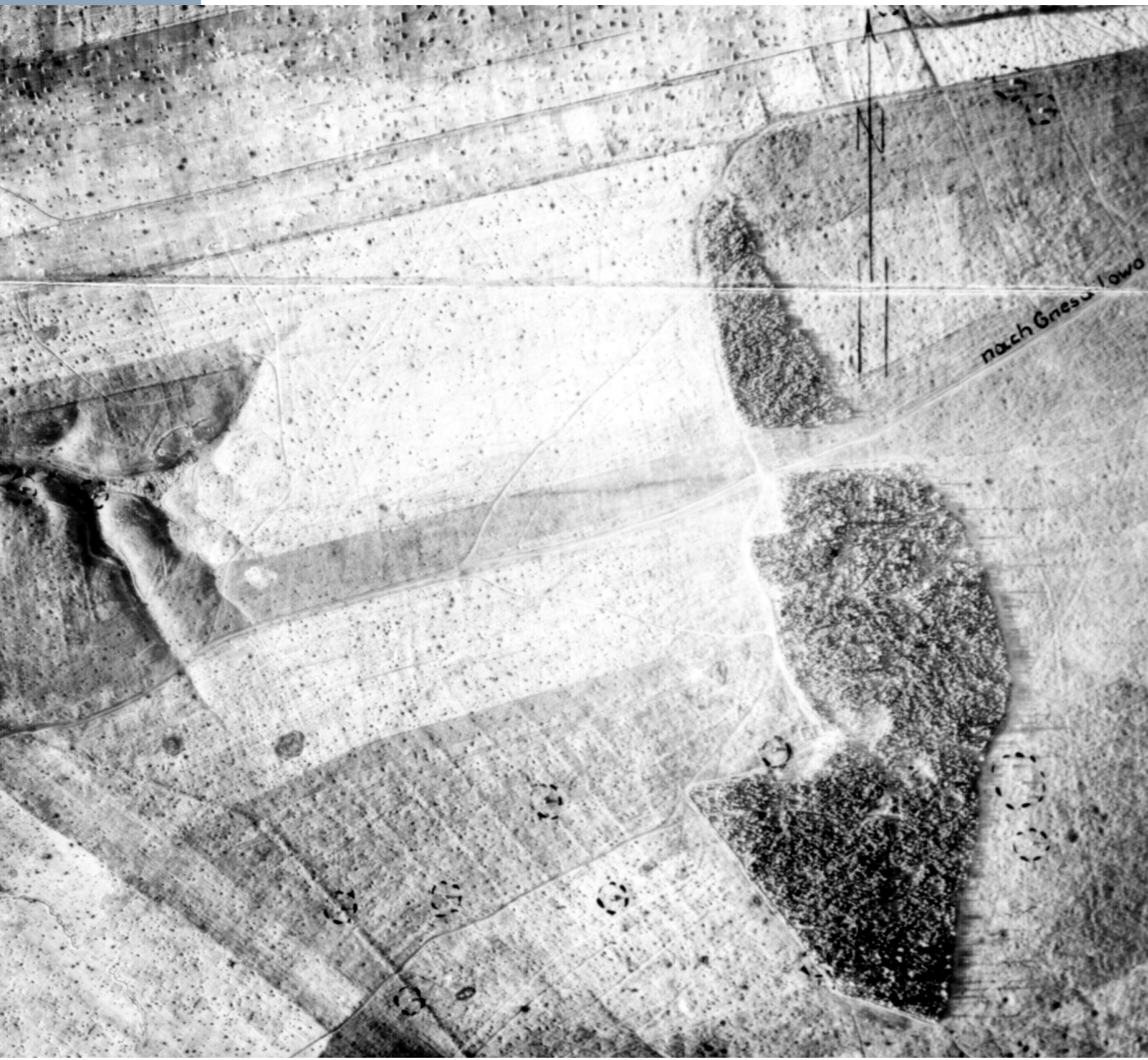




Gnezdilovo - Olkhovatka

September 15-17, 1942

Translated Soviet and German Army Documents



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Gnezdilovo – Olkhovatka

September 15–17, 1942



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German Army

Translated Documents¹

¹ – The nomenclature used to refer to the German units is explained in the Appendix ("German Units").
– Images contain links to high-resolution scans of the original documents.
– Important locations (villages, rivers, etc.) have been marked on German Army maps provided in the Appendix ("Locations", "Maps").

"The longest days of the 377th Infantry Division."

Oberfeldwebel Karl Herdener (Infantry Regiment 769) on
September 15–17, 1942

Gnezdilovo – Olkhovatka
September 15–17, 1942

German Army

Dispositions

At the beginning of September 1942 the command of **377ID** already expected that the enemy's breakthrough attempts would focus on the area around the village of Olkhovatka.² Olkhovatka was situated directly at the "knee" of the German Don frontline:



A successful breakthrough at Olkhovatka would have enabled the enemy to advance on the west side of the Don, along the German Don frontline, towards Voronezh. To prevent this, the division's main effort in September was to establish and strengthen defensive positions in the Olkhovatka area, which was on the division's right wing and in the sector of **769IR**:



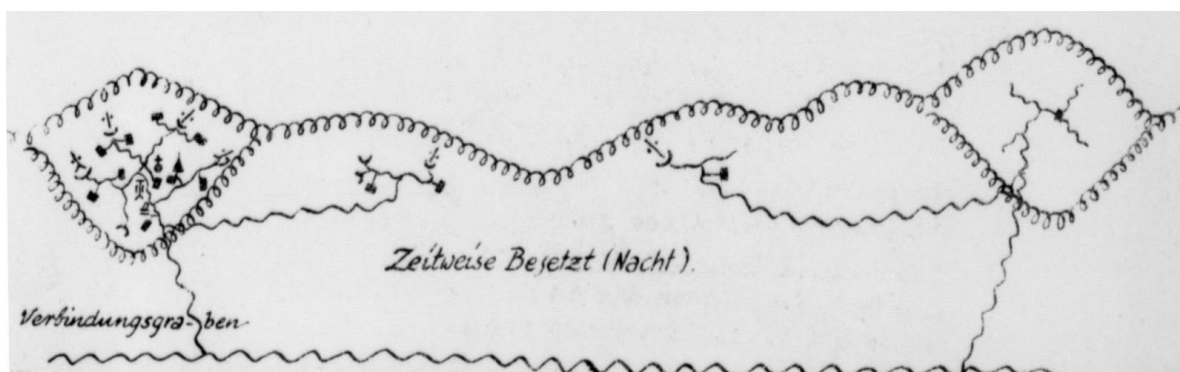
377ID's defense sector: 768IR (left sector), 770IR (middle sector) and 769IR (right sector) with the frontline north of Olkhovatka (colored brown).

² See Herdener, 1970: 44, 55.

Following are 1:1 translations of the daily entries from the **377ID** war diary, as well as translations of documents from the division's supplement folders (orders, reports, messages, etc.):

1 September 1942

- Heavy rainfall. Road closures follow.
- The Ia of the division visits the Olkhovatka area for a general evaluation of the terrain.³
- A division order on the construction of strongpoints and, in general, the expansion of defensive positions is released:



2 September 1942

- Talks between the Ia and the Chief of Staff of the **XIIIAC** on establishing prepared blocking positions⁴ in the Olkhovatka area.
- Observed fire (100 shells) on identified enemy positions in the area of the woods at 111.2.
- Shelling of an enemy battery near 191.3 which was located by sound ranging.
- Talks between the Ia, the Ib and the division's engineer commander on establishing prepared blocking positions in the Olkhovatka area.⁵
- A corps order is issued for **377ID** to immediately evacuate the civilian population out of the combat area:

³ "**Ia**" = The Ia (also known as the "Chief of Operations") is the 1st general staff officer in a German infantry division and responsible for the operational and tactical command of the division's units (leadership, organization, training, troop transport, housing, air raid protection, evaluation, etc.). He is in charge of presenting combat options to the division commander, of drafting orders and furthermore represents the division commander when the commander himself is absent.

⁴ "**blocking position**" = Defensive position so sited as to deny the enemy access to a given area or to prevent the enemy's advance in a given direction.

⁵ "**Ib**" = The Ib is the 2nd general staff officer in the division and responsible for the supply of the division: the transfer of supplies to the front (ammunition, rations, clothing, etc.) as well as the transfer of wounded, prisoners, residual material, etc. to the rear. The Ib is furthermore responsible for the organization of supply trains, road construction, traffic regulation, air raid protection, etc. in the rear areas of the division.

"A restricted zone will be established. The residents of the restricted zone are to be brought to the loading railway stations in closed marching groups either by utilizing unused transportation column space or by foot march. The population of the restricted area will then be taken to the army rear area by rail. After the evacuation is complete, the area will be closed to any civilian traffic. Clearly visible signs with the following text in Russian are to be placed at the boundaries of the area: "Stop! Restricted zone! Do not enter! Trespassers will be shot!"

- **II./768IR** (Oberlt. Wienecke) is temporarily attached to **769IR** with immediate effect for the construction of strongpoints and other defensive positions at Olkhovatka. **II./768IR** will also function as a **769IR** reserve for hasty counterattacks in case of an enemy attack.

3 September 1942

- Terrain evaluation staff gather in the Olkhovatka area. Decisions on the placement of trenches, barbed wire obstacles and mines are made.

4 September 1942

- Enemy harassing fire, partly from heavy artillery.
- Mine laying by **377 Eng Bn**: 285 T- and S-mines
- **768IR**: Combat activity in the sector of the left neighbor. A small enemy attack (50 men) is repelled after a local break-in.

5 September 1942

- Strong enemy air activity by bombers in the afternoon. One bomber is shot down by our aircraft.
- **79 Cnstr Bn** is ordered to build-up and expand positions in the depth of the defense area at Olkhovatka.
- **377ID**'s [situation map](#) is published.
- The division commander, Generalmajor Erich Baeßler, issues a message for announcement to all units of the division:
"I have to demand from all commanders that the troops be prepared to demonstrate the toughness required on the Eastern Front. Softness, cowardice, or even just carelessness on the part of one individual soldier can result in the loss of many valuable lives and can lead to incalculable consequences for the entire division. (...) If my orders are violated on the battlefield, each officer's duty is to enforce the execution – at gunpoint if necessary."

6 September 1942

- **79 Cnstr Bn** takes responsibility for the construction and expansion of positions in the depth of the defense area at Olkhovatka.

7 September 1942

- The division commander visits the infantry regiments.

8 September 1942

- The division commander visits **768IR**.

9 September 1942

- Enemy harassing fire on road Olkhovatka-Lipovka.

10 September 1942

- Larger enemy groups are spotted in front of the right sector. Most probable enemy intent: preparations for an attack.
- **II./768IR** under the command of Oberlt. Wienecke stops construction work at Olkhovatka and returns to the **768IR** sector.

11 September 1942

- Strong enemy artillery fire on Olkhovatka.
- Ia talks to the commander of **1./AA school 1**⁶ regarding the deployment of Flak guns in the ground role against possible enemy attacks with tanks. Flak units will take positions on the line: "Olkhovatka – south of Sklyaevo 5th – northern edge of Kaverya".

12 September 1942

- 01.00 – Enemy scout troop activity begins in **769IR**'s sector.
- Adjutant **769IR** reports: On 07.00 the enemy attacks strongpoint "Berta" with 70–80 men. The small attack is preceded by two artillery salvos (of 9 shells each) coming from Verilovka-North. The attack is repelled with heavy infantry weapons.
- **377ID**'s [situation map](#) is published.
- The division's actual strength report is compiled and sent to the **XIIIAC** the next day:

⁶ Antiaircraft Artillery School 1 trained personnel for heavy AA guns.

Tag: 13.9.42	Gen.Kdo. XIII.A.K.	377.I.D.
Zeit:		
Dringlichkeits- Deterneth SSD		
		fernprech- Anschluß:
Betrl.: Kampfsterkemeldung, Stand 12.9.42 20.00 Uhr		
1.) a) Anzahl der Bataillone:	9	davon 3 starke, 1 mittelstarke, 5 Durchschn.
b) Durchschn.Gef.Stärke je Btl. =	363	(I.R.768 = 471 I.R.769 = 272 I.R.770 = 347)

Date: 13.9.42 To: General Command XIII.A.C. From: 377.I.D.

Subj.: Actual Strength Report, 12.9.42, 20:00

- 1.) a) Number of battalions: 9 thereof 3 strong,
1 medium-strong,
5 average.
- b) Average combat strength per Bn. = 363⁷ (I.R.768 = 471
I.R.769 = 272
I.R.770 = 347)
- c) Mobility of the Bn.:
3 Bn. = 100%
3 Bn. = 99%
3 Bn. = 60%
- d) Evaluation of the Bn.:
2 suited for limited attack tasks,
4 fully suited for defense,
3 conditionally suited for defense.
- 2.) a) Number of batteries: 3 heavy, 6 light, 2 MLRS.
b) Mobility of the batteries:
3 heavy = 87%
6 light = 83%
2 MLRS = 88%
- 3.) a) Mobility of the Eng. Bn.: = 67%
b) Evaluation of the Eng. Bn.: fully suited for defense
- 4.) Critical equipment shortages: 110 M.G. (light)
20 M.G. (heavy)
25 light mortars
755 horses

⁷ **377ID** and especially **769IR** were already weakened from previous battles. In early August the average combat strength per battalion had been 500 men.

5.) Level of mobility: Limited mobility due to severe shortage of horses and fuel.

6.) Evaluation of the combat effectiveness: Fully capable of defense. The division is, however, in addition to commander and other personnel replacement, in urgent need of a reorganization of elements to raise the combat effectiveness and to consolidate formations.

377. Inf.Div.Ia

Nr. 1372/42s, 13.9.42

13 September 1942

- **XIIIAC** reconnaissance aircraft reports 5 new enemy batteries in the area south of Fomina-Negachevka.
- The Ic⁸ informs the Ia that, according to defector statements (on 9.9 – 14 defectors, on 13.9 – 6 defectors), the enemy plans to attack the right wing of the division [the Olkhovatka area] in the next few days. The enemy attack will be supported by a tank brigade. The Ia informs the Ia of **387ID**⁹ about the enemy's intentions. According to further defector statements **240RD** and **86TBde** are supposed to attack.
- The commander of **AA school 1** informs the Ia that the Flak combat teams need about 3 hours to take positions in Olkhovatka. The combat teams will move forward and take positions as soon as tank sounds get reported.
- Division commander to the commander of **377 AT Bn**: Heightened alertness.
- Commander **377AR**: All batteries are registered on possible enemy assembly areas.
- The commander of **769IR**, Oberstleutnant Heising, reports that everything (incl. the AT defense) is ready to repel an enemy attack.
- Ia to the commander of **AA school 1**: The 2 Flak combat teams shall be moved forward during the night (4x 8.8cm and 8x 2cm guns).
- 21.25 – After an estimate of the situation the division comes to the conclusion that an enemy attack, supported by tanks, is to be expected in the next few days.

⁸ "Ic" = The Ic (also known as the "Chief Intelligence Officer") is the 3rd general staff officer of the division. He is responsible for reconnaissance, intelligence and counter-espionage. Intelligence reports by the Ic give detailed information on enemy activities, situations and operations, enemy troop identifications, amounts of prisoner taken, prisoner interrogations, etc. The intelligence information provided by the Ic is of fundamental importance for the decisions of the division commander and the Ia.

⁹ **387ID** is the right neighbor of **377ID** and **543IR** of **387ID** is defending the area east of Olkhovatka.

14 September 1942

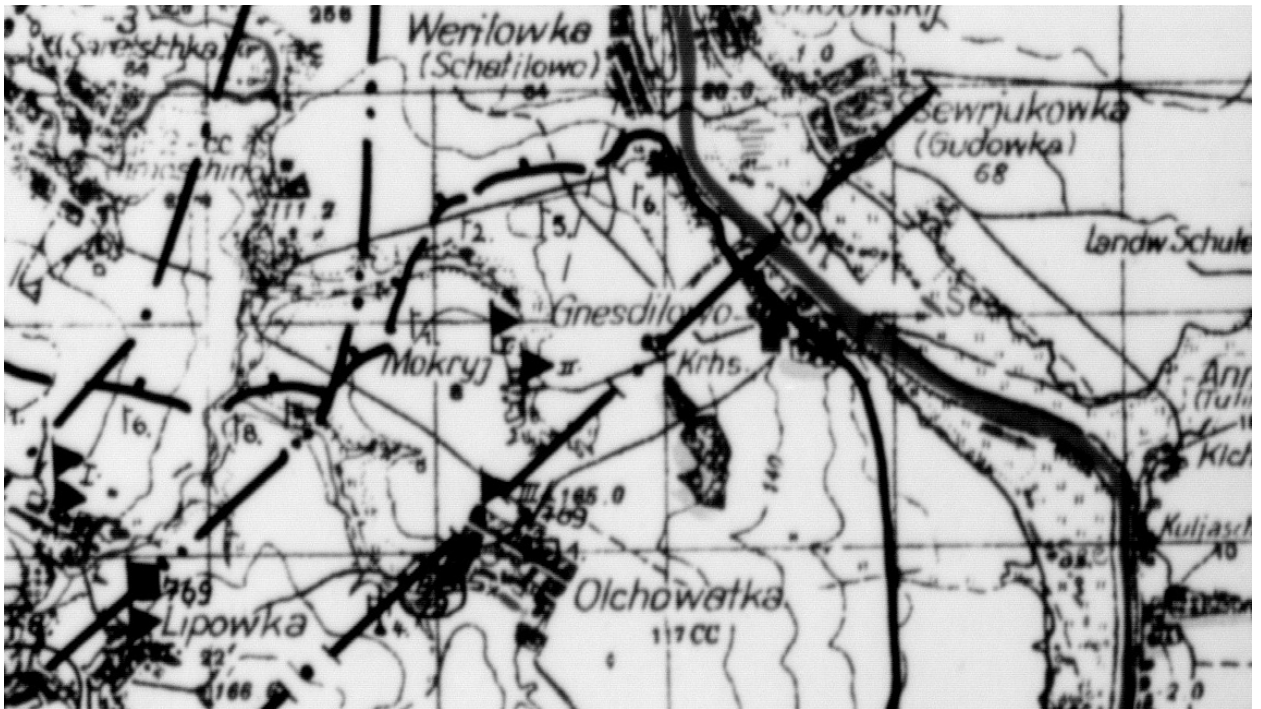
- A [map](#) of the **377ID** main frontline is published, showing the strongpoint locations.
- 07.55 – 3 enemy bombers and 9 enemy attack aircraft carry out a low altitude attack on Kaverya. The enemy aircraft use bombs, cannons and novel incendiary balls¹⁰ of 2 cm in diameter.
- 10.00 – 4 of our attack aircraft drop bombs on Sklyaevo 3rd.
- 10.30 – Major Drechsler, the commander of **654 AT Bn**, informs the Ia: In about 2 hours the battalion will arrive with 16 heavy AT guns and 11 Panzer II.
- 16.25 – Adjutant **769IR** reports: Nonstop small-caliber artillery fire on Lipovka since 15:45.
- 16.45 – Own air raid is carried out by bombing the woods at 111.2, the woods northwest of Niz. Vereyka and the northeastern edge of Sklyaevo 3rd (target: a firing enemy battery).
- 17.25 – After a 40-minute-long artillery preparation, enemy infantry advances in the sector "Verilovka – Height 111.2". The enemy advance collapses in the combined fire of our artillery and infantry.
- 17.30 – **654 AT Bn** arrives and gathers in Kudryavy.
- 18.10 – Adjutant **769IR** reports: Heavy enemy artillery fire on the forward line of our troops.
- 19.00 – Commander **769IR** reports: Loud engine noise is heard in front of our sector from the direction of Niz. Vereyka.
- 21.20 – The division commander orders the commander of **377AR** to release a barrage in front of **769IR**'s sector, because [Strongpoint Don](#) is threatened again.
- 21.27 – The commander of **769IR** reports that the enemy is coming closer again and that the commander of the right wing, Major Wehle, asks for reinforcements.

Note by Oberfeldwebel Karl Herdener, 769IR staff writer:

"On September 14 the command post of 769IR is still in the village of Lipovka. This whole day I observe shell airbursts over Lipovka, hanging in the air like cotton balls. Some smaller caliber shells also hit the village and wound several soldiers.

I interpret this process as zeroing in of larger enemy artillery formations and suggest to the regiment commander to reposition the command post into the wooden bunkers, located closely behind the village, as early as tonight. It gets done. The next morning shows that it was the right decision: In the early morning of September 15, after the first heavy strikes of the enemy artillery, the village of Lipovka is nothing more than a smoking heap of ruins!"

¹⁰ Glass spheres filled with pyrophoric "KS" fluid (a mixture of phosphorus and sulfur).



15 September 1942

- 04.45 Heavy artillery and mortar fire on the entire **769IR** sector precedes the large-scale enemy attack.¹¹
- 06.15 The attack in **769IR**'s sector begins at 06.15. At the same time, the enemy conducts feint attacks in front of the other two sectors of the division, the left sector [**768IR**] and the middle sector [**770IR**]. The attack on the right sector [**769IR**] confirms the statements of a defector who was brought to the **769IR** command post at 06.00. According to the defector, the enemy has prepared a large-scale attack with tank support (which begins after one and a half hours of preceding artillery fire) with the aim of occupying Khvoshchevatka on the evening of 15.9.
- 06.20 Keyword "Mudra" is transmitted over radio to **769IR** and **79 Cnstr Bn**, signaling them to get ready for an enemy attack.¹²
- 06.25 An enemy infantry attack in the sector "Don – Sklyaevo 4th" with a strength of about 4 battalions breaks down in combined defensive fire.

¹¹ **377ID** Ic reports later: "After the initial harassing phase, the intensity of the hostile artillery fire increased dramatically. The entire division sector was under heavy shelling from 5.40 to 6.30. The strongpoints in the **769IR** sector were targeted with extra intensity."

¹² According to a **377ID** directive from 14.9, **79 Cnstr Bn** will take blocking positions in the area north and northwest of Olkhovotka and get tactically attached to **769IR** when the keyword "Mudra" is transmitted. It further has orders to defend the positions.

- 06.35 Order from the Ia to the **377 Eng Bn** commander: The 3rd company of the battalion is to be brought to Lipovka in the **769IR** sector.
- 06.50 **769IR** reports: The enemy penetrated southeast of 111.2 and has reached the heights north of Mokryy. Field cable connection is broken.
- 769IR** has deployed its 3rd battalion for a hasty counterattack. (**III./769IR** has been in the reserve until now.)¹³
- 06.50 **Bicycle Squadron 377** is dispatched to Olkhovatka.
- 07.00 Enemy bomber attack on Tërny. 1 bomber is shot down by AA guns.
- 07.10 Another enemy attack with a strength of about 3 companies and tank support on Strongpoint Don.
- 07.30 Adjutant **769IR** reports: The enemy penetrated at a strongpoint of the 1st company – our men in the strongpoint were annihilated. The enemy now advances in company strength from the break-in point to the southeast, towards Mokryy. The adjacent strongpoints are held. Three simultaneous attacks on the 5th company's positions and two on Strongpoint Don.
- In total, 24 enemy tanks are observed in front of the regiment's positions. The attacks break down in the combined fire of artillery and heavy infantry weapons, the tanks turn and roll away.
- 07.40 **II./768IR** (reserve battalion less 2 companies) is alerted on order of the division commander. Enemy pressure in front of Strongpoint Don decreases slightly, but intensifies on **769IR**'s left wing.
- 07.45 The hasty counterattack of **III./769IR** pushed the enemy back towards 111.2. Oberstleutnant Heising (commander **769IR**) reports to the division commander that Strongpoint Don and the positions of the 5th and 2nd companies are firmly in our hands.
- 08.00 The commander of **377 Eng Bn**, Oberstleutnant Schunck, is ordered to form a battlegroup consisting of **377 Eng Bn** and the **Bicycle Squadron 377**. The group is to be organized so that it can be used in combat and shall assemble in Sivirtsevo-Kaverya.

¹³ **769IR** was ordered to hold a regimental reserve at Olkhovatka. Such reserves – called "thrust reserves on standby" – were to be held "combat ready in the depth of the defense area at all times for hasty counterattacks ["counter-thrusts"] in cases like an enemy breakthrough at the main frontline." The task in such a case was "to intercept the penetrating enemy forces and drive them out of the defense area."

- 08.10 The whole AT defense in the division's sector is placed under the command of Major Drechsler (commander **654 AT Bn**). Ia gives the permission to bring forward the remaining operational tanks to Olkhovatka.
- 08.30 Oberst Kegler (commander **768IR**) informs the division commander about the situation in front of **768IR**: According to defector statements, enemy attacks are not to be expected in this sector. The only purpose of the enemy's feint attacks is to fix forces on the left wing of the division.
- 08.40 1 enemy attack aircraft is shot down over **768IR**'s sector by MG.
- 09.45 Commander of **377 AT Bn** reports: Focus point of the enemy tank attack is the center of **769IR**.
- 09.50 Commander of **770IR** reports to Ia that the situation on their right wing is very critical due to an enemy attack with 3 tanks.
- 10.00 Message from Adjutant **769IR**: "The enemy crushes our strongpoints at the Don with 6–7 tanks! 2 strongpoints are already occupied by enemy infantry." The situation remains unclear, because the communication links are disrupted.
- 10.15 Strongpoint Don reports by radio that it is encircled by 6–7 tanks and that the enemy is now gunning down the courageously resisting men one by one. Own losses are very high.
- 10.20 The hasty counterattack of **III./769IR** has come up right to the front of the enemy-occupied strongpoint, but is stopped there in the enemy's hand grenade throwing distance.
- 10.20 The enemy advances with stronger forces from direction 111.2 along the Kaverya creek towards the south. Own artillery lays concentrated fire in front of the 1st and 2nd companies.
- 10.30 Leutnant Pape retreats to Mokryy with the remaining men from Strongpoint Don (about 30 men in total) and reports: The strongpoint of the 6th company is lost.
- 10.45 Ia orders the battery commander of **1./AA school 1** to take up firing positions north of Olkhovatka and to immediately reconnoiter a route of approach to these positions. Moving forward is necessary, to be

able to effectively fire with the 8.8cm Flak guns at enemy tanks located at the main frontline.

- 10.47 Ia orders **769IR**: Block! Block immediately from the gully north of Gnezdilovo westwards to the 2nd company.
- 10.50 **770IR** informs: A company-size enemy attack against the left wing has been repelled.
- 11.10 The division's AT defense commander, Major Drechsler, gets the order by the Ia to move the division's whole AT defense forward, so that it can provide effective AT fire onto the main frontline. The reason for this order is the fact that the enemy tanks do not penetrate into the depth of our defense area, but stay at the main frontline. Because of this, they are outside of the effective fire range of our AT guns.
- 11.35 The division commander Generalmajor Baeßler himself arrives at the command post of **769IR** and briefs the Ia on the orders he has given: The AT defense commander will move another 3 Pak 40 to the right wing and will also bring the 1st company forward to Olkhovatka (The 1st company has been in reserve in Russkov until now). Up to now no tanks have been taken out by AT gun fire, the reason being that numerous AT guns have been put out of action. The enemy has already reached the northern edge of Gnezdilovo with tanks and tank mounted infantry. As a result the ordered blocking is no longer possible. Therefore, the new order is to hold the line:

"Northern edge of Gnezdilovo – Bird Grove¹⁴ – Mokryy"

Defectors at **769IR** state that the enemy has the mission to push straight along the Don, capture Gnezdilovo and then Olkhovatka.

- 11.53 Ia to **768IR**: The alerted **II./768IR** (a reinforced company) with 4 HMGs shall march to Sivirtsevo-Kaverya immediately.
- 11.53 Ia reports to the **XIIIAC** Chief of Staff that – in adjustment to the changed situation – **387ID** is establishing a defensive front from the northern edge of Gnezdilovo to the northern tip of Bird Grove and further reports that AT defense is guaranteed throughout the whole sector of the division.

