

# **Operational Art and the Narva Front 1944, Sinimäed and Campaign Planning.**

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the University of Liverpool for the degree of Doctor in Philosophy**

**by**

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## ABSTRACT

There is much written history for the military professional to read, but little is of value to his education. While many works are often wonderful reading, they are too broad or narrow in scope, often lacking the context to be used for serious study by professional soldiers. This work was written with two audiences in mind; my colleagues in the academic world, along with my many comrades who are professional soldiers. The present work was originally conceived as a contribution to historical literature on the subject of military education. More specifically, it was to be an exploration of the concept of operational art and the manner in which planning was doctrinally conducted to articulate battle on the Eastern Front in the Second World War. Any study of war devoid of the theory and doctrine of the period would be of little use to academics and military professionals alike. By the same token, it is often necessary for an author to relate the unfamiliar feelings of combat to a reader in order to give the perspective needed to understand war. Military professionals should study history to become better decision makers. Peter Paret best explained the role of history in relation to military professionals or historians when he said, “ By opening up the past for us, history added to the fund of knowledge that we can acquire directly and also made possible universal concepts and generalizations across time. To enable history to do this, the historian must be objective or as Clausewitz would have said- "as scientific or philosophical as possible.”<sup>1</sup> Decision making must be looked at through the lens of what Clausewitz called “critical analysis.”<sup>2</sup> Clausewitz sought to answer the question of “why” something happened in terms of cause and effect. A decisions being examined can only be understood if we know something of the character of the man who made it. These thoughts

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Paret, *Understanding War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1992), 131.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid,133. This work provides a central understanding to the use of history. Paret continues by saying “In the chapter “Critical Analysis” of *On War*, Clausewitz distinguishes between “the critical approach and the plain narrative of a historical event” and further identifies three paths that the critical approach might take; “The discovery

together provide the foundation on which greater understanding of the art and science of war is built, thus giving the military professional the tools to deconstruct a decision in terms of the problem historically in time and space. This facilitates a greater appreciation and understanding of his trade. The “reenacting process” allows scholars and professional soldiers to reconstruct problems in terms of the terrain and material used during the period; giving a clearer view into the heart of the problem.<sup>3</sup> As students of the art and science of war, we must make every effort to morally, mentally and physically put ourselves in a position to understand why leaders made the decisions they did. While the sheer terror of combat can never be properly replicated, our studies must find a way to understand them. The English language, or any language for that matter has a poor ability to explain in words, written or spoken, the horror of war. War is not just the extension of policy by other means, it is a societal interaction where human beings struggle within the phenomenon called war.

We must understand war to be a human activity, thus a social affair. Grasping human emotions, we see events capable of motivating or terrifying combatants in the lonely hours with the extreme violence typical of combat. In this light, we correctly educate ourselves about the true nature of war. War studied at the strategic, operational or tactical-levels should always consider decisions made, particularly in terms of their moral, mental and physical properties. Common elements to the offense or defense are the weather and terrain being fought on. While the weather will ultimately affect each differently, weather has the ability to complicate terrain in ways man to this day cannot conquer. The following pages reflect a military professional’s understanding of the events at Leningrad, Narva and Sinimäed from 68 years ago. Understanding of these events was achieved through German plan for Operation BLAU. An examination of this

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and interpretation of equivocal facts...; the tracing of events back to their causes...; [and] the investigation and the evaluation of the means employed.”

and other operational-level documents has yielded a tremendous understanding of how the Germans envisioned the retrograde of their forces into the Baltic states. It brings the author joy to know this work can be used to explain the monumental events and sacrifices of others. To this end, I have made my finest attempt.

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<sup>3</sup> Jon Tetsuro Sumida, *Decoding Clausewitz* (Lawrence: Kansas University Press 2008), 45.



## **DEDICATION**

*UPON THE BACKS AND IN THE HANDS OF SO FEW RESTED THE HOPES AND DREAMS OF SO MANY. THE GRATIFYING WORK OF THE PROFESSIONAL SOLDIER IS PROPERLY MOURNED ONLY BY WE WHO KNEW THEM. ONLY THOSE WHO SUFFERED WITH ME EVER KNEW THE TRUE COST.*

**THE AUTHOR**

**FOR THE MEN OF COMPANY K, THIRD BATTALION, EIGHT MARINE REGIMENT, RAMADI,  
IRAQ 16 MARCH 2006 TO 29 SEPTEMBER 2006**





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# CHAPTER 1

## Introduction with Literature Review

### 1.1 PURPOSE/SCOPE OF WORK:

The painful human phenomenon known as war is a form of social interaction like all others. Unlike other endeavors man participates in, which easily divide into fields of either art or science, war appeals to both equally. Equally affecting the art and science of war are the moral, mental and physical dimensions which man contributes to war while being subject to them himself. The art of war is concerned with intangible and fluid factors such as the effect of leadership on the human will, while the science of war appeals to more tangible, consistent factors such as the effects created by the employment of weapon against targets. The art and science of war affects the strategic, operational and tactical levels of war equally. A belligerent nation must first understand its own strengths and weaknesses, then those of the enemy to correctly employ the art and science of war to win at all three levels. It is thought by many military professionals and historians alike that nations can compensate for weaknesses at one level of war, yet still win the war with total dominance in the others. War is not governed by natural laws, but rather by luck and chance. In war, lessons observed come at a heavy cost. Winning at one level of war may provide a short term solution, but to win at war, a nation must be able to effectively communicate national objectives or end states from the strategic level into tactical action. Combatants must use their respective doctrines to link the use of tactical battle as a **means** to securing national political objectives as their **ends**. History has shown through timeless examples that nations capable of efficiently communicating the emergence of strategy and tactics through their campaign design and plans usually win their wars.

The study of war throughout history has yielded significant reflections from which historians and professional soldiers have both learned. Both professional soldiers and historians usually fail to understand the outcome of events relative to the contemporary mentality tasked to solve the original problem. Often this leads historians and professional soldiers to the wrong conclusions, as little adjustment is made from the present mentality. Professional soldiers study history to develop their decision making and judgment for future engagements. For the study of history to be relevant to professional soldiers, problems must be understood in the ex-ante, while examined in the ex-post to see possibilities for a future war.<sup>4</sup>



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**Map 1: German OKH Operations Section Situation Map November 12, 1943**

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<sup>4</sup> An ex-ante view of a problem is to understand it as it was at the time. The ex-post point of view sees the original problem through the lens of what is known today in reflection of the time.

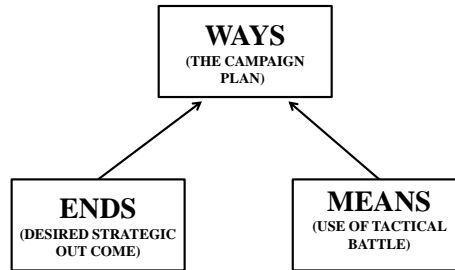
The purpose of this work is to explore the relevance of campaign design and planning through the examination of operations conducted in the Baltic region in 1944. [See Map 1] By first developing an understanding of the operational environment along with the numerous challenges created by the terrain and weather, the issues associated with operational design and planning are properly framed for investigation. By examining the variables of the Soviet and German strategic situations and doctrines, scholars and professional soldiers gain a better understanding of how each combatant's war planners interpreted their desired strategic (**end**) states through the creation of operational plans (**ways**). With this understanding, historians and professional soldiers correctly see the desired end states linked to the creation of a campaign plan through applied theory in the forms of doctrine and tactical battle. Thus, campaign planning joins the desired strategic end state to the use of tactical battle as a **means** to achieve the specified **ends** of a strategy.<sup>6</sup> [See Figure 1] Identifying the emergence or **ways** is the essence of the campaign plan. In today's parlance, military professionals refer to this practice of linking strategy to tactics as "operational art."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> NARA RG 242, Stack 33, Row 77 Compartment 15-17 Boxes 1-48.

<sup>6</sup> Using the model of ends, ways and means as a method for campaign planning was introduced to the author by Dr. Bradley Meyer while serving as a student at the U.S. Marine Corps School of Advanced Warfighting in 2009. The origin of ends, ways and means was first recorded to describe strategy in the May 1989 edition of *Military Review* by Colonel Arthur F. Lykke, Jr. See: Arthur F. Lykke, Jr., "Defining Military Strategy," *Military Review*, May 1989, 2-8. When speaking of a theory for strategy, H. Richard Yarger stated of Lykke's work that, "There is little evidence that collectively as a nation there is any agreement on just what constitutes a theory of strategy. This is very unfortunate because the pieces for a good theory of strategy have been lying around the U.S. Army War College for years-- although sometimes hard to identify amongst all the intellectual clutter. Arthur F. Lykke, Jr.'s Army War College strategy model, with its ends, ways and means, is the center piece of this theory. The theory is quite simple, but it often appears unduly complex as a result of confusion over terminology and definitions and the underlying assumptions and premises." See: J. Boone Bartholomees, Jr., ed., *The U.S. Army War College Guide to National Security Issues, Volume I* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2010), 45.

<sup>7</sup> Explaining operational art in terms of a cybernetic control loop is possible through the use of a "Z" diagram as seen in Figure 1. For more on the cybernetic control loop, see Norbert Wiener, *Cybernetics or Control and Communication in the Animal and the Machine* (New York, NY: The Technology Press, 1948).



**Figure 1**

As a term which gained popularity in the late 1970s and 1980s in the western militaries, “operational art” has often been a “used and abused” military term.<sup>8</sup> In the years following the beginning of the “War on Terror” or the “Long War,” operational art has been equally challenged for its relevance by military and academic circles. Professional soldiers and scholars have both searched history to validate or disprove the notion of operational art as a credible tool. Today, a common mistake regarding operational art is to apply an ex-post understanding of the term to historical scenarios without an understanding of the context. Indeed, this problem is part of a wider issue stemming from the military field, confusing the currency of an issue with overall relevance for the study of war. Two themes currently falling into this confusion are the ideas of joint operations and countering an asymmetric threat. Using the case study of the Baltic in 1944, these issues can be addressed, yielding an ex-post understanding based upon ex-ante thought and actions.

Harnessing effects created by the synergy of joint operations is as much a popular theme today as it was throughout the Cold War. At the heart of all force employment considerations is a doctrine for the conduct of war. Doctrine is based on theory regarding the nature of war. While the idea of joint operations finds roots in the Second World War, the name “joint” was certainly not applied in Soviet or German thoughts about the strategic, operational or tactical levels. A

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<sup>8</sup> Michael Howard, “The Use and Abuse of Military History,” *Parameters Vol XI No 1*, 9-14.

similar idea which serves to confuse the issue further is the employment of weapons known as combined arms.<sup>9</sup> Combined arms as we know it today, seeks to place the enemy in the “horns of dilemma,” meaning if the enemy is not exposed to the dangers created by your direct fires, he is susceptible to the effects of indirect fires. This concept existed before the Second World War, being resident in the doctrine of both the Soviet and German Armies. While the use of naval fires or air delivered ordinance in support of ground operations is certainly considered combined arms, it is not necessarily a joint operation. How a nation employs its forces through its doctrine determines if an operation is considered joint. A purpose of this work is to make clear the reason why we find so few works written on the joint use of forces in the Second World War. While the German and Soviet air forces and navies were separate services, during the course of the 1944 campaign, each nation had different command relationships between the services. While the Soviets subordinated their air force and navy under the command and control of the ground commander for employment, the Germans continued to maintain three autonomous forces.

Explored during the course of this work is how the Soviet air force and navy were largely used to provide tactical level support to the army in the prosecution of their operations out of the Leningrad pocket into the Baltic state of Estonia. Soviet thought regarding the use of naval fires and airpower as a method of supporting ground tactical actions were considered enabling operations necessary for the army to conduct operational breakthrough.<sup>10</sup>

In 1944, the German air force on the other hand was in midst of a doctrinal dilemma. No doubt, learning something of the value of strategic bombing from the Western Allies in 1942/43,

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<sup>9</sup> Headquarters U.S. Marine Corps, United States Marine Corps, *Warfighting MCDP-1* (Washington, DC: U.S. Marine Corps, June 20, 1997), 94-5.

<sup>10</sup> Faculty of History and Military Arts, Развитие Тактики Советской Армии В Годы Великой Отечественной Войны (1941-1945 гг.), (Evolution of Soviet Army Tactics during the Great Patriotic War (1941-1945) (Moscow, USSR: Military Publishing House, 1958). This work provides understanding of the Soviet view of the Second World War. While it is written in typical Soviet style, it exposes much about Soviet ex-ante thought on



the leadership of the German Air Force sought to return to their original concept of employment laid out before the war.<sup>11</sup> German air force leadership thought it prudent to return to regaining air supremacy and attacking targets such as rail junctions and production capability. In essence, the German leadership was interested in conducting a strategic bombing campaign of its own, while continuing to support the tactical needs of the army. The employment of the German air force in Russia was explored in recent years by Richard R. Muller in *The German Air War in Russia*.<sup>12</sup> The development of German air force doctrine was explored as a combined effort by James S. Corum and Richard R. Muller in *The Luftwaffe's Way of War*.<sup>13</sup> Both works of scholarship provide great depth of thought in their comparison of German actions during the war to their doctrine as it developed and evolved throughout the Second World War. Reading these works, it quickly becomes clear they were written to substantiate the airpower paradigm of the U. S. Air Force. According to the paradigm, airpower is inherently offensive as a capability, strategic by nature, so air power must be independent as its own service to be used properly.<sup>14</sup>

Histories of the Second World War usually only consider conventional ground combat operations without ever mentioning the role of airpower or naval power. The campaign in the Baltic, 1944 provides an excellent opportunity to explore how the Germans and the Soviets used or did not use their air and naval forces in conjunction with ground actions. Unlike land locked operations in the central Soviet Union or the miniscule naval operations conducted by the Soviets

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how lessons were observed at the tactical level of war and incorporated throughout the greater Soviet Army. In essence this work demonstrates how the Soviet Army observed and shared lessons across the force.

<sup>11</sup> James S. Corum and Richard R. Muller, *The Luftwaffe's Way of War* (Baltimore, MD: The Nautical & Aviation Publishing Company of America, 1998).

<sup>12</sup> Richard R. Muller, *The German Air War in Russia* (Baltimore, MD: The Nautical & Aviation Publishing Company of America, 1992).

<sup>13</sup> James S. Corum and Richard R. Muller, *The Luftwaffe's Way of War* (Baltimore, MD: The Nautical & Aviation Publishing Company of America, 1998).

<sup>14</sup> This paradigm was taught to the author during the course of his education at the U.S. Marine Corps School of Advanced Warfighting in 2009. The author is indebted to the teaching of Dr. Wray Johnson for the time he spent explaining this concept.

in the Black Sea, operations in the Baltic Sea provide an example to examine the use of naval force in conjunction with air and ground forces.

Operations in the Baltic in 1944 provide the scholar and professional soldier another unique possibly for the study of war. Many today act as if the current wars are the first time a uniformed conventional symmetric force has been used against a non-uniformed asymmetric force.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, this is not the case. While history is replete with examples, the case study of operations in the Baltic from 1944 have largely gone unexplored.<sup>16</sup> During the course of operations in the Soviet Union, German forces observed value lessons about how the Soviets “operationalized” the use of partisan forces in concert with conventional force operations.<sup>17</sup> Partisan actions often created several serious challenges for German forces. In a constant balancing act to find the appropriate level of troop strength for the front lines, and the need to secure rear areas, the Germans always had units of battalion or regimental strength occupying positions near senior headquarters or significant lines of communication. This was necessary to protect vital command and control structure as well as nodes and modes of communication for resupply to the front. A central lesson this work will examine is the Soviet as well as the German use of unconventional forces in concert with conventional forces to accomplish a common strategic end state. To the present, many still believe only the Soviets used unconventional forces. A factor never considered in the

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<sup>15</sup>See the work of von der Heydte for an introduction to conventional forces working with irregular forces. Friedrich August von der Heydte, *Modern Irregular Warfare, In Defense Policy and as a Military Phenomenon* (New York, NY: New Benjamin Franklin House, 1986).

<sup>16</sup>Two more recent works published in the last 20 years have examined the problem of using a partisan force in the Baltic. Albert M. Zaccor (1994) and Alexander Hill (2007) have both address the issues in, Albert M. Zaccor, “Guerrilla Warfare on the Baltic Coast: A Possible Model for Baltic Defense Doctrines Today,” *The Journal of Slavic Studies* 7:4, 682-702 and Alexander Hill, “The Partisan War in North-West Russia 1941-44: a Re-Examination,” *Journal of Strategic Studies* 25:3, 37-55. Both work present information in a historical context that could be of use to those that currently plan operations in the Baltic states.

<sup>17</sup>Department of the Army, Edgar M. Howell, *Department of the Army Pamphlet No 20-244 The Soviet Partisan Movement 1941-1944* (Washington D.C.: Department of the Army 1956). This highly under used work is one of the finest to be written to date on the Soviet use of unconventional forces during the Second World War. In researching this work, the author found the background documents (in six boxes) of this work, located at NARA to be of great service.

study of the Second World War, is what was happening in the occupied territories. Indeed, nothing has been written which examines the thoughts and actions of the native populations during the conduct of the Second World War in relation to the major combatants. While it is widely known how the Soviets employed partisans against German front and rear areas with equal effectiveness, the story of German anti-partisan efforts is incomplete.<sup>18</sup>

While many works have been written describing the brutality of the German anti-partisan effort, these works lack the correct context. In the Baltic region in 1944, the Baltic states each wanted to regain their independence from the Germans and Soviets alike. In the case of Estonia, men fought in the uniform of both combatants conventionally as well as unconventionally. In the service of the Germans, Estonian men fought in the uniform of the 20th Waffen SS Division.<sup>19</sup> Incorrectly, many have drawn the conclusion that these men were all dedicated National Socialists who wanted to fight for Adolf Hitler and the Nazi regime. While this may have been the case for some, it certainly was not the case for all. There are two factors of critical importance, 1) The Germans deliberately drew on the native populations of the occupied territories to fulfill the never-ending requirement for manpower to serve at and support the front.<sup>20</sup> Many senior German Officers did not feel non-Germans deserved to wear the field grey of the German Army, hence placing non-Germans under the command of Himmler and the Waffen-SS. 2) in the titanic struggle that was the Soviet-German War; the Estonians had a plan to reestablish their

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<sup>18</sup> Valdis Redelis, *Partisanenkrieg* (Heidelberg, Germany: Kurt Vowinckel Verlag, 1958). This work constitutes an excellent ex-post look at operations conducted against partisan formations during the Second World War. The strength of the work is the comparison of operations connected in the west with those operations in the east. The work takes a very good look at how the Germans waged war at the moral and metal dimensions through over reliance in physical measures.

<sup>19</sup> Mart Laar, *Eesti Leegion, Sõnas Ja Pildis, (The Estonian Legion)* (Tallinn, Estonia: Grenadier Publishing, 2008). A recent ex-post work which re-examines the role the Estonian Soldier played in the Second World War. The first of many recent works which challenge the traditional view of Estonians being ardent Nazis fighting for Hitler's Germany.

<sup>20</sup> Alfred Bilmanis, *Latvia Under German Occupation 1941-1943* (Washington D.C.: Latvian Legation 1943). An interesting work, albeit difficult to find, written during the war which explains what was happening in the occupied territories of the Baltic.

independence. This task was to be accomplished through the use of conventional forces, such as the 20th Waffen SS Division or the lesser known operations of the Omakaitse or the Estonian Home Guard.<sup>21</sup> As developed in the course of this work, the Germans used the Omakaitse to help secure the rear areas in conjunction with dedicated uniformed German forces such as the Kommandant des rückwärtigen Armeegebietes or Korück.<sup>22</sup> While there is little doubt the efforts of the Omakaitse benefited the Germans in the north, the motivation of this organization was to again secure Estonia's independence from foreign invaders and prevent a recurrence of 1940 with another Soviet occupation.

There is no doubt that for history to be of use to the professional soldier, he must be able to apply lessons being learned from what he is studying to current problems. In doing so, a professional soldier develops his judgment and increases his decision making ability for future conflict. Understanding the application of combat power on the battlefield is best gained through the painful experiences provide by war. Leaders do themselves a service by not just merely reading about war during times of peace, or in between deployments, but through studying war and how it is waged. Studying war means not only understanding the tangible and intangible factors of the art and science of war, but how these factors contribute to the decisions being made on the battlefield at the strategic, operational and tactical-levels. Some have argued in the past that study of war must stop during the execution of a campaign.<sup>23</sup> While the campaign being executed clearly take precedence over everything, leaders must continue to challenge their minds and look

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<sup>21</sup> Recent documentation recovered from the Estonian National Archives reveal a close connection between the Omakaitse and the German Army. These documents will be further explored in chapter six.

<sup>22</sup> When comparing the Oberkrietes documents against document from the captured German records section of NARA and interesting comparison can be done between what was being reported about Soviet partisan activities at the tactical level and what the Germans were relaying from the operational level back to Berlin.

<sup>23</sup> See Prince Kraft zu Hohenlohe-Ingelfingen, *Letters on Strategy* (London, UK: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co. Ltd, 1898). as he discussed this idea in great detail in the course of two volumes.

to other examples from the past to find similarities, thus creating efficiencies for their own time. In doing this, professional soldiers and scholars use history for a valuable purpose.

## **1.2 METHODOLOGY OF EXAMINATION:**

To gather relevant ex-ante lessons from the Soviet breakout of the Leningrad pocket and the invasion of the Baltic States in 1944, the framework of the strategic, operational and tactical levels are used throughout the course of this work. Several works of literature exist from both the Soviet and German perspectives which enable modern scholars and professional soldiers to learn valuable ex-post lessons for current operations. While thinking of war in terms of the strategic, operational and tactical levels is thought to be a modern construct, this framework has roots in the Soviet way of war.<sup>24</sup> Therefore examining the Soviet breakout of the Leningrad pocket along with the subsequent campaign using the levels of war is not repugnant to the past. This was the method used by Soviet military leaders during the course of the Second World War to frame problems. Conversely, the Germans tended to view the conduct of war in terms of only strategy or tactics. It is important to understand that what the Germans generally considered “strategy,” was in fact what we now think of today as the operational level of war.<sup>25</sup>

Many of the works which already exist on the Soviet breakout of the Leningrad pocket and the subsequent German defensive campaign follow the German methodology, meaning they are either written from the strategic or tactical level perspectives. Much of the literature being cited throughout the course of this work examines only the strategic or tactical levels. To properly examine the operational aspects of this campaign from planning through execution, primary

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<sup>24</sup> Faculty of History and Military Arts, Развитие Тактики Советской Армии В Годы Великой Отечественной Войны (1941-1945 гг.), (Evolution of Soviet Army Tactics during the Great Patriotic War (1941-1945) (Moscow, USSR: Military Publishing House, 1958).

<sup>25</sup> The Germans certainly had understanding of the ‘operational level’ long before any other military, but did not express it as a distinct level of war as the Soviets did. Indeed, the Russians developed it from the ideas of Sigismund von Schlichting. The Germans certainly used the terms ‘operativ’ and ‘Operationen’ as a distinction from tactical and tactics in the First World War.

German and Soviet source documents will be used to fill in the holes which exist in the historiography of this portion of the Eastern Front. For the needed operational examination of the German defensive campaign from the Leningrad pocket to the defense of the “Panther Line” culminating at Sinimäed or the Tannenbergstellung, along with operations into Latvia, a valuable series written by German commanders and planners has been found. From the Foreign Military Studies series, comes *P-035*.<sup>26</sup> In the past, many scholars dismissed the Foreign Military Studies as a credible reference because of obvious bias and the lack of references. Many of these studies were written from memory, as many of the source documents were not yet found. It should be remembered that few documents in history were written objectively. When the documents of the Foreign Military Studies are combined and cross referenced against the Captured German records holdings of the National Archives and Records Administration, a clear and concise operational picture of events emerges.<sup>27</sup> The value of *P-035* is clear, being written by the commanders and primary planners of operations in the wake of the Leningrad breakout it covers events to the demise of Army Group North in the Kurland pocket.<sup>28</sup> Many of the operations have long since been forgotten and it is time to learn from their fine example.

The National Archives and Records Administration contains a wealth of German information in the “Captured German Documents” section. Close inspection of these holdings yielded T-314, roll number 1362 as well as several others. This collection is Army Group

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<sup>26</sup> Department of the Army, MS# P-035 *Retrograde of Army Group North During 1944*. (Carlisle, Army War College: Foreign Military Studies Department 1950).

<sup>27</sup> Bernd Wegner wrote in *The Road to Defeat: The German Campaigns in Russia 1941-43*, “The most important results of this interest (Western interest in the war in the east post the Second World War) were the hundreds of operational studies on the war in the East produced by German generals after the end of the Second World War for the Historical Division of the United States Army.” See: Bernd Wegner, “The Road to Defeat: The German Campaigns in Russia 1941-43,” *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 13:1, 105-127.

<sup>28</sup> The work of Generalleutnant Oldwig von Natzmer is the primary section of *P-035* that deals with the defense of the Leningrad pocket. Natzmer served as an Operations Officer at the division level in both Italy and Russia until 1943. In the latter part of 1944, he would be promoted to the rank of Generalmajor and assigned the duties of the Chief of Staff for Army Group Kurland. Natzmer demonstrates exceptional understanding of the front and communicates clear understanding of events in terms of cause and effect.

North's log book of situation reports from subordinate headquarters along with recorded commander's estimates of the enemy and friendly situation from the time of the actions to be examined. These are vital pieces of the Narva Front which have never been explored. The captured German documents section also contains several army, corps and division records related to the actions from the Soviet breakout of Leningrad through the Narva Front from the German perspective.

Writing a history of the Second World War from the Soviet perspective, even today, is still a problematic for western historians. Western historians with a background in Russian aside, access to the ЦА МО РФ (Central Archives of the Ministry of Defense) is still extremely difficult to gain. During Soviet times, the archive was administered by the Military History Institute which was founded in 1966.<sup>29</sup> Under the hand of Lieutenant General P.A. Zhilin, the first director of the Institute, many relevant works were written. Zhilin was instrumental in writing and editing the *История второй мировой войны 1939-1945. (History of the Second World War 1939-1945)*.<sup>30</sup> This 12 volume series is considered the definitive official Soviet history of the Second World War and was better written than previous attempts.<sup>31</sup> Many of the pertinent 11 million documents in the holdings of the archive were used in the construction of the *History of the Second World War 1939-1945*.<sup>32</sup> While Russia continues to placate the west with the recent release of documents relating to the Katyn Forest, it must be remembered that Russia

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<sup>29</sup> P.H. Vigor, *The Study of Military History and the Soviet Union*. Contained in the holdings of the U.S. Army Center for Military History, HRC 091.711, pg, 24.

<sup>30</sup> While this is the Official Soviet History of the Second World War, the 12 volume series of the latter Soviet Union included several general details that enable the scholar and professional soldier the ability to understand basic strategic goals and some tactical realities. See: *История второй мировой войны 1939-1945, (History of the Second World War 1939-1945, Volume I-XII)*.(Moscow, USSR: State Publishing, 1970s).

<sup>31</sup> The original six volume series of the Second World War was written during the Khrushchev era, suffering much in the way of propaganda from that time. See: *История Великой Отечественной войны Советского Союза 1939-1945, (History of the Soviet Great Patriotic War 1939-1945, Volume I-VI)*.(Moscow, USSR: State Publishing, 1960s).

<sup>32</sup> P.H. Vigor, *The Study of Military History and the Soviet Union*. Contained in the holdings of the U.S. Army Center for Military History, HRC 091.711, pg, 27-28.

only provides access to those documents it wants seen. Potentially, what could yet be contained in the Russian Archives are documents that relate to the consolidation objectives for the Baltic states once they were again under Soviet control. These documents could further connect events of 1944 and the Soviet campaign plan with the overall political end state. This would also help clarify Soviet war termination criteria and lend understanding to what the official Soviet priorities were for the Baltic after the Second World War. While the digital age has made gaining Soviet information somewhat easier, the reliability of this information is difficult to ensure.

While scholars believe gaining access to Russian primary sources through the Russian State Archives is too difficult, many relevant documents remain in former Soviet occupied countries such as Estonia where the actions took place. Weather and light records essential to understanding local conditions in Estonia from 1944 were found in the possession of Tartu University.<sup>33</sup> Located in the holdings of the Estonian National Archives in Tallinn are critical document related to the Soviet and German occupations along with the details of subsequent partisan actions. These documents not only provides the Soviet side of the campaign, but from intelligence work, professional soldiers and scholars may be able to regain a perspective lost from German documents captured at the time of the campaign.

### **1.3 DEFINING THE STRATEGIC PROBLEMS AND THE OPERATIONAL ENVIRONMENT IN 1944:**

Among the questions which confront scholars or professional soldiers studying any campaign or battle is defining the political and strategic reasons why combatants fought. The reasons men fight are as old as man himself. The motivations to initiate hostilities throughout the centuries vary, but a general commonality linking nation states or individuals to violent action stem from

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<sup>33</sup> Tartu University Astronomic Observatory, *Astronomic Calendar, 21<sup>st</sup> Edition 1944*, (Dorpat (Tartu), Estonia: University Publishing 1943, as well as the Eesti Meteoroloogijaamade Vork, *Weather Record, February 1944*, (Dorpat (Tartu), Estonia: Station Year Record 1944.



either a perceived or real fear of something or someone, the need to maintain personal or national honor and some form of personal or national interest.<sup>34</sup> In the past two decades historians have debated the extent of power exercised by Hitler and Stalin in their respective countries. This thesis assumes both as pivotal in their role of forming and executing policy within the limits of their reach. Both Hitler and Stalin knew the Non-Aggression Pact of August 1939 would not last. Some scholars believe Stalin had plans to attack Hitler before Germany could attack the Soviet Union. The fact is open hostility between Germany and the Soviet Union began with the German attack of the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941.<sup>35</sup> The strategic reasons behind the German attack have generally been identified with the need for resources, such as oil and grain, as well as for ideological reasons such as lebensraum, or living space.<sup>36</sup> The horrific contributions to the physical dimension are well known. The political motivations for this conflict fueled the brutality of fighting at the tactical level on both sides as each combatant made consistent efforts to de-humanize their opponent.<sup>37</sup> Thus the political motivations for the conflict are directly linked to the moral and mental dimensions of war through physical evidence .

With an understanding of the strategic motivations for war in 1941, scholars and professional soldiers are better able to understand how these motivations evolve over the course of the war as a

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<sup>34</sup> Thucydides, *Landmark Thucydides* (New York, NY: Free Press, 1998), pg 43.

<sup>35</sup> While to date, a significant topic of discussion, several authors are examining the possibility of a Soviet attack before the German general assault of June 22, 1941. The argument of Gorodetsky has also been looked at by Joachim Hoffman and Viktor Suvorov independently. See: Gabriel Gorodetsky, *Grand Delusion, Stalin and the German Invasion of Russia* (Hartford, CT: Yale University Press, 1998).

<sup>36</sup> Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (Munich, Germany: Zentralverlag der NSDAP, 1941) 726. Chapter 14, beginning on page 726 of this edition instructs the world on Hitler's ideas for the East. While the subject of German goals in the East are still hotly debated, Hitler's thoughts dominated the National Socialist Party and the logic for war with the Soviet Union as future chapters will show.

<sup>37</sup> The brutality of fighting on the Eastern Front is well known. For general examples of conduct in the East, see: Earl F. Ziemke, *Stalingrad to Berlin: The German Defeat in the East* (Washington D.C.: Department of the Army 1968), Omer Bartov, 'Soldiers, Nazis, and War in the Third Reich,' *Journal of Modern History* 63 (March 1991), 44-60., or Klaus Jürgen-Müller, 'The Brutalization of Warfare: Nazi Crimes and the Wehrmacht,' in John Erickson and David Dilkes, ed. *Barbarossa: The Axis and the Allies*. Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, 1993.

result of sustained operations. While there are several variables effecting the Germans and Soviets, there are two which the combatants have in common, those being the terrain and the weather.

When combined, terrain and weather have the ability to bring operations to a standstill at the strategic, operational and tactical levels. Terrain and weather are often overlooked by scholars and professional soldiers when examining the strategic context of a conflict. Often, most think terrain and weather are too tactical a consideration to examine.<sup>38</sup> This lack of understanding demonstrates many think of war in isolation, meaning the strategic level independent from the operational and the tactical isolated from the strategic and operational levels. If nothing else, terrain and weather are unifying factors which interconnect the levels and dimensions of war more closely.

A key consideration of why terrain and weather are so important in the study of war resides in the notion of time and space. The considerations of time and space are the dominate factors governing the employment and sustainment of forces at the strategic, operational and tactical levels. Forces failing to understand the terrain and the effects of weather will never be able to effectively measure how long it will take to move their forces into contact with the enemy, or how long it will take to resupply those forces once in contact.<sup>39</sup>

In the 1950s, the United States Army spent considerable effort employing captured German officers with Russian Front experience to write about the terrain and weather of northern

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<sup>38</sup> What is important about terrain and weather is not the conditions, but the effects they have on military operations. Terrain and weather impact not only the abilities of leaders to employ weapons in cold weather because they are frozen at the tactical level, these conditions typically inhibit strategic and operational leaders ability to mass material, manpower or firepower to assist the tactical level.

<sup>39</sup> Documents of the Estonian National Archives, ERA 1091-1-1797 contain detailed information which scientifically demonstrates the Estonian port and airfield composition which would dictate German logistical throughput capacity.

European Russia.<sup>40</sup> The result was a series of studies elaborating issues associated with operating in Russia. These studies are an excellent collection of lessons observed, but lack significant explanation of the operations conducted to be of value to scholars. These studies also lack conclusive modern scientific evidence.<sup>41</sup> One of the goals of this work is to show the interconnection between the sciences of climatology and geology in relation to planning and executing a campaign plan.

#### **1.4 SHAPING THE SITUATION IN 1944: THE EASTERN FRONT FROM DECEMBER 1941- DECEMBER 1943:**

With hostilities between Germany and the Soviet Union commencing with Operation Barbarossa on June 22, 1941, German ground forces quickly advanced through Soviet defenses, winning tremendous early victories at the tactical and operational levels. German forces were organized into three Army Groups, Army Group North, Army Group Center and Army Group South to cope with the vastness of Soviet Russia.<sup>42</sup> Initial German intelligence and staff estimates grossly underestimated the Soviet will and their numerical strength.<sup>43</sup> False initial reading of Soviet capabilities was further reinforced by the continuous German victories, creating a false sense of confidence throughout the German forces.

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<sup>40</sup> Department of the Army, *Department of the Army Pamphlet No 20-290 Historical Study Terrain Factors in the Russian Campaign* (Washington D.C.: Department of the Army 1951). A must for beginners looking to understand the terrain in relation to the problems associated with operating in Russia.

<sup>41</sup> See Ivar Arold, Translated by Eric A. Sibul, *Eesti Maastikud, (The Landscapes of Estonia)*. Tartu, Estonia: Tartu University Press 2005. This work is the best of its kind to understand the physical nature of the Estonian landscape from its formation during the ice ages through transformation from land erosion. In order to understand why some pieces of terrain are impossible to attack or defend, requires scientific understanding of the physical composition of the terrain.

<sup>42</sup> *Army Group North* by Walter Haupt has long been considered the industry standard for the operations in the northern AO. At issue with the work is the lack of depth in the references used throughout. This work mainly treats the problems of the tactical level of war without explaining the strategic context.

<sup>43</sup> NARA T-312, Roll 776, First Frame 8425689. General Marcks wrote an numbered 23 page report dated August 5, 1940. This report was a pre-conflict assessment (Estimate of the Situation) written to evaluate a future conflict with the Soviet Union. As Germany had yet to lose anyplace at this stage of the war, Hitler and others in the German High Command cast the report aside as a “defeatist” outlook for a future war.

In December 1941, German offensive actions ground to a halt as severe weather conditions and relentless Soviet counter attacks crippled German manpower and equipment. The distance of German lines of communication made the timely delivery of replacements increasingly difficult. The Soviets analyzed how the Germans worked along exterior lines of communication and created plans to affect their usage.<sup>44</sup> Like all invaders of Russia, the Germans were susceptible to the extreme weather and distances create by the terrain. With the Germans manning massive rear areas, the Soviets understood how the German lines of communication (LOCs) were susceptible to partisan activity. In concert with conventional Soviet offensive actions, partisan bands began cutting German LOCs. With the thought of inflicting massive casualties and regaining lost territory, the Soviets executed a series of winter offensives in 1941-42. In the north, the Germans were stopped outside Leningrad, beginning a siege lasting over 900 days.<sup>45</sup> Moscow was saved in the center, while the Soviets fought desperately in the south, losing large amounts of territory and manpower in the process.

Throughout 1942-43, the Soviets found ways to break the massive German offensives. First, the Soviets broke the German Sixth Army at Stalingrad. A hard blow, but one from which Germany could recover. In the late summer of 1943, the Soviets inflicted the death blow on German forces at Kursk. Collectively, the losses the Germans suffered in manpower and equipment were more than they could replace. The Soviets applied a strategy of attrition, using superior strength in manpower and material to continually weaken German forces.

Throughout the remainder of the summer of 1943 and while continuing to fight the Germans, the Soviets continued to build significant combat power for a general offensive. The Soviets

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<sup>44</sup> Lieutenant General Colmar von der Goltz, *The Conduct of War* (Kansas City: MO, The Hudson-Kimberly Publishing Company, 1896), 82. This classic work explains the difference between lines of operation and lines of communication. These concepts will be further developed in coming chapters.

<sup>45</sup> Harrison E. Salisbury, *The 900 Days, The Siege of Leningrad* (New York, NY: Harper and Row, 1969).

enjoyed significant success in the fall of 1943 by retaking Kiev.<sup>46</sup> On September 9, 1943 the Soviet commander of the Leningrad Front, General Govorov, sent forward his estimate of the situation recommending an attack of Army Group North to STAVKA for their approval.<sup>47</sup> Fearing insufficient combat power, the STAVKA informed General Govorov to continue holding positions around Leningrad while continuing to build combat power for a general assault. On October 12, 1943, STAVKA informed General Govorov “We do not object to your plan of operations for the Leningrad Front. Put it into effect quickly in the event of an enemy withdrawal.”<sup>48</sup> Soviet strategic assessments of the situation led to the belief that German Army Group South was close to total failure. Stalin’s “Broad Front” strategy was launched in January 1944 across the entire Russian Front. Designed to attack the Germans everywhere, the “Broad Front” tested German defenses for weaknesses. Once weaknesses were identified, the Soviets would commit significant forces to attack, with follow-on reinforcements to exploit success.<sup>49</sup>

The Germans in December 1943 could do little to defend the ground they held. To support offensive actions at Stalingrad and Kursk, Germany took men and material from other fronts giving Army Group South the manpower and material it required.<sup>50</sup> Thus, Army Group North, a supporting effort, was incapable of supporting the main effort to the south. Throughout the fall of 1943, Army Group North secretly began planning a delay and defend operation to withdraw

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<sup>46</sup> Earl F. Ziemke, *Stalingrad to Berlin: The German Defeat in the East* (Washington D.C.: Department of the Army 1968), 185.

<sup>47</sup> David M. Glantz, *The Battle for Leningrad* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 2002), 331.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid*, 332.

<sup>49</sup> Reference to the Soviet strategic goals and "Broad Front" are found in the Soviet Official History. See: История второй мировой войны 1939-1945 (History of the Second World War 1939-1945) Москва, Воениздат, Volume VIII (Moscow, USSR: State Publishers, 1977), Pgs 119-127.

<sup>50</sup> Material from the Italian Campaign are useful for comparing the status of other German Armies to the condition of the Eastern Front in 1943/44. See: Historical Section, 5<sup>th</sup> US Army (Col John D. Forsythe), *Fifth Army History Part IV Cassino and Anzio* (Florence, Italy: L'Impronta Press, 1945).

forces back to pre-established positions along the “Panther Line” further to the west.<sup>51</sup> On January 14, 1944 the Soviets launched an attack breaking the German hold on the city of Leningrad. This attack was a supporting effort designed to enable ongoing offense actions to the south and to reoccupy the Baltic region from German forces. These details form the bases of the operating environment in the fall of 1943/44. Attention is now to be paid to German strategic guidance and how operational planning was conducted in the late war period.

## **1.5 STRATEGIC GUIDANCE AND OPERATIONAL PLANNING:**

### **THE GERMAN PERSPECTIVE:**

There are two prominent reasons among the many why the Germans wanted to maintain control of the Baltic region. The foremost German strategic concern was their relationship with Finland and to maintain secure lines of operation and communication with them. Finland was important to the German war effort because it protected the flank of Swedish iron ore to the west while placing pressure on Soviet forces in the northern portion of the Leningrad pocket. With this in mind, Hitler was determined not to lose Estonia. The relationship with Finland was so vital to German interests that Hitler sent a delegation to Finland headed by General der Infanterie Dr. Waldemar Erfurth.<sup>52</sup> In *MS# P-041bb* or *The German Liaison Officer with the Finnish Armed Forces*, Erfurth explained as a result of two meetings between the German and Finnish forces in “Salzburg on May 25, 1941 and Zossen on May 26, 1941, it had been agreed that a German

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<sup>51</sup> The contents of plan Fall BLAU are examined for the first time in the course of this work. See NARA T-311, Roll 76, First Frame 7099655 or First Frame 9103373 AOK 18 Ia Nr. 059/43 g.Kdos.Chefs for the contents of Plan BLAU.

<sup>52</sup> General der Infanterie Dr. Waldemar Erfurth, a.D. was a prolific author before and after the Second World War. Before the Second World War, Dr. Erfurth wrote *Surprise* which compared and contrasted the German experiences in the First World War against the writings of von Schlieffen’s *Cannae*. In *Surprise*, Erfurth felt the essence of *Cannae* was the idea of *Vernichtungsschlacht* or “victory through a single battle” (Pg 7). *Surprise* was an attempt to show the theoretic connection of von Clausewitz’s theory for war with von Schlieffen’s work regarding the practice of the First World War. This was a common practice for German military writers in the post World War period. After the Second World War, Erfurth authored for the U.S. Army Historical Division OKH Project #7 or *MS# P-041bb The German Liaison Officer with the Finnish Armed Forces*. A more in-depth treatment of this topic was covered in his work *Der Finnische Krieg*, published in 1950.

General was to be sent to the Finnish headquarters as liaison officer of the Army High Command (OKH) and the Wehrmacht High Command (OKW).”<sup>53</sup> Although not written in a formal tasking statement, Erfurth had six core tasks that did not change during the conduct of the war comprising his mission to Finland:

1. Establishing and maintaining contact between the German and the Finnish High Commands.
2. Coordination of planning.
3. Representation of mutual wishes regarding warfare in common.
4. Briefing of both sides on the situation of the war at any given moment.
5. Liaison between the German sectors and the Finnish sectors adjacent to them.
6. Exercising the power of a commander of a military area (Wehrkries) in regard to the German agencies and troops in the Finnish zone of operations.<sup>54</sup>

This relationship helped secure German economic and operational interests in the Baltic while operating against the Soviet Union. Throughout the course of the relationship with Finland, General staff officers were sent from Germany to observe all facets of the relationship as objective observers.<sup>55</sup> This was done to give planners in Berlin some idea of what capacity Finnish forces had to continue the war. On one such visit, a General staff officer named Major Jordan conducted a visit to Finland between June 7-23, 1943. Apparently asked by his higher headquarters to comment on the dedication of the Finnish forces, he stated in the first section of his official report of June 25, 1943:

The view being held by many Germans that the Finnish soldier is especially good and that the entire Finnish nation, unlike any other, is fully participating in the war effort to the last man and woman, is not justified according to the statements of responsible German officers.

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<sup>53</sup> Department of the Army, *MS# P-041bb The German Liaison Officer with the Finnish Armed Forces*. (Carlisle, Army War College: Foreign Military Studies Department 1952), 1.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid*, 2.

<sup>55</sup> Bernd Wegner correctly stated that Finnish support for the German war effort began to decline in early 1942. "Confidential surveys showed a dramatic decline of expectations of victory among the Finnish population, which stood in sharp contrast to the repeated declarations of loyalty to Germany by the Finnish government, and to reports in the Finnish press, which were often characterized by censorship and self-control." See: Bernd Wegner, "The Road to Defeat: The German Campaigns in Russia 1941-43," *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 13:1, 105-127.

It may well be true that the Finnish soldier is a particularly adept forest fighter and that Finnish troops are in many respects superior to the German troops, for example in hunting down the enemy in the woods, conducting small-scale operations, and adapting themselves to the difficult local conditions. However, the Finns generally tend to avoid heavy fighting, and in the opinion of General Dietl it appears extremely doubtful whether the Finns will be able to cope with a heavy Russian attack which, even though it may not be imminent, is bound to be launched at some time in the future.<sup>56</sup>

After the resignation of the Finnish President, Field Marshal Mannerheim believed he no longer had to honor previous agreements.<sup>57</sup> Seeing the war was not going to end well for the Germans, he negotiated a separate peace with the Soviet Union to preserve his own country's freedom. "According to the Soviet conditions of the Finnish capitulation, Finnish territory had to be cleared of German troops by September 15, (1944)."<sup>58</sup> With German troops having to be removed from Finland, the Germans could not maintain pressure on the northern flank, requiring the Germans to conduct a withdrawal from the Baltic region, sealing the fate of Estonia and Eastern Europe. To explain how fighting on the Narva Front could assist in a German withdrawal, it is necessary to look at *MS# 151, Fighting on the Narva Front, the Evacuation of Estonia and the Withdrawal to the Dvina*.

Examination of *MS# 151* reveals discussion of the German plan for withdrawal. Accordingly, the following steps were taken:

1. The operation was assigned the code name "Entruenpelung" house-cleaning. All equipment not absolutely needed was moved to Germany.
2. A small group of officers, sworn to absolute secrecy, conducted a dry run of the planned operation under the code name "Tannenbaum I". Direction of the withdrawal and lines of resistance were established on the maps and were reconnoitered on the ground inconspicuously.
3. Armeearbeitung Narva designated highways for motorized and horse-drawn vehicles. Bridges are to be reinforced.
4. Depots were established for all classes of supply.

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<sup>56</sup> NARA CMH, Files *Stalingrad to Berlin* RG 319, Stack Area 270, Row 19, Compartment 31, Shelf 4-6, Box 9.

<sup>57</sup> Department of the Army, *MS# P-041bb The German Liaison Officer with the Finnish Armed Forces*. (Carlisle, Army War College: Foreign Military Studies Department 1952).

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid*, 78.



A withdrawal directly west toward Reval (Tallinn) and the Island of Ösel (Saaremaa) would have been the least difficult for *Armeeabteilung* (Army Group) Narva. The over-all situation however necessitated a southwesterly and ultimately a southern direction toward Riga.<sup>59</sup>

The second critical reason for the Germans to maintain control of the Baltic region was for the use of the Baltic Sea by the German navy as a training ground. While training was accomplished in the Baltic Sea by the German navy, the value of the Baltic Sea as a line of operation and communication was also significant. According to C.W. Koburger, Jr., in *Naval Warfare in the Baltic, 1939-1945*, “an estimated 50-60 percent of U-boat training was carried out in the Baltic.”<sup>60</sup> German hopes were being placed in the strategic value the U-boat brought to all theaters of operation, only as an unfortunate after thought.<sup>61</sup> As the situation continued to deteriorate on the Eastern Front, Admiral Doenitz recalled in his memoirs written in 1958, a meeting he was summoned to on July 9, 1944 with Hitler. Admiral Doenitz stated:

I took part in a conference on the deterioration of the situation on the Russian front, to which Hitler had summoned Field Marshal Model, Lieutenant General Friessner and General Ritter von Greim. Hitler asked me what effect a Russian break through to the coast would have on naval operations in the Baltic? My answer was:

Control of the Baltic is important to us. It is of great importance as regards the import of the iron ore from Sweden which we require so urgently for our armaments, and it is of vital importance to the new U-boats. The most westerly point at which we can close the Gulf of Finland to the Russian fleet lies to the east of Reval [Tallinn]; possession of the Baltic Islands from this point of view is of equal importance. If, however, the enemy

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<sup>59</sup> Department of the Army, *MS# 151 Fighting on the Narva Front, The Evacuation of Estonia and the Withdrawal to the Dvina* (Carlisle, Army War College: Foreign Military Studies Department 1952), 6-7.

<sup>60</sup> C. W. Koburger Jr., *Naval Warfare in the Baltic, 1939-1945, War in the Narrow Sea* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1994), 70.

<sup>61</sup> Since before the beginning of the war in the East, the leadership of the German navy was trying to convince Hitler to accept a plan that would allow the German navy to take the lead in operations against the Western Allies. Wegner states, "The importance of ideological aims in Hitler's strategic calculations was evident in his rejection of plans submitted by the Navy leaders and by the Foreign Minister Ribbentrop in 1940 as alternatives to an offensive in the East. The plan developed by the commander-in-chief of the Navy, Raeder, to shift the main German war effort to the Mediterranean, the Near East and North-west Africa, and the concentration on the disruption of sea links between Great Britain and the United States favored by the commander of the submarines, Dönitz, did not, in the end, receive Hitler's approval because they ignored his most important war aim, namely by conquest of the East." See: Bernd Wegner, "The Road to Defeat: The German Campaigns in Russia 1941-43," *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 13:1, 105-127.

were to succeed in breaking through to the coast further south- in Lithuania, for example, or East Prussia, the Gulf of Finland and the Baltic Islands would become worthless from a naval point of view. Enemy naval bases in our immediate vicinity would then constitute a grave threat to our iron ore imports, if they did not, indeed, put a complete stop to it, and would interfere with the training area for our new U-boats. The primary object which, in my opinion, must take precedence over everything else, including even the evacuation of the northern Army Groups, must be at all costs to prevent the Russians from breaking through to the sea. Once they did so, the exposure of the flank of our sea lines of communication to attack from their air bases in Lithuania would make it impossible for us to continue to carry supplies by sea for Finland and the Northern groups of armies.<sup>62</sup>

## **1.6 THE SOVIET PERSPECTIVE:**

The Soviets traditionally saw the Baltic region as theirs, just as the Russians did dating back to the time of Peter the Great and the Northern War against Sweden.<sup>63</sup> The Baltic countries were secretly sacrificed by Germany to the Soviet Union by the Molotov-Ribbentrop agreement, subsequently being occupied by the Soviet Union in 1940.<sup>64</sup> The Soviets temporarily lost control of the region for three years as a result of German occupation. With the breakout of Soviet forces from the Leningrad pocket in January 1944, reoccupation of "Soviet" territory was possible. At this time, the Soviets had every intention of reoccupying the Baltic region and telling their Anglo-American allies they were keeping the Baltic States. There were two purposes in reoccupying the Baltic States, 1) A buffer from the western powers by using Poland to the west; and 2) Reorganizing former German occupied areas under Soviet Communism. Josef Stalin went to Yalta with these parameters in mind as he insisted on a Soviet sphere of control.

Strategically, like their western allies, the Soviets had already started to think about their place in the post war world at the time of the Leningrad breakout and subsequent campaign

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<sup>62</sup> Karl Doenitz, *Memoirs, Ten Years and Twenty Days* trans. R. H. Stevens (New York, NY: The World Publishing Company, 1959), 398.

<sup>63</sup> A.T. Mahan, *The influence of Sea Power Upon History* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown and Company, 1897), 231.

<sup>64</sup> Alfred Bilmanis, *Baltic Essays* (Washington D.C.: Latvian Legation, 1945), Pg 166.

through the Baltic. Having suffered significant casualties, the Soviets felt it their right to retake what they saw as theirs. They followed this course of action diplomatically through the Yalta conference from February 4-11, 1945.<sup>65</sup> By the time of the conference, the Baltic region was back under Soviet control, with the notable exception of the Courland Pocket in Latvia.<sup>66</sup> The Yalta Conference was an opportunity to discuss what was going to be done with the vanquished and what role the victors would play in the post war world. Once again, the Soviets had decided the fate of the Baltic countries and Poland, this time with their Anglo-American Allies.<sup>67</sup>

To understand Soviet operations from breakout of the Leningrad pocket to the attack on the “Panther Line” and the final assault on Sinimäed (The Blue Hills) and beyond requires an examination of Soviet strategic guidance in relation to tactical actions. For the purpose of this examination, the three fights will be treated as two different campaigns, as the campaign goals for the Leningrad breakout and the attack on the “Panther Line” differ. The main vehicle for this examination is the campaign plans themselves and how they were created as the situation developed. As has been discussed, the Soviets began to formulate their strategic plans for 1944 in the fall of 1943. Soviet operational and tactical momentum in the fall of 1943 was still focused on actions in the Ukraine. As General Shtemenko stated:

The main blow, as before, was to be delivered in the Ukraine west of the Dnieper. The task here was to smash Manstein’s armies and split the enemy front by bringing the First and Second Ukrainian fronts up to the Carpathians. According to the plan of the campaign, the earliest offensive (January 12) was to be launched by Second Baltic Front. On January 14th it would be joined by the Leningrad and Volkhov Fronts. Using Stalin’s “Broad Front” Strategy required Soviet Forces to test the Germans everywhere for weaknesses.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Evan Mawdsley, *Thunder in the East* (London, UK: Hodder Arnold Publishing, 2005), 368.

<sup>66</sup> See Department of the Army, *MS# P-035 Retrograde of Army Group North During 1944*. (Carlisle, Army War College: Foreign Military Studies Department 1950) for greater treatment of the Courland Pocket in relation to operations in Estonia.

<sup>67</sup> Mark A. Stoler, *The Politics of the Second Front* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1977), 22.

<sup>68</sup> S. M. Shtemenko, *The Soviet General Staff at War 1941-1945* (Moscow, USSR: Progress Publishers, 1975), 198-99.

## **1.7 THE SOVIET CAMPAIGN PLANS:**

At the end of 1943/beginning of 1944, the objective (**ENDS**) of Soviet forces operating around Leningrad was to break the German hold on the city and liberate it. Through the end of 1943, the Soviets had built the requisite combat power in the Leningrad pocket to execute offensive tactical operations (**MEANS**). With tactical reconnaissance reports indicating the possibility of an early German withdrawal from Leningrad, STAVKA sent the following instructions to the Leningrad, Volkhov and Northwestern Fronts on September 29, 1943 to stall those efforts:

According to agent intelligence, which requires verification, the enemy is preparing to withdraw his forces, which are opposing the Leningrad, Volkhov, and Northwestern Fronts.

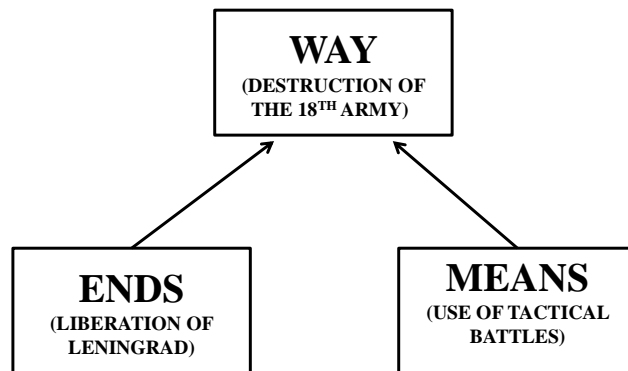
In connection with this eventuality:

1. Intensify all types of reconnaissance and determine the enemy's intentions.
  2. Increase the vigilance and combat readiness of your forces.
  3. Create shock groupings along the likely axes of enemy withdrawal so that they can pursue along his withdrawal routes.
  4. Create mobile pursuit detachments in first-echelon units and begin an energetic pursuit in the event of an enemy withdrawal. While conducting the pursuit, employ aviation extensively against the withdrawing enemy.
- Report measures undertaken.

Antonov<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> David M. Glantz, *The Battle for Leningrad* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 2002), 332-33.



**Figure 2**

With these ideas in mind the Army Commanders set their staffs to work to develop the methods or (**WAYS**) to accomplish the desired (**ENDS**) of the campaign. Figure 2 represents the emergence of the first Soviet campaign plan goal. The (**WAY**) to accomplish the (**END**) was by the destruction of the German Eighteenth Army through the use of tactical offensive actions. To accomplish this task, the (**MEANS**) required the Leningrad Front to attack the left flank of the German Eighteenth Army, while the Volkhov Front concentrated on the right flank of the Eighteenth Army.

Based on the situation, General Govorov of the Leningrad Front created two plans taking into consideration an early German withdrawal or the need for a general penetration of the German defenses if they choose to stay. The first possibility was code-named Neva 1 and the second possibility, Neva 2.<sup>70</sup> Looking first at Neva 2, Govorov planned to concentrate the actions of his armies first on the Ropsha/Krasnoe Selo area to break the German hold on Leningrad. Based on the strength of the German defenses, which were stronger in the east around Mga and weaker in the west around Oranienbaum, Govorov weighted the 2d Shock Army as the main effort and

ordered it to breakout from the Oranienbaum pocket in the west toward Ropsha/Krasnoe Selo in the east. The 42d Army was ordered to attack from the south of Leningrad in the east toward Ropsha/Krasnoe Selo in the west. The 2d Shock Army and the 42d Army received 80 percent of the fire support assets available, translating to an opening barrage of 65 minutes for a total of 104,000 shells falling on the *III SS Panzer Corps* and the *9th and 10th Luftwaffe Field Divisions* at dawn on January 14, 1944.<sup>71</sup>

In support of breakout operations in the north and facilitating the attack of Eighteen Army's right flank, the Volkhov Front under the command of General Meretskov had a similar scheme of maneuver to the Leningrad Front. General Meretskov ordered General Korovnikov's "59th Army to conduct two attacks: a main attack from its bridgehead on the western bank of the Volkhov River 30 kilometers (18.6 miles) north of Novgorod, and a secondary attack across Lake Il'man south of Novgorod. The Attacks were to converge west of Novgorod, encircling and destroying the German XXXVIII Army Corps, and capturing the city."<sup>72</sup>

The key factors driving the tactical actions or (**MEANS**) were the weather and terrain. As the terrain in the Leningrad area was either forest or swamp, attacks had to occur during the winter months when the terrain was hard enough for cross country movement, if they stood any chance of success. Soviet after action reports (AARs) stated Soviet actions in the attacks were slow, blaming poor reconnaissance and command and control.<sup>73</sup> There are a few obvious reasons why these two areas were problematic. All of the Soviet fronts involved needed to essentially relearn how to conduct an attack after years of fighting an active defense. Good reconnaissance takes time to develop. Good reconnaissance also requires commanders and staffs to have well thought

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid, 334 and 338.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid, 335.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid, 341.

out lists of assumptions being confirmed or denied by reconnaissance efforts. The more reconnaissance is used, the more friendly intentions are betrayed to the enemy. Command and control was made difficult because most communications of the day were done by land line telephones, susceptible to the effects of artillery. The key factors creating difficulty in command and control of the operation were primarily the troop to task assigned to the mission and a violation of the principle of unity of command. To remedy this problem the STAVKA disbanded the Volkhov Front effective 2400, February 15, 1944, sending its combat power to the other fronts, mainly the Leningrad Front.<sup>74</sup>

With the completion of the Leningrad breakout and the dissolution of the Volkhov Front, the Leningrad Front made painfully slow progress to the “Panther Line” because of the bad

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid, 595. From endnote 43 based on a Stavka Directive 220023:  
The Stavka of the Supreme High Command orders:

1. Transfer from the Volkhov Front effective 2400 hours 15 February:

a. To the Leningrad Front:

- The 59th Army consisting of the 112th Rifle Corps (the 2d and 277th Rifle Divisions), the 6th Rifle Corps (the 286th and the 239th Rifle Divisions and the 24th Rifle Brigade);
- The 8th Army consisting of the 7th Rifle Corps (the 372, 256th, 378th and the 191st Rifle Divisions and the 58th Rifle Brigade), the 99th Rifle Corps (the 311th, 229th, and 265th Rifle Divisions), the 14th Rifle Corps (the 382d, 225th, and 285th Rifle Divisions), and the 2d and 150th Fortified Regions; and
- The 54th Army consisting of the 111th Rifle Corps (the 44th and 28th Rifle Divisions and the 1st Rifle Brigade), the 119th Rifle Corps (the 198th, 229th, and 364th Rifle Divisions), and the 65th and 310th Rifle Divisions of the front’s reserve.

b. To the 2d Baltic Front:

- The 1st Shock Army consisting of the 14th Guards Rifle Corps (the 23d Guards and 208th Rifle Divisions and the 137th Rifle Brigade), the 391st Rifle Division, and the 14th Rifle Brigade.

2. Transfer the armies with all their reinforcing units and rear service units, installations, and reserves.

3. Leave all Volkhov Front rear service headquarters and units and facilities in place and temporarily subordinate them to the Leningrad Front commander.

4. After the transfer of the Volkhov Front’s armies consider the front dissolved and temporarily leave the front headquarters in Novgorod in Stavka reserve.

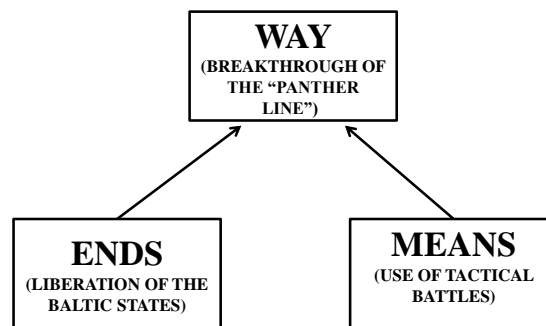
5. Effective 2400 hours 15 February 1944, establish the following boundary line between the Leningrad and 2d Baltic Front: the mouth of the Shelon’ River, Dno, Ostrov, Pliavinas, and farther along the Western Dvina River to Riga 9all points inclusive for the Leningrad Front).

6. Report fulfillment.

[signed] I. Stalin, A. Antonov

This order demonstrates something fundamental about units gaining forces; they almost always gain battle space when gaining more combat power.

weather, difficult terrain and stiff German resistance.<sup>75</sup> By the end of February 1944, the Germans had also made adjustments to their task organization reflecting the needs of the operational and tactical situation. In the far north along the Narva Front, “the Germans toward the end of the month had gained only enough strength to tip the scales slightly in their favor. On February 24, 1944, General der Infantry Johannes Friessner, who had proven himself in the fighting on the Sixteenth Army- Eighteenth Army boundary, took over Sponheimer’s command which was then redesignated *Armee-abteilung* [Army Detachment] Narva.”<sup>76</sup> Greater exploration into why each combatant adjusted their command and control structures should be of interest to the scholar and the professional soldier. Specifically, was the addition or reduction of command and control structures commensurate with historical doctrinal considerations of employment?



**Figure 3**

The Soviet’s second campaign plan centered on the liberation of the Baltic States. This was the stated (**ENDS**) for this campaign. As demonstrated by Figure 3, the (**MEANS**) centered on the use of tactical battle to achieve the (**ENDS**). The Leningrad Front’s new campaign plan goal was designed to break through the “Panther Line” as the (**WAYS**) to accomplish the desired

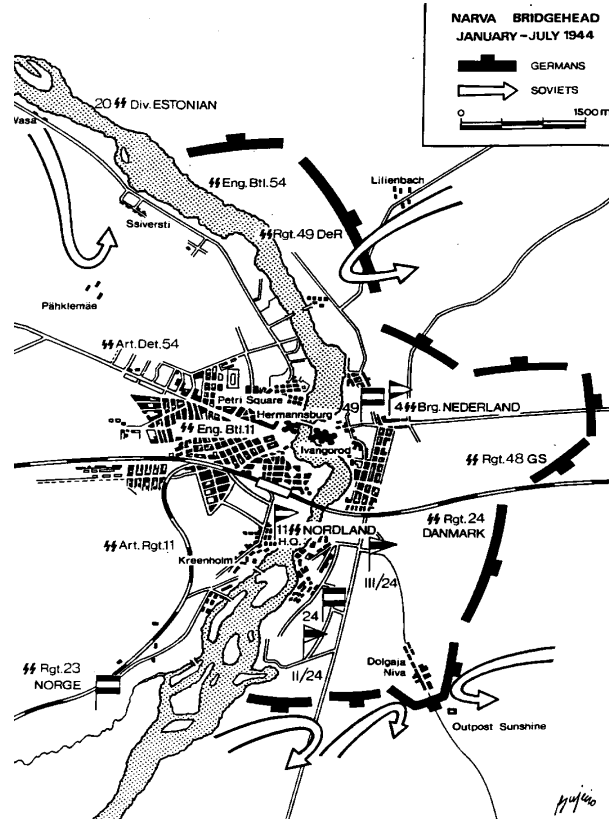
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<sup>75</sup> David M. Glantz, *The Battle for Leningrad* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 2002), 347.

<sup>76</sup> Earl F. Ziemke, *Stalingrad to Berlin, The German Defeat in the East* (Washington DC: United States Army Office of the Chief of Military History, 1968), 264-65.



(ENDS). Recognizing a breakthrough in the northern part of the “Panther Line” was only possible in the winter months because of the terrain and weather prompted the Soviets to plan and act quickly. Using the terrain, natural obstacles and weather to the best possible advantage, the *III. SS Panzer Corps* under the command of *SS Obergruppenfuhrer* Felix Steiner inflicted heavy casualties on the advancing Soviets east and west of the Narva River [See Map 2].

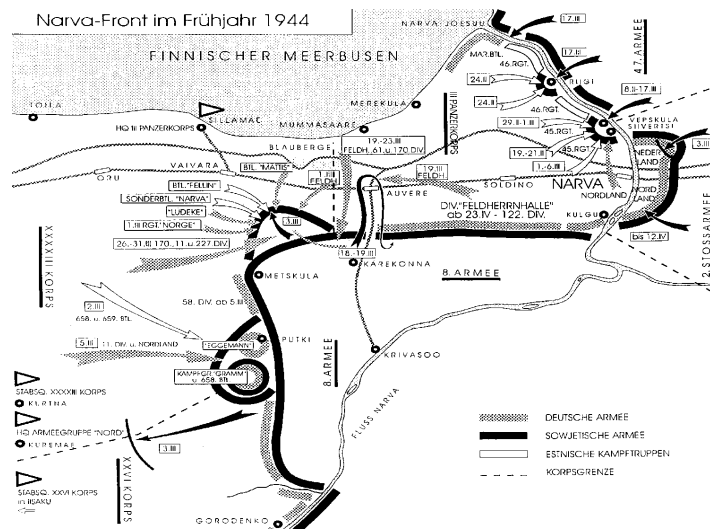


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**Map 2: Positions of the *III. SS Panzer Corps* of the east side of the Narva River**

Tactical actions at the Narva bridgehead drove the Leningrad Front to explore other areas to cross the Narva River. Examination of Soviet river crossing doctrine from the period against weather data from the year 1944 quickly illuminates reasons why the Soviets wanted to cross the Narva River during the winter. As bridging assets were a rare commodity across the entirety of

the Eastern Front, the Soviets needed these assets for more important axes of advance further to the south where crossing over ice was not possible. Once the tactical realities facing the Leningrad Front became apparent and political pressure was applied from Moscow to conclude the liberation of Narva, more tactical pressure was applied to attacking the Panther Position in the south.<sup>78</sup> By late winter/early spring 1944, the Leningrad Front was established on the western side of the Narva River, quickly closing on the German positions at Sinimäed. [See Map 3] The question that needs to be answered is which combatant benefited more from the battles in the Sinimäed area? Was it pride, doctrine or necessity that drove the Soviets to continue the attack toward Sinimäed? What did the German technique of trading of space for time allow and how well did their plans facilitate their end state?



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**Map 3: Situation of III. SS Panzer Corps in February 1944**

<sup>77</sup> Richard Landwehr, *Narva 1944: The Waffen SS and the Battle for Europe*, (Silver Springs: Bibliophile Legion Books, Inc 1981), 63.

<sup>78</sup> For a detailed account of the actions of the III. SS Panzer Corps, see: Wilhelm Tieke, *Tragedy of the Faithful, A History of the III. (germanisches) SS-Panzer Korps*, (Manitoba, Canada : J.J. Fedorowicz Publishing 2001)., Richard Landwehr, *Narva 1944: The Waffen SS and the Battle for Europe*, (Silver Springs: Bibliophile Legion Books, Inc 1981)., or Andrew M. Del Gaudio, *Battle Staff Ride for Sinimäed (The Blue Hills) January-July 1944*, (Tartu: Estonia: Baltic Defence College, 2009).

## **1.8 THE GERMAN CAMPAIGN PLAN:**

Looking at how German operational plans were made requires an understanding of their strategic directives. In an affidavit made on November 7, 1945, Halder and Brauchitsch explained how directives were written. General staff planners of the three services were summoned by Hitler and given the necessary instructions [Richtlinien]. Plans were drawn up on the basis of these instructions forming the basis of OKW directives called [Weisungen]. The Weisungen would generally reproduce the orally communicated Richtlinien.<sup>80</sup> More detail was given on September 15, 1945 in a statement to the International Military Tribunal by Field Marshal Keitel. He explained how the OKW formulated (via the Führungstab) Hitler's orders as directives to the Armed Forces. There were four general categories Weisungen fell into:

**Cat. (a)** Regulations (Richtlinien) covering the preparation of military operations. (In essence, a warning order for preparation for combat)

**Cat. (b)** Directives issued during the course of operations as the result of Situation Conferences. (With new information being brought to light, this would be a way to cope with emergence resulting from action with the enemy.)

**Cat. (c)** Requests for fresh directives (Anweisungen) emanating from the Supreme Commanders of the Armed Forces.

**Cat. (d)** Directives issued to settle differences of opinion or misunderstandings between the branches of the Armed Forces. The Führer's decision in such cases was imperative as Chef OKW had no command authority over the army, navy and air force.<sup>81</sup>

The method of issuing the above categories of Weisungen was as follows:

**Cat. (a)** Hitler informed Keitel and Jodl (Chef Führungstab) of his point of view and the required directives was formulated by Jodl and issued after various readings and corrections.

**Cat. (b)** Situation reports were presented daily at noon and in the evening to Hitler by Jodl. If the necessity for fresh instructions arose during ensuing discussions, Jodl instructed his deputy Warlimont, orally or in writing, to prepare a Führer Weisung.

**Cat. (c)** Hitler decided during his Situation Conferences whether requests for instructions should be met either orally or by the publication of a fresh directive.

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<sup>79</sup> Andrew M. Del Gaudio, *Battle Staff Ride for Sinimäed (The Blue Hills) January-July 1944* (Tartu: Estonia: Baltic Defence College, 2009), 42.

<sup>80</sup> NARA CMH Files *Stalingrad to Berlin Collated list of German Military Directives*, RG 319, Stack Area 270, Row 19, Compartment 31, Shelf 4-6, Box 8.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

**Cat. (d)** Jodl was informed of opinion ect. Either orally or in writing. After deciding on the necessary line of action he reported (via Keitel) to Hitler and explained the reasons for a given directive.

Hitler subjected all directives to very critical examinations, both as to content and style before authorizing.<sup>82</sup>

German Directive 34 dealt specifically with actions on the Leningrad Front, dated July 30, 1941.<sup>83</sup> This directive largely stayed in effect for Army Group North as they continued to prosecute offensive operations against the Soviets until January 1944. The key to a more in-depth understanding of the German retreat is contained in the studies and subsequent operations known as “Fall BLAU” or Operation BLUE.<sup>84</sup> Examining Fall BLAU will show the German operational plans that allowed the Germans to trade space for time from the City of Leningrad to the Panther Position along the Narva River (Operation BLAU), operational and tactical documents allowing the Germans to hold terrain at Sinimäed (Operations SEEALDER and FLAMINGO ) and finally transition to controlling the retrograde of their forces under pressure to Latvia using the Marienburg Line outside of Dorpat (Tartu).<sup>85</sup> Once German forces had retreated back to the “Panther Line” and it was clear Finland was about to leave the war, plans were secretly draw up for the evacuation of the Baltic. This operation was assigned code-name “Entruenpelung” or house-cleaning as discussed previously.<sup>86</sup>

Through an examination of Operation BLAU, for the first time scholars and professional soldiers can examine how the German Army in the latter stages of the Second World War

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

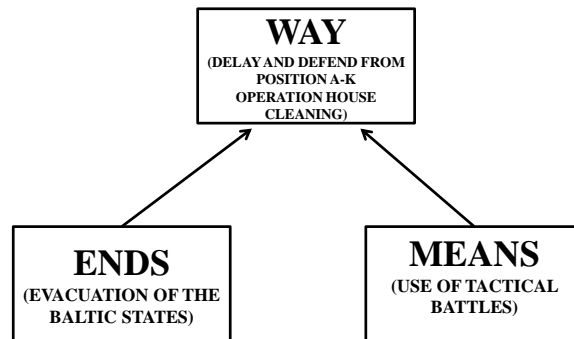
<sup>83</sup> NARA CMH Files *Stalingrad to Berlin collated list of German Military Directives*, RG 319, Stack Area 270, Row 19, Compartment 31, Shelf 4-6, Box 8.

<sup>84</sup> Operation BLAU is contained in its entirety in NARA T-311, Roll 76, First Frame 7099655, Army Group North Ia Nr 072/43g. Kdos. Chefs.

<sup>85</sup> Operation SEEALDER and FLAMINGO are contained in NARA T-312, Roll 1633, Frame Number 000245. Reference to "Marienburg Line" or position is found in Arved Kalvo, Арвед Калво, *Изгнание фашистов из южной эстонии* (Banishment of Fascists from Southern Estonia) (Tallinn, ESSR: Eesti Raamat, 1984), 44.

