



The Semenovka Bridgehead

July 17-23, 1943

Translated Soviet and German Army Documents



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“Suddenly I hear rolling thunder coming from the direction of the front. I listen carefully, because it sounds differently than the usual surprise artillery attacks. It stretches along the entire frontline and is a non-stop rumbling. This is not a fire raid or a local artillery duel; this is massed fire of all calibers across the entire front. This is the prelude to a major enemy attack – the large Soviet Donets offensive, the large Russian summer offensive of 1943 has begun. Now I understand the urgency put into building defensive works with our whole battalion. Higher command must have expected the offensive. Just now, three Russian ground attack aircraft roar over our heads (...).”

Diary entry by Leutnant Herbert Schrödter (257th Infantry Division, “Feldersatz-Bataillon 257”) in the early morning of 17 July 1943.

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Red Army

Documents¹

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- The abbreviations and nomenclature used to refer to Soviet and German Army units are explained in the Appendix ("Abbreviations").
 - Image descriptions and footnotes contain links to scans of the original documents.
 - Coordinates of important locations mentioned in the translated documents (villages, heights, gullies, etc.) are provided in the Appendix ("Locations", "Maps").
 - It is highly recommended to use this *German Army topographic map* from 1943 while reading the translated documents. The German spelling of location names is similar enough to their English equivalents to be identifiable.

Izyum-Barvenkovo Offensive

17 – 27 July 1943

At the beginning of July 1943 the *Southwestern Front* was deployed for defense with the expectation of countering an inevitable German summer offensive. In particular, the Front's southern sector along the Severskiy Donets river between Ivanovka (northwest of Izyum) and Lopasskino (northwest of Lugansk) was echeloned in two lines: The first line was formed by the *1st* and *3rd Guards Armies*, while the *8th Guards Army* was held in the second line. Three of the Front's mobile formations (two tank corps and a mechanized corps) were further back, ready to counterattack in case of a German offensive against the Front's southern sector.

This changed on 5 July 1943 when the German offensive operation "Citadel" commenced with German attacks against the Kursk salient. As a reaction, the Southwestern Front began preparing for an offensive of its own: the intended immediate effect of this so-called "Izyum-Barvenkovo offensive operation" was to tie down the German Donbass grouping, draw in enemy reserves, and weaken the German's ongoing effort in the direction of Kursk against the Voronezh Front. But the operation's ultimate goal was the breakthrough of the enemy defense in the Izyum area (employing the *1st* and *8th Guards Armies*), which would be followed by the Southwestern Front's mobile elements entering the gap and advancing first to Barvenkovo and Slavyansk, and then towards Stalino. At Stalino, the Southwestern Front would meet the mobile elements of the *Southern Front* (provided that the Southern Front's "Mius offensive operation"² succeeded) thus completing

² The "Mius offensive operation" had the initial goal of breaking through a major German defensive line known as the "Mius-Front" (named so because it ran along the western bank of the Mius river to the Azov sea) and then capturing Stalino and Budenovka. The operation was assigned to the Southern Front and started simultaneously with the Izyum-Barvenkovo offensive operation.

the encirclement of the German Donbas grouping to finally recapture the economically important region. The 3rd Guards Army was assigned the secondary mission of advancing towards Artemovsk.³

As part of the preparations, the 1st and 3rd Guards Armies had their frontlines shortened by bringing the 8th Guards Army forward and deploying it between the two. Prior to the start of the operation, the troops of the Southwestern Front held two bridgeheads on the Donets southern bank: one in the river bend directly to the south of Izyum, the so-called “Izyum bridgehead”⁴ (1st Guards Army) and a smaller one in the river bend north of Lisichansk (3rd Guards Army). The Izyum bridgehead was connected to the northern bank by bridges, which provided the tank units with existing stream crossing infrastructure. The *23rd Tank Corps* was attached to the 1st Guards Army as a mobile strike force. The *1st Guards Mechanized Corps* played a similar role for the 8th Guards Army. The two armies had 655 tanks and 33 SPGs in total. Air support was provided by the *17th Air Army*.

The offensive commenced in the morning of 17 July (simultaneously with the Southern Front’s Mius offensive operation), but neither of the three participating armies of the Southwestern Front managed to break through the German defenses. After ten days of fierce fighting,⁵ the 1st and 8th Guards Armies gained a limited foothold on the southern bank of the Severskiy Donets, while the 3rd Guards Army did not make any progress.⁶

³ Until 1924 Artemovsk had been known as “Bakhmut”.

⁴ The Izyum bridgehead has been marked on *this map*.

⁵ The intensity of fighting was not uniform along the entire frontline. The 1st Guards Army ordered its forces to halt the offensive and consolidate gains on 21 July, the 3rd Guards Army on 20 July, and the 8th Guards Army on 23 July (attacks with scaled-down objectives continued).

⁶ See the map on the next page.



Southwestern Front – Izyum-Barvenkovo offensive operation (17–27.7.43)

This book focuses on the right wing of the Izyum-Barvenkovo offensive. Particularly the area southwest of Izyum starting at *Semenovka village* and stretching westwards (Andreyevka, Zavodskoy, Sredniy) in the zone of advance of the Southwestern Front’s 1st Guards Army. The 1st Guards Army deployed its *4th Guards Rifle Corps* in the first line with the goal of crossing the Severskiy Donets, breaking through the defenses of the German 257th Infantry Division,⁷ and capturing ground suitable for the 23rd Tank Corps to deploy into a battle formation.

Following are translations of operational documents from the files of the 4th Guards Rifle Corps, its elements, reinforcements, and neighbors. All of which were involved in the fighting at and near what would become known as – *the Semenovka bridgehead*.

⁷ The German 257th Infantry Division was attached to the 40th Panzer Corps (which in turn was attached to the 1st Panzer Army). The 257th Infantry Division’s defense sector at the start of the Soviet Izyum-Barvenkovo offensive can be seen on *this annotated map*.