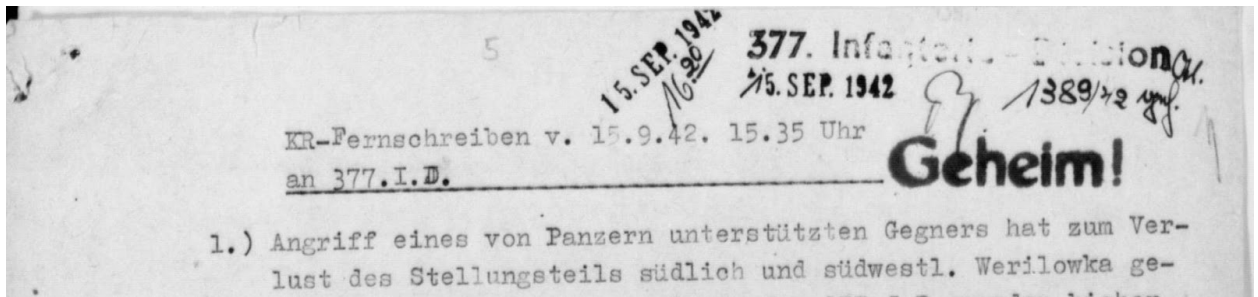
¹⁴ Named "Redkaya" grove by the Soviet side. The Germans named it "Bird Grove" ("Vogelwäldchen"), because the small wood looked like the silhouette of a bird from above.

- 12.00 The commander of **AA school 1** informs the Ia: It is not possible to move forward to new firing positions north of Olkhovatka, because the terrain is open and unprotected.
- 12.05 Another enemy attack without tanks is repelled by **768IR** on the left wing of the division.
- 13.00 The division commander gives his impression of the situation, gained at the observation post northeast of Olkhovatka:¹⁵
"The enemy tanks are just driving around on the positions at the main frontline and cannot be fired at effectively by our AT guns, because the firing distance is too large. It is imperative that the AT guns change positions and move forward!"
- 13.20 An artillery forward observer spots 20 enemy tanks driving from Niz. Vereyka into the woods at 111.2. He also spots 3 enemy tanks in firing position eastward of it.
- 13.25 **377AR** conducts an artillery strike on 111.2.
- 13.35 An advance thrust of 6 enemy tanks on Olkhovatka is repelled. 2 tanks are destroyed, the rest of the tanks turn and drive away.
- 14.00 Another heavy attack (battalion-size) supported by several tanks in the sector of **769IR** and **770IR** with emphasis on both sides of the Kaverya creek. The attack is repulsed, inflicting heavy enemy losses.
- 14.00 The division intends to use **BG Schunck**, supported by 6 Panzer II and by closely following AT guns, to establish contact with the elements of the 5th company (**769IR**) still holding at the main frontline. **BG Schunck** shall advance at least as far forward to the main frontline, as required for the AT guns to fire effectively at the enemy tanks, which are currently attacking the 5th company.
- 14.40 Another enemy attack on **5./770IR** and eastward of it.
- 14.40 In the very heavy fighting, 2 areas of main effort of the enemy attacks are becoming increasingly noticeable, one is the area around Mokryy, the other the area at Sklyaevo 5th.

¹⁵ At the height of the crisis on September 15, 13.00, the division commander Generalmajor Baeßler insisted on being brought forward to the observation post northeast of Olkhovatka to see the ongoing battle and the terrain with his own eyes – and be able to make the correct tactical decisions. [Herdener, 1970: 66].

15.35 Urgent message from the **XIIIAC** to **377ID**:¹⁶

Corps Message



Urgent teletype message, 15.9.42 15.35
to 377.I.D.

- 1.) Enemy attacks with tank support lead to the loss of positions south and southwest of Verilovka. Attacks against the other sectors of 377ID have been repelled up to now.
- 2.) 377ID is hereby ordered to retake these lost positions and to report to the Corps as soon as possible how it will accomplish this and when the attack is expected to begin.
- 3.) For this task the Corps attaches the following units to 377ID:
 - a) Regiment Staff/695IR (from 340ID) [Cmd.: Oberstlt. Herbst]
 - b) II./539IR (from 385ID)
 - c) III./188IR (from 68ID)
 - d) III./168IR (from 82ID)
- 4.)
 - a) The commanders of 3.) a-d) got the order to contact 377ID.
 - b) Arrival of the units 3.) a-d) in the 377ID rear area can be expected in the late afternoon of 15.9.42. (...)

General Command XIIIAC Ia No.2904/42s
from 15.9.42

¹⁶ *This message is important:* The Corps gives (a) the shortest possible situation overview for 15.9, (b) assigns **377ID** a new task and (c) sends **377ID** additional units to accomplish it: An ad-hoc regiment is formed, consisting of reserve battalions from the other divisions of the **XIIIAC**. The units for this regiment are transferred to the **377ID** sector on 15.9 and will get attached to **377ID** upon arrival in the late afternoon. This newly formed ad-hoc regiment will be called "**Herbst IR**", named after its commander Oberstleutnant Hellmut Herbst. The regiment will assemble at Olkhovatka on 16.9.

- 15.50 Oberstleutnant Schunck reports that his battlegroup has formed up for the attack and that the group is now advancing northwards, towards the positions of the 5th company at the main frontline.
- 16.00 Call of the Commanding General (**XIIIAC**): The AT defense of **377ID** is to be moved forward, so that the AT guns can effectively control the main frontline.
- 17.05 The commander of **377 AT Bn**, Hauptmann Becherer, receives a new order from the Ia: All reserves of the AT defense are to be used to support the advance of **BG Schunck** towards the north. Oberstleutnant Heising, commander of **769IR** and commander of the sector, is held personally responsible for the execution of this order.
- 18.05 Oberstleutnant Heising reports that forward elements of BG Schunck have established contact with the 5th company.
- 19.00 **II./768IR** (less 2 companies) arrives and is called *Battlegroup Wienecke* from now on [= **BG Wienecke**, named after the group's commander Oberleutnant Wienecke]. It is attached to **BG Schunck**.¹⁷
- 19.00 At nightfall the enemy infantry and tank attacks start again. The units from **5.**, **2.** and **1./769IR**, which are still retaining some pockets of resistance at the main frontline, withdraw under pressure to the line: "northern edge of Bird Grove – southern edge of the gully eastwards of Mokryy into the prepared blocking position northwest of Olkhovatka". The withdrawal is ordered by the local battalion commander.
- 19.10 **BG Schunck** receives the order to hold the line: "northern edge of Bird Grove – height 165".
- 19.30 Adjutant **770IR** reports: The main frontline in the sector of **770IR** is firmly in the hands of the regiment.
- 19.37 The Flak combat teams of **AA school 1** are ordered to displace forward to Olkhovatka-Northwest, so that they can fire effectively onto the main frontline.

¹⁷ **BG Schunck** consists of 377 Eng Bn, Bicycle Squadron 377 and BG Wienecke from now on.

20.15 Ia of **387ID** informs the Ia of **377ID** that **BG Auinger** (2 reinforced companies of **I.** and **II./543IR** and a combat engineer company) is sitting in Bird Grove. The battlegroup has orders to hold the position in Bird Grove at all costs.

20.20 **543IR** has given up Gnezdilovo.

20.35 The division commander requests the **XIIIAC** to attach another artillery battery or an artillery battalion to the division, because the artillery available to the division up to now is insufficient for the tasks assigned to it. These tasks consist primarily of shielding the east bank of the Don.

II./67AR is thereupon committed to **377ID**.

22.10 Commander **769IR**, Oberstleutnant Heising, reports to Ia that the two strongpoints 1 km west of Mokryy (called "**Neckar**" and "**Main**") are still held by the 1st company, but all other strongpoints have been crushed by the tanks. The remnants of **III./769IR** are deployed as a link between **769IR** and **770IR**.

In a long-distance call with Oberstleutnant Heising, the division commander, Generalmajor Baeßler, assesses the situation for the next day as very serious, since continued strong tank attacks by the enemy are to be expected.

23.55 Ia of **387ID** informs **377ID** that the enemy is seeping through the thinly manned own line "southern edge of Gnezdilovo – northern tip of Bird Grove", and is moving southwards past the western edge of Gnezdilovo with individual vehicles.

The division's intent for 16.9:

The new frontline of **377ID** "northern tip of Bird Grove – blocking positions up to the boundary line between **769IR** and **770IR** – and from there the old, still held main frontline of **770IR** and **768IR**" is to be held in order to create the precondition for a counterattack. Objective of the counterattack: Regain the lost parts of the old main frontline in the Olkhovatka area in the afternoon of 16.9, when new forces [**Herbst IR**], which will lead the counterattack, have arrived.

*With the end of 15.9 **377ID** command has the following picture of the current situation (from east to west):*

- **BG Auinger** holds Bird Grove.
- Next to BG Auinger is **BG Schunck**, which holds positions from the northern tip of Bird Grove along and north of the road. The units of BG Schunck (377 Eng Bn, Bicycle Squadron 377 and BG Wienecke) are strongly intermixed.
- Next to BG Schunck is **769IR** which holds positions north of Olkhovatka. 769IR had many losses today and is very weak. The units of the regiment are also intermixed.
- West of 769IR, in the Kaverya creek area, elements of **II./770IR** are still holding their strongpoints. Behind them is 770IR's reserve, "Group Fuchs".¹⁸ But there is a gap between 770IR and 769IR now. The situation in this gap is unknown.
- **770IR** and **768IR** have successfully defended their positions on the main frontline in the other two sectors of 377ID up to now.

Today's losses of men and equipment are high. There is, however, no clear information about it at the moment. The division expects the enemy attacks to continue on 16.9 with the mission – known from a captured enemy order – of taking Olkhovatka first. Everything now depends on defending the thinly manned current frontline at Olkhovatka against the next attacks of the Russians until the newly arrived **Herbst IR** has completed its assembly at Olkhovatka and is ready to counterattack – which will not be before 14.00.

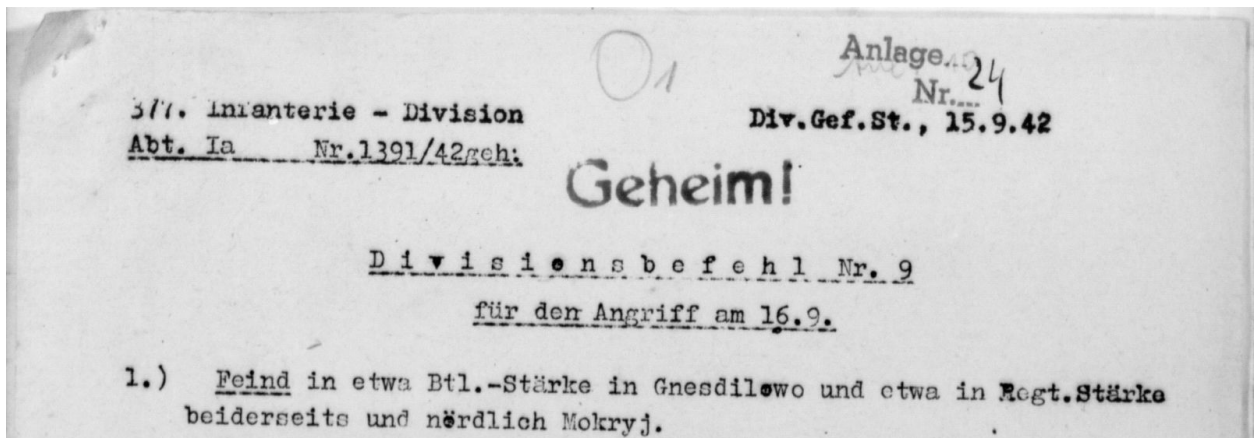
When **Herbst IR** is ready and starts its counterattack (with the objective of retaking the old main frontline positions which were lost today) it is to be joined by **769IR** and **BG Schunck**.

The respective orders will be issued by phone first and subsequently, in written form, in a summarizing division order during the night.

[This division order for the attack on 16.9, mentioned in the above war diary entry, is translated on the next pages.]

¹⁸ Later also called "Fuchs Company from **770IR**" in the documents; there is no info on this formation.

Division Order



377. Infantry - Division
Sec. Ia No.1391/42s

Div. Command Post, 15.9.42

Division Order No. 9 for the attack on 16.9.

- 1.) The enemy is in Gnezdilovo (battalion-size) and on both sides and north of Mokryy (about regiment-size).
- 2.) On 16.9, after assembly, BG Schunck, Herbst IR and 769IR will drive the broken-in enemy out of 769IR's defense sector and will then recapture the lost positions on the main frontline of this sector.
The main frontline in the other two sectors, the middle sector [770IR] and the left sector [768IR], will be held and defended.
- 3.) Boundary lines: (...)
- 4.) Missions:
 - a) Reinforced Herbst IR (Herbst IR, 654 AT Bn (-), 13./769IR without 1 platoon) assembles at Olkhovatka and to its north, so that the regiment is ready to attack by 14.00. The exact time for the start of the attack will be ordered by the division. The regiment will then advance towards and through the defending division units in front of it, pass them, recapture Mokryy and then immediately fight its way forward to the old main frontline with the mission to recapture and hold it.
It is crucial for the regiment to cross the open terrain northeastwards of Mokryy in one go, without considering conditions on its own flanks in order to maintain momentum.

The regiment's reserve battalion will follow behind in such a way that – depending on the development of the attack – it can be deployed to the right or left to break emerging enemy resistance. Use of the reserve battalion only with the permission of the division.

b) BG Schunck will hold and defend the current main frontline and protect the assembly of Herbst IR. When the attack starts, BG Schunck joins the attack of Herbst IR and, while protecting the right flank of the attack (against enemy attacks coming from Gnezdilovo), will then recapture the old main frontline between Gnezdilovo and Strongpoint Don.

It is crucial for BG Schunck to not lose contact with Herbst IR during the attack and to protect Herbst IR against enemy flank attacks from Gnezdilovo and the Don area.

c) 769IR will hold and defend the actual main frontline until the beginning of the attack and protect the assembly of Herbst IR until then.

When the attack starts, the regiment joins the attack of Herbst IR and retakes and holds the old main frontline in the regiment's sector.

It is crucial for 769IR to not lose contact with Herbst IR during the attack, so that it can protect the left flank of Herbst IR against possible enemy flank attacks out of the gully northwest of Mokryy.

d) 770IR and 768IR missions unchanged. [The regiments hold and defend their frontline positions.]

5.) Reconnaissance: (...)

6.) Artillery support:

a) 769IR and Herbst IR work together with II./377AR.

b) II./67AR is currently moving to Churikov and will be attached to 377AR upon arrival. The first battery is expected to arrive at 11.00. II./67AR is to be brought in a firing position so that it can support the attack with focus on the area in front of Herbst IR.

c) Artillery missions:

1. Support of the attack with focus on the area in front of Herbst IR and 769IR.

2. Elimination of enemy influence and action coming from the east bank of the Don, from the elevated terrain west of Verilovka and from the area of the woods at 111.2 (Smoke!).

3. Parts of the artillery have to ensure that enemy resistance in the Gnezdilovo area is eliminated.

4. It is essential for the success of the attack, that the massed fire of the available artillery immediately disrupts any encountered enemy resistance.

7.) AT defense:

- a) 654 AT Bn (-) is attached to Herbst IR.
- b) Elements of 654 AT Bn and 377 AT Bn are attached to 769IR according to verbal instructions.
- c) Elements of 654 AT Bn are attached to BG Schunck according to verbal instructions.
- d) AT defense unit 1./AA school 1 is to be brought into firing position in the area northwest of Olkhovatka, so that it can repel enemy tank attacks coming from the area south of Verilovka and northwestward Mokryy.

It is important for the AT defense, including the heavy AT guns, to follow the regiments' attack closely.

8.) Air defense:

I hereby re-declare active air defense, especially during assembly, as a duty of all units.

9.) Communication links as previously ordered.

10.) Division's command post as before. [In Tërny]

11.) The start of the attack will be ordered on 16.9.

[Signed] Generalmajor *Erich Baeßler*

16 September 1942

- 00.10 Order from the Ia of **377ID** to **Herbst IR**: After assembly the regiment will start its counterattack at 15.30.
- 03.30 **Herbst IR** starts to move to the gullies south of Olkhovatka with 2 battalions. The 3rd battalion [**III./168IR**, the reserve battalion of **Herbst IR**] moves to the gully southeast of Sivirtsevo-Kaverya. An attack is planned for the regiment with the objective to reach the old main frontline.
- 05.50 Low altitude attack on Perlevka¹⁹ carried out by 15 enemy attack aircraft with bombs and aircraft cannons.
- 06.00 An enemy attack against **11./770IR** is disrupted by combined fire of infantry weapons and artillery support.
- 06.10 Another enemy attack in company strength on the right wing of **11./770IR** is repelled, inflicting heavy losses on the enemy. The enemy also carries out a probing attack with weak forces against **6./770IR**. One 5cm AT gun and one 7.5cm AT gun are lost.
- 06.20 Heavy artillery fire on **I.** and **II./769IR**. Enemy forces are observed assembling in the gully. An enemy attack with a strength of 2 companies is expected on the positions of **I./769IR**. The enemy is furthermore attacking Bird Grove from the east with the support of 9 tanks. There is no working communication link with **BG Schunck** at the moment.
- 07.40 30 tanks are observed driving from direction 111.2 to Mokryy. Also observed is enemy infantry in the strength of one regiment, in large part cyclists, moving in a deployed formation along the road Gorozhanka – Niz. Vereyka.
- 07.45 The enemy attempts to bypass Bird Grove from the south. Presumably with the intention of attacking Olkhovatka.
- 08.20 The pressure in front of **I.** and **II./769IR** is getting stronger and stronger. The regiment desperately demands reinforcements. Combat strength of **I./769IR** is down to 50 men.

¹⁹ Perlevka is located south of the **377ID** command post in Tërny.

08.25 **770IR** fears a breakthrough on its right flank.

08.35 The AT defense on the division's right wing is deployed as follows:

- Southern tip of Bird Grove 2x 7.5cm AT guns
- On the way from Olkhovatka towards n-e 1x 7.5cm AT gun
- Northern tip of Bird Grove..... 1x 7.5cm AT gun
- At point 165.0 1x 7.5cm AT gun
- 300 m north of the kolkhoz at Olkhovatka 1x 7.5cm AT gun
- Northwestern exit Olkhovatka 1x 7.5cm AT gun
- Northern exit Olkhovatka 1x 7.5cm AT gun
- On the road south of the "o" in "Mokryj" 1x 7.5cm AT gun
- About 1200 m north of the "k" in "Lipowka" ... 1x 5cm AT gun
- In the triangle above the "o" in "Lipowka" 1x 5cm AT gun
- On the road from Sklyaevo 5th to
Sklyaevo 2nd, 150 m behind the frontline 1x 5cm AT gun

09.10 The Ia informs the Chief of Staff (**XIIIAC**) in a long-distance call about the current situation. **Herbst IR** will assemble south of Olkhovatka now. It is expected to be ready at 14.00.

09.15 The commander of **377AR**, Oberst Ehlert, passes on the report of one of his forward observers to the Ia: According to the forward observer, 10 enemy tanks have entered Olkhovatka and own infantry is now seen moving out of the area.

09.20 Ia reports the [unconfirmed] observation of the artillery observer to the division commander.

10.15 Adjutant **770IR** reports that a strongpoint has been lost and is now occupied by the enemy.

10.20 **XIIIAC** Chief of Staff informs the Ia that **543IR** (Gengenbach) is hereby attached to **377ID** with immediate effect and with the task to prevent the enemy from advancing south along the Don.

10.35 Ia of **377ID** informs the Ia of **387ID** that **543IR** is now attached to **377ID**. BG Auinger (**I.** and **II./543IR**, and **3./387 Eng Bn**) is positioned in the Bird Grove. The right wing of **543IR** is at Khvoshchevatka (by the church). There at the Don front it is quiet.

10.50 Commander **770IR** reports to Ia: "The forefield is littered with dead enemy soldiers. Our left battalion captured 3 prisoners. According to

prisoners' statements, **104RBde** suffered heavy losses, with only 1 battalion left. They also state that 5 tanks are positioned on the right near Mokryy."

- 10.55 Call of commander **377AR**, Oberst Ehlert: Arko 139 [= corps artillery command of the **XIIIAC**] has contacted Ehlert and blamed him that his regiment carries out too many artillery strikes and conducts too much unobserved fire. As a result, the regiment would consume too much ammunition. Ia will speak with the **XIIIAC** Chief of Staff about this rebuke.
- 11.12 Ia informs Oberst Ehlert of the decision of the Commanding General: Ammunition is not to be conserved, **377AR** shall use as much ammunition as needed.
- 11.15 Adjutant **769IR** reports that the enemy has broken in eastwards of Point 165. Own western elements are now withdrawing towards Olkhovatka. The enemy is seeping through in dense groups 1 km northeast of Olkhovatka, moving southwards.
- 11.40 Adjutant **769IR** passes on a received radio message: "Enemy attack with tanks on **II./769IR**, **I./769IR** and **79 Cnstr Bn**. The enemy is pressing heavily with tanks and infantry in the sector of **II./769IR**, but the battalion is holding. Left wing was ordered to withdraw. New position at the kolkhoz. One tank taken out by an AT gun. All elements of **769IR** are now gathering to support the upcoming counterattack on the left flank." Current frontline: "point 165 – road – edge of the gully west of Olkhovatka".
- 12.00 Adjutant **769IR** reports: Enemy tanks are attacking the northwestern edge of Olkhovatka, they are 500 m away from Olkhovatka, own troops in withdrawal.

The division commander informs the Ia:

"I visited observation posts and spoke to Oberstleutnant Schunck. 769IR is no longer capable of attacking, it has only 100 men left. Schunck has 150 men left. I am worried and have reservations about letting Herbst IR undertake the attack alone without anyone covering its flanks. The enemy is already firing on them with tanks – in their assembly areas! AT defenses are plentiful and close enough, but the AT guns get taken out."

The Ia points out to the division commander that an attack would need to be carried out at least forward to Mokryy, only this would make it possible to reestablish a defensive front with an effective line of resistance.

- 12.17 Ia explains the situation to the Chief of Staff (**XIIIAC**).
- 12.35 The Commanding General (**XIIIAC**) insists and orders **377ID** again to carry out an attack and retake the old main frontline.
- 12.35 15 enemy tanks drive into the positions of **I.** and **II./769IR**, they crush 4 heavy AT guns.
- 13.00 The division commander reorders the attack:
- New start of the attack: 16.00
 - Objective: Heights at 165
- 13.07 Ia talks with the commander of **377AR**, Oberst Ehlert, about artillery support during the attack.
- 13.20 Ia to **Herbst IR**: Your offensive operation will be supported by 2 attack aircraft squadrons!
- 13.22 Call of the Chief of Staff (**XIIIAC**): Aircraft will be dropping bombs on Mokryy and the area north of it from 16.00 to 16.20.
- 14.35 According to unconfirmed reports, enemy infantry has entered Olkhovatka. One of our firing positions near Olkhovatka is being fired at from houses located in the village.
- 14.43 Adjutant **543IR** reports: A new enemy attack from Gnezdilovo on Bird Grove is in progress since 13.55.
- 14.43 Enemy in the western part of Olkhovatka.
- 14.45 The division commander orders: "**Herbst IR**, which is just about to finish its assembly, will immediately start the attack! First intermediate objective: Olkhovatka."
- 15.30 **769IR** reports: "There are enemies in Olkhovatka, they came from northwest out of the gully. One of our batteries is encircled with forces up to one company. A counterattack starts immediately."

Ia informs the Chief of Staff (**XIIIAC**): Own attack is in progress since 15.20. **4./377AR** took out 3 enemy tanks with direct fire. **BG Schunck** is still deployed between Olkhovatka and Bird Grove. **5./770IR** is still holding its positions. Behind this company is the reserve²⁰ of **770IR**, which is now ordered to advance towards Olkhovatka.

15.55 The commander of **1./168 AT Bn** (with 6 x 7.5cm AT guns) receives orders to bring his company forward to the command post of **543IR** at Repnoe. [The Corps attached the AT company to **377ID** on 11.00 this day].

16.00 Major Böhme, **1./AA school 1**, reports to the Ia:

"I am retaining the southern edge of Olkhovatka with 3 guns and combat engineers. The enemy is in Olkhovatka. Own infantry is withdrawing from the village; I am picking all of them up, holding them at my position. Herbst IR is attacking Olkhovatka since 15.30, it is involved in house-to-house fighting inside the village now."

Ia points out that own counterattack has already begun and that the forces picked up by Major Böhme should join the attack.

II./67AR in use.

16.30 The enemy had penetrated to the center of Olkhovatka by 15.00. Around 15.30 own counterattack on Olkhovatka started from the south and the enemy was driven out of the village. Olkhovatka is firmly in our hands again as of 16.30.

The next objective of the attack towards the north is to reach the high ground on both sides of Mokryy.

16.35 The attack reaches the northern edge of Olkhovatka. The 4th battery's [**4./377AR**] encirclement is broken.

16.45 **Herbst IR** informs that it will re-engage at 17.00, after having brought the heavy weapons forward, and then advance towards the final objective: the heights eastward and to the west of Mokryy. Artillery strikes on the heights north of Mokryy and on the heights eastward 111.2 are ordered.

²⁰ Also called "Group Fuchs" (**770IR**'s reserve) and "Fuchs Company from **770IR**" in the documents.

- 16.45 **III./188IR** [Herbst IR] repelled an enemy counterattack supported by tanks around this time. **770IR** reports: The gully from Olkhovatka to the northwest is clear of the enemy.
- 16.55 Major Böhme, **1./AA school 1**, reports: Olkhovatka is firmly in our hands. At 17.00 the attack will continue. **III./188IR** [Herbst IR] is already 300 m north of Olkhovatka.
- 17.37 During the enemy counterattack on the attacking **III./188IR** [Herbst IR] 2 enemy tanks were taken out. The reserve battalion **III./168IR** [Herbst IR] is ordered to move forward from the gullies southeast of Sivirtsevo-Kaverya into the gully southwest of Olkhovatka.²¹
- 17.45 The enemy gathers more and more infantry in front of **5./770IR**. There is no free field of fire. Because of this, the 5th company decides to resolve the situation with a hasty counterattack.
- 17.50 The division commander reports from the front that **III./188IR** [Herbst IR] is pinned down 450 m northwest of Olkhovatka by the fire of 4 enemy tanks. Strong enemy tank fire from the area south of Gnezdilovo and the woods at 111.2.
- 19.00 **BG Schunck** is advancing towards Bird Grove, which is still firmly in our hands.
- 19.05 The commander of **79 Cnstr Bn**, Oberstleutnant Marthenka, has been killed and large parts of the battalion scattered. The battalion is currently being reassembled in Repnoe, the adjutant led the battalion there following his own decision.
- 19.25 Oberstleutnant Schunck, commander of **BG Schunck**, gives an after action report for the afternoon:
- "At 13.30 the enemy appeared with 8 tanks at the northern tip of Bird Grove. I tried to take out 4 tanks, but this was not possible due to the loss of the guns. My battalion joined the attack at 16.00 and is currently east of 165. The attack was halted by enemy tank fire."*

²¹ The division still did not give the permission which allows **Herbst IR** to use its reserve battalion **III./168IR** in combat. But the battalion follows in a distance behind, to be available if the division should give the permission at some point.

Schunck intends to occupy the blocking position during the coming night. His right wing, **Bicycle Squadron 377**, is already north of it. Schunck will also try to establish contact with own units in Bird Grove by sending reconnaissance teams into the grove.

22.25 Tanks are reported in the northern part of the grove.²²

24.00 Two officer reconnaissance teams from **543IR** try to clarify the situation in the grove.

24.00 Even if the end of the day did not bring the hoped-for final result "recapture of the old main frontline" and even if the high ground on both sides of Mokryy could not yet be retaken, the division can nevertheless be satisfied with what it has achieved. The attacks of the Russians, which were also heavy on this day, were repelled everywhere, inflicting – as prisoners' statements confirm – heavy losses on the enemy. Moreover, after the dramatic afternoon hours, **Herbst IR** was able to seize terrain that would provide the necessary conditions for a continuation of the attack.

Unfortunately, our own losses were considerable; but they reflect the low level of training of our troops. On this day 14 prisoners were brought in.

The question of whether the attack should be continued or stopped on 17.9 is in the opinion of the division to be answered as follows: The attack should continue and at a minimum the line "Gnezdilovo – Mokryy" has to be reached in order to create a defensible frontline that is connected to the Don once again. This will also take the possibility to advance southwards through the area east of Bird Grove away from the enemy. This area (the western bank of the Don and Gnezdilovo) cannot be seen from our positions at the moment and allows the enemy to pass through unhindered.

The division therefore decides to release the reserve battalion of **Herbst IR (III./168IR)** and make it available to **Herbst IR** for the attack on 17.9. **III./168IR** is ordered to assemble in Bird Grove. It is to be brought forward early for this purpose and shall infiltrate into the grove during the course of the morning.