<sup>86</sup> Department of the Army, *MS# 151 Fighting on the Narva Front, The Evacuation of Estonia and the Withdrawal to the Dvina* (Carlisle, Army War College: Foreign Military Studies Department 1952), 6-7.

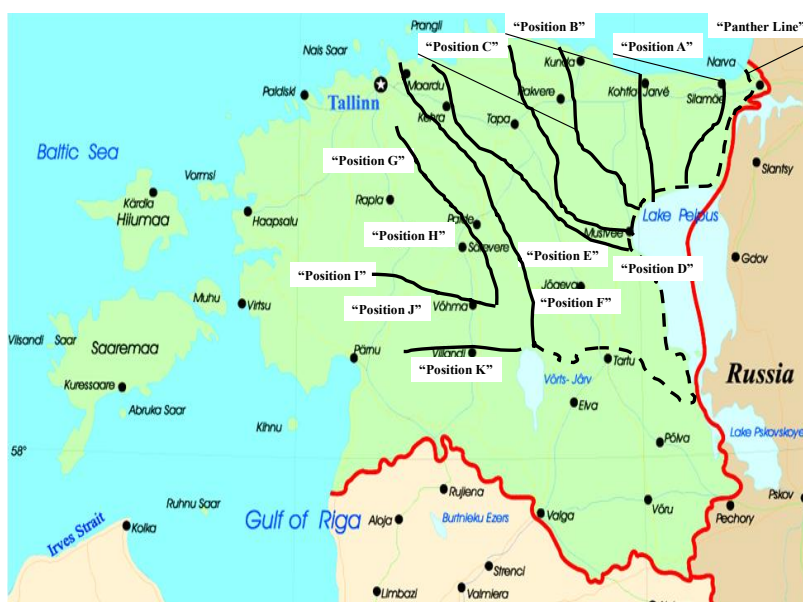
applied their doctrine of trading space for time using elements of coordination from the operational level and vigorous tactical level defensive execution. As the body of this work will show, German adherence to doctrine is done in direct opposition to the will of Adolf Hitler and is an attempt on the part of the Army Group North to fight as it had been educated and trained to do for decades prior to the outbreak of the Second World War. Seeing how the Operation BLAU order was written allows all to understand how Army Group North task organized their assets for battle along with how they were going to use their campaign plan of Operation BLAU to articulate assets in the time and space of the Northern Baltic using the terrain and weather to best advantage. What should also be of interest to scholars and professional soldiers is how the Germans quickly transitioned from conducting delay and defend operations to the execution of an evacuation. With the evacuation of the Baltic being the desired (**END**) to preserve manpower and equipment for the coming battles, the Germans would give tactical battle as a (**MEANS**).



**Figure 4**

The (**WAYS**) would be accomplished through a campaign plan goal which sought to use Army Detachment Narva to delay and defend along a series of positions labeled A-K to inflict massive Soviet casualties. [See **Figure 4 and Map 4**] Position A was in the vicinity of the

“Panther Line” and extended to Position K in the vicinity of the Estonian/ Latvian border. In actuality, this plan was not fully realized because the Soviets retook Tartu in August 1944, but use of the Marienburg Line assisted the Germans with the execution of Operation HOUSE CLEARING.<sup>87</sup>



**Map 4: Delay and Defend positions Labeled A-K**

### **1.9 THE OPERATIONAL USE OF PARTISAN FORCES, COUNTER MEASURES AND TACTICAL EXECUTION:**

A key tenant of this work to be addressed in follow-on chapters will be the Soviet use of unconventional forces, as well as the German response. On the 12th day of the German invasion, July 3, 1941, Stalin addressed the Soviet nation publicly for the first time.<sup>88</sup> In this address Stalin set forth his initial planning guidance for the use of unconventional forces. During the address, Stalin reiterated instructions given to all party officers four days earlier; he called for evacuation

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Earl F. Ziemke and Magna E. Bauer, *Moscow to Stalingrad, Decision in the East* (Washington DC: United States Army Center for Military History, 1987), 29.

and a scorched earth policy in the threatened areas and partisan warfare in enemy occupied territory.<sup>89</sup>

By January 1, 1944, the Soviets had become masters of the use of unconventional forces. Partisans were operating in German rear areas, generally attacking German supply convoys, reinforcements or the lines of communication and communication themselves. In addition, partisan forces also attacked German conventional force positions. Examining the Soviet use of partisan forces through the lens of Friedrich August von der Heydte's, *Modern Irregular Warfare, In Defense Policy and as a Military Phenomenon* allows the student of the art and science of war to visualize the use of partisans as an element of the Soviet combined arms effort against the Germans.<sup>90</sup> As will be demonstrated in subsequent chapters, the Soviet method for the use of asymmetric force was consistent with the teachings of Marx and Lenin, helping to galvanize the moral will of the Soviet people against the German enemy. Use of von der Heydte's work shows the unity of effort between conventional and asymmetric tactical objectives along with how all units operating on the battlefield can be coordinated through the use of a campaign plan.

In preparation for the Leningrad breakout the following orders were issued to partisan forces operating in the Area of Operations (AO):

1. Broaden the centers of popular uprisings in the areas of operations of the 2d, 5th, 7th, and 9th Partisan Brigades. Foment popular uprisings in the Volosovo, Kingisepp, Os'mino, Krasnogvardeisk, Oredezh, and Tosno regions in northern Leningrad regions and in the Porkhov, Pozherivitsk, Slavkovichi, Soshikhin and Ostrov regions in southern Leningrad region.
2. During the course of the developing uprisings, completely destroy the occupations authorities' local organs, such as *uyezd* [large town], regional [mid-sized town], and *volost'* [small town] organs and create Soviet administrative organs under armed partisan

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid, 29.

<sup>90</sup> Friedrich August von der Heydte, *Modern Irregular Warfare, In Defense Policy and as a Military Phenomenon* (New York, NY: New Benjamin Franklin House, 1986).

protection. Save the population from destruction or transport to Germany and deny the enemy command the opportunity to use the population in the construction of defensive positions. Defend populated points from destruction and disrupt the transport to Germany of grain, livestock, clothing, and other materials.

3. Intensify combat operations by partisan brigades, detachments, and groups against enemy communications-roads and railroads- with all means at your disposal. Put the Krasnogvardeisk-Luga-Pskov, Krasnogvardeisk-Kingisepp-Narva, Pskov-Slantsy-Veimari, Staraiia Russa-Dno-Porkhov-Pskov, and Puskin-Dno-Chikhachevo rail lines out of commission for the longest period possible in order to paralyze completely the transport of personnel, equipment, and ammunition for the enemy's operating armies, particularly during the period of the Leningrad, Volkhov, and 2d Baltic Fronts' offensives.<sup>91</sup>

This instruction demonstrates clearly the Soviet High Commands understanding of the situation, best addressing the synergy and use of their assets against the problem of supply distribution in German rear areas. It is interesting to examine how the tasking of partisan forces was written. Central to the instruction is the importance of the people and generating support for the movement. Also of interest, is how the Soviet high command gave partisans a priority of targets to attack like conventional forces. Finally, the connection of partisan operations to the greater offensive demonstrates how their efforts were to be synchronized with the overall scheme of maneuver. Scholars and professional soldiers must understand the role of conventional and unconventional forces operating in the same battlespace, both in their employment and the employment of forces to counter their actions. Understanding the asymmetric threat along with use of conventional forces to respond to it was as problematic then as it is today. This work continues to shed light on this very difficult problem.

### **1.10 CONCLUSION:**

Operational planning requires acute situational awareness of the environment and understanding of the enemy at all levels of war. These qualities are born of experience and

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<sup>91</sup> David M. Glantz, *The Battle for Leningrad* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 2002), 336-37.

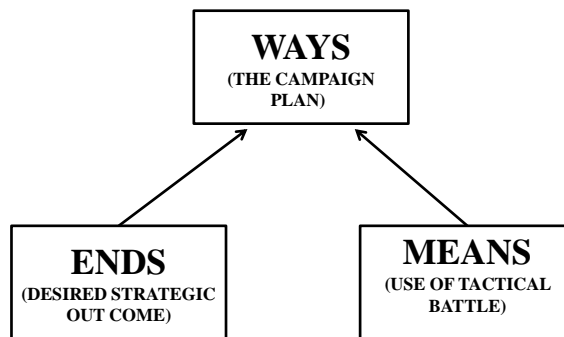


reflection on times spent in study as well as operating at the tactical level. The role of the operational planner is to translate strategic vision into synchronized tactical actions to impose friendly will on the enemy. Through the design of a campaign plan, the operational planner links strategic vision to tactical actions, thus achieving the desired end state. An examination of the Leningrad withdrawal plan is long overdue and this work provides the perfect lens to dissect the various components of tactical reality against the combatant's doctrines and general theory for war. Understanding the parts of the problem and the questions surrounding the process of designing a campaign plan are at the core of this work. By identifying the strategic (**ENDS**) and looking at the (**MEANS**) available to accomplish the desired (**ENDS**), the emergent (**WAYS**) are quickly identified in a campaign goal and a plan can be written. Identifying the elements which make a situation and being able to quickly get to the heart of a matter allows the planner the ability to analyze the core issue of a problem. By understanding the parts that comprise a problem, planners are better able to solve it. A planner should not plan an operation without understanding how various transportation networks affect supply chain management through his friendly lines of communication. Time and space are the two critical factors which determine the effectiveness of a plan and ultimately, the success of the plan's execution. Within the confines of time and space, the environment is governed by complications created by terrain and weather. In the end, superb strategic vision and excellent tactical execution are not enough to assure victory. A nation must win a war at the strategic, operational and tactical levels, whether against conventional or unconventional foes. Study of past campaigns is the duty of every professional soldier, even when conducting them himself. Teaching those campaigns to subordinate unit leaders is the duty of every senior. Only through learning about the past and present can the professional soldier preserve peace while training for war in the future.

## CHAPTER 2

### Strategic Ends, the Operational Environment and Doctrine

Examining the collapse of the German Armed Forces in 1944/45 requires not only an understanding of the events leading to the destruction of Germany in the east, but also how the plans written enabled that destruction. To understand how a plan was created, the plan must first be considered in the context of time it was written. Examination should focus on the strategic ends the plan was designed to serve as well as the means available to achieve the ends. (See **Figure 1**)



**Figure 1**<sup>92</sup>

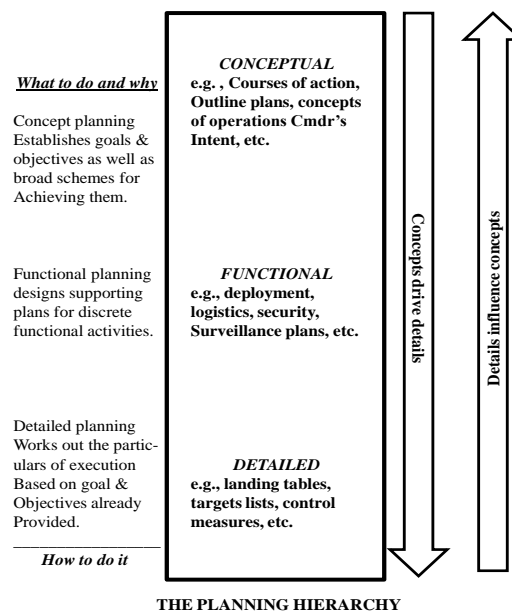
More fundamentally, the first question to be answered is what is planning? A modern definition provided by the United States Marine Corps' *MCDP-5* states, "Planning is the art and science of envisioning a desired future and laying out effective ways of bringing it about."<sup>93</sup> This quote rationalizes planning in the same manner as war itself, as an art and science. The art of planning

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<sup>92</sup> "Battle is the means of the operation. Tactics are the material of operational art. The operation is the means strategy, and operational art is the material (way) of strategy." see: V. K. Triandafillov, *The Nature of the Operations of Modern Armies* (Essex, UK.: Frank Cass, 1994), XV.

<sup>93</sup> Headquarters U.S. Marine Corps, United States Marine Corps, *Planning MCDP-5* (Washington, DC: U.S. Marine Corps, July 21, 1997), 3. This quote originally came from the work of Herbert A. Simon, *The Sciences of the Artificial* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1981) and Russell L. Ackoff, *A Concept of Corporate Planning* (New York, NY: Wiley-Interscience, 1970), 1.

consists of conceptual and functional planning, while the science consists of detailed planning (See Figure 5).<sup>94</sup> In order to understand the connection of national strategy to the tactics being employed on the battlefield, the plan must be understood through the lens of what it was supposed to achieve conceptually. How was the plan made functional when flushed out with more information? How do units at the tactical level carry out plans through the use of doctrine? Finally, what were the details of the plan and can the available assets accomplish the desired ends with what is available? While planning is considered a process, the product of planning (the plan) Moltke the Elder once said does not survive first contact with the enemy. Planning is not a single act “because it involves a number of ongoing, iterative and interdependent activities.”<sup>95</sup>



**Figure 5<sup>96</sup>**

Through the process of planning, those doing the planning are seeking to achieve a greater understanding of the problem they are attempting to solve.<sup>97</sup> It only makes sense to understand a

<sup>94</sup> Ibid, 35-38. *MCDP-5* relates conceptual, functional and detailed planning as the “Planning Hierarchy,” Conceptual planning is “establishes aims, objectives, and intentions and involves developing broad concepts for action.” Functional planning is, “planning concerned with activities like maneuver, fires, logistics, intelligence and force protection.” Detailed planning is “concerned with translating the broader concept into a complete and practicable plan.”

problem before attempting a solution, but the second and third order effects must also be anticipated with the possible solution. *MCDP-5* states: “Planning encompasses two basic functions- envisioning a desired future and arranging a configuration of potential actions in time and space that will allow us to realize that future.”<sup>98</sup> As planners are not able to see into the future or fully predict the manner in which the enemy will commit forces, the plan must solidify a desired future end state as well as how friendly actions will be arranged in time and space. Time and space also relate to why planning is essential in the first place. *MCDP-5* states three reasons for properly executed planning:

1. Planning can be essential to the ability to seize the initiative. In order to seize the initiative, we must be able to anticipate events and act purposefully and effectively before the enemy can.
2. Planning is essential to reduce the unavoidable time lag between decision and action on the battlefield, especially at higher levels.
3. Planning is essential when situations reach a certain level of complexity.<sup>99</sup>

While *MCDP-5* may seem a distant topic from the Eastern Front of the Second World War, ideas relevant to planning presented there provide a framework to understand how a human disaster on this scale came about, while also providing a common frame for examining both combatants thoughts about planning with an objective eye. What is missing from histories of the Second World War is not the discussions from the planning tables or actions at the tactical-level, rather, it has been the connection between the two found in an understanding of how the campaigns were planned.

Understanding a campaign plan does not always yield a nation’s rationalization for war in the first place, nor will it necessarily show the associated end states or connection to available

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid,1.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid, 36.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid. On page 4 of *MCDP-5*, the manual describes this as “We should think of planning as a learning process-as mental preparation which improves our understanding of a given situation.” What is important is not only the learning about the problem, but rather the shared common understanding of the effects the problem creates.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

tactical means.<sup>100</sup> Inquiries of the German strategic situation in the Second World War typically only consider the use of military force on land, while ignoring the use of naval units or air power.

Joining strategy to tactics requires a campaign plan, a product of planning. As MCDP-5 states, "Military planning comprises two broad categories- force planning and operational planning. Force planning is planning associated with the creation and maintenance of military capabilities."<sup>101</sup> In other words, force planning generates combat power from all the strategic dimensions (military, economic, informational and diplomatic) to accomplish the task at hand. The second category, operational planning is comprised of, "planning for the mobilization, deployment, employment, sustainment, and redeployment of military forces to accomplish assigned missions."<sup>102</sup> How Germany created its strategic end state for the war in the east given intangible factors such as terrain and weather is the focus of this chapter. Commensurate with examining the German strategic end state, this chapter will also develop an understanding of the combatant's doctrinal force employment considerations along with their development. In conclusion, the chapter will close with an exploration of the Soviet end state for the Second World War. In understanding the linkage between strategy and tactics, the student of history better sees the creation and implementation of the operational art through a campaign plan.<sup>103</sup>

To understand how the campaign against Soviet Russia was conceived in terms of operational art, it is first necessary to identify the desired German end state for the campaign.

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid, 6-7.

<sup>100</sup> The end state for a war can change for a state over the course of a conflict, thus the design of the campaign plan may likely change to reflect the needs of the state. The allocation of tactical assets must be linked to the end state for the war through a campaign plan.

<sup>101</sup> Headquarters U.S. Marine Corps, United States Marine Corps, *Planning MCDP-5* (Washington, DC: U.S. Marine Corps, July 21, 1997), 8.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> From the Russian and Soviet tradition, operational art was described by A. A. Svechin as "the bridge between tactics and strategy, that is, the means by which the senior commander transformed a series of tactical successes into operational "bounds" linked together by the commander's intent and plan and contributing to strategic success in a given theater of military actions." see: V. K. Triandafilov, *The Nature of the Operations of Modern Armies* (Essex, UK.: Frank Cass, 1994), XV.

With an understanding of what the Germans wanted to gain by invading the Soviet Union, students of history not only identify the objectives of the campaign, but are also able to see how the elements of national power were applied to facilitate a German strategy for the war in general as well as for the Baltic region. In doing so, the student comes to their own conclusion regarding the unity of effort between the elements of national power and the end state of the campaign. With the identification of the desired strategic end state, the student must then understand the means available to the planner at the time in relation to what the enemy was capable of fielding. In modern parlance, this is referred to as the force ratio. A common planning coefficient used by planners today is a force going into the offense seeks to achieve a 5:1 ratio over the enemy in the defense. This lends credence to Clausewitz's maxim of the defense being the stronger form of war.<sup>104</sup> While the defender is incapable of defending everywhere, the offense is also unable to attack with decisive strength everywhere as well, thus the offense looks to achieve local superiority at a place of focus to overwhelm the defense. These considerations must always be further examined in time and space.

## **2.1 STRATEGIC REASONING AND THE OBJECTIVE OF THE GERMAN INVASION OF THE SOVIET UNION:**

The strategy and objectives of a war are determined by the political leadership of a nation. The coming war with Soviet Russia was first written about by Adolf Hitler in *Mein Kampf* in 1923.

Present-day Russia, divested of her Germanic upper stratum, is, quite aside from the private intentions of her new masters, no ally for the German nation's fight for freedom. Considered from the purely military angle, the relations would be simply catastrophic in case of war between Germany and Russia and Western Europe, and probably against all the rest of the world. The struggle would not take place on Russian, but German soil.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Carl von Clausewitz, *On War* ed. Michael Howard and Peter Paret, trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 358.

<sup>105</sup> Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (Munich, Germany: Zentralverlag der NSDAP, 1941), 748.

While few at the time took notice of his writings or his rants for that matter, in a decade he was able to begin expanding the war machine that he would use to attack Soviet Russia.<sup>106</sup> Hitler, like Germans of his generation, was deeply scarred by the experience of the First World War and the peace which followed.<sup>107</sup> There were two considerations which found an audience with Germans of this generation. The first was the universal truth of fighting a war on only one front at a time, and the second was not allowing the German people to starve as a result of fighting at the front.<sup>108</sup> In the late summer of 1939, Hitler shocked the world twice; the first time by concluding a Non-Aggression Pact with Joseph Stalin's Soviet Union and by beginning the Second World War against Poland on the September 1, 1939.<sup>109</sup> On account of the first event, the world found it incredible that the two socialist states would not only put their difference aside, but actively work together. While both were signatories of the 1922 Rapallo Treaty, their working relations remained vexed.<sup>110</sup> For almost two decades, Germany and the young Soviet Union had been working together. Both countries were able to find common ground and fault with the Treaty of Versailles. The very methods of employment used against Poland by Germany were developed in the vastness of Russia, away from the prying eyes of the west. For almost two decades, Germany and the Soviet Union exchanged ideas, along with tactics, techniques and procedures in the military dimension, while developing trade in the economic dimension and

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<sup>106</sup> To examine the pre-war development of the German Army see: James S. Corum's *The Roots of Blitzkrieg, Hans von Seeckt and German Military Reform* (Lawrence, KS: Kansas University Press, 1992).

<sup>107</sup> There is substantial literature that examines the attitude and thoughts of post First World War Germany in the wake of the war. The experience of life in the trenches provided an entire generation with the realities of war that forever cast a shadow on how Germany would see the future. See: James S. Corum's *The Roots of Blitzkrieg, Hans von Seeckt and German Military Reform* (Lawrence, KS: Kansas University Press, 1992) for details of German thoughts in the post First World War period.

<sup>108</sup> See Ibid for details of the social effects resulting from the First World War for Germany.

<sup>109</sup> For details of planning of the Polish campaign, 1939 see, Robert M. Kennedy, *Department of the Army Pamphlet No 20-255 The German Campaign in Poland 1939* (Washington D.C.: Department of the Army 1956).

<sup>110</sup> Horst Boog and others, *Germany and the Second World War, Volume IV, The Attack on the Soviet Union*, ed. Militärgeschichtliches Forschungsamt (Research Institute for Military History) trans ed. Ewald Osers (Oxford, UK: Claredon Press, 2008), 67-68.

continuing to build diplomatic relations.<sup>111</sup> Soviet Russia, specifically “Jewish Bolshevism” was the true ideological enemy of Hitler’s National Socialism as written in *Mein Kampf*.<sup>112</sup> In any future question of the Soviet Union, the issues of the Soviet regime and Judaism were seen as “inseparably linked with the political, military-geographical, and economic motives in Hitler’s living-space program and his racial ideas concerning the necessary annihilation of ‘Jewish Bolshevism’.”<sup>113</sup> Hitler’s approach to foreign policy questions of the future saw the problem of land, Russia and Judaism through the same lens. To Hitler’s mind, the impending struggle against Soviet Russia was also historically determined:

We take up where we broke off six hundred years ago. We stop the endless German movement to the south and west, and turn our gaze to the east. At long last we break off the colonial and commercial policy of the pre-War period and shift to the soil policy of the future. If we speak of soil in Europe today, we can primarily have in mind only Russia and her vassal border states.<sup>114</sup>

Hitler also wrote in *Mein Kampf*, “As opposed to this, we National Socialist must hold unflinchingly to our aim in foreign policy, namely, to secure for the German people the land and soil to which they are entitled on this earth.”<sup>115</sup> The idea of lebensraum or living space along with the annihilation of Bolshevism were the ideological underpinning for all plans to invade the Soviet Union.<sup>116</sup> Hitler did not foresee the Soviet Union giving the land to Germany without a

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<sup>111</sup> To see pre-war cooperation between the Soviet Union and Germany, see: James S. Corum’s *The Roots of Blitzkrieg, Hans von Seeckt and German Military Reform* (Lawrence, KS: Kansas University Press, 1992).

<sup>112</sup> Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (Munich, Germany: Zentralverlag der NSDAP, 1941). This is a continuous theme throughout Chapter 14.

<sup>113</sup> Horst Boog and others, *Germany and the Second World War, Volume IV, The Attack on the Soviet Union*, ed. Militärgeschichtliches Forschungsamt (Research Institute for Military History) trans ed. Ewald Osers (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 2008), 25.

<sup>114</sup> Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (Munich, Germany: Zentralverlag der NSDAP, 1941), 742.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid*, 739.

<sup>116</sup> Bernd Wegner expounded on a point made in the theses of Andreas Hillgruber in *The Road to Defeat: The German Campaigns in Russia 1941-43*, when he stated, "Hitler's decision to attack the Soviet Union was the result of a mixture of ideological and strategic considerations. The idea of a large-scale colonization of the East, with the two main aims of annihilating Bolshevism and conquering 'living space' for the German nation had been, in addition to his militant anti-Semitism, the most important element in Hitler's world view since 1924-25 at the latest. It provides the key for understanding the attack on the Soviet Union, which, from a purely strategic or operational point of view, was foolish. The emphasis on Hitler's ideology does not mean, however, that strategic considerations



fight. In a speech delivered on November 23, 1939, Hitler stated, “The safeguarding of living-space can be solved only by the sword. A racial struggle has erupted about who is to dominate in Europe and in the world.”<sup>117</sup> In actuality, not only was it a question of living space for the German people which motivated Hitler to draw up plans to invade Soviet Russia, but the promise of unlimited resources such as grain and oil.<sup>118</sup> In *Germany and the Second World War, Volume IV, The Attack on the Soviet Union*, Hitler sees the living space program as the synthesis of military, diplomatic and economic purpose, as Hitler himself defined it in *Mein Kampf*.

His (Hitler’s) living space program contained all the factors which, individually or collectively, figured also in the reflections of military leaders, diplomats, and economists. Expansion of living-space ‘towards the east,’ in Hitler’s opinion, not only promised the safeguarding of Germany’s economic existence within a blockade-proof greater European economy- because of the foodstuffs and raw materials to be found in the Soviet Union- but would also afford an insuperable defense in depth, absolute political freedom of action, and independence from international ties and obligations.<sup>119</sup>

In these terms, “Hitler defined his war aim as the ‘liquidation of Russia’s manpower’ and the conquest of the Ukraine, the Baltic States, and Belorussia.”<sup>120</sup> The question in Hitler’s mind was not if he should invade the Soviet Union, but rather when. Hitler was a student of history and knew the horrors of Napoleon’s Army in 1812, so how could Germany and Hitler achieve what Napoleon could not? After the smashing victories over Poland in 1939, followed by the defeat of France in 1940 along with a host of other nations, Germany seemed unstoppable.

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played no role in his decision, but rather that they can be understood only in terms of their function in his attempt to realize his overriding ideological aims." See: Bernd Wegner, “The Road to Defeat: The German Campaigns in Russia 1941-43,” *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 13:1, 105-127.

<sup>117</sup> Horst Boog and others, *Germany and the Second World War, Volume IV, The Attack on the Soviet Union*, ed. Militärgeschichtliches Forschungsamt (Research Institute for Military History) trans ed. Ewald Osers (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 2008), 35.

<sup>118</sup> In addition to discussing available war resources, H. W. Koch in his work makes an interesting connection between General Halder and policies for the Baltic region prior to the invasion of the Soviet Union when he stated, "He (Halder) was a staunch anti-Bolshevik and shared Beck's anxiety that the Russo-German pact would open the door to the Soviets for expansion into the Baltic and Black Sea areas, an anxiety shared by members of the German Foreign Office" See: H. W. Koch, “Hitler's 'Programme' and the Genesis of Operation 'Barbarossa',” *The Historical Journal* 26:4, 891-920.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid, 25

<sup>120</sup> Ibid, 26

England had to be defeated next, if Germany was to dominate the continent of Europe. The First World War was the single event that formed the schema of every nation's senior leaders for the Second World War. England was still the respected naval power of the world that needed a strong partner with a land army on the continent to have a say in continental affairs. While in the First World War, France did not fall, Russia eventually did in 1917 with the Bolshevik Revolution. In 1940, France fell shaking the paradigm of all global leaders to their cores. Not only did France fall, but it did so quickly. The logic of this strategically was if France had been removed and the massive Soviet Union was also been dispensed with, then England would not have a "sword in the hand" on the continent left to fight Germany with.<sup>121</sup> While Hitler and the German general staff respected England, it was still acknowledged as the greatest threat to German domination on the continent. It was not the prospect of owning the British Isles which excited Hitler, but rather the resources of the British Empire. With the elimination of the Soviet Union, not only could Germany dominate the resources of the Soviet Union, but it could also have a monopoly of those in the British Empire as well without the aid of Turkey.<sup>122</sup> In the minds of the most senior German leadership, the English were the force to be reckoned with.<sup>123</sup> While direct methods of German air and naval power were being applied without success to England, German leaders continued to plan the invasion of the Soviet Union.

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<sup>121</sup> Charles Burdick and Hans-Adolf Jacobsen, eds., *The Halder War Diaries, 1939-1942* (Narvato, CA: Presidio Press, 1988), 244.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 533. Halder also covers the strategic ramifications of Turkey entering the war on the German side and the meaning it would have in relation to England and the Soviet Union.

<sup>123</sup> Bernd Wegner wrote in contrast regarding Hitler's thoughts about Ribbentrop's plan for a 'continental bloc' against England as "... a 'continental bloc' directed against the sea powers Great Britain and the United States and extended from 'Madrid to Yokohama' with the participation of the Soviet Union. Hitler did consider this option in the summer of 1940, but only as a means to increasing the pressure on Great Britain and not with the intention of laying the foundation for a lasting new European order. In his eyes the *conditio sine qua non* for that was a war not against Britain, but against the Soviet Union." See: Bernd Wegner, "The Road to Defeat: The German Campaigns in Russia 1941-43," *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 13:1, 105-127.

As displayed in *Germany and the Second World War, Volume IV, The Attack on the Soviet Union*, in writing plans to invade the Soviet Union, England was thought of as the true enemy. General Halder, at the time the Chief of the German General Staff and the man most responsible to Hitler for the BARBAROSSA plan saw the problem of England and Russia as a much bigger global issue.<sup>124</sup> Based on conversations with Hitler during the initial planning phases, he took down the following thoughts in his notebook:

Britain's hope lies in Russia and the United States. If Russia drops out of the picture America, too, is lost for Britain, because elimination of Russia would tremendously increase Japan's power in the Far East. Russia is the Far Eastern sword of Britain and the United States pointed at Japan... Russia is the factor on which Britain is relying most. Something must have happened in London!... With Russia smashed, Britain's last hope would be shattered. Germany then will be the master of Europe and the Balkans. Decision: Russia's destruction must therefore be made part of this struggle. Spring 1941. The sooner Russia is crushed, the better. Attack achieves its purpose only if Russian state can be shattered to its roots with one blow. Holding part of the country alone will not do. Standing still for the winter would be perilous.<sup>125</sup>

In Halder's thoughts, the student of history sees not only confirmation of England as the main threat on the global stage, but also how German strategic leaders saw the destruction of the Soviet Union as the vehicle to facilitating that end. Also addressed in concept are the ideas of time and space for operations against the Soviet Union. Halder foresaw this operation taking place in the Spring of 1941 and before the winter, thus defining the timeframe for offensive operations. These thoughts would become underlying themes in the BARBAROSSA plan. An interesting thought Halder has in relation to the formation of war aims from these notes is

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<sup>124</sup> Koch describes General Halder as having enjoyed a substantial amount of autonomy in his decision making prior to the winter of 1941 when he stated, "Until the winter crisis of 1941/42 they, especially the chief of the general staff, General Halder, exerted decisive influence in military policy making and on occasions showed no hesitation in ignoring or even forgetting about Hitler's orders." See: H. W. Koch, "Hitler's 'Programme' and the Genesis of Operation 'Barbarossa', *The Historical Journal*, 26:4, 891-920.

<sup>125</sup> Horst Boog and others, *Germany and the Second World War, Volume IV, The Attack on the Soviet Union*, ed. Militärgeschichtliches Forschungsamt (Research Institute for Military History) trans ed. Ewald Osers (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 2008), 26.

“holding part of the country will not do.”<sup>126</sup> *Germany and the Second World War, Volume IV, The Attack on the Soviet Union* confirms Hitler’s intention to destroy the Soviet Union in “one blow” and how this related to the formation of war aims for a campaign against the Soviet Union:

The war aims formulated by him (Hitler) on that occasion differed substantially in their spatial dimension from those of the general staff: Hitler, in view of the by then obvious necessity to continue the war against Britain for an uncertain period of time and to prepare for an American entry into the war, did not aim merely at ‘gaining space, but at smashing the Russian state with a single blow.’<sup>127</sup>

Ultimately, the argument was the same as it had been since the July 31, 1940 conference where Hitler thought the only way to determine hegemony in Europe would be through the demise of the Soviet Union.<sup>128</sup> “The decision on hegemony in Europe would be made in the struggle against the Soviet Union as this deprived Britain of her ‘continental sword’.”<sup>129</sup> The purpose of the operation was the annihilation of ‘Russia’s manpower’.<sup>130</sup> As will be discussed in other parts of this chapter, these very thoughts haunted German planners in the execution of hostilities with the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941.

## **2.2 THE CREATION OF THE GERMAN STRATEGIC END STATE AND HITLER'S INITIAL PLANNING GUIDANCE:**

As Hitler decided on a course to invade the Soviet Union based on the aforementioned reasoning, he also decided the time and space of the operation. Following this chain of logic, if

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<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid, 135.

<sup>128</sup> H. W. Koch describes the views of Andreas Hillgruber regarding German hegemony as, "In Hillgruber's view, Hitler's programme, his *Stufenplan*, envisaged first of all the consolidation of the NSDAP within the Reich, then re-establishment of military sovereignty in the demilitarized zone of Germany, followed by an aggressive foreign policy which in stages would ultimately achieve for Germany world hegemony." See: H. W. Koch, "Hitler's 'Programme' and the Genesis of Operation 'Barbarossa', *The Historical Journal*, 26:4, 891-920.

<sup>129</sup> Removing France from the war allowed Germany to further isolate England. Koch posited "From Hitler's point of view the campaign in the west had as its objective to deprive Great Britain of its 'continental sword'; for the protagonists of Hitler's 'programme' it was necessary precondition before smashing Russia." See: Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid, 47.

Hitler knew the Soviet Union was the last of England's swords on the continent and England needed the Soviet Union's manpower, then it followed that Germany should annihilate Russia's manpower. What requires examination is how did these words and ideas of Adolf Hitler's translate in actionable orders by the German Armed Forces and specifically, how did they contribute to the creation of Directive 21 and Operation BARBAROSSA.<sup>131</sup>

Like all operations, BARBAROSSA began with initial planning guidance which was continually refined through staff action, conferences, studies and by the political leadership and higher headquarters. Most would expect for an operation the scope of the invasion of the Soviet Union, Adolf Hitler would have a grand conference to promulgate his initial planning guidance along with his thoughts about the desired end state for the operation. There was a meeting and it would be more consistent with what military professionals have come to expect. Likely for reasons of operational security, the concept was initially only briefed to the most senior officers who were needed to discuss the problem. On July 21, 1940, Adolf Hitler was finishing his daily situation update with the General Staff Officers. The main topic of the discussion that day was the state of operations against England.<sup>132</sup> After the meeting, Hitler asked Field Marshal von Brauchitsch, the Commander in Chief of the Germany Army to remain behind.<sup>133</sup> It was here Adolf Hitler first socialized the idea of invading the Soviet Union with a member of the German Armed Forces. Most military plans typically begin in this fashion. It was also in this meeting with Brauchitsch that Hitler provided his initial planning guidance for what would become BARBAROSSA. There were four items Hitler discussed as follows:

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<sup>131</sup> To see Directive 21 in full, see: Department of the Army, *Department of the Army Pamphlet No 20-261 Historical Study The German Campaign in Russia- Planning and Operations, 1940-42* (Washington D.C.: Department of the Army 1955).

<sup>132</sup> Charles Burdick and Hans-Adolf Jacobsen, eds., *The Halder War Diaries, 1939-1942* (Narvato, CA: Presidio Press, 1988), 229. These were the notes of July 22, 1940 covering the events of the conference on July 21, 1940.

1. The concentration of the attack forces would take 4 to 6 weeks.
2. The military objective would be the defeat of the Russian Army or at least to seize so much Russian territory that the armaments plants in eastern Germany, particularly those in Berlin and Upper Silesia, and the Romanian oil fields would be beyond the range of Russian air attacks. At the same time the German ground forces would have to advance far enough to bring important production centers of European Russia within striking distance of the Luftwaffe.
3. The political aims would include the creation of an independent Ukraine and a confederation of Baltic States under German domination.
4. The Army would need approximately 80-100 combat divisions; the Soviet Union had some 50-75 good Russian divisions in Europe. If the campaign against Russia was launched that autumn (of 1940), some of the German air power committed against Britain would have to be transferred to the East.<sup>134</sup>

What is of particular interest about this initial planning guidance is Hitler concisely delivered the desired end state for the future operation BARBAROSSA with consideration given to how the military dimension of national power would be used to achieve aims in relation to economic and diplomatic dimensions.<sup>135</sup> This shows thought was given to all elements of national strategic power, the question which remained unanswered was how would the planners create a synergy of the military, diplomatic and economic strengths in a plan and how would this message be articulated through a directive. Based on this initial planning guidance given to Field Marshal Brauchitsch, it is clear the German Army was going to be the main effort for the impending operation and the German Air Force would be a supporting effort to the Army. Regarding the use of military power in the future operation, the planning guidance also reveals a serious fault. The planning guidance only talks about the role of the German army and air force without any mention of the use of naval forces. The navy being left out of the initial planning

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<sup>133</sup> Department of the Army, *Department of the Army Pamphlet No 20-261 Historical Study The German Campaign in Russia- Planning and Operations, 1940-42* (Washington D.C.: Department of the Army 1955), 1.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

guidance was likely an intentional decision, as the BARBAROSSA plan was being written to facilitate the fall of England. In this light, it was likely thought by the Germans that the navy was already fully committed to the fight against the Royal Navy. The following day after being told by Hitler of the desire to go to war with the Soviet Union, Field Marshal Brauchitsch the chief of the German Army High Command turned to his Chief of Staff Generaloberst Halder.<sup>136</sup>

Brauchitsch informed Halder of the meeting with Hitler the day prior and commissioned him with gaining situational awareness about the Soviet Union and the disposition of its forces.

### **2.3 GERMAN ANALYSIS OF THE MISSION AND THE ENEMY:**

It is imperative to remember the role of the planner and a military staff in the creation of a plan for a commander. Planners and staffs do the research and detailed work of exploring problems, while creating potential courses of action to facilitate the decision making of the commander. The art of the planner is to take often complicated thoughts of decision makers and seamlessly transform them into simple orders. While not all of the information the planner and staffs examine becomes part of the final product, which is briefed to the decision maker, the products and information are typically shared amongst other planners and staff officers to provide a common approach to the problem being explored. Before any planning or examination of a problem can take place, the planners and staff doing the work must gather the “tools” they need to work. Not only must the “tools” be gathered, but the lead planner must have a “plan for the planning.”<sup>137</sup> Maps and manuals are amongst the first things to come to the planning table, the staff officer most likely to be bringing them is the intelligence officer. To properly understand the problem that needs to be solved, the planner must first understand the context of

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<sup>135</sup> These words are clearly an interpretation of Hitler's thoughts in Brauchitsch's words, yet they still demonstrate clear and cogent objectives designed for military planners.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

the problem; not only in terms of the objective items, such as the terrain and weather, but also in terms of the subjective enemy. Comprehending these factors is not just understanding for the sake of understanding, but rather, grasping the effects created by these factors. On a staff, the intelligence officer is the best qualified to explain the effects of terrain, weather and the enemy in the operational time and space. In June of 1940, Halder as the Chief of Staff turned to Lieutenant Colonel Kinzel, who was the Chief of the Eastern Intelligence Division.<sup>137</sup> Kinzel was tasked with providing Halder with a brief on the area of operations (AO) along with the composition, disposition and strength of the Red Army. Kinzel delivered the briefing on July 26, 1940.<sup>138</sup> At the same time that Halder sent for Kinzel, he also directed the Chief of the Operations Division, Colonel von Greiffenberg to assign a General Staff Officer to begin writing the draft plan of action.<sup>139</sup> Halder did what all well trained professional soldiers do, he gained situational awareness of the problem he had been tasked to solve before he tasked subordinate staff officers with preparing products for the decision maker. In doing so, Halder was better focused on the problem he was to have others investigate and better able to focus the efforts of his staff toward creating a product, ultimately what the OKW created in Directive 21.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> Having a “plan for the planning” was a term taught in 2009 at the United States Marine Corps School of Advanced Warfighting by Colonel Tracy W. King, USMC. The term is describing all of the preliminary work which is required before a focused examination of an issue can be fully engaged.

<sup>138</sup> Department of the Army, *Department of the Army Pamphlet No 20-261 Historical Study The German Campaign in Russia- Planning and Operations, 1940-42* (Washington D.C.: Department of the Army 1955), 3. In examining page 260 of *Germany and the Second World War, Volume IV, The Attack on the Soviet Union*, Kinzel likely consulted the Military Geography Department for the latest information. He would have again looked at “older reports, map and other material.” “It was not possible, however, to obtain accurate information on road conditions or other transport facilities beyond what were to be found in the literature.” This statement would lend credibility to the possibility of N. Reek’s work, *Military Geography of Estonia* being looked at by German planners during the planning phase for operation BARBAROSSA.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid, 4.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid, 3.

<sup>141</sup> To see Directive 21 in full, see: Department of the Army, *Department of the Army Pamphlet No 20-261 Historical Study The German Campaign in Russia- Planning and Operations, 1940-42* (Washington D.C.: Department of the Army 1955). Bernd Wegner wrote in *The Road to Defeat: The German Campaigns in Russia 1941-43*, “... Directive 21 represented a superficial compromise between two fundamentally incompatible operational ideas. On the one hand, the Army General Staff believed that Moscow as the operational objective should have absolute priority. Its capture would mean the elimination of the political and administrative nerve center



After Lieutenant Colonel Kinzel had briefed Halder on the terrain to be expected in Russia and gave an idea of what to expect from the Soviet Armed Forces, Halder drew some vague conclusions. These conclusions were drawn based on what he had heard from Kinzel and the initial planning guidance Hitler had given to Brauchitsch on July 21, 1940. Based on these two factors, Halder had some very tough prerequisites to meet. The first and most major problem was mobilizing a force large enough in four-six weeks, while finding an assembly/staging area for mobilization that would not draw Soviet attention. The art of mobilizing an army for action was something every German General Staff officer studied in his courses. Students at the General Staff Course spent hours reading and listening to lectures about the work of Moltke the Elder and the manner in which he mobilized the great Prussian Army for war with France in 1870.<sup>142</sup> If the lessons were not learned directly from the readings of the great Moltke himself, then officers of Halder's generation would have learned them from the work of Schlieffen.<sup>143</sup> When describing Schlieffen's seminal work, *Cannae*, Generaloberst Hans von Seeckt stated in his work, *Thoughts of a Soldier* that, "No catchword (Cannae) has done us more harm than this. It is a typical example of the way in which the truth in a catchword is perverted."<sup>144</sup> While Seeckt was discrediting the way many of his time used Schlieffen's work as an excuse not to think while treating each problem of tactics in the same way, meaning from the front and flank; Seeckt was not against the teachings of Schlieffen regarding concentration. All

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of the Soviet Union and the fall of the most important Soviet traffic junction. On the other hand, Hitler was convinced that military successes on the flanks of the offensive were more important than capturing the Soviet capital. In the North he wanted to link up with the Finns and destroy the Soviet position in the Baltic by eliminating Leningrad; in the South he wanted to capture the all-important industrial and raw materials centers of the Donets Basin and the Caucasus and destroy Soviet air bases near the Black Sea, which posed a threat to German oil supplies from Romania. " See: Bernd Wegner, "The Road to Defeat: The German Campaigns in Russia 1941-43," *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 13:1, 105-127.

<sup>142</sup> See the Hartness Report, dated November 25, 1936, National Archives, MID File 2277, B-44. Captain Harlan N. Hartness was the first American Officer to graduate from the German Kriegsakademie and he commented widely in his report about the contents of the German Officer's education.

<sup>143</sup> Alfred von Schlieffen, *Cannae* (Ft. Leavenworth, KS: Command and General Staff School Press, 1936).

<sup>144</sup> Hans von Seeckt, *Gedanken eines Soldaten* (Leipzig, Germany: Verlag von K.F. Koehler, 1935), 13.

officers of Halder's generation knew the great maxim of Moltke the Elder, "Concentrate on the battlefield the scattered detachments" or "move separately, fight together."<sup>145</sup>

Based on the situational briefing presented by Kinzel, Halder came to the following determinations prior to meeting with Colonel von Greiffenberg's assigned General Staff Officer regarding offensive operations against Russia; "An attack launched from assembly areas in East Prussia and northern Poland toward Moscow would offer the best chances for success. After the seizure of Moscow the Russian forces defending the Ukraine and the Black Sea coast would be compelled to fight a series of battles on a reversed front."<sup>146</sup> With these thoughts, Halder would receive Generalmajor Marcks on July 29, 1940 in Fontainebleau.<sup>147</sup> Marcks was the Chief of Staff of the Eighteenth Army, which had recently been assigned to the East with the task of defending against a possible Soviet attack.<sup>148</sup> Historians have often wondered why Marcks was picked to be the lead planner for what would become BARBAROSSA.

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<sup>145</sup> Alfred von Schlieffen, *Cannae* (Ft. Leavenworth, KS: Command and General Staff School Press, 1936), 38.

<sup>146</sup> Department of the Army, *Department of the Army Pamphlet No 20-261 Historical Study The German Campaign in Russia- Planning and Operations, 1940-42* (Washington D.C.: Department of the Army 1955), 4. A "reversed front" in this case refers to German forces penetrating Soviet positions and encircling Soviet forces while other German forces positioned themselves between the Red Army and Moscow. This meant that Soviet forces would have to fight through German encirclement to have contact with their capitol.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid. In comparison with the *Germany and the Second World War, Volume IV, The Attack on the Soviet Union* which states, "Marcks initially regarded the creation of a point of main effort on the southern sector of the front-the operational group Kiev- as the most obvious solution. Halder, on the other hand believed that the basis indispensable for that plan, Romania was rather uncertain, and that the existence of the river barriers of Dnestr and Dnieper argued in favor of a shift of the point of main effort of the attack." See Horst Boog and others, *Germany and the Second World War, Volume IV, The Attack on the Soviet Union*, ed. Militärgeschichtliches Forschungsamt (Research Institute for Military History) trans ed. Ewald Osers (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 2008), 258-259.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.



*Picture 1: General Marcks*

The likely answer is Halder and his inner staff had already come to the conclusion that Eighteenth Army would likely be a subordinate main effort for the impending attack. From this point of view, it made great sense to have the Chief of Staff from the unit most responsible for the attack's success to plan the operation. A natural handicap Marcks would have unwittingly carried with him to do this planning was seeing this problem from his own unit's perspective and being bounded by his own experience and rationality for ways to solve the entire front. With his assignment from Halder, Marcks prepared his study on the Russian problem.

The Marcks Study provides the student of history or the military professional a look into the next step into the evolution of the BARBAROSSA plan. This often misunderstood study was originally a 23 page document Marcks submitted on August 5, 1940.<sup>149</sup> Marcks begins the document by explaining the objective of the campaign in the first paragraph. Marcks wrote:

The objective of the campaign was to defeat the Russian armed forces so that the Soviet Union could not threaten Germany in the future. German troops would have to seize all territory west of the line Rostov-Gorki-Archangel to eliminate the danger of Russian bombing attacks on Germany.

From the military-economic view point Russia's most valuable regions were the food and raw-material producing areas of the Ukraine and the Donets Basin as well as the armament-production centers around Moscow and Leningrad. The industrial areas of Asiatic Russia were not greatly developed. The principle objective was Moscow, the

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<sup>149</sup> NARA T-312, Roll 776, First Frame 8425689. For those unable to read German, a condensed version of Marcks' report can be found in Department of the Army, *Department of the Army Pamphlet No 20-261 Historical Study The German Campaign in Russia- Planning and Operations, 1940-42* (Washington D.C.: Department of the Army 1955), 6-12.

nerve center of Soviet military, political, and economic power; its capture would lead to the disintegration of Soviet resistance.<sup>150</sup>

Analysis of this simple opening statement reveals several interesting thoughts requiring further inquiry. While Marcks echoes the initial planning guidance which Hitler delivered to Brauchitsch on July 21, 1940 and Brauchitsch no doubt conveyed to Halder the following day; Marcks' study provides no connection in the opening statement to the true purpose of the operation, which was the destruction of England. What was the reason of England not being included? Was Marck's not told that England was the reason for the invasion of the Soviet Union, or more likely was he told to leave England out of his work? While leaving England out of initial Russian planning may have simplified things for those who were planning the future operation against the Soviet Union, for planners assigned to other plans at the strategic level, the question of operational priority and nesting of operations became a question.<sup>151</sup> Planners are always competing for the same resources, such as manpower, firepower or transportation to make plans feasible. In the case of the plan Marcks was charged with creating, the operation was going to be resource intensive. This requires a serious question, if an operation takes the vast majority of 2/3's of the total available land and air forces; at what point does England cease to be the reason for the Soviet invasion? A question Marcks had to ask himself in the course of drawing his study is what would be lost from other theaters of war by the conduct of an operation against the Soviet Union. Certainly Marcks would have asked himself at some point where the

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<sup>150</sup> NARA T-312, Roll 776, First Frame 8425689. In the initial discussion with Halder regarding Moscow as the center of gravity and debating whether the main effort thrust should attack toward Kiev or Moscow, page 259 of *Germany and the Second World War, Volume IV, The Attack on the Soviet Union* states, "His (Halder's) decisive arguments, however, was his believe that the capture of Moscow would mean an end to the campaign and that, in consequence, the shortest approach to Moscow should be chosen. In accordance with Halder's preliminary considerations, as well as with Hitler's directives of 31 July, Marcks therefore prepared a draft for the conduct of operations with the main effort concentrated on the central sector, the principle objective being the capture of Moscow by way of the 'land-bridge' of Smolensk."

manpower and material were going to come from? These sorts of questions amongst staff officer help guide discussions with decision makers regarding mission priorities.

Another important factor which is drawn from Marcks' opening statement on the objective demonstrates where the lines of operation for the campaign were going to be physically on the ground, along with how far the German forces must drive to meet the requirements set by Hitler of not having German factories in range of Soviet bombers. The lines of operation are correctly justified by giving economic reasons for the directions of march as well as the limit of advance. Identified were economic areas of interest, such as the Ukraine and the Donets Basin. Taken collectively, Leningrad and Moscow represented industrial centers which were capable of supplying arms and equipment to Soviet forces, while the Ukraine and the Donets Basin were capable of sustaining those forces and the population.<sup>151</sup> These locations represented target areas for each axis of advance.

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<sup>151</sup> When planning a military operation, planner and commanders want the purpose of their mission to support the mission of the headquarters above them. This is called "nesting."

<sup>152</sup> According to page 259, *Germany and the Second World War, Volume IV, The Attack on the Soviet Union*, Marcks gained his information regarding the Russian terrain "from access to the Department for Foreign Armies East and the Military Geography Department of the General Staff. He (Marcks) also used an excerpt from Tukhachevsky's book *Advance over the Vistula*. This described the terrain where the main effort of the German operation was to be made. Tukhachevsky had come to the conclusion that the terrain south of the lower Berezina was totally unsuitable for operations by major formations. The most favorable terrain for military movements, he had argued-with regards to both road and rail communications-was north of that region, between Lepel and Dvina."



**Map 5: Marcks' Plan for the Invasion of the Soviet Union**

Based on his experience and knowledge of the terrain, Marcks identified the effects of terrain for the campaign in the following words on the first two pages of his study:

To the north and west of Moscow was screened by huge forests and swamps which extended from the White Sea past Leningrad through Vitebsk to a line Kobrin-Slutsk-Kiev. The Pripyat Marshes, forming the southern part of this forest and swamp area, divided the western border region of Russia into two separate theaters of operation. The most extensive forests were between Leningrad and Moscow and in the Pripyat Marshes. The intermediate area was crossed by main highways extending from Warsaw and East Prussia via Slutsk, Minsk and Vitebsk to Moscow. South of the Pripyat Marshes were the lightly wooded regions of eastern Poland and the Ukraine. The terrain was favorable, but mobility was limited by the scarcity of good roads. Only one main east-west highway via Kiev and by the Dnepr River constituted a major obstacle.<sup>153</sup>

Once Marcks had explained the general scheme of the Soviet defensive forces, he expounded on their disposition on the ground. Marcks had a ground-centric view of the possible Russian defense, as he said very little about the role the Soviet air force or navy would have in a

possible campaign. Marcks wrote the following about the disposition and concentration of Soviet ground forces and the role the air force and navy would have in the defense of the Soviet Union:

The main concentrations were in the Baltic States in the north and the Ukraine in the south. In general, the Russian troops in the west were about equally divided between the areas north and south of the Pripyat Marshes with a reserve force around Moscow. It would be assumed that the same disposition would hold in any war with Germany. Whether appoint of main effort would be formed in the north or south would depend upon political developments. In all probability the troop strength in the north would exceed that of the south. Once the Russian lines had been pierced, the Red Army, being spread over a wide front, would no longer be able to coordinate its maneuvers and would be destroyed piecemeal.<sup>154</sup>

The picture being painted by Marcks was the Soviet flank forces in the north and the south would be strong, as these flanks would be anchored to water obstacles in the north along the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea in the south. The Soviets also recognized the strength of the Pripyat Marshes as a natural obstacle and wanted to use it to help protect Moscow at the center. To Marcks, it made sense for the Soviets to place their reserves at what he saw as their center of gravity, Moscow. This would afford it protection and offer the possibility of counter-attack. In light of these thoughts, the proposed German scheme of maneuver made sense. A northern German army attacking toward Leningrad, thus securing the left flank of the main effort advance toward Moscow, would avoid the Pripyat Marshes by keeping them to their right flank while attacking quickly using an excellent transportation hub to attack north. In doing so; the northern German army would be cutting the Soviet line of retreat back to Moscow by pressing Soviet forces into the Baltic Sea, while continuing the attack toward Leningrad.<sup>155</sup> Lines of operation

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<sup>153</sup>Ibid.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

<sup>155</sup> The idea of pushing Soviet forces against the Baltic Sea was echoed in the Army's Operation Order, dated February 3, 1941. It stated under Army Group North, "A powerful drive emanating from central East Prussia and directed via Kovno and Dvinsk into the area south of Pskov would cut off the Russian troops stationed in the Baltic States and squeeze them against the Baltic (Sea)." See Department of the Army, *Department of the Army Pamphlet No 20-261 Historical Study The German Campaign in Russia- Planning and Operations, 1940-42* (Washington D.C.: Department of the Army 1955), 28.

would be long, but a mobilized ground force leaving out of well-developed East Prussia could make it easier.

As the main effort thrust and attack on the Soviet center of gravity, Moscow was the crown jewel the Germans wanted to take from the Soviets. The Germans believed because of the highly centralized nature of the Soviet military, the taking of Moscow in conjunction with the destruction of their forces in the field would be more than the Soviet system could take. In other words, if the Soviet command and control structure was to collapse in Moscow and Soviet field commands were being crushed while asking for permission or waiting for orders from higher headquarters, collapse was imminent. To bring collapse about, Marcks thought the troop strength in the north was likely to eclipse that of the south and left flexibility in his study for political developments to facilitate what he saw as inevitable. Regardless, in the final analysis, the Soviet armed forces and Moscow needed to go in order to bring about the collapse of the Soviet state.

Regarding the Soviet air force, on page 4 of his study, Marcks thought they were a threat to be taken seriously.<sup>156</sup> Marcks saw the role of the Soviet air force as something that would be used to interdict German traffic on the roads, making friendly movement more difficult. Marcks saw this as a way to remind other planners the German Army needed more anti-air capabilities before attacking the east. These two thoughts would lead German air planners to consider their own role in the coming campaign. Their argument was in order to support ground forces, more than just air superiority, but rather, total air supremacy was required.<sup>157</sup> This was a part of the

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<sup>156</sup> NARA T-312, Roll 776, First Frame 8425689.

<sup>157</sup> Military professions think of air superiority as something that can be contested between two rival air forces or local to a part of the front, whereas air supremacy is thought of as something which is not contested.



larger intellectual discussion the German Luftwaffe was having regarding its role in relation to the army.<sup>158</sup>

Regarding the role of the Russian navy, Marcks also explains on the fourth page of his Study what he thought of Russia's naval capabilities and how he expected them to be used in the coming campaign. Marcks saw the Soviet surface and subsurface fleets the equal of the German High Seas Fleet.<sup>159</sup> Interestingly, Marcks makes a significant comment regarding the possibility of Russian vessels interrupting the flow of Swedish iron ore coming to Germany through the Baltic Sea.<sup>160</sup> He predicted the Soviets would achieve this through the use of submarines and mine warfare. For Germany, Swedish iron ore was a significant economic factor in 1940 and any future prosecution of the war depended on it.<sup>161</sup> Also a priority made by Marcks was the capture of Baltic Sea ports. Marcks felt if these ports fell into German hands the situation of the Red Banner Baltic Fleet would be hopeless, as it would be confined to ports such as Leningrad which freeze in the winter. These Baltic ports could also become a major source of German sustainment for forces operating in the Baltic States. In this area of the document, Marcks also stated the Soviet navy needed to be eliminated from the Baltic Sea in order to prevent it from connecting with the English fleet and gaining a source of supplies.<sup>162</sup>

In terms of the operation itself, Marcks conceptualized the operation to be a four phase operation, once forces had been mobilized and deployed to their starting positions prior to the commencement of hostilities. Marcks explains the four phases of the operation in terms of time and space:

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<sup>158</sup> For more about the intellectual debate within the Luftwaffe regarding independent air power or being a ground support element for the army, see, James S. Corum and Richard R. Muller, *The Luftwaffe's Way of War* (Baltimore, MD: The Nautical & Aviation Publishing Company of America, 1998).

<sup>159</sup> NARA T-312, Roll 776, First Frame 8425689.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid.

**Phase 1.** In the initial phase of the operation the Russians would likely fight delaying actions over a distance of 400kms until they reached their prepared positions. The German infantry divisions would take three weeks to cover this distance. The panzer divisions would have to advance rapidly and penetrate deeply so the Russians would be unable to man a continuous defense. The issue of the entire campaign would depend on the success of the armored thrusts.

**Phase 2.** The fight for the forest areas and the river courses would dominate this phase. The depth of this zone was about 100 to 200kms. It would take two to four weeks to cross it. At this stage, the German forces would either achieve a decisive breakthrough or destroy the previously shattered Russian forces individually.

**Phase 3.** Moscow and Leningrad would have to be seized and the drive into the eastern Ukraine initiated. The distances were 400 and 300kms respectively. This phase could only be executed after the second phase depending on the condition of the railroads, the serviceability of the tracked and wheeled vehicles and the degree of success achieved. If the Russians were beaten, a few armored or motorized divisions would have to keep them off balance and to seize Moscow and Leningrad and thrust deep into the eastern Ukraine. This would require one to two weeks, if sufficient tanks and motor vehicles were available. If, however, the bulk of the Red Army was still capable of offering organized resistance, the start of the third phase would have to be delayed until sufficient supplies were brought up to support the continuation of the offensive. In this case it might be three to six weeks, depending on the time needed to generate supplies.

**Phase 4.** This phase would see the Germans pursuing the Russians to the Don, the Volga and the Severnaya Dvina. The distances to be covered were 400kms in the south and 800kms in the center and the north. After the Germans captured Kharkov, Moscow and Leningrad, the Soviet command would have lost control over its forces but complete occupation of the territory acquired during this phase would be possible nor necessary. Motorized forces and rail-transported infantry would be responsible for this part of the operation. The time needed for this phase of the operation was estimated at two to four weeks.<sup>163</sup>

In the writing of these four phases, Marcks was going to have to make assumptions and predictions, two things most planners do based on their experience. One assumption Marcks made was the Soviets would fight using delay and defend tactics, in the same manner the Germans thought of them. Planners often have to have a model of how the enemy will do something in order to share this understanding with others. In making this prediction, Marcks was acknowledging the Soviets would use the traditional Russian defense of trading space for

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<sup>163</sup> Ibid.

time in the same manner Alexander I did against Napoleon in 1812. It is also clear in phase one that Marcks believed the success of the operation and the deep armored drive need to capitalize on the initial strategic, operation and tactical surprise achieved when the operation began.<sup>164</sup> The Germans needed to be prepared to take the initiative away from the Soviets in the initial hours of the campaign, not letting go until Moscow was seized.

Marcks had demonstrated more thought about “joint” issues than most typically give him credit for. But Marcks’ planning was only conceptual, meaning it lacked the detail to be of any use in reality. Other planners from the German air force and navy had to add more flesh to the skeleton of this plan. Plans considering items such as terrain and weather move plans from the conceptual level to the functional by adding required details. Planners must not only understand how terrain and weather affect military operations, but how to plan to use their effects to advantage. Understanding how terrain was formed instructs planners on potential uses in offensive and defensive operations. Throughout the course of the war, both the Germans and Soviets developed their understanding of the conditions of terrain and weather, while they continued to refine their tactics to incorporate these understandings. A critical portion of the coming German operational plan for retrograde in the Baltic relies heavily on understanding the effects of terrain and weather.

## **2.4 TERRAIN: DEFINING THE OPERATING ENVIRONMENT**

As no other factor instructs combatants more than terrain as it relates to the space in which battle is joined, it is first prudent to examine terrain through the lens of the military

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<sup>164</sup> According to page 268, *Germany and the Second World War, Volume IV, The Attack on the Soviet Union*, regarding surprise, “Marcks therefore concluded that the greater the elements of surprise in the outbreak of war, the greater the chance of defeating major forces on the frontier. This to him was an indispensable condition of the success of the campaign, and hence of a decisive victory before the ‘Red coalition’ would come into effect. He therefore concluded: ‘Any serious operations by major Russian forces west of the large forest zone and the large rivers can only be welcome to us’, emphasizing once more that such a form of engagement would be a positive ‘good turn.’”

professional. Before the current age of technology, military professionals were much more in touch with the dangers and possibilities afforded by terrain. The strategic, operational and tactical levels each carry with them different considerations related to terrain. For an operational plan to be valid, it must consider grander issues of terrain in relation to the strategy being pursued, while having a total appreciation for the tactical level situation. Generally speaking, strategic-level considerations of terrain center on land masses in relation to the bodies of water that surround them. The northern front from Leningrad to the western edge of Estonia is comprised of the coastline of the Baltic Sea in the north. The eastern portion of the northern front is dominated by terrain mainly comprised of swamps, forests, small lakes and roads of small width. The southern area of the northern front is also covered with small lakes, forests, swamps, but lacks any significant road structure. The western area of the northern front is comprised of forests with more significant road infrastructure than the other parts. To better understand how the northern front was formed as a land mass, it is necessary to scientifically examine the geographic history of northern Russia and Estonia.

In ancient times the land mass of northern Europe was shaped by the glaciers of the ice age.<sup>165</sup> While glaciers did most of the work, it was the wind and rain that caused erosion and refined the terrain over the course of years.<sup>166</sup> The isthmus of Estonia is defined by a current work on the Estonian geography as “generally narrow, but varying in width (6-28 km) with the mesa running from the border of Kõrvemaa from Sagadi east towards the Narva River (126km). The southern border at Alutaguse is dominated by swampy depressions created by glaciers. The widest area (28km) of the mesa is Jõhvi elevation (in line with Ontika-Jõugu) and Alutaguse’s

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<sup>165</sup> Archibald Geikie, *Scenery of Scotland* (New York, NY: MacMillian Company, 1887), 15.

<sup>166</sup> Ralph S. Tarr, *Elementary Physical Geography* (New York, NY: The Mac Millian, 1902), 319.

most northern point is at Oru and Vaivara.”<sup>167</sup> Once across the Narva River, “the mesa in general is higher in the western part around Vaivara where it is 68 meters above sea level, while becoming lower in the east at 30-34 meters above sea level on the west bank of the Narva River. From the smooth mesa, noteworthy knobby protuberances of moraine (the deposits of rocks, sand and clay left by melting glaciers) rise at Jõhvi to an elevation of 79 meters and at Sinimäed (84.6 meters). These are the highest natural elevations in the mesa” (See Map 9 for the general area).<sup>168</sup>

In the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries several countries took an active interest in learning more about the physical geography of the Baltic region. Contained in a document uncovered at the Estonian National Defence Academy in Tartu, Estonia, there is evidence making it abundantly clear the Estonians knew the Russians and Germans knew more about their terrain than they did.<sup>169</sup> This important and extensive work entitled “Estonian Military Geography” was written, compiled and edited by Colonel, later General Nikoli Reek in 1920-1921.<sup>170</sup> A little known figure outside of Estonia, Reek was central to the Estonian military reform effort following the Estonian War of Independence.<sup>171</sup> This 144 page document explains what was known about Estonian physical geography up to 1921 and who the main contributors were. Reek did not act alone in the creation of this document. Reek makes it clear in the document’s introduction he tasked students of the Higher Command and Staff Studies Course, (or senior General Staff Officers going through the Estonian War College) to assist in the collection of information relating to Estonian terrain. This brilliant action had two significant positive effects: first,

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<sup>167</sup> Ivar Arold, *Eesti Maastikud* trans. Eric A. Sibul (Tartu, Estonia: Tartu University Press 2005), 245.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>169</sup> Nikoli Reek, *Eestimaa Sõjaageograafia* (Estonian Military Geography), dated September 13, 1921, Estonian National Defence Academy, General Staff Holdings, Number 29199. This document was translated with the assistance of Captain Rene Toomse of the Estonian Defence Forces.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

students would look at the same pieces of terrain through experienced military eyes which could better relate the significance of the terrain to others like themselves and secondly, leverage the experience of officers who were certainly educated in the use of the Estonian landscape from the First World War and Estonian War of Independence.<sup>172</sup>

In the first sentence of the document Reek states, “All authors writing about Estonian geography agree there is not enough material written in Estonian about our homeland. Many of the most important works have yet to be written, because they could not be appreciated at the higher levels.”<sup>173</sup> What this statement exposes and is continuously expounded on throughout Reek's work, is how much of what was known about the physical georgaphy of Estonia was only good for either school children or tactical-level leadership. Reek reconized the need for a document which made use of strategic and operational considerations regarding terrain. The available litature was not sufficient for the needs of General Staff Officers working at the strategic and operational levels of war. Continuing to highlight the fact other countries knew more about Estonia then they did, Reek said, “In German one can find many important works written about the Baltic states, including works on Estonia. However, the German publications are old, while newer works are published abroad making them difficult to obtain.”<sup>174</sup> Reek continued to expand on this point by explaining,

This is the situation with general Estonian geography. It is even worse with Estonian military geography. The Russian and German General staffs have secret publications on the Batlic countries and one can find data on Estonian military geography, but the data from those sides is enilghtened to suit either the German or Russian General Staffs from their perspective. On the other hand, data which concerns the state and economics are

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<sup>171</sup>See: Jaan Traksmäa, ed, *Eesti Vabadussõda 1918-1920* (Estonian War for Independence 1918-1920 in Two Volumes) Vabadussõja Ajaloo Komitee, (Tallinn, Estonia, 1939) 468.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid, 468.

<sup>173</sup> Nikoli Reek, *Eestimaa Sõjaageograafia* (Estonian Military Geography), dated September 13, 1921, Estonian National Defence Academy, General Staff Holdings, Number 29199, 1.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid.

completely aged. Thirdly, names and descriptions do not correlate to names in Estonian. Fourth, the works are difficult to obtain because they are secret.<sup>175</sup>

What was not a secret was how Reek compiled his document and how the “Professor of the Military Art, Professor Baiov” had been instrumental in his efforts to provide material and instruction to student of the Estonian Military Academy.<sup>176</sup> Many of the works written in Baiov’s time were not written with military application in mind, requiring Reek to point out, “this material in scope is good for military academy courses, but not the higher courses. The differences are understandable and for this reason I was compelled to attempt a concise work on the subject entitled Estonian Military Geography.”<sup>177</sup> In the introduction of the document Reek exposes ten works influencing thoughts about Estonian geography up to 1921. The ten sources and authors used in conjunction with Reek’s work were as follows:

1. Russian Professor Baiov (Experiences on Estonian Military Geography).
2. Russian Professor Baiov (Overview of the Petragrad Military District) (Top Secret).
3. Russian Professor Baiov (Pilot’s Guide to Baltic Sea Navigation).
4. Kupfer, Baltic Landscape, 1910.
5. Tornius, The Baltic Provinces and the Finnish Gulf, 1918.
6. Estonian Abteilung 1920 Road map Latvia and Estonia (German General Staff), 1918.
7. J. Kots. Baltic Geography Study (work) Book, 1921.
8. G. Wilberg (Harjumaa County), 1921.
9. M. Kampmann Estonian Homeland Part 1, North Estonia, 1919.
10. J. Jürgens Geography Textbook Economical Geography, 1920.<sup>178</sup>

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<sup>175</sup> Ibid.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid, 2.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid.

Analysing these works in the context of the Second World War, only 20 years later, it is apparent both German and Soviet planners were influenced by these works and the work of Reek. Both the Soviet and German armies, along with their planners had access to these documents and understood their wider meanings in terms of their own experiences from operating in Estonian territory during the First World War.

Certainly Soviet military planners refined their understanding of Estonian terrain after the occupation of the Baltic States in 1940 as part of the Ribbentrop/Molotov Agreement.<sup>179</sup> A most important tool of the planner and the commander alike is the map. Throughout the ages, military professionals have relied on two dimensional representations of complex three dimensional terrain by the use of maps. To understand what was known by Soviet military planners in regards to the terrain of Estonia at the beginning of the war, a Soviet operational level military map dated July 10, 1941 was examined.<sup>180</sup> Contained in the marginal information, located at the bottom of the map, there were a few interesting facts. The geospatial information regarding the grid lines used on this 1:500,000 scale map were created in 1935; while the political boundaries used on the map were from 1936. Located on the far right side of the map is a reference to the map being produced in 1939. This evidence shows a few things. In the first place, based on the production date (1939), this map was produced for the expected invasion of then independent Estonia. This thought is solidified by the map's representation of the original Estonian border with Russia, being along the Luga River in the north and generally 15 kilometers east of the Estonian city of Narva in the south. This boundary was established at the conclusion of the Estonian War of

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<sup>179</sup> Alfred Bilmanis, *Baltic Essays* (Washington D.C.: Latvian Legation, 1945), Pg 166.

<sup>180</sup> The map examined was a "Top Secret" Soviet Operational Situation Map from July 10, 1941. The value of the map was the scale and marginal information showing how the information was gathered.



Independence.<sup>181</sup> Second, the Soviet Union had access to maps which were updated since the Estonian War of Independence.

To understand how Soviet military maps were produced it was necessary to consult a collection of after action comments from the Soviet General Staff dated September- October 1942.<sup>182</sup> To obtain information regarding border territories, a special unit was organized within the Soviet Military Topographic Directorate. Regarding geospatial information, “the primary mission of field units of the military topography service consisted of providing the border territory of the USSR with ranging documentation of fortified areas by means of geodetic points and surveys.”<sup>183</sup> The Narva area and the isthmus between the Baltic Sea and Lake Peipus in Estonia were a traditional area of focus for all major combatants since the time of Peter the Great, thus the Russians had amassed significant information regarding the area’s defensive possibilities.

In January 1915, Hilaire Belloc wrote an article for The Geographical Journal entitled “The Geography of the War.”<sup>184</sup> While the article was written to explain events occurring at the commencement of the First World War on the Western Front in 1914, it provides some useful ways to look at terrain in the strategic and tactical senses, while observing offensive and defensive considerations. Belloc stated, “There are two main aspects of the way in which natural features affect the movement of armies.”<sup>185</sup> In essence, Belloc explains how terrain forces the actions of armies in terms of offensive and defensive movements based on aspects of the terrain.

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<sup>181</sup> Jaan Traksmäa, ed, *Eesti Vabadussõda 1918-1920* (Estonian War for Independence 1918-1920 in Two Volumes) Vabadussõja Ajaloo Komitee, (Tallinn, Estonia, 1939).

<sup>182</sup> Soviet Army Studies Office, *Soviet Documents on the Use of War Experience, Volume II The Winter Campaign 1941-1942*. (London, UK: Frank Cass 1991).

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid*, 202.

<sup>184</sup> Hilaire Belloc, “The Geography of the War,” *The Geographical Journal Vol XLV No1 January, 1915, 1*.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid*, 2.

Offensive and defensive operations in terms of terrain are relegated to natural lines of advance for offensive operations and natural obstacles for defensive operations.<sup>186</sup> Like the flow of water following the least path of resistance, armies do the same. As significant land forms allow or restrict movement, armies must follow suit. Military professionals refer to these “paths of least resistance” as avenues of approach.<sup>187</sup> An avenue of approach determines the size of unit that can move through the terrain. An opposing army wanting to stop the movement of an enemy force must establish a defensive position from which he can use the effects of his direct and indirect fire support assets along with physical presence to stop an enemy advance. This is part of the reason why armies always want control of the “high ground.” An army in a defensive posture will seek a natural obstacle or series of natural obstacles or “defiles” allowing them to stop offensive movement with their massed direct and indirect fires.<sup>188</sup> Thus, defensive terrain provides natural obstacles necessary for the defense to be the “stronger form of war.”<sup>189</sup> Belloc identifies five “strategic” obstacles that offer defense against the advance of an enemy army. These obstacles are ranked from least to greatest difficulty; rivers, forests, hill country, desert and marsh lands. In the area of Leningrad to the Baltic, all but desert terrain is something that an army in the attack must contend with. Looking at the strength of each obstacle, Belloc described rivers as never a “permanent” obstacle but a “very valuable temporary obstacle.”<sup>190</sup> Advancing or retreating from Leningrad into Estonia, both armies were required to cross three rivers. A point raised in *Terrain Factors in the Russian Campaign* is practically all streams and rivers of

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<sup>186</sup> Ibid.

<sup>187</sup> Norman M. Wade, *The Battle Staff* (Lakeland, FL: The Lightning Press 2005), 3-15.

<sup>188</sup> Belloc, “The Geography of the War,” 3.

<sup>189</sup> Carl von Clausewitz, *On War* ed. Michael Howard and Peter Paret, trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 358.

