same command took Labiau, near the mouth of the Deime. Thus, the "Königsberg Army," even before it was organized, had already lost the two advanced forts of Königsberg and the line of the Deime, which was an essential part of the outer perimeter of the fortified camp!

These events made it impossible for the Fourth Army to hold the line of the Angerapp. Fortified with so many efforts and so much care, this line had to be abandoned: on the 23rd the Russians occupied Darkehmen and crossed the river. But the Fourth Army also had to move back those units, which were still far to the east, away from the battlefield. A general retreat across the Masurian Lakes region began, followed up by Chernyakhovsky's central and left flank columns, which, as yet, had not to fight. Marggrabowo (re-named "Treuberg") was occupied and the extreme right of Rokossovsky's command fought their way to Lyck and Biala. On the 24th the Russians entered Angerburg; the whole line of the Angerapp was now in their hands and the invasion route to the inner area of East Prussia was widely opened from the east. On 26 January the Germans left Lötzen, a fortress on the eastern fringe of the Masurian Lakes system. This proves how much the problem of the Fourth Army's retreat perplexed the enemy. And there was reason for this: the Russians had already captured Nordenburg and Allenburg, and now threatened the important inner cross-roads of Gerdauen.

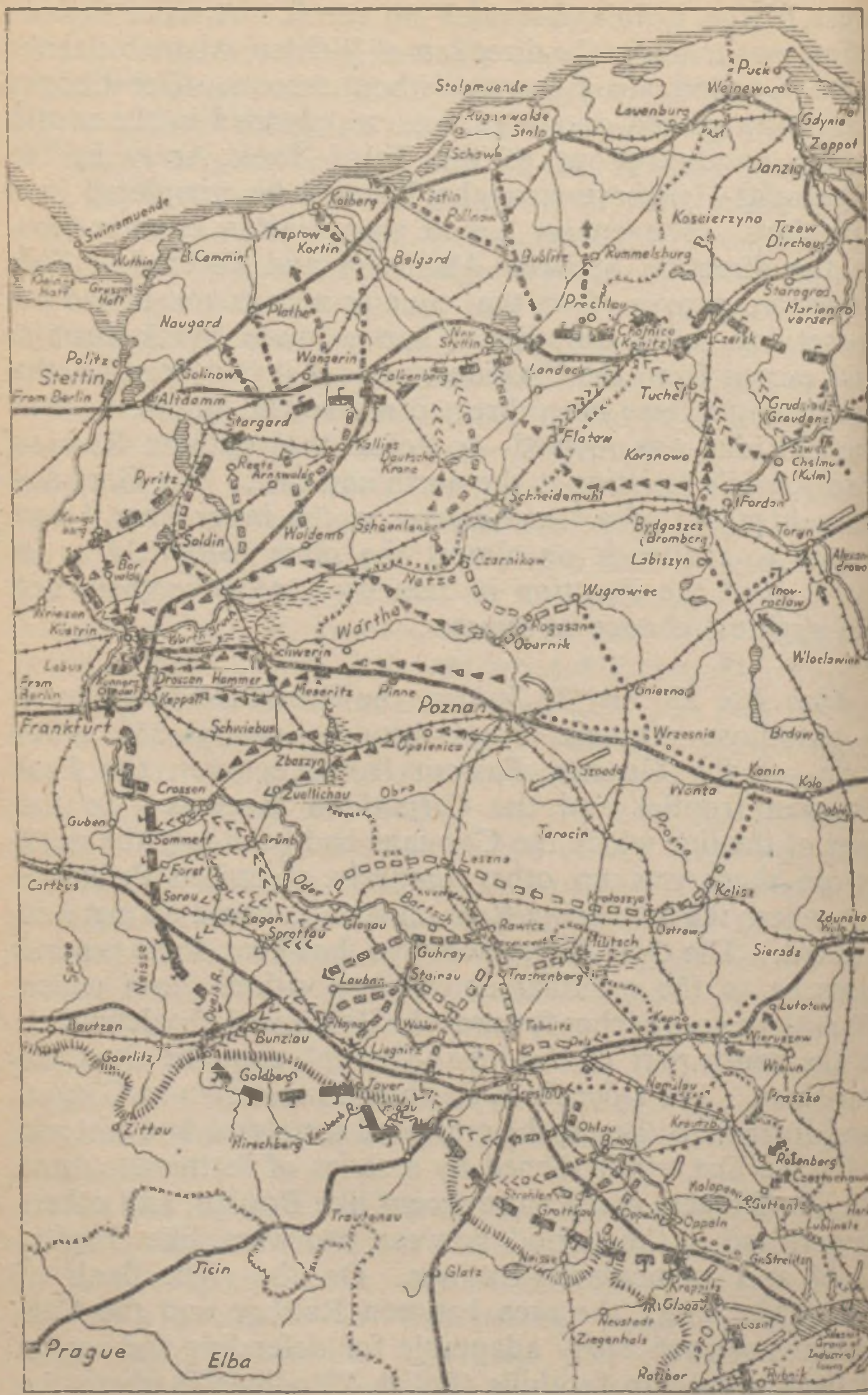
Thus the situation suddenly became critical, not only on the roads westwards, but in the region immediately west of the Masurian Lakes, and beyond the Deime, on the nearest approaches to Königsberg. General Butkov's tanks captured another advanced fort of Königsberg, Tapiau, in the angle formed by the Deime and the Pregel. The enemy then in haste organized several counter-attacks

west of the Deime, but with no result. A more serious effort was made in the direction of Wehlau, where his tanks were in action, also however without success. Great hopes were now placed on the manœuvre, planned in the south, where concentrations of the Third Tank Army in the Wormditt-Heilsberg stronghold would be completed in a few days. The enemy would then start a counter-blow in the direction between Allenstein and Osterode. This direction proves that the counter-manœuvre aimed at something more ambitious than a mere break-through and escape from the Russian ring. If it had been so, the effort would have been directed not south, but west. But the old idea was revived—to defeat the southern Russian Army, while resisting in the north and east. The Germans thought again of a "manœuvre on the inner lines," and hoped to realize it on almost the same battlefield as in 1914. But the situation in January 1945 gave them not the slightest chance of success.

* * * * *

Map No. 23. By 20 January the Russians had achieved a grandiose strategic break-through—nearly 350 miles wide—of the German Eastern front, between the East Prussian frontier and the Carpathian foothills. To the west of the line which the Germans had held only the week before there was no other properly organized defensive line where the advancing Russian Armies could be met and resisted. The *Ober-Kommando* had, however, some general ideas as to the eventual defensive positions from which the eastern approaches towards the Reich could be defended. In the south part of the break-through area the situation was clear. The Oder from Ratibor downstream to Glogau (and further to the north) presented a natural and historic defensive line, strengthened by a series of fortresses, some old like Glogau, some more recent like Breslau, and others modernized in the period between two wars, like Oppeln, Cosel and particularly Ratibor. On the right flank of this "Oder line" the area between Ratibor and the Carpathians seemed easily adaptable for defending the region of the Carpathian foothills (Polish "Podhale") where the Vistula's tributaries run in deep valleys. And even if this

MAP 23


Stolpmuende
Lauenburg
Puck
Weineworo
Gdynia
Zoppot
Danzig
Kolberg
Köslin
Swinemuende
Treptow
Kartin
Belgard
Bublitz
Rummelsburg
Koscierzyno
Tczew
Dirchau
Nuthin
B. Commin
Plathe
Naugard
Prechlau
Chojnice (Konitz)
Czersk
Staragrad
Marienwerder
Politz
Stettin
From Berlin
Altdamm
Golinow
Wangerin
Falkenberg
Landeck
Tuchel
Grudziadz (Graudenz)
Stargard
Flatow
Kallies
Deutsche Krone
Kornowo
Chelmno (Kulm)
Pyritz
Regis Arnswalde
Schneidemühl
Fordon
Soldin
Waldemb
Schönlanke
Bydgoszcz (Bromberg)
Torun
Czarnikau
Labiszyn
Alexandrowo
Netze
Wugrowiec
Inowroclaw
Warthe
Kriessen
Küstrin
Bartch
Rogasen
Oborniki
Schwerin
Wloclawek
Lebus
Droszen
Hammer
Meseritz
Pinne
Gniezno
Frankfurt
Keppen
Pozna
Schwiebus
Wrzesnia
Brdyw
Opalenica
Zbaszyn
Konin
Koto
Crossen
Zuellichau
Obra
Wanta
Guben
Sommerf
Grünb
Tarocin
Drosna
Leszno
Cottbus
Forst
Oder
Kalisz
Sorau
Sagan
Sprottau
Glogau
Bartsch
Krotoszyn
Rawicz
Ostrow
Zduns. Wola
Militsch
Guhrau
Sieradz
Spree
Neisse
Lauban
Stainau
Trachenberg
Lutomiersk
Bautzen
Bunzlau
Tebnitz
Kepno
Wieruszow
Goerlitz
Liegnitz
Wielun
Goldberg
Jauer
Namslau
Praszka
Zittau
Hirschberg
Ohlau
Kraschen
Rosenberg
Czestochowa
Kolopanz
R. Guttentag
Hertz
Lublinitz
Trautenau
Oppeln
Gr. Strelitz
Ticin
Neisse
Glatz
Krappitz
Gleiwitz
Neustadt
Ziegenhals
Cosel
Prague
Elba
Ratibor
Hubnik
Group of Industrial Towns

difficult region were crossed by the Russians, there existed in its rear, near Moravska Ostrava, solid fortifications, covering the "Moravian Gap," built by the Czechs against a German invasion.

The situation seemed even clearer in the north where the lower Vistula formed a natural front line with the ex-German "Vistula fortresses," Graudenz, Kulm, and Thorn. Torun and Grudziadz, which had been ceded to Poland, still remained fortresses, and if they had not retained their armament, they still possessed many works of substantial construction. Somewhat different was the situation in the central area, between the Vistula and the Oder, or to put it differently, between Torun and Breslau. Here on a line of some 150 miles, there were neither fortresses nor forts, nor natural features, forming serious obstacles to a modern invader. It is true that, in the north part of the Vistula-Oder gap, a topography useful for defence is to be found along the upper course of the Netze. This tributary of the Warta runs from its source northwards through a chain of small lakes, then, near the commercial town of

MAP 23

DRIVE TO THE ODER AND TO THE POMERANIAN COAST
21st JANUARY–4th MARCH, 1945

Russian columns advancing 21st January
Russian columns advancing 22nd and 23rd January
Russian columns advancing 24th to 27th January
Russian columns advancing 28th January to 3rd February
Russian columns advancing 4th to 11th February
Russian columns advancing 12th to 18th February
Front line reached by 20th February
Breakthrough to the Pomeranian coast (27th February to 4th March)
German frontiers
Motor roads
Roads
Railways (only principal)
Canals
Lakes
Marshes
Foothills

Bromberg (Bydgoszcz), turns sharply westwards, leaving a defile 10 miles wide between its course and that of the Vistula. When not frozen, the Netze, with its small marshy lakes, can serve for defence, provided, however, that the "Bydgoszcz defile" be defensively organized. But even then the basic problem remains unsolved, for to the south of the Warta, which runs east to west through the middle of the Vistula-Oder gap, there are no obstacles even like the Netze; the river Prosna on which Kalisz stands being easily fordable in places.

As well as a definite and continuous defensive line, the Germans also lacked the troops necessary to defend such a line, if it existed. The situation was somewhat better on both flanks, but particularly bad in the centre. Of their central Armies, the Second and the Fourth Tank could be finally written off, while the Twelfth had been so badly mauled that its reconstitution needed weeks, if not months. The Russians published the losses suffered by the enemy from 14 to 24 January; those caused by Konev's, Zhukov's and Rokossovsky's Groups were calculated at more than 200,000 "killed," 75,000 prisoners, 2,000 tanks and s.-p. guns destroyed or captured. Three-quarters of these losses certainly fell on the Second and the Fourth Tank Armies, and meant their almost complete destruction. As three divisions of the Twelfth Army fled from the Narev into East Prussia, only remnants of five or six Divisions could join the Twenty-First Army, which had to defend the Vistula and its fortresses, the Bydgoszcz defile and the route to Poznan.

In the south the situation seemed more hopeful for the Germans. The First Tank Army, which had fought only rearguard actions against Petrov's troops, and was only partially involved in the fighting against Konev's left flank, was in fairly good order. This part of the front had, besides, an organized reserve, the "reconstituted" Ninth Army, in which were some reliable Divisions transferred from various countries late in 1944. Its formation took place in Silesia and was almost complete at the time of the Russian offensive. While the First Tank Army was retreating westwards, south of the upper Vistula, the enemy

Command had to decide a delicate question: how and where to make use of the Ninth Army? On the Oder, chiefly behind the river, on its stretch between Ratibor and Breslau? Or in an attempt to defend the important group of industrial (Polish and German) towns, almost touching each other between Sosnowiec and Gleiwitz? The vital significance of these towns for the enemy's war production was obvious. But to organize a defensive line round the industrial group (first along the Klodnitz canal, then following the outer fringe of Gleiwitz, Beuthen and Bedzin, and finally along the river Przemsza, flowing to the Vistula), the greater part of the Ninth Army was needed. As a result of the enemy's scarcity of troops at that moment, it was decided not to take this risk: the greater part of the Ninth Army might be destroyed in the industrial towns, and then no troops would be left to defend the Oder line to Breslau and possibly further downstream. . . . Only local formations, supported by some infantry, belonging to the First Tank Army, were left in the industrial region. The Germans rightly expected a coming extension of the operations towards the line Poznan-Breslau and further west. The Ninth Army must then be moved downstream beyond Breslau. To replace it on the upper Oder, the transfer of the Seventeenth Army to this region was ordered. This Army had been for some time forming in Austria, as the reserve of Friesner's Group. Its units were now transported by rail and road, across Moravia to upper Silesia.