Soviet military bridge over the Donets to the west of Semenovka village on 18 July 1943, the 2nd day of the Izyum–Barvenkovo offensive.⁸



Closer exposure of the above bridge. During the offensive the Red Army also employed underwater bridges, harder to detect for air reconnaissance.⁹

⁸ GX-5185-SD – N49E37-290 – No. 066

⁹ GX-5185-SD – N49E37-290 – No. 067



A large part of the fighting at Semenovka took place in the densely wooded area around the village.¹⁰



German strongpoint (500 m south of Semenovka) at the main road between Izyum and Vel. Kamyshevakha. To the south of Semenovka vast grassland steppe replaced the forests of the Donets lowland.¹¹

¹⁰ GX-3319-SG – N49E37-275 – No. 013

¹¹ GX-3319-SG – N49E37-275 – No. 011



Reconnaissance photograph taken of the battle in progress: Tanks operating near the village of Sredniy (7 km west of Semenovka) on 18 July 1943. As the operation unfolded, more than 200 Soviet tanks (including UK-made heavy Churchill tanks) were deployed for combat in the sector of the 4th Guards Rifle Corps.¹²

¹² GX-5185-SD – N49E37-290 – No. 074

4th Guards Rifle Corps

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53rd Rifle Division – After Action Report	40
57th Guards Rifle Division – After Action Report	62

4th Guards Rifle Corps – After Action Report¹³

*Covering the period from
17 July through 22 July 1943*

1. Dispositions

On 10 July 1943 the Corps was (...) attached to the 1st Guards Army. After two night marches it arrived in the area of Zakomelskaya, Kunye and Ivanovka (to the northeast of Izyum) and assembled in the woods to the west of Izyum in the early hours of 16 July. The large area covered by the forest afforded the ability to covertly assemble the Corps and the attached reinforcements.

There were no obstacles of any particular concern in the assembly area and in the zone of advance, however, sandy soil in the woods and the lack of prepared roadways restricted and slowed down maneuvering of the troops and supply deliveries.

The enemy held defensive positions along the southern bank of the Sever-skiy Donets river, which presented a serious obstacle for any attacker. Crossing the river was only viable with the use of specialized equipment. The river was 40 to 75 m wide, and 2 to 7 m deep, with a current speed of 0.9 m/s. In the Corps zone of advance there were two fords: 0.9 m and 1.5 m.

The southern bank dominated the approaches, there was a steep drop right by the river, and a series of heights restricted the view into the depth of the enemy defenses. The lack of observation allowed for covert maneuvering of enemy reserves and made it difficult to advance uphill after a successful crossing (particularly for the artillery). Any forward movement of the artillery on the southern bank would therefore needed to be done on foot, aided by

¹³ CAMD RF, Fond: 456, Series: 6850, File: 202 (Document begins on page 1).

additional detachments of infantry. On the Corps' left flank, the southern bank had woods stretching 0.5–2 km from the river. Further along, the terrain had a lot of gullies running across and along the zone of advance. Large settlements and free-standing hills helped the enemy with organizing a defense in depth.

The unpaved roads were passable for all troops when the weather permitted. Rainy weather made these roads difficult for wheeled vehicles. During the operation the weather did not have a significant impact on the action, outside of the observation being restricted by rainfall for brief periods.

During the operation, the 4th Guards Rifle Corps only had one division (20 Gds RD) under its command left from its organic organization. As the operation proceeded, the Corps composition changed several times. The Corps had three guards rifle divisions at the time it received orders for the offensive (20, 38, 62). 38 Gds RD was sent to the Army reserve and replaced by 53RD during the redeployment (53RD was detached from the 1st Guards Army and held a defensive line on the northern bank of the Severskiy Donets at that time). 38 Gds RD was reattached to the Corps later. Further down the line, the Corps was reinforced by 57 Gds RD, which was taken away after one day and re-attached yet again later on.

For the duration of the operation, the Corps was reinforced by 320HAR, 210LAR, 531MtrR, 101MtrR, 103GAR, 518GAR, 1029GAR, 174ATAR, 35 Gds MtrR, 62 Gds MtrR, 62 EngBde, and 4 Pontoon Bde.

All formations and reinforcements were battle-ready. However, we would like to note that 20 Gds RD had been engaged in defensive fighting for the previous four months and been replenished with poorly trained personnel. It had nine penalty companies and was not prepared for the offensive.

While 62 Gds RD spent a significant period of time in the Army reserve, its formations were still poorly prepared for the offensive action. 53RD was on the defense and as a result did not conduct exercises to practice offensive maneuvers (outside of small detachments). The commanding staff reviewed river crossing as part of the advance, but it was not covered in training for the rest of the troops. With the exception of 4 Pontoon Bde, the attached engineer units did not train in river crossing either and only held brief exercises as part of the preparation for the offensive.

The attached artillery reinforcements were adequately prepared and were ready to execute their mission.

On the eve of the operation, the Corps was deployed in a single echelon formation with a three-division line:

- 20 Gds RD on the right,
- 62 Gds RD in the center, and
- 53RD on the left.

The Corps' neighbors were:

Right flank: 195RD, which continued to defend its sector.

Left flank: 6th Guards Rifle Corps (60RD and 44RD), which was preparing for the upcoming offensive.

Enemy force

As of the morning of 17 July 1943, the 17 km-long line “mouth of r. Bereka – Shpakovka” was defended by the following German forces:¹⁴

First line: 457IR (257ID) and up to a battalion from 97IR (46ID)

Second line: 466IR (257ID) from the divisional reserve, positioned near Vel. Kamyshevka, Barabashevka, Petropolye.

In the sector of the planned breakthrough the enemy had 46 divisional guns, 12 regimental guns, 40 AT guns, 40 mortars, 50 ATRs, and 240 MGs. This resulted in the following density per 1 km: 0.2 of a battalion (0.3 counting the divisional reserves), 3.4 field artillery pieces, 2.3 AT guns, 2.3 mortars, 3 ATRs, and 14 MGs.