<sup>190</sup> Belloc, “The Geography of the War,” 5.

the Soviet Union flow from north to south, though a few flow in the opposite direction.<sup>191</sup> The Narva River begins in the south at Lake Peipus flowing north through the city of Narva to the Baltic Sea. From the east to west, the Luga and Plussa Rivers flow from north to south. All three rivers are generally within a total distance of 10 kilometers of each other.<sup>192</sup>

When the distance of the rivers from each other is considered in time and space while compared against the distance and tasks required of the Soviet Army to deploy fully from defensive positions in the vicinity of Leningrad into a general assault, close examination is required. After the Leningrad breakout, the Soviet Army was required to breach a significant German defense which had been occupied for over three years, continuing the attack into the three rivers. The distance of the rivers from each other is significant when it is considered what engineer assets were required for the Soviet Army to cross a river against the amount of space available to stage, cross and consolidate units after a river crossing. Further complicating the crossing of these three rivers, like most rivers in European Russia, the west bank is higher than the east bank.<sup>193</sup> This was a consistent advantage the Germans had in their retreat out of the Soviet Union. Looking at maps of the Leningrad to Narva area, leaders at the strategic and operational levels of war could be easily lulled into thinking there are no significant problems for the tactical-level leader to overcome with regard to elevation between the west and east banks of these rivers. This causes an even more severe problem, because the rivers lack significant elevation on either bank, water collects on the surface of the ground causing swamps. Along the Baltic coastline, the soil composition is the other main contributing factor to the formation of swamps. As a result of the terrain and the water table, the ground quickly soaks up water and the

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<sup>191</sup> Department of the Army, *Department of the Army Pamphlet No 20-290 Historical Study Terrain Factors in the Russian Campaign* (Washington D.C.: Department of the Army 1951), 4.

<sup>192</sup> Looking at a current map of the Narva region, the Plussa River has largely been destroyed by a man-made lake made during the Soviet period.

terrain is unable to move it.<sup>194</sup> When the task organizations of the armies is examined in conjunction with the composition of the soil and the amount of space required, it is not difficult to understand why the Germans were able to frustrate Soviet attack formations with relatively small formations. In addition to rivers and swampy conditions, both armies had to contend with the natural strength of the forests.

Hillaire Belloc when writing on the issue of forests in 1915 said, “It is a more serious obstacle for a reason which, like so many things concerned with the elements of strategics, modern people miss it because they are used wholly to artificial conditions, and almost wholly to conditions of peace.”<sup>195</sup> In essence, forests and swamps constitute “no go” terrain for most modern armies comprised of mechanized or motorized assets, leaving them to seek offensive action only along roads as the line of advance. The Germans and Soviets also employed many carts and sleds drawn by horses. Being unable to find suitable areas to graze, fodder had to be transported to the front, taking up valuable space aboard trains and trucks. When roads or lines of advance meet a significant piece of elevation in a hill or mountain, an army in the offense should expect to find the enemy. While nature provides several obstacles for an army to exploit such as forests, the strength of a defensive position is further enhanced with the use of manmade obstacles. It is also prudent to consider the effects of man-made obstacles in terms of strategic, operational and tactical thought.

When planning offensive or defensive operations at any level of war, planners must always consider man-made infrastructure along with the effect it has on operations. For example, it is generally advisable for large mechanized or motorized forces to avoid cities, as urban

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<sup>193</sup> Department of the Army, *Department of the Army Pamphlet No 20-290 Historical Study Terrain Factors in the Russian Campaign* (Washington D.C.: Department of the Army 1951), 16.

<sup>194</sup> Having personally walked the ground in the region, the author quickly noticed how standing water quickly formed and what the possible implications were for military operations.

combat swallows armies, as the Germans and Soviets learned at the monumental battle of Stalingrad in 1942/43.<sup>196</sup> When planners consider nature terrain together with manmade features, a fuller picture emerges of what is possible for an army regarding the use of the time and space available. While nature shapes the terrain, man builds infrastructure in key defiles to protect himself or to expedite the movement of forces and commerce. The combination of natural and man-made obstacles form avenues of approach as well as defensive positions. A force in the offense which can use an avenue of approach or line of advance (also referred to as a line of operation) with more tempo, or speed over time, in conjunction with overwhelming mass will likely overcome a force in the defense. However, a force in the defense which can wisely chooses natural defiles enhanced by man made efforts can take the initiative away from the offense, destroy combat power and thus make the offense susceptible to counterattack and destruction. This is what Carl von Clausewitz meant when he described the defense as “a shield of comprised of well directed blows.”<sup>197</sup> The “well directed blows” are the counterattack force which the defense uses at the decisive moment in time and space to destroy the enemy. The transition from the defense to the offense must occur in the same areas available to the enemy. Nature provides planners with significant options for conducting military operations. In addition to obstacles, the weather associated with the change of seasons can take otherwise impassible terrain during one time of year and transform it into an avenue of approach. Closer study of how weather effects terrain is necessary. By focusing specifically on how military planners can correctly use this scenario to their advantage, better understanding of the conditions of 1944 are created.

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<sup>195</sup> Belloc, “The Geography of the War,” 2.

<sup>196</sup> Earl F. Ziemke, *Stalingrad to Berlin: The German Defeat in the East* (Washington D.C.: Department of the Army 1968). or see the later work of Earl F. Ziemke and Magna E. Bauer, *Moscow to Stalingrad, Decision in the East* (Washington DC: United States Army Center for Military History, 1987).

## **2.5 WEATHER: HOW SCIENCE AFFECTS THE ART OF WAR**

Many scholars and military professionals only associate the effects of weather on terrain and men in the tactical sense. By failing to consider how weather effects the strategic and operational environment in terms of terrain and infrastructure, the ability to mobilize, field, operate and sustain a group of large formations cannot be fully appreciated by planners. No credible scholar or professional soldier would deny the conditions of the Eastern Front in the winter were anything but horrible. What is of particular interest is the lack of literature on the subject, certainly of the conduct of military operations in relation to the climatic conditions. One of the few works on the subject was a pamphlet issued by the U.S. Army. *Effects of Climate on Combat in European Russia* was originally published in February 1952.<sup>198</sup> The 79-page document covered the important points of the climate in European Russia, but the document did not provide the details required by operational-level planners in the event the Cold War became a shooting war. Planners must consider the effects of climate and weather on operations being conducted or risk the destruction of their force. A plan created when the weather was cold which fails to consider climatic changes in the time and space available will be catastrophic to an army.

The study of weather is not typically a subject of interest to professional soldiers until they are subjected to weather's effects. Like terrain, a failure to understand weather can spell defeat very quickly. Facets of climatology are of interest to historians and professional soldiers alike. Sunrise, sunset, moonrise, moonset, temperature, wind speed and precipitation all have an effect on planning, as well as the execution of operations. Ultimately, weather effects decision making at all levels. Knowing the answers to scientific questions can provide historians with a

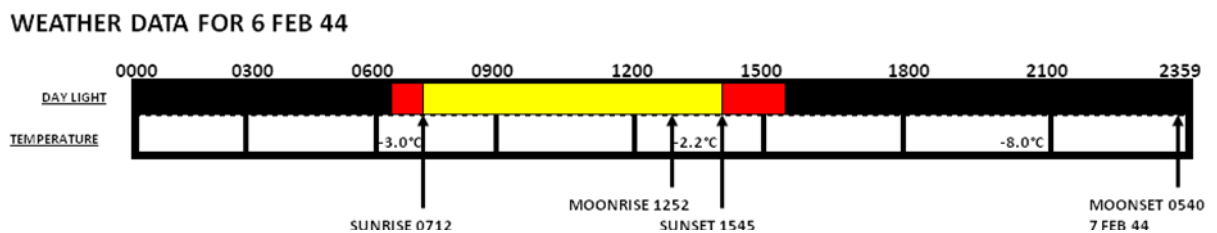
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<sup>197</sup> Carl von Clausewitz, *On War* ed. Michael Howard and Peter Paret, trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 357.

<sup>198</sup> Department of the Army, *Department of the Army Pamphlet No 20-291 Historical Study Effects of Climate on Combat in European Russia* (Washington D.C.: Department of the Army 1952).

clearer picture of why events happened as they did. This picture is not reliant on the memories of common soldiers or officers, but rather scientific instruments and records. To better understand decisions made at the planning table or on the battlefield, all should first strive to understand the factors driving the decisions. Positioning of the sun in reference to the terrain is a key factor when examining the placement of a defensive position. An important question to consider is what time did the sun rise and set during the fighting? Knowing this information allows us to explore the decisions leaders made against the historical record, collectively evaluating their results against objective science.

Another important factor related to the sun is the temperature during the fighting. Only recently have military professionals begun to appreciate the effects of weather and temperature on the human body, particularly while conducting military operations. Certainly during the battles of 1944 when men carried only one canteen, soldiers on both sides suffered tremendously from heat related illness, forcing commanders to consider the issue because of the loss of combat power. Figures 1 and 2 demonstrate weather in terms of climate and available daylight for the early part of the year in 1944.



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DATA COLLECTION TIMES				
	07.12	13.12	21.12	AVG

<sup>199</sup> Tartu University Astronomic Observatory, *Astronomic Calendar, 21<sup>st</sup> Edition 1944*, (Dorpat (Tartu), Estonia: University Publishing 1943), 9.

<b>TEMP</b>	-3.0°C	-2.2°C	-8.0°C	-4.4°C
<b>WIND SPEED</b>	1 KPH	1 KPH	1 KPH	1 KPH
<b>DIRECTION</b>	WNW	NW	W	
<b>AVE HUMD</b>	3.3°C	2.8°C	2.3°C	2.8°C
<b>REL HUMD (%)</b>	90%	71%	93%	85%
<b>STATION INFORMATION WAS COLLECTED AT: TIIRIKOJA (ON LAKE PEIPUS) LAT: 58° 52' LONG: 26° 57'</b>				
<b>INFORMATION COLLECTED BY: ALLEK VALDUR</b>				
<b>***TIMES ARE PER LOCAL ESTONIAN TIME ZONE. IF USING IN GERMAN PLANNING SUBTRACT ONE HOUR FOR BERLIN'S TIME ZONE.</b>				
<b>IF USING FOR SOVIET PLANNING ADD ONE HOUR FOR MOSCOW'S TIME ZONE.</b>				

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### Figures 6 and 7

## 2.6 PHYSICAL NETWORK ANALYSIS:

Planners are able to connect the physical effects of terrain and weather to planning considerations of support operations in time and space through nodes and modes of transportation. In order to effectively plan an offensive or defensive campaign, planners must seriously consider the time and space requirements to move men and material from point to point. A physical network analysis or (PNA) is a planning tool used today which allows planners to better understand the various hubs available to ground, sea and air facilitating throughput of supplies and reinforcements. Conducting a PNA should be an objective look at the capability a facility provides, remembering that capability can be used equally by friendly or enemy forces with the same result. Common considerations for all forms of transportation are the security of the lines of communication and staging area space. Both considerations are addressed by

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<sup>200</sup> Eesti Meteoroloogijaamade Vork, *Weather Record, February 1944*, (Dorpat (Tartu), Estonia: Station Year Record 1944), 5-8.



planners in terms of troops to the task. In other words, how many men and in what formations are required to secure the rear area or a facility to ensure consistent resupply operations.

A survey of documents located in the Estonian National Archives reveals an excellent view of what was known about Estonian facilities prior to the first Soviet occupation in 1940. These documents discuss dimensions of facilities, loading space available and the composition of runways. To gain insight into some of the capabilities of the Baltic region, the U.S. Department of the Army commissioned study *MS# 232 or Conditions of the Railways in the Baltic Countries During the Advance of Eighteenth Army to Leningrad* in the late 1940s.<sup>201</sup> This study not only discussed the condition of the railways, but also the bridges and roadways and how they were used to move men and material in late 1941. These facilities would go largely undeveloped as the Germans continued operations into 1944.<sup>202</sup> This study is pertinent when combined with ex-ante sources related to the condition of the roads, sea ports and air fields located in the Estonian National Archives. This information is essential to determining the throughput potential of facilities and understanding the time and space required to move men or material.<sup>203</sup>

## **2.7 RAILROADS:**

From its invention through the mid 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, railroad revolutionized the ability to mobilize and send men and material to theaters of war quickly. The Soviet occupation of the Baltic in 1940 saw most of the standard gauge track, the track most common in Europe,

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<sup>201</sup> Department of the Army, *MS# 232, Conditions of the Railways in the Baltic Countries During the Advance of Eighteenth Army to Leningrad*. (Carlisle, Army War College: Foreign Military Studies Department 1947).

<sup>202</sup> See ERA 1091-1-1797.

<sup>203</sup> Throughput capacity is the ability of a facility to push various classes of supply through its infrastructure.

torn up by the Soviets and replaced with broad gauge track.<sup>204</sup> Broad gauge track was the track system common to the Soviet Union .

With the vast majority of German supplies coming out of East Prussia, the Germans were able to use well developed double set tracks to quickly move men and material out of German mobilization areas. During the advance of the German Eighteenth Army, the Soviets damaged a few minor bridges along their route of egress. However, these actions did nothing to slow the German advance. Where bridges crossed natural obstacles for railroads, typically they also crossed in the same location for a road.<sup>205</sup> Before 1940, most rail lines to Riga from the south were standard gauge. When German forces secured Riga, they gained a major freight and passenger hub which connected to several points in Estonia. As the Germans continued their advance, they employed a Railway Engineer Officer whose duty it was to facilitate maintenance through the host nation. The Railway Engineer Officer found many men throughout the Baltic the Soviets had used to lay broad gauge track. These same men “volunteered” to relay standard gauge.<sup>206</sup> When Eighteenth Army reached Estonia, it was tasked with continuing the attack to the northeast by first securing Tartu, then continuing to attack toward Narva. Rail tracks in this area were also standard gauge. The Germans quickly discovered the western part of Estonia was mainly narrow gauge track. While converting standard gauge to broad gauge was difficult for the Soviets because the rail bed would have to be expanded, the same was true of German conversion of narrow to standard gauge. In Tallinn, the Germans found broad gauge equipment,

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<sup>204</sup> See: Department of the Army, *MS# 232, Conditions of the Railways in the Baltic Countries During the Advance of Eighteenth Army to Leningrad*. (Carlisle, Army War College: Foreign Military Studies Department 1947) for the specifics regarding times and locations of track change-overs from standard to broad gauge.

<sup>205</sup> See: Department of the Army, *MS# 232, Conditions of the Railways in the Baltic Countries During the Advance of Eighteenth Army to Leningrad*. (Carlisle, Army War College: Foreign Military Studies Department 1947), 12.

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid.*

such as locomotives and cars which they pressed into service along with the host nation support to run them.<sup>207</sup>

While the Railway Engineer Officer was responsible for the maintenance of the track, the Army Transportation Officer was responsible for the schedule and timing of train movements within the area of operations. Due to a lack of phones, tracking movement along the routes was difficult. As a result, the Transportation Officer could often only provide a guess on where men or material were along the route, based on the time the train left. Another significant challenge was the space available at major hubs to transfer and stage men and material for movement to their next destination. Early on, the further north the Germans were in Estonia, the more frequent the changes of trains from standard gauge to broad gauge.<sup>208</sup> Men and material would have to be “transloaded” or what is called today “cross leveled,” from one train to another. They were staged and accounted for in a marshalling area, then moved to another train to continue their journey to the front.<sup>209</sup> This time consuming process could take days, if the right equipment or manpower were not available. Most of the time, despite their best efforts, the Germans found this to be a very time consuming and inefficient process, even in the later years of the war.

## **2.8 ROADS:**

Overly, roads in the Baltic region during the Second World War were what is referred to today as “unimproved” surface roads; meaning they were not covered with pavement or concrete. Roadways in major cities were paved, but as forces moved out of the cities, roads quickly turned to dirt. Speaking on the condition of the roads in Estonia, according to *MS# 232*,

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<sup>207</sup> Department of the Army, *MS# 232, Conditions of the Railways in the Baltic Countries During the Advance of Eighteenth Army to Leningrad*. (Carlisle, Army War College: Foreign Military Studies Department 1947). This document was reviewed against documents are found in the Estonian National Archives ERA 1091-1-1797. In this collection of documents examines the dimensions of Estonian facilities which were likely used by Soviet and German military planners to determine the initial throughput capacity along with informing logisticians on what efforts would have to be expended to improve capacity.

<sup>208</sup> *Ibid.*

“The condition of the roads was hopeless. There was nothing but deep sand which turned into mud whenever it rained.”<sup>210</sup> Dirt roads were typically small in width, not being designed for the heavy traffic an armored formation would send through an area. Also, a common feature of Baltic roads was having a drainage ditch on both sides of the road. This made getting off the road quickly difficult in the event of air attack. Dirt roads presented two significant problems for planners with regard to the weather: 1) the slightest amount of rain could make them impassible; and 2) once a road was destroyed by usage, crews would have to be employed to repair them before they could be used again. After the initial drive to the north, the Germans found 2) more difficult than 1). Manpower was a consistent problem and as the war progressed, it only became worse. Summertime road usage also created significant challenges. A dry road being used by a large formation in the Baltic could be expected to produce a dust signature which could be followed from the air. As a result, the preferred technique was to move at night.

## **2.9 PORTS:**

The Baltic nations have always had a rich tradition of using the Baltic Sea as a line of communication. With many quality deep water ports along the coast, military and commercial traffic in the Baltic Sea flourished for centuries. The major mainland ports in the region were Königsberg, Memel, Libau, Riga, Pärnu, Tallinn, Narva and Leningrad. What makes each of these ports a piece of key infrastructure is not only the throughput capacity, but also the distribution facilities of roads and railways to move material to the front. Operating out of Königsberg and ports further to the west, the Germans easily gained and maintained control of Memel and Libau. From operations conducted in the Baltic region from the First World War, the Germans had excellent working knowledge of these areas and understood how to gain control

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<sup>209</sup> Ibid, 4.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid, 13.

quickly.<sup>211</sup> The crown jewel of the region in terms of port facilities was Riga. Riga was geographically secured by the Courland peninsula to the west and could secure ships with shore based anti-ship batteries once inside the Bay of Riga. As the First World War taught the Germans, using the Bay of Riga and Riga itself first required the neutralization of Soviet positions in the Baltic Islands, particularly the main island of Saaremaa with the Sõrve peninsula. Thus, the German Navy was dependent on ground forces to secure the Estonian north and west coasts along with the Baltic Islands before the port of Riga could be used. During the German drive north in 1941, the decision was made to first secure the city of Narva and continue attacking east toward Leningrad before clearing back toward the port city of Tallinn and the Baltic Islands.<sup>212</sup>



**Picture 2**

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As demonstrated by this pre-war picture, Tallinn had a significant port facility, but more importantly the infrastructure in terms of roads and rail heads to move material quickly to the

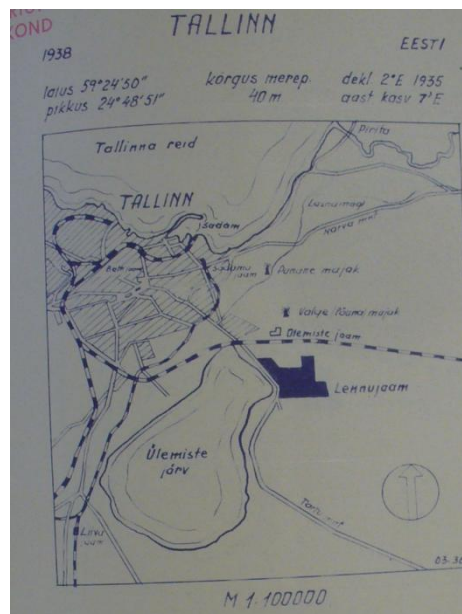
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<sup>211</sup> See: Erich von Tschischwitz, *The Army and Navy during the Conquest of the Baltic Islands in October 1917*, trans. Henry Hossfeld (Fort Leavenworth, Kansas: The Command and General Staff School Press, 1933) for a detailed history of German operations in the Baltic region during the First World War.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid, 14.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid.

front. (See **Picture 2**)<sup>214</sup> It took additional effort before the Germans could take full advantage of the port of Tallinn. There were two roads, one leaving Tallinn to Tartu in the southeast, and another leaving to Narva in the east. In addition, each of these roads had a railroad running close by. With the port located in the north, airfield in the south and rail and road hubs in the center, Tallinn was an ideal solution for German problems of distribution to the front lines. (See **Picture 2/Figure 8**)



**Figure 8** 215

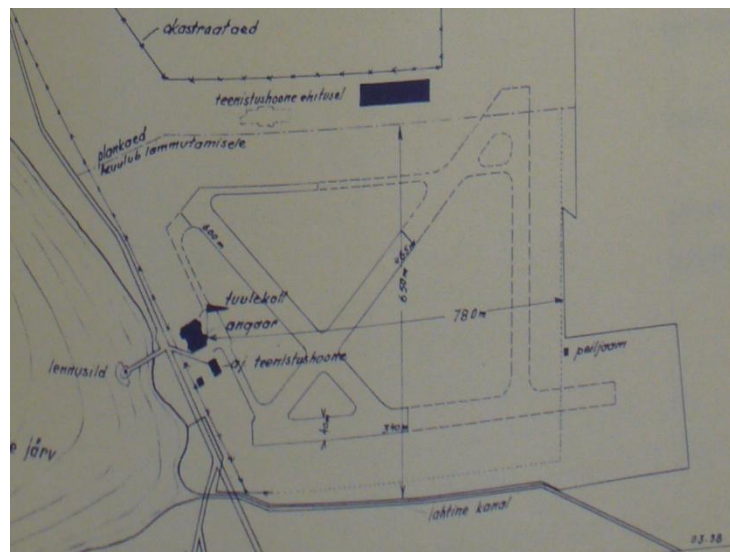
With total control of the ports, the Germans were able to increase their war material throughput to support combat operations. As has been discussed, it is also important to remember German war industries were dependent on Swedish iron ore being transited across the Baltic Sea. Securing additional ports in the Baltic region better allowed for the safe passage of this vital resource.

<sup>214</sup> Estonian National Archives, ERA 526-1-181.

<sup>215</sup> Estonian National Archives, ERA 495-11-27.

## 2.10 AIRFIELDS:

As aviation was still a rather new phenomenon at the start of the Second World War, Baltic air-fields were substandard for the use of “modern” air forces. Much like the roads of the region, air-fields were mostly made of dirt and susceptible to the effects of weather until improved. Airfields could be found in many of the larger cities and were most likely to be improved using a concrete surface. Recent document from the Estonian National Archives demonstrate before the war the Estonians were developing their throughput capacity at the airfield in Tallinn.<sup>216</sup> As demonstrated by Figure 5, this airfield was more than sufficient at the beginning of the war, and the location of the airfield in relation to the rest of the city made it ideal for growth.



**Figure 9**

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All air fields, regardless of construction, suffered from the same problem of throughput generation and sustainment like the other types of transportation. Sufficient ground personnel

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<sup>216</sup> Figure 5 comes from the Estonian National Archives, ERA 495-11-27. This folder of documents considers the throughput possibilities of the Tallinn airfield against other throughput location around the city. This document was made in 1938.

were required to offload planes and cross level equipment to trucks once on the ground. This also required sufficient space to store items waiting to be transported forward.

Aircraft of the period were limited in range, necessitating forces to have air fields closer to the front. However, the closer to the front aircraft were, the more susceptible they are to interdiction and destruction from the air. Being closer to the front meant shorter turn-around times for aircraft to refuel and rearm getting them back into action quicker. Another advantage of having aircraft closer to the front from a planning perspective was planners could better coordinate air actions with their ground. This allowed for better synchronized actions against the enemy. Information presented at these meetings allowed air planners to explain to ground commanders the capabilities and limitations, not only of the aircraft and the facilities, but also the rates and amounts of time needed for aircraft to support ground actions. A disadvantage of airfields being close to the front was the need for extra security to prevent an enemy breakthrough along with additional anti aircraft assets to protect the air field.

In the case of fighting around Leningrad and Narva, the Germans could generate sorties from Tartu in the south and Tallinn in the west. The Soviets had many more options closer to the front in the vastness of Russia. The location of German fields required aircraft to operate at their maximum range to support ground actions. The danger of operating in this fashion was aircraft had a very narrow window to support ground actions before needing to refuel, reducing their flexibility and responsiveness. During the course of the war, communications improved between the ground and air, but it was still far from optimal. The totality of all of these planning considerations allowed planners to define and understand the physical nature of the operating environment and construct operational plans which were capable of joining strategic end states to

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<sup>217</sup> Ibid.



the tactical means available. It is now prudent to explore the combatant's doctrine and their development for actions in the Second World War.

## **2.11 DOCTRINAL CONCEPTS OF CONVENTIONAL FORCE EMPLOYMENT AND THE INFLUENCE OF STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP:**

### **THE GERMAN VIEW OF DEVELOPED DOCTRINE:**

The doctrinal concepts of German ground force employment used in the Second World War were largely based on German experiences from the First World War and interwar years.<sup>218</sup> The two most important concepts developed from the First World War were defense in depth and stormtroop tactics.<sup>219</sup> Having reached the zenith of their wartime development in 1918, the key lessons the Germans learned from their experiences in the trenches were to tactically do more with less manpower. They needed to better economize their forces and use weaponry, such as the machine gun to its fullest capability. The final result desired for German strategy was to return to the traditional German view of war provided by Fredrick the Great. Wars were again to be “short and lively.”<sup>220</sup> The doctrine, equipment and subsequent employment of German ground, naval and air forces reflect this thought in the development of German strategy. Their strategy was faulty and no amount of tactical prowess could help Germany fight a war of attrition against the Soviet Union.

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<sup>218</sup> Wilhelm Ritter von Leeb, the first commander of Army Group North during the interwar years wrote a book simply called *Defense*. Like Erfurth, Leeb was a disciple of Schlieffen’s *Cannae* and widely referred to examples provided in it. The essence of the discussion in Leeb’s work revolved around the ideas of a strategy of annihilation, as proposed by Schlieffen, vice a strategy of attrition. Erfurth notes “Schlieffen clearly recognized that especially in the period of mass-armies, strategy of annihilation is only possible by continuous movement, See: Waldemar Erfurth, *Surprise* Trans. Stefan T. Possony and Daniel Vilfroy (Harrisburg, PA: Military Service Publishing Company, 1943) 156. Based on experiences of the First World War, the Germans wanted to avoid another war of position in favor of a war of movement. German actions in Army Group North in November and December 1941 were directly influenced by these works. Leeb wrote speaking of the French experience in the First World War, “There are aims for which the French High Command is compelled to engage its very last man. But while doing so, it has to bleed France’s troops, because there can be no retreat.” See: Wilhelm Ritter von Leeb, *Defense* trans. Stefan T. Possony and Daniel Vilfroy (Harrisburg, PA: Military Service Publishing Company, 1943).

<sup>219</sup> For more information on stormtroop tactics, see: Bruce I. Gudmundsson, *Stormtroop Tactics, Innovation in the German Army, 1914-1918* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1989).

Trading space for time and inflicting the maximum amount of casualties while delaying and defending against the enemy did indeed help reduce friendly casualties. The Germans were able to capitalize on the strength of the tactical defense allowing the enemy to reach his culminating point. Finding the enemy culminating point was facilitated by a reorganization of the battlefield. The model below forms the basis for how the Germans would conduct a tactical defense in 1944.

#### The Security Area:

The Advanced Positions (1-5 Kms). Provides early warning, deceives the enemy as to the location of friendly main positions and forces the enemy to deploy his formations early. Friendly units are not to be decisively engaged. Forward elements use supporting arms (Arty/Air) and smoke to break contact before the position is untenable. Cavalry moves to the Rear Area to rearm and to reconstitute as a mobile reserve. Infantry rejoins parent units in the Outpost Positions and continues fighting.

The Outpost Post Positions (5-10 Kms). Provides the main defenses more time to finish being built and further deceives the enemy as to the location of the main defenses (One infantry regiment, one cavalry battalion and two artillery battalions in support).

The Main Battle Area (MBA): Begins at the rear positions of the Outpost Positions, continues through the Main Line of Resistance and ends at the beginning of the Rear Positions (10-20 Kms). The MBA is organized and dispersed in depth to increase friendly fire on enemy targets while reducing the attacker's ability to mass fire (Two infantry battalions in the line and six artillery battalions in support).

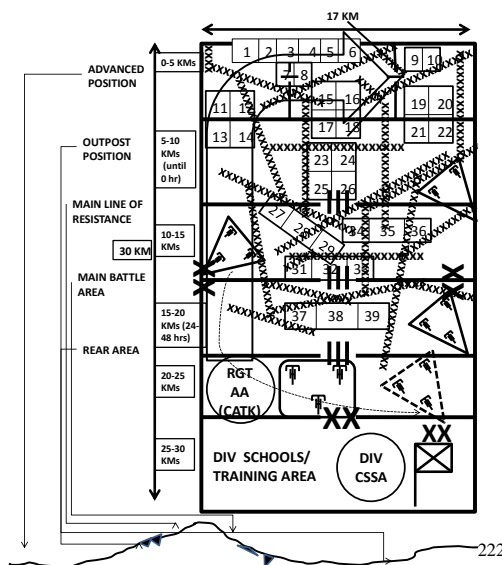
The Rear Area: Begins at the end of the MBA and ends at the Division's rear boundary (20-30 Kms). The Rear Area houses the Division Headquarters, the counterattack (CATK) force, Division Schools, training/rehearsal areas and logistic support nodes (One infantry regiment is the CATK force and three 155Arty battalions in support).<sup>221</sup>

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<sup>220</sup> Robert M. Citino, *The German Way of War, From the Thirty Years War to the Third Reich* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 2005), 102.

<sup>221</sup> Example organization taken from the Hartness Report, dated November 25, 1936, National Archives, MID File 2277, B-44. Captain Hartness learned this organization of the defense during his attendance. Also see: Timothy T. Lupfer, *The Dynamics of Doctrine. The Changes in German Tactical Doctrine During The First World War* (Leavenworth, KS: Command and General Staff School, July, 1981) for doctrinal tactical defensive changes from the experience from the First World War or see: Timothy A. Wray, *Standing Fast: German Defensive Doctrine on the Eastern Front During the Second World War*, (Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute, 1983) for German tactical defensive changes from the Second World War.

Notes:  
 1. Infantry units placed by subordinate unit leaders in zone.  
 2. Organization taken from the Hartness Report, dated 25 November 1936, National Archives, MID File 2277, B-44.



**Figure 10**

The execution of the defense would generally flow as follows:

Concept of Execution:

Defensive operations of the Division (Rein) are executed in three phases:

- a.) Counter-reconnaissance and security operations from the Advanced Position and Outpost Position (preparation) (48-24 hrs then 24-0 hrs): Units destroy the enemy reconnaissance effort and Advanced Guard in zone before breaking contact.
- b.) Executing the defense in the Main Battle Area (shaping) (0-24 hrs): Relies heavily on organic indirect and artillery fire support assets. Units fix or destroy enemy Main Body in zone.
- c.) Operational counter-attack from the rear area (decisive) (24hrs-comp): Defense destroys enemy in the MBA, CATK force facilitates follow-on operational motorized CATK by tactical penetration.

The main effort of the defense in depth was the counter attack.<sup>223</sup> Once the enemy had reached their culminating point, fresh stormtroops could be used to create a tactical penetration of the weakened enemy defenses or cut the enemies lines of retreat. Creating a tactical penetration allowed for an operational breakthrough by follow on forces.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid.

<sup>223</sup> The counter-attack, as described by Leeb in reflection of his First World War experiences was, “Defensive was successful particularly on account of a suitable training in peace-time, which taught leaders and men alike to resort to counter-blows and counter-attacks whenever possible according to the local situation. A good part of the success in this Aisne battle should be ascribed to this offensive element in the defensive against a superior

Little exists on the doctrinal employment of German maritime power from the Second World War. Throughout most of the Second World War, the German navy's focus of effort was the strategic use of the U-Boat in the North Atlantic against allied shipping.<sup>224</sup> The German navy in the Baltic Sea performed two main purposes: 1) to offensively mine Soviet ports and 2) interdict Soviet resupply efforts and Soviet surface and subsurface threats. Defensively, the German navy concentrated its patrolling effort on the security of ports and merchant vessels operating along the German strategic lines of communication (SLOCs).<sup>225</sup> These forces suffered considerably at the hands of the Soviet navy in the Gulf of Finland.<sup>226</sup> During the fighting on the Leningrad, Narva and follow on fronts, Army Group North relied heavily on the German navy for resupply and evacuation efforts.<sup>227</sup>

The German air force at the beginning of the Second World War was largely considered the finest air force of its day.<sup>228</sup> With the limited range of its platforms, it was a tactical air force whose primary mission was to support the German army. This function it performed well throughout the war, but this was not enough to win. As a result of faulty strategic employment, it was tasked with winning the Battle of Britain in conjunction with the German navy. Chiefly as a result of unsynchronized actions and British radar, it was decimated beyond repair before the invasion of Russia. Continuing to suffer tremendous losses throughout the Russian campaign, by function of organization and as a result of enemy action, it quickly lost air superiority to the

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offensive.” See Wilhelm Ritter von Leeb, *Defense* trans. Stefan T. Possony and Daniel Vilfroy (Harrisburg, PA: Military Service Publishing Company, 1943), 66.

<sup>224</sup> Karl Doenitz, *Memoirs, Ten Years and Twenty Days* trans. R. H. Stevens (New York, NY: The World Publishing Company, 1959).

<sup>225</sup> C. W. Koburger Jr., *Naval Warfare in the Baltic, 1939-1945 War in the Narrow Sea* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1994), 67-68. This is one of the few works which exist on the usage of German Naval power in the Baltic Sea. This well written work which provides the reader with an excellent understanding of German Naval employment in relation to their mission.

<sup>226</sup> *Ibid*, 82.

<sup>227</sup> C. W. Koburger Jr., *Naval Warfare in the Baltic, 1939-1945 War in the Narrow Sea* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1994).

larger and massed Soviet VVS.<sup>229</sup> As Soviet Armies surrounded German ground forces, for the first time in history, the idea of aerial resupply was tried in 1942.<sup>230</sup>

In the end, all German strategic efforts were crippled by indecision or poorly made decisions on the part of Adolf Hitler. Hitler's strategic policy of not giving ground once taken by German forces was in total contravention to German employment doctrines.<sup>231</sup> By refusing field commanders requests to allow withdrawal, cost the German Army men and material it could not replace. As a result of strategic failure, excellent tactical actions on the part of many could not compensate for the actions of one. As German tactical doctrine called for centralized command and decentralized execution, heavy losses made it impossible to train men capable of executing *auftragstaktik* in concert with the increased need caused by casualties.<sup>232</sup> Hitler's insistence of holding every last inch of ground in the defense eliminated individual initiative for the lowest tactical level, creating centralized execution; while Hitler's interference in tactical matters was creating an environment of centralized command. This was the total opposite of the German leaders education.

## **2.12 THE SOVIET VIEW OF DOCTRINAL DEVELOPMENT:**

Like German officers of the post First World War period, officers of the Red Army debated the ideas along with the merits of a strategy of annihilation verse one of attrition. Each

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<sup>228</sup> See: Richard R. Muller, *The German Air War in Russia* (Baltimore, MD: The Nautical & Aviation Publishing Company of America, 1992) for details of German air power at the beginning of the Second World War.

<sup>229</sup> Earl F. Ziemke, *Moscow to Stalingrad: Decision in the East* (Washington D.C.: Department of the Army 1987), 479. In November of 1942 alone the Germans transferred "400 combat aircraft from the Eastern Front to North Africa." This impressive work is a model by which many subsequent works on the Eastern Front was written. In the course of researching this work, the author made the honor of examining all of the work related to this book in the holding of the National Archives at College Park, Maryland.

<sup>230</sup> Ibid, 154. Demyansk was the first "pocket" the Germans attempted to supply by air. Based on the very limited success of supplying the 95,000 men in the pocket with 80-90 tons of the 200 tons needed every day to operate, a similar attempt would be made at Stalingrad with terrible results.

<sup>231</sup> Timothy T. Lupfer, *The Dynamics of Doctrine. The Changes in German Tactical Doctrine During The First World War* (Leavenworth, KS: Command and General Staff School, July, 1981).

school of thought was fueled by the experiences of officers from the Russo-Japanese War, First World War and Russian Civil War of 1918-1920. Most were influenced by the writings of Lenin. The debate came to a head in 1926 at the Military Academy of the Main Staff of the RKKA.<sup>232</sup> Championing the school of annihilation was Mikhail Nikolaevich Tukhachevsky. A deep and critical thinker, Tukhachevsky authored several works of military thought during the interwar period supporting the strategy of annihilation or destruction.<sup>234</sup> An equally deep and critical thinker was the chief proponent of the school of attrition, Alexandr Andreevich Svechin. The author of *Strategy*, Svechin appears to have been the first to use the phrase “operation art,” found in a series of lectures from 1923-24 at the Military Academy of the RKKA.<sup>235</sup>

The 1926 debate ended in favor of Tukhachevsky and the annihilation school, but not without input of Svechin’s thoughts influencing future doctrine.<sup>236</sup> As described by Kipp, Svechin’s “own approach to military art and theory could be described in the same fashion in which he characterized the German military historian Hans Delbrück: a combination of Hegelian dialect with historical materialism.”<sup>237</sup> Also of interest was Svechin’s approach to the use of

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<sup>232</sup> Mission type orders or mission command. The relevant book of German doctrine incorporating this concept for the Second World War was the *Truppenführung* of 1933.

<sup>233</sup> Jacob Kipp, *The Operational Art, Development in the Theories of War* Ed. B. J. C. Mc Kercher and Michael A. Hennessy (Westport, Ct.: Praeger 1996), 69.

<sup>234</sup> For more on Tukhachevsky’s writings, see: Тухачевский М.Н., Избранные произведения, (М. N.Tukhachevsky’s Selected Works, 1928-1937) Москва, Воениздат, Т.2 (1928-1937 гг.), (Moscow, USSR: State Publishers, 1964).

<sup>235</sup> For *Strategy*, see: Aleksandr A. Svechin, *Strategy* (Minneapolis, Mn.: East View Publications 1992). as well as Jacob Kipp, *The Operational Art, Development in the Theories of War* Ed. B. J. C. Mc Kercher and Michael A. Hennessy (Westport, Ct.: Praeger 1996), 61.

<sup>236</sup> Demonstrating the differences in thought between Tukhachevsky and Svechin, "He (Tukhachevsky) specifically criticized those military theorists, especially Svechin, whom he accused of underestimating the transformations being brought about by the First Five-Year Plan and, therefore, assuming that the Red Army in future wars would have to rely upon a "low economic-technological base" and therefore, employ a strategy of "attrition" as suggested by Svechin. see: V. K. Triandafilov, *The Nature of the Operations of Modern Armies* (Essex, UK.: Frank Cass, 1994), XIX.

<sup>237</sup> Jacob Kipp, *The Operational Art, Development in the Theories of War* Ed. B. J. C. Mc Kercher and Michael A. Hennessy (Westport, Ct.: Praeger 1996), 62. The current student of the art and science of war should find this of great interest, as these are topics of current debate. The idea of Hegelian dialect is talked about by Brigadier General Shimon Naveh in the current concept of Systemic Operational Design (SOD) and others in Effect Based Operations (EBO). However, as pointed out by Milan N. Vego in *A Case against Systemic Operational*

history in the development of strategy. He stated: “Strategy reflects systematic reflection on military history. Failure to utilize historical insights could only lead to disasters. Isolation from the historical base is as dangerous for the strategist as it is for the politician.”<sup>238</sup>

Moving forward from the debate, Tukhachevsky sought to consummate his thoughts on strategy and tactics by updating existing Soviet military doctrine. The evolution of Soviet military doctrine begins with Field Service Regulations 1925 (PU-25), which could be best described as an attempt to get the Soviet Army to operate in a common way. These regulations were a fair attempt to make progress, but are viewed by historians as “highly tentative because the ideas presented were new and not well developed.”<sup>239</sup>

Next in the Soviet chain of development was Field Service Regulations 1929 (PU-29). The significance of this document, albeit very tactical in focus, was for the first time the Soviets articulated their thoughts on mechanized and motorized operations, a key component of their Deep Battle concept.<sup>240</sup> As the primary author of Field Service Regulations 1936 (PU-36), Tukhachevsky sought to encapsulate the Soviet High Command’s vision for modern war, describing the manner in which the Red Army would operate in the future.<sup>241</sup> The essence of Deep Battle was to use the weight of combined arms to attack an opponent in depth, seeking to use speed and tempo generated by mobile and mechanized forces to cut enemy lines of operation

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*Design*, “However, despite the claims of its advocates, SOD does not contain, except for some terms, any of these ideas. The leading theorist of SOD falsely reinterpreted the early Soviet writings on operational art. Supposedly, operational art in contrast to strategy and tactics is systemic in nature. This is not the case. In the process, Bertalanffy’s ideas were intentionally or accidentally distorted or misinterpreted. A more serious problem is that the Soviet theory of operational art as defined by SOD supporters bore almost no resemblance to what the Soviet theorists actually wrote or implied in their numerous published works. The Soviets were given undeserved credit for essentially creating the modern theory of operational warfare.” See Milan N. Vego in *A Case Against Systemic Operational Design*, Joint Forces Quarterly, April 2009.

<sup>238</sup> Ibid, 66.

<sup>239</sup> Richard Simpkin, *Deep Battle, The Brainchild of Marshal Tukhachevsky* (London, UK: Brassey’s Defence Publishers, 1987), 49.

<sup>240</sup> David M. Glantz, *Soviet Military Operational Art: In Pursuit of Deed Battle* (London, UK: Frank Cass and Co, 1991), 24.

and communication. This was the embodiment of Tukhachevsky's vision for a strategy of annihilation.

Neither Tukhachevsky nor Svechin would survive Stalin's purges of the 1930s, but their ideas would in an evolved form. Their ideas were first tested against the Finns in 1939, ending with terrible losses and serious questions. Stalin blamed the losses in Finland on "traitors" such as Tukhachevsky and Svechin without taking the time to evaluate whether Soviet forces were trained and equipped to execute the doctrine as it was written. War serves as the true test of a written doctrine, calling for periodic evaluation. Most doctrine written and practiced during time of peace is found wanting when tested against the realities of war. Regardless, the thoughts found in PU-36 formed the corner stone doctrine Soviet forces took into the conflict with Germany in 1941. As the war evolved, so too did Soviet thought with regard to doctrine. As explained by Earl Ziemke in *Moscow to Stalingrad, Decision in the East*: "In the summer of 1943, the Soviet forces abandoned the blitzkrieg tactics they had employed in the previous winter campaign and took up the "cleaving blow," a less sophisticated and inherently more ponderous mode of conducting operations, but one vastly more reliable in the hands of Soviet commanders and troops."<sup>242</sup> The cleaving blow was still an operational form of attacking in depth, seeking to cut off large formations of Germans and destroy them in pockets.

To complement this strategy, the Soviet navy and air force were subordinate in their efforts to the Red Army. To support breakout operations from the Leningrad pocket in January 1944, the Red Fleet was "organized into three battle groups: one built around the old battleship Marat, including two destroyers and a gun boat; another centered on the old battleship October

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<sup>241</sup> Richard Simpkin, *Deep Battle, The Brainchild of Marshal Tukhachevsky* (London, UK: Brassey's Defence Publishers, 1987), 164-174.

<sup>242</sup> Earl F. Ziemke and Magna E. Bauer, *Moscow to Stalingrad, Decision in the East* (Washington DC: United States Army Center for Military History, 1987), 512.



Revolution with three cruisers and two destroyers and a third smaller group including four destroyers and three gun boats.”<sup>243</sup> The purpose of the ships was to provide naval gun fire support to forces breaking out of the Oranienbaum pocket. The Soviets also employed submarines to great effect in the Baltic Sea, mining German ports and sinking unprotected German supply ships.<sup>244</sup> In addition to ships, the Red Fleet had 313 aircraft to support maritime interdiction operations of German merchant shipping or support the ground scheme of maneuver.<sup>245</sup>

The key difference between the German and Soviet approaches to the employment of airpower is found in the weight of effort the Soviets applied in direct support of the ground.<sup>246</sup> Massing their aircraft, the Soviets would first gain, then maintain air superiority and begin attacking ground targets with massed aircraft to achieve effects. For the breakout of the Leningrad pocket, the 13<sup>th</sup> Air Army in support of the operation consisted of the latest bombers, (Tu-2s, Il-4s, Pe-2s), updated versions of the IL – 2 Shturmovik, and Yak – 9 and La – 5 fighters.<sup>247</sup> Like the German employment of close air support, the Soviets had difficulty coordinating the effects of their fires with actions on the ground, often inflicting casualties on their own forces.

Doctrinally, Soviet forces were as prepared for war as the Germans, the difference was the Germans practiced their doctrine of war as they trained to execute it before the war during times of peace. The Soviets were no less responsive in modifying their doctrine than other armies of the period; in fact, they were more responsive in the field at the lower levels. The trouble was

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<sup>243</sup> C. W. Koburger Jr., *Naval Warfare in the Baltic, 1939-1945 War in the Narrow Sea* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1994), 66.

<sup>244</sup> *Ibid*, 82-83.

<sup>245</sup> *Ibid*, 66.

<sup>246</sup> Von Hardesty, *Red Phoenix: The Rise of Soviet Air Power 1941 – 1945* (Washington DC: Smithsonian Institution Press. 1982),184, 248.

<sup>247</sup> *Ibid*, 184, 284.

Stalin and the STAVKA. With the Soviet command structure as centralized as it was, subordinate commanders were afraid to act without permission from higher headquarters, thus Stalin and the STAVKA made many decisions affecting operations without full knowledge of the situation.

### **2.13 THE SOVIET WAR AIMS AND STRATEGY 1944:**

As strategy is informed by politics, specifically foreign policy, it is prudent to examine Soviet foreign policy at the outset of the Second World War to establish a frame of reference for what changed over the course of the war. As the Soviet Union was invaded, their initial policy was largely reactionary. As stated in the first volume of *Soviet Foreign Policy, 1917-1945*, “The main task of Soviet foreign policy was to ensure the optimal international conditions for organizing resistance to the enemy, the future liberation of enemy occupied territory and total defeat of the Nazi aggressors.”<sup>248</sup> As the external arm of diplomacy, foreign policy further wanted, “to ensure that the bourgeois states already fighting Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy became as reliable as possible allies of the USSR.”<sup>249</sup> In essence, Soviet foreign policy could be reduced to three items in 1941. They were:

- 1) The opening of a second front to relieve the Soviet forces fighting on the Eastern Front.<sup>250</sup>
- 2) To prevent attacks by states that were maintaining neutrality in Germany’s war against the USSR, such as Japan, Turkey and Iran.
- 3) To render all possible assistance to the peoples of Europe languishing under the yoke of Nazism in order to bring about their liberation and restore their sovereign rights.<sup>251</sup>

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<sup>248</sup> I. N. Zemskov, *Soviet Foreign Policy Volume I, 1917-1945* (Moscow, USSR: Progress Publishers, 1981), 415.

<sup>249</sup> Ibid.

<sup>250</sup> Recently, Williamson Murray expressed in foot note 57 of *The Shaping of Grand Strategy* an interesting thought on why the Allies did not give the Soviets a second front sooner. “The lack of a second front was entirely the result of the actions of the Soviet Union, which had stood by in the spring of 1940 and watched the Western Front disappear. And then Molotov had passed along to the German ambassador his government’s heartfelt congratulations for the Wehrmacht’s success on news of the French surrender.” See: Williamson Murray, *The Shaping of Grady Strategy* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 19. This author would submit, while the Allies in the West may have not wanted to help the Soviets, they lacked the forces needed to assist even if they could have in 1940.

With these concepts in mind, Joseph Stalin articulated the war aims for the Soviet Union in a declaration delivered on July 3, 1941. Stalin stated, “To bring about the speediest and most decisive defeat of the aggressor and assemble devoted (Soviet) strength and resources for the full accomplishment of the task.”<sup>252</sup> Included in this task was the subordinate thought of post war organization after the extermination of Fascism. To work with the Western Allies, Stalin saw it as a necessity to build an Anti-Hitler Coalition, if he was going to gain relief from the German onslaught with the use of a “second front.”<sup>253</sup> As the war progressed through the difficult years of 1942 and 1943 and after repeated requests to the Western Allies to open the second front against Germany, Stalin had finally broken the German will to attack and the Soviet Union regained the initiative for offensive operations. By late 1943 the Soviets felt confident in their ability to survive without a second front; they now saw an opportunity to break Germany once and for all while establishing themselves as the dominant power in Europe. It was clear to Stalin that he could only deal with the Germans or the Western Allies from a position of strength at the negotiation table. The first verbalization of Stalin’s post war desires to the Western Allies was seen at the Tehran Conference in late November, 1943.<sup>254</sup>

As Soviet sources portray, the war goals of the Soviet Union in 1943/44 were largely unchanged from what Stalin had said in 1941. In a General Order dated May 1, 1944 Stalin said the following with regards to the political and military goals of the Soviet Union, the goals were, “to clear the Soviet land from Fascists and restore state borders of the Soviet Union in all

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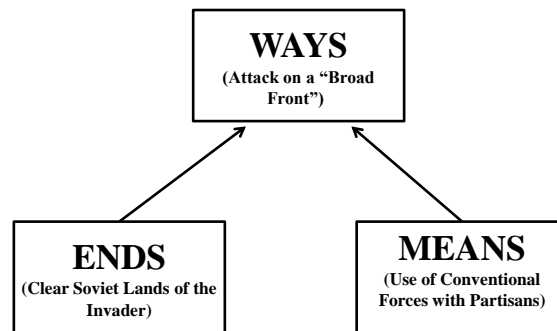
<sup>251</sup>I. N. Zemskov, *Soviet Foreign Policy Volume I, 1917-1945* (Moscow, USSR: Progress Publishers, 1981), 415.

<sup>252</sup>Ibid.

<sup>253</sup>Ibid.

<sup>254</sup> As known as the “Eureka Conference,” the Tehran Conference of November 28, 1943 demonstrates the Western Allies trying to “sell” Stalin on the timing of the second front, while Stalin is telling the Western Allies the harsh reality of Soviet force distribution on the Eastern Front along with the Soviet plans to crush the Germans. See Pg 515-24 of the Tehran Conference transcript for details on the Second Front.

directions from the Black to the Barents Sea, to chase the wounded beast back into his lair and finish him off, and to free our brother poles, Czechs and other allies in Eastern Europe.”<sup>255</sup>



**Figure 11**

Stalin’s words had shaped the Soviet campaign plan for 1943/44 and how the war was to be brought to an end. Per the Soviet Official History of the Second World War, the campaign plan would place the massive weight of the Soviet offensive against German forces on a “broad front.” Below was how the Soviet broad front was to look;

Soviet leadership intended to start the offensive with Leningrad and Karelia front operations on Karelia neck and in South Karelia. Crushing the enemy in this area would inevitably force the enemy to withdraw part of forces from the central part of the Soviet-German front as well as force Hitler’s partner Finland to leave combat. Leningrad and Karelia front operations should have been immediately followed by the crushing blow of four fronts in Belarus. By the time Hitler’s government would have concluded that main efforts of the Soviet army was concentrated exactly in this place and would have moved his reserves from the south. At this time, it was planned to commence decisive attack of the 1<sup>st</sup> Ukraine front forces in the direction of Lvov. Meanwhile, it was planned to hold forces of the army group “North”, prevent them from helping their neighboring army group “Center” from right flank. After defeat of the enemy Soviet government would have been able to start active offensive operations in Balkans, Baltic countries and far north.<sup>256</sup>

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<sup>255</sup> J. V. Stalin, *Success in the Great Patriotic War* (Moscow, USSR: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1953), 145-6.

Judged by this statement, the offensive operation planned for the break out of Leningrad would be a supporting effort attack in order to enable the successful destruction of German Army Group Center. In doing so, the Soviets would accomplish all of their goals, destruction of the enemy, as well as the investment of the Baltic States or to the Soviet mind, the reestablishment of the Soviet prewar borders. To solve the problem of Leningrad and carry out the breakout as planned, the Soviets needed leaders who understood the challenges of the Leningrad front. A key source of Soviet tactical continuity to the Leningrad problem from the initial days of operations was General of the Army I. I. Fediuninsky. In November/December 1941, Fediuninsky was the commander of the Soviet 54th Army in the vicinity of the city of Volkhov, just to the east of Shlissel'burg [See Map 1]. Fediuninsky quickly recognized many tactical level issues and actively sought operational level methods of coping with the many dilemmas. General Fediuninsky would record his observation and reflect on the actions of late 1941 throughout 1942 while the eyes of the world began to focus on a small city on the banks of the Volga River named Stalingrad.<sup>257</sup> The Germans were fighting the series of Soviet “Verduns,” first in Stalingrad in 1942/43, then at Kursk in 1943, just as the Soviets wanted.

No where in the East was this war of attrition more obvious than the Leningrad Front. In *P-035, The Retrograde Defensive of Army Group North During 1944*, German Generalleutnant Oldwig von Natzner referred to these battles as, “the large-scale battles of attrition, fought on the pattern of the “Todesmuehle von Verdun” [Death mill of Verdun,] in World War I, came to an end only after the unusually high losses had made continuations of the battle impossible, even

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<sup>256</sup> История второй мировой войны 1939-1945, (History of the Second World War 1939-1945, Volume IX.)(Moscow, USSR: State Publishing, 1978), 20.

<sup>257</sup> See: I. I. Fediuninsky, Поднятые Потрвоге, *Prodnepre Preneyvocha (Raised by an Alarm)* (Moscow, USSR: Military Publishing House, Ministry of Defense of the USSR, 1964).

according to Russian standards, or if the break-through had been successful.”<sup>258</sup> In the war of numbers, which both side knew too well from their past experiences, the Germans couldn’t hope to trade soldiers with the Soviet Union. How did this tactical level reality play into the larger Soviet Strategy?

As most matters of Soviet strategy were decided by Stalin, it is necessary to examine what Stalin understood about Leningrad and how these thoughts helped form decisions toward a strategy to free the city and fulfill his desires for the post war period. As a strategic leader, Stalin had a greater appreciation for the operating environment of Leningrad than most scholars give him credit for. Examining the fourth volume of *Stalin’s Collected Works*, Stalin explains the area of then Petrograd from his experiences during the Russian Civil War. In an interview with the Pravda News Paper printed July 8, 1919, Stalin concisely explains Petrograd, in terms of avenues of approach and how to capture the city. It matters little if Stalin arrived at these conclusions himself or a military professional assisted him to his understanding. Stalin had 22 year between 1919 and 1941 to reflect on these military lessons, while he continued to learn the broader pieces of economic and diplomatic principle comprising strategic thought. The following depiction provided to a writer from the Pravda, while a tactical look at the terrain surrounding Petrograd, certainly provided significant background to Stalin’s understanding of the military problems he faced again in Leningrad, 1941. Stalin stated:

The approaches to Petrograd are those points, proceeding from which the enemy, if he is successful, may surround Petrograd, cut it off from Russia and finally take it. These points are: a) the Petrozavodsk sector, with Zvanka as the line of advance; objective- to envelop Petrograd from the East; b) the olonets sector, with Lodeinove Polve as the line of advance; objective- to turn the flank of our Petrozavodsk forces; c) the Karelian sector, with Petrograd as the direct line of advance from the North; d) the Narva sector, with Gatchina and Krasnoye Selo as the line of advance; objective to capture Petrograd from the Southwest, or, at least, to capture Gatchina-Tosno line and envelop Petrograd from

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<sup>258</sup> Department of the Army, *MS# P-035 Retrograde of Army Group North During 1944*. (Carlisle, Army War College: Foreign Military Studies Department 1950), 10.

the South; e) the Pskov sector, with Dno-Bologove as the line of advance; objective- to cut off Petrograd off from Moscow; and lastly, f) the Gulf of Finland and Lake Ladoga, which offer the enemy the possibility of landing forces west and east of Petrograd.<sup>259</sup>

Understanding lines of operation run both ways, meaning towards friendly lines and the enemy, the Soviets planned the attack to liberate the City of Lenin. The next chapter examines the German campaign plan (Operation BLAU) that was developed to stop the Soviets attacking down the access labeled “d)” or the “Narva sector” by Stalin.<sup>260</sup>

## **2.14 CONCLUSION:**

Joining ends to the means to find the ways is the operational art, but finding the ends first and determining if they are a fitting reason for war in the first place is of the utmost importance. War and planning for war are art and science, as both directly relate to obtaining objectives held by the enemy in time and space. The ultimate questions all planners ask those who make decisions are first, what is important to you and why, followed by the second question, what effort and resources are you willing to lose to accomplish the end state. Hitler’s planners did this. Strategically, the answer was England at the expense of the Soviet Union, along with anything and everything being expended to achieve victory. Using the indirect approach of attacking the Soviet Union to defeat Great Britain sounded excellent in theory, but in practice, more unavailable assets and manpower were expended which, when lost over time could not be replaced. Germany simply could not afford a two front war. When a supporting effort costs more in term of resources and manpower than the main effort, as was the case with the Soviet Union, England is no longer the main effort. Bringing plans from the conception phase of planning to the functional phase and having the situational awareness of problems with a plan are not

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<sup>259</sup>J. V. Stalin, *Stalin’s Collected Works, Volume IV* (Moscow, USSR: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1953), 275.

<sup>260</sup> Army Group North’s “Fall BLAU,” or Operation BLUE is contained in NARA T-311, Roll 76, First Frame 7099655 and is the subject of the next chapter.

enough. Solutions must be sought and found in order to continue planning efforts into detailed planning. Planning does not take place in a vacuum; there must be unity of efforts between those who support and those who are supported. The planner is not the commander; he can only help the commander to a better informed decision. Without proper staff work the possibility of a commander making an informed decision are greatly reduced. The character of the planner must be strong to voice an opinion of reason or truth when the commander is not seeing the problem holistically, but rather emotionally as was the case with Hitler. In the case of the invasion of the Soviet Union it was not a flawed plan, poor tactical leadership or any other factor which doomed a generation in the Soviet Union; it was the officer's responsible for planning and executing that lacked the character to stand up and speak their minds, as German general staff officers were trained to do.<sup>261</sup> While the problem of character is largely an intangible quality resident in the art of war, the tangible aspects of terrain and weather dominate the science of war.

The following understatement comes from *Effects of Climate on Combat in European Russia*: "That victory remained beyond reach was not due to climate alone, but in great measure to the fact that the German war potential was not equal to supporting a global war. The Wehrmacht was weakened by climatic conditions, and destroyed by the overpowering might of enemy armies."<sup>262</sup> While this statement captures a valid conclusion for the purpose for which it was written, it fails to consider the totality and gravity of the situation from the strategic, operational and tactical levels in time and space. Weather alone will only demoralize an army, making the conduct of

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<sup>261</sup> As Wegner stated in his work, ideology played a significant piece in not only personalities, but in the conduct of the war. "As this and other examples show, the ideological view of warfare was by no means an alien idea forced upon the military 'professionals' by Hitler and fanatics of his inner circle; rather it was the natural consequence of a specific image of the enemy help by the German military elite responsible for operations in the East. In other word, the planning and execution of the German campaigns were strongly influenced by ideological factors from the beginning, a fact which has received insufficient attention, even in more recent studies by British and American historians."See: Bernd Wegner, "The Road to Defeat: The German Campaigns in Russia 1941-43," *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 13:1, 105-127.



operations difficult due to a lack of light or precipitation. Adverse weather in conjunction with poor terrain creates a series of different issues for planners whether conducting offensive or defensive operations.

It is clear war relies on art and science equally. While the employment of troops in battle is an art, it is the sciences of the weather and the terrain which have the greatest influence on operations. Operational level planners must consider the terrain and the weather in terms of climatic conditions along with avenues of approach to determine throughput capacity. Their plans must take into consideration not only the time and space they are currently occupying, but also that same time and space should they be forced to remain there longer than desired. The Narva Isthmus along with the areas of Russia which include the Luga, Plussa and Narva Rivers are some of the most difficult pieces of terrain in the world for a well trained army to negotiate. Planners conducting offensive or defensive operations must take into consideration not only the conditions while they are planning, but also the conditions during execution and consolidation on the objective in the future. Operational planners must thoroughly understand the nodes and modes of communication available to them to conduct and sustain operations. Through the use of a physical network analysis, planners are better able to examine the nodes and modes of communication against the weather of the operating environment in regards to the time and space available for operations.

Time and space are the chief concerns of force employment from the strategic to the tactical level of war. Having a doctrine for the conduct of war based on theory helps to organize the force in time and space. Forces must not only use a pre-existing doctrine when the situation calls for it, but they must recognize emergence and communicate necessary changes laterally across the

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<sup>262</sup> Department of the Army, *Department of the Army Pamphlet No 20-291 Historical Study Effects of Climate on Combat in European Russia* (Washington D.C.: Department of the Army 1952) 79.

force. Combatants must also communicate these changes to higher for the force to learn and adapt to the enemy. Only a force that is open minded and willing to observe and communicate need changes can be qualified as a learning organization and stand a chance of winning at every level of way. Doctrine is not dogma, but it guides the **means** to the **ends** through the operational **ways**.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **Initial Victories Followed by Indecision and Loss: The German Operational Plan for Withdrawal in the North 1943/44 (Operation BLAU).**

The connection of a nation's strategy to the resources it places in the field to accomplish national goals are the domain of operational art. Understanding a nation's desired end state for war, along with a commensurate understanding of the means available to accomplish the desired ends facilitates an examination of the ways available to accomplish the ends through a nation's campaign plan. As war is a dynamic and fluid social phenomenon, rarely do nations begin and end a war with the same desired end state. While there is little doubt a nation waging war desires to win, the manner in which they pursue the end of final victory leading to the restoration of peace may evolve based on the opponent being fought. The articulation of end states and changes are found in the operational campaign plans armed forces write to link their tactical means to the desired strategic ends.

As explained by *MCDP-5, Planning*, conceptual planning is the repository of national strategy, while functional planning informs the operational level of war.<sup>263</sup> The campaign plan is thus the functional plan and the medium of communication which links the desired strategic end state found in the conceptual plan to the means available described in the detailed tactical plan. In essence, the campaign plan, as a functional plan, is the conduit and means of communication of a nation's vision for the art and science of war.

After the German summer offensive of 1943 had been stopped at Kursk, the Soviets took note of the fact that German Army Group South was on the verge of collapse. While the Western

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<sup>263</sup> Headquarters U.S. Marine Corps, United States Marine Corps, *Planning MCDP-5* (Washington, DC: U.S. Marine Corps, July 21, 1997), 35.

Allies were fighting a determined German defender in Sicily and examining ways to gain access to the Italian mainland, the Soviet Union had destroyed massive amounts of German war material and manpower which had become nearly impossible for Germany to replace.<sup>264</sup> While Stalingrad was devastating to the German war effort in the east, it was the loss at Kursk which truly signaled Germany's end. While the losses directly affected Army Group South in terms of manpower and material, it was the other Army Groups, in particular Army Group North, who were also placed in a precarious position. As Germany was engaged in a war on two fronts, manpower and material could not be readily withdrawn from one front and moved elsewhere quickly without Allied interference.<sup>265</sup> The ability to break contact with the enemy at the tactical level and mobilizing the combat power for another front was difficult and could not happen quickly under favorable conditions. Taking raw manpower from Germany or the occupied territories was not an expedient measure either, as many men were not yet trained for front line service. This left only one viable option, if Germany needed manpower and material quickly which was already formed, train and equipped to accomplish a similar mission, the other Army Groups who were less decisively engaged needed to lose capacity to the Army Group who was the main effort.<sup>266</sup> Such was the situation for Army Group North. Throughout the years of 1942 and 1943, Army Group North continued to feed the demand signal of the other Army Groups. Generalleutnant Oldwig von Natzmer characterized the problem of losing Army Group North's tested combat power as follows, "the loss of combat-experienced soldiers and the strong intermixture with foreign (Latvian, Estonian, Spanish, and so forth) troops and inexperienced

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<sup>264</sup> See: Historical Section, 5<sup>th</sup> US Army (Col John D. Forsythe), *Fifth Army History Part IV Cassino and Anzio* (Florence, Italy: L'Impronta Press, 1945).

<sup>265</sup> The effects of Allied tactical air interdiction are well know and as the war progressed, weapons became more accurate along with German losses higher. See: Thomas A. Hughes, *Overlord: General Pete Quesada and the Triumph of Tactical Air Power in World War II* (New York, NY: Free Press, 1995).

<sup>266</sup> See: Earl F. Ziemke, *Moscow to Stalingrad: Decision in the East* (Washington D.C.: Department of the Army 1987).

units represented a considerable reduction in fighting (combat) power.”<sup>267</sup> Natzmer continued to demonstrate Army Group North routinely lost combat power without replacement when he expounds on a report made by the Army Group North Commander from November 16, 1943:

1. I report the following:

a. Eighteenth Army has made available seven divisions, two battalions, artillery, Tiger tanks, mortars and assault guns since its victorious third defensive battle south of Lake Lodoga.

b. In accordance with the order dated November 13, 1943, the 5th Mountain Division will also be transferred without replacement.

c. By order of the Führer the army is to hold its present line. However, the army is no longer in a position to cope with the situation in case of strong enemy attacks.

2. Request permission for a personal report to the Führer to acquaint him with the situation of the army and consequences which the transfer of the 5th Mountain Division will have.<sup>268</sup>

On the surface, the statement of November 16, 1943 by the Army Group North commander demonstrates little more than a subordinate commander highlighting to higher headquarters the dangers of stripping more combat power away from his command. This was also a clearly a request for a commander-to-commander conference to change Hitler’s mind. In essence, this statement is the army group commander’s argument to gain reinforcements in order to fulfill the requirement levied by Hitler to hold the current position as ordered without saying the situation was lost. There is however more to this statement. As the documents contained in the holding of the National Archives in College Park, Maryland demonstrate, efforts for planning a time phased Army Group withdrawal had been underway since August of 1943. These

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<sup>267</sup> Department of the Army, MS# P-035 *Retrograde of Army Group North During 1944*. (Carlisle, Army War College: Foreign Military Studies Department 1950), 27. Generalleutnant Oldwig von Natzmer authored this section of P-035. Natzmer served as an operations officer at the division level in both Italy and Russia until 1943. In the latter part of 1944, he would be promoted to the rank of Generalmajor and assigned the duties of the chief of staff for Army Group Kurland.

<sup>268</sup> Ibid.

planning efforts were initially referred to as a “study,” to hide their true purpose from Hitler, later be known as “Fall BLAU” or Operation BLUE.<sup>269</sup>

When the planning effort of Army Group North in “Fall BLAU” is compared against the problem of Soviet combat power opposite it, the commander’s argument and need for urgency in a decision are made clearer.<sup>270</sup> Losing combat power without replacement is a serious dilemma for a commander who had already written a “study,” read plan, to accomplish the most difficult of military missions, an orderly withdrawal under intense enemy pressure.

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the operational environment through late 1943 on the Eastern Front and the impact felt on the Leningrad Front. Most importantly, this chapter will eliminate several long standing questions by introducing detailed understanding of what information comprised a German campaign plan, along with how it was written. How did events of the first two years on the Leningrad Front and the environment of the post Kursk offensive period contribute to Army Group North’s need to create study “Fall BLAU?” Was “Fall BLAU” originally called a “study” to disguise the appearance of a planning effort to withdraw forces against Hitler’s will or was it a hybrid plan/justification for the argument to conduct such a withdrawal? In light of the circumstances being presented to Army Group North, how did the

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<sup>269</sup> For the purposes of this work, Army Group North’s “Fall BLAU,” or Operation BLUE was first examined in the finished form contained in NARA T-311, Roll 76, First Frame 7099655. There was not likely a single author for this document, as it was a collective staff document many officers would have contributed to. The finished product for “Fall BLAU” was completed and signed on September 2, 1943. Subsequent to this document’s examination, the author further examined the draft copy of Army Group North’s “Fall BLAU” contained in NARA T-311, Roll 77, First Frame 7099700, Army Group North Ia Nr 072/43g Kdos. Chfs. This document was submitted for initial edit on August 8, 1943.

<sup>270</sup> Generalleutnant Oldwig von Natzmer explains Soviet combat power facing Army Group North in these terms, “The Russians faced the army group with a far greater number of units; at the beginning of 1943, seven Russian armies (\*) with about twenty-eight divisions and forty independent brigades were committed opposite the Sixteenth Army, while the Eighteenth Army had to face ten Russian armies (\*\*) with thirty-three divisions and twenty-six brigades. (\*) First and Third main –Attack (Shock) Armies, Second Guard Army and Eleventh, Twenty-seventh, Thirty-fourth and Fifty-third Armies. (\*\*) Second Main Attack (Shock) Army, Fourth, Eighth, twenty-Third, Forty- second, Fifty-second, Fifty-fourth, Fifty-fifth, Fifty- ninth and Sixty-seventh Armies.” See: Department of the Army, MS# P-035 *Retrograde of Army Group North During 1944*. (Carlisle, Army War College: Foreign Military Studies Department 1950), 6.

plan translate the tactical reality of being severely outnumbered into an operational plan which allowed for a near seamless trading of space for time in harsh terrain and under extreme difficulty? Did this withdrawal suit the manner in which German officers were educated and trained? Did the younger generation of officers have an education that complimented or violated the experiences they gained during the war? Was there a gap between senior officer understanding their visualizations of the battlespace based on their education, and did this gap make them unable to communicate to a younger generation of officers with a different experience of war along with a different style of education? Finally, in the examination of “Fall BLAU,” an effort will be made to understand how German staff work at the various levels of command functioned in light of a despondent strategy. How did organizations provide mission sets, guidance and intent to subordinate level commanders? Effort will be expended to show how “Fall BLAU” when looked at by the various levels of subordinate command, “nests” elements of guidance and intent into a cogent plan to be executed in the time and space of the Leningrad Front.

### **3.1 THE YEARS OF INVESTMENT ON THE LENINGRAD FRONT THROUGH LATE DECEMBER 1943:**

Based on initial planning for initiation of hostilities against the Soviet Union in June 1941, Army Group North was to act essentially as “supporting effort 1” to enable the “main effort” in Army Group Center to envelop and secure Moscow.<sup>271</sup> Due to astonishing early German tactical level successes, Hitler continued to issue guidance through strategic directives to shift the main effort to Army Group North to take Leningrad, while continuing to close the

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<sup>271</sup> As discussed in General Marcks’ report in Chapter 2, Moscow was the original German main effort and Leningrad was seen as a supporting effort that would enable the success of the attack on Moscow. See: NARA T-312, Roll 776, First Frame 8425689.

distance to encircle Moscow.<sup>272</sup> Forces were then reallocated from Army Group Center to facilitate the success of Army Group North. While Germany had not suffered a serious setback to date, the Russian winter was about to set in, and Germany's luck was about to run out. On November 29, 1941, Hitler returned to his Headquarters in East Prussia, the *Wolfsschanze*, to find, in the words of Earl F. Ziemke, "the rarest kind of news thus far in the war: German troops were retreating."<sup>273</sup> The first strategic setback for the German plan to invade the Soviet Union occurred at Rostov, in Army Group South's zone of attack.<sup>274</sup> By November 28, 1941, the Soviet South Front under the command of General Cherevichenko reported twenty-one Soviet divisions against III Panzer Corps at Rostov.<sup>275</sup> On the other hand, the German corps commander, General der Kavallerie Eberhard von Mackensen, had reported several weeks earlier, before the last advance began, that his two divisions, the "Leibstandarte" (1st SS Panzer Division) and the 13th Panzer, were short on everything and down to a half to two-thirds their normal strengths.<sup>276</sup>

The question that needs to be answered is why were the reports of General Mackensen disregarded and how did this foreshadow things to come in the future? It is not possible that the reports or the situation of a Corps Commander would go unread or unknown by his immediate higher headquarters for three weeks. Once the reports were read by a higher headquarters, the salient points relating to a significant degradation, or loss of combat power would have had to been communicated to the strategic level from the operational level for a senior decision maker's

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<sup>272</sup> See: H. R. Trevor-Roper, *Blitzkrieg to Defeat, Hitler's War Directives 1939-1945* (New York, NY: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964). for Hitler's strategic directives 34, 34a and 35.

<sup>273</sup> Earl F. Ziemke, *Moscow to Stalingrad: Decision in the East* (Washington D.C.: Department of the Army 1987), 55.

<sup>274</sup> *Ibid.* There is a difference in meaning between the use of the word "zone" vice "sector." Military formations on the offensive attack or clear in "zone," while they defend in "sector."

<sup>275</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>276</sup> *Ibid.*



understanding and subsequent action.<sup>277</sup> Meanwhile, General Mackensen at the corps level and his commander at the army level, General Bernard Kleist, were the men with the most immediate need for a decision. In the absence of orders, they acted in the finest tradition of the German Army and without approval of orders, ordered a retreat. Kleist made a tactically sound decision and frankly, given the situation in front of him, the only one that made sense. Kleist was acting to save his men in the field by finding defensible terrain around the Mius River, 45 miles west of Rostov.<sup>278</sup> Kleist was trading space for the time he needed to get his units logistically ready for action again. In light of superior Soviet combat power, it was in Kleist's best interests to find terrain where his units could defend from with less combat power, while the necessary repairs to equipment were made. Sound operational decision making informed by tactical circumstances allowed Kleist to make the decision he did. Hitler however did not appreciate the logic of this retreat from the strategic perspective. In Hitler's mind, the retreat from such a strategically important area such as Rostov was bound to be a moral victory for the Soviet Union, and thus something Hitler could not afford.<sup>279</sup>

When Rostov is viewed from Hitler's perspective, the gravity of the situation becomes clear quickly. What other situations on the Eastern Front or the Western Front helped form Hitler's thoughts on Rostov and why did Hitler assign such strategic emphasis to this location? More importantly, how would the events at Rostov become a sign of things to come when Germany would have to deal with like situations in the future? A partial answer to these questions can be found in Halder's war diary. Not only does Halder's war diary talk of the situations from other areas, it provides some idea of the atmosphere Hitler created by his

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<sup>277</sup> Evidence these reports were read exists in the form of actions taken by German Headquarters and battlefield front visits to assess the situation for themselves.