Units of Konev's Group had the honour of being first to cross the frontier of the Reich. On 20–21 January the offensive developed on the front of three of Konev's Armies. On his extreme left General Gusev concentrated his Army on the north side of the Vistula, west of Cracow, advancing towards the industrial towns; the operations to the south of the Vistula were left to Petrov's Group. Marshal Konev skilfully moved the main force of that Army *round* the industrial agglomeration: Gusev's right flank column soon approached the Breslau-Gleiwitz motor road where it crosses the Klodnitz. In the meantime Zhadov's Army advanced with its left flank along the Malapane, on Oppeln, and with its right along the Stober, on Brieg. On the 21st

it captured Kreutzburg, Rosenberg and Guttentag, where Volkssturm formations were easily brushed aside. Further north the vanguard of Koroteyev's Army crossed the frontier near Namslau. The fourth of Konev's Armies (under the command of General Pukhov) was somewhat behind the other three Armies, as it had to cover the long distance from Piotrkow to Wielun; still further behind was Gordov's Army, which advanced as the second échelon of Konev's right flank, after being occupied for some days in liquidating enemy units dispersed in the Malopolska forests.

Despite the great distances to be covered, Pukhov's mobile columns moved rapidly, and on the 23rd they, in their turn, crossed the Reich frontier near Militsch, 18 miles north-east of Breslau. Koroteyev on the same day not only captured Namslau and fought near Oels, but reached the Oder, between Breslau and Ohlau. Zhadov continued to advance towards Oppeln and on his left his units, together with those of Gusev's command, had some serious fighting at Gross Strehlen (near the motor road) against enemy troops belonging to the garrison of Gosel, entrenched on the hill Annaberg. On the 24th Rybalko's Tank Corps, operating with Zhadov's Army, captured Oppeln, the capital of upper Silesia; the greater part of the town is on the east side of the Oder. With Koroteyev near Ohlau and Zhadov at Oppeln, it was clear that the next step for the Russians would be the crossing of the upper Oder. On the same day Lelushenko's Tank Corps, operating with Pukhov's Army, entered the Polish town of Rawicz and the German town of Trachenberg, some 20 miles east of Steinau, which is on the Oder more than 40 miles north-west of Breslau. Pukhov's Army established liaison with Zhukov's left flank, which had already by-passed Kalisz.

Covering even longer distances, Zhukov's columns advanced no less rapidly than those of Konev's command. If the Germans had seriously hoped to resist on the "Netze line," these hopes proved ephemeral. On 21 January the Russians occupied Inowroclaw, and the next day Labiszin on the Netze; this river and its chain of lakes were frozen

and easily crossed by strong formations of tanks, under the command of Generals Orel and Katukov. On the 23rd the ancient Polish town of Gniezno (the capital of Wielikopolska, 35 miles from Poznan) was in Russian hands. A still greater surprise awaited the enemy on the same day: after having concentrated units of Belov's Army and Bogdanov's tanks in the Bydgoszcz defile, Marshal Zhukov suddenly launched an attack, aimed at the capture of Bydgoszcz. Although this important town (known to the Germans as Bromberg) had been prepared for defence and garrisoned by the three best Divisions of the Twenty-First Army, the violence of the Russian attack so impressed the enemy, and his troops so feared to be cut off from the west by the Russian tanks, that, after short and confused fighting Bydgoszcz fell. It was a considerable success for Marshal Zhukov, as the road towards the Reich frontier (only 50 miles to the west) was now open.

Another of Zhukov's Armies, under the command of General Chuykov, was behind the tanks which crossed the Netze, while further south appeared the heads of the columns belonging to General Tsvetaev's and General Kolpakchi's Armies. Units of these two Armies captured Kalisz, crossed the Prosna and made connection with Konev's Group. By 25 January an almost continuous front of at least eight Russian Armies was formed between Bydgoszcz and the Silesian industrial towns, on a line 200 miles long, with other Armies and reserves behind that line, which was only 200 miles from Berlin.

A general re-grouping of the German forces in the West and East was now an obvious necessity. But the state of those forces and of their communications, subject for months to devastating Allied air attacks, were such that to fight the "two-front war" was less possible than ever for the Germans. Except the Sixth Panzer Army, which was taken from the Western front for reorganization, not a single complete Army could be moved from West to East. And even the number of single Divisions which might be moved, after being replaced by new formations of a "passive" type, was very limited and did not exceed ten, those taken from Italy included. Conditions of transport

did not allow of their appearance on the Eastern front before the second half or the end of February. The Divisions transported by sea from Holland, Norway and particularly from Denmark might reach the northern sector sooner, but good quality Divisions were few in those countries, while formations of a recent date were certainly no better than those which could be formed "on the spot." In any case the deficiencies of land transport (lack of fuel and even lack of motor vehicles) began to be felt on the roads, while the much decreased railway transport made sea transport in the Baltic of particular importance to the enemy. During one night, in winter, troops could be shipped more or less safely from the Kiel Canal not only to Stettin, but to Kolberg or Danzig. The Pomeranian coastal zone became an area where reinforcements could be concentrated quicker than elsewhere. And by the Baltic sea route not only fresh units, but numerous complements arrived from West and North Germany; many wounded men, whose convalescent leave was suddenly curtailed, were among them.

This explains why the Twenty-first Army obtained considerable reinforcements, while from the units which reached Danzig by sea (some from East Prussia) a fresh Army (mostly Volkssturm) was rapidly constituted (the Twenty-second?). Himmler, as head of the "Home Front," was sent to Danzig and Pomerania, everywhere recruiting not only unfortunate Volkssturmer, but those S.S. who had so far escaped their "own" call up. The re-constitution of the Twelfth Army was also accelerated by the conditions in the area between the lower Oder and the lower Vistula. Precautions were taken so as not to expend its force in rearguard actions: Poznan was left to an improvised garrison, while infantry and tank Divisions of the Twelfth Army concentrated on the "Obra line" (the frontier of Brandenburg), prepared, however, to retreat still further to the west, behind the Oder. They were, in fact, for the moment the only defenders of the direct route to Berlin.

There were projects to form a new tank Army in the Berlin region, but, even if material were available for this,

there was a lack of well-trained and experienced men. Only after the Third Tank Army in East Prussia had lost practically all its tanks, s.-p. guns and other auto-vehicles, its survivors were carefully shipped to Germany to form a "new" Third Tank Army round this nucleus in the Berlin sector. There was one more Army in formation, the Eleventh, on the middle Elbe. But while several more or less ready Divisions were taken from it to reinforce the Ninth Army, the others were retained in the West by the rapid development of the Allied offensive in March.

The Ninth Army, strengthened to perhaps fifteen Divisions, had the important task of defending the upper Oder, not only from Ratibor to Breslau, but further to the north-west, as the Russians were already near Steinau and might appear any moment near Glogau. No wonder this Army was in haste to transfer its right sector to the First Tank Army, which had to hold the line Cosel-Ratibor-Pless-Wadowice, with its right flank in the Carpathian foothills. And as has already been said, there was no adequate force to defend the group of industrial towns north of this line and east of that of the Oder.

By a skilful manœuvre Marshal Konev facilitated the task of his left flank (Gusev's Army). The industrial group was attacked as it was outflanked from the west: the first town of the group, which the Russians captured, was the most western—Gleiwitz (25 January). This led to confusion in the other industrial towns, panic spreading not only among German civilians and administrative personnel, but among the "battle groups" and Volkssturm, who were afraid of being cut off from the Reich. On the 26th Gusev captured Hindenburg and, during the next two or three days, extending his assaults, rather paradoxically, from west to east, he captured Konigshütte, Beuthen, Kattowice and, at last, the whole of the Dąbrowa coal basin. . . . This amazing loss of centres of war production, so vital for the enemy, proves that German resistance was neutralized, not only by Konev's surprise attack, but by the presence in the industrial towns of big crowds of foreign workers who submerged the weak garrisons. After clearing the industrial agglomeration, Gusev's vanguards occupied

Oswiecim—a former Austrian fortress, where the Nazis had established an extermination camp—and advanced towards Rybnik, but at Mikolow met with active resistance from elements of the First Tank Army. General Petrov advanced westwards slowly, across difficult terrain; by the end of January he crossed the Skawa.

Zhadov's and Koroteyev's Armies consolidated their positions on the east bank of the upper Oder and made their first attempts to cross the river. In spite of continued frosty weather the rapid current of the upper Oder prevented the formation of a sufficiently thick ice cover. Single men, and in places light guns or vehicles, succeeded in crossing the river; Russian patrols and special parties were as daring as usual. On the 27th and 28th the Germans admitted the establishment of several small Russian bridgeheads on the west side—near Steinau, north-west of Breslau, near Ohlau and at Oppeln. The Germans resisted stubbornly at Brieg, however, and showed a feverish energy in organizing the defence of Breslau. Koroteyev's troops, after having taken Oels (where 150 aircraft were captured on the airfield), captured Trebnitz, reached the Oder and approached the industrial suburbs on the east side of the river. But Breslau was protected by two lines of real forts, not modern, but still useful; while anti-tank ditches and minefields modernized the defence and made it more effective; strong artillery, four infantry Divisions, tank units and numerous Volkssturmers were concentrated in this stronghold on the Oder.

The Silesian operational plan had to be determined by the Russian Command before the crossing of the Oder began on a big scale. The troops which were to cross the upper Oder would certainly be expected to march north-westwards, parallel to the river, making use, first of all, of the great Silesian motor road which leads to Berlin. But between Oppeln and Breslau the Sudetes foothills on the west side of the Oder valley are only 15 miles from the river, and in places less than 5 miles from the motor road. An Army advancing into this narrow corridor would not have enough space to manœuvre and might be threatened on its left flank by an enemy holding strong positions

in the foothills a short distance from this Army's march. More favourable conditions could be found north of Breslau where the line of the foothills turns sharply to the west, leaving a considerable and more or less flat area between the river and the mountain region. Moreover, from Lower Silesia to Berlin the route is much shorter and operations there might be developed in close contact with Zhukov's Armies. All this made Marshal Konev transfer "the strategic centre of gravity" of his offensive to his right flank—to Pukhov's Army, which had already reached the Oder near Steinau, and to Gordov's Army, which was expected to occupy a sector on the right flank of Pukhov's troops. After the arrival of Gordov's Army in the Glogau region, Konev's offensive in Lower Silesia was to be started.

Meanwhile Zhukov's offensive towards the middle Oder was in full development. German reconnaissance aircraft reported that all highways and byways leading westwards across the Polish salient, round Poznan, were "black" with Russian mechanized columns, many miles long, bringing troops, munitions, fuel and supplies. In accelerating the tempo of his advance, Zhukov was helped by a great number of motor vehicles, delivered to the Russians by the Allies. The frosty spell still continued, but a change of weather might come and made road conditions less satisfactory.

One of the consequences of Zhukov's success at Bydgoszcz was the crossing of the Vistula at Kulm by General Popov's Army (the left flank Army of Rokossovsky's Group). This Army operated now in the "Polish corridor," towards Danzig, while Zhukov moved Belov's Army and Bogdanov's tanks westwards, on both sides of the Netze, leaving several Divisions to invest Torun. On the nothern side of the Netze, the twin junctions of Schneidemühl and Deutsche Krone were organized as small fortresses; they had already been prepared by the enemy as advanced bases before the Polish Campaign of 1949. With Schneidemühl on its left, the German Twenty-first Army held the defensive line along the Netze, covered by the marshes of the "Netze Bruch." Instead of a frontal attack on Schneidemühl, Zhukov preferred to find the weak points in this line

further west, and he was helped by the frost, which made the Netze icebound. His columns moved through Wągrowiec to Czarnikow, which was reached on the 27th. Then on 28 and 29 January, not only Belov's infantry but also Bogdanov's tanks crossed the Netze and surprised the enemy at Woldenberg and Schönlanke. The Netze line had been broken before it was adequately organized.

Chuykov's Army, in the meantime, completed the encirclement of Poznan, where the Germans kept a mixed garrison after the retreat of their Divisions of the Twelfth Army to the "Obra line." But this "Obra line" fell as easily as the Netze line, and the marshes of the "Obra Bruch" were no more serious obstacle than those of the "Netze Bruch," Orel's and Katukov's tanks, moving ahead of Chuykov's and Tsvetayev's infantry, were able to cross the Obra lakes and marshes near Beutschen (the frontier station) and at other points (30 January). The enemy tried to organize a rearguard action on the line Schwerin-Meseritz-Schwiebus-Züllichau; he fought well, particularly at Schwerin, but on the 31st he was overwhelmed by Tsvetayev's lorried infantry and began a retreat towards Frankfurt and Küstrin. During the next two or three days Russian vanguards were across the Frankfurt motor-road at Sonnenberg and Reppin; they also reached Ziebingen opposite Fürstenberg near the mouth of the Neisse.

Zhukov's immediate object was, however, not the nearest approaches to Frankfurt, but the consolidation of his right sector, where he expected more important strategic developments. He was anxious to concentrate Chuykov's Army (except for units left to invest Poznan) on the north side of the Netze and Warta. This proves that the Marshal fully appreciated the significance of Pomeranian *place d'armes* to which the enemy was bringing his reinforcements.

On 31 January Zhukov's units captured Landsberg, an important cross-roads on the north side of the Warta. During the succeeding days, Russian columns advanced across the Pomeranian motor-road; Soldin was taken by surprise, and on 2 February the Russians were at Neudamm and Bärwalde. The enemy showed some fighting spirit

and busily organized a new defensive line—Königsberg-Pyritz-Arnswalde. Other Russian columns advanced on the last-named town and on Deutsche Krone, while Schneidemühl was encircled, becoming a "hedgehog." In the frontier region, Schneidemühl was also by-passed; Russian columns reached Jastrow and Flatow in liaison with Popov's vanguards, advancing on Tuchel and Hoinice (Konitz). At the end of January the thaw began, but the greater part of the marshy areas was already behind the Russians; moreover, the roads in Pomerania are excellent and the ground sandy in many places.

In less than a month after starting his offensive, Marshal Zhukov was able to form a front on the middle Oder, on the shortest route to Berlin. By 10 February the positions of his two left flank armies followed the east bank of the river from the Züllichau region to a point near Ziebingen, then they crossed the Kunnersdorf battlefield (where the Russians had defeated Frederick II in the Seven Years' War) and again reached the Oder, opposite Lebus (some 12 miles north of Frankfurt) and approached the defences of Küstrin, in the angle between the Oder and the Warta. On the other side of the Warta, Chuykov's units were already near the northern suburbs of Küstrin and held the right bank of the Oder at a point west of Bärwalde. The Germans more than once stated that the Russians established small bridgeheads on the west side (north-west of Küstrin, near Lebus, near Fürstenberg); these crossings were made only by some reconnaissance parties, but as they afterwards sometimes returned to the east bank, the enemy was able to claim that "the bridgeheads were wiped out." The time had not yet come to establish real bridgeheads west of the Oder.