Closest operational reserves were the SS Division “Wiking” (Lozovaya) and 17TD (Slavyansk area). The latter was expected to arrive by the end of the second day following the operation's launch.

¹⁴ Also see *this* annotated German Army map.

The German defense system between Bol. Garazhevka and Semenovka was underpinned by strongpoints saturated with mutually supporting wood-and-dirt pillboxes, “Panzernests”, and concrete pillboxes. The enemy set up these strongpoints in a series of settlements (Bol. Garazhevka, Sredniy, Zavodskoy, Semenovka) and along the hills. The heights 186.9 and 192.4 were best fortified among those. The cornerstone of the enemy defense was “Zavodskoy – Sredniy”, which was fortified in a particularly deliberate fashion and was prepared as an anti-tank sector.

The approaches to the forward edge of the defense next to “Bol. Garazhevka – Semenovka” were protected by the Severskiy Donets, with the river’s southern bank towering over the northern bank by 40–50 m. Moreover, the southern side is very steep: the bank goes down at 45–50 degrees. These natural obstacles were enhanced by a large number of anti-tank barriers covering almost the entire length of the frontline and were developed in depth in the sector of “Bol. Garazhevka – Semenovka”.

Strongpoint *Bol. Garazhevka* incorporated positions near the settlement, as well as positions on the surrounding heights (125.2, 131.5, 134.0). This sector included robust anti-personnel and anti-tank minefields. The following types of mines were used: T-35, the wooden German AT F-35 with pressure and wire-based fuses, and cement mines POMZ. Wire entanglements (low stakes and knife rest) were placed to the south of the minefields. Full-profile trenches with a field of fire all the way to the Severskiy Donets were dug behind the wire entanglements. A pair of two-embrasure and a single one-embrasure wood-and-dirt pillboxes were built near ht. 121.2, with a field of fire that covered the river bend and the northern bank. The flanks and the rear of the pillboxes were covered by MGs, which were set up in open trenches. A 2.5 km-long anti-tank ditch was dug from Bol. Garazhevka towards Mal. Garazhevka. The ditch was within the field of fire of the defenders deployed in the trenches behind it. There was an observation post near ht. 131.5, protected by a steel dome. It provided a view of approaches to the river, the area around Chervonyy Shakhter and a large portion of the adjacent forest. The bunkers near Bol. Garazhevka happened to be built in a simplified manner, were dug deep into the ground, and had 5–6 layers of beams. These bunkers were connected by communication trenches. The communication trenches

were enhanced by designated firing positions for riflemen and emplacements for machine guns and mortars. On a whole, Strongpoint Bol. Garazhevka was equipped for all-around defense, with the frontal part getting most fortifications, DFPs, and obstacles, whereas the southern exit was only covered by infantry trenches.

The key resistance node in the sector “Bol. Garazhevka – Semenovka” was “Sredniy – Zavodskoy – ht. 186.9”. This area was established as an anti-tank sector with a concentration of anti-tank guns and anti-tank reserves. Each of the settlements was prepared for all-around defense and was separated from the others by obstacles and positions meant to prevent flanking attacks. This strongpoint was better equipped with weapons, wood-and-dirt pillboxes, and had a more developed trenches network. The enemy only placed anti-tank minefields and had wire entanglements 2–3 rows deep. Wood-and-dirt pillboxes were built with the use of railway rails and metal beams. Communication trenches next to the pillboxes were covered with a half-pipe of ribbed armor plate (5 mm thick). Panzernests with a space for one HMG were also observed.

Taking advantage of the favorable location of Sredniy and Zavodskoy, the enemy fitted a large number of houses as DFPs (mainly for small arms and MG fire). Some bunkers were located in gullies and were built more than 10 meters under the surface.

The safety of the strongpoint’s flanks was well-thought through. Wood-and-dirt pillboxes and open emplacements for MGs and mortars were placed on the flanks. Additionally, the flanks were protected by wire entanglements (2–3 rows deep), while a minefield was put in the gap between Sredniy and Zavodskoy. The rear-facing direction of Sredniy and Zavodskoy had trenches and MG positions, but was not fortified nearly as well as its frontal sector or its sides. Nevertheless, a strongpoint on ht. 186.9 provided reliable cover for the rear of Sredniy and Zavodskoy.

The Semenovka strongpoint included positions located in the river bend (1.5 km to the northwest of Semenovka), ht. 159.8, and the positions in the settlement itself. The largest number of fortifications was in the river bend near the lakes. Over there, along with regular wood-and-dirt pillboxes, the recon discovered two pillboxes made of rebar concrete (each fitted one HMG).

The large concentration of minefields, wire entanglements, and DFPs implied that the Germans expected our offensive and were well-prepared for it. Here, the defense had three echelons: the first immediately adjacent to the river and near the lakes, the second on the slopes of ht. 135.4, and the third in the settlement itself. The defense system was built similarly to the other two strongpoints.

Brief description of the enemy force

The 257th Infantry Division (257ID) was formed prior to the war against France from professional servicemen. Starting from June of 1941, the Division was deployed on the Eastern Front, where it was employed in several offensives and defensive assignments. During the summer of 1942 the Division suffered significant losses, was withdrawn from action and sent to France to refit. It stayed there until March of 1943. In April 1943 the Division was deployed back to the Eastern Front (to the Severskiy Donets defensive line).

Up to 20% of the Division's personnel were professional soldiers. Most of the officers were professionals as well, with significant combat experience. A larger proportion of the personnel happened to be awards recipients.

Personnel added during the refit in France were sourced in part from a pool of recovered wounded (average age 25–30 years old) and from the arms manufacturing industry (30–35 years old). They were adequately trained.

The manpower and equipment were in line with the regulations for an infantry division. There were 10 battalions, 10800 men, 66 field artillery pieces, 50 anti-tank guns, 54 mortars, 470 MGs. The combination of equipment, combat readiness and morale made this division one of the best infantry divisions in the German army.

The presence of operational reserves in the area of Lozovaya and Slavyansk ensured a timely counter to any breakthrough in the 257ID sector.