<sup>278</sup> Ibid. More information regarding the order to retreat from Rostov can be found in *Pz. AOK 1 Pz. Armeebefehl Nr. 40, 30.11.41*, Pz. AOK 1 19194/5 file of the NARA holdings.

presence and interactions with subordinate staff and commanders. The period of the November 29-30, 1941 is a very telling point of departure examining the strategic significance of Rostov.

On November 29, 1941, based on previous reporting from Rostov, Halder stated the following, “the numerically weak forces of First Panzer Army had to give way before the concentric attack launched in very great strength from south (here apparently a main effort), west and north. On the morning of 29 November, SS “Adolf Hitler” (1st SS Panzer Division) was taken back into the new defensive position west of Rostov; the withdrawal of 16th Motorized Division was still in progress.”<sup>280</sup> Halder continues with a comparison to the other armies in Army Groups South, Center and the 16th Army from Army Group North. Halder makes mention of the “rapidly changing picture” in Africa and posits no prediction for the outcome. Following his description of the situation in Africa, Halder records his thoughts of a phone conversation with Field Marshal Fedor von Bock of Army Group Center. Halder writes; “Phone conversation with von Bock concerning the allegation that army group lacks definite objectives (Goering’s unconsidered opinion). Army group knows exactly what it is after. However, if the current attack on Moscow from the north is unsuccessful, he fears the operation will become another Verdun, i.e., a brutish, chest to chest struggle of attrition.”<sup>281</sup> What Halder recorded was the field commander, in this case Bock, knew what should be done based on the situation he had in front of him, while Berlin was no longer clear because of competing requirements from other areas.

This brief snapshot demonstrates the German strategic leadership was disjointed regarding the mission and objectives of Army Group Center, while Bock understood clearly. Even while Bock’s Army Group Center continued toward its object, making progress toward

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<sup>279</sup> Ibid.

<sup>280</sup> Charles Burdick and Hans-Adolf Jacobsen, eds., *The Halder War Diaries, 1939-1942* (Narvato, CA: Presidio Press, 1988), 567-8.

<sup>281</sup> Ibid, 569.

Moscow through attacks against the northern portion of the Moscow line; the following day, November 30, 1941, Army Group South was again in Hitler's sights.<sup>282</sup> Halder begins his entries of November 30, 1941 with brief explanations of the situations in Army Groups North and Center. As Halder stated,

Today's great worry is in Army Group South. This does not apply to Sixth and Seventeenth armies, which repelled the usual attacks. It refers to First Panzer Army, against which the enemy has launched an enveloping attack in such overwhelming strength that army reserve (14th Armored Division) had to be committed on the very day it reached its new position in the withdrawal.<sup>283</sup>

In the next paragraph of Halder's diary insight is gained into how Hitler's "extreme agitation over the situation" forbid the withdrawal of First Panzer Army "to the Taganrog-Mius-mouth of the Bakhmut River, and demands that the retrograde move be halted."<sup>284</sup> Instead of the logical conversation regarding Army Group South's problem between a senior and subordinate, Hitler "browbeat Brauchitsch into trying to get Rundstedt (Commander of Army Group South) to delay executing Kleist's order."<sup>285</sup> Regarding the order, Halder states, "Field Marshal von Rundstedt's reply was that he could not comply with the order and asked that either the order be changed or he is relieved of his post."<sup>286</sup> At 04.00 on December 1, 1941 Halder states, we receive three teletypes from the Führer:

1. Addressed to von Rundstedt: He is relieved of the command of army group.
2. Addressed to von Reichenau, transferring to him the command of Army Group South with the mission to halt the retreat of First Panzer Army, take all necessary measures to bolster up the panzer army, and strike as soon as possible for Voroshilovgrad from the sectors of 49th Mountain Corps and IV Corps.
3. Addressed BdE, directing him to move at once by rail and as far forward as possible, up to forty PzKW IIIs and PzKW IV each, for 13th, 14th and 16th Armored divisions.<sup>287</sup>

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<sup>282</sup> Ibid, 569-70.

<sup>283</sup> Ibid, 570-71.

<sup>284</sup> Ibid.

<sup>285</sup> Earl F. Ziemke, *Moscow to Stalingrad: Decision in the East* (Washington D.C.: Department of the Army 1987), 55.

<sup>286</sup> Charles Burdick and Hans-Adolf Jacobsen, eds., *The Halder War Diaries, 1939-1942* (Narvato, CA: Presidio Press, 1988), 571.

<sup>287</sup> Ibid, 573.

According to Ziemke, on December 2, 1941, “Hitler left East Prussia by air for Kleist’s headquarters in Mariupol on the Black Sea.”<sup>288</sup> Hitler then stopped in Poltava where he picked up Reichenau. Together they continued to the front to “visit” Kleist along with the commander of the 1st SS Panzer Division Obergruppenführer Josef Dietrich.<sup>289</sup> Dietrich was an “old fighter,” meaning he was one of those who had been a body guard for Hitler in the early days of the party, also participating in the fighting of 1923 Beer Hall Putsch. Thus, the opinion of Dietrich was important to Hitler, even though Dietrich was far from an experienced military professional and was generally considered a party lap dog by men of equal grade and position in the German Army.<sup>290</sup> In the end Hitler’s “visit,” was nothing more than a fact finding tour and something which caused more problems at the front than it solved. All of the decisions were already made about the retreat of Army Group South, while the Soviets continued to prepare for the counterattack against Army Group Center at Moscow. Ultimately, Hitler’s actions of fixation on Army Group South enabled the Soviets the ability to continue to planning and successfully counterattack Army Group Center on December 6, 1941.<sup>291</sup> Tactical level interference by Hitler violated the German tactical doctrine for the employment of forces and forever marred attempts of professional soldiers to fight formations as they were educated and trained to do for the remainder of the war. Recognizing the German fear of another Verdun, the Soviets bought time

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<sup>288</sup> Earl F. Ziemke, *Moscow to Stalingrad: Decision in the East* (Washington D.C.: Department of the Army 1987), 55.

<sup>289</sup> Ibid.

<sup>290</sup> Mark C. Yerger, *Waffen SS Commanders, The Army, Corps and Divisional Leaders of a Legend Augsberger to Kreutz*, (Atglen, PA: Schiffer Military History 1997), 135.

<sup>291</sup> Earl F. Ziemke, *Moscow to Stalingrad: Decision in the East* (Washington D.C.: Department of the Army 1987), 65. Marshal of the Soviet Union Zhukov issued the order to counterattack Army Group Center on 5 December 1941.

over the winter to reallocate forces from other theaters of operation to fight a prolonged war of attrition that matched the Soviet ideals found in Leninism.<sup>292</sup>

While attacks were underway against Army Groups South and Center, the Soviets explored possibilities for attacking Army Group North. The Soviets always recognized the danger of the Germans making contact with Finnish forces and how this would spell disaster for Leningrad.<sup>293</sup> The commander of Army Group North, Field Marshal Wilhelm Ritter von Leeb believed, “the Russians were beginning to see a chance to not only retake Tikhvin but to liberate Leningrad, which would constitute a substantial political and military success for them.”<sup>294</sup> This attack could certainly only assist Soviet forces fighting at Moscow. As Glantz explains, the STAVKA had two purposes in conducting an attack against the area of Tikhvin. Those purposes were;

- First and foremost, to save Leningrad by destroying the German forces at Tikhvin and Volkhov and restoring communications between Leningrad and Moscow via the Tikhvin-Volkhov railroad.
- Second, it tried to tie down as many German forces as possible along the northwestern axis in the interest of the Moscow defense.<sup>295</sup>

Soviet analysis of the Leningrad situation, like most other problems, was reduced to a math problem. In late November 1941, the 54th, 4th and 52nd Soviet Armies consisted of “17 rifle and 2 tank divisions, 1 cavalry division, 3 rifle brigades and 2 tank brigades, and 3 tank and 2 ski battalions.” All together, this Soviet force was 192,950 strong. German forces operating in the area consisted of 10 infantry, 2 motorized, and 2 panzer divisions operating between Lakes Ladoga and Il’man. German forces were operating around 60% strength, numbering around

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<sup>292</sup> See the Collected Works of Lenin for multiple examples of the total use of the Soviet people in total war.

<sup>293</sup> See: David M. Glantz, *The Battle for Leningrad* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 2002) for Soviet thoughts regarding the situation in Leningrad to their strategy for Finland.

<sup>294</sup> Earl F. Ziemke, *Moscow to Stalingrad: Decision in the East* (Washington D.C.: Department of the Army 1987), 65.

<sup>295</sup> David M. Glantz, *The Battle for Leningrad* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 2002), 103-4.

120,000 men with 100 tanks and assault guns supported by about 1,000 artillery pieces of various calibers.<sup>296</sup> While the numbers indicate an advantage to Soviet forces, the tactical reality on the ground was far worse than anyone in Berlin was willing to admit. On December 5, 1941, “The temperature dropped sharply to -22 degrees F, and on the next day to -32 degrees F. The extremely cold weather had a crippling effect on the troops, especially since they had been poorly fed for weeks due to supply difficulties and because their clothing gave inadequate protection against the cold.”<sup>297</sup> The weather conditions greatly informed how any operation was going to be conducted, along with the effect it would have on combat power.

Based on the disposition of available combat power, STAVKA ordered the 54th, 4th and 52nd Armies to crush German forces operating in the Tikhvin salient, thus failing to accomplish the two stated goals for the campaign.<sup>298</sup> The Soviet attack would fail to liberate Leningrad, but it did support Soviet forces in their bid to break the German hold on Moscow by capturing Tikhvin on December 10, 1941.<sup>299</sup> The Germans would abandon Tikhvin during the evening of 7/8 December. In the mind of Field Marshal Leeb, German units were grossly undermanned and underequipped for what was being asked of them, so these forces needed to be withdrawn or lost. Hitler did not want to accept the fact the Tikhvin operation had failed. While Hitler gave permission to withdraw from the city, the city was to remain in the range of field artillery until more forces could be found to continue the attack.<sup>300</sup> While defending the Tikhvin salient was out of the question to Leeb, forces would be withdrawn in an orderly manner to prevent a route. This allowed German forces to trade space for time in the same way Leeb had written about in

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<sup>296</sup> Ibid.

<sup>297</sup> Department of the Army, MS# P-114a *The Campaign Against The Soviet Union in the Northern Sector of the Eastern Front 1941-1945*. (Carlisle, Army War College: Foreign Military Studies Department 1950), 141.

<sup>298</sup> David M. Glantz, *The Battle for Leningrad* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 2002), 104.

<sup>299</sup> Ibid, 109.

<sup>300</sup> Department of the Army, MS# P-114a *The Campaign Against The Soviet Union in the Northern Sector of the Eastern Front 1941-1945*. (Carlisle, Army War College: Foreign Military Studies Department 1950), 143.

his 1938 work, *Die Abwehr* or *The Defense*.<sup>301</sup> According to P-114a, *The Campaign Against the Soviet Union in the Northern Sector of the Eastern Front 1941-1945*, Generalmajor Mueller Hillebrand, a staff officer in Leeb's Headquarters, explains that, "Field Marshal von Leeb saw no further possibility of exerting any effective influence on the Russians in the Tikhvin area in the foreseeable future. For this reason he desired to use the unavoidable withdrawal to the swamp line and, if necessary, to the Volkhov (River), in order to obtain forces for an attack designed to broaden out the corridor at Schluesselburg."<sup>302</sup> The withdrawal from Tikhvin is a prominent occasion to showcase Hitler's desire to maintain total control of the situation, while reducing the operational and tactical level commander's ability to decide to nothing. Leeb's desire to withdraw to the so called "Swamp Line," approximately 37 miles away to the southwest of Tikhvin, was in Hitler's mind out of the question.<sup>303</sup> Generalmajor Mueller Hillebrand explains how interference from the top levels of command crippled the efforts of subordinate commanders when he writes;

There was far too much interference in the top levels of command with Army Group North. This finally went to the extreme of involving tactical details, such as a question of the attack by the 291st Infantry Division after 3 December and in the decision of the withdrawal from Tikhvin. These details were decided in the highest levels of command. This meddling would inevitably result in an atmosphere of a lack of confidence, although, in any event, there was no doubt about the accomplishments of commanders and troops. The gulf between top levels of command and subordinate staffs was apparent as is indicated by the frequent use of the following words in directives; "Der Führer had directed that..." or similar words. This was designed to give the directive special emphasis; however, it frequently betrayed the effort of the person giving the directive to disassociate himself from its contents.<sup>304</sup>

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<sup>301</sup>Ritter von Leeb, *Defense* trans. Stefan T. Possony and Daniel Vilfroy (Harrisburg, PA: Military Service Publishing Company, 1943).

<sup>302</sup> Department of the Army, MS# P-114a *The Campaign Against The Soviet Union in the Northern Sector of the Eastern Front 1941-1945*. (Carlisle, Army War College: Foreign Military Studies Department 1950), 144.

<sup>303</sup> Ibid, 143.

<sup>304</sup> Ibid, 150.

The underlying theme of Hillerbrand's statement is found in an order from Hitler dated December 16, 1941. In this order, Hitler finally approved the withdrawal from Tikhvin, but in a new language which did not coincide with the German practice of defensive doctrine in development since the end of the First World War; nor in a manner consistent with Leeb's *The Defense*.<sup>305</sup> The order read, "it will be the task of the army group to defend this (the new) front to the last man, not yielding another step, thus maintain the blockade of Leningrad."<sup>306</sup> A question that should interest scholars and professional soldiers is what was the logic of Hitler's order? Hillerbrand answers the question with the following;

In the face of reversals at several points along the eastern front, Hitler believed that he could force his armies to hold their positions at all cost through the issue of strict orders to that effect. The order of December 16th was therefore followed by others with this same line of thought. A "basic Hitler order" of December 30, 1941 demanded that every foot of ground be defended to the last man, and he forbade the abandonment of even the most makeshift position without fighting to retain it. On January 8, 1942 a further Hitler order rejected "the false idea" that Russian aggressive strength could even for a short time be impaired through a voluntary withdrawal, and he allowed the abandonment of a position only when the defenders, through lack of ammunition or food, were no longer able to stand and fight.<sup>307</sup>

Unlike other orders where the subordinate commander had the latitude to execute an order in away consistent with the situation, "Hitler insisted on the literal execution of these orders. The commander in chief of the Fourth Panzer Army was dishonorably discharged from the Army on January 8, 1942 because he ordered a local withdrawal involving some of his troops, without having received permission to do so. Army Group Headquarters and all subordinate commands were thus to a large extent deprived of freedom of action."<sup>308</sup> German

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<sup>305</sup>Timothy T. Lupfer, *The Dynamics of Doctrine. The Changes in German Tactical Doctrine During The First World War* (Leavenworth, KS: Command and General Staff School, July, 1981).

<sup>306</sup> Ibid, part II, 2.

<sup>307</sup> Ibid, part II, 3. This statement was originally found in *Der Fuehrer und Oberste Befehlshaber der Wehrmacht vom β.1.* (document No. 75129/73), sent to Army Group Headquarters North on January 9, 1942 through the Army High Command, the Army General Staff, Operations Branch I No. 420013/42, Top Secret. The order was received by Army Group North on January 9, 1942.

<sup>308</sup> Ibid, part II, 3.



commanders would continue to struggle and lose against Hitler's idea of defending to the last man throughout the war. In essence, the struggle between the German tactical and operational level commanders against their strategic leadership was a debate of how German forces were manned, trained, equipped and doctrinally employed against overwhelming odds.<sup>309</sup>

Thoughts regarding defensive tactics of late 1943, early 1944 are contained in P-082, *Study of Tactics Employed in the Russian Campaign*. This report was submitted by the late Generaloberst Hube to Hitler in April 1944 and explained the differences between defensive and delaying tactics.<sup>310</sup> At the heart of this debate is the German tactical through strategic disconnect existing since December-1941. By the later stages of the war, Generaloberst Hube had correctly deduced German forces at the tactical through the strategic level could not be in receipt of the same order, meaning to all be on the defense and hold to the last man.<sup>311</sup> Hube was trying to convey his argument through military theory, but Hitler was a practical man who was not militarily educated enough to understand the logic of Hube's argument. The connection between military theory and doctrine, along with the relationship to actions on the ground were connected in the following statement from Hube;

After we had lost the initiative in the East in 1943 in spite of launching one major offensive and many counterattacks, we were compelled to change over to defensive operations along the entire front. We took up defensive positions and tried to hold whatever terrain was still in our hands. The preservation of our fighting strength was only a secondary objective. Against the incessant Russian attacks along the entire front throughout the year, the field forces almost invariably were given the same order: tactical and strategic defensive, holding at any cost, without taking into consideration the situation of the adjacent unit.<sup>312</sup>

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<sup>309</sup> See: Alex Buchner, *Ostfront 1944: The German Defensive Battles on the Russian Front, 1944*. (Atglen, PA: Schiffer Military History, 1991) for examples of how the Germans were planning and executing defensive operations in other areas of the Eastern Front.

<sup>310</sup> Department of the Army, MS# P-082 *Study of Tactics Employed in the Russian Campaign*. (Carlisle, Army War College: Foreign Military Studies Department 1950).

<sup>311</sup> *Ibid*, 4.

<sup>312</sup> *Ibid*.

Hube was linking his understanding of the tactical and strategic defensive back to the theoretical works of Goltz. Goltz is of course a direct link to the theories of Clausewitz and figured prominently in the education of several generations of German officers. In P-082, *Study of Tactics Employed in the Russian Campaign*, scholars and professional soldiers can easily see the connection of Hube's argument to the works of theory of Goltz and Clausewitz. In Goltz's *Conduct of War*, he asserts it is possible to be on the strategic and tactical offensive at the same time, because an army which is strategically advancing will have to bring the enemy to battle tactically at some point to win.<sup>313</sup> Goltz continues by saying, "On the other hand, we might permit the strategic offensive to be followed by the tactical defensive, by allowing the enemy to become the aggressor on the battlefield after having advanced to meet him."<sup>314</sup> This statement by Goltz is a direct correlation to the "defense is the stronger form of war" from the work of Clausewitz.<sup>315</sup> Many want to reduce these thoughts to a literal statement, because on face value, no army would ever advance into tactical level actions to assume a defensive posture. What would be lost from an immediate dismissal of this statement is the utility of reality which comes from the practice of combat. It is impossible for an army to remain in the strategic offensive indefinitely; the army will eventually reach a culminating point. As was correctly stated by Goltz, "it is impossible to calculate in advance where the culminating point of the offensive will lie."<sup>316</sup> Goltz defines the idea of the culminating point in terms of the enemy, not friendly combat power when he says, "the latter (combat power) depends upon the losses sustained by the opponent during the course of operations on account of battles, combats, marching, or want and

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<sup>313</sup> Lieutenant General Colmar Von der Goltz, *The Conduct of War* (Kansas City: MO, The Hudson-Kimberly Publishing Company, 1896), 32.

<sup>314</sup> Ibid.

<sup>315</sup> Carl von Clausewitz, *On War* ed. Michael Howard and Peter Paret, trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 358 or 366.

<sup>316</sup> Lieutenant General Colmar Von der Goltz, *The Conduct of War* (Kansas City: MO, The Hudson-Kimberly Publishing Company, 1896), 158.

disease.”<sup>317</sup> The idea of the “culminating point” is an important point of discussion, because it allows the defensive force the opportunity to counterattack when the enemy is at his weakest, or as Hube quotes from Clausewitz in his position paper to Hitler, it makes the enemy susceptible to “the shining sword of retaliation” in a counterattack.<sup>318</sup> What is being recognized in a culminating point is the transition of combat power from the defense to the offense. Goltz looked specifically at the problem of transitioning combat power from the strategic defensive to the tactical offensive when he considered Willisen’s *Theory of War*.<sup>319</sup>

The argument Hube was trying to convey to Hitler regarding how strategic and tactical orders could not be the same was better expressed by Goltz in *Conduct of War* when he said, “With a combination of strategic and tactical defensive we arrive at complete passivity, which not only awaits the movements of the enemy’s armies, but also the attack on the field of battle, and is satisfied with the repulse of the enemy.”<sup>320</sup> Goltz derived this thought from the work of Willisen. As stated by Goltz, “Willisen, in his *Theory of War*, has arranged all the possible practical results in a scheme which shows what may be expected from the several combinations in case of victory or defeat.”<sup>321</sup> These thoughts were arranged in the following chart,

Vital forces:	(a) Strategic defensive and tactical defensive.	(b) Strategic defensive and tactical offensive.	(c) Strategic offensive and tactical defensive.	(d) Strategic offensive and tactical offensive.
Results there from-	Complete absence of a decision.	Victory on the field of battle without general results for the campaign or war.	General situation favorable for a victory, which, however, is without results because the fighting (combat) power of the enemy	Destruction of the enemy, conquest of his territory.
(a) In case of victory:				

<sup>317</sup> Ibid.

<sup>318</sup> Department of the Army, MS# P-082 *Study of Tactics Employed in the Russian Campaign*. (Carlisle, Army War College: Foreign Military Studies Department 1950), 9. Also see Carl von Clausewitz, *On War* ed. Michael Howard and Peter Paret, trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 370. Here Clausewitz describes “the flashing sword of vengeance.” It was thought the weight and shock of the counter attack produced results, but it was the pursuit which was more destructive of enemy force.

<sup>319</sup> Wilhelm von Willisen, *Theorie des großen Krieges*. (Berlin: Germany, Duncker und Humblot, 1840).

<sup>320</sup> Lieutenant General Colmar Von der Goltz, *The Conduct of War* (Kansas City: MO, The Hudson-Kimberly Publishing Company, 1896), 32.

<sup>321</sup> Ibid.

			in not impaired.	
(b) In case of defeat:	One's own destruction and loss of the country.	Retreat with intention of resuming the offensive.	Avoidance of the consequences through favorable strategic position.	Temporary abandonment of enterprises undertaken.

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The highlighted portion coinciding with (b) explains the strength of the strategic defensive and the tactical offensive as discussed by Hube and is the heart of his argument to Hitler through the value of the counter attack. In Hube's mind, recognition of the Soviet culminating point and a German counter attack could not be accomplished through a ridged defense as Hitler insisted, but by adherence to the German tactical doctrine of the "elastic defense" dating to the experiences of the First World War.<sup>323</sup> What Hube describes in P-082 is the essence and intellectual framework for the German campaign plan written to stop or slow the Soviet breakout from Leningrad.

### **3.2 THE GERMAN PLAN FOR THE DEFENSE OF THE LENINGRAD AREA AND THE WITHDRAWAL TO THE BALTIC STATES:**

After the Battle of Kursk in July 1943, the German tactical units on the Eastern Front no longer had any delusion of far reaching offensive operations as during the opening days of the war. With clear understanding of Hitler's intentions to defend to the last man and faced with the reality of an impending Soviet attack in force on all fronts; German commanders in Army Group North examined possibilities for how they would defend against what they knew was going to be coming soon. Throughout the remainder of the late summer and into the early fall of 1943, Army

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<sup>322</sup> Ibid. In a desire to ensure students of the art and science of war did not look at this chart as an expedient or a coefficient without real planning, Goltz included the following warning in conjunction with the chart, "In the domain of the art of war such mathematical calculations are somewhat dangerous; they might be the cause of false expectations and of treacherous confidence."

<sup>323</sup> Department of the Army, MS# P-082 *Study of Tactics Employed in the Russian Campaign*. (Carlisle, Army War College: Foreign Military Studies Department 1950), 9. or see: Timothy T. Lupfer, *The Dynamics of Doctrine. The Changes in German Tactical Doctrine During The First World War* (Leavenworth, KS: Command and General Staff School, July, 1981).

Group North issued a “Study” name Operation BLAU on September 2, 1943.<sup>324</sup> This “study” examined the problem of retrograding forces in heavy contact in the time and space of the Leningrad Front. This unprecedented examination of a German campaign plan as a **(way)** demonstrates not only the art of connecting the **strategic German (ends)** to their **tactical (means)**, but it also allows scholars and professional soldiers to examine the science of planning multiple movements of several significant forces in contact through time and space.

### **3.3 THE FORMAT AND STYLE OF "STUDY" OPERATION BLAU**<sup>325</sup>:

The format of this order looks very much like what professional soldiers would expect to see today.<sup>326</sup> In fact, in many ways this product is far superior in terms of capturing the problem simply for decision makers to understand, as well as tying an intellectual framework to a doctrine for the employment of forces. As this study was written in a field environment, the quality of the product as a document or the graphics were exceptionally neat and fit all of the stereotypes associated with the German general staff officers who produced it.

The signed copy of the study consisted of an “executive summary,” a table of contents, the study itself, two appendices and three enclosures.<sup>327</sup> Maps and overlays were included in the enclosures of the study for the purposes of orientation. In all, the “executive summary,” base study and attachments comprised 26 pages of text with several maps and overlays to illustrate the plan.<sup>328</sup> The “executive summary” or plan’s introduction, was a two page explanation of the

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<sup>324</sup> NARA T-311, Roll 76, First Frame 7099655

<sup>325</sup> NARA T-311, Roll 76, First Frame 7099661, Army Group North Ia Nr. 072/43 g. Kdos. Chfs, dated September 2, 1943.

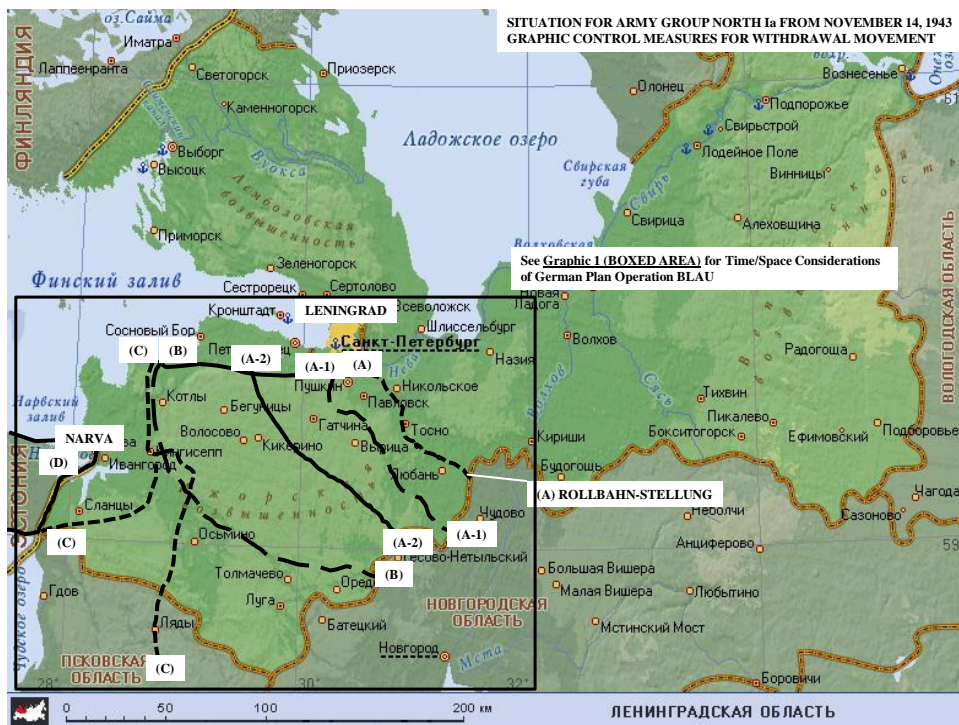
<sup>326</sup> A constant complain of professional soldiers today is receiving a set of Microsoft Power Point slides in lieu of a written order. While Power Point is a handy tool to compose a concept of operations, it is not a replacement for a written order. This has become a bad habit perpetuated by 10 years of war.

<sup>327</sup> The table of contents lists the following from top to bottom, 1.) Study “Operation BLAU, 2.) Annex 1 Clearance (of the Battle Space), 3. Enclosure 1 of Annex 1, Enclosure 2 of Annex 1 (1:100,000 map), Enclosure 3 of Annex 1 (1:100,000 map), Annex 6 (1:300,000 map) and 088/43g.Korps overlay 2. (This was hand written in at the last moment).

<sup>328</sup> While executive summary is a modern term, the concept is clearly displayed in the content on this Operation BLAU study.

study detailing the purpose and tasks to be accomplished by the subordinate units, followed by a distribution list of who was to receive the study. The executive summary served the same purposes it does today; it allows senior officers who do not require detailed knowledge of the plan to have some general situational awareness of what the study entailed. The study was a top-secret document. The first three pages of the study provide preliminary remarks and tasks to subordinate units, along with the general idea of how the withdrawal was to be conducted. The study was followed by an operations order which was more specific and should be considered the heart of the study. The first sentence of the operations order establishes the purpose for the operation, followed closely by the three phases of the operation and a detailed explanation of German movement in time and space. After several pages of detailed instructions, the annex for the clearance of battle space begins with the attached maps and overlays.

### **3.4 THE CONTENT OF STUDY OPERATION BLAU:**



Map 6

As is the case with all plans and orders, there must be a stated purpose for the proposed operation. The purpose of the study was found as a “bottom line up front” statement as the first sentence of the executive study. It reads, “In the following study and annexes are transmitted the plan of withdrawal of Army Group North to the “Panther Position.”<sup>329</sup> The “Panther Position” was the Narva River from the Baltic Sea in the North through Lake Peipus in the south [See Map 6].<sup>330</sup> In essence, the Panther Position was the modern day border of Estonia. The study of Operation BLAU was so secret, commanders were instructed to “confront all rumors of the operation and crush them with the sharpest rejection.”<sup>331</sup> A constant theme throughout the study is maintaining as much deception and secrecy as possible, to mask German intentions from the Soviets as well as from Berlin. A side effect of gaining secrecy was the need for additional time to plan laterally, thus restricting the efforts of planners to fewer members on planning teams. The executive summary continued by tasking the army and other subordinate headquarters to examine key tasks and respond to Army Group North’s Headquarters by September 15, 1943, so planning could be completed. For subordinate Armies, the following tasks were to be examined:

- 1.) Time/phase flow of the proposed withdrawal movement. (e.g., how would the subordinate armies plan to withdraw their subordinate units across the time and space to reach the Panther Position.)
- 2.) Use of any freed up combat power. (e.g., as a result of the proposed army withdrawal plan, would any combat power be freed up for other taskings. While not stated, but in essence, a reserve force for counter attack.)
- 3.) Positions and arrangement of forces in the Panther Position once reached.
- 4.) Positions along the rearward withdrawal route of the Armies in sector.
- 5.) Position of Army Headquarters (i.e. location of command and control to facilitate the movement of the Army.).
- 6.) A survey and report of all explosives that would be needed to fulfill the priority of destruction while conducting the withdrawal. How many mines would be required in the defense?<sup>332</sup>

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<sup>329</sup> NARA T-311, Roll 76, Frame number 7099658.

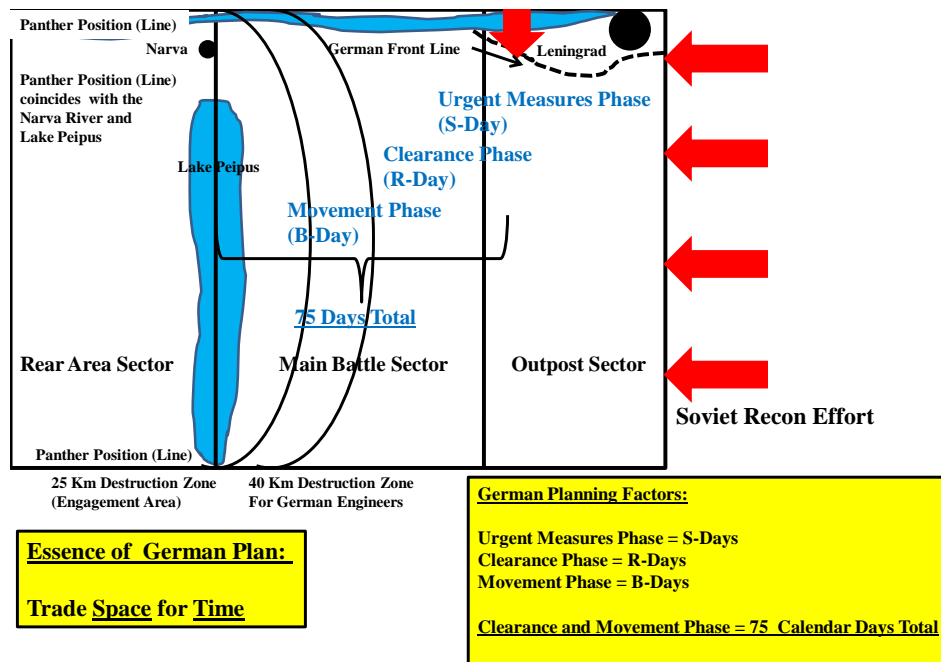
<sup>330</sup> NARA T-311, Roll 76, First Frame 7099655. See the graphic depictions found in the maps and overlays attached to the study.

<sup>331</sup> NARA T-311, Roll 76, Frame number 7099671.

<sup>332</sup> NARA T-311, Roll 76, Frame number 7099658.

The Army Group Headquarters had four tasks, with two sub parts to examined by September 15, 1943. The tasks were as follows:

- 1.) Order of services and time required to fulfill the following subtasks:
  - a) The evacuation of the population from the area to be used by the Army Group for the withdrawal.
  - b) The production of a 25km destruction zone or “engagement area.” [See **Figure 12**]
- 2.) Position of the limit of rearward movement.
- 3.) Positions for the establishment of Headquarters (during the retrograde to facilitate command and control).
- 4.) Quantity of explosives and mines needed by type for (demolitions and counter mobility) work in old Russia.<sup>333</sup>



**Figure 12:** Depiction of Withdrawal Plan Using the Study of Operation BLAU From Army Group North

Before continuing with the content of the Army Group study for Operation BLAU, it is necessary to conduct a limited task analysis of the executive summary. This executive summary was designed to focus the efforts of subordinate commands and the headquarters onto the problem of withdrawing the Army Group in the time and space determined by the enemy and the



terrain. What the commander of Army Group North was asking his subordinate elements to do was create an engagement area in “old Russia” to facilitate the tactical level destruction of Soviet forces. By gaining efficiencies in manpower through the use of terrain in coordinated defensive positions, the Germans could form a reserve for the purposes of counter attack. This was an option Army Groups on the Eastern Front had not had for some time.<sup>334</sup> Summarily, the subsequent study for Operation BLAU should be looked at as a mechanism to bring Army Group North back into line with established doctrinal defensive techniques, those of elastic defense which was discussed earlier.<sup>335</sup> While the German strategic leadership was contributing to the problems of the operational level commanders, the operational level could facilitate the success of the tactical level by creating engagement areas through choke points, thus allowing German forces local superiority of numbers with a counter attack force to deal with the coming massive Soviet attack out of Leningrad.

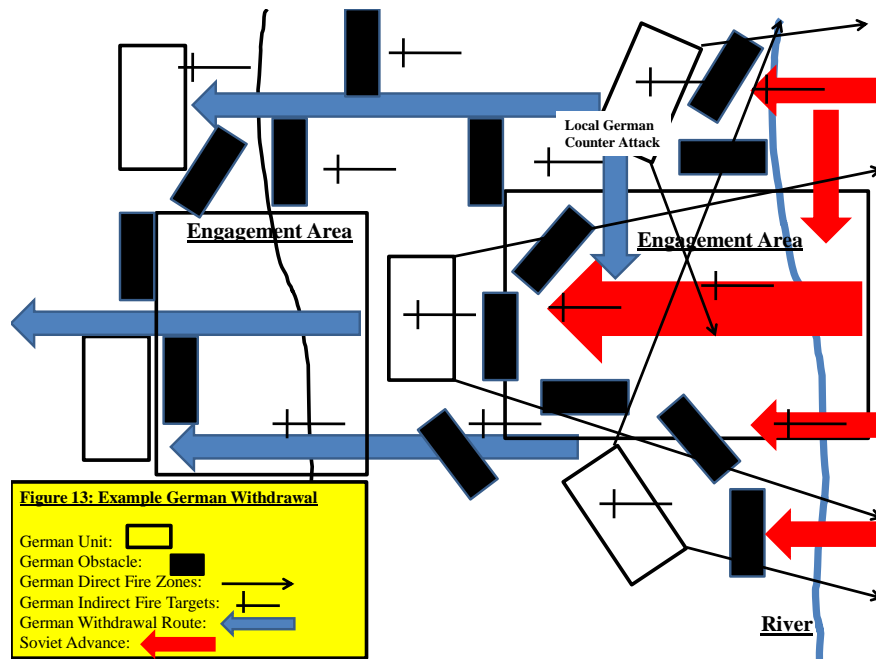
The disposition of German combat power through the engagement area, along with the quantities of explosive and mines being asked for would shape the engagement area, allowing the commander the ability to decide where to employ the counter attack force to greatest effect. Through the use of the reconnaissance and engineering efforts, the Germans would seek to fix the Soviet advances tactically from the front in the engagement areas, while searching for a Soviet culmination point. It is perhaps better thought of as a series of German engagement areas, vice only one. Once the Soviets had demonstrated significant weakness, the Germans would launch a counter attack into the Soviet flank seeking to achieve decisive results [See **Figure 13**].

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<sup>333</sup> NARA T-311, Roll 76, Frame numbers 7099658-9.

<sup>334</sup> See: Timothy A. Wray, *Standing Fast: German Defensive Doctrine on the Eastern Front During the Second World War*, (Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute, 1983).

<sup>335</sup> Department of the Army, MS# P-082 *Study of Tactics Employed in the Russian Campaign*. (Carlisle, Army War College: Foreign Military Studies Department 1950).



To set the conditions for a series of tactical engagement areas required vision and understanding of the terrain to the minutest detail. This sort of understanding also required knowledge of the disposition of the civilian population.

Of suspect interest is the German desire to evacuate non-combatants from what would become the German engagement area. While humanitarian thoughts played some role in why the Germans would not want non-combatants in the area, there were much better reasons. As the mission was going to be a retrograde under contact, the Germans predicted the already bad roads would be swamped with German mechanized and motorized units executing their scheme of maneuver.<sup>336</sup> The Germans certainly did not want non-combatant traffic flooding the already stressed roads. Other interesting thoughts are contributed by *MS# D-057, Relations between German Forces and the Local Population in the Zone of Operations on the Eastern Front*.<sup>337</sup> When discussing the idea of civilian migration, the report explains Russian civilians could,

<sup>336</sup> In German military writings, a Rollbahn is a military only road designated for mechanized and motorized traffic.

“cover hundreds of kilometers and place a heavy burden on the roads. It became necessary therefore to bring order to these movements.”<sup>338</sup> As monitoring the lines of communication was difficult enough, the Germans knew partisan forces would be operating and hiding amongst the civilians as they transited battlespace. There is little doubt the commanders and staff of Army Group North were concerned with the partisan threat.<sup>339</sup> Moving the population out of the proposed engagement area made defensive operations more manageable and enemy targets easier to identify.

In the preliminary remarks of study, the time for carrying out the operation along with the reasons for these times are given. As stated by the study, “The experiences gained previously from Eastern Front operations had yielded strategic movements of the Army Group should be carried out with consideration to terrain and weather factors.”<sup>340</sup> The times of year identified for the execution of the movement were the beginning of November until the end of February as one option, along with the beginning of June until the end of September as the other.<sup>341</sup> The study explains in the second paragraph, “in the case of an Army Group withdrawal to the East Wall (Panther Position), the following areas are essential to be held, Latvia and part of Estonia.”<sup>342</sup> What is not explained well in words is which part of Estonia did the Germans envision holding? When the intent of the wording is compared to the overlays and maps, the picture becomes clear. The Germans were going to delay and defend to the Panther Position, then they would begin defending towards Latvia. This would make the best use of the natural obstacles defining the

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<sup>337</sup> Department of the Army, *MS# D-057, Relations between German Forces and the Local Population in the Zone of Operations on the Eastern Front.* (Carlisle, Army War College: Foreign Military Studies Department 1947). This short report of nine pages was completed on May 12, 1947. The author of the report is unknown.

<sup>338</sup> *Ibid.*, 8-9.

<sup>339</sup> As mentioned in the introduction of Plan BLAU, German staff officers were concerned with the contents of the plan falling into the hands of the partisans. See: NARA T-311, Roll 76, Frame number 7099661.

<sup>340</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>341</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>342</sup> *Ibid.*

German withdrawal route. In terms of space, this turns everything before the Narva River in “old Russia” into an engagement area.

The next thing which had to be decided on was how to clear the population from the area the Germans planned to use as the engagement area. This was essential to reduce the amount of civilian traffic that could interfere with the planned retrograde. Specifically, the study called for 25 kilometers to be cleared in front of East Wall, as a destruction zone or engagement area to fight the enemy.<sup>343</sup> This concept fit well with the third major paragraph of the study which addressed the need to use combat power freed up as a reserve force to act as a counter attack force in the 25 kilometer destruction zone.<sup>344</sup> In the fourth paragraph, the study estimated 1.4 million people needed to be cleared, while only 600,000 of the 1.4 million needed to be evacuated.<sup>345</sup> What the study does not state, is who the Germans desired to move out of the area, vice who was being evacuated. To find answers to these questions required an examination of documents related to the relocation of ethnic Germans from the Baltic along with a group of Finns who lived on the East side of the Narva River in the 25 kilometer destruction zone. These Finns were known as the Ingerman and were generally located around the area of Gattsehina.<sup>346</sup> Regarding the ethnic Germans, the Reich ordered all “Volksdeutsche” or ethnic Germans, living in the area occupied by Army Group North to be resettled.<sup>347</sup> Movement by train was authorized. **[See Rail Diagram]** The Ingerman living in the Gattsehina area were addressed in a correspondence named Az.222, dated August 31, 1943. This memo identified the need to relocate the Finns living in the area

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<sup>343</sup> NARA T-311, Roll 76, Frame number 7099662.

<sup>344</sup> Ibid.

<sup>345</sup> NARA T-311, Roll 76, Frame number 7099661.

<sup>346</sup> Information related to the ethnic Germans is found on Kz. 221 Nr. 3950/43 dated October 11, 1943 located in NARA T-312, Roll 918, Frame numbers 9094086-6. Information related to the Finns living in the vicinity of Gattsehina is found in NARA T-312, Roll 909, Frame numbers 909260.

<sup>347</sup> Ibid. This information can be linked to NARA T-312, Roll 918, Frame numbers 9094086-6, where it is stated, "Those who qualified were to identify themselves to German authorities were required to arrive in Pleskau no later than October 20, 1943 for movement to the west."

while the German Finnish Relocation Commission was being established in close coordination with the German Foreign Office. Relocation of the Ingerman was to occur no later than October, 1943.<sup>348</sup> Based on these documents, it is clear the Germans wanted to clear the engagement area by the end of October in anticipation of attack. What did the cleared space for the engagement area look like and how were the Germans planning on controlling the retrograde to prevent it from becoming a route?

The amount of time required for the retrograde to the Panther Position was set for 75 days from the beginning of the operation to the conclusion of actions in the positions along the Panther Position.<sup>349</sup> The last sentence of the study described the quickest the operation could be conducted was 28 days [See Figure 12].<sup>350</sup> Attached to the study was an Army Group operations order, which in the first page flushes out the specific timeline and names of the phases associated with the retrograde operation [See Map 6]. Generally speaking, the withdrawal was to occur in three phases. The three phases were the Urgent Measures Phase, Clearance Phase and the Movements Phase. Each of the three phases carried a generic timeline and was driven by enemy action. This made the timeline event driven and receptive to unanticipated enemy actions. The Urgent Measures Phase began almost immediately. From the German perspective, this would not have been the all out attack of January 14, 1944, but rather the Soviet reconnaissance units probing the German lines trying to determine German composition, disposition and strength. These probes would provide the Germans indications and warning necessary to begin, while the Germans would take prisoners from whom they could divine more accurately the Soviet intentions for attack. Solid reporting of Soviet indications and warnings would inform S-Day.

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<sup>348</sup> NARA T-312, Roll 909, Frame number 909260.

<sup>349</sup> NARA T-311, Roll 76, Frame number 7099663.

<sup>350</sup> Ibid.

Once the commander chose to proceed to the Clearance Phase, the first day of clearance would begin as R-Day. Once R-Day had been assigned, the last S-Day would be assigned to allow for a smooth transition from S-Days to R-Days. The third and final phase was the Movement Phase. For this phase, the first B-Day was also assigned by the commander. **[See Force Flow Diagram]** The Clearance and Movement Phases were both programmed for 75 days in total.<sup>351</sup> A detailed description is provided for the tasks associated with each phase. It is critical to point out that no major retrogrades of German combat power were to take place until the Movement Phase. The Urgent and Clearance Phases would today be considered “shaping operations” while the Movement Phase would be considered the “decisive phase.” This did not mean the enemy was not going to be engaged in the first two phases; rather he would be shaped through German reconnaissance and engineer efforts while maneuver forces were situated.

Examining the tasks by themselves doesn’t tell the full story. Taken together with the Pioneer Annex, the picture of the tasks comes into focus. Annex 1 of the base plan was the Pioneer or Engineer Annex. Stated clearly, 16th Army would be responsible for Latvia and 18th Army would have Estonia.<sup>352</sup> In conjunction with the Urgent Measures Phase, there were 14 tasks commanders were expected perform, while taking a holistic look at the enemy situation and using the time available to develop engagement areas through the use of engineering efforts, such as the destruction of bridges and the development of obstacle plans.<sup>353</sup> In difference to the base order, the pioneer annex states the “destruction zone” or engagement area was to be 40 kilometers from the Panther Position **[See Figure 12]**.<sup>354</sup> Priority of engineer destruction was categorized into two categories, actions to be carried out during R-days (or in conjunction with

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<sup>351</sup> NARA T-311, Roll 76, Frame number7099664.

<sup>352</sup> NARA T-311, Roll 76, Frame number7099673.

<sup>353</sup> NARA T-311, Roll 76, Frame number7099665.

<sup>354</sup> NARA T-311, Roll 76, Frame number7099687.

actions in the Clearance Phase) and conclusive measures, meaning items needed up to the last minute which needed to be destroyed with the movement of the last German troops out of an area.<sup>355</sup> Annex 2 in the Pioneer Annex had six priorities for destruction in descending order, they were:

1. Roads and canals (big and small).
2. Roads in close proximity to swamps and dams through the use of time fuze (meaning while the Soviet we advancing into the area to cause casualties and confusion).
3. Civilian infrastructure, such as electric plants, saw mills and dock yards.
4. Water pump to make drinking water.
5. Any living spaces. (Use of time fuze was authorized).
6. Any water craft not being used for the evacuation of non combatant persons.<sup>356</sup>

The Germans were so determined to maintain secrecy in their destruction of key items; instructions were given to initiate explosions only with artillery barrages to cover the noise of detonation. All engineer efforts were to be closely linked to reconnaissance efforts underway in sector.<sup>357</sup>

By directing these actions through the Base Operations Order and the Pioneer Annex at the Army Group level, Army Group North along with 18th Army was operationally shaping the enemy into the numerous tactical engagement areas, thus taking away the Soviet advantage to mass. This also allowed the Germans better coordination of tactical-level direct and indirect fire weapons. This technique made the best use of limited German assets, while providing a scheme of maneuver that made the maximum use of formations to slow an enemy advance, while having some uncommitted combat power to counter-attack into the flanks of Soviet formations. In this manner, the Germans were economizing their efforts to best accommodate the conditions of the time and space of their operating environment, thus fitting the sciences to the art of tactics. In the

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<sup>355</sup> NARA T-311, Roll 76, Frame number7099687.

<sup>356</sup> NARA T-311, Roll 76, Frame number7099688.

Clearance Phase, in addition to the removal of the non combatant population, commanders were to adhere to five separate annexes which would aid future shaping of the battlespace for the enemy's arrival. These five annexes were:

- Annex 1: Clearance
- Annex 2 Pioneer (Engineer) Status
- Annex 3 Reporting of Significant Events
- Annex 4 Railroad Status
- Annex 5 Logistics<sup>358</sup>

Finally in the Movement Phase of the order, exact information was provided, which brought the plan from conceptual strategic planning to operational functional planning. The order instructed Army Group force flows to reach the Luga position (in essence 15-25 kilometers from the Panther position) by the 30th B-Day with a closure date on the 75th B-Day. [See Figure 12] Thus, 45 B-Days (Movement Phase days) were to be used to attrite Soviet forces in the Destruction zone (engagement area) 25 kilometers in front of the Panther Position as originally instructed.<sup>359</sup> The order then shifts focus to the timeline for 16th and 18th Armies relative to positioning on the ground. For 16th Army the following key points were provided on page 8 of the operations order:

- The movement of 16th Army was to begin on the 40th B-Day and was to be carried out in close coordination with elements of Army Group Center to the south. (This was done to prevent Soviet force from exploiting a seam between Army Groups.) The order to begin the movement was to commence only with an order from the Army Group North Commander.<sup>360</sup>

Army Group North specified two locations in particular where 16th Army was defending in strength on the ground. They were:

- In the C-Line [See Map 6]:

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<sup>357</sup> NARA T-311, Roll 76, Frame number7099689.

<sup>358</sup> NARA T-311, Roll 76, Frame number7099666.

<sup>359</sup> Ibid.

<sup>360</sup> NARA T-311, Roll 76, Frame number7099668.



- Between the old line of resistance (HLK) and Dolovo Lake
- At the route leading east on Dedovitschi and on both sides of the Petrovo (River)
- At the route of Staraja Rusa, Ssolzy and the area around Vagljady
- In Schimsk
- In the C-1 Line [**See Map 6**]:
  - In Loknja
  - In the area of Dedovitsehi
  - At Dno<sup>361</sup>

Instructions to 18th Army also began on page 8 of the order and carry on to the 9th page. In comparison to the orders issued to 16th Army, 18th Army's instructions were much more controlled. They stated:

- The start of the movement of the Army will begin on the 6th B-Day from the "A Line" (labeled as the Rollbahn) position [**See Map 6**]. The plan also explained the routes and the combat power associated with the movements to the various positions. Specified were three main routes for westward movement in the 18th Army Area of Responsibility (AOR);
  - The Ljuban-Luga Route
  - The Leningrad-Luga Route
  - The Leningrad-Narva Route<sup>362</sup>

To facilitate the destruction of items in the 18th Army sector, the Pioneer Annex stated 35 engineer units would be surged into the 18th Army's sector beginning on September 20, 1943.<sup>363</sup>

In the Narva area, the Germans envisioned 10-12 divisions of combat power for follow-on operations. In the final pages of the order, the actions expected of the German air force and the navy were given. Each service in the area was subordinate to the commander of the Army Group North for employment and unity of command purposes. Each service had four tasks. The air force tasks;

1. Provide airborne reconnaissance to the Leningrad and Oranienbaum area to provide the ground commander indications and warnings of impending attack. Along with this task came the implied task of interdicting enemy actions were local air superiority allowed.

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<sup>361</sup> Ibid.

<sup>362</sup> NARA T-311, Roll 76, Frame number7099669.

<sup>363</sup> NARA T-311, Roll 76, Frame number7099687.

2. Provide flak units to key intersections and vital bridges. (While it is not said here, the reason was to provide an anti-air capability while also providing extra firepower for stopping Soviet armor).
3. Provide Close Air Support (CAS) and interdiction capability in the Leningrad and Narva Bay areas.
4. Assist rear guard elements in breaking contact from the enemy while conducting withdrawal operations.<sup>364</sup>

To the navy the following tasks were assigned:

1. Extra patrolling when the weather was poor. (To prevent surprise attacks.)
2. Provide Naval units to rivers and lakes.
3. Provide coastal artillery in Estonia to defend shipping.
4. Provide clearance of the noncombatant population from Narva-Jõesuu to Reval (Tallinn).

While the tasks provided in the Army Group North order were sufficient for the land force, the tasks did not allow the air force or the navy the flexibility to do the other implied tasks common to their special functionalities. Simply stated, as a result of doing the specified tasks per the Army Group North order, they had little to no combat power left for other taskings.<sup>365</sup> While the services had ideas of how their war time employment substantiated their employment paradigms, there was no time or command relationships to allow for experimentation. As the other services were in a command relationship of direct support to the Germany Army, the army employed them in support of their scheme of maneuver. The Germans would never find the time or resources to change their service paradigms before the war ended, but certainly the United States and others observed in the German's mistakes.

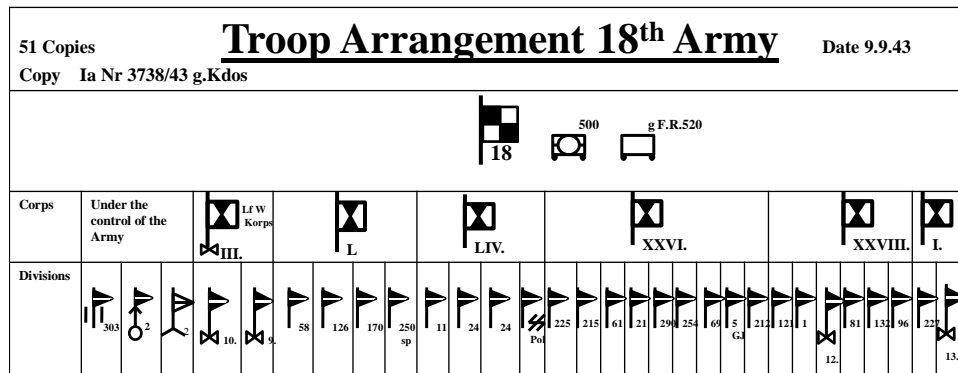
### **3.5 COORDINATING THE ENDS AND MEANS WITH THE WAYS:**

Understanding Army Group North's plan through the study Operation BLAU allows scholars and military professionals to understand the scientific aspects of the German art of withdrawing combat power while trading of space for time in accordance with established prewar doctrine.

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<sup>364</sup> NARA T-311, Roll 76, Frame number7099671.

While the Germans had grown far beyond prewar doctrine, the principles of how a defense in depth was conducted were rooted in pre-war doctrine; firstly in the education of those who executed the plan, but also in the manner in which the defense in depth was executed. These factors form the basis of 18th Army's plan based on Army Group North's Operation BLAU study.<sup>366</sup> Before examining the plan, it is prudent to examine the composition of 18th Army as they were planning this operation. The diagram below shows the combat power of 18th Army at the time the plan was written.



**18<sup>th</sup> Army was comprised of 6 Corps:**  
**3<sup>rd</sup> LW FK: 2 Divisions**  
**L A.K.: 4 Divisions**  
**LIV A.K.: 4 Divisions**  
**XXVI A.K.: 9 Divisions**  
**XXVIII: 6 Divisions**  
**I A.K.: 2 Divisions**

**27 Infantry Divisions in Total**  
 • These division were never at strength  
 • Unit were always being moved around  
 The units you plan with may not be the ones you are going to be fighting with.  
 How does the plan adjust?

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The plan in support of Operation BLAU for 18th Army itself is 14 pages and captures the projected movement of 18th Army in retrograde by unit (down to the division level) and B-Day. The 18th Army plan was a base order with 14 annexes of maps and overlays. This document was

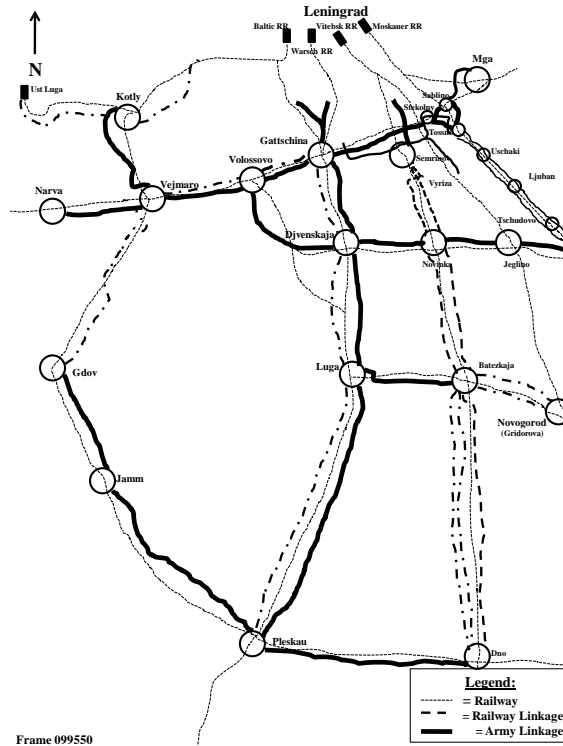
<sup>365</sup> In modern terms, this is referred to as “troop to task,” meaning what is the troop level associated with a particular task.  
<sup>366</sup> Details of the German withdrawal plan are found in : NARA T-312, Roll 919, First Frame 9103360.  
<sup>367</sup> NARA T-312, Roll 904, Frame 9084054.

signed on September 9, 1943.<sup>368</sup> According to this document and in accordance with the order from Army Group North, the 6th B-Day consisted of, “the execution of the third phase,” or the Movement Phase and was to act as the beginning of the retrograde operation to the Panther position.<sup>369</sup> It is important to note, units were moving prior to the 6th B-Day. This would have been allowable by Army Group North, as the commander would understand the subordinate units commander’s need to move units within his own battle space to facilitate the timeline of the Army Group plan. In order for units to be arranged in depth in sector, there had to be movement to build proper engagement areas. To use classical military thought of the period, as German officers would have been trained to think of the problem, shows a strategic concentration in reverse. An army and certainly an army group requires many trains to move the quantity of gear they have no ability at this stage of the war to replace. The fact is, the science of withdrawal is a logistical problem as much as an operational problem. **[See Rail Diagram]** To move this gear quickly required the use of trains to arrange the gear in time and space as the plan required. As the roads were not dependable, the education of Moltke the Elder on the strategic use of trains paid the German general staff officer dividends. Below is a German train map of the region demonstrating the throughput capacity for the reconstitution of German equipment on the rail lines of communication. These thoughts were figured into the overall plan to reset German forces.

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<sup>368</sup> NARA T-312, Roll 919, First Frame 9103364.

<sup>369</sup> NARA T-312, Roll 919, First Frame 9103375.



**Rail Diagram**

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According to 18th Army’s plan, the 1st- 5th B-Days would have the “254th, 290th, 227th, 61st and 215th Infantry Divisions holding the main line of resistance (HLK),” then beginning to move to the 1st retrograde position as needed.<sup>371</sup> Subsequently the second position was defined from:

Northern edge of Ssigalovo - eastern edge of Kissino - eastern edge of Ivanvo – Northern edge of Ivanvo - on both sides of Baahn Lesje (River), to Netschepertj – Northern edge of Wojtolovo – to the north edge Sachoshje - to the Northern edge Woskressenskoje.<sup>372</sup>

The Mga position was to be manned on the right by the German 5th Mountain Division, in the center by the 61st Infantry Division and on the left by the 215th Infantry Division.<sup>373</sup> Units were responsible for connection to the units on their flanks to ensure there were no seams. On the 3rd

<sup>370</sup> NARA T-312, Roll 919, Frame 9103467.

<sup>371</sup> NARA T-312, Roll 919, First Frame 9103373.

<sup>372</sup> Ibid.

<sup>373</sup> Ibid.

B-Day at 12.00, the Mga position was to be collapsed fully with the withdrawal first of the right corps wing with the 121st and 212th Infantry Divisions (Both with XXVIII. A.K.), then the left flank in the Kelkolovo heights beginning on the 4th B-Day. The 4th through the 6th B-Days saw the withdrawal from the Mga position to the Rollbahn or highway position occurring in three phases. On the 4th B-Day after movement, the right was to be occupied by the 254th Infantry Division, the center the 290th and the left by the 227th Infantry Division. Contact on the right flank would be made with 1st Infantry Division (XXVIII A.K.) and on the left flank with the 24th Infantry Division (LIV A.K.).<sup>374</sup> On the 5th B-Day began the 2nd phase out of the Mga position with the 5th Mountain Division, 61st, 215 and 225th Infantry Divisions moving to their secondary positions.<sup>375</sup> On the 6th B-Day began the 3rd and final phase out of the Mga position. German planners at 18th Army envisioned by 12.00 on the 6th B-Day the 254th Infantry Division would complete its march to A-1 by the 7th B-Day on the right flank, the 290th Infantry Division would be established in the center and the 227th infantry Division would be established in the Nikolaus position on the left flank. The SS Police Division was to act as a Corps reserve behind the Rupprecht position in the vicinity of Szablino.<sup>376</sup> At the end of the 6th B-Day, XXVI A.K. was to have full command over the LIV A.K. sector and the withdrawal would continue.<sup>377</sup> In essence, units were being tasked to defend in the vicinity of the “Rollbahn position” position from the 6th- 11th B-Days while other units formed in positions along the A-1 position.<sup>378</sup> On the 12th B-Day units would begin the withdrawal from the Rollbahn position in the following sequence:

1st Phase; 12 B-Day: Road intersection secured through Tossno by 290th Infantry Division.

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<sup>374</sup> NARA T-312, Roll 919, First Frame 9103374.

<sup>375</sup> Ibid.

<sup>376</sup> NARA T-312, Roll 919, First Frame 9103375.

<sup>377</sup> Ibid.

2nd Phase; 254th Infantry Division moves to and occupies the third line of resistance. Strong rear guards from the 290th, 227th, 24th, and the 11th Infantry Divisions remain under the leadership of the 227th Infantry Division.<sup>379</sup> Routes of march over designated lines of communication are also given. This is done as a control feature, not only to identify what friendly units that have retrograded, but to also determine the rate of enemy advance. Items which needed to be completed before an area could be cleared were movement lanes needed to be closed in obstacle belts before the Soviets learned where the lanes were, rails, bridges and other things needed to be destroyed in accordance with the priority of destruction assigned in the pioneer annex. Here again, a detail which normally goes unnoticed by a casual reader of history. Having centralized command and control with decentralized execution is what allows this plan to function; this is the true essence of Auftragstaktik.

Through the 13th and 14th B-Days, units continued to fight down to the A-1 defensive position. The 14th through the 17th B-Days saw units of 18th Army defending the A-1 position with advanced elements beginning their movements to A-2.<sup>380</sup> From the 20th through the 25th B-Days, units assumed the defense of the A-2 positions.<sup>381</sup> Movement from the A-2 position was scheduled to begin on the 26th B-Day.<sup>382</sup>

In Frame 9103381, some general considerations were made about the time requirements for the withdrawal operation. “The most favorable time of year for the withdrawal was the winter months because movement of the heaviest vehicles, even in the snow was possible. In the muddy season, the air threat is severe as roads tended to become swamped with heavy volumes of

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<sup>378</sup>This clearly shows the German scientific approach to controlling the space or terrain in time. See: NARA T-312, Roll 919, First Frame 9103376.

<sup>379</sup> NARA T-312, Roll 919, First Frame 9103376-7.

<sup>380</sup> NARA T-312, Roll 919, First Frame 9103378.

<sup>381</sup> NARA T-312, Roll 919, First Frame 9103379.

<sup>382</sup> NARA T-312, Roll 919, First Frame 9103380.

traffic.”<sup>383</sup> Special “Bottlenecks” were identified “between the H.K.L. or Main Line of Resistance and the Rollbahn, In Ssologubovka, Mga, Nurma and Tossno in the XXVI A.K. Sector, and in Nikolskoje and Szablino in the LIV A.K. Sector.”<sup>384</sup> Further detail was provided for choke points between positions. As follows:

- 2) Between the Rollbahn and A-1 [**See Map 6**]  
in Tossno, Lissino, Pegi, Mercedesstern and in Annolovo,
- 3) Between A-1 and A-2  
in Mina and Pishma,
- 4) Between A-2 and B  
in Kurowizy - Siwerskaja, Roshdestweno, Jaschtschera, Mschinskaja and Luga.<sup>385</sup>

On Frame 9103384, 18th Army listed the planned headquarters positions during the withdrawal in the following manner [**See Map 6**];

- 1.) H.L.K. and Mga position:  
Until 4. B. – Tag                      Netschepertj, Lager Marienburg,
- 2.) A- Position (Highway Position):  
from 5. -11. B – Tag                      Lissino-Korpus,
- 3.) A 1 – Position:  
from 12.- 16. B- Tag                      Siwerskaja,
- 4.) A 2 - Position:  
from 17. -25. B – Tag                      Mschinskaja,
- 5.) Luga – Position:  
from 26. B - Tag                              Ropti, south Luga,
- 6.) C 1 – Position:  
from 30. B- Tag                                Bolschoje,
- 7.) Area of Pleskau                              Lipno<sup>386</sup>

In essence, units that defended in the Rollbahn position would move directly to the A-2 position under the cover of units in A-1 positions. When the Soviets would give chase thinking units were routed, they would come across a German obstacle belt and find themselves fighting in another engagement area against heavy direct and indirect fires. This maneuver is difficult and

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<sup>383</sup> Ibid.

<sup>384</sup> Ibid.

<sup>385</sup> Ibid.

<sup>386</sup> NARA T-312, Roll 919, First Frame 9103382.



requires units to pass through an active defense with a Soviet force closing on them quickly. Seeing this scheme of maneuver graphically depicted as in Graphic 2, helps explain why the order seems so scripted, instead of the Auftragstaktik or mission type orders military professionals have come to expect from German folklore. This scientific scripting allowed the Germans to tactically, in a local sense, achieve effects on the Soviet flanks. Judged by the level of difficulty of the operation and the fact that many junior men without experience would be executing the order for the first time, it made good sense for the operations order to be heavily scripted to facilitate more coordinated tactical actions. What is evident is the tactical level education of the planners who wrote both plans, both of which are tactically focused on stopping a Soviet advance not on logistical movement. Both the Army Group North and 18th Army plans acknowledge without words the universal truth; the art of strategy and tactics is useless without the science of communicated operations. Plans at every level must compensate for the human elements, or they are not worth the paper they are written on. The fact of the matter is in an uncertain environment, combatants try to limit the amount of things which can be left to interpretation. Ultimately, the best laid plans chance of success rests on the backs of 18 and 19 year soldiers; no matter how skilled or experienced, they are human and prone to error. They fatigue, tire and make mistakes. One side had measures in place to prevent major incidents based on human error; while the other could do nothing more than drive the attack.

The best graphic depiction of the German withdrawal plan was found in frame 9103401.<sup>387</sup> This document was dated September 29, 1943. On the top of the page, is the German 18th Army Corps in sector, underneath the corps is the subordinate divisions. On the left side of the page are the B-Days and on the right side of the page are the phased positions of the ground. In the center, the chart shows the status of each unit during the withdrawal and if the units was

static or moving. This document captures the essence of the German science of operational art in a manner which is still instructive to planners today.<sup>388</sup> [See Force Flow Chart below]

Anlage 11 zu XXVI. A.K. Ia Nr. 23/43 g. Kdos.Chefsache vom 29.9.43

B	LIV.				XXVI.							XXVIII			
	11.	SS-POL	24.	225.	215.	61.	227.	290.	254.	5. GEB	69.	212.	121.		1.
1.													HLK		
2.															
3.															
4.															
5.															
6.	HLK	Res													
7.	HLK	Res													Highway Position
8.	HLK	Res													Position A
9.	HLK	Res													
10.	HLK	Res													
11.	HLK	Res													
12.															A 1 Position
13.															
14.							A 1								receive position behind A 1
15.															
16.							A 2								receive position behind A 2
17.							A 2								
18.							A 2								
19.							A 2								
20.				A 2											A 2
21.				A 2											
22.				A 2											
23.				A 2											
24.				A 2											
25.				A 2											
26.															Receive Position
27.															Luga Position
28.															
29.															
30.															
	Gr Kleffel	XXVIII.	XXVIII.	XXVIII.	Army	Gr Kleffel	C	Army	Army	C	Army				




















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<sup>387</sup> NARA T-312, Roll 919, First Frame 9103401.

<sup>388</sup> Ibid. This allows planners today to see a very uncomplicated way of flattening a three dimensional battlespace into a two dimensional document for use in time and space.

























<sup>389</sup> NARA T-312, Roll 919, First Frame 9103401.

As the Force Flow chart demonstrates, the planning was done for the worst case scenario of having only 28 days to conduct the full movement. In the time-restricted scenario the Germans certainly had, planners typically only have time to examine the most dangerous course of action. This is prudent planning. Plans once written and acknowledged by the commander typically sit on the “shelf” or in the “pigeon hole” waiting to be brought into action. Often times, senior and subordinate commanders will continue to reassign units without acknowledging the impact on a particular planning effort. A prominent example of this phenomenon can be demonstrated through a comparison of the task organizations for 18th Army at the time of the signed plan in September of 1943 and of January 1944.

		Troop Arrangement of Army Group North As of 6.1.44 (Minus 16 <sup>th</sup> Army) Frame:7091152															
		 NORTH															
2	A.O.K.	 ( <table border="0" style="display: inline-table; vertical-align: middle;"> <tr> <td>15 Inf Div</td> </tr> <tr> <td>1 Jg Div</td> </tr> <tr> <td>1 K Gr</td> </tr> <tr> <td>1 Few Leg</td> </tr> <tr> <td>1 SS Nordld</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2 Bz</td> </tr> </table> ) 										15 Inf Div	1 Jg Div	1 K Gr	1 Few Leg	1 SS Nordld	2 Bz
15 Inf Div																	
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2 Bz																	
3	Corps	 			 			 									
4	Divisions	 4 Fw Br.	 5 Gr Pol	 10 Nordland	 9	 126	 170	 215	 11	 24	 225						
5	Attached from other Divisions:		XXXVIII				er			XXXVIII	XXXVIII						
6	Attached to other Divisions	II./Gr.Rgt. 391 L/ " 399			} 170J D												
7	Police securities - and order troops																

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<sup>390</sup> NARA T-311, Roll 70, First Frame 7091153.

		Troop Arrangement of Army Group North As of 6.1.44 (Minus 16 <sup>th</sup> Army) Frame:7091152							
		 NORTH							
2	A.O.K.	 ( <table border="0" style="display: inline-table; vertical-align: middle;"> <tr> <td>15 Inf Div</td> </tr> <tr> <td>1 Jg Div</td> </tr> <tr> <td>1 K Gr</td> </tr> <tr> <td>1 Fw Leg</td> </tr> <tr> <td>1 SS Nordfd</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2 Br</td> </tr> </table> ) 		15 Inf Div	1 Jg Div	1 K Gr	1 Fw Leg	1 SS Nordfd	2 Br
15 Inf Div									
1 Jg Div									
1 K Gr									
1 Fw Leg									
1 SS Nordfd									
2 Br									
3	Corps	  XXVI. 113	  XXVIII. 24	  XXXVIII. 30 <small>Reports directly to 18<sup>th</sup> Army:</small>  					
4	Divisions	   	     	   <small>r.A.583.</small>					
5	Attached from other Divisions:								
6	Attached to other Divisions								
7	Police securities - and order troops								

What is quickly noticed in comparison is the loss of the 1st Infantry Division and the 5th Mountain Division. Not only were these units highly experienced combat units, but much of the success of the Plan for Operation BLAU rested on the positions these units were holding for continuity on the German flank positions. Without being continuously revisited, plans are nothing more than one time good ideas that satisfy only a particular snap shot in time. Plans must evolve with the battlefield and be brought off the shelf periodically for the commander to be informed of techniques being used to mitigate the risk of executing a particular option or course of action. Plans must always be updated to be valid.

**3.6 CONCLUSION:**

To articulate command and control in time and space requires a simple campaign plan, thus making a campaign plan that which joins the strategy of the political ends for war with the tactical means. The campaign plan acknowledges the art of creativity along with the science of

numbers in actuality. The place where art meets science is found in military doctrine. Armies that deviate from the established patterns of norms found in their doctrine are in fact improvising, but in an informed manner, leaving units on the left and right no ability to predict the next move of the center.

When Hitler established the “to the last man” defense as a method of defending the gains made on the backs of the German soldier, he failed to take into account the gravity of the situation faced by his subordinate commanders. The bias of action in German tradition lay with the commander; it was he who was empowered and responsible to act. Those at the front knew the reality Berlin did not want to acknowledge. As Hitler continued to take more and more decision making authority away from his able subordinate commanders, commanders did what was natural and continued to look for ways to fight the battle of numbers they knew the Soviets would fight. When Hitler’s need for total control is combined with the mentality of senior German Generals, who only want to avoid a Soviet Verdun; years of German land defensive doctrine had to be used to allow the survival of 18th Army along with Army Group North. Use of combat enablers such as the air force and the navy were needed to help accomplish strategic end states in a joint fashion, rather in a disaggregated fashion. Evidence of this is clearly seen in these planning efforts.

Examination of late German planning efforts such as Operation BLAU at the Army Group and 18th Army levels yields a very different understanding than traditional thoughts on the subject. It is clear both planning efforts recognized the gravity of the foreign as well as domestic strategic situations and were written to connect not only the strategy to available tactical means, but Operation BLAU also acknowledged the necessity to drive the German army back into their tactical doctrine it was forced to discard by Hitler's decisions. Based on the

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<sup>391</sup> NARA T-311, Roll 70, First Frame 7091153.

disposition of forces, it is also clear the German planners understood the Soviet strategic aims as envisioned by Stalin. Both German plans were a method of operatically answering the unacknowledged strategic reality of the coming Soviet breakout attack at Leningrad, while acting as a forcing function to make German tactical units conform to their prewar land doctrine. Integration of the air force and the navy was the clear weakness of German planning efforts. Both organizations were subordinate to the tactical needs of the theater of war, rather than being allowed to serve the strategic purposes for which they were so badly needed. Instead of attacking the strategic flanks of the Soviet Union, both the German Air Force and Navy were being put against low level tactical missions where they could not mass enough combat power to achieve needed results. Fulfilling their specified tasks per the plans did not allow either organization the flexibility needed to fulfill their intended purposes.