After a month of uninterrupted fighting and marching Zhukov's Armies needed to readjust their communications. By 10 February, not only most of the rear services, but some of the fighting units were still on the move towards the front line. And two of Zhukov's Armies north of the Warta and Netze had to hold the front, 150 miles long, from the Oder to the region north of Schneidemühl, while some of their units were diverted to invest the enemy fortresses

and "hedgehogs"—Torun, Schneidemühl, Deutsche Krone, Poznan and Arnswalde; the first was fortunately cleared of the Germans on 9 February. Meanwhile the enemy concentrations in Pomerania increased behind the new fortified line, which ran from Königsberg to Pyritz and then to the regions of Stargard, Falkenberg and Neustettin. Before starting an offensive across the Oder, it was necessary to eliminate any possibility of enemy action, based on this line and directed against Zhukov's communications. Reinforcements were expected from Marshal Rokossovsky's Group, as developments in East Prussia now allowed units of Batov's and Feduninsky's Armies to join Popov's Army already operating in the Polish corridor. Before they arrived, Zhukov's troops on the Pomeranian front avoided any general action, but gradually improved their positions, capturing Deutsche Krone and Märkisch Friedland (11th), Kallies (12th), Schneidemühl (14th), Arnswalde (22nd). After twenty-eight days of investment and systematic reduction of the area held by the enemy, Poznan fell on 23 February. These captures raised the number of prisoners by some 40,000. Popov captured Hoinice (Konitz) on the 15th; Graudenz (Grudziadz) was invested by other troops of Rokossovsky, and remained the only Vistula fortress still in German hands.

Marshal Konev's great drive beyond the Oder started on 4 February in Upper Silesia. The Oder was crossed by Zhadov's Army, assisted on its left by Gusev's units. Thaw made the crossings still more difficult, as nowhere was there any ice cover from one bank to the other of the rapidly running river. The narrow Russian bridgeheads at Oppeln and near Ohlau were under severe gunfire. It took two nights and days to concentrate on the west side sufficient infantry to storm the German strong points, Ohlau and Brieg, and only few light tanks could be used. On 6 February Ohlau and Brieg were taken; the Russians crossed the motor-road, captured Grottkau and approached Strehlen. The enemy First Tank Army was prevented by Gusev's demonstrative attacks, near Cosel, from intervening. This first move by Konev had only a limited object: Zhadov's troops reached the south-east approaches to

Breslau, where they expected soon to meet Koroteyev's units, encircling the Silesian capital from the west.

On 8 February the greater part of Koroteyev's Army crossed the Oder at the Steinau bridgehead and at other points nearer Breslau. During the three following days the Russians succeeded in advancing rapidly; they used numerous tanks in the flat country of Lower Silesia. Lübenau, Liegnitz, Haynau were captured and, switching some of his columns towards Breslau, Koroteyev captured Neumarkt and Canth—the latter point on the Berlin motor-road, only a few miles from Breslau. The next day other Russian tanks reached Bunzlau, the town where Field-Marshal Kutuzov died early in 1813. And this was still not the principal "wave" of Konev's great offensive. On Koroteyev's right appeared columns of Pukhov's and Gordov's Armies, accompanied by Lelushenko's tanks. They crossed the river at Steinau and on both sides of Glogau, which was encircled; the enemy forces on the river were in great confusion. On the 14th mobile columns of these two Armies were already in Grünberg, Neusaltz, Freystadt and Sprottau, while Koroteyev firmly held the line Bunzlau-Goldberg-Jauer-Striegau, and his advanced parties moved to meet those sent by Zhadov, south of Breslau. On 15 January the Silesian capital was finally surrounded; on the same day Lelushenko's tanks, followed by Pukhov's and Gordov's infantry, crossed the Bober and captured Sommerfeldt and Sorau. On the 16th Sagan fell; having crossed the Queis, Russian tanks next day approached the Neisse, between Guben and Forst. The Germans hastily evacuated the region of Crossen, where the Oder is joined by the Bober. So long as only the cruiser tanks and mobile columns penetrated the area between the Bober and the Neisse, the enemy several times counter-attacked, approaching Sommerfeldt, Sorau and Sagan. After a few days, however, the infantry firmly established a front line in this sector, with main positions along the Bober, and advanced strong points at Sommerfeldt and Sorau; patrols observed the Neisse near Guben, Forst and Muskau.

In a single week the Germans lost the greater part of

Lower Silesia. They lost also some 50,000 prisoners and killed, and very considerable material: even aircraft captured on the airfields amounted to many hundreds. But this time the enemy Command proved reasonable and did not insist on rearguard fighting or on garrisoning of "hedgehogs" (except Glogau, whence the garrison was not able to escape). As a result, the bulk of the Ninth Army could retreat and concentrate behind the Neisse. This marshy river (in itself not a great obstacle to the invader) became, in fact, "the last ditch" of the Eastern defence, being only 80 miles by motor-road from Berlin and 50 from Dresden.

The last week of February Konev's Group occupied *positions de départ* for the next and final stage of the offensive. A period of about six weeks was necessary to readjust the lines of communication—a task no less urgent here than behind Zhukov's front. With Gordov's and Pukhov's Armies concentrated on the Bober and Queis, Koroteyev's Army could complete the investment of Breslau and start a systematic attack on the fortress. Other units took positions along the line of the foothills, covering the siege of Breslau from any eventual enemy attempt of relief (from beyond the mountains). Further to the south-east, Zhadov's Army held the front line, stretching towards the Oppeln region, while on the east side of the Oder, Gusev's Army occupied the area between this river and the Upper Vistula (near Pless). Here liaison was established with Petrov, who, after fierce fighting, had recently captured Bielsko—an enemy strong point on the road to Teschen. Konev's left flank Armies, together with Petrov's Group, were operationally connected with the last phase of the Danubian-Carpathian campaign and not with the developments expected in the direction of Berlin and Dresden.

On Marshal Zhukov's front preparations continued for a drive to the Pomeranian coast, which was to be the last manœuvre before crossing the Oder and the march on Berlin. A regrouping took place in Pomerania and the Polish corridor of the units of Batov's Army (belonging to Rokossovsky's Group). They were to advance towards Danzig, while General Popov's Army, with General

Panfilov's tanks, deployed west of Hoinice (Konitz), for a blow which was to outflank Neustettin. Zhukov concentrated Belov's Army (strengthened by several infantry Divisions and Bogdanov's and Katukov's Tank Corps) for a break through between Stargard and Neustettin; Chuykov's units were to attack the line Königsberg-Pyritz. The operation started on 24 February and developed into a brilliant success.

In the Polish corridor General Grishin's Army Corps stormed Czersk—an important cross-roads. West of Hoinice, General Popov smashed the enemy lines at Schlohau and Hammerstein, and his tanks switched round Neustettin to Bublitz, which was taken on the 26th. The Germans fled in disorder from their stronghold at Neustettin, and their attempted counter-attacks from the east, by the Danzig Army (formed by Himmler), were easily brushed aside; during the first days of March, Popov captured Rummelsburg, Pollnow, Schlawe and Köslin, and Russian tanks reached the sea coast near the last-named town.

Belov's attack began a few days later and developed even more rapidly. The front line of the Twenty-first Army was broken on the Pomeranian motor-road, between Wangerin and Falkenberg. Numerous Russian tank columns fanned out between Polzin and Platne. Then Körlin was reached and, as the next step, the Russians (on 3 March) advanced to the sea coast near Kolberg. Chuykov took Pyritz by storm, and the enemy, fearing encirclement at Stargard, on 5 March evacuated this important and carefully fortified defensive base in Pomerania. Neugard was also taken by the Russians, and on the left they entered Konigsberg, in the salient formed by the Oder—an area of great strategic importance for future operations towards Berlin.

CHAPTER XII

END OF THE DANUBIAN-CARPATHIAN CAMPAIGN; THE MARCH ON VIENNA

(March–April 1945)

Map No. 24. During the second half of February the Germano-Hungarians continued to counter-attack on the north side of the Danube, east of Komarno. The object of these counter-attacks (which were not on a big scale) was to eliminate the Russian bridgehead on the Hron. Near the mouth of this river General Pliev's troops retired on the east bank, but further upstream the Russians continued to hold a sizable area. At the other end of the Danube front enemy activities increased; units of Weich's Balkan Force even crossed the Drava in the marshy region where this river joins the Danube. They succeeded in penetrating across the Danubian *Plavni* (see chapter X) in the direction of the Mohacs-Pecs road.

The Russians well understood the diversionary character of both these movements and connected them with big concentrations of enemy troops (mostly armoured) in the Gyor region, which had for some time been under observation by the Russian Air Command. It was evident that the Germans were preparing something like a counter-blow on a large scale in the Szekes-Fehervar region.

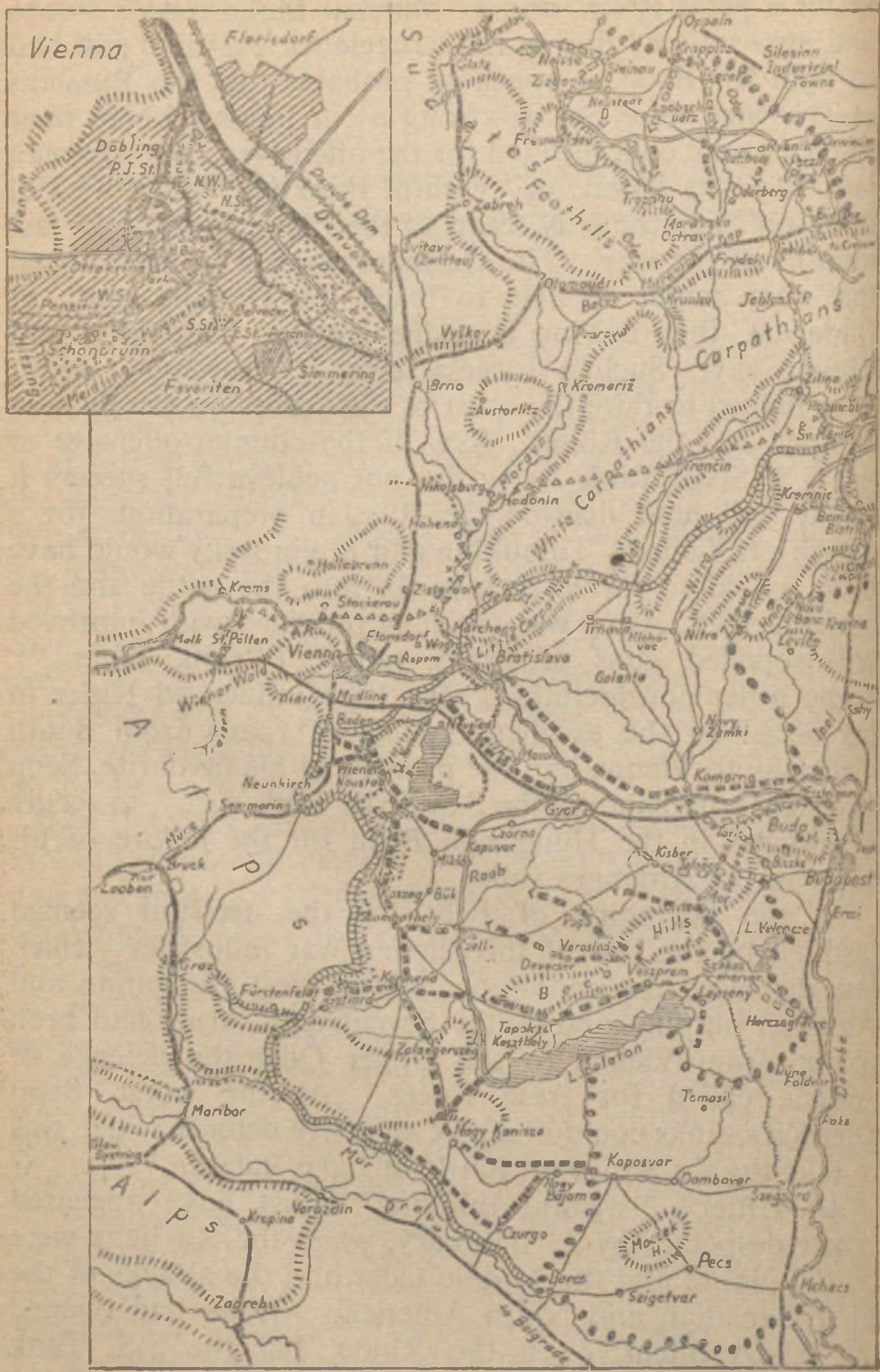
Such was indeed the case, and the concentrations observed were those of the S.S. Sixth Tank Army which, after having been withdrawn from the Western Front and reorganized in Southern Germany, began, in the second half of February, to appear round Vienna and further eastwards to Gyor. The decision to move this Army to Hungary had possibly been taken by Hitler after 20 January, when, following the news of the failure of Friesner's relief attacks, it became known that some Hungarian Divisions had succeeded in recapturing Szekes-Fehervar. This Hungarian success seemed to suggest that Marshal Tolbukhin's forces were

under a great strain, and as Marshal Malinovsky's troops had also suffered during the struggle for Pest and still had to fight for Buda, it appeared probable that the Russians in Hungary were not as strong as in Poland where their reserves were concentrated for the offensive. The German initiative was based on "wishful thinking," but "wishful thinking" was the only resort of the Führer during the last months of the war. The Germans seemed to have hoped that they might be able to reach the Danube south of Budapest, thus driving a wedge between Tolbukhin and Malinovsky. Such a success, even if temporary, might have helped to raise the spirit of the armies on the Eastern frontier and the Rhine. Even if the counter-offensive of the S.S. Sixth Tank Army did not achieve full success it might well have delayed the Russian preparations for a march on Vienna. Tolbukhin and Malinovsky would have been forced to throw their tanks into the battle and the attacking S.S. Army was specially provided with improved self-propelled guns of heavy calibre ("Tank Killers"). Some other considerations may have influenced Hitler in his decision: the excellent system of roads from South Germany to Vienna and the promise of his favourite, Sepp Dietrich, commanding the S.S. Sixth Tank Army, to secure a *revanche* in the Hungarian Plain for the failure of his tanks in the Ardennes valley.