Supplies level of the Corps units at the start of the operation

The level of supplies in the divisions at the start of the action as of 18:00 on 16 July 1943:

Ammo: Around 2x units of fire on average (2.5x for the 76mm and 122mm shells of the divisional artillery).

Fuel: 3.3 allowances of gasoline, over 2.5x allowances of engine oil in 20 Gds RD and 62 Gds RD (1.5x for 53RD and the other Corps units).

Food: 4–8 daily rations.

Transportation (motorized):

From the 274 vehicles assigned to the units, 230 (84%) were operational (using GAZ definitions). Of that number, the following were used in transporting supplies between the Army depots and the divisional supply dumps:

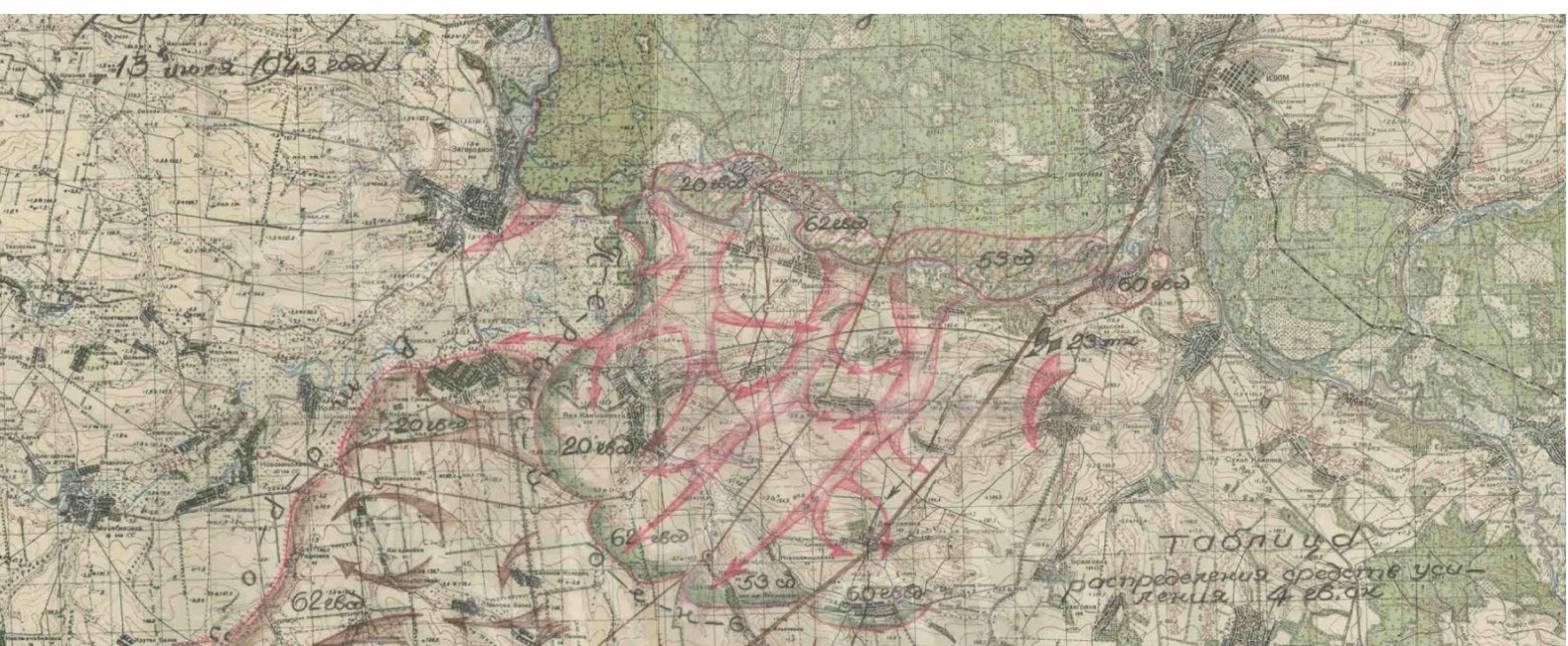
- 75 (32.5%): ammunition
- 12 (5%): fuel
- 68 (29.5%): food

The rest were used for moving other types of supplies, or moving supplies from the divisional supply dumps to the regimental ones.

Personal items:

Basic personal items were present in sufficient quantities. There were 1.7 pairs of undergarments per person. 35% of shoes needed repairs.

2. The Mission, the Corps Commander's Decision and the Battle Plan



4th Guards Rifle Corps – Plan for the offensive as of 13.7.43

The Corps' mission was to cross the Severskiy Donets (between the mouth of the Bereka river and Shpakovka), break through the enemy's fortified line of defense, and then continue the offensive towards Bliznetsy, which in turn would support the western flank of the offensive by the shock task force. As the Corps would advance into the depth of the enemy defense, it would pivot facing to the west and northwest.

The entire initial operation was supposed to take four days. On the right, 195RD would conduct a feint attack towards Petrovskaya using a portion of its available forces (and continue defending with the remainder). On the left, the 6th Guards Rifle Corps would break out of the Izyum bridgehead and start the advance towards Barvenkovo. The 23rd Tank Corps was going to be committed in the 6th Guards Rifle Corps zone of advance with the mission of capturing Barvenkovo by the end of the first day.