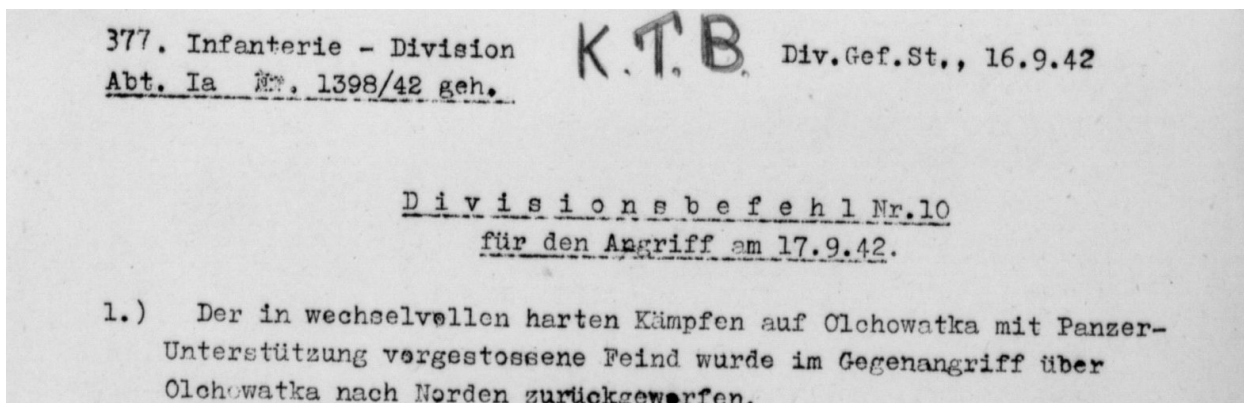
The plan is to resume the attack with **Herbst IR** on 17.9 after reorganization; namely with **III./168IR** (and **BG Auinger**) in the

²² **377ID** Ic later reports to the **XIIIAC**: "In the evening hours of 16.9 the enemy managed to break into Bird Grove after the defending troops lost all of their AT weapons."

direction of Gnezdilovo, and with **II./539IR** and **III./188IR** towards the heights on both sides of Mokryy. Once these objectives have been reached, the units are ordered to regroup there for defense. Corresponding orders go out to the units during the night.

[The summarizing division order for the attack on 17.9 is translated below.]

Division Order



377. Infantry - Division
Sec. Ia No. 1398/42s

Div. Command Post, 16.9.42

Division Order No. 10
for the attack on 17.9.42

1.) With hard-fought seesaw battles raging on, the enemy advanced with the support of tanks, broke into Olkhovatka, but was ultimately pushed back to the north by a counterattack through Olkhovatka.

Numerous enemy attacks in the other sectors of 770IR, 768IR and 543IR (387ID) collapsed with heavy losses for the enemy.

Over the course of 15.9 and 16.9 a total of 25 enemy tanks were taken out.

2.) 377ID (with attached 543IR, II. and III./387AR, 217 Cnstr Bn) continues the attack on 17.9 and takes the line: "northern edge of Gnezdilovo - high ground on both sides of Mokryy - old main frontline east of Kaverya creek".

The main frontline in the other two sectors, the sector of 770IR and the sector of 768IR, will be held and defended as before.

3.) Boundary lines: (...)

4.) Missions:

a) Herbst IR (III./168IR, BG Schunck, II./539IR, III./188IR) clears Bird Grove of enemy forces first and then reorganizes to be ready by 15.00 for the attack on Gnezdilovo and both sides of Mokryy. For this purpose, the elements of Herbst IR, which are deployed north and northeast of Olkhovatka, start to move as far forward as possible at daybreak.

After the beginning of the attack (15.00), the regiment captures the assigned attack objective and holds it.

It is important for Herbst IR to repel all enemy attacks on the current line of resistance before the attack begins.

b) 543IR with attached II./387AR defends its current positions. The regiment then joins the attack of Herbst IR and recaptures its own old main frontline.

c) 769IR with attached "Company Fuchs"²³ from 770IR is on the defensive next to Herbst IR until the beginning of the attack .

If possible, the regiment shall be moved forward towards Mokryy before the attack begins. It then joins Herbst IR's attack and recaptures the old main frontline with its left wing, which connects to 5./770IR to the west.

d) Missions for 770IR and 768IR are unchanged. [The regiments hold and defend their frontline positions.]

5.) Reconnaissance:

Combat reconnaissance must continuously gain clarity about the enemy's OOB and strength.

(...)

7.) Artillery support:

a) II./387AR is attached to 543IR.

b) Artillery missions:

1. Until own attack begins, disrupt assembling enemy forces and identified enemy attack preparations; support the division's defensive fighting.

²³ It was previously called "Group Fuchs" (**770IR's** reserve)" in the documents.

2. At the start of the attack, destroy the enemy's defenses by conducting strikes on Gnezdilovo, gully south and eastward of Mokryy, Mokryy itself and height 111.2.
3. Eliminate enemy resistance encountered during the attack. It is particularly important to take out enemy tanks that are out of reach of our AT defense by combined, concentrated artillery fire. It is also particularly important to prevent the enemy from conducting flanking attacks from the east bank of the Don and from area 111.2.

8.) AT defense:

- a) Organization of the whole AT defense is assigned to Major Drechsler, the commander of 654 AT Bn.

The AT assets are to be deployed in such a way that they can repel enemy tank attacks from the north until the start of our own attack. They closely follow the attack once it begins.

- b) AT defense teams of I./AA school 1 are to be positioned in the northeast corner of Olkhovatka and 300 m east of Olkhovatka, with the mission to repel enemy tank attacks coming from the north and the east.

9.) Air support:

The attack of Herbst IR is expected to be supported by attack aircraft. It is possible – depending on the circumstances – that the division's defensive fighting before the start of the attack will also be supported by attack aircraft.

10.) Communication links :

377 Comm Bn maintains radio and long-distance telephone communications with Herbst IR, 769IR, 770IR, 768IR, 377AR as well as telephone cross communications with 543IR and a radio connection with BG Schunck.

- 11.) Division's command post as before.

[Signed] Generalmajor *Erich Baeßler*

17 September 1942

- 00.25 The division commander gives an order to the commander of **769IR** for transmission to the bicycle squadron: **Bicycle Squadron 377** is ordered to establish contact with **II./543IR** [BG Auinger] at dawn.
- 04.05 Report **543IR**: The enemy has tanks and infantry in Bird Grove. Obstlt. Auinger, who is still in the southern part of the grove, has orders to regain possession of the grove. Two officer reconnaissance teams, sent to establish contact [with Auinger], have not yet returned.
- 05.30 Adjutant **770IR** reports that the enemy has been attacking since 04.30, but was repelled by fire of own infantry and artillery. The enemy took heavy, bloody losses.
- 06.20 Obstlt. Herbst reports that 12–14 tanks are driving southwards from Mokryy.
- 07.30 **377AR** conducted a fire raid on Mokryy, causing the tanks to turn and change course. Another artillery fire raid into the gully north of Mokryy has disrupted an assembly of enemy infantry.
- 07.40 Bird Grove is in our possession again. **BG Auinger** had withdrawn to the west, because 16 enemy tanks had entered the grove. A new enemy attack is expected. Loss of AT guns: 2x Pak 38 and 2x Pak 97/38 were crushed by enemy tanks.
- III./168IR** (Herbst IR) has orders to assemble in the grove and to attack Gnezdilovo at 15.00. **543IR** [BG Auinger] has orders to join the attack and recapture Gnezdilovo.
- 08:50 **III./168IR** is ordered to advance through the grove and drive out the rest of the Russians.
Flak combat team of **AA school 1** changes firing positions and moves to the southeast and southwest corner of the grove to take over the AT defense there.
- 09.00 Ia orders **543IR** to prevent an infiltration of enemy forces between Bird Grove and Gnezdilovo.
- 11.30 The enemy attacks Olkhovatka from the north again.

11.30 Our 1st objective will be Gnezdilovo.

III./168IR will enter the village north of the road and shall use the long gully north of Gnezdilovo for this approach. **BG Auinger** has orders to advance on the southern edge [south of the road] to reach Gnezdilovo and then turn east.

12.00 **III./168IR** clears Bird Grove of remaining enemy forces. But 8 tanks stand in front of the grove and fire round after round into it.

12.15 Flak combat team of **AA school 1** is positioned with one gun at the southwest corner of Bird Grove, the other gun is positioned at the protruding corner of Bird Grove.

12.55 **III./168IR** is severely weakened.

14.45 Low altitude aircraft attack on **9./768IR**. Bombs are also dropped on Sklyaevo 5th and 4th.

15.00 Attack. [This entry means the start of reinforced **Herbst IR's** attack].

III./168IR suffers very high losses from heavy enemy artillery fire. The battalions **II./539IR** (Hauptmann Flohr) and **III./188IR** (Major Mann) initially had some success advancing, but were eventually halted by heavy fire.

III./168IR is pinned down by frontal heavy tank fire from the southern edge of Gnezdilovo.

The attack of **II./539IR** picked back up later, but the attack of **III./188IR** is still halted. Our own artillery lays heavy fire on the heights east and west of Mokryy.

15.20 The artillery assigned to **543IR** fires with 2 battalions on enemy tank groups at Gnezdilovo and on infantry on the other side of the Don.

II./539IR reaches the southern edge of the gully.

17.00 Obstlt. Herbst crossed point 165 towards the north. **III./188IR** advanced only about 300 meters. There is no point in continuing the attack. The division commander gives the order to stop the attack and go over to the defensive.
In essence, at least the blocking position has been reached again.

Countering the enemy artillery is impossible as it is very far away. Strength of the enemy artillery is estimated at 8–12 batteries. **BG Schunck, III./168IR**, and **769IR** suffered heavy losses.

17.20 An enemy attack from the direction of Mokryy on **III./188IR** gets beaten back by conducting a hasty counterattack.

18.20 **II./539IR** has reached its attack objective despite heavy incoming enemy fire on both flanks, but sustained heavy casualties and is low on ammunition.

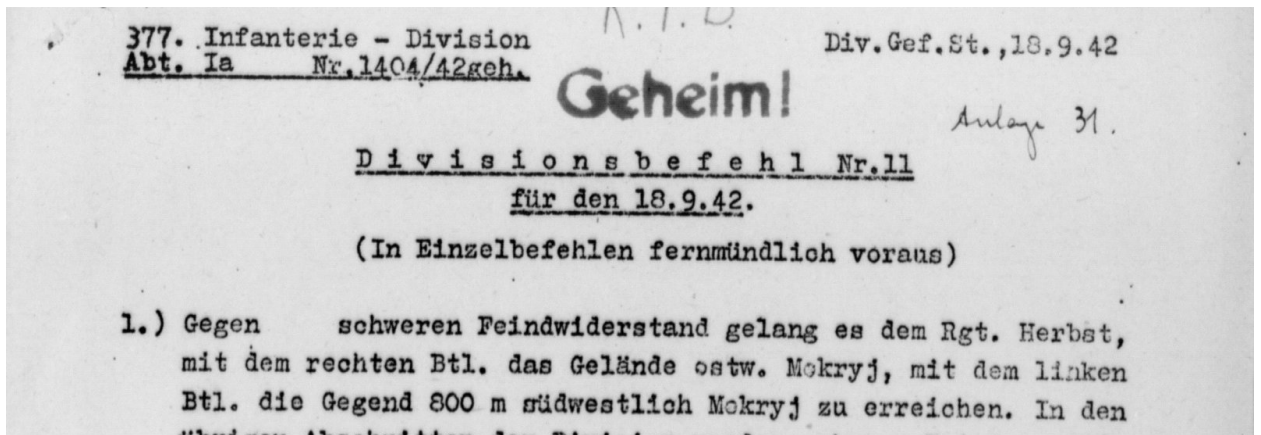
The battalion's reserve is already deployed to extend the line on the right wing. On the battalion's left wing, the enemy is attacking undeterred by the nightfall along the north-south gully of Mokryy. The left wing is under extreme threat.

[**II./539IR** from Herbst IR will withdraw southwards later and then organize for defense next to Herbst IR's **III./188IR**, as shown on the situation map below.]



Debrief

Division Order



377. Infantry - Division
Sec. Ia No. 1404/42s

Div. Command Post, 18.9.42

Division Order No. 11 for 18.9.42

1.) Against heavy enemy resistance, Herbst IR reached the area eastwards of Mokryj with the right battalion and the area 800 m southwest of Mokryj with the left battalion on 17.9. In the remaining two sectors of the division [768IR and 770IR] enemy attacks were repulsed with severe, bloody losses for the enemy. Numerous tanks were destroyed.

It is expected that the enemy continues his futile attempts to force a breakthrough to the south.

2.) 377ID is on the defensive along the Eastern Front holding the line reached on the evening of 17.9. (...)

Even the last man must be thoroughly imbued with the idea that this line has to be held at all costs to prevent a further Russian advance or a breakthrough to the south. (...)

79 Cnstr Bn continues the important mission of constructing bunkers in Olkhovatka and expanding the blocking position at Olkhovatka. (...)

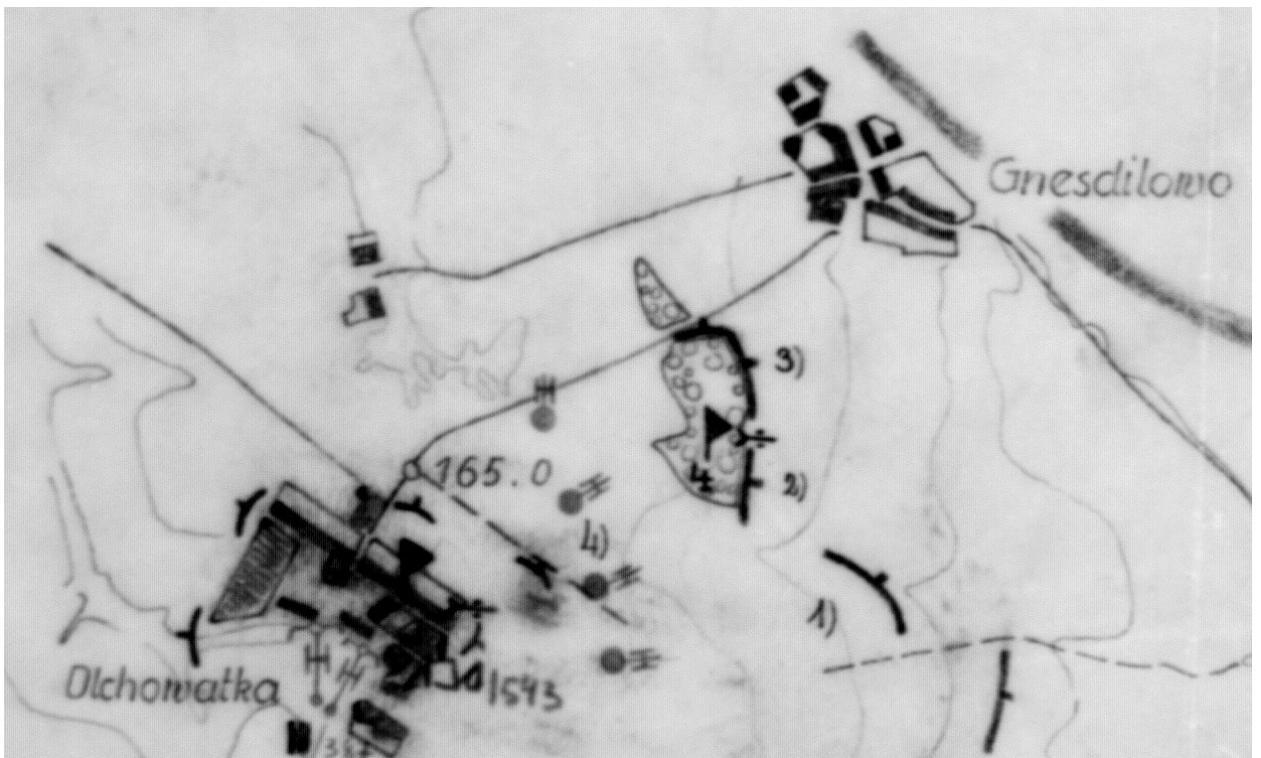
[Signed] Generalmajor *Erich Baeßler*

Situation Maps

377ID's situation map for the morning of 18.9.42:



The corresponding regimental situation map from **543IR (387ID)** showing the situation at Bird Grove:



1) and 2) is **BG Auinger**, 3) is **III./168IR** from **Herbst IR**, 4) is **1./AA school 1** with the firing positions of the 8.8cm guns shown on the map.

The German Army High Command situation map, showing the general situation on the Eastern Front in the evening of 17.9.42:



The northern part of the "frontline knee" in the Olkhovotka area is dented as a result of the battles on September 15–17:



4.) Critical equipment shortages: 199 M.G. (light)
 56 M.G. (heavy)
 45 light mortars
 25 heavy mortars
 8 3.7cm Pak
 9 Pak 97/38
 1 Pak 40

821 horses

5.) Level of mobility: Limited mobility due to horse and fuel shortage.

6.) Evaluation of the combat effectiveness: Only in parts and to a limited extent still suited for defense. The division – in addition to commander and other personnel replacement – is in urgent need of prompt reorganization to raise the combat effectiveness and to consolidate and partially rebuild the formations.

377.Inf.Div.Ia
 Nr.1411/42s, 19.9.42

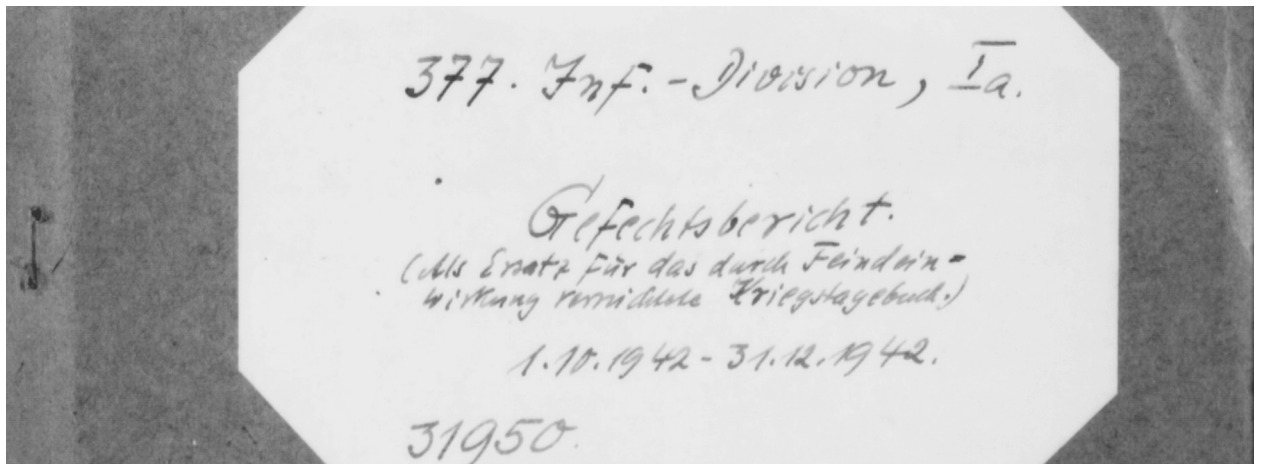
AT guns total losses during 15.9.–21.9.42:

		Nr.	
Total-Ausfälle an Pak			
=====			
in der Zeit v.15.9.-21.9.42			
<u>Pz.Jg.Abt.377</u>	3	Pak	40
	2	"	97/38
	1	"	38
	1	"	3,7
<u>Pz.Jg.Abt.654</u>	3	"	40
	2	"	97/38

After Action Reports

The following pages contain the translated after action reports and debriefings from **377ID**, **769IR** and the **XIIIAC** covering the defensive battles in the Olkhovatka area on September 15–17 and the ensuing time span until mid October 1942.

377th Infantry Division



377th Inf.Div., Ia.

Reference No.: **31 950**

After Action Report of the 377th Infantry Division

(Compiled by the division as a replacement for the war diary destroyed during the fighting retreat from Kursk, on the basis of the remaining incomplete records of the division's units).

The large-scale Russian attack launched on 15.9.42 with the goal of breaking through the German positions along the Don River towards Voronezh had already stalled before the first objective, Olkhovatka.

After the enemy's initial gains of Strongpoint Don (southern part of Verilovka) and the villages Gnezdilovo and Mokryy, as well as the "Bird Grove" (which was a subject of intense fighting and changed hands several times) the main frontline had essentially been stable since 17.9.42. The line initially ran along the Don, then turned northwest 2 km north of Khvoshchevatka and merged with the old frontline northwest of Olkhovatka.

Over the course of these costly, yet successful battles, units of all other divisions of the XIII Army Corps, army troops²⁴ and Flak artillery were deployed one by one in the Olkhovatka battle area and attached to the 377th Infantry Division. The infantry in particular had been severely depleted during this hard, non-stop fighting. The remnants of 769IR, which had been deployed in the focus area of the fighting at the beginning of the Russian attack, had a combat strength of 6 officers, 28 NCOs and 199 men on 1.10.42. These remnants were combined into one single battlegroup,

²⁴ The term "army troop" ("Heerestruppe") was used for units which did not belong to a regular divisional formation. Army troops were usually subordinated to a higher command (army or army corps) and then temporarily attached to divisions as needed. Army troops attached to **377ID** during September 15–17 were, for example, **654 AT Bn** and **II./67AR**.

named "Battlegroup Wehle". The infantry battalions, which had been pulled out of quieter parts of the division's and corps sector to be deployed at Olkhovatka, such as II./768IR, III./188IR and II./539IR, were similarly depleted from these hard defensive battles and counterattacks.

By early October, the infantry battalions shown in **Attachment 1** were under the command of the division. Deployed artillery: 24 howitzer and gun batteries, as well as 2 rocket launcher batteries; among them II./67AR, I./108AR, Arty. Bn. 709, Heavy Arty. Bn. 735.

On 1.10.42, combat activity was limited to enemy attacks southeast of Olkhovatka. A local break-in of the enemy was blocked.

On 2.10.42, during the morning, attacks of two Russian battalions in the sector of 770IR (south of Sklyaevo 2nd) collapsed in artillery and infantry fire in front of the main line. At noon on 2.10., after heavy fire preparation, the enemy launched an attack on Olkhovatka again. With the support of about 30 tanks and strong ground-attack aircraft formations he attacked from the east and north. After local penetrations, the attack stalled. Tanks that had penetrated through were knocked out by gun fire. At 17.00, the enemy made another attempt to force a breakthrough to Olkhovatka, supported by ground-attack aircraft and MLRS. Individual enemy tanks managed to get as far as Olkhovatka, but the enemy infantry got stuck behind in the combined fire of our weapons. Some of the tanks that had penetrated through to Olkhovatka were destroyed in close combat; the rest retreated across the main frontline after dusk. In addition to high personnel losses, the enemy lost at least 13 tanks that day. With this, the enemy's last major breakthrough attempt had failed.

In the following period, the enemy withdrew to his initial positions in the sectors of 770IR and 768IR, having succeeded in taking away only a few strongpoints in the course of the fighting since mid-September. In the rest of the division's sector, attacks of only local significance decreased significantly in force. Repeatedly, our own artillery was successful in pre-emptively disrupting the enemy in his assembly areas.

Redeployment of units attached to the division over the course of the defensive battles (army troops and other units not belonging to the division) began on 11.10.42 due to a decreased combat activity.

At this point, combat activity was limited to scouting and shock troop operations; apart from that, all forces were used for strengthening and fortifying the new main frontline.

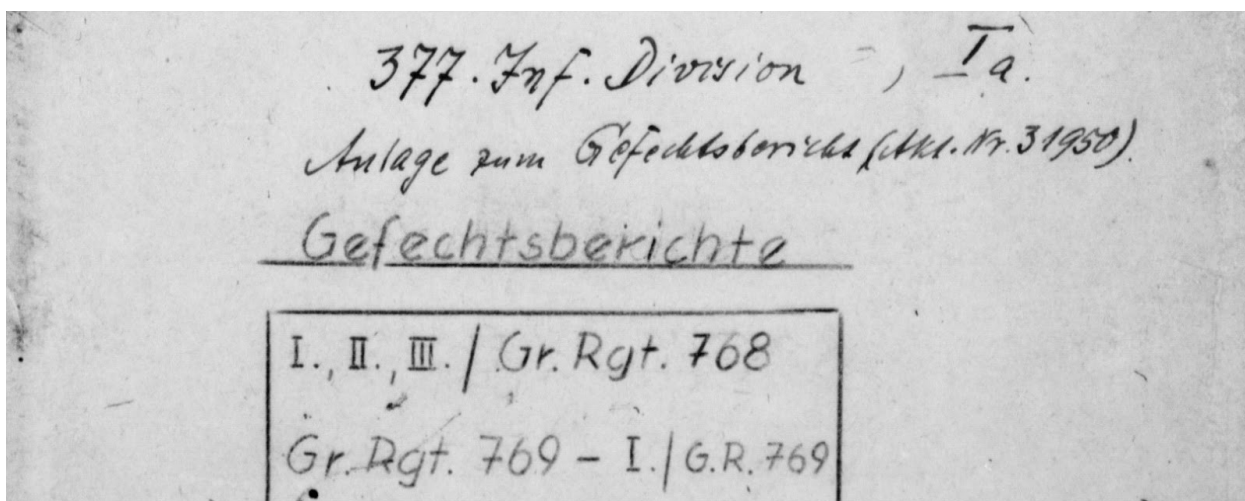
In order to eliminate an indentation of the frontline, formed over the course of the defensive battles northwest of Olkhovatka, the remnants of 769IR (Battlegroup Wehle) carried out a limited objective attack on 14.10.42 on the orders of the XIII Army Corps. Despite heavy losses, the battle group took 6 enemy strongpoints in a swift, energetic attack and thus achieved the ordered objective. Hasty counterattacks by the Russians, supported by strong artillery fire on the newly won frontline, collapsed in the barrage fire of our weapons. 19 killed and 49 wounded in our own ranks against Russian losses of 64 captured (not counting dead and wounded). Among the captured equipment were: 3 AT guns and 6 AT rifles. (...)

Attachment 1:²⁵

Anlage 1 zu K.T.B. 377.J.D.		Kampfstärken Stand: 12.10.42		
Tr.Teil	Führer	Stärke		
I./543	Auinger	3	13	171
II./543	Fuschberger	1	7	159
I./168	Herrmann	3	23	108
II./168	Vosswinkel	7	51	235
III./188	Mann	5	16	77
II./169	Gebühr	3	11	83
II./694	Handroe	2	103	
II./539	Flohr	1	6	31
III./537	Rathmann	3	18	115
I./768	Jacobi	3	52	266
III./768	Kießling	4	49	239
J.R. 769	Wehle	3	16	155
II./770	Schramm	5	31	189
III./770	Hager	7	41	215

²⁵ **Kampfstärken** = Combat strength; **Stand** = Date; **Tr.Teil** = Unit; **Führer** = Name of the commander; **Stärke** = Unit strength (officers, NCOs, men)

Infantry Regiment 769



377th Inf.Div., Ia.

Reference No.: **31 951**

After Action Report of Infantry Regiment 769

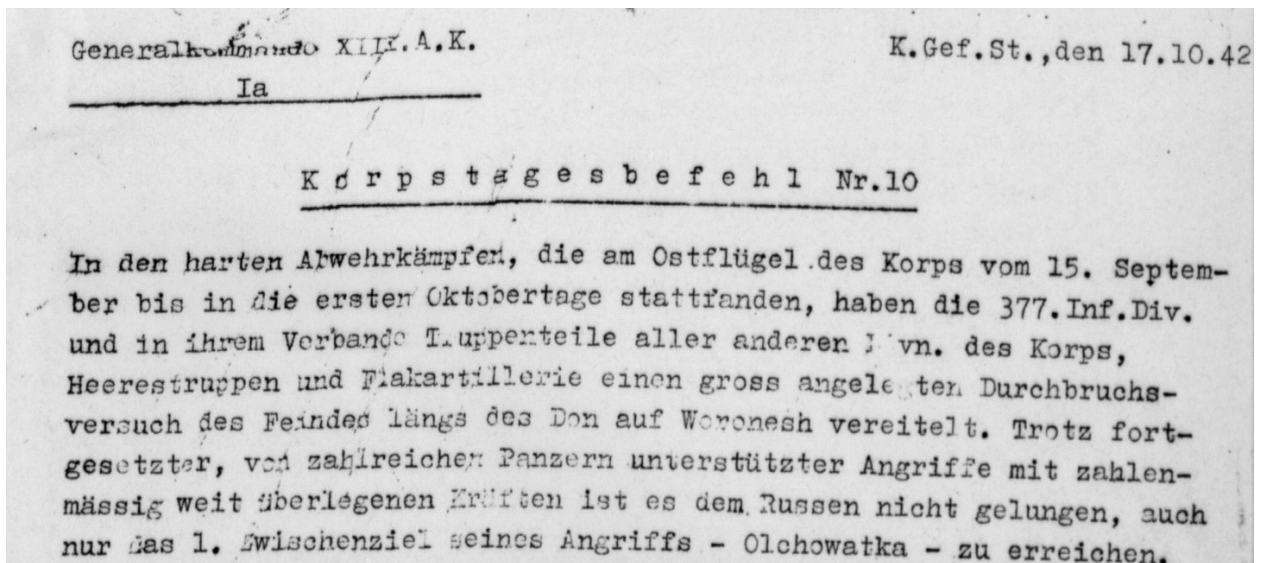
(Compiled by the regiment as a replacement for the war diary destroyed by enemy action during the fighting retreat from Kursk.)