At the beginning of February the decision seemed justified by the loss of the Silesian war industries—which loss increased the importance of the West Hungarian and Austrian output—and as the Seventeenth Army had been moved from Vienna to the Upper Oder the defence of Austria called for fresh forces. At the worst, Sepp Dietrich's tanks could organize an active defence which was to take the form of the "Battle of Lake Balaton."*

All Hitler's "wishful thinking" must have appeared rather desperate by 23 February, when the Russians were on the Neisse and the Middle Oder and the attacks of the First Canadian and Ninth American Armies had opened the Allied offensive on the Rhine, but the S.S. Tank

* The late Field-Marshal Ludendorff had once prophesied that "the future war" would be decided in a battle near Lake Balaton.


Vienna
Floridsdorf
Dobling
Schönbrunn
Favoriten
Simmering
Meidling
Danube
Oppeln
Silesian Industrial Towns
Foothills
Ostrava
Olomouc
Vyškov
Brno
Austerlitz
Kromeriž
Carpathians
Nikolsburg
Hodonin
Trencin
Kremnic
Krems
Stockerau
Zistersdorf
Marchegg
Bratislava
Melk
St. Pölten
Vienna
Aspern
Wiener Wald
Modling
Baden
Neunkirch
Semmering
Nitra
Galanta
Nitra
Levice
Nove Zamky
Komorn
Gyor
Budapest
Kisber
Raab
Steinamanger
Graz
Fürstenfeld
Zalaegerszeg
Tapolczar
Keszthely
L. Balaton
Veszprem
Tatabanya
Hills
L. Velencze
Temosi
Maribor
Nagy Kanisza
Kaposvar
Dombovar
Nagy Bajom
Varazdin
Krapina
Csurgo
Pecs
Mohacs
Zagreb
Alps
to Belgrade

Divisions were already concentrated near Gyor, and they were thrown into battle.

These tank Divisions of the S.S. Army, supported by four mechanized infantry Divisions, constituted a serious reinforcement of the enemy front in Hungary. General Friesner's forces (if Friesner was in fact still in command) had considerably deteriorated after the loss of its best Divisions in and around Budapest. There remained scarcely more than twelve Divisions—the remnants of the Eighth and Sixth Armies, and four tank Divisions of the Second Tank Army reduced to half their strength. There were also two Hungarian tank Divisions and eight or ten infantry Divisions, but the Hungarian troops had been discouraged by the loss of Buda and their morale had again become very shaky, so the S.S. Sixth Tank Army could not gain a strong support on the spot. Its own Panzers were not at full strength. There were less than a hundred tanks in each Division and few in reserve, but the percentage of Royal Tigers and Panters was high. Organization was on the whole defective. There was a shortage of fuel, which ran out on the fifth or sixth day of the attack. Moreover, the terrain chosen for the "Battle of Lake Balaton" scarcely corresponded with Sepp Dietrich's expectations. This part of the Hungarian Plain between the north end of Lake

MAP 24

MARCH ON VIENNA AND THE END OF THE DANUBIAN-CARPATHIAN CAMPAIGN, MARCH-APRIL, 1945

Front line on 15th March, 1945

First wave of Russian offensive to 26th March

Line reached on 28th March

Second wave to 4th April

Line reached on 14th April

Roads

Motor roads

Mountains and Hills

Frontier of Austria

Lakes

Scale: 50 miles to 1 inch

Balaton and the Danube, once marshy in character, is traversed by canals and numerous drainage ditches.

During the second half of February Tolbukhin and Malinovsky were regrouping their forces for their forthcoming offensive in the direction of Vienna. They were well aware of enemy preparations for a counter-attack between Lake Balaton and Lake Velencze, and they took certain precautions, but they were not particularly impressed by enemy plans to capture the initiative and they intended to develop their own offensive immediately after the failure of the German attempt.

In spite of losses, unavoidable in such a long operation as that against Budapest, the forces of the two Marshals in Hungary had been increased rather than diminished by the beginning of March. Tolbukhin had received a certain number of tanks (some of the heaviest type) and General Kravchenko was forming a special Tank Corps for the march on Vienna. The effective conclusion of the operations in the Carpathian foothills had liberated the greater part of Malinovsky's right flank Army, the commander of which, General Trofimenko, took over Tolbukhin's left flank Army between the Drava and Lake Balaton. This Army was reinforced by several well-equipped Bulgarian Divisions, and, early in March, Trofimenko was able to throw back the enemy troops which had previously crossed the Drava. Malinovsky's units, drawn from the Carpathian region, strengthened the front on the Hron and between the Danube (near Esztergom) and Lake Velencze. This latter sector, formerly held by Tolbukhin (on both sides of Bicske), was now taken over by Malinovsky. The adjustment enabled Tolbukhin to concentrate his right flank Army under General Glagolev opposite the gap between the two lakes where the enemy attack was expected. Tolbukhin, confident in Glagolev's infantry and artillery in co-operation with the Air Force, kept his main armour away from the anticipated battlefield—perhaps even on the east side of the Danube. Thus, even if the enemy succeeded in driving his wedge as far as the west bank of the Danube, communications between Tolbukhin's and Malinovsky's groups could be fully maintained along the east bank by

the adequate system of roads and bridges round Buda and downstream. In such conditions a wedge could not survive for more than a few days.

According to plan, the Germans began their attack on 3 March after having concentrated between the two lakes the Sixth S.S. Panzers and three other tank Divisions supported by mechanized infantry. At the same time several infantry Divisions with the aid of two tank Divisions attacked on General Trofimenko's sector, west of Kaposvar. The enemy remained strictly on the defensive opposite Malinovsky on both sides of the Danube; he had not the forces available for an attack on this sector. The attack on Trofimenko's lines was clearly diversionary and spent its momentum in two or three days, but the attack launched by massed tanks on the line Lake Balaton–Lake Velencze was most violent and supported by the *Luftwaffe*. The Russian Stormoviks were active and had many combats with enemy fighters. During the first three days the German armour made slow progress, losing forty to sixty tanks every day. The resistance of the Russian defence groups and artillery was everywhere stubborn and skilful. The Russians took full advantage of canals and drainage ditches and, although the Germans near Herczeg-Falva were only a few miles from the Danube, they were unable to drive their wedge towards the river. They feared perhaps to find their spearhead cut by some Russian counter-manœuvre. On the seventh and eighth days it became clear enough that the enemy was handicapped by irregularities in the supply of fuel for his tanks and troop-carriers. Many big tanks were already immobilized in the fields—excellent targets for Russian guns and aircraft. On the tenth day signs of enemy withdrawal could be observed; and two or three days later "the Battle of Lake Balaton" practically came to an end, with the enemy tanks—of which some four hundred had been lost—again between the two lakes, and Glagolev's infantry gradually occupied the area which had been temporarily lost, preparing it for the passage of Russian armour.

Already by 15 March the Germans were under the necessity of fighting a defensive battle in the Szekes-Fehervar

region as well as in the sector of the Vertesz Hills. It seems, however, that Sepp Dietrich was reluctant to take part in a defensive battle and that, under the pretext of protecting Vienna, he planned to move his precious tanks westward as soon as possible. On the other hand Friesner's troops—particularly the Hungarians—had been badly depressed by the failure of the counter-blow. The enemy units were aware of the loss of Cologne and of the crossing of the Rhine at the Remagen bridgehead, and their morale was rapidly deteriorating.

On 17 March the *Ober-Kommando* had to face a strong Russian attack from the north in the direction of the Moravian Gap. This attack seemed to be concerted with the imminent Russian offensive in Hungary. The attack by Marshal Konev's troops was certainly planned as a diversion; led by a strong formation from Zhadov's and Gusev's Armies with the support of Lelushenko's tanks, it gave substantial results. Zhadov's columns attacked west of Oppeln, while other troops assailed the enemy lines between Krappitz and Neisse. During the next five or six days the Russians achieved a deep penetration of the enemy defensive belt. Neisse, Krappitz and Cosel were taken and a divisional group of the Seventeenth Army was defeated and partly surrounded at Neustadt, where 15,000 prisoners were taken. By 24 March the Russians were at Leobschütz, advancing towards the Moravian frontier and the valley of the Opava. After the capture of Rybnik, Ratibor was attacked from three sides, and this small but strong fortress fell by the end of March. The enemy First Tank Army retired to the fortifications which cover Moravska Ostrava forming the frontier of Czechoslovakia. These fortifications had been built by the Czechs before 1938 and had been improved by the Germans since that date. Konev's southern drive was not, however, continued. The threat to the Moravian Gap had been planned to divert enemy forces from the defence of Vienna and Bratislava and so to facilitate the task of Tolbukhin and Malinovsky. But by the end of March the offensive of the two Marshals had developed with such rapidity and success that any effort from the north seemed unnecessary.

On 18 March Tolbukhin launched his blow. While Glagolev's infantry and artillery pressed heavily upon the enemy positions between the two lakes, Kravchenko's tanks —which had so far been kept away from the battle—moved towards the north end of Lake Velenzce. When a passage through the enemy lines was opened at this point the defences of Szekes-Fehervar were outflanked by Kravchenko's powerful drive towards Mor. This objective was reached on the 19th, and on the following day Szekes-Fehervar, attacked on two sides, was captured with a considerable booty, including hundreds of guns and many tanks and self-propelled guns dumped during the previous days. Between the 21st and 23rd fighting developed near Veszprem and in the Bakony Hills, where the Germans tried to organize a second defensive line. They even counter-attacked with a hundred S.S. tanks, but lost almost all of them. The remainder of Sepp Dietrich's tanks were already in full flight towards Vienna. After the capture of Veszprem and the passage of the Bakony Hills Kravchenko's tanks switched towards the cross roads at Papa. Among the enemy troops west of Lake Balaton confusion was now complete. Tolbukhin took 6,000 prisoners, and enemy losses in tanks and self-propelled guns on his sector exceeded 700.

This second phase of the battle of Lake Balaton had opened for Tolbukhin the road to Vienna. Simultaneously this road had become open for Malinovsky. He had started his attack a day or two later. Four of Friesner's Divisions in the lines built on the Vertesz Hills and one at Esztergom fought rather stubbornly during the first two days. They asked for reinforcements, but the group at Szekes-Fehervar was already cut off from them; only one Division and one mechanized Brigade could arrive from the north bank of the Danube. On 23 March the defence crumbled. The Russians crossed the Vertesz Hills and appeared at Totis (Tata). Esztergom was surrounded and stormed. Malinovsky registered 7,000 prisoners. These two principal thrusts in the centre were followed by one on each flank. On the north side of the Danube Malinovsky's troops, comprising half of Shumilov's Army with Pliev's

cavalry and Kurkin's tanks, crossed the Hron on a wide front (27 March). Brushing aside enemy rearguards this considerable force advanced without a pause, forced the Nitra, captured Novy Zamki and, on 30 March, entered Komarno. The southern part of this town and the important town of Gyor had already been occupied by Petruchevsky's Corps operating on the right bank of the Danube. The remnants of the German Divisions which held this sector fled towards Bratislava.

Meanwhile, on Tolbukhin's left, General Trofimenko's Army had taken the offensive between the Drava and Lake Balaton. On 29 March Russian and Bulgarian Divisions broke the enemy front line near Nagy Bajom (west of Kaposvar). The retreat of the Germans and Hungarians quickly became disorderly as on the 30th Glagolev's columns operating on the west of Lake Balaton passed through Topolcza and Keszthely and captured Zala-Egerszeg in the rear of the southern enemy group. So on the 31st Nagy-Kanisza and its oilfields were almost completely encircled, while Russian mobile columns proceeded westwards, captured Kermend, forced the Raba and reached St. Gotthard on the frontier of Styria. The Hungarian and, in part, the German troops had lost their fighting spirit; between 29 March and 2 April—the day on which Nagy Kanisza was captured—Trofimenko's troops took nearly 30,000 prisoners.

In the central sectors of the Hungarian front operations had now resolved themselves into a rapid pursuit of the fleeing enemy. On the 26th Kravchenko's tanks, closely followed by Glagolev's lorried infantry, were at Papa. After a few clashes with enemy rearguards they forced the Raba on a broad front and on the 29th entered Szombathely and Kapuvar. On the same day the spearhead of a Russian column crossed the Austrian frontier near Keszeg. On 1 April the Russians captured Söprön (Odenburg)—the last considerable town in Hungary.

The Russians closed in on Vienna from two directions. Tolbukhin advanced to Wiener Neustadt (2 April) and Baden (3 April) and Neunkirchen was occupied in strength as a precaution against any move from beyond the Sem-

mering Pass. Malinovsky's troops (General Petrushevsky's Corps) advanced by the motor road from Gyor, but met with some resistance on the Leithe near Bruck. However, the enemy was not able to organize a defensive line to protect the approaches to Vienna. The same situation was apparent on the north side of the Danube—along the roads from Bratislava. A river so considerable as the Vah was crossed in a single day and on 1 April the Russians were in Galanta and Trnava. For a moment it seemed that the defence of Bratislava might be helped by the peculiar topography round this city; the Danube Plain is here broken by a ridge of the "Little Carpathians," some 2,000 feet in height, which almost reached to the river. But the confusion of the enemy was so great and his morale so low that Pliev's cavalry easily crossed "the wall" of the Little Carpathians to Malacky and the Morava. Before the encirclement of Bratislava from the west had been completed the panic-stricken enemy had fled from the city (3 April).

"The battle for Vienna" had begun. But the real "battle for Vienna" had been fought round Szekes-Fehervar. The fighting inside the Austrian capital was neither so carefully organized by the enemy nor so systematic as the fighting in Pest and Buda. Furthermore, Marshal Tolbukhin had his own idea of how to win this battle in the shortest possible time. When his vanguard reached Baden he directed one column of picked guardsmen northwise across the mountains to the point (15 miles from Vienna) where the Linz motor road begins to ascend to the Wiener Wald. On 5 April this motor road was cut. Russian infantry, supported by light tanks, then advanced along the Wiener Wald towards the Danube, where they surprised and captured several enemy gun positions. In the meantime Glagolev's main forces reached Mödling and Laxenburg south of the capital, and Petrushevsky's Corps approached the south-eastern suburbs.