The Commander decided to employ the Corps in a single-line formation, with a concentration of forces on the right wing.¹⁵ Given the nature of the enemy defense (based on strongpoints at the line of contact and in the depth), the plan was developed as a combination of separate maneuvers that would bypass the strongpoints, as well as flanking attacks on the most important strongpoints. Initially, the breakthrough attempts in each divisional sector were aimed at gaps between the strongpoints with the goal of enveloping the strongpoints. Each division was assigned its own mission:

Combat Mission – 20th Guards Rifle Division

20 Gds RD (with main effort on the right) crosses the river and breaks through the defense between the mouth of the Bereka river and Sredniy. Unit boundary on the left is “Church in Chervonyy Shakhter – kurgan¹⁶ +1.1 (excl.) – Barabashevka (excl.) – kurgan +2.5 – ht. 134.3 – Kasyanovka”. Immediate objective: ht. 128.1 and the collective farm 2 km south of Sredniy. Following that, the Division takes Vel. Kamyshevakha by enveloping it from the western and eastern directions – then it captures Grushevakha. As the Division reaches the vicinity of Mal. Garazhevka, it deploys a detachment to seize and destroy the crossing over the Bereka river (north of Grushevakha) in order to cut off the approach route of the enemy reinforcements from Petrovskaya. As the Division advances further into the enemy defense, it begins to pivot to the west and consolidates on the line “Bol. and Mal. Garazhevka – western edge of Vel. Kamyshevakha – Grushevakha – height to the southwest of Grushevakha”.

Combat Mission – 62nd Guards Rifle Division

62 Gds RD attacks employing its left flank units, crosses the river and breaks through the defense east of Zavodskoy. The Division then encircles Zavodskoy from the southeast by an enveloping maneuver (in cooperation with 20 Gds RD). The main force strikes towards Barabashevka without a delay

¹⁵ 20 Gds RD and 62 Gds RD on the right wing and 53RD on the left wing.

¹⁶ A burial mound

and by the end of the first day is expected to reach the line “gully Shirokaya – Karnaukhovka (excl.)”. Additionally, it will assist 20 Gds RD in capturing Vel. Kamyshevka. By the end of the second day, the Division’s right flank units are expected to catch up with 20 Gds RD and capture Ryadnovka and Bol. Andreyevka. The third day’s objective is limited to capturing Bepaltsevo and Plisovo, and consolidating on the lines reached. Unit boundary on the left is: “mark 92.1 (excl.) – Andreyevka (excl.) – Karnaukhovka (excl.) – Molochnyy – Morokino”.

Combat Mission – 53rd Rifle Division

53RD dedicates one regiment to providing cover for the Corps’ deployment at the jump-off line and reassigns this regiment before the offensive commences. The Division is also responsible for deploying security detachments in the 20 Gds RD and 62 Gds RD zones of advance until they [these two other divisions] successfully complete the river crossing.

The main concentration of forces is to be deployed on 53RD’s left wing. The Division is ordered to cross the Donets river west of Semenovka and advance by bypassing Strongpoint Semenovka on the southwest. Further advance of the Division and the elimination of enemy forces in the vicinity of Shpakovka is planned to be executed in coordination with 60 Gds RD of the 6th Guards Rifle Corps. One battalion of 12RR moves into the vicinity of Donetsk to join forces with elements of 60 Gds RD (this last mission was canceled once it became clear that the attacks of the left-hand neighbor did not yield any results). The Division is expected to attain the following objectives:

1. by the end of the first day – capture Karnaukhovka and ht. 159.5;
2. by the end of the second day – advance to the line “Danilovka – Arkhangelevka”;
3. by the end of the third day – advance to the line “Valerianovka – Zolotivka (excl.)”;
4. by end of the fourth day – consolidate on the line “Serafimovka – Dunina”.

A motorized detachment (a reinforced battalion of 53RD) will be created and assigned the mission to assist the 23rd Tank Corps (the Tank Corps will operate in the sector of 53RD) by following the 23rd Tank Corps units' advance towards Barvenkovo. The Division's boundary on the left is the 6th Guards Rifle Corps zone of advance: "Donetskiy (excl.) – Shpakovka – Kopyanki – Dmitrievka – Soviet farm "Ilyichevka" – Soviet farm "7th Congress of Councils" – Barvenkovo (excl.) – Zolotivka (excl.) – Bliznetsy".

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For the initial breakthrough the Corps deployed its main concentration of forces on the right wing. Once at the final objective line, the Corps planned to concentrate its troops on both flanks, taking the likely direction of enemy counterattacks into account.

The Corps reserve consisted of 184 Gds RR (of 62 Gds RD) and 107 ATRBn. The reserve was intended to advance behind the left wing of 62 Gds RD. Reinforcements attached to the Corps were employed as follows:

(a) Artillery Support

- 20 Gds RD was reinforced by 40 Gds AR, 320HAR, and 35 Gds MtrR.
- 62 Gds RD was reinforced by 101MtrR, 210LAR, 174ATAR, and 62 Gds MtrR.
- 53RD was reinforced by 531MtrR and 88 Gds AR (of 38 Gds RD).
- 1092GAR, 103GAR, and 518GAR were employed as the Corps' long-range artillery group.

The majority of the regimental and battalion artillery pieces (and a portion of the divisional artillery) were deployed right on the northern bank of the Severskiy Donets for direct fire missions. The artillery group had the following density of tubes per 1 km of the frontline (including 82mm and 120 mm mortars): 41 for 20 Gds RD, 41.3 for 62 Gds RD, 46.5 for 53RD.

(b) Engineers Support

Engineers were attached as follows:

- 60EngBn to 20 Gds RD,
- 57EngBn to 62 Gds RD,
- 59EngBn to 53RD.

A sapper company of 60EngBn and one of 57EngBn were added to the Corps' Commander reserve. 4 Pontoon Bde equipped with N2P pontoon sets was charged with setting up pontoon ferries and was prepared to construct three bridges – one in each division's zone of advance.

Light stream-crossing equipment was distributed as follows:

- 20 Gds RD received 13 A3¹⁷ boats, 2 MNLs¹⁸, 15 SDLs¹⁹, 75 DSLs²⁰.
- 62 Gds RD received 27 A3 boats, 1 MNL, 17 SDLs, 33 DSLs.
- 53RD received 3 A3 boats, 3 MNLs, 128 SDLs.
- Additionally, 20 Gds RD and 62 Gds RD had one 16-ton pontoon set N2P each, while 53RD had two.