On 1.10.42 the regiment was engaged in hard defensive fighting at Olkhovatka since 14.9.42. All attempts by the Russians to break through the German positions along the Don River towards Voronezh had failed. Despite the deployment of 3 rifle brigades, 3 cavalry regiments, 8 heavy and 29 rifle battalions and 4 tank brigades, the Russians had been unable to take even their first objective, Olkhovatka. After initial loss of ground in the first days of the Russian large-scale attack, the frontline remained stable from 17.9.42 on.

The regiment's combat strength had been reduced to 6 officers, 28 NCOs and 199 men in these costly yet successful battles. These remnants of the regiment were combined into a battlegroup under the command of Major Wehle. Further attached to the regiment on 1.10.42 were:

- II./768IR under the command of Oberleutnant Wienecke
with a strength of 2 officers, 7 NCOs, 47 men.
- III./188IR under the command of Major Mann
with a strength of 5 officers, 16 NCOs, 93 men.
- II./539IR under the command of Major Flohr
with a strength of 5 officers, 14 NCOs, 71 men.

XIII Army Corps



General Command XIII Army Corps
Ia

Corps Command Post, the 17.10.42

Corps Daily Order No. 10

In the hard defensive battles, which took place on the eastern wing of the Corps from September 15 until the first days of October, the 377th Infantry Division and attached units (elements from other divisions of the Corps, army troops and Flak artillery) repelled a large-scale attempt by the enemy to break through along the Don River towards Voronezh. Despite continued attacks with numerically far superior forces and supported by a lot of tanks, the Russians did not succeed in reaching even the 1st intermediate objective of their attack - Olkhovatka. Besides sustaining very heavy personnel casualties, they lost more than 125 tanks.

Then, on 14.10.42, Infantry Regiment 769 of the 377th Infantry Division improved its main frontline by a well-prepared and determined attack, inflicting further personnel and material losses on the enemy, despite being in the focus area of the defensive fighting continuously since September. This once again proves that the German soldier is always superior to the Russian in attack, even after tough defensive battles and great strains.

I express my full appreciation to all units that participated in these battles for their demonstrated bravery and their achievements.

In reverence we remember the brave comrades who remained on the field of honor in these battles. Their heroism shall be our exemplar and obligation for coming battles.

Because of the bravery and steadiness of all the units under the command of the Corps, I am convinced that even in the hard and exhausting winter months to come, any attempt by the enemy to break through our lines will fail just as badly as his attempt at Olkhovatka.

[Signed]

The Commanding General
Erich Straube
General of the Infantry²⁶

²⁶ At the beginning of summer 1941, Straube led the 268th Infantry Division in the eastern campaign and the attack on Central Russia. There he commanded the division until early January 1942, when he resigned his command and was transferred to the Führerreserve. On April 21, 1942, Straube was assigned to lead the General Command of the **XIIIAC** in the central sector of the Eastern Front. On June 1, 1942, he was promoted to "General of the Infantry". As a result, he was now appointed Commanding General of the **XIIIAC**.

References

- 1** 377ID – NARA, Item No.: 377.ID 25928/9, T-315 R-2174, F:404-802
- 2** 377ID – NARA, Item No.: 377.ID 31950, T-315 R-2174, F:967-974
- 3** 377ID – NARA, Item No.: 377.ID 31951, T-315 R-2174, F:975-1012
- 4** 377ID – Kriegstagebuch der 377. Infanterie-Division mit GR 768, 769, 770 und Divisionstruppen, Karl Herdener, 1970.

Red Army

Translated Documents

"A soldier who was under unrelenting artillery and mortar shelling and air attacks for the entire day, would get exhausted and lacked the will to go forward."

Sr. Lt. Kozmin of the 86th Tank Brigade's motor-rifle battalion on the Okhovatka offensive in September 1942.

Gnezdilovo – Olkhovatka
September 15–17, 1942

Red Army

Introduction

In September of 1942 **38A** was assigned the following mission: To draw enemy reserves away from the city of Voronezh with the goal of assisting the offensive of the Voronezh Front (the objective of the front's offensive was to capture the city of Voronezh). The mission was to be carried out by the forces of **38A**'s left flank with the main effort directed towards Olkhovatka. Opposing **38A**'s planned offensive was the sector of **377ID**, where the enemy held carefully prepared defensive positions. **240RD**, **104RBde**, **253RBde**, **86TBde** and **150TBde** were the units initially assigned to the mission by **38A** command.

On 14.9, **1/931RR** of **240RD** attempted to seize an unnamed farmstead²⁷ south of Verilovka. It sustained heavy casualties while fighting through barbed wire entanglements, broke the enemy's first line of resistance (capturing one wood-and-dirt pillbox) and then consolidated their new positions.

On the night of September 14–15, **86TBde** assembled at the southern edge of Fomina-Negachevka. Late in the evening of 14.9 an SMG squad from the reconnaissance platoon attempted to conduct a recon in force against the enemy positions southwest of Verilovka.

150TBde intended to use an approach route following Kaverya creek stream bed. The route crosses over a few gullies and thus poorly suited for tank movement. On 9.9 and 10.9 the reconnaissance platoon of the brigade reconnoitered gullies located south of 111.2. The plan was to send tanks of **150TBde** into the battle after the infantry of **104RBde** seizes gullies near Kaverya creek and farmstead Mokryy and reaches the line: "Northern edge of Sklyaevo 5th – Olkhovatka".

At the start of the offensive **150TBde** had 59 operational tanks (8-KV1, 29-T34, 9-T70, 6-T60, 7-T26), with 3-T34 and 3-T26 undergoing repairs.

September 15, 1942

At 05:40 on 15.9 the artillery of the striking task force (including detachments of **60A** from the east bank of Don and reinforced by fires of the MLRS subgroup) commenced a 55-minute-long artillery preparation. Under

²⁷ The "unnamed farmstead south of Verilovka" is situated between Verilovka and Gnezdilovo in the area of the German "Strongpoint Don", which was the largest German strongpoint in the **377ID** sector at that time.

the cover of this barrage **86TBde** moved into its assigned assembly area on the southern bank of Vereyka River:

- 1) **232TBn** – 1 km to the southeast of Niz. Vereyka,
- 2) **233TBn** – 1 km west of the Don River,
- 3) **86MRBn**²⁸, an AT battery and a separate tank company (less one platoon)²⁹ – 200-300 m behind **233TBn**.

The brigade commander's reserve (a platoon of T34 from **232TBn**, a platoon of T60 from the separate tank company and the tank desant³⁰ company of **86MRBn**) was located west of Gorozhanka. The command post of the brigade's HQ was established in Donskaya Negachevka starting from 06:00 on 15.9.

240RD assigned the following combat missions to its regiments (*842RR*, *931RR*, *836RR*) and a separate consolidation group:

- Combat mission of **842RR** (reinforced by an AT battery and ATR platoon from *217 Sep Destr AT Bn*³¹ and a platoon of *368 Sep Sap Bn*): To break through the front line of the enemy's defense in the direction of "fstd. Mokryy – 165.0 – northern outskirts of Olkhovatka". Initially, the push will be supported by a tank battalion from **86TBde**. After the capture of Olkhovatka, the regiment will be supported by the two tank battalions of **86TBde**. It will then advance on Panskaya Gvozdevka.
- Combat mission of **931RR** (reinforced by an AT battery and ATR platoon from *217 Sep Destr AT Bn* and a platoon of *368 Sep Sap Bn*): To break through the front line of the enemy's defense in the direction of the unnamed farmstead south of Verilovka. The immediate objective is Redkaya³² grove. After gaining the objective, advance on Khvoshchevatka.
- Combat mission of **836RR** (less one Bn and reinforced by *368 Sep Sap Bn* (-)): To advance in the 2nd line deployed in right echelon formation on "Olkhovatka – Panskaya Gvozdevka" with the aim of providing protection for the right flank of the division and repelling counterattacks coming from west/southwest. Next, advance bypassing Khvoshchevatka and capture Panskaya Gvozdevka.

²⁸ Tank Brigade organization included a "Motor Rifle-MG Battalion", which somewhat ironically had a TO&E with fewer machine guns than a "Rifle Battalion" of a Rifle Regiment. It did provision for trucks for troop transport (hence "motor").

²⁹ T-60 light tanks

³⁰ From "descent", aka "tank riders"

³¹ Tank Destroyer unit (organic within division structure)

³² A [small wood](#) between Olkhovatka and Gnezdilovo. It was named "Bird Grove" ("Vogelwaldchen") by the Germans. In Russian "redkaya" means "sparse".

- A separate consolidation group (9th rifle company and two MG platoons of **836RR**, *1/533 Sep Sap Bn*, three platoons of *368 Sep Sap Bn*, a battery and one ATR platoon of *217 Sep Destr AT Bn*) is ordered: "Wait for the leading division elements to capture Olkhovatka and Gnezdilovo, then rapidly redeploy to the Olkhovatka area and organize a strong defensive position facing west/southwest."

A platoon of *368 Sep Sap Bn*, **3/836RR** (less one coy), 3-T34 and 5-T60 remained in the reserve of the division commander.

Early in the morning the two tank battalions of **150TBde** started to move out of their assembly area via the northeastern side of height 111.2. Two T34 tanks were bogged down crossing the Bolshaya Vereyka River on the way to the assembly area. At 06:35 **104RBde** (supported by fires of two guards mortar battalions, *124 HAR HCR*³³ and *611 Destr ATAR*) began the forward advance from the grove near 111.2. Some KV1 tanks were discovered by the enemy and taken under fire. One tank was disabled by the shelling.

842RR and **931RR** of **240RD** commenced the offensive at 06:35 upon the completion of the artillery preparation. The positions of **377ID**'s artillery were suppressed by artillery and airstrikes. The enemy met the advancing troops with small arms fire and didn't open up with artillery or mortars for the first hour of the engagement.

By 07:00 **842RR** (advancing on the right wing of the division) seized the northern slopes of height 165.0 to the north of Olhovatka. This accomplishment led to **86TBde** entering the battle in the zone of **842RR**. **232TBn** route: "Intersection of the dirt paths 1 km west of Verilovka – Redkaya grove (southeast of fstd. Mokryy) – northwestern edge of Khvoshchevatka – Gvozdevka". **836RR** and **233TBn** are following **232TBn** in the second echelon. **86MRBn** (reinforced by an AT battery and a separate tank coy) advanced in the zone of **931RR** on the left flank of the division via: "road split 0.5 km west of the unnamed farmstead south of Verilovka – western edge of Gnezdilovo – Redkaya grove – triangular-shaped grove north of Khvoshchevatka." The AT guns were towed by four T60 tanks. These tanks were attached to the AT battery for the duration of the offensive.

Tanks of **232TBn** breached barbed wire entanglements and assaulted the front line of the enemy defenses. Within an hour (by 08:00), **2** and **3/842RR** captured the enemy's forward trenches with the support of tanks from **232TBn**. Further progress was halted by the enemy in front of fstd. Mokryy and on the northern slopes of height 165.0.

³³ Artillery Reserves of High Command were detached units used as reinforcements for Corps and Divisions. "HAR" stands for "Howitzer Artillery Regiment".

On the left-flank, **1/931RR** breached barbed wire entanglements, pushed into the unnamed farmstead and proceeded to clear up the resistance pockets. When the infantry of **842RR** and **931RR** reached the line "fstd. Mokryy – northern outskirts of Verilovka", tanks of **232TBn** marched past them and joined **232TBn**.

86MRBn (with two rifle companies supported by a company of light tanks and an AT battery) was advancing behind **2/931RR**, the supporting units and motor-rifles infantry moving in a mixed formation. By 09:00 **86MRBn** reached the northern side of an unnamed height to the northeast of fstd. Mokryy despite heavy shelling. The mortar company displaced forward and deployed among the motor-riflemen positions on the southern bank of Vereyka River 600 m to the southwest of mark 98.2. It then opened fire from the new position.

2/931RR supported by tanks of **86TBde** attacked the unnamed farmstead south of Verilovka from the west, thus helping **1/931RR** to gain full control over the farmstead by 10:30. Following the capture, both battalions of **931RR** and the tankers started to advance towards Gnezdilovo.

By 12:00 **232TBn** reached the line: "Northern outskirts of Gnezdilovo – fstd. Mokryy". It was followed by **233TBn** which, by 14:00, reached the northeastern edge of Redkaya grove (1 km west of Gnezdilovo).

The defenses of **377ID** units near Kaverya creek were not suppressed even after receiving a heavy artillery barrage. The infantry of **104RBde** advanced without the support of **150TBde** tanks (as per plan). Departing from the southern edge of the grove at 111.2, **1/104RBde** advanced 200–300 m to the south along Kaverya creek. The brigade's right-flank battalion displayed no discernable progress, and neither did its neighbor to the right, **253RBde**.

Tanks of **150TBde** were committed despite **104RBde**'s failure to capture the gullies between 111.2 and Olkhovatka. At 09:30 the tanks from the 1st tank battalion passed through the gully of Kaverya creek heading in the direction of Olkhovatka. Half an hour later, at 10:00, tanks from the 2nd tank battalion crossed the line of departure too. By 10:30 units of **240RD** reached the unnamed farmstead south of Verilovka and the outskirts of fstd. Mokryy.

At 13:00, after the capture of an unnamed height by **931RR** (1 km west of the unnamed farmstead south of Verilovka), **86MRBn** temporarily passed to the defensive on the captured hill. At 14:30, the T60 tank of the separate tank company carrying the Dpt. Commander of **86MRBn** (Mjr. Lt. Sergei Kozmin) went over a landmine while returning from a reconnaissance mission from the vicinity of fstd. Mokryy. The Dpt. Commander suffered a concussion.

By 15:00 **86TBde** had destroyed up to 150 Germans, 3 AT guns and had captured 2 LMGs and 11 rifles. Own losses: 3-T34 (one in **232TBn** –

burned, one – ran over a landmine, one – hit by artillery fire) and 7 servicemen (2 killed, 5 wounded).

At 15:00 **86TBde** was engaged in fighting near Redkaya grove, where several **377ID** units that had withdrawn from their forward positions earlier had been able to dig in. The grove housed ammunition and food depots, while undergrowth helped with camouflage and defense for the Germans. **232TBn** paused the offensive on the grove's northern edge after running into a minefield north of the grove, receiving heavy artillery fire from the southern outskirts of fstd. Mokryy and AT fire from the northeastern edge of the grove. To **232TBn**'s left **233TBn** attacked towards Gnezdilovo.

842RR reaching fstd. Mokryy facilitated the further advance of **104RBde**. The brigade subsequently reached the northern side of the gully 1 km to the northwest of Olkhovatka at 14:30.

86MRBn (supported by tanks of the separate tank company and an AT battery) breached barbed wire entanglements and destroyed remaining enemy DFPs³⁴ in the unnamed farmstead south of Verilovka. It then reached the line "northern edge of the farmstead – crossroads 800 m west from the farmstead" by 17:00. **86MRBn** passed to the defensive after taking up positions in the unnamed farmstead facing southwest. It supported the advance of **931RR** and tanks of **86TBde** with mortar and MG fire concentrated on Gnezdilovo.

At 17:30 **931RR** supported by the tanks of **232TBn** captured Gnezdilovo. Next, the tanks navigated a minefield and attacked towards Redkaya grove. **931RR** followed the tanks to the grove and seized the grove's northern edge.

836RR was then committed into action from the second echelon in the zone of **842RR**. **836RR** advanced within 500 m of Olkhovatka from the north. At this point **240RD** consolidated its positions on the line: "500 m north of Olkhovatka – northern edge of Redkaya grove – Gnezdilovo".

Tanks of **150TBde** reached Olkhovatka via a gully, while the accompanying infantry of **104RBde** fell behind. **104RBde** managed to reach the southern edge of the gully 1 km to the north of Olkhovatka as late as 19:00. The main forces of **836RR** took cover 300–400 m north of Olkhovatka. A small infantry group (40–50 men) pushed into the village assisted by the tanks of **150TBde**, but could not hold on.

The separate light tanks company and the AT battery of **86TBde** acting in support of the motor-infantry of **86MRBn** assisted in destroying enemy DFPs on the northeastern edge of Redkaya grove and then fell back to the western outskirts of Gnezdilovo by 23:00.

At 22:00 **1/842RR** (committed from the second echelon) took full control of fstd. Mokryy, ending **842RR**'s day-long battle for the objective.

³⁴ Defensive fighting position

At 23:00 **2/150TBde** left 4-T34 and 2-T60 in the gully in front of Olkhovatka to consolidate captured positions, while the remaining 8 tanks (5-KV1, 1-T34, 2-T60) moved back to the grove at 111.2.

As a result of the day's action on 15.9, at 23:00, **86TBde** consolidated its positions at the line:

- 1) **232TBn** – 500 m east to Redkaya grove,
- 2) **233TBn** – northern edge of Redkaya grove,
- 3) **86MRBn** – unnamed farmstead south of Verilovka,
- 4) AT battery and sep. tank company – western outskirts of Gnezdilovo.

240RD advanced as far as 3 km. It captured 27 prisoners from **769IR** (of **377ID**), 2 AT guns, 10 mortars, 18 MG's, 6 SMG's, 30 rifles, 6 radios, 5 phones, 5 km of phone cable, goods and food depots, 5000 rounds of small arms ammunition, 300 mortar bombs. **240RD** losses totaled 767 dead and wounded. Out of three regiments **842RR** of **240RD** suffered the worst losses (in the battle for fstd. Mokryy) – 558 men.

Between 15:00 and 23:00 **86TBde** destroyed 4 AT guns, 2 mortars and captured 3 MG's, 15 rifles and 5 boxes of small arms ammo. Own losses: 2-T34 – burned out, 2-T34 and 1-T60 – mines (both T34's were recovered), 10 servicemen (2 killed, 8 wounded). Four tanks were written off as a total loss: 3-T34 and 1-T60.

150TBde had 6-T34 and 1-T70 put out of action. Of these, 3-T34 were hit by enemy fire, 2-T34 bogged down crossing a river, 1-T34 and 1-T70 broke down. Additionally, 2-KV1 and 1-T34 burned out and were left on enemy territory.

Exact casualties of **377ID** were unknown at the moment, yet prisoners from **769IR** and **387 Eng Bn** (captured by **931RR**) stated that after the day's fighting over the unnamed farmstead south of Verilovka, Gnezdilovo and Redkaya grove, these German units were left with as little as 7-15 men per company.

During the night of September 15–16, **931RR** made an unsuccessful attempt to gain Redkaya grove. Under the cover of darkness and fog the Germans brought forward an AT gun and opened fire on tanks of **233TBn** (the tanks were 100 m away from the grove). The crew of starshina Mikhail Zhilyaev's T34 returned fire and destroyed the gun.

150TBde was attached to **240RD** to exploit favorable conditions achieved by the end of 15.9 in the zone of **240RD**. **150TBde** had 50 operational tanks left at the time (7-KV1, 23-T34, 7-T70, 6-T60, 7-T26).

September 16, 1942

240RD resumed its offensive towards Redkaya grove and Olkhovatka at 07:00 on 16.9 after 30 minutes of artillery preparation. **836RR** and tanks of **150TBde** had Olkhovatka as the objective, **931RR** and tanks of **86TBde** – Redkaya grove. The units advanced at a very slow pace due to the failure of the artillery preparation to suppress enemy defenses (in contrast to the successful suppression for the previous day's offensive). At 10:00 **150TBde** was committed in the zone of **836RR**. By 12:00 the 1st tank battalion had pushed within 150 m of Olkhovatka from the north, the 2nd tank battalion had reached the northwestern edge of Olkhovatka, yet the accompanying infantry had fallen behind back at an unnamed height northwest of the village.

Tanks of **232TBn** (on the right) and **233TBn** (on the left) reached the western edge of Redkaya grove, destroying enemy DFPs on the grove's western edge and AT guns on ht. 165.0. Further advance of **232TBn** towards the grove's southwest edge was prevented by enemy AT fire from eastern Olkhovatka and ht. 165.0.

At the same time **86MRBn**, the separate tank company and AT guns advanced to the western boundary of Gnezdilovo. Its further progress towards Redkaya grove was halted by enemy fire originating at the grove's northern edge.

By 15:00 tanks of **150TBde** had spent all their ammunition and were forced to fall back in order to resupply ammunition and fuel. **240RD** reconnaissance reported enemy reinforcements brought in from the direction of Khvoshchevatka.

During the assault on Redkaya grove (until 15:00) **86TBde** eliminated 50 German soldiers, 4 AT guns, 3 wood-and-dirt pillboxes, took 2 captives and captured 1 HMG and 5 rifles. Own losses: 5 men (1 killed, 4 wounded) and 4-T34 (3-T34 – burned out, 1-T34 – hit by enemy fire, resulting in a broken turret rotation mechanism).

At 16:00 **86MRBn** established communications with the brigade's tank battalions and dug in at the southwestern edge of Gnezdilovo where it continued to engage the enemy with small arms fire.

At 19:00 the 1st and 2nd rifle companies of **86MRBn**, mounted on tanks of **232TBn** and **233TBn**, assaulted the eastern edge of Redkaya grove, drove out the defending Germans and then pushed all the way to the western edge and gained the entire territory of the grove. **240RD** infantry did not support this attack.

The assault on the grove cost **86TBde** 3-T34 (1 – burned out, 1 – mechanical breakdown, 1 – drowned in Vereyka River) and 10 men (1 killed, 9 wounded). The brigade captured 6 rifles as trophies.

Meanwhile, tanks of **150TBde** and infantry of **836RR** had pushed into Olkhovatka from the north. Infantry groups penetrated further into the village and engaged defenders among the village streets, but were cut off from the main forces by a rocket barrage and then counterattacked by the enemy. The regiment's commander and chief of staff were killed. **3/836RR**, held in the divisional reserve until then, was committed to reinforce the regiment, but was blocked from reaching Olkhovatka by artillery fire.

In the evening German forces renewed the counterattack from Olkhovatka with the aim of seizing the hills to the north, but were stopped 250 m north of the village by the fire of 150TBde tanks. The Germans passed to the defensive on the ground then held.

As of 21:00, **150TBde** had 44 operational tanks: 4-KV1, 18-T34, 8-T70, 7-T60, 7-T26. Personnel losses: 23 casualties (5 killed, 4 missing, 14 wounded). Tank losses: 3-KV1, 5-T34. One T34 and one KV1 burned out, the rest were hit by enemy fire.

As of 24:00, **86TBde** completed its objective of seizing Redkaya grove. Both tank battalions of **86TBde** reached the southern and southwestern edges, while the separate tank company and the AT guns took up positions 500 m east of the grove. There were 26 operational tanks left (11-T34, 15-T60). Summary of losses for the day: 5-T34 (4 burned out, 1 hit by enemy fire) and 13 servicemen (2 killed, 11 wounded). 3-T34 were written off as a total loss.

The T34 of deputy company commander **233TBn** Mjr. Lt. Mikhail Taranenko was penetrated 4 times (engine and crew compartment) by HEAT rounds. The tank caught fire and was abandoned. After bailing from the burning tank, its radio operator Mjr.Sgt. Verhoglyad cut approximately 500 m of cable from the German phone line connecting Redkaya grove with Olkhovatka.

After ceding most of Redkaya grove (and losing all available AT weapons in the process), the units of **377ID** consolidated their position on the southern edge of the grove. **931RR** was not able to exploit the success of **86TBde**. The infantry had only seized the northern part of the grove by the evening of 16.9 and failed to reach the tankers' positions.

September 17, 1942

At 06:00 on 17.9 **86MRBn** was attacked from three directions. The captives taken the next day stated that **79 Constr Bn** and **387 Eng Bn** were committed to this counterattack. The mortar company of **86TBde** supported motor-rifles by fire from its positions behind a gully north of Gnezdilovo and inflicted up to 100 enemy casualties.

At 6:00 both tank battalions of **150TBde** were ordered to redeploy from the right flank of **240RD** to its left flank with the aim of supporting an attack towards Olkhovatka from the east.

Orders to **240RD**, **86TBde**, **150TBde**, **66 Gds MtrR**: "Keep the possession of currently held ground, gain ht. 155.8 and Olkhovatka by attacking from east-southeast. Next, consolidate your positions and maintain readiness to continue the offensive."

86MRBn successfully repulsed all counterattacks, and at 10:00 two of its rifle companies along with the tank desant company took up outpost positions at the eastern edge of Redkaya to provide security for the tanks of **232TBn** and **233TBn**.

At 12:00 **150MRBn** deployed to a gully southwest of Verilovka with the mission to plug a gap between the battalions of **931RR**.

The fight over Redkaya grove lasted through 12:00. At that time **86TBde** and **931RR** started to retreat under enemy influence and were out of the grove by 12:30. The enemy forces taking over Redkaya grove were up to two infantry battalions strong with 9 AT guns.

At 13:00 **150TBde** gathered in the assembly area of Gnezdilovo and a gully east of Verilovka. The brigade had 38 operational tanks 3-KV1, 17-T34, 6-T70, 5-T60, 7-T26 at that time. Later in the day **1/150TBde**, **86TBde** and **240RD** counterattacked towards Redkaya.

240RD committed **836RR** (positioned at the northwest edge of the grove), while **931RR** reached the line "eastern slope ht. 165.0 – southern edge of Redkaya grove" and then encircled the enemy in the grove with the support of **86TBde**. The battle for the grove was raging through the evening of 17.9 without either side gaining critical advantage. According to the reconnaissance, the enemy was bringing reinforcements throughout the day and had up to two infantry regiments assembled in the vicinity of Olkhovatka.

232TBn, motor-rifles, AT guns and the separate tank company fought an intense battle for the southeastern edge of Redkaya and the southern side of ht. 165.0 that lasted into the evening. After destroying AT guns and enemy infantry on ht. 165.0 that attempted to counterattack, the tanks of **232TBn** reached the southeastern edge of the grove by 17:00. From there the tanks opened fire on enemy DFPs located on the southeastern outskirts of Olkhovatka. **86MRBn**, AT guns and the separate tank company assumed a defensive position 300 m east of the grove. **233TBn** spent the day firing at enemy DFPs located on the northern slopes of ht. 165.0 and near Olkhovatka from stationary positions at the northwestern edge of Redkaya.

In the afternoon **377ID** attempted another counter offensive towards Gnezdilovo and fstd. Mokryy with the forces of **769IR** and composite **Herbst IR**³⁵. The advance was stopped by combined fire of tanks, artillery and heavy infantry weapons.

³⁵ III./188IR (from 68ID), II./539IR (from 385ID), III./168IR (from 82ID), BG Schunck.

For the entire day 17.9: **86TBde** destroyed 8 AT guns, 3 MG firing nests and up to a company of enemy personnel. Own losses: 3-T60 damaged and 50 men (8 killed, 5 missing, 37 wounded). After the fact real losses were established: 6 tanks (3-T34, 3-T60) hit by enemy fire, with 2 out of 6 repaired on the battlefield.

150TBde lost 8 tanks: 3-T34, 5-T60 (3-T60 permanently, 2-T60 due to mechanical issues, 3-T34 hit by enemy fire). 1-T34 was abandoned on the battlefield.

Debrief

Seesaw fighting over the possession of Redkaya grove and the heights near Olkhovatka lasted through September. On 22.9 another unsuccessful Olkhovatka offensive took place. On 23.9, at 17:00, the enemy counterattacked using 10 assault guns from *201 StuG Bn*. The attack was beaten back.

As of 23.9, **86TBde** had 13 operational tanks (5-T34, 8-T60). The brigade was transferred to the **240RD** reserve by the order of **68A** on the evening of 23.9. It withdrew to Niz. Vereyka village, where it was to be refitted in preparation for a new offensive.