This Russian move radically changed the defensive problem of the enemy officer in command (probably Sepp Dietrich). The line of retreat to the west was cut, and the only way now left open was to the north through Vienna

and across the Danube. Thus the defensive problem became twofold and self-contradictory; the defenders had to fight inside Vienna a delaying action for as long a time as possible; on the other hand they had to extricate themselves from the labyrinthine streets of Vienna as rapidly as they could, lest they should be encircled by Tolbukhin's troops crossing the Danube from the Wiener Wald and by Malinovsky's columns advancing from the Morava over the plain along the northern bank of the Danube. Under such conditions, despite the great defensive advantages offered by factory buildings, canals and ditches, railway embankments and other obstacles, there could be no effective resistance in the southern and south-eastern suburbs of the capital.

On 7 April Petrushevsky's column penetrated into the industrial suburb of Simmering while Glagolev's troops were fighting in the model workers' settlement of Favoriten. But the defending units were not much encouraged by the sounds of battle which suddenly came to them from the north-west as the Russians crossing the Wiener Wald descended to Hietzing and advanced towards the West Station. Already, by the 8th, the area of fighting had moved nearer to the centre of Vienna. The Russians captured the South and East Stations and the Arsenal.

Next day street battles were raging near the Ring. The Germans, mostly small battle groups and numerous single snipers, were ready to sacrifice the most famous architectural monuments of Vienna in order to gain a little time for the withdrawal of their tanks (remnants of the S.S. Sixth Panzer Army) across the Danube Canal and the Danube. The Russians had to make use of their artillery and mortars. Fires began and on the 9th and 10th the Ring, Kärntnerstrasse, and Graben, suffered badly. The Burg Theatre and the Opera House were completely destroyed; the Town Hall, House of Parliament and parts of the Hofburg were seriously damaged and fire partially destroyed St. Stephen's Cathedral.

All this destruction did not facilitate the escape of the enemy. After having withdrawn beyond the Danube Canal the Germans had to fight their fiercest fight in Vienna in

order to be able to cross the Danube. On 11 and 12 April, day and night, a savage struggle continued on the island formed by the Danube and the Danube Canal. The Russians had crossed the latter from Döbling to the North-West Station and from the central market to the Prater. Sharp clashes with the last battle groups took place in Leopoldstadt near the North Station. On 13 April Marshal Tolbukhin reported that his troops, supported by those of Malinovsky's Group, had cleared Vienna of the enemy.

This fighting in Vienna—particularly during the last three days—cost the enemy dear. He lost some scores of thousands of men—more killed than prisoners. Only a few tanks succeeded in escaping to the north side of the Danube. The enemy may have intended to form a new defensive front covered by the Danube and the Danube Dam, but he found that he had not enough left to carry out such a plan. Florisdorf was taken on the 14th, and on the same day Malinovsky's mobile column crossed the Morava at Hohenau. Two days later the Russians reached the Zisterdorf oilfields. Remnants of different defeated units fled towards Brno, but other columns of Malinovsky's were moving on the Moravian capital from Hodonin. Brno was entered on 26 April. As Konev's troops had forced the defensive line of the River Opava and captured Troppau on the 23rd, Moravska Ostrava was evacuated by the Germans on the 26th. They fled towards Olmütz (Olomouc) through the famous Moravian Gap.

Thus the fall of Vienna meant the end of the Danubian-Carpathian campaign. This campaign had been decided on the Danube Plain near Budapest. As for the Carpathian operations, it would seem that both sides had entertained some illusions with regard to their possible importance. The Carpathian countries—Sub-Carpathian Rus, Slovakia, Polish Podhale—proved to be impracticable foro perations on a big scale between November and March. Only very local action could be developed there during the winter months, and some efforts made by the Germans and by the Russians in this region were not finally justified by the results. The Russians, however, had soon understood the operational difficulties connected with any serious offensive

aimed at the Moravian Gap. But the *Ober-Kommando* had for a long time continued to expect the main Russian offensive from this direction and had imagined Russian columns storming through the Moravian Gap towards Bratislava and Vienna. As a matter of fact the Russians only passed the Gap in pursuit of fleeing Germans and this debâcle was not the cause but the result of the fall of Bratislava and Vienna.

CHAPTER XIII

THE LAST BATTLES: EAST PRUSSIA (27 JANUARY–24 APRIL), DANZIG (30 APRIL), STETTIN (25 APRIL), BATTLE OF BERLIN (17 APRIL–2 MAY)

THE passage of the Rhine by the Allied armies brought about a complete change in German war psychology. Few Germans could have remained who still doubted that the end was near and believed that further resistance might bring some results. In the mind of the average German the Rhine had an importance not to be compared with that of other rivers and other frontiers. To the east of the Rhine began "Germany proper," and the passage of the Rhine by enemy armies meant the real invasion of the Fatherland. This sentiment was not the result of any logical conclusion; it was irrational but very deep-rooted and had behind it many centuries of German history. This feeling now took the form of a general belief that the end of the war was at hand.

Under such conditions of mass psychology it was hardly possible to organize anything like a systematic defensive operation in the West. There were still units well able to fight. There were commanding officers willing to resist (but not all of them). There was no serious lack of equipment and munitions, although the deficiency of fuel was keenly felt. There was more than one natural defensive

line of rivers and mountains. But no defensive line could be held when units resisting at one point could expect that other troops on their right or left might prefer surrender to battle.

Many episodes of this kind took place in the West during the last week of March and in April. Repercussions of the events on the Rhine were, naturally enough, less felt in the East. Many phenomena which went to prove the deterioration of German morale had, however, been observed during the Russian march on Vienna and in the last stages of the Danubian–Carpathian campaign. On the main front, on the Neisse-Oder, there was, in the first half of April, an uneasy lull. Sharp clashes still continued in some places in the East, though mostly where enemy garrisons were isolated and had no way of escape (e.g. in Breslau). In East Prussia enemy resistance was strong in March and even early in April, since the troops—most of whom were of good quality—were well controlled by their commander in the narrow space which they were defending and where few civilians who could influence their morale had been left.

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Map No. 22. The Germans had been so surprised and even bewildered by Rokossovsky's rapid drive towards the Baltic coast and Chernyakovsky's successful break-through between Tilsit and Insterburg that there was at first a considerable confusion in their orders and in the movements of their troops. (See Chapter XI.) But when General Feduninsky's spearhead reached the Baltic at Tolkemit and the isolation of East Prussia became an accomplished fact (26 January) the enemy began to show both energy and skill in his resistance.

As a matter of fact the defensive resources of the Germans in East Prussia were very considerable and seemed to guarantee a long struggle. In this area about thirty divisions had been concentrated, belonging to three Armies: the Third Tank, the Fourth and the "Königsberg" Armies, and also three Divisions taken from the Twelfth Army. To this strength must be added the well-trained Königsberg fortress troops as well as new formations supplied by the

marines, military schools and grounded Luftwaffe. Further, two good infantry Divisions arrived after the evacuation of Memel. Thus, despite heavy losses, in February the enemy still had at least twenty-five Divisions, including seven tank Divisions and some ten infantry Divisions with a serious fighting record. The main eastern defensive complex had crumbled, the line of the Deime had been lost, and the Masurian Lake system had been evacuated, but there still remained the solid fortifications of the Wormditt fortified camp and the recently modernized forts, batteries and strong points of Königsberg. Königsberg itself was a powerful arsenal with well-protected dumps, workshops and war factories (some of them underground) in the town or on the Samland peninsula. Moreover it was important that East Prussia, though cut off from the Reich on land, still maintained sea communications through Königsberg and Pillau. Warships—mostly small—were active near Königsberg and their guns sometimes took part in the defence.

Hitler gave the order to resist, of course, "to the end." He sent to East Prussia one of his favourites, the adventurous Croat General Rendulic, who had been with the Twentieth Army on the Murman coast and had retired from there into Norway. In pursuit of an ambitious plan "to repeat Tannenberg" Rendulic took over that active group (four tank and four infantry Divisions) which had been concentrated at the Wormditt camp. However the plan had been conceived before General Feduninsky reached the coast and cut the motor road to Elbing (26 January). So when the Germans started their attack on the 28th it was still on the Allenstein–Mohrungen front, which was for the moment a wrong direction. They persisted for three days with no noticeable result, and when at last they changed the direction of their counter-blow from southward to westward it was too late. Feduninsky's troops had had time to consolidate their positions between Tolkemit, Schlobitten and Pr. Holland. Their situation might have become precarious if they had been attacked in force on the 28th along the motor-road from Königsberg and simultaneously from Elbing. There is no doubt that

the enemy would then have been in a position to secure the escape of several Divisions from the encircled part of East Prussia to Elbing and possibly to Danzig. But this was not his object on the 28th; and when he regrouped for the attacks to the west he had no chance of success, since the whole situation round his Wormditt–Heilsberg pocket had changed to his disadvantage.

The German attacks on the Mohrungen–Allenstein front were met by General Gorbatov's Army. On its right this Army was keeping touch with other Divisions which were clearing the Germans out of Rastenburg—the principal rear base of the Masurian system. North of Rastenburg the German counter-attacks at Gerdauen failed to stop Krylov's Army (Chernyakovsky's Group) advancing towards the Alle on a broad front. On 31 January and 1 February Friedland, Schippenbeil, Heilsberg, Guttstadt—all on the Alle—were captured by Krylov's and Gorbatov's concerted action. Two days later Bartenstein—an important cross-roads and the last town on the Alle—was taken after fierce fighting. The pocket held by the enemy "active group" was so reduced east of Wormditt that instead of attacking westward this group had to defend its communications with Königsberg passing through Preussisch Eylau and Zinten. On the sea coast Feduninsky stormed Frauenberg and extended his lines to the river Passarge.

On 9 February units of Krylov's Army and Rodin's tanks captured Preussisch Eylau—intermediate between Königsberg and Wormditt. This point had been transformed into a stronghold; vast dumps were found there, and the booty included 4,000 motor vehicles. On the 10th Feduninsky took Elbing with 9,000 prisoners; but part of the garrison succeeded in escaping to Danzig before the coastal road was cut. The liquidation of the Wormditt camp was now approaching. Gorbatov's Army attacked in strength from the south, and after three days' fighting, during which Rendulic lost in desperate counter-attacks the last remaining tanks of the Third Tank Army, Wormditt and Mehlsack were captured (17 February). Three days later Krylov took Zinten. The enemy pocket in the Königsberg–Wormditt–Braunsberg triangle had ceased to

exist. The Germans now held only a narrow strip of land (some ten to twelve miles in width) between the sea and the Königsberg–Braunsberg motor road.

General Chernyakovsky, so successful in his manœuvre, had been mortally wounded on the battlefield, and he died on 18 February. Marshal Vasilevsky took over his group in which Gorbatov's Army was now included. Marshal Rokossovsky's operations were to be developed on the west side of the Vistula. General Popov's Army was already there, and General Batov's Army (which had advanced from Ostrolenka to outflank the Masurian Lakes from the south) had become free for other operations since Chernyakovsky had outflanked that region from the north. It was on the move westward. Feduninsky's Army still remained to the east of the Vistula, but only to clear Graudenz (Grudziadz) and Marienwerder of the Germans and to help the coming offensive against Danzig.

The attempted counter-blow from the Wormditt fortified camp had failed, and had cost the enemy the best of his active troops. But indirectly this attempt aided the preparations of the defence of Königsberg. A period of at least three weeks had been gained during which Krylov's Army had been engaged in the operations against the enemy pocket between the Alle and the Passarge. General Galitsky's Army alone was hardly strong enough to complete the investment of the fortress. On 28 January Galitsky's vanguard reached the line of the eastern forts. Moving round the outer perimeter the Russians by-passed the northern and north-western forts and, cutting the road to Pillau, reached the north coast of the Frisches Haff (2 February).

The Russian staff well understood the importance of the Samland peninsula whence an enemy attack might be directed against the flank of Russian positions in front of the northern and north-western forts of Königsberg. The struggle for Samland proved difficult and costly, since the peninsula was strongly fortified, and General Lasch, commanding in Königsberg, defended it with the utmost energy. The two Divisions evacuated from Memel—reliable troops—were concentrated there, and there followed nearly a

fortnight of Russian attacks and German counter-attacks: fierce fighting although of a local character and not on a big scale. On 20–22 February the Germans registered a certain success as they re-established their communications with Pillau. The main "Samland line" from the neighbourhood of Kranz to Frisches Haff (west of Königsberg) remained unbroken. Opposite it the Russian line was firmly held till the situation completely changed to the south of Königsberg. Krylov's Army was now ready to co-operate, and Marshal Vasilevsky saw no more reason to insist on the conquest of Samland.

At the beginning of March he prepared a strong attack south-west of Königsberg. It was launched in the direction of the coast (13 February). On the 15th the Frisches Haff was reached—ten miles south-west of the fortress. The complete investment now began. All the forts, the port and the town were under Russian artillery fire.

At the same time air attacks were concentrated on Pillau and enemy shipping. The wedge driven into the coastal strip held by the Germans isolated the Braunsberg Group from Königsberg. The final liquidation of this group was near, and the Germans knew it. Small parties and single men made use of all kinds of small craft to escape across the Frisches Haff to Frische Nehrung—a long sandbank whose western point is only a few miles from Pillau. Earlier in March when communications between Braunsberg and Königsberg had not yet been cut the men of the Third Tank Army—which had lost all its equipment—were shipped from Pillau to Stettin; from there they could reach the Berlin region to form the nucleus of a new tank Army (also called the Third). But now only a few specialists—given "priority of escape"—were able to reach Pillau from the Frische Nehrung. Braunsberg fell to Gorbatov's troops after fierce fighting on 20 March; 200 tanks, mostly wrecked, represented the debris of the Third Tank Army. But the Germans in the coastal area still resisted and desperate fighting at close quarters continued until the 25th, when Heiligenbeil, the last enemy stronghold, was taken. The number of prisoners who fell into Russian hands during the liquidation of the coastal pocket exceeded

20,000. Marshal Vasilevsky could now concentrate his effort against Königsberg.