German planning succinctly tied theory to science and produced a usable and practical product. It is clear that late German plans were quite scripted to account for the difficulty of the operation they were conducting as well as to compensate for the inexperience of the troops tasked with executing these difficult missions. German operational plans had a clear science of numbers that tied Operational Art to the strategic art and science as well as the tactical art and science. The German plans supporting Operation BLAU were clearly functional plans informed by conceptual planning and designed to inform detailed planning at the tactical level. It is also clear that German mission type orders were thought of in the plan by allowing the tactical commander the room on the ground to place his unit where he thought they needed to be, but the plan was general enough to allow for the necessary redundancies accounting for the Soviet independent will, albeit very predictable. The plans created by both Army Group North and 18th Army both supported the commander's intent of conducting a retrograde action that supported

strategic goals while it set the lower tactical commanders up for success with resources they had available to execute their assigned mission.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **The Art and Science of Breakout Attack: The Soviets Attack into the Teeth of BLAU**

An enduring truth of war is strength of a position is predicated on two things; the will of the defender to hold the position while resisting attack and the strength of the position's flanks. Another truth of defensive operations is the defense chooses the location where battle is to be joined. Examining these thoughts allows a student of history to connect the art to the science of war by linking the moral/mental human desire of holding a position to the physical constraints presented by the piece of ground chosen by the defense. As these parameters govern the art and science of war, the principles and the conditions of war discipline those who plan the conduct of tactical battle.<sup>392</sup> Successful armies function well as a result of adherence to prescribed doctrine; the same armies continue to be successful by learning and transmitting lessons observed from both what they themselves have observed of their own performance and what they learned from the enemy. Successful armies are further defined as successful by how well they are able to integrate their lessons observed at the lowest tactical level of war into the operational conduct of war. Not only must an army accurately recognize its own capabilities and limitations, but also those of their enemy. As war is a highly competitive environment for time, the army better prepared to validate lessons observed at the lowest tactical-level changes their standard operating

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<sup>392</sup> In an article, Fuller lists the following as the principles of war: Objective, Offensive, Mass, Economy of Force, Movement, Surprise, Security and Co-Operation. He then lists the following conditions of war: Time, Space, Ground, Weather, Numbers, Moral, Communication, Supply and Armament. See: J. F. C. Fuller, "The Principles of War, with Reference to the Campaigns of 1914-1915," *The Journal of the Royal United Service Institution Vol LVI No 441*, 1-40. Reference to the timeless nature of the principles of war was made earlier by Baron De Jomini in *The Art of War*. "I lay no claim to the creation of these principles (of war), for they have always existed, and were applied by Caesar, Scipio, and Consul Nero, as well as by Marlborough and Eugene; but I claim to have been the first to point them out, and lay down the principle chances in their various applications." See: Baron De Jomini, *The Art of War* (Philadelphia, PA: J.B. Lippincott & Co, 1862), 127-128.

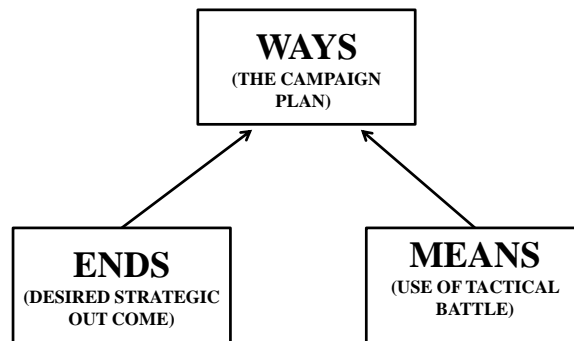


procedures to more accurately reflect the conduct of war stands a better chance of success in the immediate course of the battle. This is the functioning of a successful learning organization; students of history have the opportunity to learn from successful as well as unsuccessful examples.<sup>393</sup>

Collectively, these factors form the lens of examination for this chapter. With the strategic and operational level conditions met on other parts of the Eastern Front by December 1943, the Soviet Union was in a position to conduct a breakthrough attack against the German defensive lines at Leningrad. By conducting their attack against the German defenses, the Soviets could recognize their first operational goal; the end of the Leningrad siege through overwhelming offensive action. In order to recognize this first goal, the Soviets saw the use of tactical combat power directed against the German 18th Army, with the aim of separating and fragmenting it from 16th Army as their bid for operational success. Once German positions were broken in Leningrad and the offensive was underway, the Soviets then had to be able to dominate any German attempts to disrupt the movement of additional German forces in time and space. Here the connection between the operational **ways** and tactical **means** available becomes clear. What must be made clearer is how the Soviets wanted to articulate available tactical level combat power in the time and space to accommodate available conditions; thus joining tactical **means** to the desired strategic **ends** state.

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<sup>393</sup> Defining an army as a learning organization requires a force to observe and record lessons based on experiences that it subsequently incorporates into future operations. In recent years in the profession of arms, it has wrongly become commonplace to refer to these lessons observed as "lesson learned." Developing better tactics, techniques and procedures from lessons observed into lessons learned requires an organization to exchange ideas across the entire force to validate they are indeed a better way of doing something, while communicating the results up the chain of command and laterally through the force. An organization capable of performing this important exchange is thought of as a learning organization.



In essence, the Soviets needed to anticipate German defensive actions resident in Plan BLAU and be prepared to counter them. The Soviets understood the German methods of defending in depth after fighting for years on all fronts. They understood, because they fought using the same tactics.<sup>394</sup> The logic is clear; to attack and destroy a defense in depth requires another force to attack in depth. A tactical penetration must be followed by an operational exploitation.

Fighting by attacking in depth is a realization of articulating tactical level combat power in time and space with the goal of seizing multiple tactical objectives near simultaneously achieving the fulfillment of the operational objective. The goal of attacking in depth should be focused on attacking to destroy the enemy holding the terrain through the use of combined arms or to isolate the enemy through the use of combined arms to attack an enemy holding more significant pieces of terrain.<sup>395</sup> While abstract as a concept of the art of war, the science of attacking in depth is an interesting problem of transition from operational mobilization of a force to the articulation of the same force in the offensive against multiple objectives in the same time and space. As the terrain

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<sup>394</sup> Evidence the Soviets used and examined the defense in depth in the same manner as the Germans from the beginning of the Second World War exists in: Faculty of History and Military Arts, Развитие Тактики Советской Армии В Годы Великой Отечественной Войны (1941-1945 гг.), (Evolution of Soviet Army Tactics during the Great Patriotic War (1941-1945) (Moscow, USSR: Military Publishing House, 1958).

<sup>395</sup> The idea of attacking in depth was not new and it certainly was not totally Soviet. In *On War of Today* by Friedrich von Bernhardi, the idea of attacking in depth is covered in detail before the First World War. In *The Evolution of Soviet Operational Art 1927-1991, Volume I*, students of history have the opportunity to see the evolution of the Soviet development before, during and after the Second World War. See: Harold S. Orenstein, *The*

and weather are constant scientific factors both combatants must contend with, they are also the most responsible for dominating the concepts of time and space.

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the conventional tactical actions and means the Soviets had available at the end of 1943 to conduct a successful breakthrough attack to the "Panther Line," while examining the German flexibility of Plan BLAU. The method of examination will be driven by what happen chronologically in time and space to satisfy the scientific aspects of war, while the art of war will be evaluated through the decisions leaders made to influence tactical actions at various times during the breakout. Thus, by linking the tactical decisions of the forces to the time and space of the tactical level, scholars and professional soldiers have the ability to learn from an examination of how the combatants saw the use of conventional tactical means articulated through their campaign plans to achieve their desired strategic ends either through breakthrough attack or defense.

#### **4.1 SOVIET SHAPING ACTIONS PRIOR TO JANUARY 14, 1944:**

As the German campaign plan BLAU examined in the previous chapter demonstrates, it was no surprise to the Germans that the Soviets were planning another breakout attempt from Leningrad. Unlike previous attempts to break the German hold on the city, actions in other places of the Eastern Front had significantly weakened the German grip by December 1943. Attempts to coordinate decisive action with the Finns in the north had not yielded the results the Germans intended.<sup>396</sup> The first question the Germans had to answer was what did the Soviets have for combat power to breakout? General der Artillerie Herbert Loch describes not only the size of the force, but where the Germans felt the main effort attack was going to take place. He states:

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*Evolution of Soviet Operational Art 1927-1991, Volume I* (London, UK: Frank Cass, 1995). and Friedrich von Bernhardi, *On War of Today*, (London, UK: Hugh Rees, Ltd. 1913).

<sup>396</sup> See: Department of the Army, MS# P-041bb *The German Liaison Officer with the Finnish Armed Forces*. (Carlisle, Army War College: Foreign Military Studies Department 1952), 78.

According to the information obtained by the German command through reconnaissance, the enemy had assembled thirty divisions, three brigades, five ski brigades, ten armored brigades, eight armored regiments, two armored battalions, and numerous other units in the area opposite the sector held by Eighteenth Army, in addition to the twenty-five divisions, nine brigades and nineteen machine gun battalions committed to the front line. Toward the beginning of January 1944, the forming of the enemy points of main effort could also be clearly observed. It took place in the sector east of Novgorod, south of Leningrad and in the area of the Oranienbaum pocket.<sup>397</sup>

Based on the amount of force required to initiate any large-scale offensive, there are inevitably indications and warnings presented to the enemy. Despite the best efforts to create surprise, forces must be positioned prior to launching major operations. In fact, offensive operations generally require a force to seize pieces of terrain in order to conduct larger offensive operations. Such was the case for the Soviet breakout from Leningrad.

According to German intelligence records from Army Group North, the first half of January, 1944 saw continuous Soviet combat activity being used to shape the battle space in preparation for the massive attack of January 14th.<sup>398</sup> The Operations/Intelligence Summary or OPSINTSUM for January 13, 1944 was compiled only hours before the massive Soviet breakout attack the following day. The information was hardly timely to provide German decision makers with a tool to assist them with providing tactical level command and control, but these reports are instructive in providing scholars and professional soldiers with a record of the events leading up to Soviet attack. Along with providing an exact picture of what German commanders were being presented by their staffs. The report for January 13, 1944 was two pages in length and was broken down by enemy actions according to German corps sectors. It was sent up the chain of command at 12.30 hours on January 14, 1944. The Corps reported the following activities for January 13, 1944:

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<sup>397</sup> General der Artillerie Herbert Loch was the acting commander of 18th Army from March-September 1944. See: Department of the Army, MS# P-035 *Retrograde of Army Group North During 1944*. (Carlisle, Army War College: Foreign Military Studies Department 1950), 74.

<sup>398</sup> German Intelligence Reports NARA T-311, Roll 89, First Frame 71165478.

XXXVIII.A.K.: Artillery fire in the area of Chutyn and Kretschewizy. Lively interdiction fire in the middle and northern sections of the 28th Jg. Infantry Division.

XXVIII.A.K.: 1 enemy assault unit per friendly unit in Mischelowo (13th Luftwaffe Field Division) and in Korodynja (121th I.D.) remained unsuccessful.

XXVI.A.K.: Enemy movements in mutual directions in front of Poretschje (212th I.D.) with 200 men as well as in the area of (227th I.D.) with 260 men were fought.

LIV.A.K.: In the area of the 225th and 24th I. D. field artillery was falling. Interdiction fire livelier than the days before. 11th I. D. rejected enemy assault on the left flank.

L.A.K.: In 170th I. D. sector the 2d Army Shock troops were unsuccessful, in company strength south of Werch and Koirow and were rejected. A further enemy attack was smashed before it could be launched. In 126th I. D. sector, the enemy with 1-2 companies attacked against the northern part of Urizk and was repulsed with high losses. In corps sections, livelier interdiction fire with high explosive shells fell about the 126th I.D.. Movements in sector much livelier.

III. SS.Pz.-Korps.: Lively field artillery activity in sector with impacts in the northern sector of the 9th Luftwaffe Field Division, as well as in 10th Luftwaffe Field Division north of Petrowskaja. 9th Luftwaffe Field Division as well as the entire 10th Luftwaffe field division observed strong work and motor sounds in sector. Between Karelien, Kronstadt, Oranienbaum five troop carriers were observed moving.<sup>399</sup>

Analysis of the information by corps from the German perspective demonstrates the Soviet main effort attack was initially difficult for the Germans to determine based on the rise of conventional activity in all corps sectors. As exchange of artillery fire would have been constant during siege operations, only the intensity and duration of fires would have given the Germans any indication of pending attack. While the other sectors had direct enemy ground contact in conjunction with Soviet artillery fire, III SS Panzer Corps did not. It is interesting to note in the III SS sector that the Luftwaffe field divisions were specifically targeted and mentioned in the report. As staff officers would have analyzed Soviet actions collectively using a process similar

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<sup>399</sup> German Intelligence Reports NARA T-311, Roll 89, Frame 7116746. This sentiment is echoed in the War Memoirs of Felix Steiner. He states, "On the morning of 14 January, the thunderstorm broke on the entire front of the 18th Army. The focal point lay at the Oranienbaum Front, at the southwest of Leningrad and at the Russian bridgehead of Wolchow. After much fire, the Soviets began to attack the front with both Air Force and ground units. What was available for reserves was shifted to threatened places of the front." See: Felix Steiner, *Die Freiwilligen Idee und Opfergang* (Göttingen, Germany: Plesse Publishing, 1958), 250.

to trend analysis, Soviet tactical actions reveal their intentions. Analysis of Soviet shaping operations through the use of artillery in conjunction with limited objective ground attacks was the Soviet method of probing the German defenses to determine composition, disposition and strength. Initial Soviet tactical efforts were being used to probe the German lines, but more importantly, these limited-objective Soviet attacks were used to secure key pieces of tactical terrain for the initial tactical penetration, setting the conditions for follow-on operational break through. The report continues with analysis by intelligence officers. It reads:

XXXVIII. A.K.: Confirms: 150th Company with 15th Staff Company.  
Enemy losses: 3 prisoners; 1 MG (machine gun) captured, destroyed 1 anti-tank gun.

Analysis:

XXVIII. A.K. Middle Sector 30 punishment prisoners out of the 59th Army, at the end of October. 600 punishment prisoners out of Irkutsk from the 59th Army and 80 from the 336th Machine Gun Battalion. Beginning of December 800 punishment prisoners out of Nowossibirsk and the Wolchow Front, from the 150th and 23rd Staff Company.

Special: In XXXVIII. and XXVIII. Army Corps sectors, Enemy propaganda message talked about the southern and northern front under threat of a 2nd Stalingrad.<sup>400</sup>

What is striking about the German analysis is two-fold; 1. Analysis of the use of Soviet prisoner units to probe German lines along with their locations; and 2. use of a reference to a second Stalingrad for the northern front. Deductions of German analysis shows first, the use of prisoner units by the Soviets served the purpose of allowing the Germans to use their resources to eliminate Soviet state enemies. The Soviets used these units to test German resistance in locations where they anticipated significant losses and usually in conjunction with main effort attacks. Secondly, it is interesting that enemy psychological operations were being reported at

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<sup>400</sup> German Intelligence Reports NARA T-311, Roll 89, Frame 7116746.

the highest levels.<sup>401</sup> These statements in an official report testify to the candidness the commander of Army Group encouraged amongst his staff officers. From these reports, a sense of the command climate can be gauged along with the ability to understand how information was reported and analyzed.

In contrast to the reports of January 13, 1944, the reports of the 14th demonstrate decisive Soviets actions taking place in the German corps sectors. The timing of the report is interesting in respect to when decisive actions occurred. The report was finalized at 19.45 on January 14th, half a day after the initiation of the Soviet main effort attack. The report states the following dispositions for Corps in the German 18th Army sector:

XXXVIII.A.K.: The 58th Soviet Brigade appeared again out of 8th Army reserve south of Nowgorod, Panzer. Battalion 501, somewhere out of the east. Have also seen 239th Soviet Division out of 59th Army in Leljawino.  
Confirms: 15th Punishment Company.

XXVIII.A.K.: Confirms: 44th Soviet Division, 198th Soviet Division, 53rd Soviet Brigade and 80th Soviet Division.

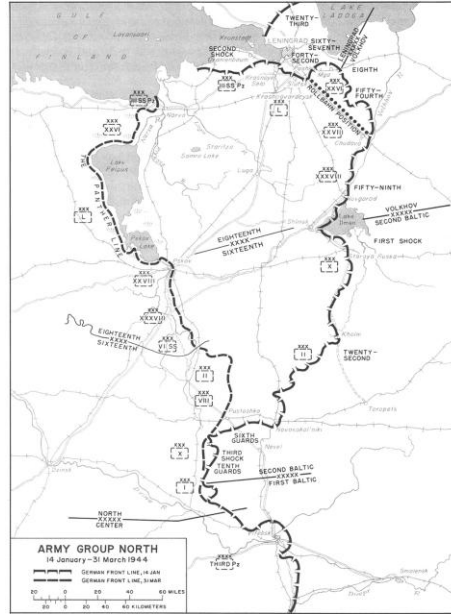
XXVI.A.K.: Confirms 1 Rifle Brigade., 364th Soviet Division, 18th Soviet Division and 286th Soviet Division all reserves from 8th Army with 1 Battalion were used in Oretschje.

III.SS.Pz.Korps: 131st Soviet Division again appeared out of 55th Army in the Petrowskaja – Poroschki sector, 90th Soviet Division out of Leningrad Front Reserve in the Poroschki – Perelesje sector, 48th Soviet Division out of 2nd Shock Army reserve with a Regiment in the Perelesje - Nowaja Burja section, 23rd Artillery Division out of 67th Army in the Tschernaja valley.  
Confirms: 168th Soviet Division<sup>402</sup>

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<sup>401</sup> The officers that wrote this series of intelligence report for 18th Army were Captain Boldt and First Lieutenant Hannemann.

<sup>402</sup> German Intelligence Reports NARA T-311, Roll 89, Frame 7116743.



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### Map 7 Strategic Situation of Army Group North, January 14, 1944

Based on the reported information, the Soviet main effort attack appeared to be concentrated on the XXVIII Corps and XXVI Corps in comparison with the report of the previous day. Clearly, the Soviets properly "shaped" the Germans and placed the proper amount of effort in places on the ground they thought would lead to decisive results without compromising the main effort attack. While the history of the Leningrad siege states the breakout of the Leningrad pocket was set for January 14, 1944, it is clear based on the intelligence reports the Soviet attack began days before with the shaping actions executed by company and battalion sized units. The Soviets themselves recorded the Leningrad breakout as January 14, 1944, but perhaps a more appropriate way to think of these events is the Soviet attack achieved decisive results and the desired effect of breaking the German siege on January 14, 1944.<sup>404</sup>

<sup>403</sup> Original map 23 from: Earl F. Ziemke, *Stalingrad to Berlin: The German Defeat in the East* (Washington D.C.: Department of the Army 1968), 252.

<sup>404</sup> General I.I. Fediuninsky, the Commanding General of the Soviet 2nd Shock Army described the breakout of the Leningrad siege in several work throughout the 1960s and 70s. In one work entitled *By the Coasts of the Amber Sea*, Fediuninsky wrote the following description of the nature of the decisive Soviet actions which transpired on January 14, 1944: "It was a quiet and slightly foggy, frosty morning. I was looking at the face of my watch without a break. These were anxious, but at the same time exciting minutes! The watch was showing 09.35



The report of January 14, 1944 also concluded with analysis of Soviet actions for the day. An interesting facet of the report is the German desire to obtain more prisoners in the XXVIII Corps area. Eighteen Army wanted to confirm the XXVIII Corps' sector was the focus of effort for the main effort of the Soviet attack. Based on these reports, this would appear correct. The Soviets attack to breakout of the Leningrad was limited to the space available in the pocket to concentrate combat power. Soviet combat power had to be echeloned in such a manner it could be sent into action precisely in accordance with the plan, but the capability had to provide the Soviet commander with the flexibility to rapidly respond to a change in situation. In a siege scenario, it only makes sense for the Soviets to continue probing the German lines for weakness for two reasons: 1) they needed to begin offensive actions to shape the enemy; and 2) the Soviets needed to have the entire force begin moving to make room to commit to main effort decisive attack of January 14, 1944. Looking at the size of the forces being committed on January 13th and based on Soviet doctrine of the period; companies and battalions would be forming reconnaissance elements as the advanced guard to guide the efforts of the main effort attack. In essence, the elements were conducting what is referred today as "reconnaissance push," meaning the main body of the Soviet force was pushing the smaller reconnaissance elements into contact with the enemy to determine German strength, but also so the Germans could commit strength against the reconnaissance effort to give away their positions and set the conditions for the main Soviet advance. A "reconnaissance push" model also best complimented the Soviet command and control style of centralized command and control.<sup>405</sup>

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when exactly at the precise moment the roar of weapons broke the morning silence. Every minute the violent racket increased. From the fire the earth seemed to be shattering. It continued this way for 65 minutes. I think if any German survived this hell, he would have never forgotten it. Our Artillery Army brought down more than one hundred thousand shells on the German positions a minute." See page 316.

<sup>405</sup> For reference to the concept of reconnaissance push, see section on surfaces and gaps. See: William S. Lind, *Maneuver Warfare Handbook*, (Boulder: CO. Westview Press Inc, 1985), 73.



**Picture 3: Soviet Leningrad Campaign Medal**

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#### **4.2 THE SCIENCE AND ART OF SOVIET DECISIVE OPERATIONS FOR BREAKOUT AND FOLLOW-ON OPERATIONS:**

During the period immediately following the breakout from Leningrad, the Soviet commanders and staffs had to sustain the massive Soviet offensive in the given time and space. Like all offensives, the Soviet commanders recognized they could not continue all-out offensive operations without an operational pause. The art of deciding where to take an operational pause to allow forces to replenish stocks is largely predicated by the disposition of the enemy and the terrain.<sup>407</sup> Both of these elements are affected by the condition of weather. When examining this concept against the Soviet operational goal of destroying 18th Army, clearly the Soviets saw the destruction of 18th Army as an enabling operation to allow them to re-enter Estonia and

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<sup>406</sup> A Soviet Leningrad Campaign Medal (Author's Collection).

<sup>407</sup> As discussed previously regarding a force reaching a culminating point during offensive operations, a force should seek defensible terrain to consider local counter attacks during logistical resupply. See: Headquarters U.S. Marine Corps, United States Marine Corps, *Warfighting MCDP-1* (Washington, DC: U.S. Marine Corps, June 20, 1997), 34.

recognize the subsequent goal of retaking the Baltic States. First, the Soviets had to decide in the rather limited time and space from Leningrad to the Narva River where to separate the German 18th Army from the rest of Army Group North to destroy it. When the Soviets thought about how the Germans would defend based on their doctrine of defense in depth, or trading space for time while inflicting losses, the Soviets would be forced not only to breakout of the Leningrad pocket, but also attack to breakthrough the German defenses in depth to counter the effects of the German defenses prior to the Narva River. In essence, the Soviet could not afford the Germans to retrograde cohesive combat power.

Thinking about the Soviet problem from a scientific point of view, it is an interesting problem of articulating the use of force in time and space. The Soviet combat power had to start from complete rest in the Leningrad pocket then accelerate rapidly to break through the German defenses, and then attack multiple tactical objectives in the planned German engagement areas. The Soviets needed to conduct several tactical level actions in several places in depth at the same time using the forces they generated. While it is impossible to attack with forces in depth, the use of artillery allows multiple targets to be shaped in time and space while combat power moves in that time and space to attack. To recognize an attack into a flank, the Soviets had to understand the enemy in relation to the geography of the area. The geography dictated only a relatively narrow front could be achieved on land without the use of the sea or air assets. To accomplish an attack into the German flank, the Soviets had to tactically fix the Germans by using direct and indirect fires to achieve a combined arms effect. Once the German front was fixed through the use of suppressive fire, the Soviets then could create a tactical level penetration in the German lines and gain space to maneuver. In order for the Soviets to continue the attack to the west, the area of penetration had to be widened to accommodate the follow on force's attack. Tactically

not only were the Soviets attacking to the west, they were also attacking to the north and south in limited objective attacks with the purpose of securing the “shoulders” of the areas where penetrations occurred and to prevent German counterattacks. The Soviets quickly realized fixing the Germans at the point of tactical penetration while continuing to maneuver in all directions gave them decisive depth in a break through. The Soviet action created an overwhelming sensation the German command and control couldn’t cope with. To recognize the strategic objective of liberating Leningrad, a precondition was to achieve a tactical penetration, but more importantly it had to be followed by a quick exploitation of the penetration with follow-on forces. It should be remembered a commander in the assault often has multiple axes of attack to enhance the chances of success. More appropriately, it should be thought of as a series of tactical penetrations linearly along a front, with multiple attacks in depth occurring near simultaneously. Taking this from abstract thought into concrete tactical missions to be accomplished by Soviet forces requires an examination of the force composition in relation to their assigned missions.

All young officers learn before they command their first troops the idea of proper task organization for a mission. The mission is a requirement that must be reconciled against the forces available to best accomplish the task. After analyzing the operating environment, the Soviets understood from decades of military action in the area the composition of the forces needed to accomplish the various missions. To accomplish the tactical task of penetration to break the German lines, the sub tasks of suppression to fix the German defenses, security of a breach site and follow on forces to exploit success had to be arranged.<sup>408</sup> First, what was the required force composition to fix the Germans in their positions?

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<sup>408</sup> Red Army Publication, Генеральный Штаб Красной Армии, *(Проект) Наставление по Форсированию Рек*, (Draft, Instructions on River Crossing) (Moscow, USSR: Military Publishing House of People’s Defense Commissariat, 1943).

To fix the Germans required the use of combined arms. The Soviets needed to employ direct fires in conjunction with indirect fires to fix the Germans, allowing follow-on forces to breach. The task of suppression required the use of artillery and mortars with armor and infantry to fix. The combination of these forces is deliberate based on the effects each weapon system or force could create. While artillery generally shoots a flatter trajectory, the effects of artillery can be massed easily to destroy an objective such as a trench line, if enough ammunition is available.<sup>409</sup> Mortars on the other hand, shoot higher trajectory, having the ability to hit targets in defilade that normally escape the effects of artillery fire. In combination, artillery and mortar fire have the ability to destroy, but the amount of ammunition drives the time that indirect assets can be used to provide suppressive effects. As the attack continues and supply trains are further from the source of supply, the attack can slow because the enemy is no longer suppressed. In doing so, the amount of support given to attacking forces is lesser. When indirect effects are combined with direct effects a greater synergy of effort is created. While armored forces contribute firepower and protection when used in a support by fire role of a subsequent advance, they use a significant amount of ammunition to achieve effects, but not fuel. Armored forces not moving have only the security they can provide for themselves with their organic weapons. The terrain in the Leningrad area is heavily wooded, therefore dismounted infantry was required to secure the flanks of armored formations against German efforts to infiltrate the armored formation and use hand-held anti-tank weapons. Understanding the tenets of available capabilities allowed Soviet commanders to decide what force composition was best to fix with suppressive effects. In this case, space available in trucks and roads determines the support that can be given and sustained.

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<sup>409</sup> To destroy 100 meters of trench line with fortified positions requires approximately 140 well adjusted 155mm rounds. Details of artillery control and effects can be found in: Headquarters U.S. Marine Corps, United States Marine Corps, *Supporting Arms Observer, Spotter, and Controller MCWP 3-16.6* (Washington, DC: U.S. Marine Corps, October 15, 1998), Appendix A.

While operations drive logistical support, there are only so many trucks and so many roads to move them on. Actions within the space determined the composition of the force to be used; the terrain would determine where the force would be employed from. It can be shown how these facets come into action in time and space.

The problem of fixing German defenses with suppressive fire for the Soviets was predicated on two things, time and space. First, how much time was required to achieve effects against the Germans at a particular location and how much space was needed to mass the material required to achieve and sustain those effects. The local problem of providing suppression is also geometric; as the effects of fires must be used in a way which allows German defenses to be isolated, while other space has to be used to maneuver a force to the next phase of breaching the obstacle belt. This creates the physical penetration of the defense. Done correctly, suppressive effects can create the necessary conditions to not only isolate, but also blind the enemy with the use of smoke to allow for a physical penetration of the enemy defenses.

Once Germans positions were fixed by supporting fires, the Soviets then employed a task-organized force to conduct the breach of German lines. The key tasks required to conduct a breach are local suppression, security and assets which allow a force to create mobility. In terms of a breaching force, the assets needed by the Soviets were an armor/infantry task force to provide securing for a tasked organized engineer unit that could breach the enemy plan, mark the breach lanes, proof lanes and expand the breach without interfering with follow-on assault forces. The easier task organization to produce was the armor/infantry team; the engineers were a more challenging asset to source based on requiring more specialized skill sets. The task the combat engineer in the offense is to create mobility. Depending on the terrain to be negotiated, the engineers may have to use bridging assets to cross rivers or reduce obstacles to facilitate the

follow-on attack. In the case of the Soviet advance in late January 1944, both were required. To maneuver in space costs time, negotiating obstacles with bridging requires even more time. The expenditure of time directly correlates to resource expenditure. Here, time needs to be thought of as ammunition. To gain the time needed to breach and exploit it requires the ammunition necessary to achieve suppressive effects. The longer a breaching mission takes; the more ammunition the support element must use to facilitate the breach. The key to the success of the breach was directly attributable to communications between the breaching force and the forces proving the suppression to fix the enemy. Not only does good communication facilitate better control of fires, but it saves ammunition vital to the success of the main effort. In this case, the main effort is the follow-on assault through the breach.

Once supporting fires became effective and the breach was prepared, only the main effort attack remained. Fires were shifted from local German positions to allow the Soviet infantry and armor the opportunity to close with and destroy the Germans in positions close to the breach site. At the same time, fires being used to support the breaching operations were shifted to deeper targets to support the main effort attack. To realize an attack in depth as a measure to defeat the German defense in depth was a more complicated logistical problem than it was operational. To sustain the attack logistically is the burden of every command seeking decision through offensive action. The art of the science is determining at what point on the ground the commander wants to achieve decisive actions allowing him to recognize the desired end state while also recognizing the limitations of the environment. With an understanding of the mechanics required to create the condition for an attack in depth, the Soviet attack can now be properly examined. The question eluding the historical record is where did the Soviets desire to achieve the destruction of the

German 18th Army relative to the limited space afforded by the terrain as well as the time they were afforded by the weather once the breakout of Leningrad was complete.<sup>410</sup>

David Glantz's record of events found in his work *The Battle for Leningrad 1941-1944*, is perhaps the most accurate and insightful work written in English about the events occurring during the battle for Leningrad in 1944. As Soviet forces attacked toward the Luga River and subsequent German positions in depth, Glantz notes unhappiness on the part of the Soviet STAVKA regarding the speed of the attack. Glantz notes,

Although Govorov's and Meretskov's fronts resoundingly smashed both flanks of the Eighteenth Army and threatened it with a general offensive from the Gulf of Finland to Lake Il'men', the STAVKA was still not pleased with their progress. It duly noted a host of shortcomings in the 2d Shock, 42d and 59th Armies' operations and demanded they be corrected. Among the most serious of these deficiencies were the poor exploitation of maneuver to bypass or envelop enemy strong points, lack of night combat, inadequate reconnaissance of German defenses, and ineffective command and control, particularly at army and corps levels.<sup>411</sup>

What this statement makes clear about the Soviet units executing the operation must be examined against the context of what the units were doing prior to the offensive. The units that conducted the attack had not fought a continuous offensive up to this point. The units involved in this action on both sides had been positioned in static defensive positions for three years where the only form of offense action was occasional security or reconnaissance patrols. Clearly, there is a significant difference between tactical units executing security patrols and conducting coordinated deliberate tactical attacks. While STAVKA may have appreciated the difficulties of conducting offensive operations after three years, STAVKA also failed to recognize the challenges of executing these operations over the difficult terrain of the Leningrad area in poor weather. No matter how well planned and communicated, there were only so many external lines

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<sup>410</sup> The key task for the Soviets breaking out of Leningrad was to quickly prevent the Germans from withdrawing in good order while destroying their combat power in swift operations in the time and space allowed.

<sup>411</sup> David M. Glantz, *The Battle for Leningrad* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 2002), 349-350.



of operation and communication for the Soviet Army to operate on to be decisive. Regarding the influence of weather during Soviet breakout operations, a contemporary approach with the historical record is needed.

Dr. Jaak Jaagus, a professor of climatology at the University of Tartu in Estonia, provides valuable generalizations about weather patterns from 1944. The Estonian winter of 1944 was fairly mild, particularly January, which is typically known for precipitation. The spring months of March, April and May were colder than normal. Maximum precipitation was recorded in May and June, while July was much dryer than normal. [See Figure 14]

Average Temperature and Precipitation Date from Tiirikoja, Estonia (Lat 58° 52' Long 26° 57' Along Lake Peipus) for 1944												
	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
Average Temperature (C)	-2.2	-4.7	-3	0.8	8.1	12.6	18.2	NR	NR	NR	6.2	0.9
Average Precipitation (MM)	27	10	13	24	52	90	62	44	NR	37	68	32
NR= Not Recorded. Most likely due to the fact the Soviets were coming back into Estonia and the people responsible for the measurements fled.												

**Figure 14**

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Analysis of this weather information in comparison to the situation at the front and the physical terrain reveals it would be possible to attack out of the Leningrad area quickly using the available road structure in the north with the thought of destroying the German 18<sup>th</sup> Army prior to it escaping into the forests and swamps and crossing the Luga, Plyussa and Narva Rivers. Based on the terrain, weather and the historical situation, there is no doubt the Soviet main effort in the north was going against the German 18<sup>th</sup> Army. Based on the Soviet official history of the Second World War, the Soviets correctly understood the German mission for Army Group North as “Units were tasked to stop the attack of the Leningrad and Volkov Fronts on defensive lines alongside the Luga River while maintaining control of the Luga-Pskov railway and highway

which were essential for the retreat of the 18<sup>th</sup> Army units to the rear defensive line at “Panther.”<sup>413</sup> Hidden in the Soviet history lies the fact the Soviet Army was concentrating forces on the German front, while attempting to cut the German line of communication to the rear. In doing so, a pocket would be created, thus allowing the Soviets to reduce the pocket over the course of time, while continuing the attack to the west. The Soviet official history attests to the poor terrain and weather conditions when it states:

Soviet units had to attack through woods and swamps, partially off-road. Units were isolated from the sources of resupply; Lack of ammunition, fuel, provisions and means of transportation existed. Armored and self propelled artillery units suffered heavy casualties and losses and could not render significant support to rifle units. All of the above adversely affected the speed of attack.<sup>414</sup>

Examining this statement against Figure 13, the scenario along with Soviet difficulties becomes clearer. The Soviets were employing massed regiments and divisions of artillery, the various types of vehicles alone on these unimproved surface roads would have been enough to not allow for infantry support. Not only would the movement on the roads be slow because of snow and inexperienced Soviet troops, but also because once the artillery left the road to establish firing positions, they would have to fight with local off-road conditions. Artillery and engineer units likely had to work together closely in order to allow artillery pieces to be set up. Engineers would have to likely clear pathways into the positions, then, clear the positions of vegetation. The amount of space needed for a regiment or division of artillery is enormous. Based on the speed of the Soviet attack and the range of their guns to support infantry and armor in the attack, it could be expected the artillery would have to displace often. With road space at a premium, troops would have move to the front to reinforce faltering attacks while artillery resupply convoys would

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<sup>412</sup> Data from the Estonian Meteorological Institute in Tallinn, Estonia. Information was furnished to the author by Dr. Jaak Jaagus a professor of climatology at the University of Tartu in Estonia.

have been trying to move to their positions, only to find the unit they were supporting had already displaced. Even if the guns were able to support with adequate fires, controlling those fires in a manner which would make them timely was next to impossible. Even if the observer could get a timely message to the fire direction center or the gun line supporting them, the artillery observer could not necessarily correct fires for a few significant reasons: First, the Soviets employed their artillery in mass, firing thousands of rounds. When these rounds impacted, the observer could not tell which rounds were fired in support of him. Second, the other significant issue was the terrain and weather itself. Securing adjustments from the air was difficult for the Soviets, as few radio were in use between tactical air and ground units. As the ground in the area of operations before the Narva River and Estonia proper are relatively flat, Soviet artillery observers on the ground had a difficult time adjusting fires based on the terrain. As there are few natural features to refer fires to or from, it was difficult to get accuracy from the map. This fact is also verified by *Combat in the Russian Forests and Swamps*, “Massed fire on important targets must be planned with extraordinary care. Systematic area fire from map data has little promise of success and, in most instances, merely constitutes a waste of ammunition. In swamp areas, furthermore, a considerable part of the fragmentation effect is lost unless time fuzes are available.”<sup>415</sup> The depth of snow on the ground in conjunction with the ice and soil under the snow made it difficult for artillery observers to see the rounds hitting the ground; vegetation such as pine trees and birch trees complicated this problem further. The Soviet answer to these problems was to employ all of their indirect fire weapon systems hub to hub and “remove” all vegetation. While the amount of rounds the Soviets expended was an impressive number, well in the millions; the effects of their fires did not

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<sup>413</sup> История второй мировой войны 1939-1945, *Istoriya Vtoroi Mirovoi Voyny, 1939-1945*. (History of the Second World War 1939-1945) Москва, Воениздат, Volume VIII (Moscow, USSR: State Publishers, 1977), 127.

<sup>414</sup> Ibid.

accomplish the mission efficiently. Ultimately, as *Combat in the Russian Forests and Swamps* points out “In forest fighting the psychological effect of artillery fire is greatly amplified while that of small arms fire is generally reduced. Prepared concentrations, if laid down to block the enemy’s main route of approach, can be highly effective.”<sup>416</sup>

Once Soviet forces left the road structure of the Leningrad region, the small lakes, forests and snow choked the Soviet advance. Armor in this terrain was generally road bound. T-34s and larger tanks had a difficult time operating in this environment, even with infantry support. As Soviet armor was designed to be employed in mass against an enemy weak point in depth, sufficient time and combat power are required along with the space to stage armor and logistical elements supporting the attack along an avenue of approach. Based on extensive Soviet experiences of conducting combat operations in winter against Finland in 1940, the Soviets published *The Regulations for Combat Actions of Troops in Winter* on March 4, 1941.<sup>417</sup> In Section 5, entitled Offensive Combat, the following critical considerations regarding the employment of armor are discussed: 1) Use tanks only on short deployments during the attack when snow depth exceeds 50 centimeters. 2) A penetration into the enemy rear by cavalry, tank and motorized units can be exploited only when the snow depth falls below 50 centimeters and when a well-developed road network to the enemy is available.<sup>418</sup> The reasonable question which needs to be asked is why 50 centimeters? 50 centimeters relates to the track width and height of the T-34 as well as other Soviet Army motorized assets. What must also be remembered is the more vehicle traffic through an area, the more disturbed the ground becomes. An answer to these problems was for the Soviets to use light tanks, such as the T-60, T-70, ect. What these tanks

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<sup>415</sup> Department of the Army, *Department of the Army Pamphlet No 20-231 Historical Study Combat in Russian Forests and Swamps* (Washington D.C.: Department of the Army 1951), 7.

<sup>416</sup> Ibid.

lacked in armored protection and firepower, they made up in maneuverability and were easier to recover if they became mired in deeper snow. With snow sitting on the surface of the ground along with the weight of vehicles pounding the snow flat, eventually when the climate provides a slightly warmer day, the ground will turn to a morass as the surface water which would be frozen on the surface and slightly below the surface unfreezes. This scenario in conjunction with increased German resistance in compartmentalized terrain before the three rivers easily caused the Soviet attack to falter.

In order for the above considerations to come to fruition, operational-level planners needed to consider their offensive and defensive possibilities, not only in terms of natural and man-made avenues of approach and obstacles, but also in terms of the nodes and modes of communication which facilitate the speed and success of either the attack or counterattack. The information needed by planners to be effective is the initial throughput capacities available for operations, but more importantly, the planner's ability to project enhanced capabilities for throughput to sustain current operations as well as build up for future operations. It is now time to examine how the Soviets took the lessons they observed and turned them into action for breaking the "Panther Position."

#### **4.3 SOVIET FORCES REACH THE LUGA LINE AND PREPARE TO CREATE**

##### **BRIDGEHEADS INTO ESTONIA:**

Even with STAVKA perturbed about the lack of speed associated with the Soviet attack after the breakout, the mere size of the Soviet attack overwhelmed German defenses. Perhaps a point that frustrated the Soviets even more was no matter how much physical size they introduced against the Germans, why were their forces unable to make the Germans totally

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<sup>417</sup> Soviet General Staff, *Winter Warfare, Red Army Orders and Experiences* ed. Richard N. Armstrong and Joseph G. Welsh, trans. Joseph G. Welsh (London, UK: Frank Cass, 1997).

break. This is an acknowledgement that the Germans executed Operation BLAU with discipline and control. The Germans knew the reality of the situation; they were going to be significantly outnumbered, but as long as they could continue to trade space for time, the Germans would continue to strengthen their position as they were reducing the length of their lines of operation and communication as they moved west toward Estonia. It should be remember from chapter 3 that the Germans planned for the main engagement area to be 25 kilometers from the Narva River or the “Panther Line,” with the engineer engagement area being built 40 kilometers from the Narva River.<sup>419</sup> Thus the Luga River in terms of an obstacle supporting a German engagement area is positioned, according to German defense in depth doctrine of the period, at the outer edge of the main battle area.<sup>420</sup> The Soviets recognized the German plan and planned to counter with break 18th Army before it could reach the Luga River. Then, the Soviets could seek an operational pause. The Soviets believed if this occurred, the Germans would not have the combat power to conduct operations in their main battle area, nor would they be able to cohesively defend the “Panther Line” at the Narva River. This concept recognized the first Soviet campaign goal, to crush 18th Army and it paved the way for the Soviets to “liberate” the Baltic region starting with Estonia.

While the Germans continued a desperate life and death struggle against incredible odds on all fronts, on January 21, 1944 the Leningrad and Volkhov Fronts continued their offensive operations.

That day, Kuechler flew to the Fuehrer’s headquarters to demand some freedom of maneuver from Hitler. Early the next morning Kuechler informed Hitler that Kranogvardeisk would fall unless Hitler permitted him to abandon Puskin and Slutsk. Hitler categorically rejected Kuechler’s pleas, stating, “I am against all withdrawals. We will have crises wherever we are. There is no guarantee we will not be broken through on

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<sup>418</sup> Ibid, 45.

<sup>419</sup> See Chapter 3 on engagement area development contained in Plan BLAU.

<sup>420</sup> See Chapter 2 for German defensive doctrine considerations for defense in depth.

the Panther line. If we go back voluntarily, he [the Russians] will not get there with only half of his forces. He must bleed himself white on the way. The battle must be fought as far as possible from the German border.<sup>421</sup>

Here again, the German strategic hand of interference restricted the essence of Operation BLAU as a plan to execute the withdrawal in accordance with doctrinal considerations.

General Fediuninsky, the commander of 2d Shock Army, later recalled these operations of late January in his memoirs;

The troops of 2d Shock Army broke through the Luga River by January 31st. The enemy showed fierce resistance. The most stubborn defense was established in the city Kingissepa, where we had to fight over every single house. Finally on the first of February the 109th Corps captured the city by using a turning maneuver and night operations. Continuing the vigorous pursuit of the enemy, the army troops reached the Narva River on February 3rd. In separate sections our advanced detachments crossed to the west bank of river on the “enemy’s shoulders” and captured small bridgeheads. Desperate battles were fought until mid-February and as a result we extended the bridgehead along the front to 18 kilometers long and 15 kilometers deep. The task of capturing the stations of Jõhvi, Atsalama, Jõuga, Kauksi and the railway from Ozeli till Mustva did not happen until later. We failed to free the city of Narva by February 17th. The military council of front expressed great displeasure on this occasion. After that, time and again I would hear just reproaches from the army group commander.<sup>422</sup>

General Fediuninsky continued to develop his understanding of the situation as his forces continued the attack on German positions along the Narva River in early February 1944. He spent considerable time along the Narva River gaining excellent tactical situational understanding for the problem he was tasked with solving. As all commanders should do, he considered alternative solutions and tried to rationalize if the small gains he was making justified the losses in casualties. Here were his thoughts:

Being on the bridgehead (of the Narva River) along with my private observations I was convinced that to force a crossing over the river and to take the city of Narva should be done from another direction where the enemy did not expect it. On the present bridgehead, it was difficult to concentrate enough troops secretly and thus the striking power would not be enough to overwhelm the enemy. I was racking my brain over the

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<sup>421</sup> David M. Glantz, *The Battle for Leningrad* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 2002), 351.

<sup>422</sup> I. I. Fediuninsky, И. И. Федюнинский, *Поднятые Потрешове*, (Raised by an Alarm) (Moscow, USSR: Military Publishing House, 1964), 184.

picture the whole evening. Where to breach the enemy defenses? Which way was best to capture the city and fortress of Narva? Is the developing of the attack worth giving up the already seized bridgehead? It was clear to me that even if the main thrust wouldn't be inflicted from the bridgehead, it wouldn't matter; the effort spent capturing it wouldn't be in vain. The enemy sent much strength against the bridgehead. That's why an idea of attacking from a different place came to mind.<sup>423</sup>

Soviet forces had control of bridgehead positions on the eastern bank of the Narva River, both north and south of the city of Narva by the beginning of February. As Glantz explains, Andreev's 43d Rifle Corps of Fediuninsky's army seized two bridgeheads across the Narva River on the army's right flank north of the city of Narva on February 1st. Two days later Zaitsev's 122d Rifle Corps seized two additional bridgeheads south of the city.<sup>424</sup> Govorov's plan was to have Fediuninsky's 2d Shock Army conduct a double envelopment of the city of Narva.<sup>425</sup> The two areas the Soviets picked in the north were those of Riigiküla and Siivertsi (**See Map 8**). The tactical reason these locations were picked by the Soviets was they were the narrowest points of the Narva River in the north and they offered the best lines of communication to continue the assault once forces arrived on the west bank of the river (**See Map 8**).

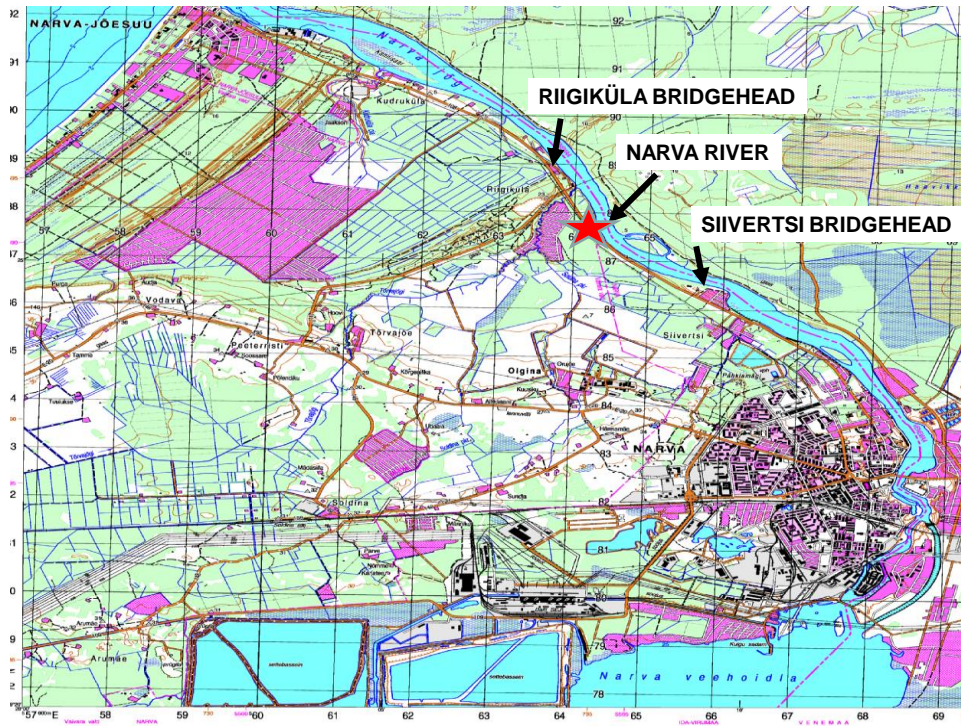
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<sup>423</sup> Ibid,192.

<sup>424</sup> David M. Glantz, *The Battle for Leningrad* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 2002), 373.

<sup>425</sup> In confirmation of this thought Felix Steiner states, "The commander of the Leningrad Front, Army General Govorov, apparently had the intention of taking the Narva defenses through use of a double envelopment attack out of the shoulders." See: Felix Steiner, *Die Freiwilligen Idee und Opfergang* (Göttingen, Germany: Plesse Publishing, 1958), 254.





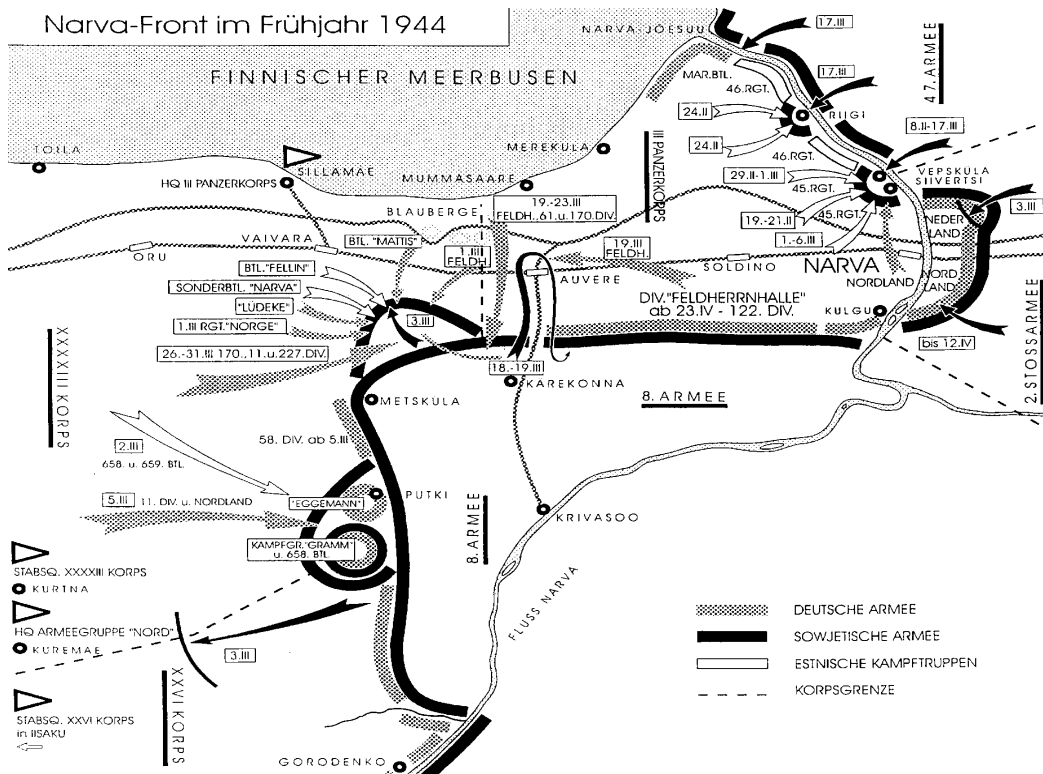
**Map 8: Northern crossing points for Second Shock Army**

From the Soviet work *Fight as I Shall Dig, February- September 1944*, comes an interesting account of actions at the Riigula Bridgehead from February 3, 1944. It reads:

From the former commander of 308<sup>th</sup> Regiment Colonel I. Naumov: “First and third battalions enveloped the enemy near the highway along the river and proceeded with the assault. Still, in the morning, the enemy was not taking any measures. The enemy was isolated between the 131st Division and our forces. Third battalion had to send a reconnaissance unit commanded by Lt. Tarasov. At 9 a.m., the enemy opened up with artillery fire on positions in the bridgehead. The bridgehead was also attacked by German ships in Narva bay. Mortars and smaller artillery were constantly being used. First two nights at the bridgehead were very tense; our regiment had no clear contact with adjacent units.

4<sup>th</sup> Rifle Regiment Commander Colonel Kuznetsov also faced intense resistance along the way. With heavy casualties, he managed to capture only the first enemy trench at the village of Riigi. 9<sup>th</sup> Company reached the western bank first. Commanded by D. Kniazikov, 9th Company managed to force the fascists out of the trench. Under heavy gunfire, 9th Company managed to eliminate 37 officers and soldiers and took an active part in resisting the enemy when it started the counterattack.<sup>426</sup>

<sup>426</sup> E. Krivosheev and N. Kostin, E. Кривошеев Н. Костин, *Битва за Нарву, Февраль - Сентябрь 1944 года* (Fight as I shall Dig, February-September 1944) (Tallinn, ESSR: Eesti Raamat, 1984), 18.



Map 9: Situation in the Narva area in February 1944

In the Siiverts bridgehead, the attacks continued. Again, *Fight as I Shall Dig, February-September 1944*, offers a description of how intense the fighting was:

In the Riigi- Siiverts zone, 131<sup>st</sup> Rifle Division was assaulting the “Panther Line.” 482nd Regiment which had suffered heavy casualties while liberating nearby settlements was kept in the second echelon. Besides the goal of ensuring the success of the first echelon units, the Regiment had been ordered to protect the left flank of the division from enemy attack from the south. In the first echelon, in Siiverts-Vaasa zone, 593rd and 743rd Rifle Regiments were assaulting. The 593<sup>rd</sup> Regiment was the main effort. It was assaulting the right flank, while insuring cooperation with the units of 98<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division.<sup>427</sup>

In the end, Soviet bridgeheads were frustrated by continuous German indirect fires and counterattacks. As Krivosheev and Kostin described on page 20:

Forces in the first echelon of the 43<sup>rd</sup> Rifle Corps were involved in intense firefights for a week to the north of Narva. Occupying a small bridgehead on the western bank of the river, it was trying to widen the bridgehead along the front and in **depth**. The enemy resisted desperately, conducting several counterattacks and using fresh reserves. For

<sup>427</sup> Ibid, 20.

almost a week, our forces could not advance and were forced to defend themselves instead.<sup>428</sup>

The obvious goal of the German counterattack effort was to eliminate Soviet control of the western bank, while preventing breaches in the Panther Line while preventing the Soviets from taking Narva. The Germans continued to buy time and frustrate the STAVKA who was well aware they had to breach the German positions before the ice of the Narva River was no longer able to support the weight of their forces crossing the river. The Soviets planned for the early winter as the best time to conduct river crossing operations based on extensive experience in other fronts, such as Kiev in the fall of 1943.<sup>429</sup> Frozen ice strong enough to support the weight of tanks facilitated momentum of the attack and required no bridging equipment which took up an enormous amount of space on the roads along with time to set up once at the front.

**YOU ARE LOCATED IN A DEFENSIVE POSITION NEAR THE RIVER CROSSING SITE IN RIIGIKÜLA.  
(PICTURE WAS TAKEN FROM VIC (35V NF 64018858) LOOKING TOWARD THE EAST.)**



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<sup>428</sup> Ibid.

<sup>429</sup> For information on the envelopment of Kiev in the fall of 1943, see: Earl F. Ziemke, *Stalingrad to Berlin: The German Defeat in the East* (Washington D.C.: Department of the Army 1968), 184.

Based on a detailed examination of the physical terrain of the Riigiküla crossing area during warmer weather, some interesting details were observed about the Narva River and the banks on both sides. The river flowed from the south to the north at about 5 knots toward the Baltic Sea. From position (**35V NF 64018858, see star on Map 8**), the bank was 315 degrees magnetic to the north and 140 degrees magnetic to the south. The river width was 251 meters from this position. The water was unclear, while the composition of the river bottom appeared to be silt. The composition of the soil at the water's edge was sand, making the banks more susceptible to being destroyed with high traffic from armored vehicles. The Soviet side of the river (east bank) was unusually higher in elevation than the west bank. The river bank on the Estonia side rose up gently from the water, but the sandy composition of the river bank would have made a spring crossing after the thaw nearly impossible. Sandy soil composition along the river could not support the weight of armored forces crossing the river. The more tanks that crossed the river, the more the vehicles would erode the crossing point making it less usable. Clearly, the best time for the Soviets to cross would have been in the winter when the river was frozen. The Estonian side of the river also had far less vegetation than the Soviet side. (In 1944, both sides of the river were cleared by continuous fire.)<sup>430</sup> The Germans had unlimited visibility looking to the east, but the Soviets dominated the western bank and could place fire wherever with impunity.

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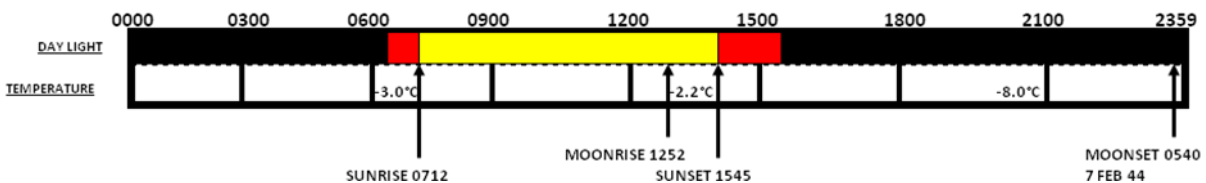
<sup>430</sup> During a teaching obligation at the Baltic Defence College, the author had the opportunity to survey the terrain personally on October 29, 2008. During this visit the following information regarding the river was obtained. All photographs and comments on them are the author's.

VIEW OF THE NARVA RIVER LOOKING TO THE EAST. (PICTURE WAS TAKEN FROM VIC (35V NF 64018858) THE DIRECTION TO THE YELLOW SIGN WAS 55 DEGREES MAGNETIC.



Operations at the Siivertsi crossing point to the south of Riigiküla were no easier for the Soviets. In the following two examples, one sees not only the desperate nature of the tactical situation at the bridgeheads, but also the hand of friction played havoc. Looking at the action of February 6, 1944 through the lens of weather for the day helps explain some of the German and Soviet difficulties of operating in the area. First, the weather in the area.

WEATHER DATA FOR 6 FEB 44



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<sup>431</sup> Tartu University Astronomic Observatory, *Astronomic Calendar, 21<sup>st</sup> Edition 1944*, (Dorpat (Tartu), Estonia: University Publishing 1943), 9.

	DATA COLLECTION TIMES			
	07.12	13.12	21.12	AVG
TEMP	-3.0°C	-2.2°C	-8.0°C	-4.4°C
WIND SPEED	1 KPH	1 KPH	1 KPH	1 KPH
DIRECTION	WNW	NW	W	
AVE HUMD	3.3°C	2.8°C	2.3°C	2.8°C
REL HUMD (%)	90%	71%	93%	85%
<b>STATION INFORMATION WAS COLLECTED AT: TURIKOJA (ON LAKE PEIPUS) LAT: 58° 52' LONG: 26° 57'</b> <b>INFORMATION COLLECTED BY: ALLEK VALDUR</b> <b>***TIMES ARE PER LOCAL ESTONIAN TIME ZONE. IF USING IN GERMAN PLANNING SUBTRACT ONE HOUR FOR BERLIN'S TIME ZONE.</b> <b>IF USING FOR SOVIET PLANNING ADD ONE HOUR FOR MOSCOW'S TIME ZONE.</b>				

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What this data demonstrates is the limited amount of daylight the Soviets had to prepare for river crossing operations. In the days prior to night vision devices, there was about 7-8 hours of light to prepare and execute crossing operations. This was one reason why STAVKA insisted on crossing operations in the winter. Based on the amount of time required to do bridging tasks, 7-8 hours was hardly enough time to move the required combat power into position for the Soviets to articulate into the Estonian space.

To attest to the brutality of the fighting at Siivertsi bridgehead, several authors contribute accounts detailing the intense tactical level combat to repulse the Soviets in the vicinity of the Siivertsi Cemetery in the month of March, 1944. This tactical action illustrates Soviet determination to hold onto the bridgehead using a monument from the 1700 Northern War as

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<sup>432</sup> Eesti Meteoroloogijaamade Vork, *Weather Record, February 1944*, (Dorpat (Tartu), Estonia: Station Year Record 1944), 5-8.

well as the multiple nationalities fighting together under German command to counterattack at the cemetery and the monument.

The road was now open for capturing the Siivertsi-Vepsküla area, so the final adjustments were made. The plan was as follows: one battalion of “Nordland” would commence the attack from a suburb of Narva, and attempt to capture the cemetery; where one battalion of “Danmark,” from the Pähklimäe manor would provide support. In addition, the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the 45<sup>th</sup> Regiment (20<sup>th</sup> Waffen SS Grenadier Division) would capture Vepsküla and the military cemetery.<sup>433</sup> The Siivertsi Cemetery was not captured that day.”<sup>434</sup> Of the memorial: “Beyond the cemetery, however, the area around the memorial from the Nordic War could not be taken. This memorial was a massive granite block erected to honor the Russian General Sheremetjev. Now, the enemy used it for their final stand. They dug a machine gun nest beneath the memorial and from there, until darkness all attempts to push the Russians out failed. Before a heavy flame thrower could be used to reduce the memorial, the machine gun nest lit itself on fire and the ammunition exploded. The Siivertsi cemetery was conquered at 20.15 on March 2, 1944.”<sup>435</sup>



**Picture 4: Memorial dedicating the Northern War of 1700.**

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<sup>433</sup> In his War Memoirs, Felix Steiner stated the following of the Estonian Men fighting at the northern bridgehead, “In the first days of the March, Estonian Regiment 45 attacked the bridgehead of Siivertsi, north of Narva. Here a further hostile Division was pressed permanently on the north edge of the city. The Regimental Commander, Lieutenant Colonel Vent, and both Battalions Commanders Lang and Riipalu performed the entire task themselves. The Estonians had cleaned their homeland of the penetrating Soviets and recovered the entire Narva bank north of the city. For the first time, the Estonian Volunteer Division fought alongside the volunteers of the SS Panzerkorps.” See Felix Steiner, *Die Freiwilligen Idee und Opfergang* (Göttingen, Germany: Plesse Publishing, 1958), 255-256.

<sup>434</sup> Reports of the Estonian International Commission for the Investigation of Crimes Against Humanity, *Estonian Border Guard Regiments*, Tallinn, Estonia: Tallinna Raamatutrukikoda 2006), 197-198.

<sup>435</sup> *Ibid*, 199-200.

The size of the counterattack force was entirely limited by the terrain, as explained on page 193 of *P-035, Retrograde of Army Group North During 1944*, “A unified counterattack did not materialize. Support by tanks, artillery and heavy infantry weapons were practicable only to a limited extent as a result of the tremendous terrain difficulties. Hence, it was possible to break up and clear the enemy out of the penetration only in piecemeal fashion.”<sup>436</sup>



**Picture 5: “Soviet batteries pounded the German positions still holding out during the morning of February 13th. *Kompanie Landmesser, Kompanie Schirmer* and *SS-Pionier-Battalion 54* at the northern edge of the Siivertsi Cemetery were hit especially hard. From positions on the higher east bank of the river, the Soviets engaged every visible target with their antitank guns.”<sup>437</sup>**

As the amount of time available to conduct operations is definitively known to be 7-8 hours during daylight, it would be instructive to see the totality of tasks the Soviets doctrinally anticipated to conduct based on their manual for river crossing from the period of operations. Based on a draft river crossing manual, we have the opportunity to learn two important points, 1) how the Soviets learned as an organization and distributed lessons observed across all of their

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<sup>436</sup> Department of the Army, *MS# P-035 Retrograde of Army Group North During 1944*. (Carlisle, Army War College: Foreign Military Studies Department 1950), 193.



fronts to benefit other organizations conducting similar operations and 2) how the Soviets planned and organized their forces to conduct river crossing operations. First, an examination of the manual itself is required.

The manual explains crossing rivers occurs in three phases: 1) Organization and preparations for river crossings, 2) Focusing on the delivery of the first echelon and capturing the opposite bank with a security element while widening the bridgehead for follow-on forces and 3) Crossing the main effort to the opposite bank to carry on the attack.<sup>438</sup> In section 39, the manual continues to explain step by step “how to” conduct the crossing in conjunction with the phases explained in section 38, starting first with the selection of a crossing point. Section 42 states specifically “Army crossing points are selected by Army commanders and division crossing points in zone are selected by the division commanders.”<sup>439</sup> This helps explain Fediuninsky’s interest in personally selecting and examining the bridgeheads. Once a point was picked, a reconnaissance effort was nominated to identify the avenues of approach to the crossing point then onto the other side of the river. The reconnaissance effort also took into account the composition and disposition of enemy defenses on the far bank. Once the reconnaissance was complete, the decision was made to cross the river. Once the plan was executed, the first duty after crossing the river was to widen the bridgehead while maintaining control of the organization and communicating the situation to higher headquarters. Specifically, the manual states every effort must be made to conceal the concentration of the main blow against the bridgehead and the completion of the third phase of organization.<sup>440</sup> This brings to mind the

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<sup>437</sup> Wilhelm Tieke, *Tragedy of the Faithful, A History of the III. (germanisches) SS-Panzer Korps*, (Manitoba, Canada : J.J. Fedorowicz Publishing 2001), 57.

<sup>438</sup> Red Army Publication, Генеральный Штаб Красной Армии, *(Проект) Наставление по Форсированию Рек*, (Draft, Instructions on River Crossing) (Moscow, USSR: Military Publishing House of People’s Defense Commissariat, 1943), 19.

<sup>439</sup> Ibid, 21.

<sup>440</sup> Ibid, 19.

excellent wartime use of camouflage and deception by Soviet forces throughout the war. Only Japanese forces could rival the Soviet's use of deception and camouflage tactically.<sup>441</sup> Finally, the exploitation attack of the bridgehead and conduct of the follow-on main effort attack were launched.<sup>442</sup>

The follow-on main effort attack was what frustrated Soviet forces. The fact was the area Feduninsky was trying to cross was too open to disguise or provide cover for his forces, nor could they maintain enough momentum to accomplish the task. STAVKA took notice.<sup>443</sup>

By February 14th, STAVKA expressed its displeasure with the failed efforts to capture Narva and issued the following message to Govorov demanding it be captured at all costs no later than the February 17th:

It is mandatory that our forces seize Narva no later than 17 February 1944. This is required both for military as well as political reasons. It is the most important thing right now. I demand that you undertake all necessary measures to liberate Narva no later than the period indicated.

[signed] I. Stalin<sup>444</sup>

An unstated military reason for hurrying the operation was the projected weather conditions in the *Instructions on River Crossing*.<sup>445</sup> First, the average temperatures for late winter/early spring 1944 (See highlight portion of chart):

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<sup>441</sup> During the Second World War the Japanese were widely considered second to none when it came to the use of tactical camouflage. See: William Manchester, *Goodbye Darkness: A Memoir of the Pacific War* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1982) for examples.

<sup>442</sup> Red Army Publication, Генеральный Штаб Красной Армии, (*Проект*) *Наставление по Форсированию Рек*, (Draft, Instructions on River Crossing) (Moscow, USSR: Military Publishing House of People's Defense Commissariat, 1943), 19.

<sup>443</sup> Reference note 17 in this chapter.

<sup>444</sup> David M. Glantz, *The Battle for Leningrad* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 2002), 375.

<sup>445</sup> The third chapter of *Draft, Instructions on River Crossing* deals with the crossing of frozen bodies. See: Red Army Publication, Генеральный Штаб Красной Армии, (*Проект*) *Наставление по Форсированию Рек*, (Draft, Instructions on River Crossing) (Moscow, USSR: Military Publishing House of People's Defense Commissariat, 1943), 61.

Average Temperature and Precipitation Date from Tiirikoja, Estonia (Lat 58° 52' Long 26° 57' Along Lake Peipus) for 1944												
	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
Average Temperature (C)	-2.2	-4.7	-3	0.8	8.1	12.6	18.2	NR	NR	NR	6.2	0.9
Average Precipitation (MM)	27	10	13	24	52	90	62	44	NR	37	68	32
NR= Not Recorded. Most likely due to the fact the Soviets were coming back into Estonia and the people responsible for the measurements fled.												

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Sort of load and full weight in tons		The least thickness in centimeters under the middle of the ice. Air temperature for seventy-two hours			Distance between the loads and minimal distance between crossing axles in meters
		-10 <sup>0</sup> and below	From -9 <sup>0</sup> till -1 <sup>0</sup>	0 <sup>0</sup> and above (during the short-term of thaw)	
Caterpillar loads (Tanks and tractors)	4	18	20	23	10
	6	22	24	28	15
	10	28	31	35	20
	16	36	40	45	25
	20	40	44	50	25
	25	45	49	56	30
	30	49	54	61	35
	40	57	63	71	40
	45	60	66	75	40
	50	64	70	80	40
Wheeled loads (Vehicles and guns by horse)	55	67	74	84	45
	60	70	77	88	45
	2	16	18	20	15
	3.5	21	23	26	15
	6	27	30	34	20
	8	31	34	39	22
	10	35	39	44	25
	15	43	47	54	30

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<sup>446</sup> Data from the Estonian Meteorological Institute in Tallinn, Estonia. Information was furnished to the author by Dr. Jaak Jaagus a professor of climatology at the University of Tartu in Estonia.

Comparing the differences in information between the average temperature and what the Soviets doctrinally needed to conduct a river crossing over the ice of the Narva River demonstrates the Soviets were starting in a lesser category and every day they went closer to April, the less likely the ice would be safe for heavier traffic bringing up bridging equipment would further slow the attack. Bridging assets would have been at a premium across all of the Soviet fronts. Every day that passed, the Soviets were growing closer to failure, but why?

General Fediuninsky stated in his memoirs the reason for this initial failure to take Narva with the following rationale: “The primary cause of our failure was not enemy resistance, but rather the serious deficiency in organizing the attack and coordinating the troops by headquarters at all levels of command, particularly by the Army Commander and the Corps Commanders. The matter was complicated by being flattered with success in battles before reaching the Narva River.”<sup>448</sup> While Fediuninsky struggled to create a bridgehead north of Narva, Soviet forces were also fighting to maintain and expand the bridgehead south of the city into the area of Auvere.

In the area south of the city, the Soviets were making better progress than they were north of the city. On the map (**See Map 9**), it would appear the Soviets were in a far better position operating from their bridgehead in the south to breakthrough to the sea than anywhere else. This was only true on the map, the terrain in the Auvere area is amongst the worse to be found anywhere in the region. Due to the amount of swamps and trees in the area, the southern bridgehead was only tenable in the winter months and only to light forces. Heavy armor operating in the southern Soviet bridgehead, even in winter had difficulty operating. Looking at the problem of approaching the sea from the area of Auvere continues to demonstrate the

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<sup>447</sup> Red Army Publication, Генеральный Штаб Красной Армии, *(Проект) Наставление по Форсированию Рек*, (Draft, Instructions on River Crossing) (Moscow, USSR: Military Publishing House of People’s Defense Commissariat, 1943), 83.

difficulty of the Soviet position. The terrain does not allow the Soviets to generate momentum quickly, nor does it allow the Soviets to maintain it. The closer the Soviets could get to the Narva-Tallinn Railroad track, the more vulnerable they became to the effective static fires coming from the Blue Hills in “Child’s Home Position (**See Map 9**).” A terrain study submitted by German 32nd Pioneers on March 14, 1944 speaks to the dominate nature of the Blue Hills terrain when it states, “The heights form a pivot position, while the forests forbid movement from the east, west or south. The heights offer unlimited visibility. Therefore the heights must be held.”<sup>449</sup> From the south, the Germans are able to negate the Soviet mass by not allowing them to deploy across their front. The Soviets are forced to attack in column and are continuously channelized by the terrain and by the German obstacle plan and fires. 32nd Pioneer’s terrain study referred to the area as “an area for the slaughter of tanks.”<sup>450</sup> As the Soviets continued to push toward the “Child’s Home Position” and Auvere, they created a salient the Germans called the East and West Sack (**See Map 9**). Again, on a map the Soviet salient looks dangerous to the German position, but the Soviets were accepting more risk by attacking than the Germans were in defending. German tank commander Otto Carius talked about his operations in the East and West Sack in his work, *Tiger in the Mud*. Carius describes action at the end of February in a chapter he described as the “calm before the storm.”<sup>451</sup> Carius was in a great position to comment on the totality of actions on the Narva Front. As an independent commander with prized comedies such as Tiger I tanks, Carius had the opportunity to understand and reflect on the situation of the entire Narva Front. There is little doubt his extensive tactical experience was tailored by his exception grasp of the operational situation.

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<sup>448</sup> I. I. Fediuninsky, И. И. Федюнинский, *Поднятые Потрвоге*, (Raised by an Alarm) (Moscow, USSR: Military Publishing House, 1964), 188.

<sup>449</sup> Br.B Nr.91/44 is in essence a terrain study in three pages describing the importance of the Blue Hills position in relation to the surrounding terrain. See NARA T-312, Roll 1627, Frame Number 807-810.