As of the morning of 23.9, **150TBde** had 12 operational tanks: 3-T34, 3-T70, 1-T60, 5-T26. Another 20 tanks were undergoing repairs, 6 tanks were listed as knocked out by enemy fire. Permanent losses amounted to 22 tanks: 3-KV1, 14-T34, 2-T70, 3-T60.

When another failed attempt to seize Olkhovatka incurred serious losses, **150TBde** was withdrawn to the 2nd echelon during the night of 23–24.9. It relocated to the south-west environs of Verilovka and southern environs of Fomina-Negachevka. **150MRBn**, a company of T26 and an ATR company remained in the defensive positions between Redkaya grove and fstd. Mokryy.

References

- 1 Combat Log 240RD - TSAMO, F:1521/1, 15, P:71-76
- 2 Combat Log 150TBde - TSAMO, F: 3217/1, 19, P:41-44
- 3 Combat Log 86TBde - TSAMO, F: 3304/1, 17, P:22-33
- 4 Combat Log 38A - TSAMO, F: 445/9005, 40, P:29-39
- 5 Combat Log 842RR - TSAMO, F: 7492/70850, 1, P:2-5
- 6 Combat Log 931RR - TSAMO, F: 7582/70938, 8, P:48-52

38th Army

Translated Documents

38th Army – After Action Report³⁶

*Covering the period from
September 15 through October 3, 1942³⁷*

1. Disposition at the Operation's Start

- 1.1. By September 15 the enemy was holding the defensive line: "Kozinka – Ivanovka – woods to the north of Ilyinovka – ht. 214.6 – ht. 213.8, woods to the north of Lebyazhye – Malaya Vereyka – Churikovo – Rubtsovo – heights northeast of Sklyaevo 4th and north of Sklyaevo 5th – Mokryy – fstd. south of Verilovka".

The enemy was defending with four infantry divisions in the first echelon and 45–50 tanks. His operational reserve was presumed to be one infantry division deployed in the area of Zemlyansk, Somovo.

All enemy divisions took part in earlier fighting over the same line against the troops of 5th Tank Army, a task force of Bryansk Front and later against 38A (which was organized from the task force). 38A was transferred under Voronezh Front control on September 1.

- 1.2. On 15.9.42 38A was holding the line described in 1.1 in visual contact with the enemy. The Army consisted of:

8CC, 167, 237, 240 and 340RD, 104, 248, 250, 253RBde, 86, 96, 150TBde, 124HAR HC, 1112AR HC, 611, 1241 and 1243 Dest ATAR, 66 Gds MtrR, 1288 AAR³⁸, 533 Sep Sap Bn.

7 Dest Bde, 18TC (with 110 and 181TBde), 161RD, 6 and 85 Gds MtrR were transferred under the Army's control as the operation unfolded.

- 1.3. Directive No. 00350, issued by the Voronezh Front commander on 2.9.1942, ordered the preparations for 38A's offensive. It provided the goals, the direction of main and secondary efforts and listed the units expected to take part in the offensive.

³⁶ CAMD RF, Fond: 203, Series: 2843, File: 81 (Document begins on page 1).

³⁷ Information pertaining to events on and after September 18, 1942, is excluded by the editor.

³⁸ Anti-aircraft regiment

2. The Goal of 38A's Offensive and the Missions of its Participants

2.1. According to directive No. 00350, issued by the Voronezh Front commander on 02.09.42, 60A's and 40A's primary mission is to eliminate the concentration of enemy forces around Voronezh, seize the city of Voronezh and establish a bridgehead on the Don's west bank at the line: "Razdolye – Endovische – Star. Selo – Bogdanovka – Rudkino". 38A is ordered to use a portion of its forces to strike south along the Don's west bank. To do its part in defeating the concentration of enemy forces around Voronezh, 38A must destroy the enemy at the juncture with 60A's sector and advance to the line: "Churikovo – 195.8 – Suharevka – r. Treshevka – Razdolye".

2.2. The third section of directive No. 00350 assigned the following mission to 38A:

- a. Strengthen the Army's hold on the line: "Kozinka – Ozerki – Ivanovka – Bol. Vereyka".
- b. Prepare and execute the offensive with 167 and 240RD, 104, 229, 250 and 253RBde, 150 and 86TBde reinforced by the entire army artillery of HCR and one regiment of rocket artillery. The main attack (with one RD, four RBde, two TBde) is to be launched from the line: "Sklyaevo 1st – Verilovka" towards Repnoe; the secondary attack (with 167RD) – "Kaverya – 189.0". It is assigned a mission to eliminate units of 377ID and 387ID and to assist 60A and 40A in their effort to defeat the concentration of enemy forces in the Voronezh area. Day one objective: "Churikovo – Kaverya – Sklyaevo 4th – Lipovka – Repnoe – Panskaya Gvozdevka". End of day three objective: "Churikovo – ht. 195.8 – Suharevka – r. Treshevka – Razdolye". Consolidate captured positions at each objective.

Preparations for the offensive are expected to be completed by the end of 09.09.42. If successful, the operation will reposition the left wing of 38A between Bol. Vereyka and Panskaya Gvozdevka to face s-w and extend the defensive front by 15km. This will free up a significant part of 60A for operations west of Voronezh.

Maximum depth of the operation is 20km, minimum – 2km. It is planned to be carried out over the course of three days.

2.3. The enemy continued to relentlessly build up and improve the defensive works during the fighting in July/August. His defensive position is now heavily fortified. Units in this wide sector had been involved in defensive operations for over 3 months.

These circumstances, along with the lack of tactical and operational reserves in the enemy rear echelon signified the lack of intention to attack in the 38A sector as well as the willingness to use his entire force resisting our attempts to disrupt his defensive system. This system shielded his concentration of forces in the Voronezh area from the north and was based on the captured Voronezh fortification belt.

The significance given by the enemy to the sector facing 38A implies a role bigger than mere flank security for his concentration of forces near Voronezh. Enemy actions in prior engagements in the sector, his orders and communications to soldiers and officers – all point to the particular importance of this sector. And if this position were to be lost and the units manning it defeated, operations in the south may have gone differently.

3. Enemy Force Composition and Location

3.1. Enemy Positions

From the moment the enemy established foothold in the Voronezh area, he set up his northernmost positions and strongpoints at the line: "heights 202.9 – 229.4 – 236.1 – Ozerki – Ivanovka – woods to the east of 214.6 – 213.8 – woods to the north of Lebyazhye – Mal. Vereyka – Bol. Vereyka – woods to the north of Niz. Vereyka – Verilovka", taking advantage of the captured fortification belt. This created a defense between 7 and 12 km deep. The main resistance line is going through "Nikolskoe – Bolynovka – Prodanoe – Golosnovka – Fedorovka – Vysochnino – Lebyazhye – Kaverya – hts. north of Sklyaevo 4th and 5th – gully south of 111.2 – fst. south of Verilovka". After losing Bol. Vereyka, Sklyaevo 1st, 2nd and 3rd, woods at 111.2, Niz. Vereyka and Verilovka in August fighting, the enemy concentrated on fortifying the following areas: Sklyaevo 4th, Sivirtsevo-Kaverya, Lipovka, Olkhovatka, grove s-w of Gnedilovo, grove north of Khvoshchevatka, Repnoe, 170.8.

In all of these locations the enemy created a series of strongpoints protected by minefields and barbed wire entanglements with field fortifications placed in between. The first line of resistance was made up of a series of strongpoints with garrisons ranging from a reinforced company up to a battalion or stronger. These strongpoints incorporated regimental guns and AT cannons, mortars, large numbers of anti personnel and anti tank landmines, MG and artillery emplacements and dug-in tanks. Stone buildings in settlements were adapted to serve as DFPs for guns, machine guns and mortar batteries. Strongpoints had outpost trenches manned³⁹ by

³⁹ Outpost trenches were often unmanned or not present (especially in the right sector of 377ID at Olkhovatka) because the units were undermanned in September 1942.

submachine gunners⁴⁰ and a network of infantry trenches shielded by barbed wire entanglements 2–3 picket rows deep (additional entanglements were placed behind) as well as minefields of varying sizes. A well-developed communication trenches system served as a conduit for personnel and equipment replenishment. A field of fire was developed with well-organized maneuvering of weapons in mind and incorporated the advantage of mutually supportive flanking fire provided by neighboring strongpoints. Large gaps between the strongpoints (500–700 m) were left unoccupied, but had blocking obstacles constructed (barbed wire, minefields). These areas were largely flat and open to machine gun enfilading fire. All of those measures turned any attempt to use the gaps to bypass strongpoints into a serious challenge.

Fortifications of the Olkhovatka strongpoint system⁴¹ (includes ht. 165.0, the settlement itself, the western side of an unnamed ht. southeast of Olkhovatka ("Lysaya") and the gullies south of Olkhovatka) are outstanding in that regard. The straight line shape of the settlement's n-e boundary turned out to be an advantage. Stone buildings along the street were turned into DFPs for machine guns, mortars and cannons. Buildings were connected by trenches. More trenches were dug in vegetable gardens behind houses with a field of view covering the hillside facing the settlement in case the positions on ht. 165.0 were taken. Aerial photographs showed the southeastern boundary of the Olkhovatka strongpoint being weaker and the southern settlement corner being weaker yet.

The gap between Lysaya and 170.8 didn't contain many fortifications, but was in the field of MG, mortar and artillery fire from the southern side of Lysaya, the northern side of 170.8, the gullies south of Olkhovatka, the gullies north of Repnoe, and the woods north of Khvoshchevatka.

Troops of the second echelon were deployed 2–4 km to the rear in case the strongpoints were encircled. They were supposed to provide relief by striking at the rear and side of the blockading forces. If the encirclement was unlikely and the strongpoint garrison suffered heavy losses, the second echelon would reinforce the garrison by deploying all or part of its forces with the garrison. As of 15.9 the reconnaissance identified the following hardened strongpoints in the army's attack zone:

- a. ht. 229.4, Nikolskoe
- b. ht. 236.1, Lobanovka, gardens to the west
- c. Ivanovka, Golosnovka (with buildings modified into DFPs on eastern and western edges and inside the settlement)

⁴⁰ Soviet reports often refer to "submachine gunners", whereas in actuality a regular infantry detachment with machine gun(s) was likely encountered.

⁴¹ The work on fortifying Olkhovatka itself was not yet finished on September 15–17 and was intensified (and positions expanded) after these battles, because the new main frontline of 377ID was directly at Olkhovatka as a consequence of the battles. See page 38.

- d. 3 groves east of Ivanovka, 218.9, 223.0. The groves are protected by barbed wire entanglements, DFPs in wood-and-dirt pillboxes, strong AT capabilities
- e. Ilinovka, Fedorovka – DFPs in buildings, wood-and-dirt pillboxes, strong AT capabilities
- f. ht. 214.6, a gully to the west, Spassokoe
- g. Novopavlovka, 227.8, 216.2, woods north of Vysochino: reinforced strongpoint with wood-and-dirt pillboxes, minefields, barbed wire entanglements
- h. ht. 213.8, woods to east, ht. 181.8
- i. Lebyazhye and woods to the south
- j. Mal. Vereyka, Churikovo, 188.5
- k. Kaverya, Rubtsovo
- l. Sklyaevo 4th
- m. Sklyaevo 5th, Lipovka
- n. Sivirtsevo-Kaverya
- o. Olkhovatka, ht. to s-e ("Lysaya")
- p. Mokryy, Gnezdilovo, woods to s-w ("Redkaya")

Another strongpoint was discovered later as the operation proceeded: "Treugolnaya"⁴² grove (north of Khvoshchevatka), Repnoe, ht. 170.8.

Conclusion:

1. The enemy relied on carefully prepared hardened defensive positions developed in depth and continuously improved.
2. The enemy used the terrain to his advantage and reinforced natural defense points by adding fortifications and obstacles.
3. The importance assigned to the defense of this fortified sector was not limited to its role of providing flank security of Voronezh and is tightly coupled with the ongoing operation in the south.

3.2. Composition and Location of Enemy Forces

On September 15 the enemy force opposite 38A had the strength of: four infantry divisions, 40–50 tanks (204TR of 22TD), one battalion of 140MIR, two battalions of 28AR. The frontline was 32 km long. All of the divisions were deployed in the first echelon. The reserves were suspected to have one infantry division deployed in the area of Zemlyansk, Chistaya Polyana. However, over the course of the operation it was determined that the enemy did not maintain the operational reserve.

⁴² "Treugolnaya" means "shaped as a triangle". The Germans called it "Dreieckswald" which means "Triangle Wood".

Defending divisions included these subordinate units:

68ID – IR 169, 188, 196

340ID – IR 694, 695, 696

385ID – IR 537, 539

377ID – IR 768, 769, 770

The first echelon employed 11 infantry regiments (undermanned), with four of those deployed along the task force's frontline.

Approximate strength of the enemy divisions along the 38A frontline as of 15.9.42:

Unit Name	68ID	340ID	385ID	377ID	<i>Total</i>
Personnel	9400	8300	6700	7500	31900
MG	390	330	250	320	1290
Mortars	90	75	50	70	285
Field Guns	62	52	44	52	210
AT guns	60	50	40	50	200

Attachments included 709 Separate Artillery Battalion HCR, 654 Separate AT Battalion, up to 10 6-barreled mortars.

We could not establish the strength of close support air forces. During the fighting, up to 38–40 simultaneous attacks by Ju-88 and He-111 were observed at some point.

As of September 15, the enemy deployed as follows:

- a. Line "Kozinka – Prodanoe": **68ID** with 196, 169IR in the first echelon, 188IR in the second echelon. The latter has 2 battalions (according to POW statements).
- b. Line "Prodanoe (excl.) – ht. 213.3": **340ID** with 695, 694, 696IR in the first echelon.
- c. Line "ht. 213.3 (excl.) – Churikovo – Rubtsovo (excl.)": **385ID** with two regiments in the first echelon.
- d. Line "Rubtsovo – Gnezdilovo": **377ID** with 768, 770 and 769IR in the first echelon.

Tactical reserves were assumed to be located in: Nikolskoe, Malopokrovka, Novopavlovka, Levyazhye, Sivirtsevo-Kaverya and Olkhovatka (one battalion in each location). 543IR of 387ID was deployed near Khvoshchevatka.

Artillery deployment areas: Verezhovka, Nikolskoe, Golosnovka, Fedorovka, Chivisovka and Levyazhye (one artillery battalion each); Sklyaevo 4th and Sivirtsevo-Kaverya (up to one artillery regiment each). This deployment of artillery is not typical, the enemy moves the units liberally to redeploy in any direction as needed. One battalion of 140MIR, two artillery battalions of 28AR and 40–50 tanks of 204TR (22TD) were assumed to be located near Somovo, Gremyachye, Bol. Treshevka.

Over the course of the fighting between 15.9 and 29.9, the task force encountered the following units (in addition to 377ID):

- 387ID with I.,II.,III./543IR; 387 Eng Bn; 387AR (three battalions)
- 340ID with I./696IR; II./694IR
- 82ID with I.,II.,III./168IR
- 68ID with III./188IR; II./169IR
- 385ID with II./539IR; I./537IR
- 79 Constr Bn; 67AR HCR (one battalion); 709 Arty Bn; 654 Separate AT Bn.

The total of 14 battalions, 6 artillery battalions and regimental artillery from two infantry regiments was thought to have been re-deployed to assist the defenders of the "Rubtsovo – Olkhovatka" line (377ID) in the task force zone of advance. Information from identification documents of killed and prisoner statements was used in making this determination. Among the redeployed units 8 battalions, 6 artillery battalions of divisional artillery and HCR, 2 regimental artillery groups were brought in from elsewhere. The rest came from the formations known to be opposing the 38A frontline prior to the beginning of the offensive.

All newly arrived units were committed immediately and there is no reason to presume the enemy ever ran out of his tactical reserves. Judging from the movement in the areas of Medvezhye, Repnoe, Khvoshchevatka it appears that at least 3–4 battalions were not discovered and remained in the tactical reserve close to the frontline where they were targeted by our air strikes.

Therefore the total strength of enemy forces that were transferred from quiet sectors outside of 38A's frontline to reinforce the 38A task force's zone of advance was twelve infantry battalions. Six more were redeployed from within the sector.

Overall, the task force's zone of advance saw the following enemy forces committed:

- 27 infantry battalions
- 3 artillery regiments
- 2 artillery battalions HCR
- 2 AT battalions
- Regimental artillery of five regiments

Strength of committed enemy forces:

<i>Units</i>	<i>Personnel (regulation)</i>	<i>Pers. (actual)</i>	<i>Div Arty guns</i>	<i>Reg Arty guns</i>	<i>AT guns</i>	<i>Total guns</i>	<i>Mortars</i>	<i>MG</i>
377ID	14742	7500	36	16	50	102	80	280
543IR	3260	1950		6	10	16	18	80
387 Eng Bn	673	450						20
I./696IR	854	480					8	25
II./694IR	854	480					8	25
168IR	3260	2300		6	10	16	20	90
III./188IR	854	500					10	30
II./169IR	854	500					10	30
II./539IR	854	420					8	24
I./537IR	854	420					8	24
4 inf bn – unknown	2562	1600					32	96
79 Constr Bn	400	400						
387AR	2696	2000	40			40		16
385AR	2696	1900	36			36		16
<i>Total</i>	35413	20900	112	28	70	210	202	756
Artillery HCR, Tanks, MLRS		1500	24		36	60		
Support Detachments		2000						
<i>Grand Total</i>		24400	136	28	106	270	202	756

Actual enemy strength (estimated from prisoner statements and high-level approximations) does not exceed 60% of prescribed strength and is deemed to be sufficiently accurate with 5–10% error. Up to 10000 personnel committed to reinforce the defense were transferred from outside of 38A's sector.

Conclusions:

- On 15.9 the enemy had four infantry divisions opposing the 38A frontline. It was deemed unlikely that in the first days of the operation any operational reserves were available.
- Opposing the task force the enemy had 377ID and one or two battalions of 385ID (the latter deployed opposing 167RD's right flank). Over the course of the operation the enemy managed to bring in tactical reserves from elsewhere in the 38A sector (8–12 battalions) and transferred 12 battalions from outside of 38A's sector. All of this was accomplished in the relatively short time period between September 15 and 20.

4. The Mission and Deployment of Own Forces

- 4.1. Redeployment of 38A units was done in the period between 04.09 and 13.09 as prescribed by directive No. 00350.

240RD

- transferred the defensive line "ht. 213.7 – woods north of 214.6 – Perekopovka – Novosilskoe (excl.)" to 835RR and 838RR of 237RD between 04.09 and 06.09;
- marched to the Niz. Vereyka, Verilovka area;
- took over 253RBde positions: "woods at 111.2 (excl.) – Verilovka";
- deployed 842RR and 931RR in the first and 836 in the second echelon.

229RBde

- marched from Arkhangelskoe to Kreschenka area (04.09 – 06.09);
- reassigned to 40A by the Front's chief of staff order No. 00408;
- marched to Khlevnoe overnight on 08.09.

250RBde

- left Lukino – Muravyevka vicinity during the night between 04.09 and 05.09;
- assembled in the vicinity of the gullies to the south of Fomina-Negachevka in the second echelon of the task force disposition.

104RBde

- took over 3/253RBde positions: "Sklyaevo 2nd (excl.) – woods at 111.2" during the night between 05.09 and 06.09.

86TBde

- left Ozerki area during the night between 08.09 and 09.09;
- assembled in the woods east of Pribytkovo.

21MntCD

- left vicinity of Dubrovskoe;
- assembled in the southern environs of Kreschenka in the second echelon of the task force;
- equine caretaking personnel were left behind among the gullies and woods around Dmitrievka, Sedelki and Verh. Kolybelka.

4.2. At the start of the task force offensive (scheduled for 05:40 on 15.9 by *Front Order No. 00451*) the Army was deployed as follows:

A. Units responsible for enemy containment in their sectors:

- **8CC** is holding the "Kozinka – Ozerki" line with 55CD and 112CD;
- **248RBde** – the line "Ozerki (excl.) – Khruschevo";
- **237RD** – the line "ht. 218.7 – woods north of 214.6";
- **340RD** – "woods north of 214.6 (excl.) – Bol. Vereyka";
- **96TBde** – reserve (in the vicinity of Kamenka, Lukino), prepares to counter an attack from Vysochino direction.

B. Striking Task Force

- **167RD** defends the line "Bol. Vereyka – Vereyka Heights (excl.)" with 465RR. 615RR and 520RR gathered in the assembly area near the Vereyka Heights and 113.2 for the attack towards Rubtsovo and Kaverya from north and n-e.
- **253RBde** gathered in the assembly area for the attack in the "Sklyaevo 4th – Sklyaevo 5th" zone.
- **104RBde** in the woods at 111.2, prepared to commence an attack bypassing Olkhovatka from the west.
- **240RD** gathered in the assembly area on the line "woods at 111.2 (excl.) – Verilovka" for the attack in the "Gnezdilovo – Olkhovatka" zone. 842RR and 931RR are in the first echelon, 836RR in the second echelon.
- **250RBde** is in the gullies south of Fomina-Negachevka, assigned to the second echelon of the task force;
- **21MtnCD** – southern environs of Kreschenka.

C. Artillery

- **167RD** support: organic, 1, 2/911 AR, 1241 destr ATAR.

- **253RBde** support: organic, artillery of 21MtnCD, artillery of 250RBde, two battalions of 6 Gds MtrR, one battalion of 85 Gds MtrR.
- **104RBde** support: organic, 124 HAR HCR, 148MTR, 611 Destr ATAR, one battalion of 6 Gds MtrR, one battalion of 85 Gds MtrR.
- **240RD** support: organic, one artillery battalion of 237RD, artillery of 75 FD, artillery of 7 Destr Bde, 66 Gds MtrR, one battalion of 85 Gds MtrR.
- Long range artillery for the task force: 1112 AR HCR.

D. Tanks

- Tanks were attached to the units participating in the principal effort: 150TBde to 104RBde, 86TBde to 240RD.

5. Comparison of Forces

The following table contains both the strength at the beginning of the operation as well as the strength of any units committed to action during the operation.

<i>Unit</i>	<i>Personnel</i>	<i>Guns (76–152mm)</i>	<i>AT Guns</i>	<i>Mortars</i>	<i>MGs</i>	<i>Tanks</i>
8CC	15577	66	43	220	419	
240RD	8720	39	18	154	228	
167RD	7049	39	27	157	114	
340RD	8018	43	24	138	138	
237RD	7152	38	18	101	121	
104RBde	3384	16	12	65	166	
250RBde	3925	12	12	56	145	
248RBde	2907	12	12	52	101	
253RBde	3046	10	8	43	73	
86TBde	1006	2	4	6	24	41
96TBde	1006	2	4	6	24	39
150TBde	1276	4	3	12	53	59
124HAR	880	22			12	
1112AR	693	12				
611ATAR	461	18			4	

1241ATAR	225		12			
1244ATAR	118		10			
88 and 90 Flamer Coy	193					
<i>Subtotal</i>	64636	335	207	1005	1622	139
<i>Committed during the operation:</i>						
161RD	6602	37	18	162	120	
18TC	1000					39
7 Destr Bde and 75 FD	378		25	17	44	
<i>Subtotal</i>	7980	37	43	179	164	39
<i>Total</i>	72616	372	250	1184	1786	178

These numbers exclude 1288 AAR, 6, 66, 85 Gds MtrR, 533 Sep Sap Bn. 18TC tanks count is taken as of the moment it was committed.

(...)

As the initial stage of the operation was unfolding, the enemy committed substantially all of its combat-ready elements. This assumption is backed by the evidence of construction and engineers battalions entering the fight shortly after the operation began. Our own dispositions echeloned in depth prevented over half of active infantry troops (riflemen and infantry support weapons) from engaging the enemy, while still being targeted by hostile mortars, artillery and air strikes. Therefore the balance of the forces engaged during the first day was 6800 defenders vs 14000 attackers. The enemy was able to increase his ability to fight back over the course of the operation by expediently committing more and more units to the battle. The ratio of forces changed from 35845 : 7500 = 4.8 at the beginning to 46525 : 24499 = 1.9 over time.

6. Planning and Preparation

6.1. As ordered by directive No. 00350 of the Voronezh Front commander, the main effort is to be executed with one rifle division, four rifle brigades and two tank brigades from the line "Sklyaevo 1st – Verilovka" towards Repnoe. Auxiliary effort – 167RD to "Kaverya – 189.0". The mission of the task force includes the destruction of 377ID and 387ID, and assisting 60A and 40A in their mission of defeating the concentration of enemy forces in the Voronezh area.

229RBde was transferred under 40A command on 09.09.42 as part of the redeployment. In its place 21MtnCD was added to the task force. The cavalry was to act dismounted. As such, the main attack was going to be spearheaded by one rifle division, one cavalry division and three rifle brigades.

To facilitate the breakthrough, the entire artillery arm of the army, three rocket artillery regiments, the entire artillery force of the second echelon formations, part of the divisional artillery of 237RD and 340RD and the artillery of 75 FD along with 7 Destr Bde (the last two were based on the east bank of the Don) were included in the effort. After the redeployment was completed the average concentration of artillery along the 23 km frontline reached 11 guns and 18 mortars per 1 km (not counting 50mm mortars). In the zone of principal effort the concentration was as high as 35 guns and 63 mortars per 1 km.

6.2. Initially, the operation was planned with the aim to achieve deep penetration as ordered by the Voronezh Front commander:

1. *First stage* – breach the first line in the enemy defensive perimeter and gain the first day's objective: the line "Churikovo – Kaverya – Sklyaevo 4th – Sklyaevo 5th – Lipovka – Panskaya Gvozdevka", then consolidate the captured positions using dedicated groups.
2. *Second stage* – take the fight deep into the enemy defense and seize Sivirtsevo-Kaverya, Pankovo and Russkaya Gvozdevka; prepare the stage for the execution of third day objectives by holding the heights 195.8, 187.9, 181.5 and 184.0. Organize for defense at the line "Churikovo – 195.8 – 187.9 – 181.5 – 184.0 – woods west of Russkaya Gvozdevka".
3. *Third stage* – seize Suharevka, Churikovo, Sviridov, Medvezhye and Razdolye and hold the line to the west of these settlements.

The artillery preparation against the front line of the enemy defense starts 55 minutes prior to the infantry attack.

Operational goals:

- a. **167RD** – part of the division holds the line "Bol. Vereyka – woods to the s-e (excl.)". The rest advances to Kaverya from the direction of ht. 113.2 via Rubtsovo. First objective – to capture Rubtsovo and then Kaverya (by the end of the day). Next – advance to the line "Churikovo – 195.8 – Suharevka (excl.)" to cover the task force's left flank. Boundary (left): "west exit from the gully 2 km s-e of 191.3 (excl.) – garden with "Road Fork" sign - Sklyaevo 4th (excl.)"

- b. **253RBde** advances in the zone: "garden with "Road Fork" sign (excl.) – woods at 111.2 (excl.)". First objective – to break through the first line of the defense and seize the unnamed heights n-e of Sklyaevo 4th and north of Sklyaevo 5th. By the end of the day capture Sklyaevo 4th (aka Shpil), Sklyaevo 5th (aka Lopatino) and Lipovka. Next – advance to the "Suharevka – Russko-Gvozdevskie" heights. Boundary (left): "woods n-w of Niz. Vereyka – woods at 111.2 (excl.) – Lipovka"
- c. **104RBde** and **150TBde** – advance in the zone: "woods at 111.2 – corner of the gully 1 km east of the woods". First objective – to break through the first line of the enemy defense and reach the line along the Lipovka-Olkhovatka road. Once there, assist 240RD in taking Olkhovatka. By midday, leave a group to cover the "Sivirtsevo-Kaverya – Lipovka" direction, then capture Repnoe with the goal to set up the attack of 240RD on Khvoshchevatka. Next – advance to "Pankovo – Medvezhye" with further plans for an enveloping attack on Sivirtsevo-Kaverya from the s-e and south using all available units. Boundary (left): "Niz. Vereyka – Olkhovatka (excl.) – Repnoe"
- d. **240RD** and **86TBde** advance in the zone: "corner of the gully 1 km east of the woods at 111.2 (excl.) – Verilovka (aka Shatilovo)" supported by the artillery of 75 FD and divisional artillery of 233RD from the Don's east bank. First objective – to break through the first line of the enemy defense, capture Mokryy, Olkhovatka and Gnezdilovo and develop an attack on Khvoshchevatka. By the end of the first day capture Khvoshchevatka and Panskaya Gvozdevka acting in concert with 232RD that advances from the east (enveloping Khvoshchevatka and Panskaya Gvozdevka). Next – capture Russkaya Gvozdevka and Razdolye. Boundary (left): Don
- e. **250RBde** is deployed in the second echelon of the offensive, in the gullies north of Niz. Vereyka. The brigade marches from 111.2 into Olkhovatka after:
- the capture of Sklyaevo 4th and Olkhovatka by the units of the first echelon;
 - 104RBde and 240RD advance to Repnoe.
- Once in Olkhovatka, the brigade prepares to commit to the fight on the boundary between 104RBde and 240RD.
- f. **21MtnCD** – in the army reserve at Kreschenka. Ready to advance in the direction of "Kaverya – Sklyaevo 5th".