Plan of Reconnaissance

A plan of reconnaissance was developed for the duration of the operation. The first day's plan concentrated on the enemy's tactical sector of defense. The reconnaissance department and units had the objectives of (a) determining the type and organization of the enemy formations immediately opposite to the Corps frontline and (b) timely discovery of enemy reinforcements moving in. To facilitate this, scout detachments were formed from divisional and regimental reconnaissance elements and assigned to every rifle battalion. These detachments would advance along the infantry units and strive to capture enemy prisoners and documents. In order to conduct the re-

¹⁷ A3 boats could be used on their own (capacity 25–30 men or one 76mm gun per boat) or as part of a pontoon bridge/raft.

¹⁸ Malaya Naduvnaya Lodka ("Light Inflatable Boat")

¹⁹ Sapernaya Derevyannaya Lodka ("Sapper Wooden Boat")

²⁰ Desantrnaya Skladnaya Lodka ("Collapsible Assault Boat")

connaissance of the tactical depth of the enemy defense and of roads beyond the frontlines, the Corps created specialized teams of scouts; some of these teams were provided with communication equipment. Long-range reconnaissance was requested from the Army HQ.

On the second day, should the enemy start to withdraw, reconnaissance was planned for certain directions and boundaries. Primary objectives were the discovery of arriving enemy reinforcements and the identification of prepared defensive lines beyond the frontline.

Command and Control

Control of the forces was organized along the line of command posts and observation posts via wired and radio communication. The communication equipment available was sufficient to maintain continuous control up to the battle's planned maximum depth.

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The plan for the operation was prepared taking into account specifics of our own situation and known data about the enemy. Its sole flaw was the lack of a second echelon, which would exploit a breach in the first line of the enemy defense.

3. Battle Preparations and Organization

For this operation no written orders were issued by the Corps HQ. One day prior to the attack, the tables (detailing troops cooperation, river crossing, reconnaissance, and artillery actions) were developed and delivered to the responsible parties. All objectives were given to the units' commanders by word of mouth.

The preparation period was spent studying the enemy and the zone of advance and planning the coordination between units. In one day, the Corps Commander coordinated a number of issues with the divisional commanders, divarty commanders and divisional head engineers. Plans for the crossing, the attack on the enemy frontline, the coordination between different arms, and

the cooperation between the divisions when attacking strongpoints (on the front lines and in the depth of the defense) were developed. The artillery designated targets for suppression or destruction. Similar work was conducted over the next two days at divisional, regimental and lower organizational levels (company commanders and above). The rest of the personnel received their orders immediately prior to the attack.

In parallel with the commanders' preparation, the troops were conducting training exercises. Units practiced stream crossing using bodies of water in the woods.

The locations for observation posts were selected and equipped (all the way down to the company commander level), thus organizing communication and visual observation. The troops were preparing means for the river crossing (rafts, ferries, assault bridges) using improvised materials. The troops practiced using dedicated stream-crossing equipment and were moving the equipment closer to the crossing sites. Divisional sappers opened gaps in own minefields on the northern bank of the Severskiy Donets. Most minefields were completely lifted. The remainder was fenced off. Jump-off areas, lines of departure, and approaches to the river were being prepared for the offensive.

The pontoon brigade built parts for bridges. 53RD conducted regular and engineer reconnaissance (other Corps formations, which arrived recently, did not participate to avoid detection). However, the reconnaissance did not yield any substantial new data. 53RD managed to capture two small bridgeheads on the southern riverbank. Artillery reinforcements spent the preparation period finishing their deployment and moving into firing positions. In order to maintain the element of surprise, only a small number of guns conducted registration fire, otherwise the existing firing data were utilized.

As far as providing supplies for the operation, the attention was concentrated on the following:

- bringing in ammunition and food,
- setting up rear units in their new locations,
- preparation of medical services for the treatment of wounded.

(...) There was enough time given for the preparation activities. The units completed all that was needed to organize and prepare for the upcoming battle.

4. Conduct of the Operation

17 July 1943

During the night leading into the 17th of July, the Corps formations moved into their jump-off positions in the dedicated zones of advance, ready to start the river crossing.

At 05:20 on 17 July our artillery preparation started along the entire front-line. As the artillery fire commenced, the divisions began to cross the Severskiy Donets. The enemy artillery was suppressed by the efforts of the Corps' long-range artillery group, and only a select few batteries were shelling the crossing sites. For the troops – trying to cross – it meant that at first they were under machine gun and mortar fire, and only later artillery joined in.

20 Gds RD and 53RD managed the crossing very well and completed the transfer of infantry and artillery across the river in just three hours and with minimal losses (53RD suffered 1 killed and 2 injured).²¹ The enemy mortar fire, however, managed to destroy some equipment, which forced some troops to swim or wade across. 62 Gds RD was not that organized. The Division missed the window of opportunity afforded by the suppression of the enemy artillery. As a result, enemy artillery fire destroyed a lot of stream-crossing equipment, and the Division was left with 2 A3 boats, 1 MNL, 4 SDLs, and 3 DSLs. It took the entire day for the infantry to cross.

Under the cover of the artillery preparation the units of 20 Gds RD and 53RD assembled on the southern bank of the Severskiy Donets. As the artillery fire shifted to targets located deeper in the defensive zone, the divisions began the next phase of their attack. 20 Gds RD penetrated the edge of the defensive line on its right wing and encountered stiff resistance around the village of Sredniy. 53RD engaged the enemy's reinforced security detachments in the dense woods to the northwest of Semenovka, and surrounded

²¹ This is contradicted by 53RD's own report showing 200 casualties.

and destroyed DFPs along the way. 62 Gds RD could not develop attacking momentum and ran into strong enemy fire originating from the vicinity of Zavodskoy and height 175.8.

Fighting through the enemy's stubborn resistance and repelling counter-attacks, our units reached the following lines on 17 July.

20th Guards Rifle Division:

- 57 Gds RR consolidated the positions on its right wing on the line "the mouth of the Bereka river – Bol. Garazhevka" and was close to seizing Mal. Garazhevka.
- 55 Gds RR advanced through the "Tatarskiy Yar" gully. The Regiment captured ht. 128.1 and the kurgan marked +0.6.
- 60 Gds RR was engaged in a battle for Sredniy, trying to push the enemy out of the settlement.