At the beginning of April the bombardment of the fortress was gaining weight while the garrison was harassed by incessant air attacks. The fire of the numerous Russian positional guns grew in intensity during the final three days before the storm. (Pillau was also under fire from long-range guns on the southern shore of the Frisches Haff.) An elaborate system of underground shelters enabled the Germans to endure the bombardment, but their own batteries were silenced and many of their strong points destroyed. During the last week of the investment the spirit of the garrison was further depressed by the news of the loss of Danzig, the fate of Vienna and the march of the American and British Armies into Central Germany.

On 8 April Marshal Vasilevsky launched his storming columns from eight different directions round the perimeter between the north-west and south-west sectors. Some of the ring of principal forts were captured and others by-passed. Before darkness the line of twenty-four old earth-works on the fringe of the town had been pierced and the troops attacking from the south had succeeded in crossing the Pregel. On the morning of the 9th the Russians entered the western part of the East Prussian capital at many points, and their columns met among exploding dumps in the fiercely burning streets. General Lasch was reasonable enough to call a halt to the useless bloodshed and surrender. A few days later the Führer signified his gratitude to the commander who had for more than two months done all possible to defend Königsberg when the *Ober-Kommando* publicly ascribed the "premature" capitulation to lack of courage. To a considerable extent General Lasch had had to improvise his defence, since Königsberg as the principal military base of East Prussia had been protected, not by its ring of forts only four or five miles from the centre of the town, but by the modern fortified lines and elaborate defence complexes at Pilkallen-Gumbinnen, on the Angerapp, in the Masurian Lake region and round Wormditt.

The Russians took 40,000 prisoners during the storming and 50,000 more after the capitulation; they estimated enemy losses in killed at 40,000. The booty included 2,000 guns and 8,500 motor vehicles. Fighting continued for some time in the Samland peninsula as the rearguards tried to protect shipping, moving troops and civilian refugees from Pillau. But on the 10th and 11th the Russians invaded Samland and by the 17th all the peninsula except Pillau had been cleared of Germans. A week later this small port fell to the Russians; 35,000 prisoners in all were collected on the Samland peninsula. Not many more escaped by sea, but if they reached Stralsund or other Baltic ports west of Stettin they became liable to capture by Rokossovsky's troops after their crossing of the lower Oder late in April. Mopping-up operations of the same character, but on a reduced scale, continued during the second half of April among the sands and pine forests of the Frische Nehrung.

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Map No. 23. After the break-through to the Pomeranian coast by Zhukov and Rokossovsky (see Chapter XI) the town and port of Kolberg resisted until 18 March. In the region of Danzig neither the hastily organized lines nor the quality of the army "created" by Himmler gave promise of a long or stubborn resistance. But weather and ground conditions helped the enemy: thaw and then daily change from snow to rain and vice versa made the roads in the Polish Corridor even worse than they usually were. Nearer to the coast over sandy ground General Popov's columns (who were also making use of the Stettin-Danzig motor road) advanced at a good tempo on Stolp and Lauenburg. Passing through Wejierowo (Neustadt) they had reached, by 13 March, a point eight miles from Gdynia. Other of Popov's columns, reinforced by units of Batov's Army, advancing towards Danzig from the south-west and the south, covered a shorter distance, but were delayed by weather and roads. Still more difficult was the movement of Feduninsky's column which, after having crossed the Nogat, approached the sea-coast along the marshy east bank of the Vistula.

The enemy was hastily evacuating Danzig by sea, giving priority of escape to Nazi officials, some civilians, wounded men and specialized units. His merchant navy and warships were active in the port of Gdynia—particularly under cover of darkness. However he intended to fight on a fortified line which ran from a point on the coast north of Gdynia, then west of this town to a point on the river Motlawa south-east of Danzig. But the line proved too long for the enemy's resources in troops and material; and his artillery was deficient. By the 17th the Russians were approaching the outer perimeter of the fortified camp which had been more or less improvised. Near Gdynia the enemy had the support of the fire from armed merchantmen and trawlers and some cruisers and destroyers. South of the city extensive minefields covered passages between the marshes. The Russian command now took the decision to cut the fortified camp area in two and divide Danzig from Gdynia. On the 23rd the wedge was driven towards Zoppot (a *spa* of Danzig) and the coast was reached. Here, masked by parklands, the Russian batteries were able to fight back successfully against the fire from the German warships. Meanwhile, between Zoppot and Danzig, the Russians captured the suburb of Oliwa. They were now able to attack Danzig from the north where topographical conditions were less difficult. The operation came to an end on the 28th and the 30th. First Gdynia, then Danzig, were stormed. Some 25,000 prisoners and considerable material were taken in the twin seaports. But the chief importance of the event was that the three armies of the Rokossovsky group were now free for other operations. First they were to replace Marshal Zhukov's forces on the lower Oder and so allow the concentration of the latter for the offensive in the Berlin direction.

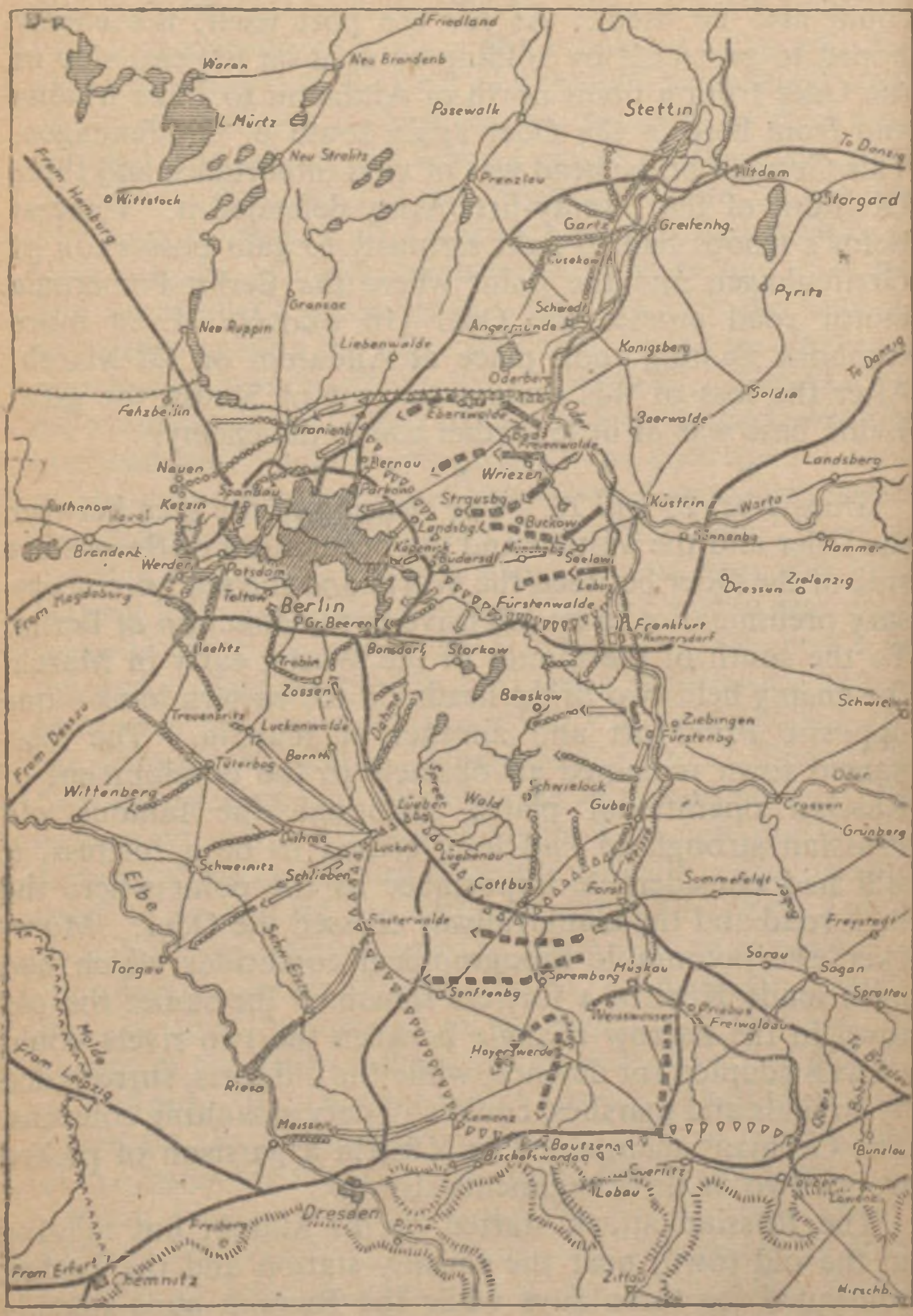
After his break-through to the Baltic coast early in March, Zhukov had, during the following fortnight, reached all his objectives east of the Oder. The Russians captured Cammin and other places near the mouth of the Oder and they were on the shores of the Grosses Haff. But these gains did not prevent the use of the port of Stettin by the Germans, since its chief communications

with the open sea went through Swinemünde (Peenemünde could also be used). As for the port itself, the enemy hoped to protect it by holding an area on the east side of the Oder from a point north of Altdamm to Lake Madue and from here to the Oder again south of Greifenhagen. This German bridgehead was of vital importance and three Divisions of the Twenty-first Army defended it. General Belov's troops had to fight seriously to gain possession of Greifenhagen and the point where the Berlin–Pomerania motor road crosses the Oder (16 March). Even more stubborn fighting took place at Altdamm on 20 March. After the loss of this eastern outpost of Stettin the great Baltic base was of little further use to the enemy.

* * * * *

Maps Nos. 25 *and* 26. The clearing of the area between the Oder and the Vistula and the occupation of the eastern side of the Oder between the Warta and the sea were necessary preliminaries to an offensive in the direction of Berlin. To the south of the mouth of the Warta, early in March, the enemy held two bridgeheads on the eastern bank—one opposite Frankfort and another at Küstrin. The last-named town remained an obstacle to the development of Russian operational plans. Although the famous old Prussian stronghold had long ceased to be a fortress, it still had considerable importance as the point where the high road and the trunk railway crossed the Oder. Moreover, the favourable topographical conditions which had once made Küstrin a fortress remained the same: the old town in the narrow triangle between the two rivers could be well adapted for defence, while the old forts, surrounded by streams and marshes, could still defy assaulting columns. The Germans maintained in Küstrin a garrison of picked troops two or three regiments strong.

The Russian attack started on 10 March, but fighting in the old town, near the railway station and the bridge, continued for three days while the Russian guns steadily destroyed the forts. There was no escape from Küstrin; 3,000 Germans surrendered; about the same number were killed. After the capture of Küstrin (12 March) and the islands on which some of the old forts held out (30 March),


Friedland
Woren
Neu Brandenb
L. Müritz
Posewalk
Stettin
To Danzig
Neu Strelitz
Prenzlau
Wittstock
Stargard
Gartz
Greifenhg
Cüstrin
Pyritz
Grancoe
Schwedt
Neu Ruppin
Angermünde
Liebenwalde
Königsberg
Oderberg
Soldin
Fehrbellin
Eberswalde
Zaarwalde
Oranienb
Freienwalde
Nauen
Hennow
Wriezen
Landsberg
Spandau
Parkow
Strausbg
Rathenow
Kotzin
Küstrin
Warta
Landsbg
Buckow
Sonnenbg
Brandenb
Köpenick
Müncheb
Hammer
Werder
Potsdam
Müncheb
Seelow
Bresson
Zielenzig
Teltow
Berlin
Lebus
Fürstenwalde
Gr. Beeren
Frankfurt
Lehrte
Trebbin
Bonsdorf
Storkow
Zossen
Beeskow
Schwiebus
Trebenbrietz
Luckenwalde
Ziebingen
Fürstenbg
Bornim
Jüterbog
Schwielock
Wittenberg
Lübben
Wald
Guben
Crossen
Lühme
Lucken
Grünberg
Schweinitz
Schlieben
Lübbenau
Cottbus
Sommerfeldt
Elbe
Senftenberg
Freystadt
Torgau
Sorau
Sagan
Müskau
Spremberg
Senftenbg
Sprottau
Freiwaldau
Hoyerswerda
Riesa
Meissen
Kamenz
Bautzen
Bischofswerda
Bunzlau
Löbau
Dresden
Freiberg
Pirna
Zittau
Chemnitz
Hirschb.

the Russians were in a position to establish bridgeheads on the west bank of the Oder. These bridgeheads might be extended gradually and so prepare the passage of the river in force.

Russian communiqués preferred to omit this work of vital importance, nor did they disclose details. But the enemy confirmed that the Russians had established two bridgeheads—one south of Küstrin and the other to the north of the town. By 30 March the Germans stated that these two bridgeheads formed one across the road Küstrin–Seelow. Both sides, however, remained silent during the first half of April on the subject of the establishment by the Russians of a third bridgehead west of Bärwalde (east of Wriezen) which was, according to the Russian plan, of decisive importance.