A set of instructions for the offensive combat was developed based on the directives issued by the Front commander. The instructions covered the following topics:

- rules of infantry and tanks advance;
- creation of obstacle breaching and assault teams;
- rules for the employment of small arms fire;
- methods of anti-aircraft defense and movement under dive bombing attack;
- consolidation of captured positions and making use of the enemy fortifications;
- assignment of representatives from the Army's military council for each battalion of the first echelon.

The troops were instructed to push forward without looking over the shoulder at slower neighbors and to actively assist any unit that gets encircled (or is in danger of encirclement).

The preparation period was used for training according to the instructions. Special attention was given to working on tactics of the offensive combat and training exercises for obstacle breaching and assault teams.

Artillery fire planning included studies of the enemy front lines, his defense organization, reviews of aerial photographs and locating his artillery groups. Prior to the start of the offensive, the base geodetic network⁴³ in the area was extended to meet standards and artillery units conducted their surveys. Observation was done from combat outposts of frontline units. By the beginning of the operation, the organization of the enemy frontline and his strongpoints located close to the frontline were identified for targeting. Control of artillery prior to the initial advance by first echelon units was centralized. After that, the army chief of artillery remained in control of the long range group, rocket artillery and (if needed) could issue missions to the infantry support groups outside of their direct assignments.

Engineer support for the operation was being done in parallel to other preparation measures. By 15.9.42, 533 Separate Sapper Bn had built up a reserve of 11000 landmines in Fomina-Negachevka and had prepared 18 rebar concrete pillbox covers for transportation. The covers were intended for the fortification of new defensive lines as those developed. 533 Separate Sapper Bn was attached to 253RBde, 104RBde and 240RD (one company each) and provided engineer support to these units throughout the entire operation. Over the course of its duties the sapper battalion:

⁴³ This network provides the basis for accurate distance measurements and therefore is vital for accurate artillery fire.

- constructed a crossing over the Bol. Vereyka River before the operation commenced;
- laid minefields in front of units positioned in the containment sector of the operation;
- cleared passes through enemy minefields;
- sappers of obstacle breaching and fortification teams occasionally took part in combat using their own fire for cover;
- repaired several bridges and roads to ensure good traffic conditions.

Ammunition supply was carried by 25 trucks at first (increased to 78 trucks later). The intended reserve of 1.5x standard units of fire (2x in tank brigades) was not built due to insufficient supply from the front's depots. All munitions arriving at the Army's depots were promptly sent to the task force units. 152mm and 76mm regimental gun shells were getting in from the front's depots with 6–8 days delay; 76mm divisional gun shells, 82mm and 120mm mortar bombs were also delayed (not as much). There were flaws in the operations of Army Artillery Field Depot No. 2550, such as: delayed in service due to the lack of personnel and mix-ups in handling of ammunition due to the personnel's lack of experience.

The operation was controlled from the fortified forward command post "Srednyaya Dolina" and from an observation post of Army HQ staff at an unnamed height south of Fomina-Negachevka. Military council, dep. Army commanders (those in charge of artillery, armor and engineers), Army chief of staff (with six subordinates), HQ staff from the army service branches were present at the command post. Parent unit commanders would visit their subordinate units in the field to gauge the progress towards objectives. The Army commander and his chief of staff used oral orders and briefs in order to save time (to be formalized in written form later).

Cooperation with the supporting air force was maintained by coordinating timing and targets for ground-attack planes and bombers. This was done via a liaison officer representing the air force formation (he was present at the command post) and via the field air command department. Communication with the air support HQ was maintained by radio, [illegible, "OT-35"?] and by messenger plane.

The meteorological survey team from the Army HQ was posted close to the zone of the operation. Weather forecasts played an important role, since unfavorable winds could suddenly degrade the quality of artillery observation with smoke rising from fires started by ground-attack planes.

7. Operation Execution

September 15 - First Day

The attack of the striking task force jumped off at 06:35. It was preceded by 55 minutes of artillery preparation (directed at the front line of the enemy defense) and a scheduled ground-attack plane strike on Sklyaevo 5th, Mokryy and Olkhovatka.

167RD: targeted Rubtsovo and Kaverya. 615RR and 520RR did not advance far. The units reached trenches of the enemy forward line, breached a row of barbed wire entanglements, and got to the edge of minefields and the second row of barbed wire. At that point, their advance was halted by enfilading fire coming from DFPs and wood-and-dirt pillboxes placed at the eastern and northern edges of Rubtsovo. All further efforts to advance failed. The division consolidated captured positions within the range of hostile small arms fire. It continued the exchange of fire through the end of the operation and spent 1x artillery units of fire.

253RBde: targeted Sklyaevo 5th. The brigade advanced as far as the barbed wire entanglements on the northern side of the unnamed heights n-e of Sklyaevo 4th and north of Sklyaevo 5th. The brigade failed to make any progress for the remainder of the operation mainly due to these two circumstances: Enemy-held positions dominated the battlefield, while the brigade did not possess sufficient artillery firepower to suppress hostile DFPs and demolish fortifications.

104RBde: departed the woods at 111.2 through the gully towards Repnoe, slowly pushed the enemy troops out of the way and reached the road between 111.2 and Olkhovatka by the end of the day. 2/104RBde held the line: "crossroads south of 111.2 – a gully spur n-w of Olkhovatka". 1/104RBde held the area 500 m n-w of Olkhovatka. 150TBde tank advance was delayed by having to navigate a gully running between Mokryy and the woods at 111.2 at the onset of the battle. Later 104RBde attacked towards Mokryy and successfully assisted the units of 240RD in capturing Mokryy by enveloping the settlement from the east. The enemy opposing the brigade resisted energetically by returning fire and counterattacking in small groups. The slopes of the height between the two gullies south of 111.2 were heavily fortified. The gullies themselves were mined and protected by barbed wire. The area immediately to the west of Olkhovatka was also heavily fortified.

240RD: attacked in the zone: "woods at 111.2 (excl.) – Verilovka" supported by 86TBde. Enemy resistance was limited to small arms fire for the first hour of the engagement due to the suppression effect of the

preceding artillery and air strikes on hostile batteries. On the division's right wing 842RR had closed in on the western edge of Mokryy by 10:30. 931RR captured a strongpoint (the unnamed fstd. south of Verilovka) around the same time.

By 19:30 the division seized Mokryy and Gnezdilovo and eliminated their garrisons. At the end of the day it held the line "0.5 km north of Olkhovatka – northern edge of Redkaya grove – Gnezdilovo" where it dug in for the night. Over the course of the day the division took 25 captives (from 769IR), captured enemy equipment and inflicted up to 800 casualties. Hostile airforce activity was limited to reconnaissance (9 sorties).

Summary of the first day:

The enemy apparently knew of the impending offensive, yet was not clear on its exact timing. He was putting up more and more stubborn resistance as the fighting went on. Strongpoints and the defense positions in general turned out to be well-fortified and his fire plan was organized well. Failure to reach their objectives by certain units of the task force gave the enemy time to bring in reserves and prepare the rear echelon for defense. Fortified positions in 167RD and 253RBde zones of advance, excessive width of those zones and the lack of artillery support turned the mission of these two units into one of containment. The battle revealed the importance of Olkhovatka as the focal point of the enemy defense system where the frontline pivots next to the Don.

September 16 – Second Day

The fighting intensified. Enemy aircraft flew 54 sorties (incl. 20 He-111 bombers, which dropped bombs on dispositions of 240RD).

104RBde: exchanged fire with the enemy throughout the day from its positions along the road "111.2 – Olkhovatka" (left flank troops were 500 m north of Olkhovatka). The enemy continued to counterattack using one or two companies at a time. By night, the brigade passed to the defensive on the ground held. The brigade's subordinate units were positioned as follows:

- 2nd battalion: along the road, left flank is 1 km north of a free-standing house n-w of Olkhovatka;
- 3rd battalion: 500 m n-w of Olkhovatka;
- 1st and 4th battalions: second echelon, in the woods at 111.2.

240RD: The fierce battle for Olkhovatka went on. The division was targeted by 20 enemy bombers.

At 07:00 1st and 2nd battalions of 836RR (commanded by the regiment commander Mjr. Artemyev) were assigned the mission to seize Olkhovatka

and launched the attack towards the settlement's northern outskirts. As it progressed, 836RR broke up two enemy attacks from the direction of Redkaya. A group of regiment's troops supported by tanks of 150TBde pushed through into the northern part of the settlement. These troops were cut off from the rest of the regiment by the fire of rocket artillery and then attacked by enemy from the direction of Redkaya. Mjr. Artemyev (regimental commander) and Cpt. Dezhorzh (regimental chief of staff) were killed in this action. Due to the loss of command and heavy casualties 1st and 2nd battalions fell back to the line 400 m north of Olkhovatka. The 3rd battalion was committed from the divisional reserve, but was stopped in its tracks by mortar and artillery fire. Soldiers in Olkhovatka were soon surrounded, yet continued fighting until the last bullet. Particularly impressive were actions of 17 submachine gunners under command of Jr. Politruk Ierokli. They held on until nightfall, with the entire group eventually eliminated (except one seriously wounded soldier who managed to crawl back to our positions). Dezhorzh misinterpreted the presence of forward regimental elements in Olkhovatka as the sign that the village was in our full control and erroneously reported the success via the chain of command shortly before his own death.

By the end of the day division positions were as follows:

- 836RR forward detachments were 600 m to the north and northeast of Olkhovatka closing on 165.0;
- 931RR left flank consolidated positions south of Gnezdilovo, facing south and s-w. Earlier in the day the regiment seized the northern part of Redkaya;
- 842RR was in Mokryy (second echelon).

The enemy kept launching frequent infantry counterattacks and conducted air strikes in the divisional zone of advance in an attempt to halt it. Inability to hold on with the remains of 769IR forced the enemy to commit 79 Constr Bn, which was defeated the very same day. 30 men from the construction battalion were taken prisoners.

In two days of fighting the division lost 950 men (killed and wounded) while inflicting 1200 enemy casualties.

250RBde: acted as prescribed by the operational plan. During the night of 17.09 the brigade moved to the area between the woods at 111.2 and Niz. Vereyka and maintained readiness for launching an attack at the boundary between 104RBde and 240RD.

21MtnCD: remained in position south of Kreschenka and Fomina-Rogachevka and maintained readiness for launching a counterattack against "Bol. Vereyka – Sklyaevo 2nd".

Summary of the second day:

The enemy was trying to slow down our advance and buy time to bring in reserves by deploying bomber aircraft against the attacking units. Insufficient manpower forced the enemy to commit his specialist units to the fight.

The effort of 836RR and 150TBde did not receive timely support from the second echelon divisional units. 600 men of 836IR available for the assault of Olkhovatka were insufficient for the mission against this reinforced strongpoint.

The losses suffered by 104RBde and 240RD over two days (1500 casualties) weakened the principal effort and triggered preparations for committing the Army's second echelon units and transferring units from quiet sectors of the frontline.

September 17 – Third Day

The right flank of the task force from Bol. Vereyka to Olkhovatka (excl.) remained stationary. 167RD, 253RBde and 104RBde passed to the defensive and exchanged fire with the enemy. Hostile aircraft were targeting 240RD and 104RBde with 24 sorties flown.

In the sector of 240RD, the enemy attacked from Olkhovatka towards Mokryy with one infantry regiment supported by tanks around 18:30. The enemy advanced in close order formation and was immediately hit by rocket salvos, mortar and artillery fire and met by dense MG fire. After losing up to 800 men and 2 tanks, the remaining forces fell back to their initial positions. 931RR and 86TBde counted seven enemy counterattacks coming from Redkaya. 387 Eng Bn and other enemy detachments were redeployed into the grove overnight. 387 Eng Bn was defeated by the combined action of 931RR and 86TBde. Small detachments were being transferred into the grove through the day.

Over the last 3 days, 240RD engaged the following enemy units: 769IR, 770IR, 79 Constr Bn, 387 Eng Bn and others.

(...)⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Skipped entries from September 18 through October 4, 1942.

Final Conclusions

1. The striking task force failed to reach its objective "Churikovo – Suharevka – Razdolye – Russkaya Gvozdevka".
2. Main causes of the failure were:

2.1. Enemy

- Well-organized echeloned defense developed in depth. Several lines of resistance, each with built-up of strongpoints, well-built wood-and-dirt pillboxes, taking advantage of favorable terrain and reinforced with minefields and barbed wire emplacements.
- Advanced system of connections between strongpoints and separate defense nodes allowed the enemy to maneuver his fire power quickly and covertly from the rear all the way to the frontline.
- Favorable terrain provided a clear view of approaches to the defensive positions and allowed excellent artillery observation.
- Well thought-out system of fire built upon strongpoints' (and/or separate defense nodes') mutual support for one another with enfilading fire. This system enabled the enemy to fight a prolonged defensive battle with a relatively small force.
- Unopposed enemy air strikes – they were often conducted with little to no escort present. Continuous air reconnaissance would discover our formations in early stages of their maneuver, which in turn allowed the enemy to conduct air, artillery and mortar strikes and delay our advance.
- Rapid redeployment of tactical reserves brought in up to 17000 men over 5–7 days and changed the balance of power to the enemy's advantage.
- Exceptional perseverance in defense combined with frequent counterattacks by small detachments and large formations.

2.2. Own forces

- Insufficient infantry manpower for a decisive blow and further exploitation. Companies were entering action with 60–70 riflemen.
- The terrain favored the defenders. Ground covered with tall grass often prevented troops from observing the enemy and interfered with the effective control of our detachments in the platoon-company-battalion command chain.
- Poor unit cohesion led to unsynchronized actions. Often groups of braver soldiers managed to push forward, but were not supported by their comrades and ended up losing what they gained.

- Less than ideal command and control between regiments and divisions. Poor command and control at company, platoon and section levels due to losses in commanders' ranks. The majority of companies were led by junior commanders.
 - Infantry was unable to stay close to tanks.
 - Restricted firing capacity of artillery due to the lack of ammunition. Ammunition expenditure per day of fighting is in "pharmaceutical doses".⁴⁵
 - Disruption of planned air support coordination. In some cases, commanders in the field had to adjust their plans to fit the air support schedule due to delayed sorties or last minute mission alterations (either targets or planes assigned to a mission would change).
3. Our men fought bravely and selflessly. Their ability to withstand air strikes increased. Enemy tank attacks were met with concentrated fire from all available weapons and with grenades. No signs of panic or stupor were displayed.

[Signed]

38 Army Commander Lt. Gen. *Chibisov*

Member of the Military Council Div. Kommissar *Voronin*

38 Army Chief of Staff Col. *Pilipenko*

⁴⁵ Meaning the artillery does not fire enough.

240th Rifle Division

Translated Documents

240th Rifle Division – Initial Order 87
931st Rifle Regiment – War Diary 92
842nd Rifle Regiment – War Diary 96
240th Rifle Division – Combat Report 100

240th Rifle Division – Initial Order⁴⁶

*Combat Order No. 11, 240th Rifle Division HQ,
Donskaya-Negachevka, 18:00 14.9.42*

1. The enemy continues to hold and reinforce the line "Mal. Vereyka – Churikovo – Kaverya – Gnezdilovo" and further south along r. Don. Immediately opposing the divisional sector on the line "south of the woods at 111.2 – unnamed farmstead south of Verilovka" presumably is III./769IR of 377ID.⁴⁷ It was recently transferred from the "Kozinka – Lobanovka" sector where it was in active combat against the units of 8CD and suffered heavy losses.

Closest enemy strongpoints:

1. ht. 165.0 northwest of Olkhovatka
2. unnamed ht. northeast of Mokryy

The *first strongpoint* features three MG wood-and-dirt pillboxes; a battery of 75mm guns (by the southern edge of Mokryy); two 81mm mortar batteries (one in the gully 1.5 km northwest of Olkhovatka, the other in the gully 500 m north of Mokryy); 7–10 bunkers connected by shallow trenches. Some of the bunkers are not manned overnight. The garrison is presumed to be a rifle company (reinforced by HMGs and mortars), with personnel below prescribed due to losses in previous engagements.

The *second strongpoint* stretches to the Don's west bank and includes the unnamed farmstead south of Verilovka. It features four wood-and-dirt pillboxes, one 81mm mortar battery, one artillery battery and up to 10 bunkers. A communication trench is dug between the farmstead and Gnezdilovo. Wire entanglements are placed in front of the first defense line, from the northern edge of the unnamed farmstead to Mokryy. The garrison is presumed to be a reinforced rifle company.

⁴⁶ CAMD RF, Fond: 3304, Series: 1, File: 2 (document begins on page: 1 [43]).

⁴⁷ 377ID documents show that this Soviet intelligence was not accurate: I./769IR and II./769IR were deployed on the frontline in this sector in mid September 1942 (as shown on the 377ID situation maps for 12.9 and 14.9). III./769IR was in the reserve at this time.

Both strongpoints share the support of an artillery battalion (105mm and 150mm guns). No minefields were discovered on the approaches. Further to the south (presumably Gnezdilovo is the northern boundary)⁴⁸ another division's sector begins; that division is not positively identified.⁴⁹

2. 104RBde advances towards Repnoe. Its mission is to take Repnoe by the end of the day, thus enabling our division's attack on Olkhovatka. Next, the brigade advances on Pankovo and Medvezhye. Our boundary: "Niz. Vereyka (excl.) – Olkhovatka – Repnoe (excl.)". The zone of advance for elements of 232RD⁵⁰ is on the left: south of Khvoshchevatka towards the woods north of Panskaya Gvozdevka. Our boundary: r. Don.
3. 240RD (with 314/66 Gds MtrR, 86TBde and a company of 533 Sep Sap Bn) is supported by the artillery of Fortified District from the eastern bank of the Don. After a heavy artillery preparation, the division will rapidly strike to break through the first line of defense in the zone "south of the woods at 111.2 – unnamed farmstead south of Verilovka". It will wipe out enemy strongpoints and their garrisons (Olkhovatka, Mokryy, Gnezdilovo) and will capture Khvoshchevatka and Panskaya Gvozdevka by the end of the day. Further objective is the line: "Razdolnoe – Russkaya Gvozdevka".

Arrive at the assembly area by 05:40 on 15.9.42.

The orders to start the artillery preparation and to begin the offensive will be given separately.

4. 842RR (with an AT battery and ATR platoon of 217 Sep Destr AT Bn and a platoon of 368 Sep Sap Bn) will break through the first line of defense at "northern slopes of ht. 165.0 (n-w of Olkhovatka) – Mokryy". Immediate objectives: Olkhovatka and Mokryy. Next mission is to advance towards Panskaya Gvozdevka. After the breakthrough, one tank battalion will support the regiment's efforts. Once Olkhovatka is taken over – a second battalion will be committed (both from 86TBde).
931RR advances on the left. Boundary: "gully north of Mokryy – unnamed ht. southwest of Olkhovatka – Khvoshchevatka (excl.)".

⁴⁸ This piece of intelligence is accurate as seen on the 377ID situation map for 14.9. The divisional boundary is at the northern edge of Gnezdilovo.

⁴⁹ It is the sector of 387ID.

⁵⁰ Part of 60A

Artillery group for infantry support: 1 and 2/692AR. Group leader: the commander of 692AR.

5. 931RR (supported by an AT battery and ATR platoon from 217 Sep Destr AT Bn and a platoon of 368 Sep Sap Bn) will break through the enemy defense on the line: "gully north of Mokryy (excl.) – unnamed fstd. south of Verilovka". Immediate objectives: "Redkaya" grove and Gnezdilovo. Next mission is to advance towards Khvoshchevatka. Boundary (left): r. Don.

Artillery group for infantry support: 3/692AR. Group leader: the commander of 3/692AR.

6. 836RR (less one battalion and supported by one platoon of 368 Sep Sap Bn) will advance in the second line (echeloned to the right) towards Olkhovatka and Panskaya Gvozdevka with the mission of providing protection for the right flank of the division and repelling counterattacks coming from the west and southwest.
The next objective is Panskaya Gvozdevka; advance to the objective bypassing Khvoshchevatka. Once committed, the regiment will be supported by a tank battalion of 86TBde.
7. A consolidation group (9th rifle company and two MG platoons of 836RR, 1/533 Sep Sap Bn, three platoons of 368 Sep Sap Bn, the 3rd battery and one ATR platoon of 217 Sep Destr AT Bn) led by the deputy commander of 3/836RR will wait for the leading divisional elements to capture Olkhovatka, Gnezdilovo and reach the line "unnamed height southeast of Olkhovatka – ht. 155.8 – 2 km northeast of Gnezdilovo". The group will then rapidly redeploy to the Olkhovatka area and organize a strong defensive position facing west and southwest.
8. 3/836RR (-) with 3–4 T-34 and 5–6 T-60 will form a division reserve, assemble in the gully south of Fomina-Negachevka and be prepared to redeploy.
9. Artillery

Infantry support group: organic (692AR), 66 Gds MtrR, FD artillery. Group leader: the divisional artillery commander.

Readiness to open fire is expected by 22:00 on 14.9.42.

Once Olkhovatka and Gnezdilovo are seized, 1 and 2/692AR are attached to 842RR, 3/692AR is attached to 931RR. 1/692AR is attached to 836RR when 836RR is committed.

Artillery missions:

- Demoralize the enemy and suppress his frontline DFPs with powerful artillery and mortar barrages.
- As the infantry advances, destroy enemy DFPs threatening their advance.
- Follow the tanks and suppress enemy AT assets on the line "Olkhovatka – Mokryy – Gnezdilovo".
- Suppress hostile artillery and mortar batteries disrupting our advance.
- It is expected that all units are prepared to deal with enemy counterattacks.

10. Tanks

- After the first line of defense is penetrated, commit one tank battalion in support of 842RR. Capture Olkhovatka and Mokryy and defeat their garrisons. Next, exploit the success with two tank battalions. Act in concert with the infantry and take Khvoshchevatka and Panskaya Gvozdevka.
- Remain combat ready and expect to repel infantry and tank counterattacks from west/southwest/south.

11. 368th Separate Sapper Battalion will create and mark breaches in minefields for the tanks when ordered by the divisional engineers lead.
12. Conduct energetic reconnaissance during the offensive. As soon as one objective is gained, start reconnaissance of the next one. Separately, 842RR will conduct reconnaissance on the division's right flank to discover enemy counterattack preparations.
13. Units will act decisively, will not look back and will strive to advance along the forward-most troops.
14. Advance rapidly, use tanks and artillery to the fullest. Repel any counterattacks on the right flank.
15. In combat, think outside the box. Avoid attacking strongpoints head on as much as possible, maneuver to create an envelopment and attack from the flanks/rear instead.
16. Keep $\frac{2}{3}$ of the AT assets in the first echelon of the advancing units to counter enemy tanks.

17. Take enemy air support into account. All units need to be prepared to defend against air strikes.
18. Units' commanders will ensure uninterrupted control over the entire depth of the engagement.
19. Under no circumstances do we step back, even when encountering the strongest resistance or the fiercest counterattack. Not a single meter of liberated Soviet soil will be yielded to the enemy.
20. Send messages to report key events:
 - Arrival to the assembly area.
 - Breakthrough of the enemy frontline.
 - Capture of Olkhovatka, Mokryy, Gnezdilovo and other enemy strongpoints.
21. My deputies: first – Dep. Commander in Charge of the Personnel, Col. *Podolskiy*; second – Div. Artillery Commander, Col. *Zhuravlev*.
22. The HQ command post is in Donskaya-Negachevka. Next location: Verilovka. The forward team is on the observation post at the unnamed ht. marked +1.8. Next observation post location: unnamed ht. southeast of Olkhovatka.

[Signed]

240RD Commander, Col. *Avdeenko*

240RD Kommissar, Reg. Kom. *Zaslavskiy*

Divisional Chief of Staff, Mjr. *Zernyashenko*

931st Rifle Regiment – War Diary

(Entries for September 13–17, 1942)⁵¹

13.9.42

The regiment was assigned the mission of conducting a limited objective operation with the goal of taking a strongpoint next to the unnamed farmstead south of Verilovka. Division HQ staff created a plan for the operation and assigned the mission to the 1st battalion: 1/931RR (supported by 3/692AR and a battery of 120mm mortars) is to punch through the defense of the strongpoint, defeat the garrison, take prisoners and occupy the objective.

At 24:00 on 13.9.42 the regimental HQ is established 1.5 km west of Gvozdevka.

14.9.42

The regiment is holding the previously assumed defensive sector: "400 m west of the crossroads – Verilovka – north bank of r. Vereyka (excl.)"

At 17:30 1/931RR began the limited objective operation to capture the strongpoint "unnamed farmstead". The assault began after a 3–5 minute-long artillery preparation. The attacking units were met by heavy mortar and small arms fire. After breaching barbed wire entanglements, the battalion took over the fortifications of the first line and captured one wood-and-dirt pillbox. In their attempts to exploit the initial success, our units faced heavy resistance from the enemies occupying stone buildings turned into hardened DFPs. After nightfall the battalion halted its offensive effort and consolidated the captured positions. 1/931RR lost 13 killed and 18 wounded in this engagement. The enemy sustained up to 30 casualties.

20:40 – Division HQ issued *Combat Order No. 011* with the divisional mission:

The rifle regiments (with the support of 86TBde) will begin the offensive with the objectives: unnamed farmstead south of Verilovka, Mokryy, Olkhovatka and Gnezdilovo. The next set of objectives (to be taken by the end of the day): Khvoshchevatka and Panskaya Gvozdevka.

⁵¹ CAMD RF, Fond: 7582, Series: 70938, File: 8 (Document begins on page: 44).

Combat mission of 931RR (reinforced by an AT battery and ATR platoon from 217 Sep Destr AT Bn and a platoon of 368 Sep Sap Bn): To break through the front line of the enemy's defense in the direction of the unnamed farmstead south of Verilovka. The immediate objective is Redkaya grove. After gaining the objective, advance on Khvoshchevatka.

15.9.42

05:40 – The offensive began after the preparation fire by all available guns and mortars:

- 2/931RR is in the first line, assigned the mission of breaking through the resistance, advancing to Redkaya grove and seizing it.
- 1/931RR has orders to capture the enemy strongpoint "unnamed farmstead", then to capture Gnezdilovo.
- 3/931RR has orders to advance in right-echelon formation following the 2nd battalion in the regiment's second line. Be prepared to act against enemy counterattacks.

The unnamed farmstead is located on a hill and dominates the approaches. Additionally, the approach route from our positions in Verilovka crosses a deep gully. The farmstead is protected by barbed wire entanglements running from the Don's west bank to Mokryy.⁵²

The 1st and 3rd companies of 1/931RR breached the barbed wire obstacles under difficult conditions, then pushed into the unnamed farmstead. The resistance is rooted out by going from house to house and taking out enemies sheltering there. First to enter are the men of the 1st company with Dep. Coy. Commander Tesminskii. Every pillbox, bunker, entrenchment and even communication trench was a site of fierce fighting until all the enemies were eliminated. A small group of enemies panics and runs toward Gnezdilovo, but those who remain keep fighting. Detachments of the 1st and 2nd rifle companies led by Bn. Commissar Rubanovich are mopping up the resistance in the remaining buildings.

In the closing minutes of the battle for the farmstead only one point of resistance remains. It's a bunker where a few Germans continue firing. Politruk Rubanovich, his messenger Kolomiets and a team of soldiers decide to storm the bunker. They succeed but Rubanovich is struck by a villainous bullet and dies a heroic death.

10:30 – 1/931RR is in complete control of the unnamed farmstead. The battalion (commander – Cpt. Naryshkin) pursues in the direction of Gnezdilovo without giving the enemy a chance to regroup. The 2nd battalion

⁵² A sketch of the unnamed farmstead south of Verilovka is provided in the war diary – seen [here](#) on page 47.

and tanks of 86TBde provided invaluable support in the battle for the unnamed farmstead by striking at the enemy's right flank. The 2nd battalion is currently advancing on Gnezdilovo together with the 1st battalion.

The enemy is using the terrain on the approaches to Gnezdilovo to his advantage and is able to mount strong resistance using "Kvadratnaya"⁵³ grove on the northern edge of the settlement as cover.