Based on a Soviet radio transmission, the Germans intercepted a Soviet operations order directing new action against the East and West Sacks. The message “forbade antitank and tank fire by the frontline units in the bridgehead. It made clear they did not want to give away their positions. Only in the case of a German attack on the bridgehead were they allowed to open fire.”<sup>452</sup> While the Soviets may not have wanted to give away their positions, they must have also wanted to save ammunition, as their supply lines were getting longer and the terrain was making delivery more difficult. As Carius states, the Germans learned two important things from the radio intercept,

On the one hand, they (the Soviets) certainly had respect for our tanks. On the other hand, it was clear that Ivan had already positioned tanks in the bridgehead. That clearly indicated an intention to attack. Tanks could only be envisioned for an attack. They were completely unsuitable for defending in marshy woods, which allowed no repositioning. It also didn't require any tremendous strategic talent to realize that the Russians would risk everything to roll up the bothersome German bridgehead at Narva from the south.<sup>453</sup>

In comparison, an interesting assessment comes from the Army Detachment Narva Intelligence Officer regarding Soviet attacks and losses in the “west sack” area. The report of February 24, 1944 states, “Enemy led violent attacks with tank support against our positions. The attack began yesterday with the intention of breaking out of the Kirikuküla area from the south (West sack). The enemy managed to advance only 100 meters before being stopped. In the remaining sectors around the front, the opponent behaved quietly.”<sup>454</sup> The report also has another interesting piece of analysis, it examines how the Soviets were replacing their losses and from what age bracket the men came from. Due to heavy losses in the infantry, the Soviets resorted to removing men from Artillery units to have enough combat power to make another attack. “Out

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<sup>450</sup> NARA T-312, Roll 1627, Frame Number 809.

<sup>451</sup> Otto Carius, *Tiger in the Mud*, (Mechanicsburg, Pa : Stackpole Books 2003), V.

<sup>452</sup> Ibid, 73.

<sup>453</sup> Ibid.

of the Artillery Regiment of the division (Guard Artillery Regiment 96) were extracted 120 men. Soviet Guard Regiment 129 (45th Soviet Guards Division) had 100 replacements arrive from Replacement Regiment 152 on February 20th, nominally in Slantsõ. Age of combatants is 60% are between 35-50 years old, 30% are 20-35 years old, and 10% are 19 years old.”<sup>455</sup> This demonstrates how the war up to 1944 had effected the Soviet population, fewer younger men available, forcing the recruitment of older men for the front. Taken collectively, the main lesson to be derived from this report of the February 24, 1944 was the Soviets were still having difficulty coordinating attacks in multiple locations at the same time across their front. The Soviets attacked again and again, failing to achieve a decisive result. Again, they saw the utility of attacking from the southern or northern positions. Carius described a period of Soviet artillery preparation before an attack, “Even the Americans, whom I got to know later on in the west, couldn’t compete with them (the Soviets). The Russians shot with every available weapon, from light mortars all the way up to heavy artillery. They showed us they had been doing everything but sleeping in the previous few weeks.”<sup>456</sup> At the end of March, 1944, the Germans made an attempt to eliminate the “East and West Sacks” Carius state, “Its execution was in the hands of Oberst Graf Strachwitz.”<sup>457</sup> As war produces characters, Oberst Graf Strachwitz was a fine example. According to Carius, Strachwitz was a talented organizer and unafraid to remind others he was of old German nobility and this meant more than rank.<sup>458</sup> The purpose of Operation STRACHWITZ was “designed to cut off the “West Sack” and eliminate it. The attack was conducted from west to east near the “sole” of the “boot.” Contact would then be reestablished

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<sup>454</sup> NARA T-312, Roll 1630, Frame Number 000595.

<sup>455</sup> Ibid.

<sup>456</sup> Otto Carius, *Tiger in the Mud*, (Mechanicsburg, Pa : Stackpole Books 2003), 84.

<sup>457</sup> Ibid, 96.

<sup>458</sup> Ibid,100-101.

with the infantry in the “boot.”<sup>459</sup> Operation STRACHWITZ was envisioned to be a joint tactical attack or as Carius described, “The entire operation was supported by Stukas (Ju-87s) or, better said, was supposed to be supported by Stukas. They proved to be ineffective in the densely forested terrain, however, and were even dangerous to our own troops! The pilots couldn’t identify their targets. The Ju-87s had arrived on time and brazenly dived onto their assigned targets.”<sup>460</sup> The air strike was not responsive enough to be of use and the fires could not be well controlled. A scenario destined to be a disaster. These efforts in conjunction with the more effective infantry and anti-tank fires gave the Germans only temporary success against the “East and West Sacks.” The efforts of Operation STRACHWITZ would be repeated two more times, but could never provide the decisive result the Germans were seeking in a breakthrough counterattack. Attesting to the success of the effort made by Strachwitz, Felix Steiner stated, “Heavy tanks of Colonel Graf von Stachwitz’s unit had thrown back the opponent with a hard forest fight near Auvere by attacking a division and removing the direct threat to the Narva-Reval (Tallinn) Highway.”<sup>461</sup> It was getting closer to spring and the terrain was no better coming from the north to south, than it was from the south to north.

At the same time Narva was under attack, the Soviets also continued their attack toward the city of Luga. STAVKA devised a way to fix what they thought were the initial command and control issues of executing the attack. After the liberation of Luga on the February 12, 1944, “STAVKA immediately reorganized its forces for a subsequent advance toward Pskov and Ostrov. At 24.00 hours on February 13th it dissolved Meretskov’s Volkhov Front, transferring the 59th, 8th, and 54th Armies and their offensive sectors, the 65th and 310th Rifle Divisions in

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<sup>459</sup> Ibid.

<sup>460</sup> Ibid.

<sup>461</sup> Felix Steiner, *Die Freiwilligen Idee und Opfergang* (Göttingen, Germany: Plesse Publishing, 1958), 254.



the front's reserve, and the 14th Air Army to the Leningrad Front effective February 15th.”<sup>462</sup>

While one would naturally think this would have made Govorov's task easier, based on the principle of unity of command under the Leningrad Front only, the space being covered was too great for effective command and control. Two days later on February 17th, “Model began implementing his order to withdraw his forces back to the Panther Line by 1 March.”<sup>463</sup> Once Govorov received more forces and a better understanding of the situation, he reworked his plan in reaction to Model's actions. Govorov send another plan to STAVKA for approval that took into consideration the sum of all changes of the situation. The plan was submitted on February 17, 1944 created the conditions for the Soviets to recognize their second operational campaign plan goal of liberating the Baltic States. It acts as the direct link between the tactical means available and the desired strategic end state. Glantz states,

Govorov dispatched his proposed operational concept to the STAVKA for its approval. His concept recommended that two mutually supporting columns conduct the offensive toward Pskov and Ostrov, the first consisting of the 42d and 67th Armies and the second of the 8th and 54th Armies. At the same time, Tikhonov's 108th Rifle Corps, on the 42d Army's right flank, was to conduct supporting attacks across the narrow neck of water between Lakes Chud (Peipus) and Pskov (Lake Teploe). Govorov's plan required Fedununsky's 2d Shock Army to capture Narva, penetrate German defenses between the Narva Bay and Lake Chud (Peipus), and make its main attack southwest toward Parnu to destroy the newly reformed Eighteenth Army in Estonia and capture Tallinn (Reval).<sup>464</sup>

On February 22, 1944, Govorov received a response from STAVKA approving the plan he had submitted just days earlier. He had been ordered to accelerate his planned offensive.<sup>465</sup>

The order Govorov receives was as follows:

The STAVKA of the Supreme High Command approves your operational plan No. 126/sh and orders:

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<sup>462</sup> David M. Glantz, *The Battle for Leningrad* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 2002), 388.

<sup>463</sup> Ibid.

<sup>464</sup> Ibid, 389.

<sup>465</sup> Ibid, 391.

1. After penetrating enemy defenses on the isthmus north of lake Chud (Peipus), the front's right wing, consisting of three armies (no fewer than nine rifle corps not counting the Estonian rifle corps and one tank corps), will develop the attack toward Pärnu with one army to cut off the withdrawal routes of the enemy's Tallinn grouping and will attack southward toward Viljandi, Valga and Tartu, and Viru with two armies.

2. The main forces of the front's left wing, consisting of three armies (nine rifle corps), will be directed to capture the Ostrov region by enveloping Pskov from the north and forcing the Velikaia River. After which it will develop an offensive in the general direction of Riga. In connection with the withdrawal of the enemies Staraja Russa grouping and the establishment of communications with the 2d Baltic Front's 1st Shock Army, it is not necessary to allocate a strong group to protect the main forces' left flank in the south.

[Signed] I. Stalin, A. Antonov<sup>466</sup>

#### **4.4 CONCLUSION:**

Ultimately, the success of anything is measured by the results it produces. In the case of the German plan for Operation BLAU, success of the plan was owed to realistic understanding of the capabilities of subordinate units along with providing flexibility to junior leaders to make decisions within an established doctrinal framework. The German operational-level success of Plan BLAU gave the strategic-level in Berlin something it thought it didn't need to plan for, that being an organized retrograde from Leningrad, while giving the tactical-level commander and soldier in the field what they needed to survive. There is little doubt the Germans understood the weight the Soviets would apply against Army Group North in their attempts to fragment the Army Group. Indeed, the Germans took the correct measures prior to the commencement of the Soviet attack, further reflecting an accurate planning effort from Plan BLAU. The execution of events in the Soviet breakout attack make it clear the Germans were operating within the bounds of their established defensive doctrine and were acting in a way they were trained and educated

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<sup>466</sup> Ibid, 391-92. The following citation was Glantz's 48 found on page 596. The information came from "Direktiva Stavki VGK no. 220035 komanduiushchemu voiskami Leningradskogo fronta o razvitii nastupleniia v raione Chudskogo ozera" [STAVKA VGK directive no. 022035] to the Leningrad Front commander concerning the offensive in the lake Chud (Peipus region), in Zolotarev, STAVKA VGK 1944-1945," 50. See Govorov's original proposal in Zolotarev, "STAVKA VGK 1944-1945," 267-268. In this directive, Govorov place priority on the capture of Narva."

to do; the Soviets on the other hand were learning how to more effectively conduct a break through attack, while developing their doctrine and learning through hard experience.

In terms of doctrinal development for the Germans, the Soviet breakout attack from Leningrad validated years of refinement in their approach to defense in depth. Critically, the absent element was enough local strength in the form of a tactical-level reserve to conduct a counter attack into the flank of oncoming Soviet formations. Time along with a massive space and oncoming opposing force did not allow reduced German combat power the slightest ability to locally mass at a position of advantage on the Soviet's flank. In terms of time, the Germans could only briefly fix the front and jab at the Soviet flank, but Germany could not afford a decisive defensive engagement as experience over two wars had definitively shown.

Doctrinally, on the other hand the Soviets had demonstrated they understood how to attack in depth, articulating massive amounts of men and material in time and space efficiently through a refined understanding of combined arms. Centralized command and control facilitated the order required to move the mass in the correct direction, then the mass predictably followed the paths of least resistance. The Soviet Army displayed a tremendous ability to be a learning organization as their bridging manual displays. Forces that seek solutions to problems from the top as well as the bottom are not only more likely to find the answers they seek, but they are also more likely to be accepted by the force that must implement them and make them work. The Soviet difficulty of crossing a river even while frozen in 1944 further validates the timeless nature of war, commanding the attention of the scholar and professional soldier today. Only through reflections born of observation can meaningful changes be made to the conduct of war.

When applying scientific understanding of the terrain and weather to the execution of Plan BLAU, it is also clear the Germans masterfully examined the external lines of operation and

communication the Soviets could use in the theater of operations to achieve their desired end state. The Germans managed tactically to do the impossible with young formations of different experience levels and from several different countries. Plan BLAU was simple enough to accommodate many different and complicated factors while flexible enough to deal with the unforeseen that ruins most plans. While Plan BLAU successfully accomplished its chief task of retrograding Army Group North to the "Panther Position," what will be explored in the next chapter is two-fold. Firstly, how well did Plan BLAU facilitate subsequent German planning efforts to fight to the Blue Hills positions and set the stage for the German evacuation of the Baltic region after the Finns decided to leave the war? Secondly, how well did the terrain chosen by BLAU for the "Panther Position" cripple follow-on Soviet tactical actions to exploit the success of their breakout attack from Leningrad?

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **Conventional Means of Exploitation: German Defense in Depth versus Soviet Attack in Depth**

While breakthrough attack is an important first step in offensive operations, it will not by itself bring victory. Breakthrough attack must be followed by exploitation. Operational and tactical breakthrough must be followed by operational and tactical-level exploitation to facilitate a strategic end state being recognized. Such was the case for the Soviets operating against Army Group North in the late spring of 1944. While the Soviets successfully broke the German hold on the city of Leningrad and achieved their first campaign goal, they now had to content with the strength of the German position along the Narva River designated the "Panther Position" as articulated in Plan BLAU.<sup>467</sup>

Understanding no plan survives as it was thought of, what should be considered is what changes are made to the original plan that allows it to remain relevant. Also, how does the plan as it was conceived allow for transition to other subsequent planning efforts as strategic goals change and how do the combatants respond to those changes. In this chapter an examination of how the "Panther Position" was composed in comparison to available terrain and the newly Army Group Narva will be conducted. Recognizing exploitation attacks designed to achieve the second goal of retaking the Baltic states were not working fast enough, the Soviets first looked to the sea with a landing operation at Merküla along the Estonian coast as a way to gain the German flank of the "Panther Position" and the new emerging "Tannenberg Position."<sup>468</sup> What should interest the scholar or professional soldier is how did the Germans manage to withdraw under

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<sup>467</sup> See chapter 3 for the contents of Plan BLAU or see Army Group North's "Fall Blau," or Operation BLUE in NARA T-311, Roll 76, First Frame 7099655.

such heavy pressure in such an organized manner. How does the "Panther Position" of Plan BLAU facilitated the success of Operations SEEALDER and FLAMINGO with the use of the "Tannenberg Position?"<sup>469</sup> How is the "Tannenberg Position" being used to Soviet forces at Sinimäed allowing for the successful retrograde of German forces to Latvia? How does a second defense in depth at the "Marienburg Line" allow this successful movement to Latvia to occur?<sup>470</sup> These questions and thoughts comprise the purposes for this chapter. Starting first with an examination of the "Panther Position."

### **5.1 THE "PANTHER POSITION:"**

First, it is necessary to define exactly what the Panther Line was in order to understand what the Soviets desired to breach. According to Operation plan of Operation BLAU, it was the last phase line or control measure labeled "D" on the plan graphic.<sup>471</sup> In *P-035*, the Germans defined the "Panther Line" or Position as;

In the Eighteenth Army's zone, the proposed position extended in front of the Velikaya River from Puchkinskiye-Gory, east and north of Pskov toward the southern tip of Lake Pskov, from there along the western shore of Lake Pskov and Lake Peipus up to the Naroova (Narva) River and along the western bank of that river up to the Baltic Sea. The total length of this position, called the Panther Line, amounted to 425 kilometers, of which 215 kilometers were "land fronts" and 210 kilometers "lake fronts."<sup>472</sup>

The explanation of the position is then given in terms of anticipated German troop to task needs to defend the "Panther Line" based on the terrain and enemy situation. *P-035* continues,

The latter (the lake front units) could be guarded by a few security units. In comparison with these figures, the old position comprised 400 kilometers of "land fronts" and 50

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<sup>468</sup> For amphibious operations at Merküla see: U. V. Ladinski, Ю. В. Ладинский, *Военная Вахта* (The Watch of War) (Moscow, USSR: Military Publishing House, 1983).

<sup>469</sup> For Operations SEEALDER and FLAMINGO see: NARA T-312, Roll 1633, Frame Number 000245 later in this chapter.

<sup>470</sup> For reference to the "Marienburg Line" see: Arved Kalvo, Арвед Калво, *Изгнание фашистов из южной эстонии* (Banishment of Fascists from Southern Estonia) (Tallinn, ESSR: Eesti Raamat, 1984), 43-44 later in this chapter.

<sup>471</sup> For Op BLAU see chapter 3 or NARA T-311, Roll 76, First Frame 7099655.

<sup>472</sup> Department of the Army, *MS# P-035 Retrograde of Army Group North During 1944*. (Carlisle, Army War College: Foreign Military Studies Department 1950), 71.

kilometers of “lake fronts.” Disregarding the “lake fronts,” the shortening of the front held by Eighteenth Army would therefore have amounted to nearly 200 kilometers. As a result of the occupation of the proposed Panther Line, very substantial elements of the forces employed along the present line would therefore have been freed to serve as reinforcements or reserves in the anticipated defensive battle.<sup>473</sup>

Examination of this statement demonstrates the Germans made a concerted effort to pair the needs of the task against the terrain to create an economy of force mission for 18th Army. This statement also acknowledges the German desire to create an operational reserve to be employed perceivably as a counterattack force. This was again another attempt on the part of German operational and tactical level leaders to fight Hitler’s dictum to not give the Soviets ground by using doctrinal considerations of defensive employment as a reason to not only retrograde forces to the “Panther Line,” but to counterattack with a prepared force.

A Soviet description of the composition of the “Panther Line” is also found in the work *Fight as I Shall Dig, February- September 1944*. It states;

The defensive line of the enemy along the Narva River was based mainly on this large water barrier and consisted of the number of well arranged positions. 100 meters away from the first trench there was a second trench reinforced by more positions. On the eastern side of the river, the fascists had two strong points. One was in the vicinity of Ivangorod, and sub-strongholds in Popovka, Lilienbach, and Dolgaya Niva. The other was located 20 kilometers southwest from Ivangorod and included the villages of Krivaso, Dolgaya Niva and Pustoi Konets. Big trenches along these strongholds, reinforced by bunkers and firing positions 20-25 meters apart. Barb wire ran in front of the first trench with minefields. Both bridge strong points could be supported by artillery fire from the stronghold located on the western bank of the Narva River. Ivangorod bridge strong points had secondary trench lines arranged in a **defense in depth**, located 100-200 meters away from the first trench. Tank avenues of approach were covered by the enemy. All roads leading to the river were mined. Underground casemates of bunkers and Swedish Bastions were equipped for artillery, mortars and shelters for personnel.<sup>474</sup>

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<sup>473</sup>Ibid.

<sup>474</sup> E. Krivosheev and N. Kostin, E. Кривошеев Н. Костин, *Битва за Нарву, Февраль - Сентябрь 1944 года* (Fight as I Shall Dig, February-September 1944) (Tallinn, ESSR: Eesti Raamat, 1984), 13.



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**Picture 6: A View of the Narva River taken from the North in Spring 1944.**

On March 18, 1944, III SS Panzer Korps wrote a study on the best way to defend the city of Narva along with the tactical level ramifications of leaving the positions they were holding in the previous quote. This document is best viewed in its entirety, as this study has never been viewed in context of this problem. It states;

Headquarters

Korps HQ, 18.3.1944

III. (germ.) SS Panzer Korps

Ia Tgb.Nr. 186/44 g.Kdos.

Subj.: Study on the Defense of Narva

Ref: Mission of the Commander of Army Group North to the Commander of III. (germ.) SS Panzer Korps

With a vision of the defense of the west bank of the Narva River, it is necessary to hold the east bank with forward positions.

The line of defense includes islands south of the city, to include Cemetery and Popowka lines. If this was to be done, two battalions could be saved.

However, here are the drawbacks:

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<sup>475</sup> Picture from NARA File Waffen SS Kriegsberichter Photograph Collection Part 3, See the Eisner folder.



- 1.) New fighting positions and old fighting positions with obstacle plans are given to the enemy (by moving from current positions).
- 2.) Defense of the towns will create more casualties. Digging in on the western side, the ground contains rock.
- 3.) Heavy weapons and artillery will be able to provide supporting fires in this course of action.
- 4.) Due to a strong current, units on the east bank will have difficulty resupplying. The narrowness of the bridgehead makes this difficult as well.
- 5.) The fields of fire on the west side for assigned weapons, in difference to what they are doing now on the HLK (Main Line of Resistance), are much smaller. Heavy weapons must be used because the river creates dead space.

The fights for Narva have already today yielded the leadership proof that the present line (HLK), even though it seems to be a loss of combat power, is the only possible form of the plan.<sup>476</sup>

Any major changes to the plan will result in the loss of the City of Narva. As of today, the defense of the City of Narva has cost 2,884 losses. There is no replacement plan, but there is a need for one.<sup>477</sup>



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**Picture 7: German use of a 20mm Anti-Aircraft Gun as a direct fire weapon.**

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<sup>476</sup> NARA T-312, Roll 1627, Frame Number 805.

<sup>477</sup> NARA T-312, Roll 1627, Frame Number 806.

<sup>478</sup> Picture from NARA File Waffen SS Kriegsbericht Photograph Collection Part 3, See the Fabiger folder.

This study demonstrates the Germans were committed to continue fighting on the east bank of the Narva River for as long as possible, even though they speak of supply concerns. Correctly, they cite “weaponering” concerns or the ability to properly employ weapons from their positions in relation to the terrain they are charged with defending as the main concern. The authors also acknowledge the idea of using the city as a place to defend from, while they also identify the cost in friendly casualties. While the Soviets could be made to pay for every block, they had more men to pay with than the Germans did. Thoughts such as these are the sign of a well trained, group of professional soldiers who understand their business. In no area of war are the effects of weapons considered more closely than the tactical level. The tie of weapons to the terrain is the most important aspect of tactical combat. Not understanding the ground and how to use it can lose a battle before it begins.

By the Germans choosing the isthmus of Narva, they were attempting to do the same thing the ancient Spartans did against Persia at Thermopylae.<sup>479</sup> Like the Persians, the Soviets had a significant amount of mass they could bring to bear against the German lines, but like Thermopylae, the terrain of the isthmus made the Soviet number count for nothing, as they could not bring their superior numbers to bear against the Germans in the given space of the terrain. There was no space to bring offensive combat power to bear and what space was available was dominated by the Germans on very narrow, limited directions of advance that were defended in depth. Soviet mass therefore could not maneuver in depth or time and space. To make needed changes to the plan required a new task organization for available German forces.

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<sup>479</sup> George Grote, *A History of Greece Volume II* (New York, NY: WM. L. Allison & Son, 1882), 272.

## **5.2 ARMY GROUP NORTH CREATES ARMY DETACHMENT NARVA:**

In the midst of the Soviet attack and reorganization from two fronts to only one, German Army Group North in conjunction with 18th Army identified the need to create a separate Army Detachment which was eventually called Army Detachment Narva. Amazingly, the Germans had to make this decision at the same time they were conducting a retrograde to the “Panther Line.” However, there is disparity in the historical record regarding the timing of the breakoff of the element that became Army Detachment Narva. According to Earl Ziemke’s work *Stalingrad to Berlin: the German Defeat in the East*, “On 24 February General der Infanterie Johannes Friessner, who had proved himself in the fighting on the Sixteenth Army-Eighteenth Army boundary, took over Sponheimer’s command which was then redesignated *Armeeabteilung Narva*.”<sup>480</sup> David Glantz also made use of the previous quote in his work on Leningrad between pages 390-91. Examining the ex-post German thoughts of General der Artillerie Herbert Loch contained in *P-035, The Retrograde Defensive of Army Group North during 1944*, yet another explanation and date is found regarding the break off of Army Detachment Narva. On page 100 Loch states, “At 24.00 hours on 3 February Group Sponheimer, which could no longer be controlled by the army headquarters because of the great distance between them, was separated from the Eighteenth Army and assigned directly to the army group.”<sup>481</sup> While the purpose here is not to retrace the various names of Army Detachment Narva, it is import to understand clearly when and why the Germans created an organization they had not planned for in their conception

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<sup>480</sup> Earl F. Ziemke, *Stalingrad to Berlin: The German Defeat in the East* (Washington D.C.: Department of the Army 1968), 264-265.

<sup>481</sup> Department of the Army, *MS# P-035 Retrograde of Army Group North During 1944*. (Carlisle, Army War College: Foreign Military Studies Department 1950), 100.

for Operation BLAU.<sup>482</sup> With an understanding of the creation of the organization comes a need to understand the command and control relationship for subsequent tactical employment.



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**Picture 8: A German Tactical-Level Command Post on the Narva Front 1944.**

While an operational level command, Army Detachment Narva was initially subordinate to 18th Army as Group Sponheimer, the organization was eventually given a direct relationship to Army Group North by March 1944 as Army Detachment Narva.<sup>484</sup> While there is disparity amongst historians and the records over when Army Detachment Narva was formed, an























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<sup>482</sup> According to Glantz's work, On the February 13, 1944, after Estonian troops broke and ran before it reached the front Sponheimer the commander of the III SS Panzer, informed Model that he would be unable to hold the city of Narva without reinforcements. Model reacted by sending the 58th division into the fight. Glantz concludes by stating the reason for 2d Shock Army's failure was because the Germans were able to reinforce their defenses at Narva quickly and significantly. See: David M. Glantz, *The Battle for Leningrad* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 2002).

<sup>483</sup> Picture from NARA File Waffen SS Kriegsberichter Photograph Collection Part 3, See the Eisner folder.
























<sup>484</sup> While discussing the command relationship, another important aspect to examine is the commander's authority. As stated on page 178 of P-035, "The commander of the Armeecabteilung Narva had no command authority in the communications zone, that is to say, he did not hold executive authority within the area of his command. In 1941 a German civil administration had been established in Estonia. It was headed by a general commissioner whose official seat was in Tallinn. Estonian authorities, with a first and second national director at the top, supported the general commissioner. The civil administration was not represented on the staff of the

examination of the Army Group North table of organization and associated manning documents makes clear the command relationship and the effective dates. The definitive answers are found in NARA T-311, Roll 70, First Frame 7,091,147 or the Orders of Battle (Kriegs-Gliederungen) for Army Group North. The table of organization for January 16, 1944 has no references to a task organized force, however it is clear based on the decisive Soviet breakout attack from Leningrad on January 14th there was a significant amount of fragmented units operating at reduced strength.<sup>485</sup>

		Troop Arrangement of Army Group North As of 16.1.44 (Minus 16 <sup>th</sup> Army) Frame:7091159										
		 NORTH										
2	A.O.K.	 18 ( 15 Inf Div 1 Jg Div 5 Lw F Div 1 K Gr 1 Frw Leg 1 SS Nordld ) 										
3	Corps	 III. Germ.  6			 L  18			 LIV.  138				
4	Divisions	 4 Frw Br.	 Nordland	 10.	 61.	 9.	 126.	 170.	 215.	 11.	 24.	 225.
5	Attached from other Divisions:				L		er			XXVIII	XXXVIII	
6	Attached to other Divisions	 1L/Gr.Rgt. 391  L/ - 399 } 1703 D										
7	Police securities - and order troops											























Armeekorps." See: Department of the Army, *MS# P-035 Retrograde of Army Group North During 1944*. (Carlisle, Army War College: Foreign Military Studies Department 1950), 100.























<sup>485</sup> NARA T-311, Roll 70, First Frame 7091159.

LEGEND:		Troop Arrangement of Army Group North As of 16.1.44 (Minus 16 <sup>th</sup> Army) Frame:7091159										
		 NORTH										
2	A.O.K.	 (  12 Inf Div 14g Div 1 K Gr 1 Frw Leg 1 SS Nordid 2 Br         ) 										
3	Corps	 XXXVI.	 113	 XXVIII.	 24	 XXXVIII.	 30	Reports directly to 18 <sup>th</sup> Army:  				
4	Divisions	 227.	 212.	 121.	 Span Legion	 5 <sup>th</sup> Gr 12	 21.	 13.	 2 Letzt	 283g.	 1.	 r.A.583.
5	Attached from other Divisions:											
6	Attached to other Divisions											
7	Police securities - and order troops											

On February 1, 1944, the table of organization for Army Group North still illustrates 18th and 16th Armies directly subordinated to Army Group North, with a task organized Group Sponheimer subordinated to 18th Army.<sup>486</sup>





















<sup>486</sup> NARA T-311, Roll 70, First Frame 7091179.

		Troop Arrangement of Army Group North As of 1.2.44 (Minus 16 <sup>th</sup> Army) Frame:7091179											
		 NORTH											
2	A.O.K.	 											
3	Corps	 III. Germ.	 Gr. Spoonheimer (LIV.)	 138	 113	 6	 L	 16					
4	Divisions	 4 Fw Br.	 Nordland	 Kgr 178.	 Kgr 61.	 Kgr 225.	 Kgr 227.	 Pz Gr Fhh.	 Reste 126.	 Reste 11.	 Kgr 212.	 KGr 24.	 Kgr 215.
5	Attached from other Divisions:												
6	Attached to other Divisions												
7	Police securities - and order troops												

		Troop Arrangement of Army Group North As of 1.2.44 (Minus 16 <sup>th</sup> Army) Frame:7091179												
		 NORTH												
2	A.O.K.	 												
3	Corps	 XXVIII.	 XXXVIII.	 30	Reports directly to 18 <sup>th</sup> Army:					 XXVI.		 HqH Argb 303		
4	Divisions	 121.	 12.	 21.	 KsGr Pol	 13.	 2. Lett	 Kgr 281g.	 12.	 Gr Korow	 Gr Pehl	 58.	 Spun Leg.	 r.A.583.
5	Attached from other Divisions:													
6	Attached to other Divisions													
7	Police securities - and order troops													

The composition of Group Sponheimer as an entity to facilitate command and control of forces was centered around the Corps staff of the LIV Corps, thus this organization was

redesignated Group Sponheimer after the commander of III SS Panzer Corps.<sup>487</sup> On February 19, 1944, two interesting things stand out on the Army Group North table of organization. First, the fragmented combat power of Group Sponheimer was clearly consolidated and strengthened to be made more cohesive. Second, the first appearance of Nahtgruppe Friessner.<sup>488</sup> This was the organization alluded to by Ziemke and Glantz that occupied a position between 18th and 16th Armies responsible for the seam between the two Armies.<sup>489</sup>



















		Troop Arrangement of Army Group North As of 19.2.44 (Minus 16 <sup>th</sup> Army) Frame:7091187											
		 NORTH											
2	A.O.K.	 											
3	Corps	 III. Germ. <del>SS</del>	 Gr. Sponheimer (I.V.)				 138	 113					 L
4	Divisions	 4 Frw Br.	 Nordland	 Kgr 178.	 Kgr 61.	 Kgr 225.	 Kgr 227.	 Est Frw Br.	 Pr Gr Fbh.	 58.	 Sich 207.	 11.	 G Krucher
5	Attached from other Divisions:												
6	Attached to other Divisions												
7	Police securities - and order troops												

<sup>487</sup> NARA T-311, Roll 70, Frame 7,091,179.





























<sup>488</sup> NARA T-311, Roll 70, First Frame 7,091,187.

<sup>489</sup> Ibid.


























LEGEND:		Troop Arrangement of Army Group North As of 19.2.44 (Minus 16 <sup>th</sup> Army) Frame:7091187										
		 NORTH										
2	A.O.K.	 18					 2					
3	Corps	 XXVI.			 18			 XXVIII.			Reports directly to 18 <sup>th</sup> Army:  2	
4	Divisions											
5	Attached from other Divisions:											
6	Attached to other Divisions											
7	Police securities - and order troops											

The table of organization for March 7, 1944 shows Army Detachment Narva, 18th and 16th Armies all directly subordinate to Army Group North.<sup>490</sup>

LEGEND:		Troop Arrangement of Army Group North As of 7.3.44 (Minus 16 <sup>th</sup> Army) Frame:7091192										
		 NORTH										
2	A.O.K.	 Armeegr. Narva					 18					
3	Corps	 III. Germ. #			 138			 Gr. Berlin			Reports directly Army Group Narva:  113	
4	Divisions											
5	Attached from other Divisions:											
6	Attached to other Divisions											
7	Police securities - and order troops											

<sup>490</sup> NARA T-311, Roll 70, Frame 7,091,192.

LEGEND:		Troop Arrangement of Army Group North As of 7.3.44 (Minus 16 <sup>th</sup> Army) Frame:7091192														
		 NORTH														
2	A.O.K.	 18														
3	Corps	 XXVIII.		 24		 XXXVIII.		 30		 VI. SS		 18		Reports directly to 18 <sup>th</sup> Army:		
4	Divisions															
5	Attached from other Divisions:															
6	Attached to other Divisions															
7	Police securities - and order troops															

What should be taken away from this discussion is the importance of command relationships and task organization based on the enemy situation and terrain. The tables of organization demonstrate not only the relationship of who was responsible, but more importantly what they were responsible for. What these tables of organization prove is based on the enemy situation and the German location of available combat power on the ground, senior German field commanders made the decision to task organize a unit to fulfill a specific purpose. What is debatable is was Army Detachment Narva task organized to fulfill the purpose of defending Narva or was Army Detachment Narva in reality what the Germans had available to fulfill the task of defending Narva. The truth is the latter. Commanders always make do with the resources they have available to accomplish their mission. True task organization is not taking fragmented capabilities and making units from them. Typically, task organization is thought of as the use of cohesive and complete capabilities to accomplish an assigned mission. These units usually have the opportunity to train with each other before they operate, but this was hardly the case

anywhere on the Eastern Front. In the case of the German forces operating around the Narva area; the terrain and situation dictated a need to have something smaller than an Army, but large than a Corps handle the task of controlling the situation and terrain in and around Narva. Recomposing capabilities under combat conditions is especially difficult, but the desperate nature of the problem certainly drove the necessity. The reason for this task organization has been little explored by historians, but the answer lies in the mission and the terrain.

NARA T-312, Roll 1630, Frame 1 is the command chronology of Army Detachment Narva. As is the case with most unit histories, reasons for command decision are rarely given.<sup>491</sup> However, the history of events leading to the creation of Army Detachment Narva allows the reason for formation to be pulled from the tactical situation on the battlefield.

As German forces continued their retrograde toward the “Panther Line,” commanders and staff planners were confronted by the reality of the enemy situation as well as the physical nature of the terrain in the vicinity of Narva. With the Baltic Sea to the north and Lake Peipus to the south, the city of Narva was considered the gate into Estonia. Narva geographically was seated at the entrance to the isthmus. It was not genius that allowed the Germans to define how the Soviets were going to try to break the Narva River positions in the “Panther Line,” but rather natural and manmade geographic constraints coupled with historical precedent. Many of the answers for how to invade Estonia in the Estonian War for Independence as well as the plan for Estonian Defense prior to 1940.<sup>492</sup> Estonian expertise could be consulted by the Germans for

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<sup>491</sup> Command chronologies are a record typically kept by the Operations Section of a unit to document the events a command has taken part in.

<sup>492</sup> As the Germans had incorporated members of the former Estonian Government into their service, those who survived the 1940 Soviet purges could have been used to explain the Estonian plan to the Germans.

how to best defend Estonian territory as well as engendering a more active interest on the part of Estonians to fight for their country.<sup>493</sup>

Examination of Soviet possibilities for the invasion of Estonia by breaking the “Panther Line” yields three possibilities for invasion. The first possibility was the Soviets could attack from the sea, if they had the available sea lift to embark a landing force. In doing so, the Soviets could dominate the use of the strategic and operational flank by concentrating a force for a tactical penetration somewhere along the northern coast. An amphibious operation was certainly the most dangerous course of action from the German perspective; but it was also the most unlikely, particularly one on a large scale. Based on a lack of experience, the Soviets were most likely to conduct an amphibious raid. While the Soviets may have had the lift required to embark a landing force, they lacked the expertise needed for the complicated ship to shore amphibious envelopment of a strategic flank. The Soviet inability to conduct an amphibious operation will be later demonstrated in this chapter by the much smaller tactical landing attempt at Merküla.

The second possibility for the invasion of Estonia was centered around directly attacking Narva and the isthmus behind it. Narva acts as the cork at the top of a bottle. With the Baltic Sea to the North and a significant swamp and forest area to the south, winter was the only feasible period to attack across the Narva River to the north or south of the city. This possibility was seriously entertained by both the Soviets and Germans. The defense of the isthmus was the reason the Germans felt they needed to create a separate Army Detachment. This direct connection to the desired strategic needs of keeping open strategic lines of communication and

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<sup>493</sup> On August 2, 1944, the Commander of Z.b.V. 300 filed a report numbered Abt Ia Nr. 95/44 g.Kdos evaluating the value of Estonian Officers, Non-Commissioned Officers and men in the service of German forces. The report generally states the men were good soldiers, but typically poorly led by inexperienced leaders. See NARA T-312, Roll 1633, Frame Number 000699.

operation to Finland in the north, while also helping to secure iron ore from Sweden.<sup>494</sup> It can be argued that Army Detachment Narva was fulfilling a joint task with tactical level force integration, as they were directly responsible for the accomplishment of two major German strategic objectives.

The third possibility for the invasion of Estonia consists of coming around the southern tip of Lake Peipus from Latvian territory. This was the most likely course of action based on the Soviet force composition. While it would take longer for Soviet forces to get to the Estonian coastal cities with an attack from this direction, it placed Soviet forces in a central position to conduct a more direct approach attack toward Riga, while cutting off German forces operating in Estonia.<sup>495</sup>

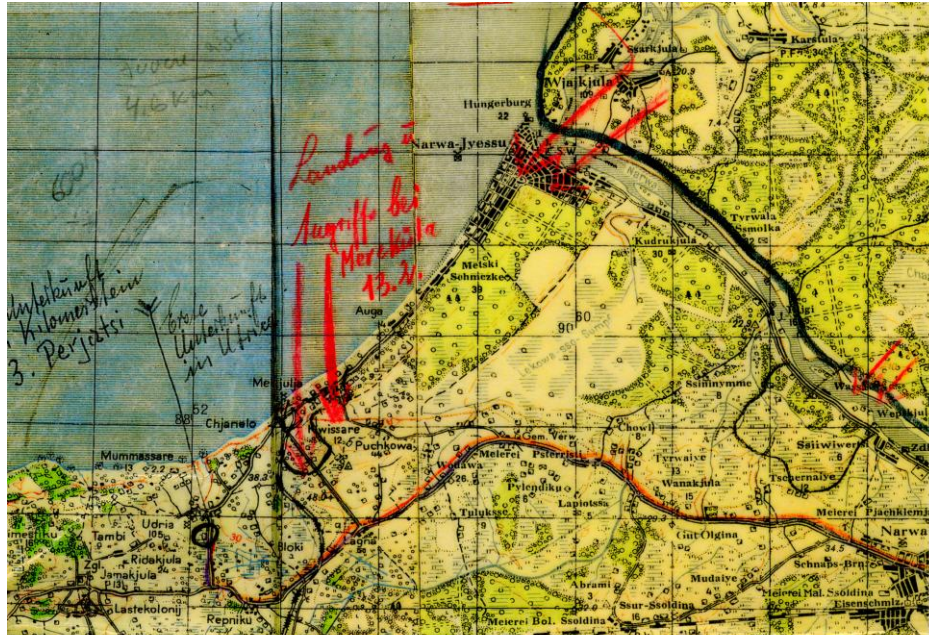
While all three possibilities fell into Army Group North's purview, they directly affected the commanders and staffs of 18th Army as they planned the defense of the Narva area. All three possibilities are addressed in the remaining sections of this chapter.

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<sup>494</sup>See Karl Doenitz, *Memoirs, Ten Years and Twenty Days* trans. R. H. Stevens (New York, NY: The World Publishing Company, 1959), 398.

<sup>495</sup>The timing of the Merküla landing was synchronized with the main Soviet plan resubmitted to STAVKA.

### 5.3 THE SOVIET AMPHIBIOUS ATTEMPT AT MERKÜLA:



(MAP 10) GERMAN MAP FROM FEBRUARY 13, 1944 SHOWING THE MERKÜLA LANDING IN CONJUNCTION WITH SOVIET BRIDGEHEAD OPERATIONS.

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The middle of February 1944 provided the Soviets with the opportunity to try their hand at amphibious operation in the area of Merküla (See Map 10). Works written in English offer little about the Soviet amphibious failure. It is necessary to examine this failure to see what can be learned from it. An interesting commentary on the failures of this operation can be found in the war memoirs of Soviet Rear Admiral U.V. Ladinski.<sup>497</sup> In *The Watch of War*, Ladinski describes all aspects of the operation; from how the operation was conceived, to thoughts about why it failed. Ladinski starts by describing the operational environment the Soviets faced in the early months of 1944, “The Front line troops failed to overpower the enemy defenses on the Narva isthmus and the attack was halted. Thus the most urgent task remaining (for the Soviet

<sup>496</sup> Map was courtesy Captain Punga of the Estonian Defense School in Tartu, Estonia.

<sup>497</sup> U. V. Ladinski, Ю. В. Ладинский, *Военная Вихтя* (The Watch of War) (Moscow, USSR: Military Publishing House, 1983).

navy) was to assist the seashore flank of army.”<sup>498</sup> Recognizing this, Ladinski recalled the reaction of the Soviet naval high command.

At the beginning of February, I was called by the Fleet Commander. The members of Military Council Rear-Admiral N. K. Smirnov and the Chief of Staff Rear-Admiral A. N. Petrov were also present. The Fleet Commander said to me:

The island base (Kronstadt) has ordered the landing of troops in the Narva Bay area; the unit chosen was the sub-machine gunners’ battalion from the 260<sup>th</sup> detached Marine Brigade. The landing will be supported by the gunboats division from Skerries detachment, which was to deliver the battalion on Lavanseri tomorrow. Tomorrow, move out to the island and take control of the landing preparation. The Chief of Staff will inform you in more details later.<sup>499</sup>

Before the details were provided to Ladinski by the Chief of Staff, the Soviets had issued some important operational planning guidance that would prove to have catastrophic effects on the operation. Ladinski recalls, “The battalion was not being provided as a means of reinforcement, this meant the battalion going ashore would join the attacking troops (already on the offensive from the bridgeheads) on the same day. Their actions before this point had to be ensured by the fleet with naval gun fire support.”<sup>500</sup> However, in order to preserve the element of surprise, the decision was made not to use naval gun fire support for the landing. Other plans for the landing operation included, “Torpedo provision for the landing detachment and fire support ships, including mine-sweeping of fairways leading towards Narva Bay and the areas of maneuver. The landing was planned for the village of Merküla. The landing was to be commanded by Rear Admiral G. V. Zukov.”<sup>501</sup> The subordinate commanders for the landing were Major S. P. Maslov, the Battalion Commander for the landing force from the 260th Marine Brigade, while the naval shipping and support force was under the command of Captain 1<sup>st</sup> Rank

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<sup>498</sup> Ibid,183.

<sup>499</sup> Ibid.

<sup>500</sup> Ibid.

<sup>501</sup> Ibid.

S. V. Kudrjavnov.<sup>502</sup> *Fight as I Shall Dig* explains the order to execute the landing was sent; “on February 13, at 13.05. Fleet headquarters sent an order by phone: “mission must be accomplished tonight February 13th to February 14th according to your plan”. At 15.30, the landing force was embarked aboard ships. Loading was completed in half an hour.”<sup>503</sup> The Soviet landing force then moved out for the landing site at Merküla with mine sweepers in the lead.

At 04.00 on the morning of February 14 1944, the sub-machine gunners loaded landing craft and headed for the shore in the vicinity of Merküla. Merküla was a “fishing village with 30 houses and two churches” and it served as the command post for Gruppe Berlin.<sup>504</sup> Initially, as troops went ashore there was no resistance. German defenses then came to life.<sup>505</sup> “The main body of the assault force was led by the landing force commander, Major S. Maslov, with 250-300 Marines. These men fought their way to Repnika, Langa, and Auvere. Their mission was to attack German positions from Merküla and consolidate with units of 2<sup>nd</sup> Shock Army attacking from the south. From the landing force, three soldiers managed to reach friendly forces: Lieutenant. A. Lubimov, Junior. Sergeant. I. Meteush and Sergeant. G. Semenkin.”<sup>506</sup>

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<sup>502</sup> Ibid.

<sup>503</sup> E. Krivosheev and N. Kostin, E. Кривошеев Н. Костин, *Битва за Нарву, Февраль - Сентябрь 1944 года* (Fight as I Shall Dig, February-September 1944) (Tallinn, ESSR: Eesti Raamat, 1984), 47.

<sup>504</sup> Wilhelm Tieke, *Tragedy of the Faithful, A History of the III. (germanisches) SS-Panzer Korps*, (Manitoba, Canada : J.J. Fedorowicz Publishing 2001), 62.

<sup>505</sup> U. V. Ladinski, Ю. В. Ладинский, *Военная Вахта* (The Watch of War) (Moscow, USSR: Military Publishing House, 1983) 185.

<sup>506</sup> E. Krivosheev and N. Kostin, E. Кривошеев Н. Костин, *Битва за Нарву, Февраль - Сентябрь 1944 года* (Fight as I Shall Dig, February-September 1944) (Tallinn, ESSR: Eesti Raamat, 1984), 53.



**Picture 9: MERKÜLA SOVIET LANDING SITE (VIC 35V NF 54988718 ) LOOKING NORTH TOWARD THE BEACH.**

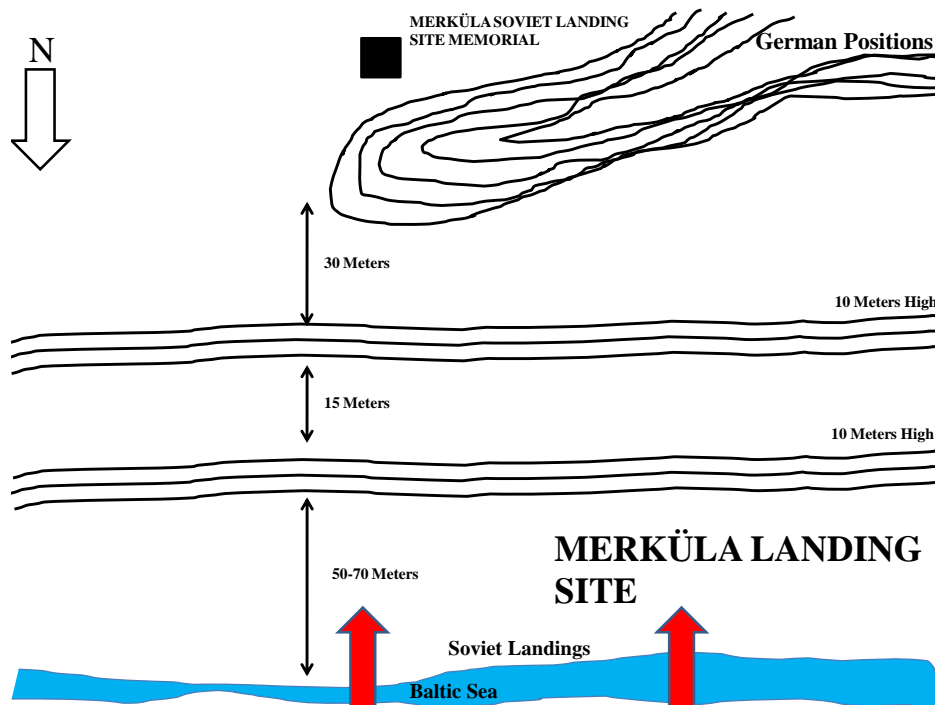


Attesting to the individual bravery of the Soviet Marines conducting the landing, Ladinski recalled,

For example, “BMO-505” under the command of First Lieutenant V. B. Lozinski distinguished itself. They reached the coast first, landed the troops and supported them with fire from their automatic gun and machine-guns. They then removed Marines from damaged launches against shells and bullets. When the launch commander was killed, Second Lieutenant M. E. Rokin then took charge. Overcoming pain of a wound, he led the launch to the coast, landed a second group of sub-machine-gunners and moved away. Many of seamen from the crew of “BMO-509” and “MBKA-562” under enemy fire showed courage and skill.<sup>507</sup>

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<sup>507</sup> U. V. Ladinski, Ю. В. Ладинский, *Военная Вахта* (The Watch of War) (Moscow, USSR: Military Publishing House, 1983), 185.



Awaiting the Soviet Marines were German defenses, “An Estonian police battalion defended the coast line from Mummassaare to Merküla. A naval coastal artillery battery with 10cm captured guns was also in the dunes.”<sup>508</sup> The sector of Merküla was controlled by Marine-Bataillon Hohnschild, a group of German Auxiliary Sailors.<sup>509</sup> Once the Germans began to gain control of the situation, “twelve Stukas showed up at the same time.”<sup>510</sup> Eventually by 09.00, an armored platoon with infantry under the command of SS Sturmbannführer Engelhardt counterattack from the southwest. Felix Steiner also recalled this landing and the counterattack,

Brave Panzer Grenadiers smashed every attack of the Soviet's landing at Merküla; they became quick prey for the Estonians. The enemy knew he had to fight to the death. Therefore, the unit landing was designated as a "death battalion." Every one of its soldiers carried a picture Stalin with his signature. In vain, Stalin had given them this talisman. Everyone fought fanatically to the last breath.<sup>511</sup>

<sup>508</sup> Wilhelm Tieke, *Tragedy of the Faithful, A History of the III. (germanisches) SS-Panzer Korps*, (Manitoba, Canada : J.J. Fedorowicz Publishing 2001), 62. The 227th Infantry Division staff under the command of Generalleutnant Berlin comprised Kampfgruppe Berlin or Group Berlin.

<sup>509</sup> Ibid.

<sup>510</sup> Ibid, 63.

<sup>511</sup> As Felix Steiner, *Die Freiwilligen Idee und Opfergang* (Göttingen, Germany: Plesse Publishing, 1958), 256-257.

By 10.00, the landing had been crushed with 300 Soviet Marines dead and 200 more captured.<sup>512</sup>

**Picture 10: MERKÜLA SOVIET LANDING SITE MEMORIAL: THE STONE TO THE RIGHT READS, “HERE IN MERKÜLA IN FEBRUARY 1944 THE SOVIET SAILORS HEROICALLY FOUGHT TO CLEAR SOVIET ESTONIA FROM THE FASCISTS! EVERLASTING GLORY TO THE HEROES!”**



Some of the lessons Ladinski observed of the amphibious attempt at Merküla were centered around the lack of support for the operation, both tactically in the local area of the operation, as well as collectively as an operational level attempt to break the German hold on the Narva area. In *Tragedy of the Faithful*, Tieke understood the Mereküla operation was being conducted in conjunction with operations in the northern and southern bridgeheads (See Map 10).<sup>513</sup> The Soviets were unable to capitalize on confusion in the German rear and exploit the fluid situation to their advantage. Amphibious operations in broad daylight are difficult enough for a well rehearsed force; the level of difficulty for a night time assault was clearly beyond the capability of the force conducting the operation. On page 185, Ladinski summarizes his thoughts about the operation;

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<sup>512</sup> Ibid, 64.

<sup>513</sup> Ibid, 62.

The landing action should have been coordinated with land forces attack. That morning the attack was undertaken without any success. At this point, help couldn't have come to the Marines. Later after returning to Leningrad, I talked to those who landed and had managed to reach our troops through the front line. They told me after landing on the coast, they met superior forces and powerful fire. To move forward was impossible. Then, the battalion commander ordered the Marines to break through the Auvere station in small groups, where it was planned for them to meet attacking troops.<sup>514</sup>

Examination of the terrain where the landing occurred demonstrates the Germans did not need to expend much energy to make the Soviet landing a disaster. On average, the water's edge was about 100 meters from German positions. The German positions rested neatly on top of a cliff 40-50 meters above the water line of the beach. German guns were aimed straight down the beach, without supporting fires from naval guns to make the transition from ship to shore. Retrospectively, it is amazing anyone survived to reach the beach. In the end, Tieke recalled, "the Soviets who had landed repeatedly charged the steep slope to eliminate the battery. Hundreds of them were killed on the steep, heavily vegetated slope with its multiple barbed-wire entanglements."<sup>515</sup>

#### **5.4 THE SOVIET ATTACK THROUGH THE ISTHMUS AND ACTIONS AT SINIMÄED AND BEYOND:**

By July 1944, the Germans understood they could not hold the city of Narva indefinitely. The constant pressure coming from the northern and southern bridgeheads was too great. While the Soviets wanted to recognize their intermediate goal of moving quickly down the Estonian coast to secure Tallinn and other ports on the west coast of Estonia, they were also attacking to capture Riga. In doing so, they were recognizing their second campaign goal of retaking the Baltic states. The Germans realized the "Panther Line" was totally compromised along the

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<sup>514</sup> U. V. Ladinski, Ю. В. Ладинский, *Военная Вакта* (The Watch of War) (Moscow, USSR: Military Publishing House, 1983), 185.

<sup>515</sup> Wilhelm Tieke, *Tragedy of the Faithful, A History of the III. (germanisches) SS-Panzer Korps*, (Manitoba, Canada : J.J. Fedorowicz Publishing 2001), 62.

southern bridgehead and it was only a matter of time before they could no longer resist in Narva. The German story of retrograde from Narva to the “Tannenberg Position” and subsequent defense in recent times was built more on myth than on facts. Most German sources written after the war treat the subject from the point of view of the Waffen SS and it's volunteers holding back the “Red Terror.” Understandably the accounts were written during the Cold War, but they are generally more emotional than factual. Many German accounts fail to explain how the Germans recognized their positions in Estonia were no longer tenable and how they continued to retrograde combat power in an organized fashion out of Estonia to Latvia. Without a political reason to have strategic lines of communication to Finland along with the military inability to continue to stop Soviet forces, an understanding must be established of how the Germans planned to retrograde their forces from Narva to the Tannenberg Positions, then out of Estonia.<sup>516</sup> Through a combination of primary and secondary sources and with analysis, a new synthesis of better understanding can be achieved. This synthesis adds more depth to existing knowledge of operations, but it also allows professional soldiers and scholars to examine the plan for retrograde from Estonia against the execution of actual operations. First, the retrograde from the “Panther Position” to the “Tannenberg Position.”

Two unknown German operations for the retrograde from the “Panther Position” are Operations SEEALDER and FLAMINGO. In the holdings of the U.S. National Archives, T-312, Roll 1633, Frame Number 000245, the German warning order for the retrograde from Narva to the “Tannenberg Position” is found.<sup>517</sup> The warning order was issued by the operations officer of Army Detachment Narva on July 13, 1944 at 01.40. to III SS Panzer Corps. The warning order

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<sup>516</sup> Giving the position the name “Tannenberg” was a Nazi ploy to inspire confidence in soldiers by linking the current defense to the ancient Germanic battles.

<sup>517</sup> Order was sent over the radio and transcribed on a “yellow canary” rather than sending a document to subordinate commanders.

states three important things, 1) the purpose of the order is to clear the Narva bridgehead to the “Tannenberg Position,” 2) orders the code name for the operation to be SEEADLER and 3) it states the 11th Infantry Division would be used to prepare the engagement area beginning at 12.00, July 12 to July 15, 1944 towards the Tannenberg Positions in Sinimäed or the Blue Hills. Retrograde operations were to commence the night of July 16th and 17th with extensive destruction of key infrastructure in conjunction with good accountability of German manpower and material. After the retrograde to the “Tannenberg Position” was complete, forces were to then decisively defend.<sup>518</sup> The Germans also demonstrated a thought toward operational security by including in the warning order that all long distance phone calls above the division level regarding the business of SEEALDER were forbidden.<sup>519</sup> Operation SEEALDER was envisioned to be a combined arms retrograde. Artillery was to support the retrograde operation from the vicinity of Jöhvi (10-12 Kms from Sinimäed). The units identified to support the retrograde were 708th and 928th Artillery Battalions with the 458th, 503rd and 508th Batteries in addition.<sup>520</sup> The actual order for the conduct of SEEALDER was issued on July 14, 1944.<sup>521</sup>



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**Picture 11: A Young SS Artilleryman from Holland.**

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<sup>518</sup> NARA T-312, Roll 1633, Frame Number 000245.

<sup>519</sup> NARA T-312, Roll 1633, Frame Number 000246.

<sup>520</sup> NARA T-312, Roll 1633, Frame Number 000254.

<sup>521</sup> NARA T-312, Roll 1633, Frame Number 000282.

In addition to the points stipulated in the warning order, the order for the retrograde movement or Army Detachment order Ia Nr. 896/44 g.Kdo, clearly stated the purpose of Operation SEEADLER was to continue defending the main line of resistance (HKL) of the Peipus position to the positions south of Wairara Church using the Tannenberg Position (**See Map 15**).<sup>523</sup> Interestingly, this order states a strategic purpose for the defense of the Tannenberg position as protecting the slate oil zone along the Estonian coast and forbid an enemy breakthrough into Estonia.<sup>524</sup> In the order, the Germans recognized the danger of the seam or area between the III SS Panzer Corps and the XXXXIII Army Corps to the south.<sup>525</sup> The operations order also adjusted the time of execution found in the warning order from the night of July 16th to the night of the 17th into the 18th.<sup>526</sup> A point of close coordination explained in the order was the destruction of key infrastructure at the same time in the city of Narva to aid retrograding forces.<sup>527</sup> Lastly, the operations order also defined the “Tannenberg Position” as tank favorable terrain and the retrograde was explained as necessary to strengthen the Narva Front.<sup>528</sup> While the orders found in the National Archives cover the plan, the actual execution of the plan used by the III SS Panzer Corps is found in the secondary sources.

The key tactical task for III SS Panzer Corps was the collapse of the Narva bridgehead and the retrograde of forces from the east side of the Narva River to the “Tannenberg Positions” in the west only 25 kilometers away (**See Map 11 for starting positions of units**).

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<sup>522</sup> Picture from NARA File Waffen SS Kriegsberichter Photograph Collection Part 3, See the Eisner folder.

<sup>523</sup> NARA T-312, Roll 1633, Frame Number 000282.

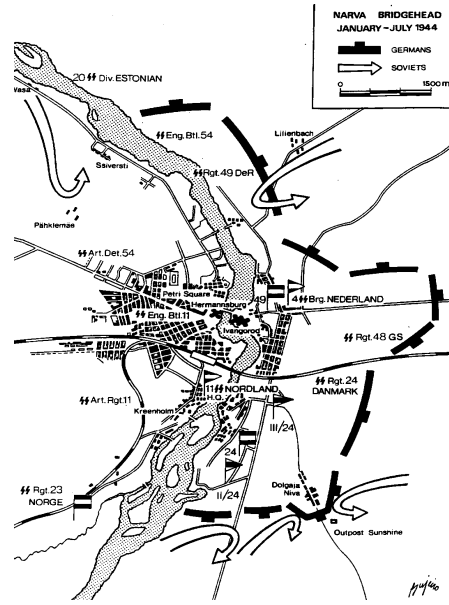
<sup>524</sup> Ibid.

<sup>525</sup> Ibid.

<sup>526</sup> NARA T-312, Roll 1633, Frame Number 000283. Tieke states the reason the retrograde time was changed was because the Soviets learned of the operation. See Wilhelm Tieke, *Tragedy of the Faithful, A History of the III. (germanisches) SS-Panzer Korps*, (Manitoba, Canada : J.J. Fedorowicz Publishing 2001), 83.

<sup>527</sup> This order also pointed out to subordinate commanders that, “it was a matter of honor that no weapons or equipment fell into enemy hands in a usable condition.” See NARA T-312, Roll 1633, Frame Number 000284.

<sup>528</sup> NARA T-312, Roll 1633, Frame Number 000285.



Map 11

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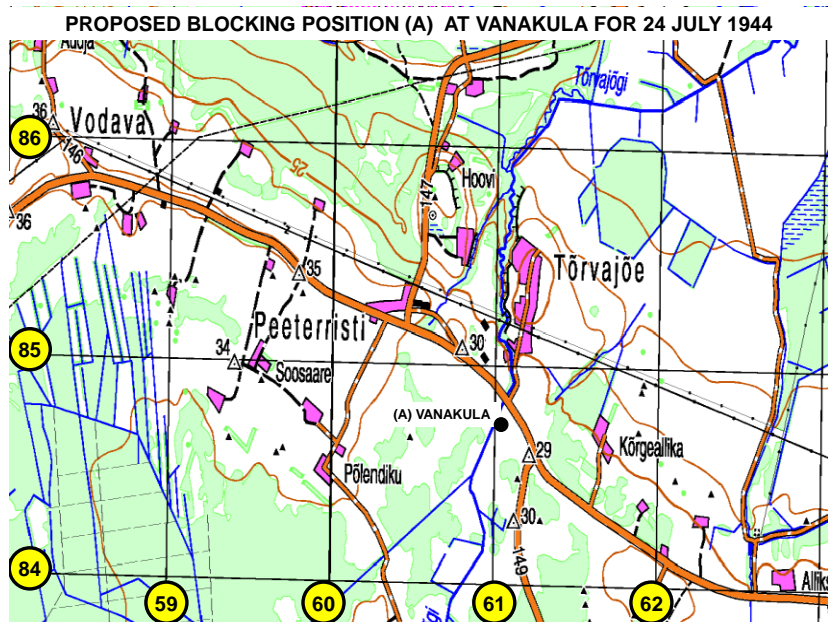
Tieke explains:

The withdrawal plan established four intermediate positions before reaching the new main line of resistance. The four positions would be occupied in leapfrog fashion and then evacuated. The first intermediate position (A) was at Vanaküla and in the Riverbank Woods at the worker's houses across from the notorious "Snake Woods." Those blocking positions were about six kilometers west of Narva. Blocking position (B) was at Puhkova, Suur-Soldino (echeloned forward somewhat to the east) and at Samokras. The (C) positions were at Walge, east of the Repikno and directly east of Auvere. Intermediate position (D) was at Udria, Auvere railroad station and 2 kilometers west of Lipsu. The plan was very precise.<sup>530</sup>

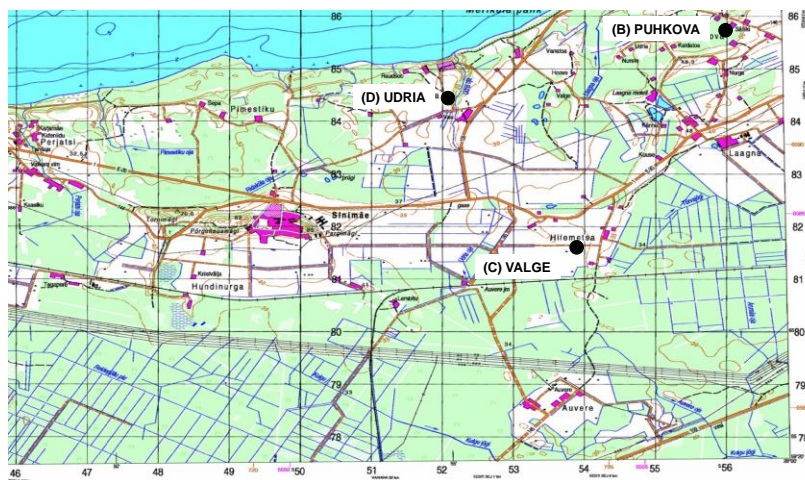
<sup>529</sup> Map 11 from Richard Landwehr, *Narva 1944: The Waffen SS and the Battle for Europe*, (Silver Springs: Bibliophile Legion Books, Inc 1981), 63.

<sup>530</sup> Wilhelm Tieke, *Tragedy of the Faithful, A History of the III. (germanisches) SS-Panzer Korps*, (Manitoba, Canada : J.J. Fedorowicz Publishing 2001), 85.





**PROPOSED BLOCKING POSITIONS (B) PUHKOVA, (C) VALGE AND (D) UDRIA FOR 24 JULY 1944**



**BLOCKING POSITION (A) FACING EAST TOWARD DIRECTION  
OF SOVIET ADVANCE**



**BLOCKING POSITION (B) FACING NORTH EAST TOWARD DIRECTION  
OF SOVIET ADVANCE**



**BLOCKING POSITION (C) FACING SOUTH TOWARD DIRECTION  
OF SOVIET ADVANCE**



**BLOCKING POSITION (D) FACING SOUTH TOWARD DIRECTION  
OF SOVIET ADVANCE**

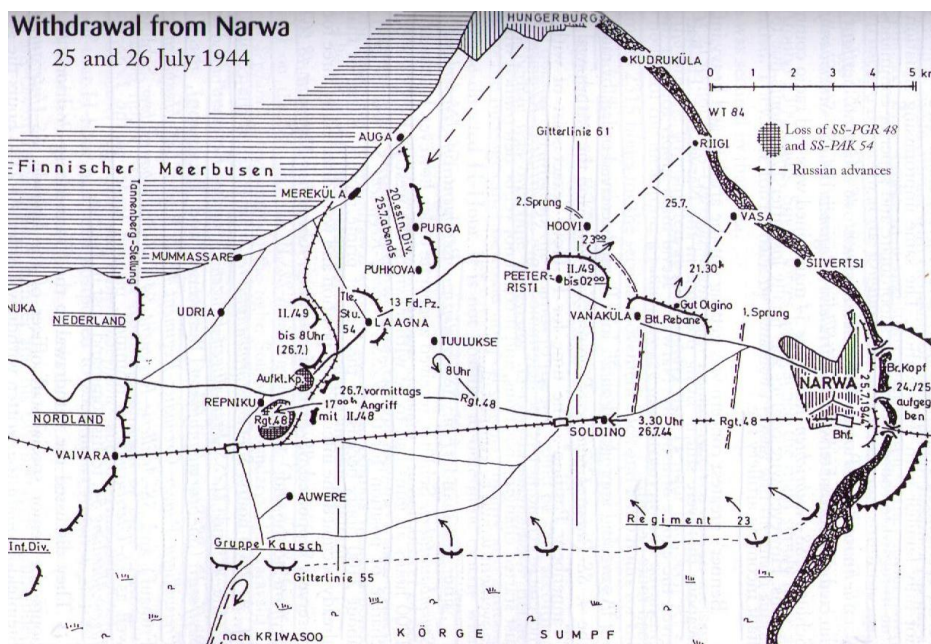


The German retrograde plan was finally executed at 23.30 on July 24, 1944. This plan was referred to as Operation FLAMINGO.<sup>531</sup> The order to execute the retrograde was sent out to subordinate commands at 20.30 on July 23, 1944. Regiments and battalions began their movements in the III SS Panzer Corps battle space **(See Map 11 for starting positions of units)**

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<sup>531</sup> The order was sent by the Operations Officer of Army Detachment Narva as Ia Nr. 988/44. See NARA T-312, Roll 1633, Frame Number 000497.

with the goal of reaching the 61 and 55 eastings in time and space to control their movement back to the “Tannenberg Position (See Map 12).”<sup>532</sup>



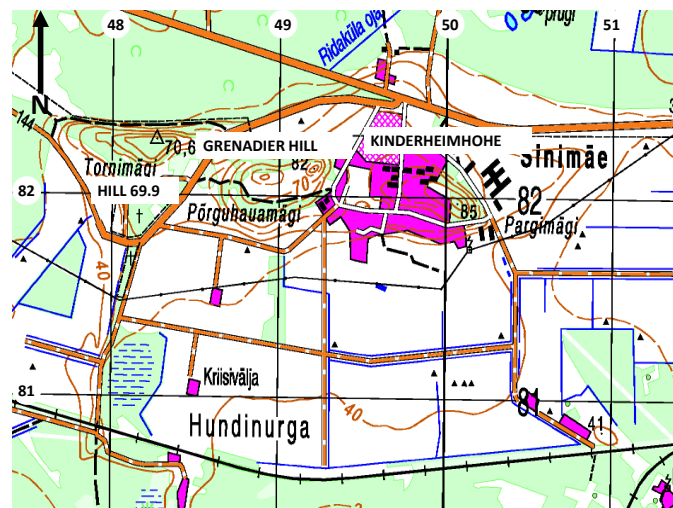
Map 12 From: Wilhelm Tieke, *Tragedy of the Faithful, A History of the III. (germanisches) SS-Panzer Korps*, (Manitoba, Canada : J.J. Fedorowicz Publishing 2001), 89.

Using a blocking positions along the main east-west road allowed III SS Panzer Corps to move quickly along the Main Supply Route (MSR) and disperse in space quickly allowing the next unit to past the static unit and begin providing security to continue the retrograde movement. In essence, the III SS Panzer Corps was using the same technique the Army Group North and Operation BLAU did leaving Leningrad. *P-035* makes mention of the III SS Panzer Corps losing a “retreating SS Regiment” in the course of moving to the “Tannenberg Position.”<sup>533</sup> The SS Regiment in question was the *SS Freiwilligen Panzer Grenadier Regiment 48* “General Seyffard.”<sup>534</sup> The lost regiment was assembled in the Narva /Kreenholm railroad station and commence movement toward Soldino (Blocking position B according to the withdrawal plan)

<sup>532</sup> Wilhelm Tieke, *Tragedy of the Faithful, A History of the III. (germanisches) SS-Panzer Korps*, (Manitoba, Canada : J.J. Fedorowicz Publishing 2001), 85.

<sup>533</sup> Department of the Army, *MS# P-035 Retrograde of Army Group North During 1944*. (Carlisle, Army War College: Foreign Military Studies Department 1950), 208.

with the reconnaissance elements arriving by 03.30 and the remainder of the regiment no later than 05.00 on July 26, 1944.<sup>535</sup> The movement of the regiment occurred along the Narva - Tallinn Railroad from the east to west. Continuing to move, by 08.00 on July 26 1944 the regiment reached the area south of Tuulukse. Breaking in from the vicinity of Auvere in the south, Soviet forces managed to move 300 men and 13 tanks in to stop the westward movement of the regiment, while other Soviet forces oriented on the unit and eventually destroyed it. Soviet focus on “General Seyffard” allowed remaining German units to fight to the “Tannenberg Position,” where some of the most serious fighting took place during the war beginning on the July 26, 1944.



**Map 13** Current 1:50,000 Scale Map of the Sinimäed

The key terrain of the “Tannenberg Position” was a series of three east-west running hills situated between the Finnish Sea in the north and the swamp area of Auvere to the south (See **Map 13**). The area is called Sinimäed in Estonian, Blaubarger in German and the Blue Hills in English. The composition of the hills was the Kinderheimhöhe or Children’s home in the east,

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<sup>534</sup> Wilhelm Tieke, *Tragedy of the Faithful, A History of the III. (germanisches) SS-Panzer Korps*, (Manitoba, Canada : J.J. Fedorowicz Publishing 2001), 93.

<sup>535</sup> *Ibid*, 92.

then Grenadier and Hill 69.9 in the west. The main east-west MSR or the Rollbahn ran directly through the three hills. Since the occupation of the “Panther Line” and the beginning of Soviet operations in the area in late January-early February 1944, the Germans had been evaluating the Sinimäed area for another defense that could add depth. Recognizing the tremendous strength of the area, the Germans saw the Blue Hills as the lynch pin in any future defensive network and likewise, the Soviet regarded it as something that had to be taken from the Germans in order to continue attacking to the west. After the German withdrawal from the Narva bridgehead from July 23-25 1944, the Soviets wanted to carry the attack forward with the same momentum and over run the Germans before they could reach the Blue Hills. The Soviet attack began in earnest on July 26, 1944.

On the morning of July 26<sup>th</sup> the Soviets began with a heavy artillery bombardment of units in the Blue Hills area. “Until now, artillery had not been concentrated but came from the southeast”<sup>536</sup> Shortly after sundown on July 26, 1944 (about 19.46 hours<sup>537</sup>) “the Soviets mounted a daring attack with five tanks and mounted infantry which drove straight through a unit of German sailors with no means at their disposal to stop them. The Soviet unit continued up the Kinderheimhöhe where the tanks stopped and took up positions and the infantry looked for cover in trenches and shell holes. News of the incident reached the commander of 24<sup>th</sup> Regiment who immediately dispatched his Panzer Jäger Platoon to link up with the *11. /SS Company*. The platoon arrived around midnight. The commander of the Panzer Jäger Platoon relays the events as he remembered them;

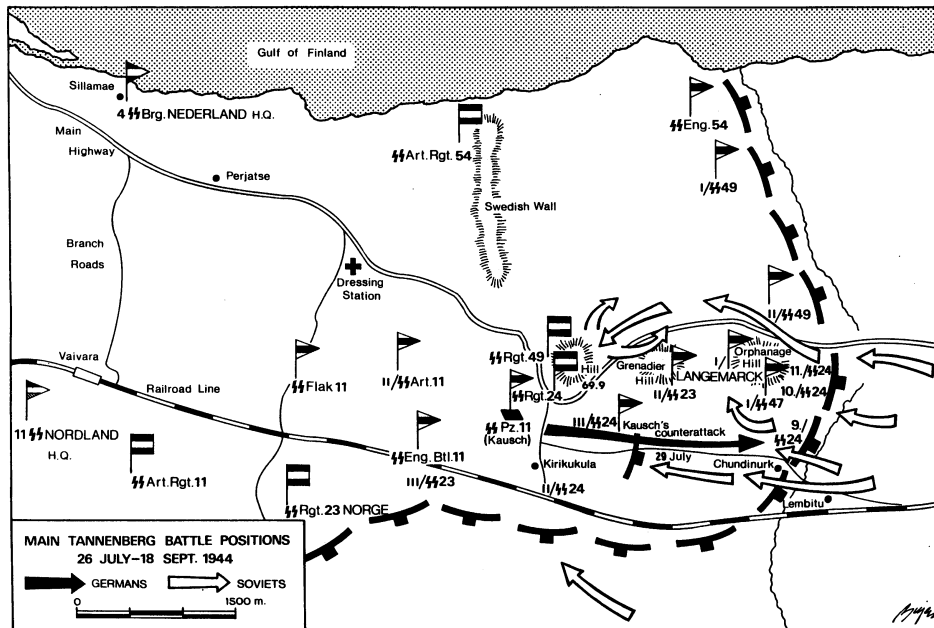
Just behind our lines in *11. /SS Company* we could see the five tanks. We were only able to see three of the tanks from our position. I decided to engage all five tanks at the same

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<sup>536</sup>Oluf Krabbe, *Danske soldater I kamp pa Ostfronten 1941-1945*, (Kobenhavn, Danmark: Bogen's Forlag 1998), 184.