62nd Guards Rifle Division:

- 186 Gds RR reached the southern edge of the woods north of Zavodskoy.
- 182 Gds RR captured the edge of the woods 2 km west of Zavodskoy.
- 184 Gds RR remained in the Corps Commander's reserve northeast of Chervonnyy Shakhter.

53rd Rifle Division:

- 223RR and 3/12RR were on the line "kurgan +0.1 – northern slopes of ht. 188.8".
- 475RR was on the line "ht. 188.8 (excl.) – edge of the woods to the northwest of Semenovka".

To summarize: By the end of the first day the Corps pushed the enemy defense in on both flanks, while in the center it did not achieve significant progress. The right-hand neighbor 195RD crossed the Severskiy Donets and was engaged in fighting near the northeastern edge of Petrovskaya. On the Corps' left side, the 6th Guards Rifle Corps was on the attack, but failed to show any progress.

18 July 1943

During the first half of 17 July, the enemy troops of 457IR had fiercely resisted and launched frequent local counterattacks in attempts to hold on to the forward edge of their defensive sector. By the second half of 17 July, the enemy's 466IR had been committed on the right wing of our Corps with the objective to stop our advance at the forward edge of the enemy's defense. Over the course of 17 July, our air reconnaissance reported the movement of vehicles and small groups of tanks towards Vel. Kamyshevakha and Mal. Kamyshevakha. During the night of 17–18 July, two fresh enemy divisions assembled in these areas, threatening the Corps' flanks: the SS Division "Wiking" in Vel. Kamyshevakha and 17TD in Mal. Kamyshevakha. The enemy continued shelling the river crossing using Strongpoint Zavodskoy as a base (and reinforcing it with the vanguard elements of "Wiking"). Flanking counterattacks (chiefly against 20 Gds RD and 53RD) were holding off the Corps' advance.

On the evening of 17 July, the Corps Commander had confirmed the prior objectives and ordered to resume the offensive on the morning of 18 July. The disposition of the Corps formations did not change. The divisions operating on the wings were reinforced by artillery. Anti-tank mines were transferred closer to the frontline, and AT artillery along with a portion of the divisional artillery crossed the river overnight. 62 Gds RD was ordered to reinforce its left wing and strike towards Barabashevka. 38 Gds RD was transferred out of the Army reserve and attached to the Corps. It was redeploying to Chervonyy Shakhter during 18 July and expected to exploit the success of 20 Gds RD on the Corps' right wing.

With the break of dawn the enemy's air forces became much more active. Groups of 20–30 planes were continuously harassing the troops and bombed the river crossings. In the second half of the day, up to 100 planes would be flying sorties at the same time. As the offensive resumed, the Corps formations ran into advancing leading detachments of the committed reserves: the SS Division "Wiking" on the right flank and 17TD on the left flank.

20th Guards Rifle Division:

- 57 Gds RR was counterattacked by a force of up to two infantry battalions and 20 tanks from the grove northwest of Mal. Garazhevka and by an infantry battalion from the grove to the west of Bol. Garazhevka.
- Up to a battalion of infantry and 15 tanks and SPGs counterattacked 55 Gds RR at ht. 128.1 from the collective farm south of Sredniy.
- 60 Gds RR remained engaged in fighting to push the enemy out of Sredniy and repelled counterattacks originating from Zavodskoy.

62nd Guards Rifle Division:

- The right wing of 186 Gds RR reached the eastern edge of Zavodskoy despite intensive artillery and small arms fire.
- 182 Gds RR reached the apiary (east of Zavodskoy).

53rd Rifle Division:

- 53RD defended against enemy counterattacks. The enemy committed approximately a battalion of infantry supported by 8–10 tanks and 2 SPGs. Hostile forces advanced from the woods southwest of Semenovka.

Following a series of intense air strikes, the enemy launched an all-out counterattack with the support of artillery along the entire frontline at 18:00. The counterattacks were repelled by combined small arms and artillery fire. From the documents left on the battlefield, and according to the captured enemy prisoners of war, we identified the presence of SS “Wiking” units, 477IR (which was transferred from the left wing of 257ID to the right wing) and the units of 40MIR and 63MIR of 17TD on the left flank.

By the end of 18 July, the Corps units were located as follows.

20th Guards Rifle Division:

- 20 Gds RD held Bol. Garazhevka, mark 114.05, and kurgan +0.6. It pushed the enemy out of Sredniy and repelled ongoing counterattacks.

62nd Guards Rifle Division:

- 186 Gds RR captured the eastern edge of Zavodskoy after a series of difficult engagements.
- 182 Gds RR reached kurgan +1.0.

53rd Rifle Division:

- 223RR held the northeastern slopes of hts. 185.2 and 188.8 with its right-flank detachments.
- The left-flank detachments of 475RR repelled counterattacks of more than three enemy infantry battalions coming from ht. 192.4 and along the shore north of Semenovka.

For the day, the Corps repelled the counterattacks of the freshly deployed SS Division “Wiking” and 17TD, captured Sredniy and the eastern edge of Zavodskoy, while advancing marginally on its left flank. 38 Gds RD assembled in an area east of Chervonyy Shakhter during the day and began crossing the Severskiy Donets near Sredniy with two of its regiments; 110 Gds RR was assigned to the Corps Commander’s reserve in place of 184 Gds RR (which was reattached to 62 Gds RD).

19 and 20 July 1943

On 19 July the 23rd Tank Corps was committed in the Corps’ zone of advance. New orders to the elements of the 4th Guards Rifle Corps were therefore drafted to accommodate the action of the 23rd Tank Corps and the newly attached 38 Gds RD into the battle plan. To attain the goals set by the commander of the 1st Guards Army, the Corps Commander decided on the following.