The Russian plan of the Berlin operation was as logical and simple as the initial plan of campaign for 1945 which began with the battles of Malopolska and East Prussia. The Russians had great advantages in tank formations and other mobile units; weather and ground conditions could not be but favourable in mid-April; the network of roads round Berlin was excellent and highly developed. The Ring motor road which on a circle 12 to 16 miles from

MAP 25

MARCH ON BERLIN 15th–25th APRIL 1945

Russian front

Initial thrusts by Zhukov and Konev (15th–17th April)

Attack developing on 18th and 19th

Line reached on 21st

Advances made on the 22nd

Moves round Berlin; advance to the Elbe and south of Stettin (23rd, 24th and 25th April)

American lines on 25th April

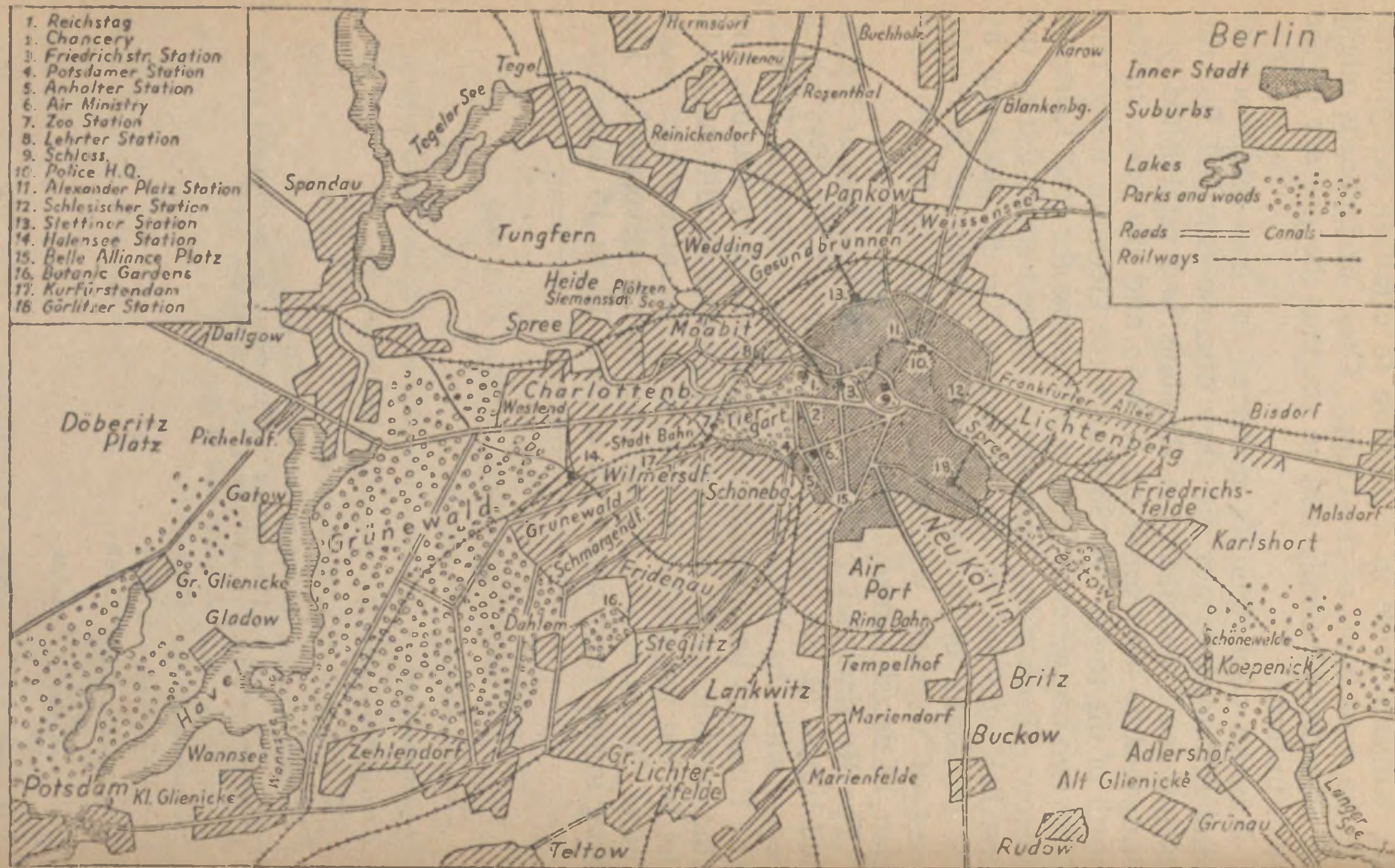
Motor roads

Roads

Canals

Lakes

Limits of mountain area


1. Reichstag
2. Chancery
3. Friedrichstr. Station
4. Potsdamer Station
5. Anholter Station
6. Air Ministry
7. Zoo Station
8. Lehrter Station
9. Schloss.
10. Police H.Q.
11. Alexander Platz Station
12. Schlesischer Station
13. Stettiner Station
14. Halensee Station
15. Belle Alliance Platz
16. Botanic Gardens
17. Kurfürstendam
18. Görlitzer Station
Berlin
Inner Stadt
Suburbs
Lakes
Parks and woods
Roads
Canals
Railways
Hermsdorf
Buchholz
Karow
Wittenau
Tegel
Tegeler See
Rosenthal
Blankenbg.
Reinickendorf
Spandau
Pankow
Weissensee
Tungfern
Wedding
Gesundbrunnen
Heide
Plötzen
Siemensdt. See
Spree
Moabit
Dallgow
Charlottenb.
Westend
Tiergart
Frankfurter Allee
Lichtenberg
Bisdorf
Döberitz Platz
Pichelsdf.
Stadt Bahn
Wilmersdf.
Schöneb.
Friedrichs-felde
Malsdorf
Gatow
Grünewald
Grunewald
Schmargendf.
Karlshort
Gr. Glienicke
Friedenau
Air Port
Neu Kölln
Treptow
Gladow
Dahlem
Ring Bahn
Steglitz
Schöneweide
Tempelhof
Koepenick
Britz
Lankwitz
Mariendorf
Buckow
Havel
Wannsee
Zehlendorf
Gr. Lichter-felde
Marienfelde
Adlershof
Potsdam
Kl. Glienicke
Alt Glienicke
Langer See
Grünau
Teltow
Rudow

MAP 26

the centre of the capital was bisected by the six motor roads radiating from it must necessarily facilitate the movement of Russian mobile columns and ensure their operational liaison. All these factors determined the strategic conception of the operation: a rapid drive by Zhukov's and Konev's mobile forces round the Berlin region and their rally somewhere west of the capital. It was calculated that the area encircled would enclose the greater part of the enemy troops concentrated in and around Berlin. Their liquidation would be the principal military object of the Russian plan, while the capture of the Reich capital was expected to have decisive political and psychological consequences. In the line of this strategic development the rapid advance of Zhukov's columns towards the Ring motor road was a substantial tactical task. Hence the importance of the Russian bridge-head east of Wriezen, where they were less than 30 miles from the Ring motor road.

Again there was nothing in the Russian plan which could not be easily guessed by the *Ober-Kommando*, and this time there was even no element of strategic and tactical surprise in the planning and development of the Russian march on Berlin. Difficulties of another kind had prevented the enemy from organizing an effective resistance. By 15 April the *Ober-Kommando* had already few illusions about the situation on the different fronts where troops and their commanding officers had begun to act according to circumstances and not necessarily in obedience to the commands of the Führer's H.Q. So long as an uneasy lull continued on the main Russian front such phenomena were not apparent there, but there could be little doubt that they would appear so soon as the Russians started their offensive from the Neisse-Oder line. Under existing conditions it seemed a vain task to move or regroup troops, and by 22 April even Hitler had come to the conclusion that the only order he could give to his troops was to stay where they were and to fight to the end. Even in this simplest form the Führer's orders were disobeyed by the great majority of his troops.

On the lower Oder the German Twenty-first Army held

the line between Stettin and the region east of Eberswalde. This Army had already been seriously depleted by the fighting on the east bank of the Oder and the morale of the troops was rather low. Further to the south the Twelfth Army defended the sector nearest to Berlin. The enemy had built there a fortified belt parallel to the river as well as a second defensive line between Eberswalde and Fürstenwalde, protecting the approaches to the Ring motor road. Here the Russians faced a difficult task: the fortified lines were strong, well provided with guns and mortars and covered by the usual wire, anti-tank ditches and mine fields. The Twelfth Army had been reorganized and reinforced by several good Divisions. Troops lacked nothing essential to stubborn defensive fighting, but somehow they lacked any confidence in the future course of events.

They lacked also an adequate reserve for an eventual counter-attack. The "reconstituted" Third Tank Army was concentrated east of Berlin, ready to make use of the Ring, but its formation was still incomplete, and its six or seven Panzer and Panzer-Grenadier Divisions with only a handful of experienced men were no match for the powerful Russian armour with all their daring and skill.

South of Frankfurt and along the Neisse the line was held by the Ninth Army with its right protecting Görlitz and reaching the mountain region. The Ninth Army had a double defensive task: to oppose an eventual Russian advance on Berlin from the south-east and to defend Dresden. So its divisions were concentrated most strongly on both flanks—at Guben-Kottbus on the left and at Bautzen-Görlitz on the right. A Russian break-through in the centre, near Muskau, might be facilitated by such a disposition: with the accustomed speed of Russian drives the Ninth Army might be easily cut in two.

So much for the defence of the approaches to the Reich capital. The Germans must have believed that if the defences of the Ninth and Twelfth Armies were broken and not re-established by the Third Tank Army the units belonging to these two Armies would be able to join the garrison of Berlin in time to strengthen its "fight to the

end." The garrison consisted of a certain number of "battle groups"—some of them with good fighting experience, others formed of "fanatical" boys of school age—mixed with the Volksstürmer (local or imported from other towns).

This heterogeneous force—some 250,000 strong—was hardly capable of acting as an operational whole or of carrying out orders issued from a central command. But many elements in it showed that they were able to fight desperately—if only locally in defence of strong points already prepared. In theory Berlin had been "organized for battle" by the Nazi Party, and this had to impress thousands of civilians who had been at work since February. But this amateurish activity produced sparse results—partly because of the scepticism and apathy of the people, which increased every week, and partly because of the immensity of a task which might defy the most intelligent planning and the most systematic work.

The area of *Gross Berlin* was too large to be transformed into a kind of gigantic hedgehog. By contrast with Budapest there were no topographical features favourable to the defence. And the *Ring Autobahn* of which Berliners were so proud made it practically impossible to defend the city from a concentric attack. Once in the hands of attacking armies, the Autobahn made it possible for them to move round the capital in a circle and to concentrate at any point they might choose for penetration into the suburbs. In such conditions the obstacles—street barricades, tank ditches and strong points prepared on the eastern fringe of *Gross Berlin*—did not avail to immobilize the Russians. Making use of the Ring motor road, their storming columns were able to appear simultaneously from the north, the south and even the west. It proved practically impossible to bar the innumerable main and secondary roads entering the Berlin suburbs from all the quarters of the compass. The special constructional characteristics of the *Ring Autobahn* made its effective destruction "at the last moment" impracticable; and the Germans were unable to disrupt this main framework of their communications while the road with its ramifications

was serving the vital network of communications for the Oder-Neisse front.

In the operational sense there was nothing in common between the struggle for Berlin and the battle of Budapest. In the defence of the Hungarian capital the strategic idea of the enemy was based on the combination of a well-organized resistance within the city with a manœuvre by a "relief force" from outside. But there was no well-organized resistance within Berlin and there was no relief force outside. With the piercing of the Oder-Neisse front and the spread of the Russian mobile columns over the network of motor roads and main thoroughfares on the approaches to the metropolis the resistance of Berlin could not but be short-lived and devoid of strategic meaning. This last stand represented the final political gesture of the *Führer*—a theatrical background for his own disappearance in "a cataclysm." As a matter of fact this *mise en scène* led only to a police operation on a scale hitherto unprecedented in history.

The Russian offensive opened on 17 April. The attack on the Neisse front preceded that on the Oder by a few hours. Marshal Konev skilfully chose the point of his initial break-through on the Neisse south of Muskau. The direction of his first assaults made the enemy believe that they were confronted with the beginning of an offensive aimed at Dresden. (The Soviet communiqué of 19 April intentionally mentioned this operation as one "in the Dresden direction.") But as soon as the Russian artillery had smashed the enemy defences near Muskau and the infantry had made deep penetrations beyond the Neisse (Muskau and Forst fell), the tanks appeared, captured Weisswasser, and then their main force advanced westward, reaching Spremberg and Senftenberg. On the 18th the armour crossed the Berlin–Dresden motor road east of Finsterwalde. At the same time other columns, widening the area of the break-through, advanced: one in the direction of Bautzen, another towards Kamenz. A large gap was opened in the lines of the German Ninth Army into which Konev threw the strong Tank Corps of his two commanders who had more than once distinguished them-

selves in mobile war—Lelushenko and Rybalko. They had orders to switch from the region of Finsterwalde northward direct towards Berlin, without paying much attention to the garrisoned towns or strong points on their way. Lelushenko's and Rybalko's tanks were followed by the main force of Pukhov's Army, while other divisions of this Army—strengthened by a Polish divisional group—had to press back towards Dresden the right flank of the German Ninth Army, which was already cut in two. To deal with the left flank of that Army in the triangle Guben–Kottbus –the marshes of the Spree, Gordov's Army was available on the right of Pukhov. Acting together with the left flank Army of Marshal Zhukov's Group, Gordov was expected to cut off from Berlin the enemy forces between the Spree marshes and the Oder.

On the Oder front the advance developed somewhat more slowly than on the Neisse. The enemy fortifications were stronger here, filling all the area, 25 miles wide, between the river and the line Eberswalde–Fürstenwalde. This is a region of sandy soil, vast pinewoods and relatively few villages; flat in the northern part, it has in the south some heights parallel to the Küstrin–Seelow–Mühneberg road lying between this road and the Frankfort–Fürstenwalde–Berlin motor road. These Seelow heights had been fortified with particular care. The Russian attack started from three bridgeheads: east of Wriezen, west of Küstrin and north of Fürstenberg. The latter attack (south of Frankfort) was only of secondary and rather diversionary importance, but the others were launched under the protection of thousands of guns and heavy mortars by massed infantry of the two Armies (Belov's and Chuykov's). Zhukov's other two Armies (Tsvetayev's and Kolpakchi's) were only partly engaged south of Frankfort and were held mainly in reserve. Three Tank Corps (Bogdanov's, Orel's and Katukov's) were ready to follow the initial breaches opened by artillery and infantry and to extend, one after another, those made in the second and third defensive belts. These tactics corresponded to those applied by the British at El Alamein in 1942 and by the Russians at Orel and Melitopol in 1943.

On the 17th principal assaults developed towards Freienwalde (east of Eberswalde), Wriezen, the Wriezen–Seelow road and the Seelow heights. Divisions of the German Twelfth Army were densely concentrated in the pinewoods behind the first defensive live; they were confident in the strength of their positions and fought stubbornly, replacing the units depleted by devastating artillery attack. On the 18th the Russians captured Freienwalde, Wriezen and Seelow, but made no further progress on their flanks towards Eberswalde and west of Seelow. Then Zhukov moved one infantry column from Wriezen and another from Seelow on Buckow—a village surrounded by pinewoods in the centre of the enemy front. On the 19th the enemy defensive belt was pierced by this manœuvre, and the woods round Buckow began to swarm with Russian tank columns fanning out westward. This was the decisive moment of the battle. The next day heavy fighting continued at Mühneberg, German tank forces counter-attacking, but on 21 April Bernau and Straussberg, two strong points of the third defensive line, were taken by storm after hand-to-hand fighting in the streets. Between these two towns the Russians reached Alt-Landsberg, on the east fringe of which the *Ring Autobahn* runs. That same day Russian long-range guns were able to fire on to the centre of the capital from the forest north of Alt-Landsberg—a distance of some ten miles. These Russian shells exploding in the streets of the Reich capital signified not the beginning, but the end, of the battle for Berlin.