<sup>537</sup>Tartu University Astronomic Observatory, *Astronomic Calendar, 21<sup>st</sup> Edition 1944*, (Dorpat (Tartu), Estonia: University Publishing 1943), 14.

time, so the second in command took two other men with Panzerschrecks around to a position where he could see the other two and he would initiate the attack by a signal. The signal he used was a bird call he had learned while in the Hitler Youth. This signal was much less dangerous than a light signal. On this signal we engaged all five tanks and they began to burn<sup>538</sup>



Map 14 From: Richard Landwehr, *Narva 1944: The Waffen SS and the Battle for Europe*, (Silver Springs: Bibliophile Legion Books, Inc 1981), 78.

Artillery fires continued to intensify at 06.00 on July 27, 1944 to barrage strength.

“Calibers of all sizes rained down on the position of the three hills covering them in a thick black smoke. The few remaining assault guns and tanks of the division antitank and armor battalions were sent forward to *SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 24 “Danmark”* which would be at the focal point of the enemy’s main effort.”<sup>539</sup> Concentrating their artillery fire on the units blocking the rollbahn, the Soviets launched an **uncoordinated** attack from three side of the Blue Hills designed to secure their objectives. The Soviet’s lacked good avenues of approach to conduct an attack. Because the Germans were not given a great deal of time to occupy their positions or

<sup>538</sup>Oluf Krabbe, *Danske soldater I kamp pa Ostfronten 1941-1945*, (Kobenhavn, Danmark: Bogen’s Forlag 1998), 184.

<sup>539</sup> Wilhelm Tieke, *Tragedy of the Faithful, A History of the III. (germanisches) SS-Panzer Korps*, (Manitoba, Canada : J.J. Fedorowicz Publishing 2001), 112.

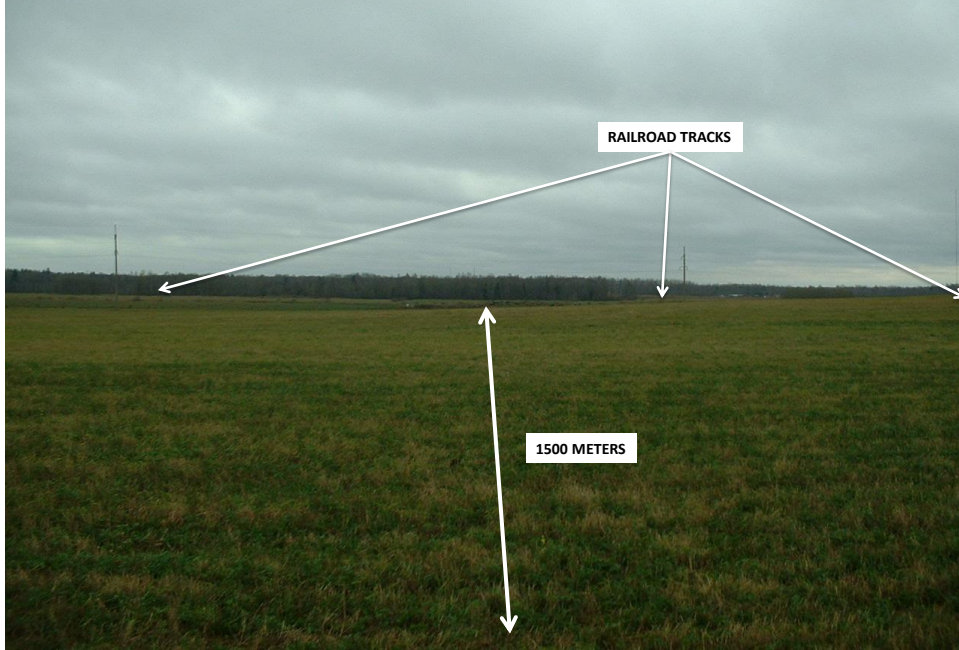
improve them with obstacles; they had to take strict advantage of anything they could from nature. The only things capable of stopping the Soviet advance were natural obstacles. Finally, the *III. (germanisches) SS-Panzer-Korps* massed their artillery regiment in the area of the Swedish Wall in order to better concentrate fires. Using *II./SS 49 and 10./SS and 11./SS 24* positions, the Germans planned direct fires for the defense in conjunction with an obstacle plan and an indirect fire plan to build an effective Engagement Area (EA) quickly.

**VIEW OF THE FRONTAGE FROM THE AREA OF 11./SS AND 10./SS 24 REGIMENT "DANMARK,"  
LOOKING TOWARD THE EAST. (PICTURE WAS TAKEN FROM VIC (35V NF 50708220))**

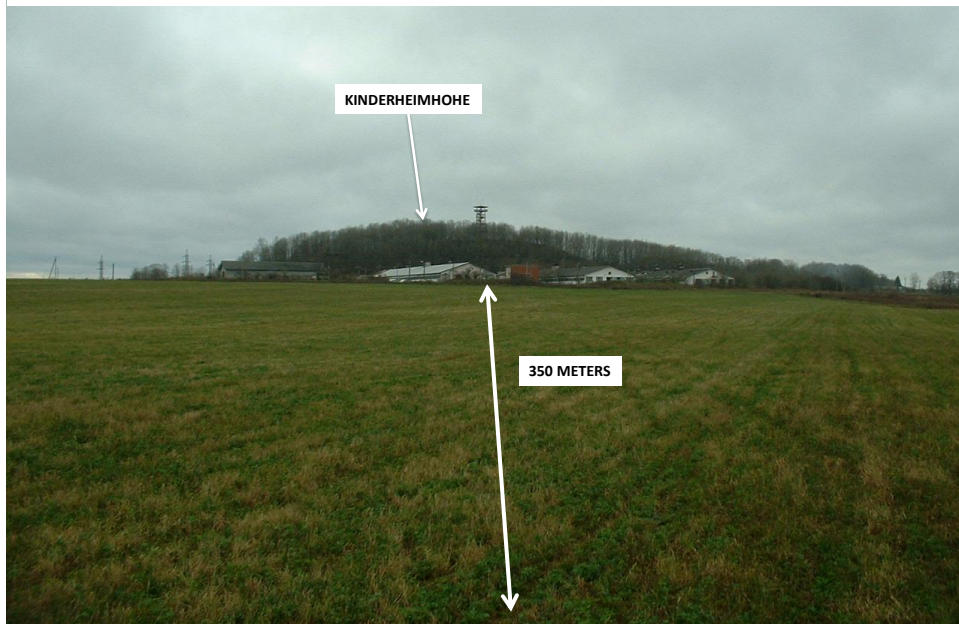


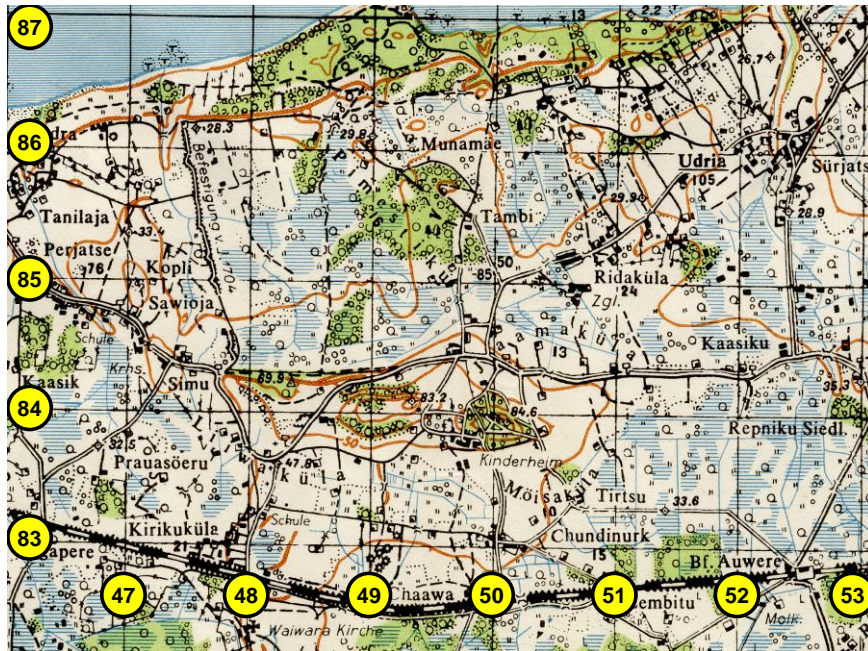


**VIEW OF THE FRONTAGE FROM THE AREA OF 11./SS AND 10./SS 24 REGIMENT "DANMARK,"  
LOOKING TOWARD THE SOUTH. (PICTURE WAS TAKEN FROM VIC (35V NF 50708220))**



**VIEW OF THE FRONTAGE FROM THE AREA OF 11./SS AND 10./SS 24 REGIMENT "DANMARK,"  
LOOKING TOWARD THE WEST AND KINDERHEIMHOHE. (PICTURE WAS TAKEN FROM VIC (35V  
NF 50708220))**

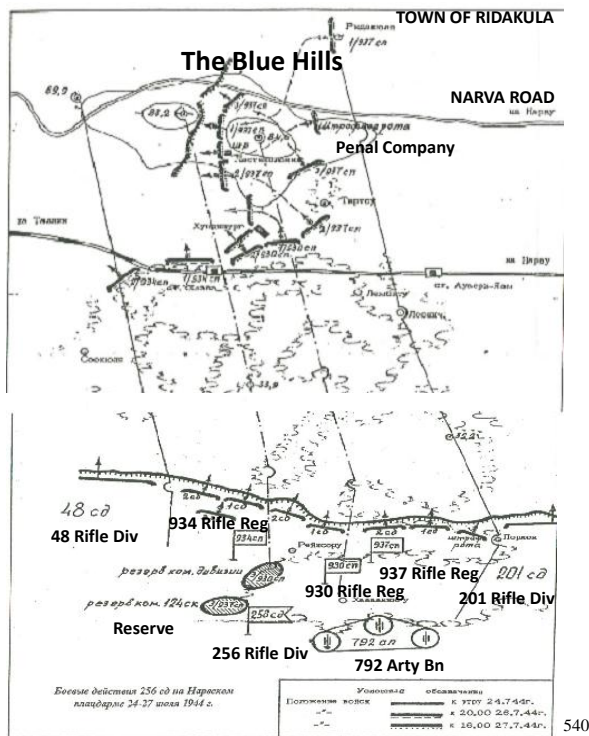
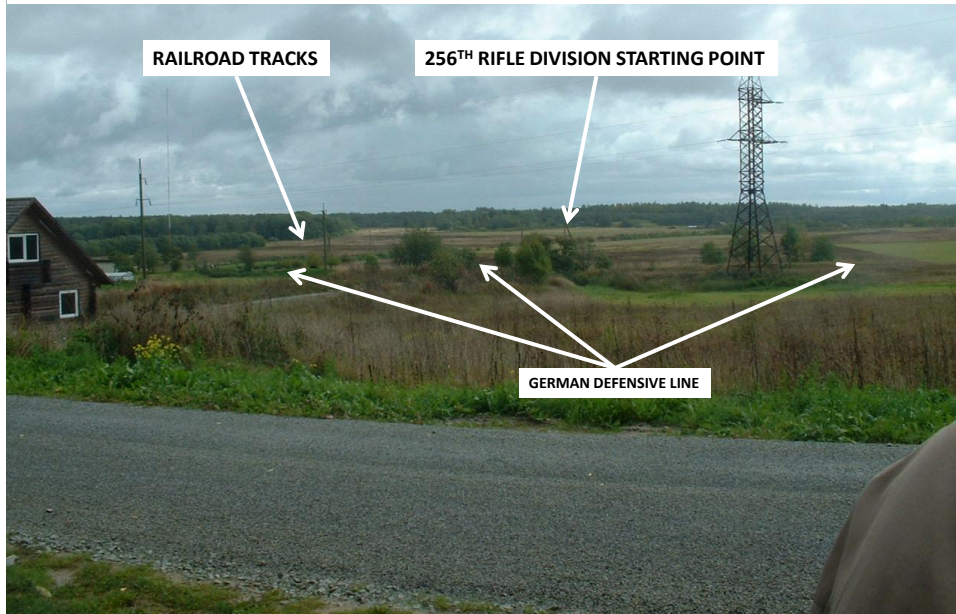




**Map 15: Original 1:50,000 Scale Map of the Blue Hills area**

The Soviets pressed the attack again, this time from the area south of the Blue Hills. N. P. Klyavin's work *Narva Red Banner, A Sketch of the Military Path of the Narva 256<sup>th</sup> Rifle Red Banner Division* examined the attack of the Blue Hills, offering an excellent account of the 256th Rifle Division's attack of the Danes of 10. and 11./SS Companies. A Soviet penal company was assigned the mission of reconnaissance in-force and did not either report back in a timely manner or at all with the situation in front of them (**See Map 16**). The Soviet's problems were further tactically complicated as the infantry and armor unit's efforts were not coordinated with timely supporting arms for their movement or maneuver. Once Soviet units were engaged, reports to higher headquarters were lacking, thus not allowing senior commanders an opportunity to exploit success.

THE DIRECTION OF 256<sup>TH</sup> RIFLE DIVISION ATTACK. THIS PICTURE WAS TAKEN FROM THE BASE OF THE KINDERHEIMHOHE (VIC 35V NF 49908190) LOOKING TO THE SOUTHEAST. IT IS ABOUT 2000M TO THE FAR TREE LINE.



Map 16: Soviet Map of the Blue Hills Attack

<sup>540</sup> N. P. Klyavin, *Narva Red Banner, A Sketch of the Military Path of the Narva 256<sup>th</sup> Rifle Red Banner Division*, (Dimitrovgrad, Russia: ICF "Vremya 1997), 140-1.

At 09.00 hours a strong Soviet infantry and tank assault force attacked the front lines of the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> Companies/ “Danmark,” which were tasked to guard the Tirtsu road. SS

*Hauptsturmführer* Trautwein, in command of 11<sup>th</sup> Company, had been badly wounded in the stomach. 30 Stalin tanks and T-34s moved to within 70 yards of the 11<sup>th</sup> Company’s trenches. A survivor of the engagement, *SS Unterscharführer* Illum, described what happen next:

When we saw what was now occurring, we became speechless. The noise of Soviet tanks caused everyone to look up. Coming directly at us from south of the highway were 30 “Joseph Stalin” and T-34 tanks! We had only one thought: how could we stand up to this great mass of armor? North of the highway, a 7.5cm PAK gun opened fire, but it was too far away to be effective. The tanks came closer and closer. From about 70 yards away their cannons opened fire on our positions. We sprang up and run for our lives. After these frightening minutes passed, we came to our senses and began aiming and shooting our “panzerfaust.” When the first tank went up in flames our old battle spirit re-exerted itself and our confidence returned. All over the tanks were bursting into flames and smoke was billowing thickly. After 14 tanks had been destroyed the others turned around and took off for the rear.<sup>541</sup>

This is an example of war in any time. Human beings have limits and react to fear. Good units will be able to get a hold of themselves and control their fears, while poorly trained units will crumble and run. Any account of war in which men were not terrified for their lives is not true to the nature of man or war. The Soviets would eventually overwhelm the German positions on Kinderheimhohe, but not without heavy losses in men and material.

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<sup>541</sup> Richard Landwehr, *Narva 1944: The Waffen SS and the Battle for Europe*, (Silver Springs: Bibliophile Legion Books, Inc 1981), 84.

**THIS MEMORIAL WAS LEFT ON KINDERHEIMHOHE HILL BY THE FLEMISH VETERAN'S RELIEF ORGANIZATION, ST. MAARTENSFONDS. THE MEMORIAL READS, "HERE REST UNKNOWN YET UNFORGOTTEN SOLDIERS FROM FLANDERS." THE INSCRIPTION IS WRITTEN IN ESTONIAN, GERMAN AND FLEMISH.**



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German actions at Grenadier Hill on July 27, 1944 center on the actions of a young Flemish SS volunteer named Remi Schrijnen. Remi Schrijnen was assigned to the 6. SS-*Freiwilligen-Sturmbrigade "Langemarck"* as a 75mm PAK 40 gunner located on Grenadier Hill. For his brave actions starting in the mid-morning of July 26, 1944 through the morning of July 27, 1944 he was awarded the Knight's Cross. *The Last Knight of Flanders* by Allen Brandt provides a sense of his actions through reading the award's citation:

On July 26, 1944 at 09.00 hours the Russians attacked with three T-34s along the "Narva-Reval" highway. Schrijnen knocked out two T-34s at a distance of 400 meters. During the afternoon at 1500 hours the Russians attacked again with infantry forces, and were supported by artillery and heavy grenade launchers (mortars). Schrynen again knocked out two T-34s and a single "Stalin" tank. A further T-34 was damaged. Its crew disembarked. The damaged tank was probably dragged away during the night. On July 27, 1944 at 04.00 hours, Geschutz Schrijnen moved to a position 400 meters north of the hill Kinderheim, left of the "Narva-Reval" highway. Schreynen recognized a position where eleven Soviet tanks were preparing to attack. Under the protection of two T-34s, Six T-34s and one KVII the soviets approached the highway from the north. At a distance of 700 meters, Schrijnen knocked out a T-34. Two T-34s in position to attack shot at the anti-tank gun. Schrijnen cleared a jam in the gun and five minutes later he

<sup>542</sup> Allen Brandt, *The Last Knight of Flanders*, (Atglen: Schiffer Military History 1998), 203.

knocked out a KVII. Immediately thereafter the Geschutz was knocked out by a direct hit. Schreyen was named in the Wehrmacht reports that followed the battle.<sup>543</sup>

**LOOKING TOWARD THE BASE OF THE KINDERHEIMHOHE FROM A POSSIBLE POSITION OF ONE OF REMI SCHRIJNEN'S GUNS (VIC 35V NF 49308223) LOOKING TO THE EAST. IT IS ABOUT 400M TO THE BASE OF THE KINDERHEIMHOHE.**



Standing at the base of Hill 69.9 looking at the large black cross and smaller memorials serving as memorials to the battle and German units that fought there, you can still feel the desperation of July 1944 in the air. At about 12.00 on the July 27, 1944, Fritz von Scholz, the highly respected commander of *11. SS-Freiwilligen-Panzer-Grenadier-Division "Nordland"* was present at a meeting in the new command post position of the *SS Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment "Danmark"* located on the southwestern slope of Hill 69.9.<sup>544</sup> The decision made in

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<sup>543</sup> Ibid, 205.

<sup>544</sup> SS-Gruppenführer Fritz von Scholz, Commander of *11. SS-Freiwilligen Panzergrenadier- Division "Nordland"* was born in Pilsen on December 9, 1896 the son of an Austrian General Officer. Von Scholz joined the Austrian Army at the beginning of the First World War where he served in a variety of Field Artillery assignments. His last wartime unit was Field Artillery Regiment 125 where he served from November 1917 until April 30, 1919. He was then transferred to the reserve. For his service during the First World War, he was awarded the Austrian Bravery Medal in Gold and the Austrian Military Services Crosses in bronze and silver. After the First World War, von Scholz continued his education in chemical engineering and continued to fight in the Freikorps. He joined the Austrian NSDAP on October 9, 1932 and the SA the following day. Von Scholz left the SA and joined the SS on June 10, 1933.

the meeting was for the “1./SS-Pionier-Bataillon 11 to send another combat patrol forward into the main line of resistance. The acting commander requested permission to lead the patrol. Fritz von Scholz denied his request.<sup>545</sup> In the early afternoon of July 27, 1944, the Soviets shot an artillery round that altered the course of the battle and never knew it.



Von Scholz left the command post. He wanted to get to *SS-Hauptsturmführer* Larum, whose *13./SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 24 “Danmark”* was in a firing position nearby. He then wanted to get an overview of the combat situation with *SS-Sturmbannführer* Kappus.

At that moment, the Russian artillery again laid down heavy fire. The regiment adjutant, *SS-Hauptsturmführer* Tenedde, decided to send a messenger with von Scholz as a guide.

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Fritz von Scholz served in all levels of command in various assignments during the Second World War. A highly intelligent officer, von Scholz was fluent in English. He only led from the front. He always wanted to share hard times with his men, and they loved him, giving him the nickname “der alte Fritz” like Fredrick the Great. Von Schulz would be severely wounded and die a day later as a result of fighting in the Blue Hills. He was awarded the Swords to the Knight’s Cross posthumously on August 8, 1944. See: Mark C. Yerger, *Waffen SS Commanders, The Army, Corps and Divisional Leaders of a Legend Kruger to Zimmermann*, (Atglen: Schiffer Military History 1999), 204-7.

<sup>545</sup> Wilhelm Tieke, *Tragedy of the Faithful, A History of the III. (germanisches) SS-Panzer Korps*, (Manitoba, Canada : J.J. Fedorowicz Publishing 2001), 115.

At almost the same moment, he and *SS-Hauptsturmführer* Larum rushed out into the open. Fritz von Scholz was hit in the head by shrapnel. They quickly got the wounded man to the command post of *SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 24 "Danmark"* and placed him on a cot. He was unconscious.<sup>546</sup>



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**Picture 12: Fritz von Scholz awarding his men in the Spring 1944.**

The Soviet leadership saw July 29, 1944 as the day for decisive offensive action against Sinimäed. German armored forces under *SS Obersturmbannführer* Kausch however, saw an opportunity to counterattack. Kausch estimated the enemy to have reached his culminating point after repeated attempts to capture Sinimäed and assessed he was no longer able to attack. “Just when the breakthrough succeeded and Grenadier Hill appeared lost, *SS Obersturmbannführer* Kausch committed his tanks and assault guns into the fray. Only they could bring the chaos to an end.”<sup>548</sup> Following behind the tanks and armored vehicles were the Estonian men of the *I./45 SS- Freiwilligen-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment* under the command of *SS-Hauptsturmführer* Paul Maitla. His battalion was badly depleted of men and material from months of fighting, but he led

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<sup>546</sup> Ibid, 115.

<sup>547</sup> Picture from NARA File Waffen SS Kriegsbericht Photograph Collection Part 3, See the Eisner folder.



his unit into the assault with about 150 men. The attack was timely and “the Red Army Soldiers were thrown off balance and fled. Although the Red Army attempted to retake Grenadier Hill the same day and the days that followed, the Estonians remained in control of the terrain. When the battalion was replaced in the positions on August 2, 1944 it had 48 men remaining. Maitla was decorated with the Knight’s Cross of the Iron Cross for retaking Grenadier Hill.<sup>549</sup>

**STAGING AREA FOR SS OBERSTURMBANNFUHRER KAUSCH’S ARMOR  
(VIC 35V NF 47308190) TO THE SOUTH WEST OF HILL 69.9. YOU ARE LOOKING TO THE  
NORTH.**



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<sup>548</sup> Wilhelm Tieke, *Tragedy of the Faithful, A History of the III. (germanisches) SS-Panzer Korps*, (Manitoba, Canada : J.J. Fedorowicz Publishing 2001), 112.

<sup>549</sup> Mart Laar, *The Estonian Legion*, (Tallinn, Estonia : Grenadier Publishing 2008), 341.

THE AREA SS OBERSTURMBANNFUHRER KAUSCH'S ARMOR CROSSED TO COUNTERATTACK. PICTURE WAS TAKEN FROM HILL 69.9 (VIC 35V NF 48738198). LOOKING TO THE SOUTH.



While the Germans crushed the attempted decisive Soviet attack of July 29, 1944 in a counterattack, the Germans maintained their position in the Blue Hills through August into September. In the end, it was a Soviet indirect attack against Tartu in the south that made the Germans lose their will to continue defending the Blue Hills, not because the position was captured. It is prudent to examine why the Germans needed to finally give up the Blue Hills after half a year of defending it. The answer to this question can be found in Operation HOUSE-CLEARING.<sup>550</sup>

In the campaign plan to evacuate Estonia, the retrograde and fighting at the “Tannenberg Position” must be looked at through the lens of *MS # 151, Fighting on the Narva Front, the Evacuation of Estonia and the Withdrawal to the Dvina* to understand how this tactical battle was part of the greater plan.

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<sup>550</sup> Department of the Army, *MS# 151 Fighting on the Narva Front, The Evacuation of Estonia and the Withdrawal to the Dvina* (Carlisle, Army War College: Foreign Military Studies Department 1952), 6-7.

Examination of *MS# 151* contains discussion of the German plan for withdrawal.

Accordingly, the following steps were taken:

1. The operation was assigned the code name “Entruenpelung” or house-cleaning. All equipment not absolutely needed was to be moved back to Germany.
2. A small group of officers, sworn to absolute secrecy, conducted a rehearsal of the planned operation under the code name “Tannenbaum I”. Direction of the withdrawal and lines of resistance were established on the maps and were reconnoitered on the ground inconspicuously.
3. *Armeeabteilung* (Army Group) Narva designated highways for motorized and horse-drawn vehicles. Bridges were reinforced.
4. Depots were established for all classes of supply.

A withdrawal directly west toward Reval (Tallinn) and the Island of Ösel (Saaremaa) would have been the least difficult for *Armeeabteilung* Narva. The over- all situation, however, necessitated a southwesterly and ultimately a southern direction toward Riga.<sup>551</sup>

Like most plans, this concept for an operation was not executed as intended because of the Soviets attacked into Southern Estonia. Recognizing their inability to break the will of the defenders of the “Tannenberg Position” at Sinimäed by using a direct approach in attacking it head-on, the Soviets decided to use the indirect approach by attacking southern Estonia. To understand the effect of the Soviet operation against German planning efforts in Operation HOUSE CLEARING, an examination of Arved Kalvo’s work entitled *The Banishment of Fascists From Southern Estonia* is needed.<sup>552</sup> Operations against Tartu occurred between August 10- September 6, 1944. The description of the Soviet planning effort to capture Tartu is described by Kalvo on page 41. Kalvo explains;

The Chief of Front (3rd Baltic Front) Staff Lieutenant General V. R. Vashkevich, the head of the operations department Major General S. S. Bronevski and the head of operations department, Colonel I.G. Nikitinski along with other staff officers

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<sup>551</sup> Ibid.

<sup>552</sup> Arved Kalvo, Арвед Калво, *Изгнание фашистов из южной эстонии* (Banishment of Fascists from Southern Estonia) (Tallinn, ESSR: Eesti Raamat, 1984).

worked out the final review of Tartu operation. There were three stages of operations in accordance with the character of battle activity. First stage covered the period of 10 to 15 of August when our troops broke through the “Marienburg Line” and swiftly started to develop success. During the second stage from August 16<sup>th</sup> to 27<sup>th</sup>, the Fascists launched large counter-attacks, attempting to stop our advance. During this period large battles were carried out and Soviet troops reached the banks of the rivers Suur and Väike-Emajõgi in the zones between the Lakes Peipsi and Võrtsjärv. In the third stage, from August 27<sup>th</sup> August – September 6<sup>th</sup>, our troops had to go on the defensive to repulse fierce enemy counter-attacks against Tartu. Units which had reached the southern line of Lake Võrtsjärv – River Vjajke-Emajõgi – River Gauja, began to prepare for the Riga offensive operation.<sup>553</sup>

There are many interesting facets to Kalvo's statement; first, the mention of the “Marienburg Line” in relation to the time and space of the Soviet advance into southern Estonia and second, how discussion of the “Marienburg Line” ties to the overall German plan of Operation HOUSE CLEARING and tactical actions of the Narva Front. Clearly, the “Marienburg Line” was part of the overall German plan to trade space for time in order to facilitate the German retrograde to the Latvian coast. It is necessary to understand the composition and disposition of the “Marienburg Line.”

According to Kalvo, The Germans began building the “Marienburg Line” in May 1944. The “Marienburg Line” was purely a tactical position, as the line reached a depth of 1.5 - 2 kilometers; in important sectors of the defenses from 3 to 4 kilometers. To the south-eastern portion of Pechora, northern and southeastern portion of Aluksne, the depth of the defenses along the main macadam roads was about 4 kilometers.”<sup>554</sup> Regarding the composition of the position itself, Kalvo adds;

The defensive positions consisted of systems of machine gun and rifle positions, located in two lines: directly along the front line and 2-3 kilometers behind. They were connected with each other by communication trenches with complete sections and passages. The Germans widely used natural obstacles as well, emplacing their weapons while establishing strong points and centers of resistance both on the front lines and in a **defense in depth** particularly along the most important roads. On each kilometer of the

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<sup>553</sup> Ibid, 41.

<sup>554</sup> Ibid, 43.

"Marienburg Line" there was 1,800 linear meters of trenches, 800 linear meters of communication trenches, 20-30 machine gun bunkers, about 20 mortar and artillery positions, 10-15 dugouts and 600-800 linear meters of wire entanglements. Density of mine fields was up to 350 mines per square kilometer.<sup>555</sup>

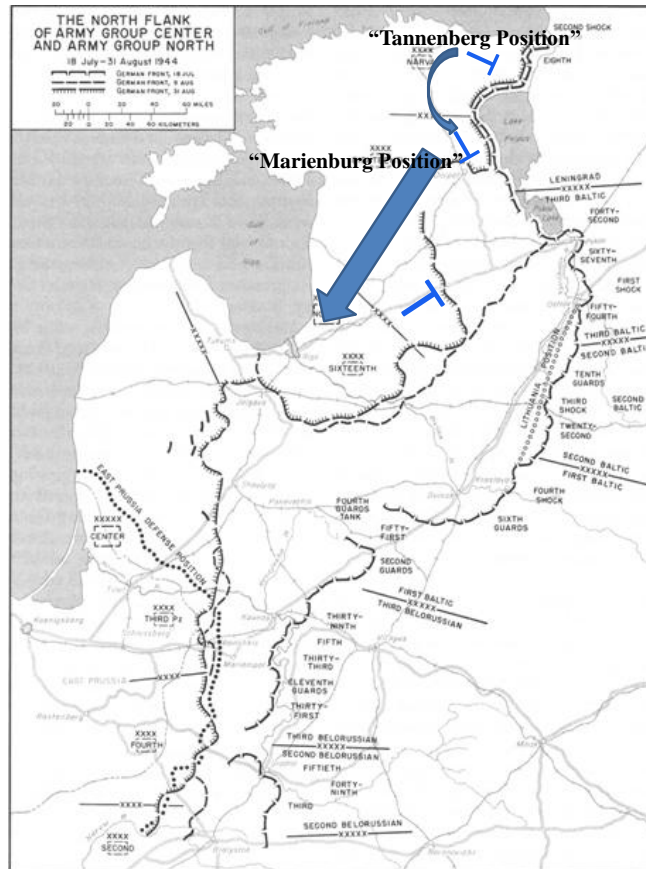
This statement shows how the Germans were continuing to refine their methods technically and tactically for tactical defensive positions in depth. The Soviets assessed the operational and tactical importance of the "Marienburg Line" as follows:

The position linked the troops of Army Detachment "Narva" (occupying the defense to the west of Lakes Pskousk and Peipsi) with the troops of 18th and 16th Armies. It enables the Fascists to freely maneuver troops and reserves to the west of the line. It gave the enemy options due to the large water obstacles (Lake Peipsi and Pskousk) to spare strength along sectors of the front. Therefore, the command of Army Detachment "Narva" considered the "Marienburg Line" together with Lakes Peipsi and Pskousk one of the most important elements in the system of defenses for Ostland.<sup>556</sup>

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<sup>555</sup> Ibid, 43-4.

<sup>556</sup> Arved Kalvo, Арвед Калво, *Изгнание фашистов из южной эстонии* (Banishment of Fascists from Southern Estonia) (Tallinn, ESSR: Eesti Raamat, 1984), 44.



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### Map 17 The "Tannenberg Position" and "Marienburg Position" Together Facilitate the Way to Latvia

With Soviet pressure in the north at the "Tannenberg Position," the natural obstacles presented by Lakes Peipsi and Pskouk at the "Marienburg Line" were an operational and tactical- level nature obstacle that facilitated the German withdrawal into Latvia. The "Marienburg Line" could be naturally reinforced as units withdrew from the Narva area in their movement south. This explains the Soviet difficulty of breaking through Estonia (See Map 17).

## 5.5 CONCLUSION:

The battles of the Leningrad Front and Army Detachment Narva in 1944 were the clash of ideological systems at many different levels. It was a continuation of the political struggle of Fascism and Communism carried out in depth through the conditions of time and space.<sup>558</sup> Whether attacking or defending in depth, the combatants each applied the principles and conditions of war successfully, but in the end the Soviets carried the day, ultimately winning the war. A universal truth of war is the ability to apply mass.<sup>559</sup> The Soviets had the ability to mass and the Germans could not. The Soviets massed effects and manpower at decisive locations and created penetrations for exploitation. Breaching and crossing obstacles such as rivers were sciences rooted in the art of tactics. Another way to think of the problem is the Soviets had the ability to concentrate their masses, while the German concentration could not defend everywhere.<sup>560</sup> Manpower and material superiority provided the Soviets with a position of advantage. The Soviets had the ability to continue replacing their losses, albeit with difficulty, while the Germans did not. While the will (moral) is to mental or physical three as to one; in the end mass can eventually break the defense's will to resist.<sup>561</sup> Battles are not won only on the battlefield they are fought on, but also on the battlefields to the left and right along with factories at home. The operational level of war must synergize the strategic ends with tactical efforts and assets through the art and science of war. This is a true realization of how **ends** and **means** meet through **ways**. The lessons observed from battle must be distributed to other units to learn from.

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<sup>557</sup> Original map 36 from: Earl F. Ziemke, *Stalingrad to Berlin: The German Defeat in the East* (Washington D.C.: Department of the Army 1968), 402.

<sup>558</sup> Friedrich von Bernhardi posited in Volume II of *On War of Today* that, "Every military action comes off in a clearly defined space, and demands for its execution a minimum of time, with which we have to reckon. The assailant, bent on beating the enemy, tries to gain space at the same time." See: Friedrich von Bernhardi, *On War of Today*, (London, UK : Hugh Rees, Ltd. 1913), 224.

<sup>559</sup> Ibid, 306. See Chapter 7, The Importance of the Operative Elements in the Modern Wars of Masses.

<sup>560</sup> As Fredrick the Great once said, "He who covers everything, covers nothing." Ibid, 363.

<sup>561</sup> Maturin M. Ballou, *Treasury of Thought* (Boston, Ma: Houghton Mifflin and Co., 1896), 497.

Refinement of doctrine exists for the simple reason of synchronization and unity of effort while spreading new ideas in the force. While the Germans continued to fall back on shortened lines of communication, the Soviet ability to generate mass and momentum marginalized the German lines of communication. The Germans were able to defend their positions because they maintained the will and means to resist along interior lines of communication, but they were unable to compete with Soviet mass. Once the Soviets identified Tartu as vulnerability in the German defense, they attacked; forcing the Germans to leave the “Tannenberg positions” or lose the force defending there. The Germans lost the “Tannenberg Position,” not for a lack of will; rather they lacked a significant offensive ability to decisively tactically counterattack. When Finland left the war, the strategic reason to defend was lost. Without the ability to operationally attack, it would only be a matter of time for a tactical level defense. Time in late 1944 was something Germany did not have in abundance.



## CHAPTER 6

### Irregular Warfare and Conventional War

The Second World War is typically thought of in terms of major battles being fought by convention forces on a grand scale. Thoughts are usually of the combatants, or the strategies (**ends**) and tactics (**means**) they used to achieve their desired ends. The use of war facilitates the end state of the combatants through their campaign plan, but conventional methods rarely defined war plans alone. In the Second World War on the Eastern Front, both the Germans and Soviets were adept at the use of unconventional forces to achieve their end states; demonstrating there is truly nothing “new” in waging war. While the names and terms have changed over the years, combatants then, as today find ways to harness the immense strength of the moral factors found in war from the will of people.<sup>562</sup> Today, professional soldiers and scholars believe there is nothing “new” to learn based on the experience of the last 10 years of fighting asymmetric forces using a counterinsurgency or COIN strategy as it has been called; a closer look reveals both professional soldiers and scholars have lost their fundamental understanding through invented terms that cause confusion while contributing nothing toward a better understanding of the art and science of war.<sup>563</sup> Regardless of the form war takes, it must be waged in time and space.

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<sup>562</sup> For information regarding the moral, mental and physical dimensions, see: J. F. C. Fuller *Foundation of the Science of War* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: United States Army Command and Staff College Press, 1993).

<sup>563</sup> In a recent article from Colin S. Gray, Gray stated the following regarding trends in current think about wars of our time, "COIN is neither a concept nor can it be a strategy. Instead, it is simply an acronymic descriptor of a basket of diverse activities intended to counter an insurgency. COIN cannot be debated intelligently as a general and generic project any more than can war and its warfare." This quote highlights the fact that a force must be able to fight in any type of situation, be it the nuclear battlefield, conventional operations or the more decentralized asymmetric operations of today such as Iraq or Afghanistan. This has been a painful lesson observed in the past ten years of war. See: Colin S. Gray, "Concept Failure? COIN, Counterinsurgency, and Strategic Theory" *National Defense University Prism*, 3:3, 17-32.

Often talked about in today's conversations is the question of law in war as it relates to the use of force by combatants.<sup>564</sup> The Second World War challenges many perceptions regarding the law, but are these examined in the proper context. In the continuum of war, irregular war is considered an illegal form of war, but not illegitimate as a method.<sup>565</sup> All parties in the Second World War engaged in irregular warfare. In the past 10 years of war, nations have “learned” several lessons they would have been better off only observing. Subjective understanding gained from experience yields little without objective thought and reflection. It seems mankind continues to “re-learn” the same lessons over and over, leaving the dirty task of reminding humanity to the historian, while generation after generation suffer in wars.

Those who doubt this is the case for asymmetric war in general, need only examine *War in the Shadows* by Robert B. Asprey.<sup>566</sup> Written at the conclusion of the American experience in Vietnam in 1975, Asprey showed the failure of American firepower against the human will. As Clausewitz once wrote in *On War*, “war is the clash of wills.”<sup>567</sup> Vietnam showed the world a superpower against an opponent of few resources along with the will to fight could achieve victory. This same lesson Americans knew from their own War of Independence against England. Summarizing the professional soldier’s and scholar’s numbness to reflecting on the

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<sup>564</sup> During the last ten years of war, the foremost question amongst states is what legal parameters apply to individual combatants who choose to fight against an armed force. Problems that existed during the Second World War in terms of the legality of non-uniformed combatants is still the issue it has always been.

<sup>565</sup> “Irregular warfare is, by nature, mostly illegal combat, i.e., in violation of norms of law- but by no means is it an illegitimate form of combat, i.e. not justified by the idea of law.” Professor von der Heydte was a scholar of irregular warfare as well as an experienced practitioner. According to his biographical sketch, von der Heydte held multiple doctorates in Law and Economics long before the beginning of World War Two. He began his military career first with service in the Reichswehr 1925-7, then in 1934 he became an officer in the Cavalry/ Anti-Tank Corps. He was awarded the Iron Crosses second and first class for service in the French Campaign. In the summer of 1940 he became a Paratrooper and later served as a battalion commander in the ill fated parachute jump into Crete. For actions in Crete, he was awarded Germany’s highest honor, the Knight’s Cross. He saw service at Wenchow, USSR, North Africa, Italy and the Ardennes. See Friedrich August von der Heydte, *Modern Irregular Warfare, In Defense Policy and as a Military Phenomenon* (New York, NY: New Benjamin Franklin House, 1986), 12.

<sup>566</sup> Robert B. Asprey, *War in the Shadows, The Guerrilla in History (in two volumes)*, (Garden City NY: Doubleday & Company Inc., 1975).

observations paid for with blood, Asprey warned, “America can afford one Vietnam, but not another.”<sup>568</sup> Reflections and observation of this warning have been long absent. The professional obligation of soldiers and scholars is to read and write for others to “learn” the lessons observed. To this end, actions on the Eastern Front in the Baltic region provide yet another clear example of the uses of asymmetric war to be learned from.<sup>569</sup>

A close examination of actions and techniques used by combatants on the Eastern Front demonstrates not only an excellent case study for how to “operationalize” the use of asymmetric forces in support of offensive and defensive operations, but it also exposes a tremendous gap in the historiography of the Second World War. One such gap is the use of combined arms techniques in conjunction with partisan and anti-partisan operations. While the German and Soviet strategies along with their tactical methods of employment have been considered in depth over the past decades, little to no understanding has been developed regarding the Estonian position in relation to Estonian goals relative to 1944. Indeed, a position which is never thought of is the plight of the Estonian population who were the rightful tenants of the land being fought over. This provides the setting to examine the Estonian use of war to achieve their end state independent of the Germans and the Soviets. While the Germans and Soviets fought to impose their will on each other through any available means, the Estonians too had an agenda they sought to evoke by restoring their borders to the pre-1940s arrangement.

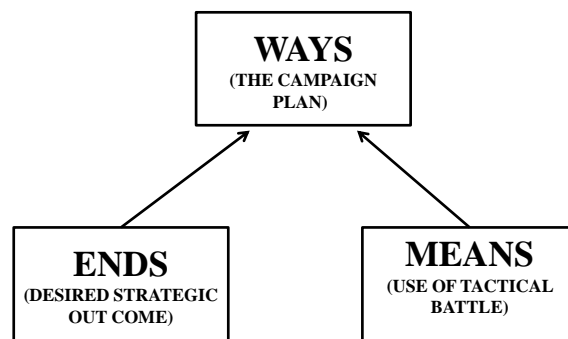
The overall aim of this chapter is to examine the use of irregular warfare through the lens of partisan and anti-partisan efforts. This chapter will first lay bare terms which have been

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<sup>567</sup> Headquarters U.S. Marine Corps, United States Marine Corps, *War fighting MCDP-1* (Washington, DC: U.S. Marine Corps, June 20, 1997), 3.

<sup>568</sup> Robert B. Asprey, *War in the Shadows, The Guerrilla in History (in two volumes)*, (Garden City NY: Doubleday & Company Inc., 1975), xiv.

abused by both professional soldiers and scholars over the past decade to achieve a common understanding for the purpose of studying this case. Once this understanding has been achieved, attention can then be directed towards understanding the tenants of Soviet ideology found in the persecution of an asymmetric war through Marxist-Leninist theory and writings. Showing the connections between the moral aspects which drove the techniques of asymmetric war being used to the use of conventional forces helps both professional soldiers and scholars understand the Soviet relationship between the **(means)** and **(ends)** found in their “operationalized” **(ways)**. A key component of Soviet success was forces were task organized for their missions and the roll they played in conjunction with conventions forces.



After examining the Soviet ideology and methods, focus will be shifted to German forces and their task organization for conducting anti-partisan operations. Attention must be paid to the evolution of German tactical doctrine along with the continued development of “combined arms” anti-partisan techniques to achieve the desired ends. To explain German failures, it is necessary to examine why the operational-level of war did not incorporate tactical-level field commands, who were largely concerned with securing external and internal lines of operation and

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<sup>569</sup> In recent years, scholars have looked at the performance of the Baltic partisans fighting against the Soviet Union as a case study for possible future operations. See: Albert M. Zaccor, “Guerrilla Warfare on the Baltic Coast: A

communication for retreating German units; while the German civil administration was responsible for the governance of Estonian territory. Lastly, the work of the Omakaitse or Estonian Home Guard will be explored to develop an understanding of their purpose and connection to German rear area security forces. First, by understanding the Omakaitse's mission, attention can be focused on their task organization to see how it complimented German units and their strengths. Through a series of Omakaitse reports submitted throughout 1944 with trend analysis, professional soldiers and scholars can see how Soviet intentions are exposed through their use of partisan forces acting in conjunction with conventional forces, thus validating the methodology of irregular warfare. Statistical analysis demonstrates how the number of partisan attacks correlates with the locations of the Soviet main effort conventional attacks in the time and space of Estonia over the duration of the two campaigns assigned to breaking the German hold on Leningrad along with the investment of Estonia.

### **6.1 DEFINING AND DECONFLICTING TERMS OF REFERENCE:**

As stated in the introduction, the last 10 years of operations in the Middle East have done more to confuse professional soldiers and scholars about the nature of asymmetric war than anything else. The words and the acronyms used to describe and define counterinsurgency operations evolve almost hourly. While it can be contended that the nature of these operations is fluid and dynamic, the tenants of current operations are not new to the history of war. Words and terms have specific meanings. Regardless of what word precedes war, such as guerilla war or asymmetric war, a violent struggle of wills as defined by Clausewitz still applies. With so much damage being done from a decade of war, it is first necessary to explain the differences and relationships between guerilla and irregular warfare. First, guerilla warfare is a tactic or method used by combatants in the conduct of fighting. Commonly, this is thought of as "hit and run"

tactics, or in other words, not being decisively engaged. On the other hand, irregular warfare combines the methods of several different tactics or methods of engaging the enemy, to include the use of guerilla tactics and conventional operations into a strategy. Successfully harnessing irregular warfare into a national strategy for war should be the goal, not having a strategy in irregular warfare.<sup>570</sup> Having deconflicted these terms, it is time to examine the use of terrorism as a tactic.<sup>571</sup> Terrorism is defined as a tactic made up of several techniques such as assassination, bombing, arson and kidnapping.<sup>572</sup> In this way, terrorism is thought of as a concrete method. Terrorism can also be thought of in the abstract or as “pure,” meaning as a logic. Regardless, all of these terms have in common one theme, violence as a means to achieve desired ends, whether the ends are thought of collectively as legitimate or illegitimate.<sup>573</sup>

During the Second World War on the Eastern Front, both the Germans and the Soviets employed forces with irregular warfare in mind. While the Soviets employed partisans and the Germans countered their efforts with anti-partisan forces, both used terrorism as a method of employing their tactical formations. Of the two combatants, the Soviets came closer to harnessing the efforts of irregular warfare (combining partisan activities with the efforts of conventional forces) into a national strategy simply, because it was a resident part of communist ideology. Next, an examination of Marxist-Leninist theory in relation to the application of violence found in partisan warfare.

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<sup>570</sup> This point was something Dr Wray Johnson spent considerable time explaining to the student body at the School of Advanced War fighting.

<sup>571</sup> As defined by Crenshaw, Terrorism is the use of violence to achieve the end state of a group. See: Marta Crenshaw, *Terrorism in Context*, (College Station PA: Pennsylvania State University Press., 1995), 3-24.

<sup>572</sup> Methods for the implementation of violent action vary. See: Ibid.

<sup>573</sup> Terrorism is a technique comprised of various methods responsible for the implementation of violence to achieve a desired end state. Determining if violence is legal often is a question for the state and not for individual combatants. Both individuals and states can engage in terrorism to accomplish their ends, but individuals, be they in the uniform of the state or not, are still responsible for the legal use of violence on the battlefield.

## **6.2 SOVIET IDEOLOGY AND ITS APPLICATIONS FOR PARTISAN WARFARE:**

To understand the role of the partisan in a Soviet concept for war, one must understand how the Soviets defined war. All Soviet activities in relation to the revolutionary era find their origin in the mind and writings of Vladimir Il'ich Lenin, the founder of the Communist Party and Soviet State, based on the works of Marx and Engels. Collectively, these thoughts comprise Marxist-Leninist thought. It is important to remember the context of the Russian Revolution and the eventual overthrow of the Tsar; the main catalysts for the events were the perceived imperialist wars of the Russo-Japanese War and the First World War.<sup>574</sup> Lenin's understanding of history saw war as a continuation of revolution and class struggle; both were at the heart of the dialectical method.<sup>575</sup> According to Lenin and in accordance with the understanding of war provided by Clausewitz, Lenin said, "War is the continuation of politics of classes and states by violent means. War is a major test of the economic, organizational and moral forces of nations, a summing up of politics."<sup>576</sup> Lenin continued by writing, "wars are a historically transient phenomenon. They are linked only with the period of existence of an exploiter society. They are based on private ownership and the division of society into classes."<sup>577</sup>

Specifically, Lenin saw the use of war as a method for societies to make the transformation from capitalism to scientific communism. Lenin "regarded in dialectical unity all the elements of the military power of a state as the totality of its economic, scientific, morale and

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<sup>574</sup> A direct correlation exists between failures on the battlefield in the Russo-Japanese War and the coming Red Revolution of 1917. On January 9, 1905, a large crowd of more than 200,000 men, women and children was stopped at the Narva Gate in the City of St. Petersburg at bayonet point by the Czar's soldiers. The impending clash resulted in thousands killed and wounded. Of the event Lenin wrote, "The revolutionary education of the proletariat made more progress in one day than it could have made in months and years of drab, humdrum, wretched existence." See Robert B. Asprey, *War in the Shadows, The Guerrilla in History, Volume I*, (Garden City NY: Doubleday & Company Inc., 1975), 293-4.

<sup>575</sup> See: V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works, 50 Volumes*, (Moscow, USSR: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1963). For discussion relative to dialectical method.

<sup>576</sup> V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works, Volume 39*, (Moscow, USSR: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1963), 321.

military potentials.”<sup>578</sup> Further examining what Lenin meant by use of the dialectical method in relation to war, it is important to understand the “dialectical method opposes a hollow, abstracted approach to the concept of war and age, comprehensively examining the historical features, the historical types of wars in each era or age separately.”<sup>579</sup> In other words, war was not to be thought about as an intangible concept, but more appropriately, in concrete terms, such as terrorism not only as logic, but as a method to perpetrate violent acts to achieve the desired end. To make war a more tangible concept, organization was needed. The first task was the organization of society for the conduct of war, as war is social phenomenon, “organizational development of a regular army can be effected both in “pure” form and in combination with elements of a militia system (universal military training, worker’s militia, ect) or can even adopt the form of a territorial-cadre system, as was the case in this country (Russia). But in all instances a deciding role is played by cadre units.”<sup>580</sup> The idea of a trained cadre for the population who was capable of participation in irregular war was the basis of the Soviet partisan effort in the Second World War.

At the center of the successful Soviet use of irregular warfare were organization and method of employment. Irregular warfare was a type of “combined arms” for Lenin, as he correctly advocated combining its effects with those of conventional arms, whether in the offense

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<sup>577</sup> N. I. Basov, *The Philosophical Heritage of V.I. Lenin and Problems of Contemporary War*, (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1972), 14.

<sup>578</sup> Ibid, 2.

<sup>579</sup> Ibid. In Volume 30 on page 86 of his Collected Works, Lenin taught that to be a Marxist means to evaluate each individual war in concrete terms. “In order to understand an imperialist, most reactionary war could and must occur between great powers, in order to understand this it is necessary to bear in mind the general conditions of the imperialist era, that is the period of transition of capitalism of the leading nations into imperialism.” See V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Volume 30, (Moscow, USSR: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1963), 86.

<sup>580</sup> N. I. Basov, *The Philosophical Heritage of V.I. Lenin and Problems of Contemporary War*, (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1972), 80.



or defense.<sup>581</sup> Lenin advocated for the use of guerrilla warfare as a tactic in combination with conventional methods as early as 1906 in an article entitled, “Guerilla Warfare.” Here Lenin wrote, “Marxism differs from all primitive forms of socialism in that it does not link movement with any one specific form of combat. It recognizes the most diverse forms of combat...”<sup>582</sup> Marxist-Leninist thought would be tested to the extreme by the German blitzkrieg crashing across Soviet frontiers on June 22, 1941 with the beginning of Operation BARBAROSSA.

With the beginning of hostilities between Germany and the Soviet Union taking Joseph Stalin totally unaware, it took until July 3, 1941, 12 days after the opening rounds of the war for Stalin to make a statement to the Soviet people about what had transpired and for him to pass guidance to the masses.<sup>583</sup> In his public radio address to the Soviet nation, with a voice demonstrating considerable strain, he reiterated a message he gave to his party officers four days earlier. Stalin called for, “evacuation and a scorched earth policy in threatened areas and partisan warfare in enemy occupied territory. He asked the *Kolkhoz* (collective farm) peasants to drive their livestock eastward ahead of the Germans and the workers to follow their fellows in Moscow and Leningrad by organizing *Opolcheniye* (home guards) in every town threatened with invasion.”<sup>584</sup> In two short subsequent speeches in November 1941, Stalin continued to show the connection between partisan warfare and conventional operations, the first speech with a strong connection to a war of annihilation. On the occasion of celebrating the 24th anniversary of the

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<sup>581</sup> To create a proper defense for the socialist state, Lenin drew the following important conclusion, “The defense of the socialist state should correspond to the nature of socialism and should be aimed at maximum utilization of the advantages of the socialist system in the interest of victorious conduct of war in defense of the conquest of socialism. The essence of Lenin’s idea on the necessity of conducting a war in a revolutionary manner lies precisely in this.” See N. I. Basov, *The Philosophical Heritage of V.I. Lenin and Problems of Contemporary War*, (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1972), 120.

<sup>582</sup> V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Volume 34, (Moscow, USSR: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1963), 383-4.

<sup>583</sup> Earl F. Ziemke, *Moscow to Stalingrad: Decision in the East* (Washington D.C.: Department of the Army 1987), 29.

<sup>584</sup> *Ibid.*

October Revolution on November 6, 1941, Stalin gave more basic instructions for the conduct of partisan warfare when he said;

The Germans wish for a war of annihilation with the people of the USSR. So be it then, if the Germans want a war of annihilation, they shall get it. From now on it becomes our duty, the duty of the peoples of the USSR, the duty of the soldier, of commanders and political collaborators, of our Army and of our Fleet to destroy to the last man all Germans who have sneaked into the territory of our fatherland in the character of occupying forces. No quarter to the German Occupation Forces!<sup>585</sup>

Reinforcing his message from the previous day, Stalin published a second message at the Red Army parade in Moscow on November 7, 1941. Here again, he reinforced the fact it was the patriotic duty of every Soviet citizen to resist. Stalin states;

Comrades, Members of the Red Army and Sailors of the Red Fleet, Commanders and Political Collaborators, partisans, men and women! Remembering all this, be a courageous and steadfast soldier. Love of the Soviet fatherland and hatred of the foe are your strongest weapons. Scorn of death- your duty. A coward dies a hundred times- but a hero dies but once. His memory is immortal among the people. However your duty does not merely consist in fighting with dignity and honor against the foe yourself, but also in carrying along with you all workers into the struggle against the Hitlerite fanatics. You are not merely a soldier, but also a propagandist, an agitator of the Party and of the People. Forge all powers of the people together for the war of annihilation against the German intruder! Bring new comrade-workers, peasants and intelligentsia, people courageous, honest and devoted to the Soviet government, into the partisan detachments and diversionary groups!<sup>586</sup>

A word used consistently in both speeches was duty; this was not by accident. Stalin was making a direct approach to the morale of the Soviet people. He was galvanizing the strength of the Soviet will against the German invader. Like their comrades in arms in the armed forces the Soviet Partisan took an oath to defend the Soviet Union. The oath is crucial to examine because

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<sup>585</sup> NARA RG # 319 Stack Area 270 Row 19, Shelf 04-4 Box 6. NARA RG #319 Stack Area 270 Row 19, Shelf 04-4 forms the basis of Department of the Army, Edgar M. Howell, *Department of the Army Pamphlet No 20-244 The Soviet Partisan Movement 1941-1944* (Washington D.C.: Department of the Army 1956). Information came from the Himmler file, document number EAP 170-a-10/7. Speech was translated from *Banden Bekämpfung* in September 1942.

<sup>586</sup> NARA RG # 319 Stack Area 270 Row 19, Shelf 04-4 Box 6. Information came from the Himmler file, document number EAP 170-a-10/7. Speech was translated from *Banden Bekämpfung* in September 1942.

it demonstrates the will and resolve of the individual Soviet partisan to approach his duties. The oath stated;

I, as a citizen of the USSR, a true son of the heroic Russian people, do hereby swear that I shall spare neither my strength nor my life in order to liberate my people from the German-Fascist invaders.

I shall not lay down my arms until the homeland has been rid of the German-Fascist persecutors. I swear that I shall carry out the orders of my commanders and superiors strictly and conscientiously, that I shall strictly observe the disciplines of war and guard war secrets.

I swear to avenge to the fullest the burning of our towns and villages, the blood and the death of our women and children, fathers and mothers, the cruelty and vilification heaped upon my people, with self-denial to fight everywhere in order to destroy the German occupants boldly, with determination, and without fear.

I swear to assist the Red Army actively with all my powers and all means at my disposal, everywhere to root out the German monsters so that I may aid in the speedy and utter destruction of bloody Fascism.

With my signature I endorse the words of this sacred oath which I have sworn before my comrades, the partisans, and shall not take one step to deviate from this oath.

Should I, however, violate this oath, due to my weakness, cowardice or evil intent, and betray the interests of the people, then I shall die an accursed death at the hands of my comrades in arms.<sup>587</sup>

Having examined the role the individual partisan was to fulfill, an exploration of the doctrine for their employment and how the partisan was going to affect the situation through a task organization is warranted.

### **6.3 SOVIET PARTISAN TASK ORGANIZATION FOR OPERATIONS IN THE BALTIC:**

The Soviet leadership had to offer the population more than just rhetoric if they were to have any luck defending the Soviet Union against seasoned German troops. The Soviet leadership understood that many of those who were going to fill the ranks as partisan fighters

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<sup>587</sup> NARA RG # 319 Stack Area 270 Row 19, Shelf 04-4 Box 4.

were either too young or old for military service in the armed forces, so the logical question to ask is what kind of service did the Soviet leadership expect to get from partisan forces? In essence, what mission were partisan forces to fulfill? From actions in White Russia emerged a leaflet subsequently translated by the Germans to help them better understand the mission the partisans were executing. Entitled Directive Number 4, it was issued by the People's Commissars for White Russia and Central Committee X of the Communist Party. The stated mission for Partisan forces encompassed four main areas as follows;

1. The partisan battalions consist of the population of the cities and the country and fight against the German Fascists in order to support the Red Army; they follow Red Army operations, secure the supply routes, liaison to the cities, industry, collective farms and bridges.
2. The battalions organize battles in connection with river crossing units and parachute troops.
3. The battalions build fortifications for defense against the enemy.
4. Partisans must know the terrain well. In case of enemy attack they must destroy their supplies, fuel and signal equipment in order to prevent it from falling into enemy hands.<sup>588</sup>

Examining the missions makes one question what sort of individual the Soviet leadership was going to find to execute such dangerous missions. The answer was someone who was expendable and would not likely return. The Soviets had a great plan for the Soviet Union when the war ended; those serving in the partisan ranks were individuals the state saw little purpose for when the war ended. From the statements of many who were used to continue fighting Baltic freedom fighters when the war was over, we know the Soviets were employing criminals and individuals of low character to accomplish the tasks they were assigned.<sup>589</sup> Flowery rhetoric

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<sup>588</sup> NARA RG # 319 Stack Area 270 Row 19, Shelf 04-4 Box 6.

<sup>589</sup>To see a description of the Soviet character in the Baltic in the post-war, see: Juozas Daumantas, *Fighters for Freedom*, (New York NY: Manyland Books Inc., 1975), 20-26.

aside, the Soviets were going to employ partisan units against missions were they blended into the environment better and could be better used as part of the deception plan to lure the Germans into a trap where they could be dealt a sharp blow with little chance of compromise or loss. This was the essence of using indoctrinated citizens to conduct guerilla warfare as a tactic against a better trained force, just as Lenin wanted in 1906. To give the partisans any military chance of success required the investment of some manpower to train and supervise the actions of the partisans against the campaign and tactical plans, but also precious material assets such as weapons and ammunition. A cadre had to be used by the Soviet leadership to ensure the partisan forces were conducting operations in accordance with the plan at the times they were required and communist mentorship was also needed for the partisans through a Commissar to ensure Comrade Stalin's orders were being followed to the death. Another possibility for trained available manpower was Soviet units and individuals cut off by advancing German units. Like all military organizations, the Soviet leadership published doctrinal publications about how to conduct partisan operations which were distributed to partisan units. The issuance of a doctrine future demonstrates that the partisan was part of the Soviet "combined arms" fight and irregular warfare was going to be used to contribute to a Soviet victory. In this doctrine Kalinin declared, "partisan warfare reaches an ever increasing importance in the strategy of this war; it has been developed to a higher degree than ever before in this war against the excellent tactics of the enemy."<sup>590</sup>

A look at the evolution of Soviet partisan doctrine helps form a useful basis for understanding how partisan capabilities could be used in conjunction with conventional capabilities against the Germans as stated previously in the four partisan missions. Making this information about Soviet partisan doctrine of more value is the fact that it comes from captured

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<sup>590</sup> NARA RG # 319 Stack Area 270 Row 19, Shelf 04-4 Box 4.

German intelligence files, having been translated and commented on by German commanders and staff officers seeking to better understand ways to address the threat. The examination of Soviet partisan doctrine begins with a document captured by the Germans dated July 20, 1941.

The documented beginnings of Soviet partisan doctrine to the four missions finds a formal beginning with an order signed on July 20, 1941 by the Commander of the North-West Front, General Sobeschvikow.<sup>591</sup> This document covered what could be considered common “how to” soldier tasks with a typical flavor of communist propaganda. The document was subsequently captured by the Germans and incorporated into intelligence reporting for Army Group South.<sup>592</sup> The opening paragraph is a focusing statement from Stalin, it reads;

Partisan units on horseback and on foot along with diversionary groups must be organized to fight the units of the enemy army, to kindle partisan warfare everywhere, to demolish bridges and roads, cut telephone and telegraph wires, and to set fire to the woods, camps and transportation. In the occupied areas, life must be made intolerable for the enemy and his henchmen. They must be pursued and annihilated at every turn, and all their measures must be undermined.<sup>593</sup>

In the next paragraph, the document wastes no time instructing partisan units how to be task organized to conduct partisan operations. Two major groupings of organizations are listed, combat units and diversionary groups.<sup>594</sup> The People’s Commissariat of the Interior exercised control over the employment of partisan forces.<sup>595</sup> A combat unit at this time was defined as a “battalion” of 75-150 men sub-organized into two-three companies of two to three platoons each.<sup>596</sup> The document further states, “As a rule, they (a combat unit) will act only at night and

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<sup>591</sup> NARA RG # 319 Stack Area 270 Row 19, Shelf 04-4 Box 3.

<sup>592</sup> This document was originally label Heeres Gruppe Sued, Ic, Russland 20.VIII.- 9.IX.41 covered in Annex merkblatt über organization und Taetigkeot der Partisanen- Abteilung und Diversionsgruppen, Übersetzung aus dem Russischen. See Ibid.

<sup>593</sup> NARA RG # 319 Stack Area 270 Row 19, Shelf 04-4 Box 3.

<sup>594</sup> Ibid.

<sup>595</sup> Ibid.

<sup>596</sup> While called a battalion, 150 men at this period of history would be the combat strength more appropriate of a rifle company.

from ambush (positions), their mission will be to attack columns and assembly area, motorized infantry, camps, transporters of fuel and ammunition, headquarters, air bases and railroad transports.”<sup>597</sup> On the other hand, diversionary units were to be comprised of 30-50 men who operated in 3-5 or as many as ten man groups.<sup>598</sup> Interestingly, the document alludes to the fact that “the diversionary groups must be plotted in such a manner that partisans of one group do not know those of other groups.”<sup>599</sup> In modern terms, these units were operating in the same manner as a terrorist cells. They were small in number, yet they operated with a common mission without knowledge of what other units were doing. This ensures the safety of other units in case a unit had members captured. The mission of the diversionary groups was to “Cut telephone and telegraph lines, setting fire to fuel dumps and transports, delivering close range rifle fire dismantling railroad tracks and removing rails, annihilating individuals driving alone or in small groups of passenger vehicles and capturing documents.”<sup>600</sup> These statements collectively help explain the unsuccessful nature of Soviet operations at the beginning of the war. The combat readiness of these early partisan units demonstrated they were woefully unprepared to accept combat with well-trained German conventional combat formations. The partisans at the early stages of the war lacked the experience necessary to attack such formations. The remaining pages of the document provide cursory guidance to partisan organizations about how to carry out their assigned tasks in terms of tactical actions. There was not enough detail contained in the document to train a man who had been a farmer the day before the war started, nor for the young soldier whose task it was to train him. The Soviets recognized the weakness of their partisan

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<sup>597</sup> NARA RG # 319 Stack Area 270 Row 19, Shelf 04-4 Box 3.

<sup>598</sup> In essence, a diversionary group was a platoon organized into squads that would fight in teams of 4 men up to squads of 10.

<sup>599</sup> NARA RG # 319 Stack Area 270 Row 19, Shelf 04-4 Box 3.

<sup>600</sup> Ibid.

efforts in 1941 and revamped their doctrine for 1942. A comparison of the 1941 and 1942 documents is in order to understand how change was affected.

The Soviet 1942 partisan doctrine by organization of content fully recognized the failures of the opening year of the war in the East. Titled, *Basic Principles of Partisan Policies*, it was based in Stalin's Order Number 130 of May 1, 1942.<sup>601</sup> The document comprising this doctrine was far more comprehensive in its approach to the conduct of operations at the tactical-level. The document contained 16 chapters of several subchapters, covering full spectrum combat operations regardless of weather conditions or enemy action.<sup>602</sup> While much of the same methodology is applied to describe formations and numbers necessary to prosecute partisan operations, far more emphasis was placed on small unit leadership and actions. This document did not contain nearly the same amount of hollow propaganda as the 1941 document, giving the partisan sound tactical thoughts which could be easily trained by a cadre. Perhaps the greatest difference between the doctrine of 1942 and 1941 was the scoping of the task expectation in accordance with the abilities of the force conducting the mission. In "Destruction of Enemy Objectives" the document clearly states partisans should attack deep into the enemy rear and along lines of communication where the Germans were conducting resupply operations.<sup>603</sup> The order of target precedence for Soviet partisans to attack in 1942 was listed as such, "Enemy communications, railroads, paved highways, dirt roads and anything that allows the enemy to move his transports, personnel and war material."<sup>604</sup> The other key difference between the document from 1942 and 1941 was in 1942, there was far more emphasis placed on the use of

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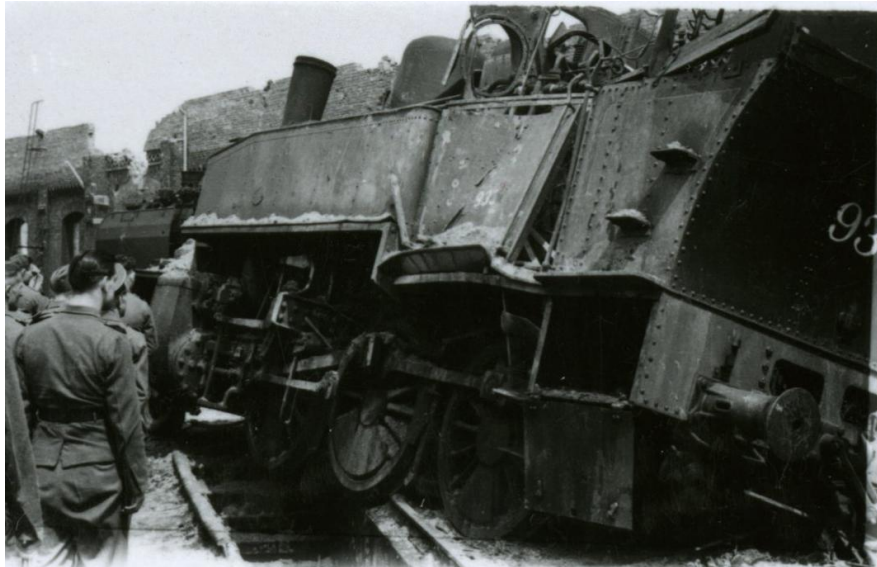
<sup>601</sup> Ibid.

<sup>602</sup> The chapters of the document were 1. Basic principles of partisan policies, 2. How the Germans combat the partisan, 3. Explosives, 4. Weapons, 5. How to handle weapons, 6. Reconnaissance, 7. Camouflage, 8. Orientation in the field, 9. Destruction of enemy tanks, 10. How to combat enemy planes, 11. Chemical warfare, 12. Close combat, 13. First aid, 14. March and bivouacs, 15. Life in the snow and 16. Appendices with 10 sub sections.

<sup>603</sup> NARA RG # 319 Stack Area 270 Row 19, Shelf 04-4 Box 3.



reconnaissance in the anticipation of Red Army movements. The document gave finite questions for the partisans to answer as they examined German facilities in rear areas. As stated, “Reconnoiter the location of the Fascist garrison in various parts of the town or village, find out the total number of the garrison, what forces are protecting the separate objectives, what the Fascists are armed with, the manner of changing guards, sentinels and patrols.”<sup>605</sup>



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**Picture 13: Soviet Partisan Destruction of a German Train on the Narva Front 1944.**

Conducting extensive reconnaissance of the objective area also allowed Soviet Partisans the ability to better pick the time of attack along with the method that would be used to break contact from the enemy once surprise, the greatest asset of the partisan was lost. The 1942 document better recognized the limitations of the partisan and employed them in ways better suited to their skill sets. The 1942 Soviet partisan doctrine would continue to be refined with minor changes, but it would largely retain its character in 1944 when the Soviets were advancing

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<sup>604</sup> Ibid.

<sup>605</sup> Ibid.

<sup>606</sup> Picture from NARA File Waffen SS Kriegsbericht Photograph Collection Part 3, See the Falkowski folder.

into Estonia. In the end, it was how effective the partisan was, not fighting alone; but as a contributing factor to the overall success of the mission and toward the irregular warfare strategy the Soviets were applying to accomplish their goals through their campaign. One way to gauge the measure of a force's performance is basing opinions on the thoughts of the opponent. German General Schenkendorf's thoughts about Soviet Partisan operations were recorded in a pivotal Soviet work entitled *The People, the Army, the Commander*. This work stated;

General Schenkendorf characterizes the growing danger to German troops arising from Soviet partisan activities as follows:

1. Key railroads for material supply purposes are under threat. The number of partisan raids and diversions increase daily.
2. Economic use of vast areas is hindered in the highest degree.
3. Continued utilization of key enterprises is hazardous.
4. In areas under their control, the partisans have such large units that our forces could hardly repel a simultaneous attack by them on our rear communications and services.
5. A continuing increase in the enemy's numerical strength should be expected.
6. The population has ceased to believe in the strength of the German army, as it sees that we cannot cope with the partisans. The local inhabitants willingly help the partisans, and are entering their ranks.<sup>607</sup>

Having explored the Soviet concept for employment for partisan forces against Marxist-Leninist ideology and developing doctrine, it is now prudent to examine the German concepts to counter the Soviet partisans and examine their methods.

#### **6.4 GERMAN ANTI-PARTISAN DOCTRINE AND OPERATIONS:**

As has been demonstrated in other chapters, while the Soviets were wholly unprepared for the German onslaught with the invasion of the Soviet Union in all facets of offensive and

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<sup>607</sup> M. P. Skirido, *The People, the Army, the Commander*, (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1970), 69. This interesting quote from General Schenkendorf originally appeared in a Soviet Work entitled Top Secret! For Command Personnel Only! (Moscow: USSR, Izd-vo Nauka Publishing, 1967.), 399-400.

defensive preparations, the Germans were no more prepared to hold the ground they had taken either. Often, professional soldiers and scholars only acknowledge the successes and failures of German front line troops, as has been examined, the more dynamic failures were of German policy at the strategic-level with Hitler at the helm. Hitler's interference into tactical matters is well known, but often times the things he chose to neglect are not. Hitler's radical racial policies were also the match that ignited the fire of failure at the tactical-level in the occupation of the USSR. Hitler's policies being implemented by his willing executioners managed to turn the welcoming civilian populations into a tool for their Soviet enemies to exploit. While Hitler's strategic policies and guidance to his commanders could be considered the cause of the greater Soviet partisan participation, the effect of Soviet partisan participation was felt by all German operational and tactical level commanders across the Eastern Front. Hitler's policies are directly to blame for the partisan problem encountered by German troops.

Just as the Soviets were unprepared to execute partisan warfare as part of a greater strategy of irregular warfare, the Germans were no more prepared to counter partisan activities in the beginning. The Germans were unprepared at the tactical level to secure their vast lines of communication. They hinged their hopes on the use of older men or reservists who were unprepared for the task of rear area security.<sup>608</sup> Like most armies and plans, the Germans had concentrated on the offensive plan and not their logistical support planning. Evidence of this exists in *Rear Area Security in Russia*. Published shortly after the war in 1951, the United States Army examined key lessons observed from German operations on the Eastern Front. Two pertinent lessons resonate, firstly, questions of the initial organizational structure to conduct rear

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<sup>608</sup> Department of the Army, *Department of the Army Pamphlet No 20-240 Historical Study Rear Area Security in Russia* (Washington D.C.: Department of the Army 1951), 5.

area security and secondly, the use of active and passive measures to provide security.<sup>609</sup> Closer examination of German structure for the conduct of anti-partisan operations and its evolution is required in order to determine how it was to be used in conjunction with their conventional operations plan.

The question of who is responsible for rear area security naturally falls on the unit commander responsible for the area which is being operated in. However, security for lines of communication, such as roads and rails for German forces was a most convoluted arrangement. Once German tactical forces left the area and continued east in the attack, the lines of communication became the problem of the Chief of Supply, while the area itself was the problem of the military occupation authorities.<sup>610</sup> Often, there was little communication between the commanders and the staffs of the Army Group and the occupation forces. Covering the occupation of territory in the rear area was a network of *Kommandanturen* or administrative area headquarters. It was the responsibility of the Chief of Supply to determine the size and the composition of forces to be employed to secure the rear area.<sup>611</sup> The task was normally assigned to security battalions through security divisions.<sup>612</sup> In actuality, these units were typically comprised of poor quality soldiers and leaders, not men up to the challenge of fighting decentralized tactical operations. In October 1941 Brauchitsch issued his *Directive for Anti-Partisan Warfare* to assist local rear area commanders understanding their mission along with the problems they were tasked with solving.<sup>613</sup> The document explained the task organization, mission and methods of the partisan, but Brauchitsch only told commanders at the front what

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<sup>609</sup> Ibid. Active measures are generally considered things that require a persistent man power presence to monitor, while passive measures use things such as cameras to monitor an area without man power.