Collapsing under our pressure, the enemy abandons Gnezdilovo.

17:30 – Gnezdilovo is ours. We have to note a job well done by the wire laying team who managed to keep the battalion commander connected throughout the entire battle. As the commander advanced, the wire connection was extended accordingly. 3/931RR, deployed in right echelon formation on the flank of 2/931RR, contributed to the success of the 1st and 2nd battalions.

Our units entered "Redkaya" grove in the pursuit of the enemy. Unorganized groups of enemies gathered in the grove, but could not hold under the pressure of our push.

- Enemy losses on 15.9.42: 400 casualties, 21 taken prisoner.
- Trophies: 3 guns, 15 LMGs, 3 HMGs, 9 mortars, SMGs and rifles, up to 50.000 small arms ammo, artillery shells, mortar bombs. Goods and food depots were seized.

The regiment was engaged in mopping up action in the grove through the night. Prisoner statements indicate that the enemy had over 1.000 men from the units of 769IR and 387 Eng Bn fighting in the unnamed farmstead, Gnezdilovo and Redkaya. After the day's fighting, enemy companies are down to 7–15 men.

16.9.42

Overnight the regiment reorganized on its new frontline: "unnamed fstd. – Gnezdilovo – eastern edge of Redkaya". Starting in the morning, it resumed the offensive with the southern edge of Redkaya as the objective and the advance on Olkhovatka to follow. The advancing troops ran into stubborn enemy resistance on Redkaya's southern edge, which was hastily reinforced overnight by transferring troops from Olkhovatka. Groups of enemy submachine gunners⁵⁴ and mortars kept disrupting the advance by hitting us with flanking fire.

⁵³ Russian for "shaped as a square".

⁵⁴ Soviet reports often refer to "submachine gunners", whereas in actuality a regular infantry detachment with machine gun(s) was likely encountered.

Over the course of the day, the regiment tries to clear the grove from hostile presence. The enemy maintains the ability to mount stiff resistance despite heavy casualties (80 killed, 200 wounded) by bringing in reinforcements in small groups from Olkhovatka. During the day the enemy used air support for the first time in the ongoing operation. 11 ground attack planes Ju-88 accompanied by 4 fighters struck the forward positions of our units. There were no losses in personnel or equipment despite heavy bombing. In the day's action the regiment took 6 captives and captured several pieces of small arms as trophies.

The HQ is located on the southern outskirts of Verilovka.

17.9.42

The regiment continued fighting over the possession of Redkaya grove.

07:30 – The enemy launched a counterattack from the northwestern edge of the grove directed at 2/931RR. The advance was beaten back with the enemy losing 60–70 men killed and wounded.

11:30 – Another counterattack (this time against 3/931RR) was broken up. Over the course of the day the fighting continues in the northwestern and central parts of Redkaya.

842nd Rifle Regiment – War Diary

(Entries for September 14–17, 1942)⁵⁵

14.9.42

20:45 – An order was issued by the 240RD commander:⁵⁶ 842RR (reinforced by an AT battery and ATR platoon from 217 Sep Destr AT Bn and a platoon of 368 Sep Sap Bn) shall break through the front line of the enemy's defense in the direction of "fstd. Mokryy – 165.0 – northern outskirts of Olkhovatka". Initially, the push will be supported by a tank battalion from 86TBde. After the capture of Olkhovatka, the regiment will be supported by the two tank battalions of 86TBde. It will then advance on Panskaya Gvozdevka. 931RR advances on our left; 104RBde advances on our right.

23:00 – After *Combat Order No. 011* was issued, the commanders of the battalions, batteries and specialist units gathered at the regimental HQ where they were briefed. Regiment Commander Lt. Col. Sapozhnikov issued follow up orders to meticulously prepare for the offensive and to replenish ammunition. He finished the meeting with these words: "Under no circumstances do we step back, even when encountering the strongest resistance or the fiercest counterattack. Not a single meter of liberated Soviet soil will be yielded to the enemy!"

15.9.42

02:00 – Preparations for the upcoming offensive begin. All personnel of the regimental units are getting briefed on the order and current situation.

06:00 – The commander of 240RD issued a directive for the offensive to commence at 06:30.

06:35 – 842RR (supported by 1,2/692AR; an AT battery and ATR platoon from 217 Sep Destr AT bn and a platoon of 368 Sep Sap Bn) attacked the enemy frontline.

07:00 – Captured the northern side of ht. 165.0

⁵⁵ CAMD RF, Fond: 7492, Series:70850, File:1 (Document begins on page: 2).

⁵⁶ See *Combat Order No. 11* in the 240RD chapter.

3rd Battalion

08:00 – 3/842RR captured enemy forward trenches. Exploiting the initial success in western direction, the fighting moved deeper into the enemy territory.

15:00 – The enemy counterattacked against 3/842RR with forces up to an infantry company from the vicinity of the gully northwest of Olkhovatka. The battalion repelled the effort, inflicting heavy casualties and forcing the enemy to retreat westwards.

16:00 – 3/842RR advanced within 700 m of Mokryy

The 3rd battalion suffered significant losses in the day's fighting and stopped to reorganize and resupply. After a pause, the battalion started advancing on Mokryy (along with 1/842RR) aiming to capture the settlement.

2nd Battalion

08:00 – 2/842RR captured the first line of trenches. The 4th company was halted by strong flanking fire of MGs and mortars coming from northern slopes of the unnamed ht. north of Mokryy where the neighbor (931RR) was slow to advance in his zone. The 5th company reached the northern side of ht. 165.0. The 6th company was committed to improve the conditions for the 4th company. After the reinforcements went in, the 4th company resumed its advance (despite taking significant losses) and also reached the northern slopes of ht. 165.0. However, the overall situation for 2/842RR remained difficult. Exposure to flanking fire didn't allow the battalion to move forward, and losses kept mounting.

1st Battalion

1/842RR (less 1 company) was committed with the objective to capture Mokryy in a joint effort with the 2nd and 3rd battalions.

22:00 – 1/842RR(-) seized Mokryy and settled in the area south and southeast of Mokryy for reorganization.

–

Regimental units are now consolidating their positions on the captured ground and digging trenches in preparation for counterattacks. In the day's fighting the regiment sustained heavy casualties (exact number to be determined).

16.9.42

00:00–17:00 – The mission for 2/842RR and 3/842RR is to hold the captured ground south and southeast of Mokryy and repel enemy counterattacks coming from the south and southeast. 1/842RR was attached to 836RR by order of the division commander. It was tasked with exploiting the success of the division's right wing and joining the efforts with 836RR to capture Olkhovatka.

2/842RR dug in southeast of Mokryy blocking south/southeast. 3/842 dug in south/southwest of Mokryy blocking south/southwest.

The communications officer of 931RR (Lt. Smirnov) reported that 931RR kept advancing southwards and was located east of ht. 165.0.

Day's losses so far: 7 killed, 16 wounded. Trophies are being processed.

17:00–24:00 – Mission: Defend liberated Soviet soil! Not a step back! Not an inch will be yielded back to the enemy! 842RR is on the defensive on the line "northern edge of Olkhovatka – along the road leading to Sklyaevo 3rd" and fully prepared to repel enemy counterattacks from the south and west:

- 3/842RR holds: "gully 800 m northwest of Olkhovatka – 400 m southwest along the road". Ready to repel enemy counterattacks from the south and southwest.
- 1/842RR holds: "northern edge of Olkhovatka – 400 m northwest along the road". Ready to repel enemy counterattacks from the south and southwest.
- 2/842RR is deployed in defense, echeloned to the right (behind 3/842RR), ready to support 3/842RR and 1/842RR.

The units are digging in, replenishing ammunition, cooking hot meals. The neighbor on the right (104RBde) is advancing southwards and has reached the eastern arm of the gully to the west of Olkhovatka. The neighbor on the left (931RR) is advancing southwards. Its progress so far: 2/931RR is closing in on the northern outskirts of Olkhovatka, 3/931RR is engaged in a battle over the possession of Redkaya, 1/931RR – is to the left of the grove.

- *Own Losses* (15.9 and 16.9 total): 243 killed, 328 wounded.
- *Trophies*: 3 LMGs, 4 rifles, 1 radio, 6 gas masks, 4 phone sets, 3 km of phone cable, 4 bicycles, 2500 rifle rounds.
- The regimental HQ is located in Niz. Vereyka, the command post and observation post are located 400 m west of the grove.

17.9.42

The mission is to maintain a tight hold on the ground captured on 15.9 and 16.9. There is no change in positions held by the regimental units. The regiment is ready to repel enemy counterattacks from south and southwest. The neighbor on the right (104RBde) is advancing southwards and reached a bend in the gully south of the woods at 111.2. One battalion of the brigade dug in west of the northern arm of the gully, another dug in to the east of it. The neighbor on the left (931RR) is advancing southwards/southwestwards and reached the area east of 165.0 and Redkaya's southern edge.

15:30 – The enemy attempted a counterattack from Olkhovatka and the area southwest of Olkhovatka using a force of up to an infantry battalion strong. Up to two battalions of infantry counterattacked from ht. 155.8 towards fstd. Mokryy. The enemy was advancing on our positions in the open. The units of our regiment waited until the enemy was within the effective range of their weapons, then opened up with heavy fire. After fierce fighting on the forward lines of the defense (breaking into a melee at times), the enemy fell back to his initial positions losing approximately 500 men.

18:00 – Reinforcements (exact headcount unknown) arrived during the heavy fighting and were immediately committed to help in repelling the counterattack.

Losses: Our regiment suffered significant losses defending against the counterattacks (the count is in progress).

Lack of food in the regiment was reported to the 240RD commander.

240th Rifle Division – Combat Report

(September 18, 1942)⁵⁷

*Combat Report No. 25, Operational Group 240RD,
ht. marked +1.8, 14:00 18.9.42*

After being forced to withdraw from the unnamed ht. northwest of Olkhovatka, the unnamed farmstead south of Verilovka, and from Gnezdilovo, the enemy is attempting to hold on to Olkhovatka and Redkaya grove, as well as to restore his initial frontline. To achieve this, a large force of infantry and artillery was brought in and committed. Small tank detachments were sighted too.

On 16.9.42, Construction Battalion 79 was committed to the fighting near Olkhovatka and got smashed almost immediately by our division's units. Approximately 30 men were taken prisoner, from which 9 were sent to the Army HQ, the rest of the battalion's personnel were eliminated on the battlefield or en route.

On 17.9.42, Engineer Battalion 387 was transferred into Redkaya overnight and consequently nearly 100% eliminated by the units of 931RR and tanks of the 86th and 150th tank brigades. In the latter half of the day a large group of infantry, artillery, vehicles and tanks assembled near the southwestern edge of Redkaya. At 18:30, the enemy launched a counterattack from the northeastern outskirts of Olkhovatka towards ht. 165.0 and Mokryy with a force of over a regiment of infantry, supported by tanks. Over half of the attacking force was eliminated by MLRS salvos, artillery, mortars and small arms fire. The rest of the attackers fell back to the initial positions, leaving around 800 corpses behind (unverified data).

931RR repelled seven counterattacks coming from Redkaya jointly with tanks of 150TBde and 86TBde. Counterattack attempts by smaller enemy detachments coming from Olkhovatka were broken up by 836RR. ATR specialist Dukatov set two German tanks ablaze.

In spite of the devastating losses in senior commanding staff of the 1st and 2nd battalions of 836RR, the soldiers declared: "We will lunge at the enemy's throat before we take a step back!" (...)

[Signed] 240RD Commander – Col. *Avdeenko*, 240RD Kommissar – Reg. Kom. *Zaslavskiy*, 240RD Deputy Chief of Staff – Cpt. *Kutsenko*

⁵⁷ CAMD RF, Fond: 1521, Series: 1, File: 12 (Document begins on page: 1 [65]).

86th Tank Brigade

Translated Documents

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86th Tank Brigade – Initial Order⁵⁸

*Combat Order No. 10, 86th Tank Brigade HQ,
Woods East of Pribytkovo, 22:30 14.9.42*

1. (...) [See 240RD, *Combat Order No. 11*, section 1]
2. (...) [See 240RD, *Combat Order No. 11*, section 3]
3. (...) [See 240RD, *Combat Order No. 11*, section 2]
4. (...) [See 240RD, *Combat Order No. 11*, section 2]
5. I decided to advance in two echelons. A platoon of T-34 (detached from 232TBn), a platoon of T-60 (detached from the separate tank company) and the tank desant company remain in the reserve.
6. *232TBn* will assemble in the area "southern bank of the Vereyka River – 1 km southeast of Niz. Vereyka". The tank battalion will be used in concert with 842RR. After the first line of defense is breached by the infantry of 240RD, advance to "the intersection of dirt paths 1 km west of Verilovka – Redkaya – map mark 155.8 – northwestern outskirts of Olkhovatka – Khvoshchevatka – Panskaya Gvozdevka".
233TBn will use the southern bank of the Vereyka River, 1 km west of the Don as its assembly area. Once the first echelon captures Olkhovatka, advance in the second line in concert with 836RR, follow *232TBn* and 842RR. Main mission is to destroy AT guns and DFPs, thus assisting the advance of the first echelon. Use the "short halt" gun firing technique. Be prepared to launch an attack to the west/southwest. Direction of the advance: same as *232TBn*.
The *motor-rifle battalion* will occupy the assembly area 300 m in front of *233TBn*. Advance following 931RR in concert with the AT battery and the separate tank company towards "the intersection of dirt paths 0.5 km west of the unnamed farmstead – western edge of Gnezdilovo – Redkaya – Treugolnaya grove (north of Khvoshchevatka)" with the mission to mop up in the enemy's strongpoints: unnamed farmstead (south of Verilovka) and Redkaya. Be ready to strike out west and southwest. Once 240RD advances to the line "155.4 – Panskaya Gvozdevka", assume an advance guard mission and deploy 300–400 m

⁵⁸ CAMD RF, Fond: 3304, Series: 1, File: 1 (Document begins on page: 1 [14]).

in front of the tanks in the gully 1 km northwest of Panskaya Gvozdevka. Be ready to defend the approaches to the tanks' dispositions and repel attacks from the west.

7. Assemble the reserve force east of map marker +1.8 and be ready to deploy on my command.
8. Start the march to the assembly area at 04:30, finish by 06:30 on 15.9.42. Marching order: 232TBn, 233TBn, separate tank company, AT battery, motor-rifle battalion, AA battery. Form up for the departure by 05:00. The offensive begins at 06:35 on 15.9.42.
9. Signals:
 - a. Beginning of the tank/infantry attack: a series of white flares, radio/phone code "Burya" [= "Storm"].
 - b. Fire transfer from the front line into the defense's depth: a series of red flares, radio/phone code "Veter" [= "Wind"].
 - c. Further artillery fire transfers: a series of green flares, radio/phone code "Uragan" [= "Hurricane"].
 - d. Cessation of artillery fire: a series of yellow flares, radio/phone code "Yalik" [= "Dinghy"].
 - e. Target sharing from tanks to infantry and the other way around: tracer bullets, green flare towards the target.
 - f. Appearance of enemy tanks: radio code "Grom" [= "Thunder"].
10. HQ command post at the start of the offensive: Donskaya Negachevka. Observation post: map marker +1.8. With the capture of "156.4 – Donskaya Gvozdevka – Khvoshchevatka", the observation post moves to the unnamed ht. southwest of Gnezdilovo, the HQ command post moves to the northern environs of Verilovka.
11. Reports to be sent:
 - a. after occupying the assembly areas,
 - b. at the beginning of the offensive,
 - c. after advancing to the line "Gnezdilovo – Mokryy",
 - d. then every two hours.
12. My deputy: Lt. Col. Kazmenko. My chief of staff: Mjr. Tertychnyy.

[Signed] 86TBde Commander – Lt. Col. *Zaseev*, 86TBde Kommissar – Sr. Bn. Kom. *Rylskiy*, 86TBde Chief of Staff – Mjr. *Tertychnyy*.

86th Tank Brigade – War Diary

(Entries for September 10–17, 1942)⁵⁹

10.9.42 – 14.9.42

The brigade assembled east of Pribytkovo. The staff of brigade and battalion HQs reconnoitered the area of future action and worked on improving in-battle cooperation and coordination. The tank brigade's personnel were working on setting up water crossings and digging pits for the tanks with the assistance of 240RD. Exercises were held to practice a combined arms attack of a rifle regiment supported by tanks and artillery.

15.9.42

First half of the day

The brigade elements were gathered in the area near the southern environs of Fomina-Negachevka prior to the start of the artillery preparation.

06:30 – Once the artillery preparation started, the units moved into their respective assembly areas:

- 232TBn moved to the southern bank of r. Vereyka, 1 km southeast of Vereyka village.
- 233TBn moved to the southern bank of r. Vereyka, 1 km west of r. Don.
- Motor-rifle battalion – 300 m ahead of 233TBn.
- Separate tank company – 200 m behind 233TBn.
- Reserve: 1 tank platoon of T-34 from 232TBn, 1 tank platoon of T-60 from the separate tank company. Deployed east of map marker +1.8.
- The rear elements of the combat units and the brigade's first echelon of rear elements are deployed in Don village.
- The command post is in Donskaya-Negachevka as of 06:00.
- The observation post is on the height at map marker +1.8.
- The second echelon of rear elements is in the woods east of Zarechye.

07:00 – The brigade advances in a two-echelon formation together with 240RD. 232TBn is in the first echelon with 931RR; 233TBn is in the second echelon with 836RR. Enemy defenses were breached in the sector: "woods south of 111.2 – unnamed farmstead south of Verilovka".

⁵⁹ CAMD RF, Fond: 3304, Series: 1, File: 17 (Document begins on page: 21).

12:00 – 232TBn's tanks moved in a mixed formation with the infantry and provided fire support using the "short halt" firing method⁶⁰, reaching the line "northern edge of Gnezdilovo – fstd. Mokryy".

233TBn advanced in the second echelon behind 232TBn and provided fire support to the infantry using the "short halt" firing method. The tank battalion moved past the infantry of the first echelon on the line "Mokryy – northern edge of Verilovka". 14:00 – 233TBn reached the northeastern edge of Redkaya grove (1 km west of Gnezdilovo).

The motor-rifle battalion advanced in the second echelon behind 931RR; it wiped out the remaining DFPs in the strongpoint "unnamed farmstead" and breached wire obstacles on the northern slopes of the height next to the farmstead. By 17:00 the motor-rifle battalion reached the line: "northern edge of the unnamed farmstead – crossroads 800 m west of the unnamed farmstead".

The AT battery and the separate tank company were deployed in front of the motor-rifle battalion and were used in a fire support role for the tanks and infantry of the first echelon. Several DFPs near Mokryy were hit and destroyed.

Platoon leader Mjr. Lt. Stepanov (232TBn) distinguished himself in the brigade's breakthrough of the first defense line. As his tanks were advancing towards Redkaya, Stepanov spotted two AT guns firing from a hollow 500 m north of Mokryy. Stepanov marked the targets with a machine gun burst, and the rest of the platoon destroyed the guns using the "short halt" firing method.

- Casualties: 2 killed, 5 wounded.
- Equipment losses: 1 T-34 of 232TBn burned (struck by a HEAT projectile), 1 T-34 was disabled by a mine, 1 T-34 was knocked out by an artillery shell.
- Trophies: 2 LMGs, 11 rifles.
- Enemy losses: 3 AT guns, up to 150 hitlerites killed.

Latter half of the day

232TBn fought alongside 842RR at the northern edge of Redkaya. It was met by a hail of artillery fire coming from the southern part of Mokryy, by AT fire coming from the northeastern edge of the grove and also encountered a minefield north of the grove. The battalion silenced the AT

⁶⁰ Fire is conducted by halting the tank for 6–10 seconds to fire a shot, then keep moving again. A compromise between firing on the move and firing while completely stationary.

guns positioned on the northern edge of the grove after pushing on through the minefield. 23:00 – The battalion is positioned 500 m east of Redkaya.

233Tbn advanced in left echelon formation, wiped out DFPs in the Gnezdilovo strongpoint and pushed through a minefield. 23:00 – The battalion is positioned near the northern edge of Redkaya.

The motor-rifle battalion followed 233Tbn, assisting in suppressing enemy DFPs in the vicinity of Gnezdilovo and supporting the tanks and infantry advance with MG and mortar fire. After mopping up Gnezdilovo, the battalion moved to the area 1 km northwest of Gnezdilovo where it consolidated its positions.

The AT battery and the separate tank company were advancing in a mixed formation with motor-rifle battalion infantry, providing mobile fire support. The troops engaged AT guns and DFPs on the northeastern edge of Redkaya and reached the western edge of Gnezdilovo by 23:00.

In the fighting on 15.9 (from 15:00 to 23:00) the brigade suffered the following losses:

- Casualties: 2 killed, 6 wounded, 2 suffered concussions.
- Equipment losses: 2 T-34 burned, 2 T-34 were damaged by mines and towed from the battlefield, 1 T-60 was damaged by a landmine and burned.
- Trophies taken: 15 rifles, 1 HMG, 2 LMGs, 5 small arms ammo boxes.
- Enemy equipment destroyed: 4 AT guns, 2 mortars.

16.9.42

The brigade continued with its earlier mission: to establish a foothold at the southern edge of Redkaya and provide fire support (from a stationary position) to 931RR in its efforts to capture Olkhovatka.

232Tbn fought alongside 931RR. It advanced over the eastern slopes of ht. 165.0, destroying enemy DFPs on the grove's western edge and AT guns on ht. 165.0. The battalion then advanced to the southern edge of the grove where it provided fire support from its newly held positions to the forces of 240RD (which were fighting to break into Olkhovatka). 24:00 – 232Tbn reached the western edge of the grove.

233Tbn advanced on the left, employing "short halt" fire to suppress enemy DFPs at the western edge of Redkaya. The battalion's tanks crushed enemy

infantry by running them over with caterpillar treads. 24:00 – 233TBn reached the southern edge of the grove.

The motor-rifle battalion, AT battery and separate tank company advanced behind 233TBn and engaged and destroyed DFPs on Redkaya's eastern edge. 24:00 – The units reorganized for defense 0.5 km east of Redkaya.

Tank commander Jr. Lt. Ivchenko distinguished himself when the motor-rifle battalion and AT battery were hit by a hail of flanking fire coming from Redkaya's eastern edge. Ivchenko directed his tank towards the enemy infantry in cover at the edge of the woods, stopped within 50 m and took out 30 men firing point blank. He also crushed an LMG with his tank. The company of Mjr. Lt. Sorokin inflicted up to 50 enemy casualties and destroyed 2 AT guns.

- Own Casualties: 2 killed, 11 wounded.
- Equipment losses: 4 T-34 burned, 1 T-34 is inoperable due to a broken turret rotation mechanism.
- Trophies: 1 HMG, 11 rifles.
- 3 wood-and-dirt pillboxes were demolished.

17.9.42

The brigade continued executing its assigned mission: to seize Olkhovatka and ht. 165.0 and then pass to the defensive at the line along the gully south of 165.0 by the end of the day.

232TBn fought over the possession of the southwestern edge of Redkaya and the southern slopes of 165.0. During the fight the battalion destroyed AT guns on ht. 165.0 and disrupted an infantry counterattack. 17:00 – The battalion took positions at the southwestern edge of the grove and from there shelled enemy DFPs on the southeastern edge of Olkhovatka.

233TBn attacked towards ht. 165.0 and destroyed enemy weapon nests on the northern side of ht. 165.0 (the tanks were firing from stationary positions). Later the battalion assisted 842RR in penetrating into Olkhovatka by eliminating hostile DFPs around the village. 17:00 – the battalion advanced to the northwestern edge of Redkaya.

The motor-rifle battalion, AT battery and separate tank company were engaged in fighting over the possession of Redkaya. By the end of the day the units took up defensive positions 300 m east of the grove.

The crew under the command of Starshina Zhilyaev (233TBn) distinguished themselves in the day's fighting. When our infantry sought cover under the strong fire from the woods, Zhilyaev's tank reacted immediately by speeding into the woods, suppressing two AT guns and taking out up to 10 enemy infantrymen plus two machine guns. Four were taken prisoner.

Another example of outstanding combat actions is that of Jr. Lt. Vakulenko (232TBn) who destroyed 4 LMGs and up to a platoon of enemy infantry, he also demolished a wood-and-dirt pillbox during the fighting in the grove.

- Own casualties: 9 killed, 31 wounded, 5 missing.
- No equipment losses.

86th Tank Brigade – After Action Report⁶¹

*To the Deputy Commander
in charge of the Armored Forces, 38A*

*Lessons learned from the 86th Tank Brigade's combat deployment
for the period between September 15 and 26, 1942.*

1. The enemy built up strong defenses in the brigade's zone of advance that rely on strongpoints saturated with well-camouflaged entrenched AT guns. Infantry dug in deep using a network of connected trenches, covered emplacements and wood-and-dirt pillboxes. Approaches vulnerable to tanks are mined. Artillery and mortar batteries mass their fires and make use of standing barrage zones. The precision of counter-battery fire must be highlighted – sound ranging equipment seems to be commonly used.

AT guns use "sub-caliber" ammunition type against our tanks. This type of shell has a good penetration and strong post-penetration effect. A single hit to the turret often disables the entire crew. Most of the disabled tanks (up to 90%) are due to AT gun fire hitting the following spots: the front of the turret, the gunner's sight, the driver's hatch, the gun mantlet or the drivetrain.

Counterattacking formations are reinforced by small tank groups (4–10). Tanks and infantry are working closely together. Our own tanks (abandoned within territory controlled by the enemy) are used as armored DFPs, with AT guns dug in under the hulls.

Strongpoints are placed on hills, in settlements and wooded areas. Given these modern characteristics of the enemy defense system, to achieve success, tankers need to flawlessly execute the instructions from the PKD⁶² orders No. 057 and No. 0455 and the AAD RA⁶³ directive 703507.

2. First day's (15.9.42) success was achieved due to the intensive preparation and training with the goal to improve coordination and cooperation between infantry, tanks and support units. Prior to the operation's start, 86TBde and 240RD participated in joint tactical exercises. The exercises concentrated on coordination and cooperation between infantry's obstacle breaching teams, assault teams, capture teams and tankers with supporting units. The importance of signals and target

⁶¹ CAMD RF, Fond: 3304, Series: 1, File: 11 (Document begins on page: 1).

⁶² People's Commissariat of Defense

⁶³ Automotive and Armor Directorate of the Red Army

designating were explained to each soldier. Four light tanks were attached to the brigade's AT company and were used as artillery tractors. This greatly increased the effectiveness of AT guns while on the offensive. Insignificant losses of the first day (see the losses report) are due to well-executed actions of close support artillery and obstacle breaching teams.

3. On 16–17.9.42 and 18.9.42, despite the aggressive effort of our tanks, Redkaya grove was only partially captured due to the infantry's inability to build on the tankers' success. The tanks "combed" the grove with treads and concentrated fire as part of their assigned mission, yet the infantry did not get up for the attack into the woods because it was pinned down by automatic small arms fire.

Tanks and infantry both suffered heavy losses as the direct consequence of lack of forward progress and were not able to secure the objective. The brigade lost 4 tanks (T34) burned and 2 tanks (T34) knocked out by AT guns.

4. Using the tactics of infantry riding on tanks during the offensive on 19.9.42 (with the objective of capturing ht. 155.8) was a resounding success. A combination of employing rapid movement and setting a limited goal ensured the capture of the strongpoint (ht. 155.8).

Brief shelling (5–10 minutes) plays an important role in such missions where tanks are attacking a strongpoint. Rockets are especially effective. The enemy in prepared positions is suppressed, blinded by smoke and therefore cannot organize effective on-target fire against the tanks and the tank-riding infantry. The brigade secured its objective in 30–40 minutes, inflicting significant losses on the enemy, while suffering only minor casualties of its own – all as a direct result of a well-organized coordination. Commanders of tank units were very active in developing the plan for the operation, and took the initiative to lead the combined troops during the attack, with infantry commanders following their lead.

5. For the remainder of the reporting period (through 26.9.42) tanks were deployed in a more or less conventional manner.

6. Battalion commanders, their staff and the brigade HQ staff gained valuable experience in controlling their own units during combat and managed to achieve a steady level of coordination with infantry commanders and their HQ staff. Battalion commanders were present among their troops, deployed with one of the companies in the field and using a T60 for communications. Battalion HQs used radios to maintain communications with the brigade's observation post (co-located with 240RD's observation post). A delegation of brigade HQ staff was permanently assigned to the observation post, assisting the brigade commander with planning of the operation, maintaining coordination with infantry and artillery commanders, sending

orders out to the units in the field, and controlling the supply and repair services via the brigade HQ (located at the command post) and the battalion HQs. No instances of delays or untimely receipt of orders and directives occurred during the operation.