The battle of Berlin was won by Marshal Zhukov during the fighting in the pinewoods between the capital and the Oder and by Marshal Konev on the Neisse and the Spree. From the moment when Zhukov's tank formations reached the Ring motor road the fall of Berlin could be but a question of days.

While Zhukov's troops were reaching Bernau and Alt Landsberg, Konev's tanks, supported by infantry, overcame, after two days' fighting, the stubborn resistance of three German divisions of the Ninth Army which barred the Berlin–Dresden motor road near Kalau–Luckau–Lubbenau, their left flank being protected by the Spree

marshes. A few hours later Russian armour was seen approaching Zossen, only 10 miles off the Ring motor road.

By 21–22 April the critical situation on the front was understood not only by Hitler and his staff but also by local commanders and the troops. After the 22nd resistance suddenly slackened everywhere east and south of Berlin. During the night of the 21st–22nd enemy motor vehicles —tanks included—were in haste to make use of the Ring motor road, not for strategic movement, but only for speedy escape north-westward and westward. The Third Tank Army and the Twelfth Army were rapidly disintegrating as operational units. Some reinforcements arrived from the Twenty-first Army from the Stettin region. They soon became involved in the general disorderly retreat of elements of the Twelfth Army beyond the Havel and towards the Berlin–Hamburg motor road which joins the *Ring Autobahn* east of Nauen. The Twenty-first Army itself, on the lower Oder, now faced the danger of being outflanked from the south, since the Russians had passed Eberswalde and were at the point where the Berlin-Stettin motor road crosses the Havel-Oder canal.

April 22 and 23 brought further deterioration of the enemy situation. On Konev's front, in the south, after having captured Bautzen and Kamenz, Russian and Polish units reached Bischofswerda, east of Dresden, but an attack on the Saxon capital was not, for the moment, planned by the Russians; their mobile columns were moving from Finsterwalde through Elsterwalde towards Riesa on the Elbe, north of Dresden. Other units of Pukhov's Army, after having built pontoon bridges over the Spree south of Kottbus (which had been evacuated by the Germans), advanced on a broad front in the general direction of the Berlin–Dessau motor road—their left flank on Torgau, their centre on Dahme–Juterbog, their right flank on the southern outskirts of Berlin. Gordov's Army was operating against seven or eight Divisions of the Ninth Army which were being encircled in the region of the Spree marshes between Beeskow, Lubben and Schwieloch See. Their situation became desperate as Zhukov's left flank Army entered Frankfort (evacuated by the enemy), captured

Fürstenwalde, and was organizing the passage of the Spree with a view to joining Konev's Divisions on the Dahme lakes and so closing the ring round the German Divisions. Other Divisions of the German Ninth Army reached Dresden (where F.M. Schönerer was organizing a new Group) or were in full flight towards Wittenberg.

In the meantime, driving ahead of Pukhov's infantry, Lelushenko's and Rybalko's Tank Corps were already approaching the southern and south-western outskirts of Berlin. Lelushenko reached Zahna, Luckenwalde and Treuenbreitzen and cut the motor road Berlin–Dessau-Leipzig. Rybalko was at Beelitz and Trebbin and crossed the *Ring Autobahn*; his tanks and mobile infantry could invade the southern suburbs of the capital while its eastern and northern suburbs had already been invaded by Zukhov's assault troops.

On the 22nd Zhukov's tanks were able to move westward along the *Ring Autobahn* six abreast, while they extended their zone of penetration on both sides of it, thanks to the excellent system of suburban communications. The passage of the Havel and the Ruppiner Canal was not seriously contested and, on the 23rd, the Russians captured Birkenwerder, Oranienburg and Henningsdorf—the last-named point only six miles north of Spandau. Simultaneously with this westward move, Zhukov's numerous columns—specially organized for assault operations and for street fighting—approached the northern and eastern suburbs, penetrating the outer fringe of *Gross Berlin*. They reached Lubars, Rosenthal, Buchholz, Blankenburg, Weissensee, Biesdorf, Schöneiche and the east part of Köpenick.

At this moment, however, Marshal Zhukov directed his principal attention to the westward move by elements of Belov's Army and Bogdanov's tanks. He planned to encircle Berlin as rapidly as possible by establishing contact with Marshal Konev's mobile columns west or south-west of the capital. It seemed necessary, first of all, to isolate the Berlin garrison and to prevent any attempt at relief by the enemy forces which were still located to the north or north-west of Berlin. In fact, no attempt

at relief was ever tried. The remnants of the Twelfth Army and the Third Tank Army were only eager to withdraw as soon as possible from the Berlin region. The enemy morale was clearly broken. While during the first phase of the battle, from 17 to 21 April, Zhukov's and Konev's troops together had taken only 23,000 prisoners, 12,000 were taken in a single day on the 23rd. As for the Twenty-first Army, its precipitate retreat from the lower Oder was imminent. By the 22nd Russian parties had already crossed the river and on the next day Rokossovsky's main force began the passage of the Oder. Resistance by some rearguards only was encountered, and Stettin was entered on the 25th. Gartz and Schwedt also fell and the German Twenty-first Army was in full flight, partly through Pasewalk to the Baltic ports and partly through Prenzlau into Mecklenburg.

On the 24th Zhukov's tanks captured Nauen and on the 25th they switched southward and reached Ketzin on the Havel—8 miles north-west of Potsdam. Here, on the same day, they were joined by Lelushenko's tanks operating along the Berlin–Dessau road. The encirclement of Berlin was complete and the second phase of the battle was over. Another event of high importance marked the date of 25 April: Russian and American troops established contact at Torgau on the Elbe, while other of Konev's units occupied Wittenberg and, south of Torgau, crossed the Elbe at Riesa and Meissen.

The third phase of the battle consisted of two operations aimed at the destruction of the two encircled enemy groups —one inside the capital and the other south-east of Berlin and north-west of Guben. Since the 24th the plight of the latter had become desperate—when Zhukov's troops established operational liaison with Konev's right flank on the Dahme near Königswusterhausen (where the *Ring Autobahn* crosses the Dahme). On the 26th the area occupied by the German Ninth Army was considerably reduced as Storkow and Beeskow in the north and Liberose in the south were taken by the Russians. The 27th found the enemy still desperately clinging to the Schwieloch See region, but on the next day big groups began to surrender—

14,000 on that day. On the 29th this large-scale mopping-up operation was completed by the surrender of some 30,000 Germans.

While this battle was still in progress the "fighting Field-Marshal" Schönerer made an attempt to help the encircled units of the doomed Ninth Army. Schönerer had been transferred from Kurland, perhaps early in April, and given the task of forming, between Dresden, Prag and Brno, a new Group made up of units of various Armies the retreat of which into Bohemia had already begun or which might begin. At the end of April Schönerer was busy organizing the remnants of these "refugee armies"—the Eleventh coming from the north-west, the Seventeenth and the First Tank coming from the east, "Friesner's Armies" and the S.S. Sixth Tank Army coming from the south or south-east. But before he was able to make some order out of these crowds of defeated units he was strengthened by several Divisions of the Ninth Army which had been pushed back towards Dresden by Konev's break-through on the Neisse near Muskau and Spremberg. These Divisions Schönerer employed for the counter-attacks which he organized during 25–27 of April in the direction of Bautzen. He recaptured Kamenz (from the Poles) and Bischofswerda, but could not dislodge the Russians from Bautzen. His attempt had no consequences, but this was anyhow the only attempt at a counter-blow during the whole of the Berlin operation.

Street fighting with the Berlin garrison started on 22 April. Although the movement of encirclement only began on that day, and although Berlin might be more easily penetrated from the west and south than from the north and east where the Germans had made preparations to meet a Russian assault, Zhukov's troops, inspired by bitter memories of the invasion of Russia and by the present enthusiasm of victory, were impatient to fight in the capital of the enemy.

While Bogdanov's tanks advanced rapidly to meet Lelushenko's armour and Belov's Divisions followed them to capture Spandau and attack Berlin from the west, specially formed storm columns of Chuykov's and

Tsvetayev's Armies assaulted Berlin from the north and east. Infantry Divisions of these two armies were providing the assault troops with uninterrupted reinforcements. Orel's tanks co-operated with the infantry in the open spaces and along the broad avenues giving access to Berlin. Kolpakchi's Army and Katukov's Tank Corps advanced south-east of Berlin to establish liaison with Rybalko's armour and to complete the encirclement of the Divisions of the German Ninth Army beyond the Spree and the Friedrich-Wilhelm Canal.

On 23 April there was very heavy street fighting in the industrial suburbs of Pankow, Weissensee and Friedrichsfelde—all well prepared for defence and desperately disputed by enemy battle groups which were in sufficient strength to launch local counter-attacks. All the next day no progress was made in Pankow, but the Russians successfully extended their attacks to the west and, after having met with less effective opposition, captured Tegel, Wittenau and the Borsig factory; they penetrated into Reinickendorf, outflanking the defence of Pankow. In the eastern sector enemy resistance was smashed by the tanks which broke into the Frankfurter Allee and, advancing along it, helped to capture the Schlesischer Station on the fringe of Central Berlin. Further south an important success was achieved: the Russians crossed the Spree at Köpenick and captured the aviation centre of Adlershof. Here enemy resistance was only slight and the Russians passed on through Alt Glienicke and Rudow; open spaces in this sector favoured the tanks which soon reached Mariendorf and at Osdorf joined Rybalko's tanks approaching from Teltow.

By the 25th the general picture of the fighting in Berlin became clear. Some German battle groups, mixed up with regular or S.S. battalions and supported by sappers, numerous 88 mm. guns and still more numerous and powerful mortars, fought quite stubbornly. They were chiefly concentrated at Moabit, Wedding, near the Stettiner Station and Alexanderplatz—the last-named quarter being transformed Into a real fortress. In this part of the capital the streets were barricaded or covered with minefields; and blocks of bombed houses became machine-gun nests or

forts sheltering mortars or dug-in tanks. Street fighting there was ferocious and the Russian advance could only be slow. But the weak point of the resistance inside Berlin was its local character: fighting units of the type described above were rare in other parts of the capital. In some places the Russians met with an opposition which was, in effect, half-hearted and only of short duration. The southern and particularly the western quarters of the capital had not been so seriously adapted to the defence as had those between the Ring Bahn and Stadt Bahn north of Alexanderplatz. In the west there were natural obstacles —canals, rivers and forests—but there were also open spaces which favoured the movement of armour; in the south the Tempelhof airport formed a wedge of open terrain driven deep into the heart of Berlin.

Under such conditions Marshal Zhukov might expect a more rapid development of the attack from the west and south. On 25 April the greater part of Belov's Army and Bogdanov's tanks operated west of the Havel where, as has been said, a liaison was established with Lelushenko's armour. After some fighting the infantry crossed the Neuendorf canal west of Spandau and, passing through forest, captured Falkenhagen and the military camp of Döberitz. Spandau, a stronghold garrisoned by two Divisions, was cut off from the west. On the next day other of Belov's units passed through Jungfern Heide, crossed the Spandau-Berlin canal and attacked Siemens-stadt on the Spree. On the 27th, after these preliminary moves, Spandau was attacked from several directions and was captured with 8,000 prisoners and very considerable material. On the same day Zhukov's and Konev's columns occupied Potsdam. Zhukov's cavalry, moving westward and northward from Nauen, reached Rathenau and Fehr-bellin. The last enemy forces immediately to the west of Berlin were eliminated and the situation was ripe for an attack on the capital from the west.

Meanwhile the greater part of Tsvetayev's Army with Orel's tanks were transferred to the southern sector, where they co-operated with Rybalko's tanks which had already been reinforced by Pukhov's infantry. On the 25th

Konev's units captured the big southern suburb of Lichterfelde; Zhukov's troops stormed Lankwitz and Mariendorf. On the left flank of the southern sector the Russians entered Zehlendorf; on its right they were at Treptow between Neukolln and the Spree. This rapid advance on the south continued during the next day, when some of Konev's units captured Dahlem and the Botanical Gardens while Zhukov's troops concentrated for the assault of Tempelhof and Neukolln. These two important suburbs were taken by storm on the 27th. It was rather astonishing that the enemy lost them in a single day, for Neukolln had a reputation as an industrial "stronghold" and the Tempelhof airport is only three miles from the Tiergarten. But the enemy defence on the southern side of Berlin was obviously disorganized and any central direction of the defence was now coming to an end. Isolated groups and their commanders fought according to their moods of the moment.

On the day when Zhukov took Tempelhof and Neukolln Konev reached Steglitz and Schmargendorf and occupied the southern half of the Grünewald forest. The two Marshals were now ready to establish a contact between their forces—near Charlottenburg. On 28 April Zhukov's units crossed the Spree at Siemenstadt and, advancing southwards, joined Konev's troops at the Westend Stadion. When other of Konev's units occupied Friedenau and, on their right, attacked Schöneberg (13,000 prisoners were taken on that day)—the periphery of the Russian ring round the Berlin garrison was nowhere further than four miles from Hitler's Chancery and even less on the south. The third phase of the battle was over and the fourth opened. It continued less than four days in the streets of central Berlin.

On the 29th street fighting went on in Charlottenberg and Wilmersdorf. Moabit was decisively assaulted and captured. In the south the Anhalter Station and Potsdamerplatz were captured. In Schöneberg an enemy group still maintained a desperate resistance, but in other places resistance slackened. Alexanderplatz fell, and more than 10,000 Germans surrendered on that day. On 30 April the end was clearly approaching: 14,000 prisoners were

taken and the Russians massed along the north bank of the Spree. They crossed the river to the Tiergarten and captured the Ministry of the Interior and the Reichstag. In the south the General Post Office in the Leipzigerstrasse was in Russian hands. May 1 saw the agony of Hitler's Chancery. His death, as it now transpires, had taken place the day before, and the event gave to the most fanatical sections of the garrison freedom to capitulate. On 2 May the remnants of the Berlin Army, numbering still some 70,000 men, surrendered. Although hostilities formally ceased only after V-Day, the fall of Berlin marked the end of the operational history of the Russian Campaigns.

THE END

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