<sup>610</sup> Ibid, 6.

<sup>611</sup> Ibid.

<sup>612</sup> Ibid.

<sup>613</sup> The document was Der Oberbefehlshaber des Heeres, Gen.St.d.H./ Ausb.Abt.Ia Nr 1900/41 25.X.41 Richtlinien für Partisanenbekämpfung. See NARA RG # 319 Stack Area 270 Row 19, Shelf 04-4 Box 3.

they already knew about the enemy and he provided them with nothing in the way of ideas to combat the partisan. Like the Soviets, as the Germans began to better understand the problems presented by partisan operations, they modified their doctrine and procedures to accommodate changes in enemy tactics, techniques and procedures.

In August, 1942, based on Führer Directive 48, *Directive for the Increased Fight Against the Partisan Menace in the East* was published.<sup>614</sup> Like their Soviet counterparts, the German doctrine had marked improvements. The document in short order recognized the threat Soviet partisan operations posed to German lines of communication. To cope with the threat the document stated;

The (partisan) bands must be annihilated and with this the front behind the army pacified by the beginning of winter, in order to prevent decisive disadvantages for the conduct of operations of the Wehrmacht during the winter. This requires:

1. Quick, sharp and active anti-partisan warfare by assembling all suitable forces of the Wehrmacht, SS and Police.
2. Concentration of all propagandistic, economic and political measures for the need of anti-partisan warfare.<sup>615</sup>

This statement demonstrates the Germans understood they could not rely solely on military actions to address the partisan problem. Instead, the Germans thought the answer to the partisan problem could only be found in a synergy of disciplines. Coming quickly from the abstract into the concrete, the document laid out six general guidelines for operations, followed by the delineation of duties for organizations operating within the area of operations. First, an examination of the six guidelines is required.

The six guidelines were as follows;

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<sup>614</sup> Ibid.

<sup>615</sup> NARA RG # 319 Stack Area 270 Row 19, Shelf 04-4 Box 5.

1. Anti-partisan warfare is like command at the front, a command responsibility. It is to be organized by the appointed command staff in accordance with OKH-GenSt d H-Gen Qu/Op Abt (I) nr. 10887/42 g.Kdos, dated August 9, 1942.
2. The annihilation of the bands requires active warfare and harshest measures against all who participate in the organization of bands or who support them.
3. The necessary confidence in the German command must be gained by strict, but just treatment of the population.
4. Prerequisite for destruction of the bands is to secure the minimum of existence for the population. If this is not accomplished and if the available goods are not distributed justly, the bands will receive increased membership.
5. Cooperation by the population in anti-partisan fighting is absolutely essential. Rewards for deserving people must be generous. They must really be an incentive. However, even harder, therefore must be the reprisal measures for all who abet and aid the bands.
6. Undue familiarity towards inhabitants, especially those employed by German agencies must be prevented. Although the mass of people are anti-partisan, one must always count on informers who have the mission to inform the bands.<sup>616</sup>

Analyzing these six guidelines, some interesting trends emerge which demonstrate how the Germans thought about the problems associated with Anti-Partisan warfare. First, the Germans made clear command of the rear area was like command at the front. While the threat was more pronounced, it gave rear area commanders the ability to be taken more seriously when they requested assets and forces to address challenges. Second and more importantly are the discussions of how to deal with the population. The Germans correctly understood the central role the population played in rear area security. Here the question should be asked, if the Germans understood the population was central to their success, then why were gross violations of law allowed? The root of this answer is found in the complex command relationship which was still developing.

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<sup>616</sup> Ibid.

In the *Directive for the Increased Fight Against the Partisan Menace in the East* the document makes a clear distinction of which organization would have responsibility for controlling rear areas. It states,

1. Reichsführer SS (RFSS) and Chief of the German Police: the RFSS is the central agency for the collection and evaluation of all experiences in the field of anti-partisan warfare. In addition, RFSS is responsible for anti-partisan fighting in the Reichskommissariate.

2. Army: The Chief of the General Staff of the Army is solely responsible for anti-partisan in the operational area. To fulfill this mission, all police forces located in the operational area are subordinate to the pertinent commanders. Besides this, there are available army forces whose mission is anti-partisan warfare. The commander will delegate the command of individual operations according to the prevailing situation, commitment of forces and available rank of personnel to army officers or higher SS and Police leaders.<sup>617</sup>

This statement continues to explain why the Germans failed to secure their lines of communication to the front from the rear area. It could most easily be explained as a lack of unity of effort. While the RFSS was responsible for the strategic rear area, the Army was responsible for the operational rear area. Common of large bureaucracies, there was very little coordination within levels, let alone cross-coordination between organizations. In essence, there was not a single headquarters at the tactical, operational or strategic-levels that looked at partisan operations through the same lens and coordinated collective efforts. There was no connection between civil matters and military matters, even though they stemmed from the same population in the rear areas. The German failure occurred at the operational level.

Failure to plan at the operational level was the connection between the German military executing the tactical rear area security mission and the civil powers responsible for the administration of the occupied territories, more importantly the centers of throughput and lines of communication to move men and material to the front at the strategic level. Without a solid

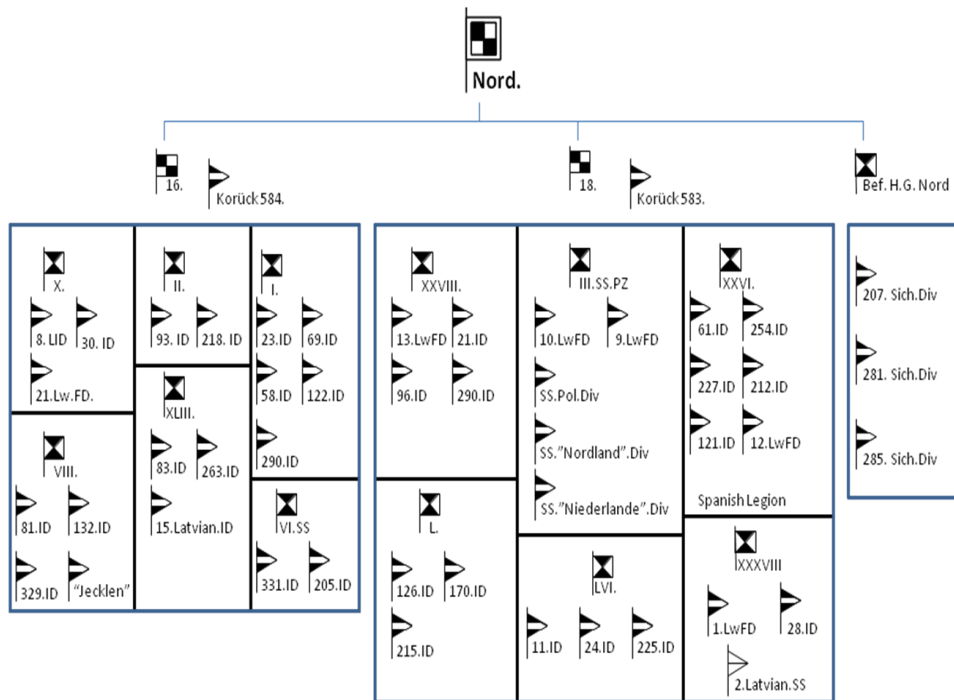
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<sup>617</sup> Ibid.

connection between the civil administration and the military authorities, the lack of a cohesive tactical doctrine for how to execute rear area operations simply hastened German failure.

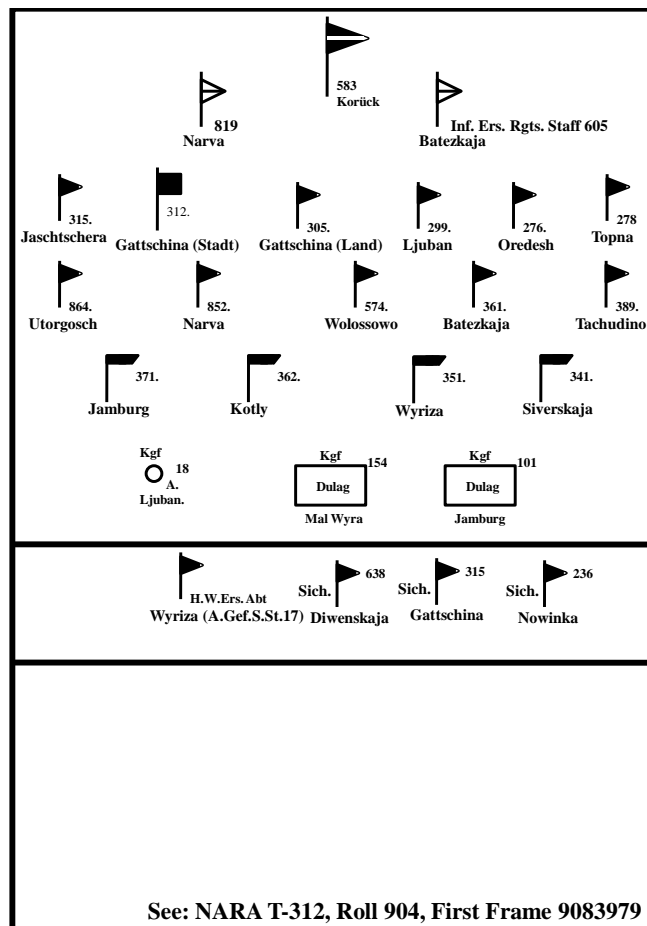
**6.5 GERMAN TASK ORGANIZATION FOR THE DEFENSE OF ESTONIA:**

While historians have typically concentrated on the exploits of the 207th, 281st and 285th German Infantry (Security) Divisions as the main organs responsible for rear area security in the Army Group North area of operations, a more accurate picture of German rear area security planning and operations is still lacking. Perhaps a more accurate way to think of those three Security Divisions is as the “catch all” division, as these units were employed against tasks ranging from being a reserve used to close a gap, to securing line of communication and conducting anti-partisan warfare. Playing a significant role in the rear area fight for Army Group North was a unit known as the Kommandant des rückwärtigen Armeebereiches or Korück 583 (See Below for Task Organization).<sup>618</sup>





Found on NARA T-312, Roll 904, Frame 9083979, the task organization for Korück 583 highlight an interesting point not often thought of when examining the history of the Second World War, that being, the role local nationals play in the defense of their own territory (**See Below**). Much has been written which examines the significant shortage of manpower the German Wehrmacht experienced from the beginning of hostilities in 1941 through the conclusion of the war, but little examines what methods were employed to cope with shortages. What has gone largely unknown are the measures the Germans took to mitigate their shortfalls with the use of local Estonian forces.



<sup>618</sup> NARA T-312, Roll 904, First Frame 9083979. This frame shows the disposition of 18th Army in November-December 1943 before the Soviet breakout from Leningrad.

Before Soviet forces broke the hold the Germans had on Leningrad on January 14th 1944, the Germans had Korück 583 in place to act as a liaison force between the Omakaitse or Estonian Home Guard and the German military occupation authority as well as Army Group North. Korück 583 did nothing but secure rear areas and conduct anti-partisan operations along with supporting the Omakaitse when needed. The Germans, rightfully understanding their shortage of available manpower and recognizing the need to secure rear areas, incorporated the use of the Omakaitse as part of a collective tactic to provide rear area security. The Germans recognized the strengths the Omakaitse had in knowledge of the physical terrain as well as the population and sought to capitalize on them. In modern parlance, we could think of the Germans “contracting” the services of the Omakaitse while providing a quick reaction force to reinforce the Omakaitse when necessary.<sup>619</sup> Playing upon Estonian fears of a second Soviet occupation, the Germans easily secured help from the Estonians. *P-035 Retrograde of Army Group North During 1944* assists in understanding the relationship of German forces to the use of Estonian forces. It states,

The general desire of the Estonians to participate actively in the defense of their country was understandable. Since there was no data for a systematic mobilization, the latter was conducted as a pure improvisation. It was carried out by Estonian agencies with the support of the German civil administration. Three infantry regiments were initially activated. Difficulties in the procurement of weapons and equipment delayed their employment. A Citizen’s Guard (Omakaitse), as a rule varying in strength from a squad to a platoon, had already been formed by the civil administration to provide security. These protective measures, as well as the attitude of the population in general, greatly relieved the burden of the Armeearbeit command. There never was much fighting against partisans.<sup>620</sup>

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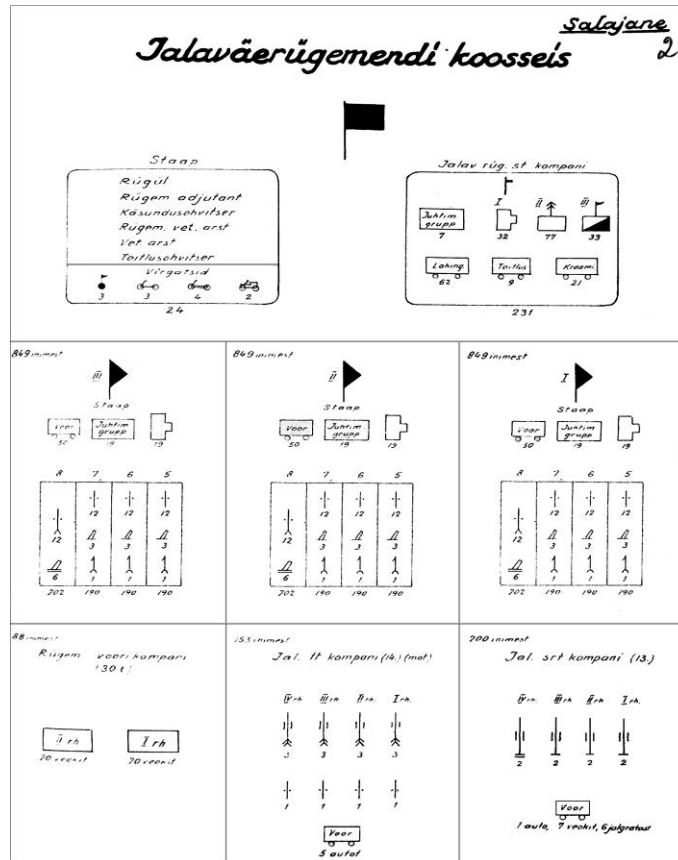
<sup>619</sup> A quick reaction force (QRF) is a unit assigned to support troops who are in contact with the enemy that do not have the required combat power to break the enemy's hold.

<sup>620</sup> Department of the Army, MS# P-035 *Retrograde of Army Group North During 1944*. (Carlisle, Army War College: Foreign Military Studies Department 1950), 183-4. This portion of *P-035* was written by Generalleutnant Paul Reichelt, who in March, 1944 was assigned to Armeearbeit Narva as the Chief of Staff.

By examining the actions of Korück 583 against the reports of the Omakaitse throughout 1944, a clearer historical picture emerges of how Soviet partisans were used as an irregular force in conjunction with advancing Red Army troops from the breakout of Leningrad to the investment of Estonia. Through documents stored at the Estonian National Archives in Tallinn, Estonia, historians have the reports of the Omakaitse for the entire year of 1944. These reports are found in Estonian National Archives, ERA 358-2-23.<sup>621</sup> While these documents do not spell out explicitly the mission of the Omakaitse, they clearly define the role it played was to defend the borders and the Estonian population. The Omakaitse was in a difficult position, while it wanted to defend Estonian territory it was still occupied by a foreign power. Clearly, the Omakaitse had to work for the Germans because they were there, not because they wanted to. While they may have disliked the Germans, they knew what would be coming with a second Soviet occupation and they would fight only to avoid that. The task organization for the Omakaitse can be found in the Estonian National Archives in ERA 358-2-24 (**See Below**).

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<sup>621</sup> The Omakaitse reports for the year 1944 are contained in Omakaitse Peavalitsus I Peaosakand Operative *Kokkuvote*. See: ERA 358-2-23. I am indebted to the friendship, scholarship and common professional interest of Captain Peeter Pekri of the Estonian Armed Forces. Without his understanding of the language and knowledge of the reports, I would not be able to interpret them. The maps and data on the number of partisan events which follow in this chapter were first captured in his work for the Estonian Defence College entitled, *1944a. Sündmused Eestis Omakaitse Ettekannetes: Edastatud operatiivettekannete Põhjal koostatud ohupilt*.



Task Organization of an Omakaitse Regiment. See: ERA 358-2-24

The examination of Soviet partisan activities begins by categorizing the types of activities conducted. ERA 358-2-23 generally speaks of Soviet partisan activities in terms of four areas, direct fire engagements between the Omakaitse and partisans, banditry and air drops, air activities and “other” reportable issues such as bombings or assignments. Within these four categories, from January 1, 1944 until September 11, 1944 there were 1,160 events reported by the Omakaitse to German authorities (See below for monthly event breakout).<sup>622</sup>

Month in 1944	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept
Number of Events	118	<u>244</u>	160	81	133	106	192	85	24

<sup>622</sup> ERA 358-2-23.

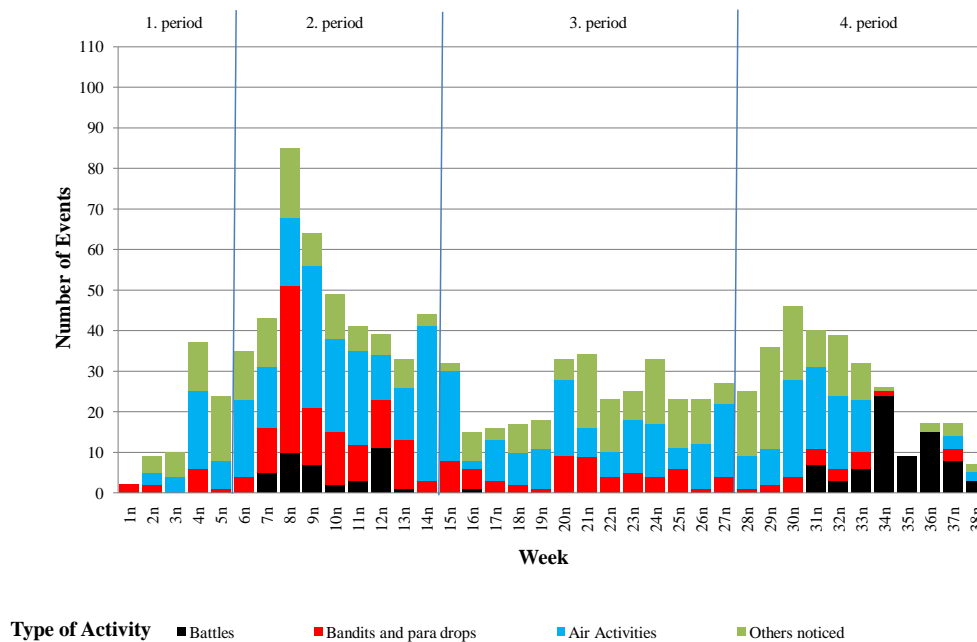
When partisan events are examined purely as numbers, it quickly becomes clear that during the month of January when the Soviets were breaking out of the Leningrad encirclement, 118 partisan activities were used to assist shaping conventional actions throughout the German rear area in Estonia. The month of February however saw the decisive main effort of partisan activity with 244 partisan events in support of breaching effort in the Narva area against the “Panther position” as examined in chapters 4 and 5. Between the months of March and May, a noticeable phase of sustainment operations is noticed, in March, with 160 Soviet partisan events, being cut almost in half in April as an operational pause was conducted to conduct tactical resupply operations and to conduct assessment of current operations along with planning for future operations. Partisan activities then spike again in May to 133 events, followed by sustained operations in June with 106 events. In July, a noticeable second spike is observed with 192 offensive events throughout Estonia, with a gradual tapering off to 85 events in August along with 24 events in the early part of September 1944.<sup>623</sup>

Looking at the types of partisan events recorded and during which periods which they occurred allows the professional soldier and scholar to understand what methods the Soviet partisan was using in support of Red Army conventional operations through the process of trend analysis. Generally speaking, banditry is a consistent theme throughout the year as a partisan activity. A consistent feature to all partisan activities was the collection of information and reconnaissance for follow-on Soviet conventional forces. Direct fire engagements between the Omakaitse and Soviet partisans are generally rare according to the number of incidents. This attests to the value of partisans to shape German rear areas through reconnaissance activities, vice becoming decisively engaged in active battle. The heaviest direct fire engagement periods

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<sup>623</sup> It must be noted that 24 is only a partial count for the month of September, 1944. September is generally considered when the conventional war in Estonia was over between the Germans and the Soviets and the beginning

occur prominently during two periods. In February when Soviet conventional forces are attempting to break the “Panther position” in the Narva area and then in the Summer of 1944 when the Soviets make a final attempt on “Tannenberg Position” at Sinimäed and adjust their main effort to the south against German positions at the “Marienburg Line” in the Tartu area in southern Estonia.



As a shaping operation, prior to the January 14th 1944 breakout of the Leningrad pocket, there were 21 actions reported by the Omakaitse in the rear area.<sup>624</sup> Speaking to actions prior to the Leningrad breakout, 18th Army reported to Army Group North from January 2-8, 1944 partisan activities beginning to increase.<sup>625</sup> On January 3, 1944 the results of Operation OTTO, an anti-partisan operation conducted by 18th Army to “clear important lateral communications

of the second Soviet occupation began with Estonian national resistance against the Soviet occupation.

<sup>624</sup> Based on ERA 358-2-23 through January 10, 1944.

<sup>625</sup> NARA RG # 319 Stack Area 270 Row 19, Shelf 04-4 Box 3.

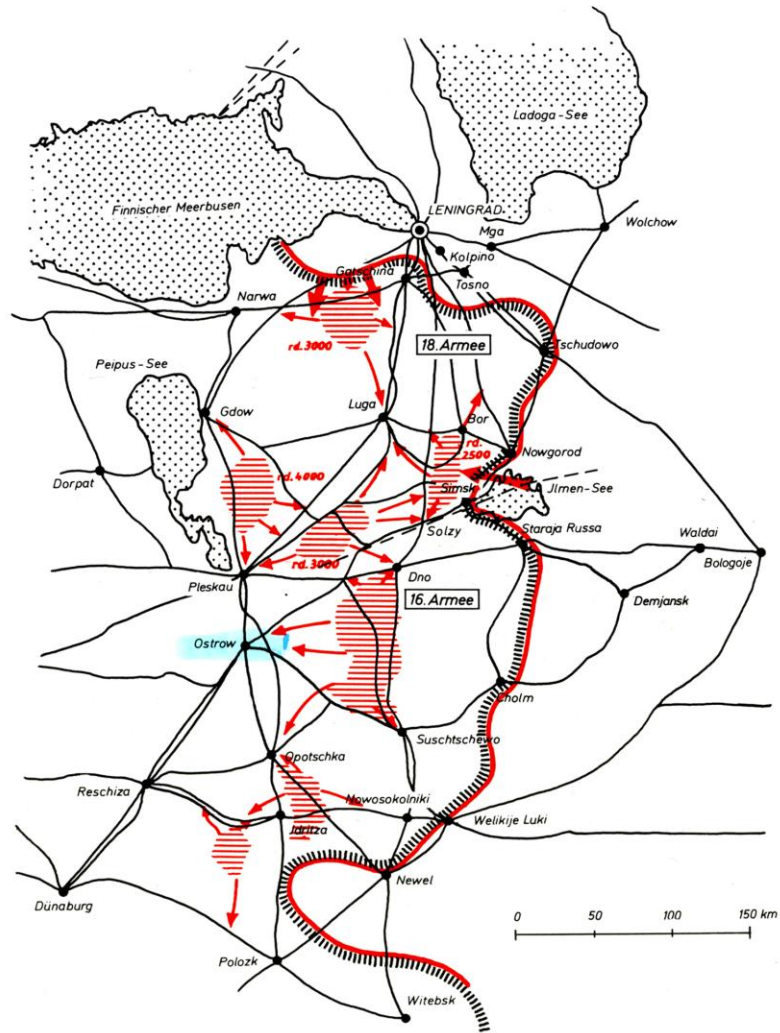
between Sebesh-Polozk and Sebesh-Drissa” were filed to Army Group North.<sup>626</sup> On January 6, 1944 18th Army “finds it imperative to destroy the partisans in the Luga-Narva area who threaten the rail road and the Narva-Gatschina road. The Army requests a Security Regiment from the Army Group.”<sup>627</sup> On January 7, “south of the Gatschina-Narva line (south of III SS Panzer Korps) there is a new partisan main effort. The danger exists that the enemy some day may block the Gatschina-Narva Road and the rail road in connection with an attack from the Leningrad and Oranienbaum area in concert with this partisan center.”<sup>628</sup> No statement could make clear the intentions of the Soviets or the German understanding of anticipated Soviet actions. Clearly, the Soviets intended to use partisan action in conjunction with conventional forces and the Germans knew it was coming.

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<sup>626</sup> Operation OTTO was conducted between December 20, 1943 and January 1, 1944 by Kämpfgruppe Jeckeln. The wildly successful operation “annihilated partisan bands operating in the area.” The results of the operation were recorded as 121 partisan camps, 56 dugouts, 25 field trenches, 94 living and combat bunkers and 10 block houses destroyed. Losses were 1920 partisans and those that aided them. German losses were recorded as 21 killed, 87 wounded and 1 German missing in action. See Ibid.

<sup>627</sup> Ibid.

<sup>628</sup> This is clear proof that the Soviets saw the use of Partisan forces as a method of irregular warfare when combined with conventional forces. Partisans should be seen as shaping the operational setting to enable local tactical area successes. See Ibid.

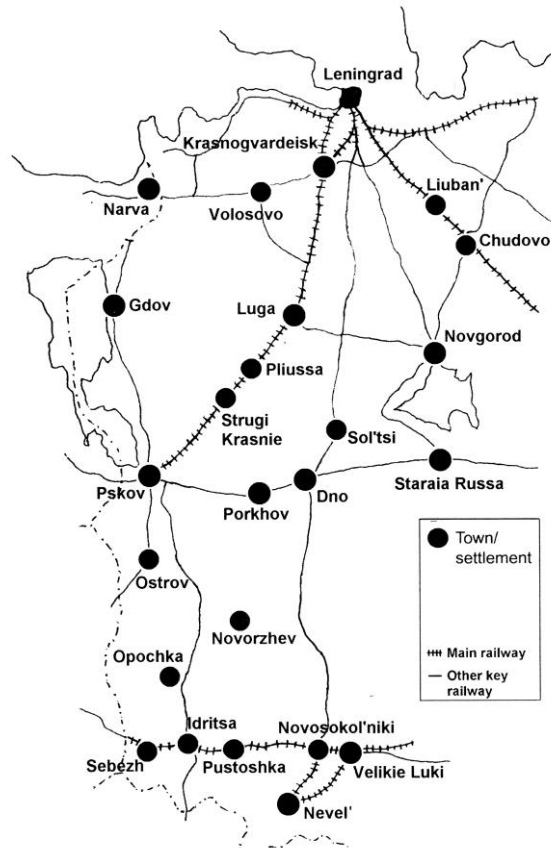


Partisanenlage im Heeresgruppenbereich Nord am 14. I. 1944

**Map 18: Soviet Partisan Activity, January 14, 1944**



THE REAR AREAS OF ARMY GROUP NORTH



The rail network on the territory occupied by Army Group North

**Map 19: Rail Network in the Baltic Area**

Examining Maps 18 and 19 in conjunction with 18th Army reports from January 13-16 makes clear how the Soviets intended to use partisan forces in support of main effort conventional operation. Reports of January 13th state anti-partisan operations in the Luga area would continue. The Soviet main effort attack breaking the hold on Leningrad is registered as January 14, 1944; however the Germans conveyed their concerns about partisan activities in the Novgorod area.<sup>629</sup> In the wake of the Soviet main effort attack, at midnight on January 16, 1944, Korück 583 reported 300 partisans attacked the Nachinskaya rail road station (31.5 Km NE of

<sup>629</sup> Ibid.

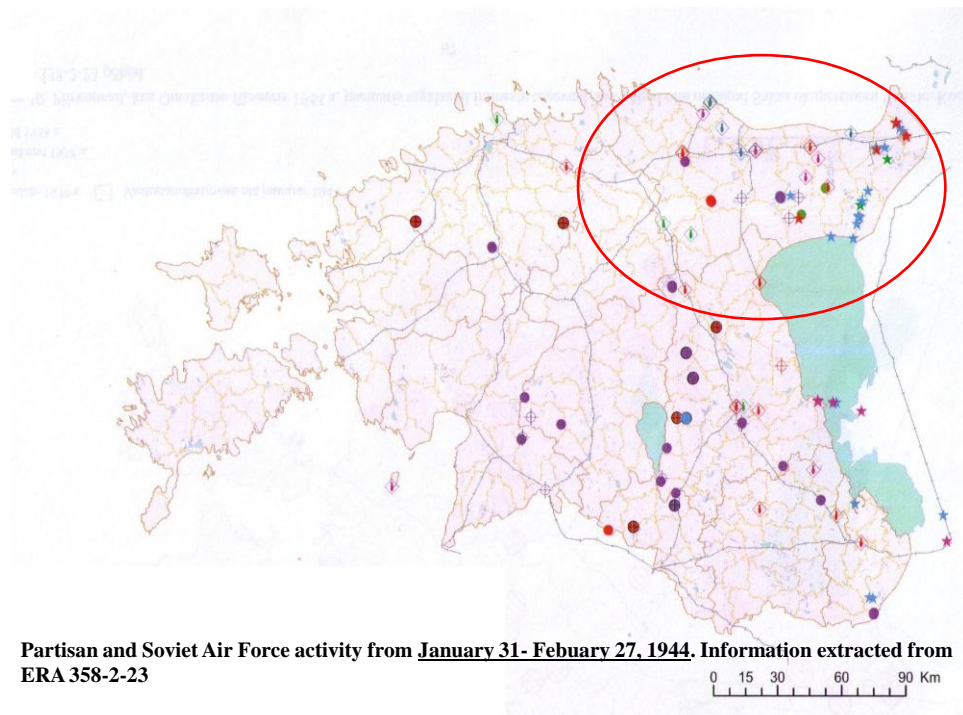
Luga) with heavy losses to personnel and rail infrastructure.<sup>630</sup> Korück 583 reports from 13.47 January 19, 1944, state the operations officer of 18th Army reports to the operations officer of Army Group North that “the arrival of 8th Jäger Division was much delayed due to rail demolitions” throughout the area. At 14.15 the same day, SS Obergruppenführer Jeckeln “states that he is able to furnish 5 Latvian and 2 Lettgallen battalions (about 4,000 men) after a short period of training for anti-partisan warfare. This requires Army Group North to furnish arms to the new units.”<sup>631</sup> Attesting to the strength of partisan attacks, at midnight on the 19th the following report was sent, “numerous rail road demolitions on the line 6 Km North of Solzy. Repair operations interrupted by raids of partisans. Strong partisan activity in the area of Army Group North. Anti- partisan actions in that area broken off due to superiority of partisan forces. Numerous rail road demolitions on all rail lines.”<sup>632</sup> The effect of such partisan operations on German lines of communication and the German rear demonstrating the Red Army was successfully conducting conventional operations in front, while clearly having a dramatic effect on the overall effectiveness of Operation BLAU as discussed in chapter 3.

Using the information from the Omakaitse reports, Map 20 (**See red circle**) demonstrates the concentration of partisan and air bombardment against the “Panther Position” in mid-February 1944. Based on the reported number of incidents by the Omakaitse for the month of February, 1944 and with knowledge that mid-February was the Soviet main effort against the “Panther Position,” it is not difficult to see the complimentary effects of Soviet operations.

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<sup>630</sup> Ibid.

<sup>631</sup> Ibid.

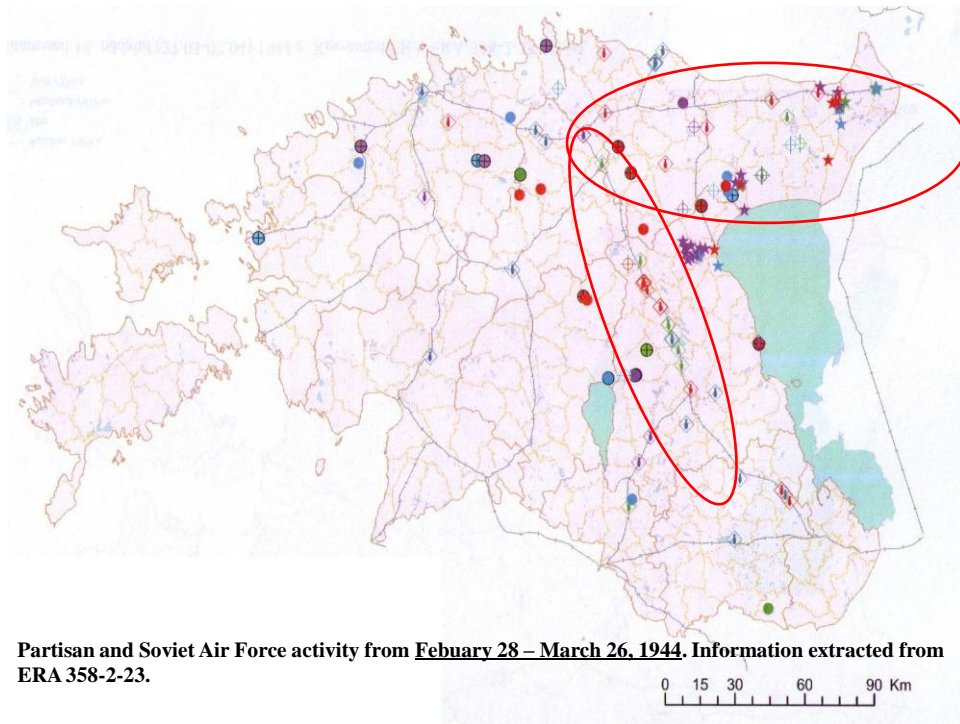


**Map 20**

Once the Soviets recognized the change in weather was coming in March and April, they shifted their tactics to continue to weakening German rear areas in the “Tannenberg Position” area, but they also directed a significant bombing effort against the rail infrastructure of Tapa to the west and against Tartu to the south. (See **Map 21**). This bombing effort would continue with a more intense duration from March 27- April 4, 1944 (See **Map 22**).

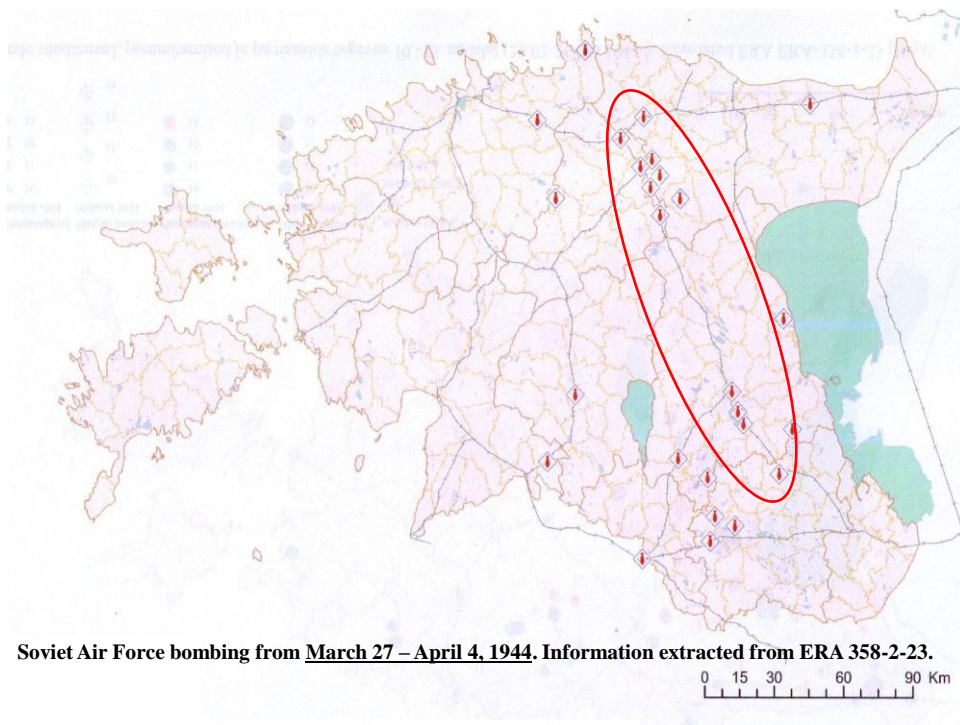
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<sup>632</sup> Ibid.



**Partisan and Soviet Air Force activity from February 28 – March 26, 1944. Information extracted from ERA 358-2-23.**

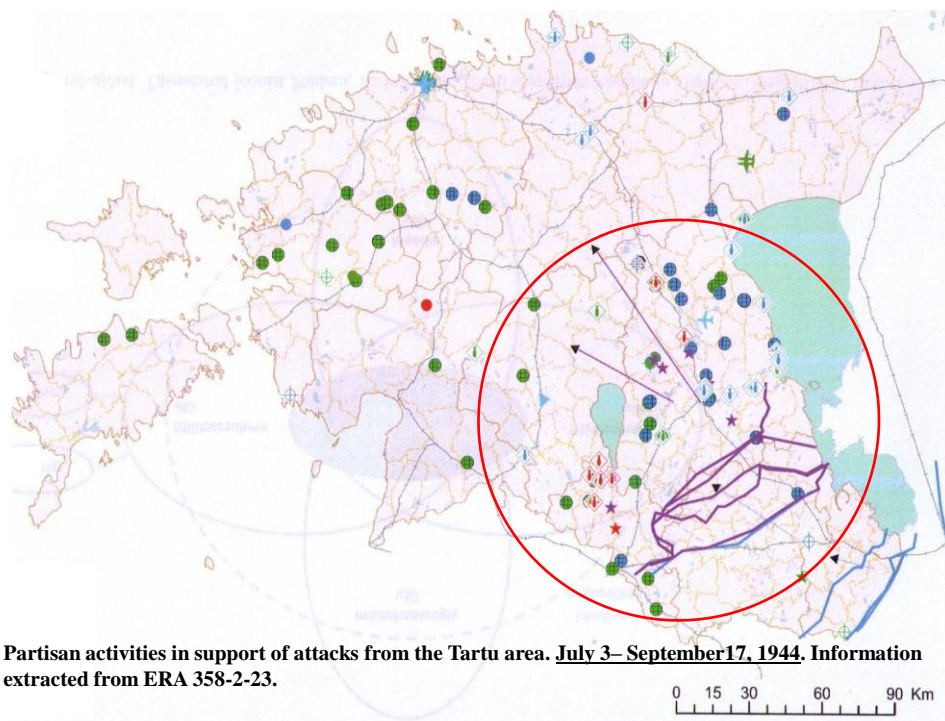
**Map 21**



**Soviet Air Force bombing from March 27 – April 4, 1944. Information extracted from ERA 358-2-23.**

**Map 22**

This intense Soviet bombing campaign of the rail infrastructure precedes German plans to retrograde equipment and personnel as part of Operation HOUSE CLEARING as described in chapter 5. Not only did Soviet bombardment and partisan activities cripple retrograde operations from the “Tannenberg Position” in the Narva area, but it also set the conditions for a shifting of the Soviet main effort to the Tartu area and the “Marienburg Line” (See Map 18).



**Map 23**

Looking at the all of the events against the locations on the various maps demonstrates a few interesting general trends. The first was Soviet para-drops would be sent deep into the German rear in Estonia. Next, ground partisan activities always preceded a major offensive by the Red Army. Red Army actions were coordination with aerial bombings against key infrastructure such as rail depots, not typically far from the front lines. Lastly, large movements of the civilian population from the front line to areas on the west coast of Estonia follow Red

Army offensive operations. Collectively, these actions demonstrate the effectiveness of a strategy of irregular warfare.

## **6.6 CONCLUSION:**

The historical record of events in the Leningrad area and Estonia demonstrate two very important observations about the Soviet use of partisan operations as well as German anti-partisan efforts for scholars and the professional soldiers to consider. The first observation is the Soviets clearly demonstrated the strength of partisan operations in conjunction with conventional forces to achieve complimentary effects. Quite clearly, this also demonstrates the value of irregular warfare as part of an overall strategy for victory. Evidence of this assertion is present in the work of Professor Friedrich August Freiherr von der Heydte.<sup>633</sup>

In an interview conducted on July 29, 1986 with Professor von der Heydte, Michael Liebig, an Executive Director of the European branch of the Executive Intelligence Review interviewed Professor von der Heydte who spoke conclusively and retrospectively about his thoughts and experiences regarding the Soviet partisan as an irregular fighter. Von der Heydte was asked by Liebig, “Do you believe that the Russian conduct of partisan war decided the war?”<sup>634</sup> Von der Heydte replied,

Yes absolutely. I saw it myself. Under regular combat conditions on the East Front, we (the Germans) could handle the Russian soldier. But when a totally new adversary cropped up in the dense forests and swamp areas, one we did not know about, then the eagerness for war vanished rapidly. We did not know how strong this adversary was, nor how extensive his coverage was, nor did we know what he was doing. We only knew, this adversary is against us. The Wehrmacht was also disorganized in its morale by the partisan war in the east.<sup>635</sup>

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<sup>633</sup> Friedrich August von der Heydte, *Modern Irregular Warfare, In Defense Policy and as a Military Phenomenon* (New York, NY: New Benjamin Franklin House, 1986), 248.

<sup>634</sup> Ibid, xxii.

<sup>635</sup> Ibid.

The other lesson is not something the Germans, nor did we today observe retrospectively; that being, the role of the population and its interaction with combatants. Without the support and will of the population, the partisan cannot physically survive, in terms of food for subsistence nor physical security. Nazi policies, convoluted command relationships and poor tactical doctrine / execution made it impossible for the Germans to capitalize on any gains at the strategic, operational or tactical levels. Like all occupiers, the Germans became their own worst enemies, not because every German soldier was trying to enforce Nazi policies, but rather because there were some who were. While good treatment amongst the occupied spreads slowly, word of abuse spreads like wild fire. The fire it ignites is the will of a people to be without occupation. Ultimately, the German challenges of dealing with the partisan problem began with a lack of planning for the occupation of Russia. The truth of the matter is winning the peace is never as expensive as its maintenance. More soldiers are required to hold what was been won than winning in the first place. Having a plan to fight and beat an enemy on the field is the easy part, planning to secure the victory is what requires skill and understanding. Fighting an army of the people is winnable, fighting the people has proven to be the same challenge in 1944 as it is today. The question to all who conquer is how to secure the peace which is won.

## CHAPTER 7

### Conclusion

War is made a complex phenomenon because of human participation and the desire for each combatant to impose his will on the other.<sup>636</sup> The ultimate aim of war is to quickly restore peace and status quo after the strategic end state of the war has been achieved. The manner in which the will of the opponents is imposed is subject to the art and science of war. The art and science of war, or the tangible and intangible aspects of the human experience comprise the method through which the conduct of war is implemented. It is the conduct of war which defines the clash of wills, providing the raw cases the scholar and professional soldier studies to learn from. For the scholar and professional soldier to develop their judgment based on past conflicts for anticipated conflicts of the future, a model is required to examine and explain the end states of combatant strategies against the tactics and equipment employed.<sup>637</sup> Effort must be expended to show how the actions of the combatants were coordinated through planning efforts. The product of planning is a plan. Plans govern ideas about the use of force, but orders are the communication medium through which plans are expressed. The model used throughout the course of this work demonstrates the utility of examining strategic **ends** against tactical **means** through the use of a historical case study. The articulation of strategies into coordinated tactical conventional and asymmetric actions occurs at the operational level through the use of a campaign plan.<sup>638</sup> In difference to an order, a plan coordinates actions of a combatant in time and

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<sup>636</sup> See: Headquarters U.S. Marine Corps, United States Marine Corps, *Warfighting MCDP-1* (Washington, DC: U.S. Marine Corps, June 20, 1997).

<sup>637</sup> The purpose of military officers studying history is to improve their judgment for future decision making.

<sup>638</sup> See: Headquarters U.S. Marine Corps, United States Marine Corps, *Planning MCDP-5* (Washington, DC: U.S. Marine Corps, July 21, 1997).



space, while the order is used as a means to communicate the plan.<sup>639</sup> The campaign plan is the essence of operational art, as it joins the strategic **ends** to the tactical **means** through operational **ways**. The purpose fulfilled by this work was demonstrating the connection existing between the levels of war through operational planning in relation to the elements of the art and science of war. The case study presented of actions in late 1943/44 in the Northern Baltic served as a means to better explain this connection to both professional soldiers and scholars.

If this work illustrates nothing else, it shows nothing about war is truly new. War is based on a few immutable facts, those being, war is an act of violence that must be fought in the same time and space where one combatant is in the offense, the other, the defense.<sup>640</sup> While the defense is thought of as the stronger form of combat, it is the offense that is decisive.<sup>641</sup> The defense is a means of stopping an enemy advance and trading time for space as a method to accomplish the ends. The Germans by the Second World War were masters at trading space for time as they had spend most of the latter years of the First World War and the interwar years perfecting techniques across the strategic to tactical-levels.<sup>642</sup>

The question of time and space speaks directly to the issues of terrain and weather. Any plan failing to consider these two key factors is doomed. Rarely do professional soldiers or scholars truly consider the effects of terrain and weather in their plans or studies. These two factors influence operations and man's abilities more than anything else. Terrain and weather influence all man does, including war. As terrain and weather always influence the nature and conduct of war, there are other immutable aspects that are timeless features of the conduct of

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<sup>639</sup> Ibid.

<sup>640</sup> See: Headquarters U.S. Marine Corps, United States Marine Corps, *Warfighting MCDP-1* (Washington, DC: U.S. Marine Corps, June 20, 1997).

<sup>641</sup> Ibid.

<sup>642</sup> See: Timothy T. Lupfer, *The Dynamics of Doctrine. The Changes in German Tactical Doctrine During The First World War* (Leavenworth, KS: Command and General Staff School, July, 1981).

war. Operations in time and space always dictate formations start from bases of operations in order to attack or defend.<sup>643</sup>

Throughout the course of the work it was made clear the Germans were operating from the main Estonian sea ports as points of entry and places from where throughput of logistical support could be controlled as their base of operations. In the Soviet case, it was the city of Leningrad itself that acted as the Soviet base of operations. To move supplies to the front required the use of lines of communication. Lines of communication can be rivers, rails or roads that move material to the front. Fronts can have a defensive or offensive character. In the case of the Soviets executing offensive operations from the Leningrad pocket, the attack was launched from a static front of limited space and was conducted over external lines of operation. In the Soviet's case, it was a true feat to start an offensive operation from the halt and generate momentum from "stacked" static combat power. Combat power was then limited by terrain that formed avenues of approach, mainly along roads. Mobility off road was severely limited during the winter months and non-existent after the winter thaw and summer months. This consideration drove operations to be conducted during the winter.<sup>644</sup> Soviet necessity to execute the operation during the winter months is confirmed when examining Soviet plans to cross ice, vice using bridging assets. The validity of the Soviet plan is confirmed by Estonian weather data and Soviet river crossing doctrine.<sup>645</sup> Securing external lines of communication is a heavy tax on combat power as it is continuous and ever moving to support the army. In the case of the Germans operating along interior lines of operation, the task was to secure the rear area from partisan

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<sup>643</sup> While Clausewitz and Jomini debated the finer points of theory in the early 19th Century, Jomini made a clear attempt at explaining the mechanics of the operational art as it was conducted by Napoleon. See: Baron De Jomini, *The Art of War* (Philadelphia, PA: J.B. Lippincott & Co, 1862).

<sup>644</sup> See: Eesti Meteoroloogijaamade Vork, *Weather Record, February 1944*, (Dorpat (Tartu), Estonia: Station Year Record 1944).

forces while continuing to shorten their lines of communication / operation and conduct the retrograde of forces from Leningrad, first to the "Panther Position," then into Latvia to the south. The fighting that occurs at the Blue Hills proves to be a significant operational level enabling operation for Germany; the Germans traded space for time to do two critical things. First, the Germans were able to shorten their lines of communication and operations to the Estonian coast while providing local reinforcements for the withdrawal to Latvia from the Blue Hills. Secondly, the Germans were able to take their time while recovering from the massive Soviet breakout attack from Leningrad, thus taking the initiative and momentum away from the Soviets. The critical element the Germans needed was a plan allowing them to execute without friction. In Plan BLAU the Germans had such a tool along with educated commanders capable of executing this difficult mission.

Commanders at all levels have a responsibility to communicate their desired end states for operations through guidance, intent and the plan they promulgate to subordinate commanders. The culmination of initial planning guidance and commander's intent becomes actionable through an operational campaign plan. The plan is not only a document comprised of operations, but also of intelligence, logistics and communications related thoughts. Without a synergy of staff disciplines, the soldier in the field could attack or hold a position for only a short period of time. The soldier must not only be told generally what is expected in the absence of orders, he must also be given an idea of the enemy composition on the objective will be and how he will be resupplied once there along with what to report to higher headquarters. Indeed, the commander enables the actions of his subordinate commanders through his guidance and intent along with his campaign plan and subordinate orders. A plan is then turned into orders for

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<sup>645</sup> See: Ibid along with Red Army Publication, Генеральный Штаб Красной Армии, *(Проект) Наставление по Форсированию Рек*, (Draft, Instructions on River Crossing) (Moscow, USSR: Military Publishing

tactical formations to execute and report their progress back to higher headquarters. The body of the work presented in this thesis examined Operation BLAU, a plan that articulated clear strategic guidance against the realities of clashing organizations; those of Adolf Hitler and the OKW against the OKH and the field commands.<sup>646</sup> Most importantly, the actions were examined in the proper historical context, where cause and effect could be considered in the totality of the decisions made.

The Operation BLAU plan clearly took into consideration the anticipated interference of Berlin and Adolf Hitler at the strategic level and weighed it against the terrible price being paid at the tactical-level by those fighting for Germany. Commanders and planners at Army Group North and 18th Army clearly understood the gravity of the situation in their sectors of operation.<sup>647</sup> Those in the field understood politicians in Berlin were not concerned with understanding the reality of the tactical situation on the Eastern Front. Commanders and staff planners also well understood Hitler was not interested in the traditional German doctrinal method of trading space for time based on Nazi ideology. Commanders and planners in Army Group North demonstrated mental flexibility and courage by creating a plan that Berlin thought it didn't need, while addressing the problems of the local commanders at the tactical-level charged with holding back an enemy without proper resources.

### **7.1 STRATEGIC ENDS:**

The strategic ends for a conflict are philosophically the moral impetus for war in the first place. The moral clause for war is defined by the political reasons for war. The political reasons for war inform strategic leader's decisions regarding the nature and the conduct of an impending

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House of People's Defense Commissariat, 1943).

<sup>646</sup> See: Army Group North's "Fall BLAU," or Operation BLUE contained in NARA T-311, Roll 76, First Frame 7099655.

<sup>647</sup> Ibid.

conflict. War is not just an exercise of military power, but the use of military power can be used to enable other methods of accomplishing strategic objectives. Examining conflict in the Baltic states in late 1943, early 1944 required first and foremost an understanding of economics and political desires for each combatant. As demonstrated throughout the course of this work, the major disconnect for Germany existed in a lack of unity of effort, not only amongst the various branches of the armed forces, but between the military and the civil branches as well. The disconnect between German civil and military authorities was never more evident than when it came to the administering the occupied territories and which organization was responsible for what action. This lack of unity of effort collectively resulted in the fragmentation of efforts between various German organizations, while contributing nothing to common operational picture to address the issues with limited assets. The Soviets on the other hand had clear unity of purpose between military and civil authorities. In essence, the two were the same. The Soviets were able to achieve strategic success because they possessed a clear vision of the world after the war terminated. As evidenced in this work, the Soviets every move was tied to war termination and the coming grand strategy post conflict. The Soviet strategic goal was the elimination of Fascist Germany.<sup>648</sup> In order to recognize this goal, certain conditions had to be met which would allow the Soviets to properly phase the efforts of their fronts in time and space, not only against the weakness of the German fronts, but in the areas the Soviets desperately needed back under their control to support their war effort. Thus, the Soviet main effort attack was made against the Ukraine in late 1943 and throughout 1944.<sup>649</sup> With strategic resources pooled to support main effort operations in the Ukraine, Soviet planners had to be deliberate in how

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<sup>648</sup> See: I. N. Zemskov, *Soviet Foreign Policy Volume I, 1917-1945* (Moscow, USSR: Progress Publishers, 1981), 415. and J. V. Stalin, *Success in the Great Patriotic War* (Moscow, USSR: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1953), 145-6.

supporting efforts would accomplish subordinate tasks associated with the Soviet idea of war termination. To reach the strategic goal of eliminating Fascist Germany in time and space, first the Germans would have to be removed from Soviet soil. This could only be accomplished by the destruction of German combat power.<sup>650</sup> While clearly the Ukraine could feed the Soviet people, the Baltic states provide the buffer from the west Stalin so desperately wanted to have back.<sup>651</sup>

Both the Germans and the Soviets recognized the economic value of the Baltic and the geographic position of advantage the area held based on hundreds of years of history. The difference in views between the Germans and the Soviets lies in their strategic end states based on the situation of the late war. While Berlin was convinced at the highest levels the war could still be won, Moscow knew the war would be won and wanted to be in a position of advantage when the war terminated against the western allies. While the campaign in the Baltic states allowed Germany the ability to remain connected to their allies in Finland, it was the iron ore of Sweden and the ability to regulate commerce and more importantly, access to the Baltic Sea consumed Germany's logic to fight in the Baltic. While the German armed forces were guided by joint principles of unified action at the strategic level, service politics dominated planning efforts and the use of resources.<sup>652</sup> In practical application the German armed forces were fighting as disaggregated forces under the command of the Army. In practice, the examination of Army Group North's concept of withdrawal from the front at Leningrad to the "Panther Position"

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<sup>649</sup> See: J. V. Stalin, *Success in the Great Patriotic War* (Moscow, USSR: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1953), 145-6.

<sup>650</sup> Carl von Clausewitz, *On War* ed. Michael Howard and Peter Paret, trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984).

<sup>651</sup> See: Horst Boog and others, *Germany and the Second World War, Volume IV, The Attack on the Soviet Union*, ed. Militärgeschichtliches Forschungsamt (Research Institute for Military History) trans ed. Ewald Osers (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 2008).

<sup>652</sup> See: Army Group North's "Fall BLAU," or Operation BLUE contained in NARA T-311, Roll 76, First Frame 7099655.

along the Narva River demonstrates the fact the army was carrying the weight of the plan, while the navy and the air force where supporting efforts.

The main difficulty with the German execution of the Operation BLAU at the strategic level was the identification of tasks commensurate with the capabilities of the force being employed. As chapter three clearly showed, German planners at the strategic level invested a significant amount of time and effort into articulating the ground concept of operations and scheme of maneuver without enough effort to explain how the air force and navy would be used to support the army's efforts. The lack of synergy in planning overtaxed the abilities of the tactical level by asking soldiers to do far more then they had the capabilities or abilities to do. Throughout history, when this is the case, historians often write heroic stories to compliment soldiers impossible acts. The fact is, leaders at the strategic and operational levels fail the soldier in the field and put him against places and positions they never should. The result is the soldier usually gets a grave, medal or both.



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**Picture 14: Grave of a Danish man who fell in Service with the Waffen SS.**

## **7.2 DOCTRINAL DEVELOPMENT:**

Examining the problem of the Soviet breakout from Leningrad in 1944 demonstrates the essence of the traditional issues of operations and tactics in time and space. At the heart of the problem is mobilizing combat power and articulating it in time and space with a common objective. While space for this problem was defined by considerations of terrain and weather; time was common to both combatants. Examination of this problem from early 1944 highlights all combat power starting from a static position must find space in order to gain the momentum to begin the tactical fight. This is best accomplished through unity of effort at the tactical level between assets. The Soviets demonstrated a high degree of this understanding in the latter years of the Second World War. Soviet tactical employment was built on decades of doctrinal development.

By 1944, two things were evident by the execution of Soviet operations on the Eastern Front; the Soviets had learned to adapt to the fighting style of the Germans and were capable of conducting breakthrough operations using centralized command and control. The Germans on the other hand, could not execute operations without interference from Berlin at the strategic level. In essence, the Soviets continued developing methods of breakthrough attack and exploitation at the operational level that had intellectual roots in the works of Svechin, Tukhachevsky, Triandafillov and others from the interwar years.<sup>654</sup> From these intellectual roots sprung the origins of deep battle.<sup>655</sup> Many Soviet officers and scholars understood how to make breakthrough attack a reality, but without the industrial base to produce the equipment needed to support the doctrine, there could be no serious future development in the late 1920s and early

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<sup>653</sup> Picture from NARA File Waffen SS Kriegsbericht Photograph Collection Part 3.

<sup>654</sup> There is little doubt Soviet military minds in the late 1920s and early 1930s were working in the correct doctrinal direction to make changes that positively contributed to the later successes of the Soviet Army.



1930s. The Soviets demonstrated they not only were a learning organization, but they clearly communicated what they observed to other fronts of the army in a more rapid fashion than the Germans. Evidence of how change at the tactical level was conducted was shown through information gleaned from the river crossing manual of late 1943.<sup>656</sup> In the publication of their doctrine, the Soviets demonstrated they recognized when change was necessary and promulgated changes across their entire force on all fronts to quickly affect the situation. Instead of waiting to send out a definitive version, the Soviets would send out a draft manual to get ideas out to the army. The army then worked with the new ideas in combat and provided feedback on the idea based on how it worked. The Soviet system of doctrinal development, while driven from the top, was refined from the lower ranks and sent back up the chain of command and distributed laterally throughout the army and drove change. This ensured "buy in" throughout the entire army regarding the new doctrine.

What is more incredible about Soviet doctrinal development was the depth of ideas rooted in theory. While Soviet doctrine was dominated by the ideology of Marx, this link galvanized the Soviet population under one cause and focused the entire weight of the Soviet Union to fight together. Indeed, the thoughts of Lenin and Marx about war and politics were connected, thus making Soviet thoughts about the two subjects the same. Marxist thought could be explained to the lowest levels of society by the political commissar and enforced through security organizations of the state. There was no difference between what the soldier thought and what the peasant thought because the "Vanguard of the Proletariat" or the Communist Party was thinking for both. Based on this, the Soviets arguably experienced the most successful use of

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<sup>655</sup> Modern concepts of maneuver warfare are clearly linked to the doctrinal experimental of the Soviet Army during the Second World War.

irregular forces in conjunction with conventional forces during the Second World War. The concepts of unity of command and single purpose allowed Soviet commanders the ability to focus their resources and give them a single task to accomplish under one commander. This was not only commensurate with their doctrine, but it made the most sense for the circumstances. What is most simple in war works best, but the simple is always the most difficult.

The Germans had been training and thinking about the war they were fighting in the Northern Baltic since the First World War.<sup>657</sup> Traditionally, the Germans were not strangers to economy of force missions and task organizing units for specific purposes. As described in this work, the concept of the "elastic defense" provided the ability to fight in depth and trade space for time, while attriting the enemy forcing him to reach a culminating point for local counterattack. The concept of the elastic defense forced leaders at the strategic, operational and tactical levels of war to truly understand the operational environment and assets in terms of manpower and resources available to accomplish a mission. A shared common understanding amongst the levels of war created consensus of vision for the best method to attack the problem. In practice, tactical-level challenges of terrain and weather could be offset against the available assets while efficiencies could be found to address the problem.

While the elastic defense was the way German leaders were trained and educated to think about the problem of trading space for time in the defense, Adolf Hitler's inflexible thoughts about holding terrain countered their education. In difference to the Soviet Army that was developing their doctrine as a result of the war, the Germans had an excellent model from before the Second World War they were forbidden from using. Many attempts by commanders and staff

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<sup>656</sup> See: Red Army Publication, Генеральный Штаб Красной Армии, *(Проект) Наставление по Форсированию Рек*, (Draft, Instructions on River Crossing) (Moscow, USSR: Military Publishing House of People's Defense Commissariat, 1943).

officers to get Hitler to understand their doctrine and how it was developed failed to satisfy Hitler's vision rooted in National Socialist ideology.<sup>657</sup> Hitler's constant interference in tactical matters forced operational level planner to compensate for strategic level interference in their planning efforts, as demonstrated in Plan BLAU.<sup>658</sup> This compensation effort did not allow German planners the ability to leverage strategic assets with the same unity the Soviets did. While there was harmony amongst the German operational and tactical levels, along with a strong connection to the strategic end state, there was no harmony amongst German decision makers. Wars cannot be won only at only one level of war. Without unity of purpose that translates common vision from the strategic level into actions at the tactical level though planning efforts at the operational level, a battle can be won, but a war lost.

### **7.3 TACTICAL MEANS:**

The articulation of combat power in time and space is addressed through the means of a plan along with a combat order developed to commit forces. The plan must clearly define the objective of the operation and how combat power can be used in time and space to accomplish the objective against potential opposition. In the philosophical dimension, the tactical level of war represents the physical manifestation of combat power and the nation's will to fight. Several critical lessons have been observed throughout the course of this work regarding the use of combat power in conjunction with planning for Operation BLAU. Most importantly, planners can never write a plan and not continually re-assess the combat power assigned to execute the plan as it was written. Not only must the units capabilities be understood, but the combat strength and experience level of the unit must also be considered before the unit is assigned a task. In the

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<sup>657</sup> Before and during the conduct of Operation ALBION (Landing on the Island of Saaremaa, October 1917) the Germans continued experiments in tactical development.

<sup>658</sup> See the comments of German General Hube in: Department of the Army, MS# P-082 *Study of Tactics Employed in the Russian Campaign*. (Carlisle, Army War College: Foreign Military Studies Department 1950).

case of German forces participating in Operation BLAU, many units at the division level were in actual number a regiment that was reinforced with partial units or individuals that were not cohesive. These units or individuals could be used to augment existing combat power, but they rarely could be used to hold an area of the front. As Operation BLAU demonstrated, being written in the fall of 1943, many of the units assigned to the plan had been significantly reduced in combat power or reassigned to other areas of the front prior to the execution of the plan. This left inexperienced units accustomed to holding static defensive lines with the responsibility of conducting a difficult retrograde operation.

In the course of this work two types of tactical-level combat power had to be assessed; conventional along with asymmetric force for effectiveness. Another way this was explained was to think of regulars acting in conjunction with irregular forces to accomplish the mission. Both the Germans and the Soviets had an excellent understanding of the use of combined arms as a means of attack and defense and both were equally adept at incorporating irregular forces into their respective schemes of maneuver or defense. The additional doctrinal development and use of irregular forces served many purposes as this work has shown, but the main purpose which should not be overlooked was the shaping of battlespace and the conservation of manpower for other purposes. Both the Germans and the Soviets used irregular forces to shape the battlespace prior to and during the execution of the breakout from the Leningrad Front. While the use of conventional forces formed an important part of both combatant's battle plans, the use of irregular forces allowed both combatants to pool more conventional combat power for other duties where more training was required for the execution of the mission.

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<sup>659</sup> See: Army Group North's "Fall BLAU," or Operation BLUE contained in NARA T-311, Roll 76, First Frame 7099655.

Another interesting question answered during the course of this work was addressed by task organization of units to specific purposes and how headquarters and commands can be created or adjusted based on operational needs. The example of task organization should not be overlooked, as most forces throughout the world have learned from this. The Germans and Soviets, were able to task organize forces to include the elements of command and control necessary to operate there. In difference to the Germans, the Soviets gave the operational level commander full control over air and naval forces. This meant there was total unity of tactical-level effect on the battlefield brought together by the operational commander and Soviet plan. At the operational-level, while the Germans had control of the naval and air assets, at the tactical-level they lacked unified purpose. Senior German commanders were fighting around internal service politics, thus failing the soldier in the field and aiding the enemy.

Plans are ultimately about the creation of orders and taskings to subordinates. Failure to understand capabilities and what assets are available for tasking is a failure of the operational-level. The operational level must correctly assess the capacity of assets in order to determine their specified tasks. At the tactical level, once these specified tasks have been analyzed, tactical commanders must also identify implied tasks that enable specified tasks to occur. Commanders at all levels must conduct this reconciliation or they will over task combat power they have available and will be less effective. Effective task organization ensures commanders are using the correct asset and level of manpower against the mission assigned.

In both cases, the Germans and Soviets task organized their tactical-level combat power under new operational-level commands for different reasons. The Germans identified the Narva Isthmus and Lake Peipus as physical geographic reasons to establish Army Group Narva, as the terrain dictated difficulties with 18th Army's ability to adequately provide command and control

to subordinates over this terrain. It required the Germans to reach the Narva River or the "Panther Position," a hard physical obstacle before the Germans could consider the establishment of a new headquarters while in contact. The Germans were able to implement this decision while in contact with Soviet forces based on years of experience, but more importantly because of necessity. Necessity is truly the mother of invention.

The Soviets on the other hand recognized the need to eliminate the Volkov Front and consolidate their combat power under the Leningrad Front at about the same time the Germans recognized the need to establish Army Group Narva.<sup>660</sup> This is telling about the combatants ability to read the situation at the tactical-level on the battlefield and make the necessary changes to their task organizations to fulfill assigned missions along with the commander's intent. Where the Germans were able to break a headquarters and combat power out of other formations to facilitate the changing situation, the Soviets collapsed a command and consolidated its combat power under one commander and staff. This speaks to the differences between German centralized command and decentralized control and the Soviet method of centralized command and centralized control. Not only were these styles of command and control traditional methods for both combatants, they also complimented the tactical situation of the battlefield. As has been demonstrated throughout the course of this work, the terrain from Leningrad to Narva into the Blue Hills was largely comprised of forests and swamps that channelized military formations into limited avenues of approach. There is little doubt the terrain favored interior lines of operation and the defense, thus the Germans held a significant advantage in the execution of Operation BLAU. These circumstances posed a significant challenge for the Soviets to overcome in the time and space. The Soviets not only had to breakout of the Leningrad pocket, but had to

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<sup>660</sup> See: Army Group North's "Fall BLAU," or Operation BLUE contained in NARA T-311, Roll 76, First Frame 7099655.

also reinvest the Baltic states per the strategic ends assigned by Stalin.<sup>661</sup> Key to the Soviet problem was conducting offensive operations on exterior lines of operation in time and space dominated by the enemy. The Soviets quickly realized shortly after executing the attack to break out of the Leningrad pocket that collecting combat power under one commander in mass best used the limited avenues of approach under the unity of one commander. By placing more combat power directly under the command of the Leningrad Front, the Soviet could use their strength better in the offense.

In the end, The German movement from Leningrad to the "Panther Position" along with the subsequent fighting in the Blue Hills, followed by the withdrawal to Latvia accomplished the goal the Germans set operationally and tactically. They were able to hold the area for a longer period of time than anyone would have guessed and inflicted heavy losses on advancing Soviet forces. The destruction of Soviet combat power was a German tactical victory, however the tactical defensive successes could not be translated into greater strategic success because of a lack of German strategic vision in Berlin.

#### **7.4 OPERATIONAL WAYS:**

Plans for Operation BLAU demonstrated a level of German understanding of time and space practically applied as never examined before. This understanding provides the student of history, whether a military professional or scholar, a practical example to examine in the context of a strategic and tactical level problem. The operational ways provide the link between the strategic moral for war with the physical tactical means. The connection between strategy and tactics is made through the mental energy expended in the operational plan. Understanding Operation BLAU provides the context to see the use of tactical combat power to achieve a

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<sup>661</sup> See: Eesti Meteoroloogijaamade Vork, *Weather Record, February 1944*, (Dorpat (Tartu), Estonia: Station Year Record 1944).

strategic end state through operational art. Operation BLAU clearly shows the connection of strategic ends to tactical means through operational ways as defined by the models used throughout the work. As a case study, Operation BLAU makes the less tangible aspects of the art and science of war more understandable, as the plan is examined in its concrete form vice the abstract way most plans are. Examination of BLAU showed the German's holistic approach to understanding the environment and the problem set, while allowing the plan to articulate the commander's vision in concert with the desired strategic ends through the use of tactical means.

Often historians fail to examine the plans themselves or the planning used to create them. How can actions in war be historically understood in terms of cause and effect if the tools used to drive action are not understood? Operation BLAU as a plan was not executed as it was intended to be, but an examination of the tasks assigned to the various units in time and space clearly demonstrates how the Germans plan for battle. This understanding of the plan combined with the historiography of events as they happened on the northern front show how tactical level initiative was nested to operational and strategic-level intentions. Examination of Soviet actions in relation to Plan and Operation BLAU show the Germans had built enough flexibility into their plan to compliment the anticipated Soviet courses of action.

Planners and leaders at the operational-level use operational art to achieve strategic ends through available tactical means. The planner must understand the capabilities and limitations of the gear and men assigned to his charge to accomplish the mission. The planner must ignore institutional or personal bias and seek solutions to his problems that not only restore peace quickly, but also limit the loss of life, not only to friendly forces but also to the enemy. Planners at the operational-level must be the "sanity check" on goals at the strategic-level, because they also understands the terrible burdens carried by the tactical-level. Often times the operational



planner spends most of his time answering the "what now," thinking through what happens after the end state has been achieved using the tactical means available. The more an operational planner is able to maintain the design of his plan and make the opponent change his design, ultimately the more successful the planner is and the more efficient and effective his plan will be.

The ultimate question that needs to be answered is was the battle for the Blue Hills necessary? From the German perspective, clearly the answer is yes. The terrain provides the reasons why. As the Blue Hills formed the cork in the neck of the Narva Isthmus, they provided channelizing terrain from which the Germans could control every Soviet move. The Blue Hills battles allowed the Germans to prevent the Soviets from advancing straight to Reval (Tallinn), thus allowing bases of operation to still function. Once the weather warmed and the Soviets were trapped in the swampy area south of the Blue Hills, they had no choice but to fight out of the swamp to the north. Blocking operations in the Blue Hills allowed the Germans to bleed off combat power from the Blue Hills and position it on the route of advance toward Dorpat (Tartu) as another series of blocking positions in depth against Soviet advances to aid in the retrograde to Latvia. The battles for the Blue Hills was a significant German tactical defensive victory. The Germans had wisely chosen good terrain to fight on and forced the Soviets to fight a battle they did not need to fight, costing them unnecessary losses. The Soviets were trapped between the Baltic Sea and Lake Peipus and Soviet pride caused them to continue attacking. Pride is a poor substitute for intelligence when dealing in lives and material. One can argue the Soviets had men and material to lose, perhaps locally, but not strategically when the effects of fighting are magnified across several fronts from the same resource pool.

The study of the art and science of war is made easier only through practical application rooted in the history of previous war experience. While the way in which man goes about

inflicting suffering and death on his fellow man may evolve through the use of new weapons and tactics, the end state has been the same since man was able to write. War is made constant throughout history by man and other tangibles such as terrain and weather. Technical advances have sometimes lessened the effects of terrain and weather, but not eliminated them. Historians have a responsibility to teach future generations of military leaders and those who will record conflict, the essence of war. Strategic end states are gathered from political desires, these ends are translated into action by tactical means through operational art in the form of operational plans. In the end, the plan is only as good as the leaders and soldiers who execute it. At the lowest tactical level, soldiers on both sides are imposing the will of nations, but they are really imposing their will to survive. Clausewitz was correct when he stated the essence of war was violent struggle.<sup>662</sup>

Wars are won and lost not only the backs of nations, but rather on the backs of 18 and 19 year old soldiers led by 23 and 24 year old enlisted leaders and officers. Nations cannot expect to win wars by only carrying either the strategic, operational or the tactical-levels. A nation can win the battles and still lose the war, as this case study has demonstrated. Incompetence in the military profession is magnified at the tactical level and is the raw material of death and suffering. It is the duty of leaders to teach their soldiers what war is all about through training and education. While training prepares soldiers for what to expect, education teaches them how to think and not what to think for the unexpected situation. Only through education can young soldiers survive the trials of the battlefield, either in antiquity or today. Leadership education is the chief intangible contributing to the art of art. It is leadership which crafts the will of subordinates and inspires them to attempt and achieve the impossible. Well led men will follow a

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<sup>662</sup> Carl von Clausewitz, *On War* ed. Michael Howard and Peter Paret, trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984).

good leader to hell, however, it is the duty of the leader to show them as little of hell as he can. The military art is not the providence of the weak, for tactical battle will quickly melt away the impure qualities of a man or destroy him. Leaders must not only be strong willed, but they must be educated about the business of war. Leaders cannot be all format; they must, more importantly, be men of content and character who contribute instant substance to the problems they are tasked to solve.

Only the educated must lead and they must do it by setting the example, leading from the front. Leaders must master themselves and their own fears before they can effectively lead others. Learning how to think and not what to think saves lives and equipment. Understanding your doctrine and following it when it makes sense saves lives; following doctrine as dogma is counterproductive and deadly. While the journey of this work has been long and covered many corners of the globe to gain understanding, it has been the honor of the author to walk in the footsteps of men like himself to learn and teach others of their trials. In the exploration of the subjects of operational art, Plan BLAU and the tactical actions that culminated in the horrible loss of life in the Blue Hills in Estonia, it is the sincerest wish of the author that others can learn from what has been paid for with the blood of many from several nations. Soldiers know all too well the cost of war, scholars must continue to remind humanity of the cost of their nation's decisions.



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