7. These facts allow for the following conclusion: servicemen, commanders of companies and battalions and their HQ staff gained sufficient combat experience and demonstrated much better execution in the period from 15.9.42 through 26.9.42.

A detailed study of the brigade's experience during July engagements and AAD RA directive No. 703507 undertaken by the personnel of the brigade was a key driver of the improvement.

[Signed]

86TBde Commander, Lt. Col. *Zaseev*

86TBde Kommissar, Sr. Bn. Kom. *Rylskiy*

86TBde Chief of Staff, Mjr. *Tertychnyy*

Motor-Rifle Battalion – After Action Report⁶⁴

Gnezdilovo Area – Voronezh Front

I. Tactical characteristics of the enemy's defense and actions

The enemy advanced guard was deployed on: unnamed farmstead (south of Verilovka) and to the west towards Sklyaevo 2nd and mark 111.2. The troops were located on a hill, providing a good view of Verilovka, Niz. Vereyka, Fomina-Negachevka, Donskaya Negachevka, Krivobor, Gorozhanka, Gudovskiy and Sevryukovka. They had deep trenches, bunkers and communication trenches dug for them. A telephone connection was also provided. The strength of the advance guard at 300 [illegible] is 2–3 infantry platoons, reinforced by light and heavy machine guns. The Germans were conducting observation of our defensive positions and troop movements from this location. About 50–60 m deeper into the defensive area the Germans placed wire entanglement two picket rows deep, reinforced with antipersonnel mines and booby traps. This setup is likely explained by the fact that the enemy did the fortification work after the earthen works were completed. Moreover, the outpost trenches being close to the northern side of the hill (a fairly steep one) didn't allow placing the entanglements in front of the trenches. Moving the locations of the troops back even by 10–15 m would obstruct the view of the gully running north to Vereyka river and thus lessen the tactical importance of the position. However, due to the discovery of our troops concentration near Vereyka river, the enemy decided that the offensive was imminent and moved the outpost behind the protection of the wire entanglements. This explains why on the morning of the 15.9 offensive the enemy was deployed in hastily dug shallow trenches.

The left flank ran along the Don's right bank. Most vulnerable areas had antipersonnel minefields installed. Gnezdilovo village was not set up as a strongpoint. This is confirmed by: 1. The lack of engineers works on the approaches. 2. Its garrison (one infantry company) gave only token resistance before retreating into Redkaya.

Mokryy farmstead was turned into a hardened strongpoint. Its defenses included three wood-and-dirt machine gun pillboxes, a battery of 75mm guns, two 81mm mortar batteries and 7–10 bunkers. Its garrison (a reinforced infantry company) resisted fiercely. The other strongpoint

⁶⁴ CAMD RF, Fond: 3304, Series: 1, File: 109 (Document begins on page: 7).

(unnamed farmstead south of Verilovka) included 3 wood-and-dirt pillboxes, 9 bunkers and one 81mm mortar battery. However its garrison did not put up much of a fight after well-placed shelling of our artillery. It retreated in panic before we began the attack.

Redkaya grove most likely was not intended to be used as a resistance node by German command, but instead served as a supply base (food and ammunition) close to the frontline. This is confirmed by the presence of underground storage facilities housing ammunition, food and rooms adapted as a field hospital. The grove was later changed into an improvised strongpoint due to the circumstances. Evidently, the remains of defeated frontline garrisons all took refuge in the grove and managed to put up a fierce fight, aided by the nature of the vegetation – low dense bushes. The enemy then decided to keep the grove under his control at any cost and began to transfer significant personnel reinforcements to the area. Our artillery's ongoing massed fires turned the grove into a cemetery for Germans.

The northeastern slopes of ht. 155.8 (facing the Don) had double-row wire entanglements installed, followed by a first line of shallow trenches. Further back (200 m) there was another line of trenches and bunkers. These defenses were not manned with the exception of a few snipers hiding in abandoned tractors. The appearance of a group (10–15 men strong) later was due to Redkaya being partially encircled by our forces. This observation leads us to believe that ht. 155.8 serves as the right flank of the defensive line passing through ht. 165.0 eastwards. That line covers the approaches to Olkhovatka strongpoint. The latter happens to be a key defensive node and Germans put a lot of effort into its defenses: 1. Engineering works and earthworks built on ht. 165.0 (northwestern approaches to Olkhovatka) aimed to build a high density field of automatic small arms fire, AT and mortars. 2. Field artillery from the fallen defensive positions were brought into Olkhovatka. 3. In addition to building an extensive network of wood-and-dirt pillboxes that dominated the approaches to the settlement, the enemy built DFPs in residential houses. The northwestern approach to Olkhovatka is shielded by deep ditches impassable to tanks⁶⁵.

Olkhovatka garrison was very sizable, a mix of different units. The village served as a transfer center for all reinforcements arriving into the area. For one, all reinforcements for Redkaya arrived from Olkhovatka.

We must note that the enemy did not limit himself to passive reconnaissance via observation and airplanes. The enemy frequently used recon-in-force, especially around Redkaya, which saw counterattacks with forces up to a platoon or more. At first, 5–7 sub machine gunners would appear, next we would see the core of the group. If this group managed to

⁶⁵ The author is most likely talking about gullies, since we do not see any mentions of man-made anti-tank ditches in this area in any other available document.

penetrate into our positions, then the reinforcements (2–3x the size of the original force) would be sent in to exploit. Artillery support for these counterattacks had a peculiar aspect to it. Namely, the shelling did not intensify prior to the appearance of these groups. It was a regular harassing fire and on occasion the shelling would stop altogether. At the same time, air recon would intensify – a so called "crutch"⁶⁶ would start circling above, dropping to a lower altitude in the area of the attempted infiltration. Focke-Wulf 189 would also fly close by. This was done to divert our attention from the frontlines. Under these conditions the recon group would move covertly holding its fire even if an appropriate target presented itself. If this recon mission did not yield the desired results the enemy would switch to recon-in-force. This would involve a short but intense shelling. Immediately following the shelling's end or its transfer to the next targeted area, the enemy counterattacked, always looking to exploit the advantage by adding more troops to the engagements to develop a strong counterattack. All of his counterattacks failed. Usually they would be launched in the morning.

All reinforcements would move overnight or early in the morning. This was particularly clear in Redkaya. Our units cleared the grove more than once, leaving just a handful of enemies untouched, only to discover a large force occupying the grove again in the morning. Another item to highlight – the enemy would change into red army uniforms, infiltrate our formations to obtain reconnaissance data and would shoot us in the back.

No tank units were seen in the area of this operation outside of one occasion on 19.9 when the enemy used three tankettes for troops transport in the area of ht. 155.8. These were knocked out by ATR units of 931RR.

German air support during the operation was especially active. It took advantage of the absence of dedicated AA weapons or organized small arm AA fire and attacked our formations unchallenged. Groups of up to 25 planes would bomb and strafe our positions from low altitude flying 2–3 missions per day. One particularly strong attack hit Gnezdilovo and the gully 0.5 km north of it. On the days without fighter-bomber activity the reconnaissance planes (Henschel 126 and Focke-Wulf 189) would drop large quantities of small bombs and grenades. (...)

II. Summary of our combat experience in the operation

(...) Reconnaissance data we had prior to the Oklhovatka offensive were precise and covered not only the frontlines, but also the defense organization in the depth and the strongpoints. The latter had a positive effect on all our actions on the offensive. Since even the best reconnaissance cannot provide a complete picture of the enemy's intentions, it's imperative for the scouts to capture enemy prisoners. The determination of the attack

⁶⁶ Henschel Hs 126

timing has an outsized impact. While this factor depends on the state of the enemy defense and the composition of the attacking force, it's desirable to launch the attacks in the early morning. This allows the troops to move into assembly areas, complete preparations and settle questions of communication and combined arms tactics overnight. An early start provides more daylight for the offensive as well as the opportunity to consolidate positions on newly reached lines. The consolidation in this case isn't simply the halt in the advance, but rather a natural need in order to resupply and reorganize. This is especially important for tank units acting in concert with rifle formations. But let's not forget that the forward momentum must not slack off, otherwise the enemy is given a chance to regroup and consolidate his new positions. In these circumstances the artillery support group needs to be active. Everything listed so far had been confirmed during the offensive on 15.9.42. The preparations for the operation were held on 13–14.9.42: a plan of the advance was developed and the entire commanding personnel walked through it. The plan was prepared by the brigade HQ staff and covered in detail all important aspects of the operation: missions, organization of the advance, special instructions and signals. Commanders meticulously reconnoitered their routes. The troops redeployed into their new locations prior to the offensive and had time to tie up the matters of communication, cooperation and deployment. These efforts were certain to lead to a successful offensive and that is exactly what happened during the first day. A success we could not repeat in the next 4–5 days.

The tempo of the advance fell significantly on the second day. This can be attributed to the break in command and control of 842RR and 931RR. Detachment commanders did not control their soldiers. Often we saw a situation where a battalion lacked a single mid-level commander. A strong-willed control on behalf of commanders was lacking too. All of this led to the infantry lagging behind the tanks, preferring to stay in cover. We cannot even begin to speak of "cooperation" in these circumstances. Moreover, most of the attacks were scheduled between 17:00 and 18:00, and these attacks would not reach their objective, were unenergetic and slow. A soldier who was under unrelenting artillery and mortar shelling and air attacks for the entire day, would get exhausted and lacked the will to go forward. This is why Redkaya changed hands three times: by the end of the day our detachments would take over, but without consolidating positions, come morning the Germans would again end up in possession. (...)

[Signed]

Motor-Rifle Battalion Commander, Sr. Lt. *Kozmin*

Adjutant, Sr. Lt. *Mulyavka*

150th Tank Brigade

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150th Tank Brigade – Combat Directive

(for September 15, 1942)⁶⁷

*Combat Directive No. 25, 150th Tank Brigade HQ
Donskaya Negachevka, 03:00 15.9.42*

1. All units will be ready by 05:20. Serve breakfast at 05:00.
2. Movement route to the assembly area: road along the Don at map marker 131.2, crossings at the eastern outskirts of Niz. Vereyka.
3. Jumping-off point: Fomina-Negachevka (1/150TBde zone). The order of movement: 2/150TBde at 05:40, 1/150TBde at 06:00. If 86TBde units move out at the same time, keep 100–200 m to the right of the original route (i.e. west of the road).
4. The traffic control company commander is responsible for organizing the route to the assembly area.
5. Responsible for the timely departure: 1/150TBde – Mjr. Bulantsev, 2/150TBde – Lt.Col. Laplyuchenko.
6. By 04:00 set up the observation from all observation posts.
7. The 150MRBn commander will designate one mid-level commander and five submachine gunners to be stationed on the southern edge of the woods at 111.2. Once the infantry advances to the line "Sklyaevo – Olkhovatka", they will convey the signal to the tanks to leave the assembly area and march to the form-up point. The signal: radio "777", telephone "Go ahead!".
8. I forbid the crews from leaving their tanks until the end of the day.

[Signed]

150TBde Chief of Staff, Mjr. *Kirilkin*

150TBde Staff Military Kommissar, Sen. Bn. Kom. *Nagornyy*

Deputy Chief of Staff (operations), Mjr. *Gurik*

⁶⁷ CAMD RF, Fond: 3217, Series: 0000001, File: 2 (Document begins on page: 170).

150th Tank Brigade – War Diary

*(Entries for September 15–17, 1942)*⁶⁸

15.9.42

05:40 – The brigade moved into the assembly areas as ordered by the 38A commander:

- 1/150TBde: northeastern slopes of ht. 131.2
- 2/150TBde: northeastern slopes of ht. 111.2
- 150MRBn: southern edge of Fomina-Negachevka (prepared to assist the tank reserves).
- AT Bn: Firing positions in the area of Sklyaevo 1st and 2nd, with the mission to cover the right flank. The 76mm gun battery is supporting the advance of 2/150TBde.
- AA Battery: Firing positions at Fomina-Negachevka with the mission to provide air defense for the brigade's second echelon and rear units.
- 1st company of 1/150TBde: brigade commander's reserve.

09:30 – 1/150TBde's attack on the unnamed height jumped off.

10:00 – 2/150TBde departed its assembly area.

15:00 – 150TBde tanks suppressed DFPs along the enemy frontline with the assistance from mortars and artillery of the brigade and made progress towards Olkhovatka. 1/150TBde reached the northern outskirts of Olkhovatka. 2/150TBde reached Olkhovatka from the northwest. After advancing up to the unnamed height the infantry halted, leaving the tanks without any support. The tanks disabled DFPs on the edge of Olkhovatka, then made another attempt to come back to the infantry positions and organize a combined attack, but yet again the infantry didn't advance.

The tanks moved back into the vicinity of 111.2 to bivouac for the night. A security detachment was set up on the southern slopes of the unnamed height.

Losses: 1 T-34 knocked out, an AT Bn staff car with documents burned, 1 man killed, 8 injured. Trophies are being processed. The brigade's 2nd echelon units and the HQ are at Donskaya Negachevka. The Command Post is on the unnamed ht. s-w of map mark +1.8.

⁶⁸ CAMD RF, Fond: 3217, Series: 0000001, File: 19 (Document begins on page: 41).

16.9.42

Brigade elements continued the mission set by *Brigade Order No. 35*: capture Olkhovatka, Lipovka, then advance to Repnoe. Following *Combat Directive No. 26*, the 1st tank battalion (acting in concert with elements of 836RR) would provide right flank protection for the division [240RD]; the tanks advance on the northwestern edge of Olkhovatka. Once Olkhovatka is secured by the infantry, the tanks advance on Lipovka, then Repnoe. The AT Bn's tanks will cover the brigade's right flank, the 76mm artillery battery will advance with the tank battalions.

10:00 – The tank battalions and infantry of 836RR began the attack on Olkhovatka.

12:00 – The 1st tank battalion advanced to within 150 m of Olkhovatka from the north. The 2nd tank battalion is northwest of Olkhovatka. Both are attempting to capture the settlement. The infantry, however, remains on their positions at the slopes of the unnamed height.

15:00 – The tanks spent all their ammunition and were forced to fall back to resupply ammunition and fuel. After resupplying, they resumed the effort, facing heavy fire from Olkhovatka. Enemy artillery fire from southern Olkhovatka, Lipovka and Sklyaevo 5th was employed to repel the brigade's tank attack.

19:30 – The tanks broke through the defenses and pushed into Olkhovatka where they were bogged down in street-to-street fighting. The enemy moved heavy weapons from Olkhovatka to Sklyaevo 5th to avoid the risk of losing them. The infantry followed the tanks this time, but could not take hold in the settlement. The tanks were then forced to move back behind the protection of infantry lines.

Equipment losses: Knocked out – 2 KVs, 4 T-34s; Burned – 1 KV, 1 T-34. Drowned next to the windmill – 2 T-34s. Personnel losses: 5 killed, 14 wounded, 4 MIA.

Enemy losses: 15 AT guns (and their crews), 17 wood-and-dirt pillboxes, 3 ammunition trucks, 4 bunkers, 30 MG nests, 1 AA gun and up to 120 men.

The brigade command post is on an unnamed height southwest of the +1.8 map marker.

17.9.42

The commander of 240RD issued a directive to the tank battalions of 150TBde: advance on Olkhovatka from Gnezdilovo.

06:00 – The brigade's deputy chief of staff led the redeployment of tanks to the assembly area near Gnezdilovo.

12:00 – The offensive via Redkaya began [troops entered from the south and east]. After reaching the western and the northern edges of Redkaya, the brigade ran into a strong fire system built by the enemy. Enemy submachine gunners were scattered through the woods. The commander of 836RR ordered the tanks to comb through the grove and weed out the resistance. The brigade's motor-rifle battalion was committed to deploy in a gap between rifle battalions of 836RR.

Command post of the brigade's motor-rifle battalion – crossroads 800 m southwest of Gnezdilovo. The brigade command post did not move.

150th Tank Brigade – After Action Report⁶⁹

Lessons Learned

38A's operation, aimed to capture the bridgehead "Sklyaevo 5th – Olkhovatka – Repnoe", began on 15.9.1942 and lasted through 03.10.1942. Ample preparation time allowed us to develop a battle plan on all levels of the command chain and to look at coordination between different arms. The question of location and timing of tank deployment was of high importance.

My thoughts on tank deployment were expressed in the suggestion to the 38A commander and his deputy in charge of the tank arm: "Use 150TBde (as the brigade with the most tanks) in concert with 240RD on the left flank of the offensive, since the topography of the area there is best suited for a tank maneuver (to "Verilovka – fstd. Mokryy" and bypass Olkhovatka from the east)."

Despite expressing this opinion on multiple occasions, the brigade was assigned a mission to operate in support of 104RBde along the line: "woods at 111.2 – following the gully south onto Lipovka". As such, the brigade was facing a strongpoint (Lipovka) in the main direction of the attack, and was exposed to flanking from both right (ht. 168.4, Sklyaevo 5th) and left (fstd. Mokryy, Olkhovatka). Moreover, to get to the assigned objective, the brigade had to traverse rough terrain. There were two gullies running across the approach route (which were held by the enemy at the time of departure) and one narrow gully (1300 m long) where the Kaverya stream bed was. The terrain was absolutely unsuited for maneuver and prevented the tanks from accelerating for the attack.

During the process of planning the tank/infantry coordination, the commander of 104RBe decided (with my input) to clear the enemy outpost from our path of advance with his own troops. The tanks would be committed once the infantry reaches the line "northern edge of Sklyaevo 5th – Olkhovatka", and the route through the gullies was secure. This was confirmed in order No. 21 issued by the 104RBde commander on 14.9.42.

On 15.9.42 1/104RBde advanced 200-300m (starting from the southern edge of the woods at 111.2) via the northern slopes of Olkhovatka hill. The battalion on the right flank did not make any material progress (just like its neighbor on the right 253RBde).

The circumstances did not allow for the use of tanks according to their mission stated in the order No. 21 by 104RBde. Instead, the tanks of the

⁶⁹ CAMD RF, Fond: 3217, Series: 0000001, File: 2, (Document begins on page: 198).

2nd battalion were barely crawling through the gully in a single file, while trying to keep in cover to avoid enemy fire from strongpoints in Sklyaevo 5th and Lipovka. 1/150TBde attacked Olkhovatka from the northwest, north and northeast. Following the tanks, a group of 240RD infantry (40–50 men) pushed into Olkhovatka, while the rest remained prone within 300–400 meters of the village due to the effect of hostile rocket fire by 6-barrel mortars.⁷⁰

Three tanks were lost, the remainder bivouacked within 300–400 m of the northwestern outskirts of Olkhovatka overnight.

On 16.9.42 the brigade's mission was updated to taking Olkhovatka while working with 240RD's right-flank regiment. The brigade's tanks broke through and entered the settlement on two occasions that day, but the infantry did not follow. 2 KVs and 2 T34s burned from being hit by incendiary bottles, two KVs and one T34 were knocked out.

On 17.9.42⁷¹ the brigade was assigned a new mission: Support 931RR and seize Redkaya grove (1 km southwest of Gnezdilovo). Then attack Olkhovatka from the northwest.

The commanders of 931RR, 150TBde and 86TBde collectively decided on a surprise attack, using tank desant tactics combined with heavy suppressive fire of artillery and machine guns and immediate mopping up action following the desant. 10 T34s carrying 100 submachine gunners seized the grove by the end of the day. Infantry units tasked with the mop up mission entered the grove (densely growing hazel) would gather trophies instead of engaging enemy submachine gunners. The commander of 3/250RBde was tasked with blocking the approaches from Olkhovatka to the grove's southern edge, but failed his mission.

As a result, by the morning there were enemies in the grove yet again: at least 2–3 German MG teams and some submachine gunners. At this point, the advance on Olkhovatka could not proceed until the grove was cleared. 931RR was assigned the mission of clearing the grove again. In spite of the assistance from tankers in combing through the woods, the grove was not clear of enemy resistance by 13:00. The tanks were then ordered to comb through Redkaya once more (by the 240RD commander). 20 tanks (with the 931RR commander riding along) crossed the grove north-south and back, but the tanks were unable to capture or eliminate all hidden enemies, while the infantry did not act. (...)

⁷⁰ These events are reported as occurring on the 16th in every other available document, including those on the German side.

⁷¹ Tank desant attack and 3/250RBde attachment to 240RD occurred on 18.9, which means the author of this document likely misremembered the exact timing of the events.

Conclusions from the experience:

1. Deployment of tanks was done without any consideration of their ability to maneuver or employment en mass. Large proportion of the tank force was engaged in frontal attack against enemy AT defenders, with little to no room for maneuver. An alternative course of actions, such as combined attack of two brigades at Verilovka – Gnezdilovo bypassing Olkhovatka from the east, would have ensured the success especially in the first phase of the operation and would have established freedom to maneuver.
2. The infantry almost never followed the tanks on the attack. As a result, tanks were left without infantry support after pushing into Olkhovatka and suffered heavy losses. Moreover, some infantry commanders have yet to understand the order by comrade Stalin regarding the optimal use of tanks as evidenced by their demands:
 - a. Prolonged tank engagement in settlements without infantry support.
 - b. To chase individual enemy infantrymen with tanks through the woods.
3. A dubious notion became commonplace: an argument that infantry can execute its mission without tanks. Because of that, tanks often ended up on "handholding" assignments for the infantry. All the while infantry commanders would underutilize the concentration of small arms, mortar and direct artillery fire in close combat, especially when launching an attack. In most cases this was the real reason behind their two major shortcomings: inability to advance and high casualties count.
4. The element of surprise was not used. The forces assembled several days prior to the operation's launch and we can tell that the enemy discovered the preparations.
5. The organization and camouflage of rear areas wasn't addressed. Road readiness for the fall weather is not seriously considered. The preparations of Don crossings to connect the supply line with the sole highway Klats – Voronezh are not considered either.
6. In the latter days of the operation, the remaining 21 tanks were attached to 86TBde. As the attack commenced, this consolidated battalion was split into separate detachments, effectively removing the 150TBde commander and Bn. commander Khvatov from the chain of command. I disagree with this decision.

These statements can be confirmed by:

1. Cpt. Baranyuk,
2. Bn. Kom. Pomaznev,
3. Sr. Lt. Khvatov,
4. Sr. Lt. Bezrukov,
5. Sr. Lt. Lapenin,
6. Cpt. Trushkin.

Additionally, the brigade's tank crews can serve as witnesses.

[Signed]

150TBde Commander – Lt. Col. *Safronov*

150TBde Military Kommissar – Reg. Kom. *Aleksin*

Appendix

German Units

The 377th Infantry Division (377ID) was formed during March–April 1942 as part of the 19th wave of deployment in France.⁷² The division commander was Generalmajor Erich Baeßler. In the summer of 1942 the newly formed division was then transferred to the Eastern Front.⁷³ During September 1942 it was attached to the XIII Army Corps⁷⁴ (XIIIAC) and deployed in a defense sector 20 km north of Voronezh.

The division consisted of the following units:

<i>Unit Name</i>	<i>Commander</i>	<i>Abbreviation</i>
Infantry Regiment 768	<i>Oberst</i> Kegler	768IR
Infantry Regiment 769	<i>Oberstleutnant</i> Heising	769IR
Infantry Regiment 770	<i>Oberst</i> Grießbach	770IR
Bicycle Squadron 377 ⁷⁵	<i>Leutnant</i> von Alvensleben	Bicycle Squadron 377
Anti-Tank Battalion 377	<i>Hauptmann</i> Becherer	377 AT Bn
Artillery Regiment 377	<i>Oberst</i> Ehlert	377AR
Engineer Battalion 377	<i>Oberstleutnant</i> Schunck	377 Eng Bn
<i>[Additionally various supply, communication and command units]</i>	–	–

⁷² It was known from the very beginning that the newly formed 377th Infantry Division was destined to be deployed on the Eastern Front because detailed guidelines on training with regard to the peculiarities of the Soviet forces were issued. Most of the personnel (officers and NCOs excluded) were "February recruits" without any combat experience (which translated to high casualty rates in the first months on the Eastern Front); the average age was 28 years. [See Herdener, 1970: 7–9]

⁷³ A small, interesting detail: The first immediate task of the 377th Infantry Division was to relieve the 9th Panzer Division near Kursk. The commanders of the relieving 377th Infantry Division and the relieved 9th Panzer Division were brothers. The younger brother of Generalmajor Erich Baeßler, Generalmajor Johannes Baeßler, was commander of the 9th Panzer Division at that time. His younger brother would get seriously wounded several times and died of his wounds in a reserve military hospital in Austria in 1944. The brothers were born in Silesia (their father being a head forester). Both had participated in World War I. [See Herdener, 1970: 10a–11a]

⁷⁴ The following infantry divisions were attached to the XIII Army Corps during September 1942: 377th, 385th, 340th, 68th, 82th.

⁷⁵ Technically the [1st company of Anti-Tank Battalion 377](#) (1./377 AT Bn).

German sub-units are designated using Arabic numerals for companies (and batteries) and Roman numerals for battalions. Examples:

1./769IR	=	1st company of Infantry Regiment 769
III./769IR	=	3rd battalion of Infantry Regiment 769
4./377AR	=	4th battery of Artillery Regiment 377
II./377AR	=	2nd battalion of Artillery Regiment 377

The following units or elements of these units were temporarily attached to the 377th Infantry Division in September 1942 [Selection]:

<i>Unit Name</i>	<i>Commander</i>	<i>Abbreviation</i>
Construction Battalion 79 (Army Troop ⁷⁶)	<i>Oberstleutnant</i> Marthenka	79 Cnstr Bn
1st battalion of Antiaircraft Artillery School 1 ⁷⁷ (Army Troop)	<i>Major</i> Böhme	I./AA school 1
Anti-Tank Battalion 654 (Army Troop)	<i>Major</i> Drechsler	654 AT Bn
Infantry Regiment 543 (from the 387th Infantry Division)	<i>Oberstleutnant</i> Gengenbach	543IR (387ID)
Infantry Regiment Herbst (ad hoc corps formation)	<i>Oberstleutnant</i> Herbst	Herbst IR
- 2nd battalion of Infantry Regiment 539 (from the 385th Infantry Division)	<i>Hauptmann</i> Flohr	II./539IR (385ID)
- 3rd battalion of Infantry Regiment 188 (from the 68th Infantry Division)	<i>Major</i> Mann	III./188IR (68ID)
- 3rd battalion of Infantry Regiment 168 (from the 82th Infantry Division)	<i>Hauptmann</i> Eggers	III./168IR (82ID)
2nd battalion of Artillery Regiment 67 (Army Troop)	<i>Oberstleutnant</i> Weissleder	II./67AR
Heavy Artillery Battalion 709 (Army Troop)	<i>Hauptmann</i> Esch	709 Heavy Arty Bn
Heavy Artillery Battalion 735 (Army Troop)	–	735 Heavy Arty Bn

⁷⁶ The term "Army Troop" ("Heerestruppe") was used for units which did not belong to a regular divisional formation. Army troops were usually subordinated to a higher command (army or army corps) and then temporarily attached to divisions as needed.

⁷⁷ Antiaircraft Artillery School 1 ("Flakartillerie-Schule 1") trained personnel for heavy AA guns. During the war some of the antiaircraft artillery schools were mobilized and established one or more battalions. Antiaircraft Artillery School 1 was the largest school, situated in Rerik on the Baltic Sea coast.

Locations

Several important locations (villages, rivers, etc.) mentioned in the translated documents have been marked on German Army maps which are provided in this chapter. Generally, the German spelling of location names is similar enough to their English equivalents to be identifiable.

- Olkhovatka
- Gnezdilovo, fstd. Mokryy, Verilovka, Niz. Vereyka
- Niz. Vereyka, Gorozhanka, Fomina-Negachevka
- Sklyaevo (1st to 5th)
- Sivirtsevo-Kaverya, Lipovka
- Strongpoint Don
- Unnamed Farmstead (south of Verilovka)
- "Redkaya" aka "Bird Grove"
- Don River, Vereyka River, Kaverya Creek
- 165.0, 111.2
- Khvoshchevatka, Panskaya Gvozdevka, Russkaya Gvozdevka
- Voronezh

Maps

- Overview Map (377ID – Sector) [12.9.1942]
- Frontline Map (377ID – Main Frontline) [14.9.1942]
- Annotated Frontline Map (377ID – Olkhovatka Area) [06:00, 15.9.42]
- Alternative Overview Map (377ID – Sector) [5.9.1942]