20th Guards Rifle Division:

20 Gds RD (with the same reinforcements, but excluding 320 HAR) will strike with its right wing in cooperation with 38 Gds RD and will capture ht. 128.1. It will then advance towards Vel. Kamyshevakha and consolidate on the line “mouth of the Bereka river – Bol. Garazhevka –

Mal. Garazhevka”, thus providing protection for the Corps’ right flank. Left boundary: “Sredniy (excl.) – Vel. Kamyshevakha – ht. 141.7”.

38th Guards Rifle Division:

38 Gds RD (with 320 HAR) will strike with its left wing in cooperation with 20 Gds RD and will capture the collective farm south of Sredniy. It will then support 20 Gds RD in capturing Vel. Kamyshevakha and will reach the line “141.7 – Karnaukhovka” by the end of the day. Left boundary: “Western section of Zavodskoy – Barabashevka – Karnaukhovka”.

62nd Guards Rifle Division:

62 Gds RD (with the same reinforcements) will concentrate the bulk of its forces on the left wing and advance towards Petropolye. By the end of the day it shall reach the line “Karnaukhovka (excl.) – Petropolye (excl.)”. Left boundary: unchanged.

53rd Rifle Division:

53RD strikes in the direction of Kopanki with its left wing in cooperation with the 23rd Tank Corps.

Time of attack:

The attack commences at 08:00 on 19 July.

Outcome: The fighting on 19 July and 20 July did not have any material effect on the Corps’ situation. The commitment of the 23rd Tank Corps did not help either. The enemy completed the deployment of his two fresh divisions and counterattacked non-stop in attempts to regain his previously lost positions. Based on the data obtained from captured enemy prisoners of war and from the enemy documents acquired during the battle, we can conclude that on the Corps’ right wing all three regiments of the SS-Division “Wiking” are engaged: Westland, Nor[d]land²² and Germania. “Wiking” was supported

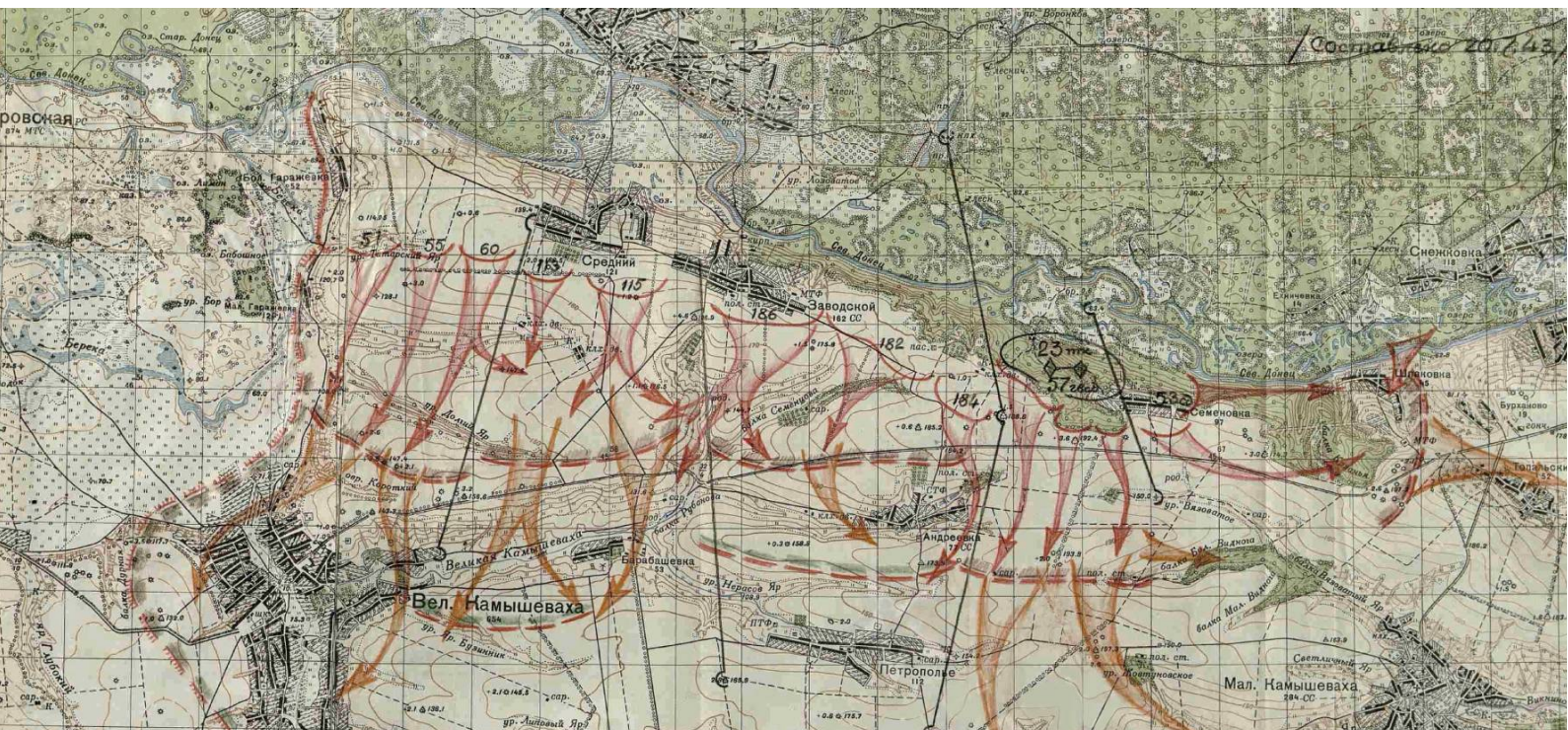
²² The Soviet intelligence was wrong. At this time, the SS Panzer Grenadier Division “Wiking” consisted of the regiments “Germania” and “Westland”, plus the Estonian battalion “Narwa” (see the TOE). The regiment “Nordland” had been detached from the Division in March 1943.

by 70 tanks. Elements of 17TD with 30–40 tanks were operating on the left wing.

By the end of 20 July, the Corps' elements held largely the same positions as before, only the Corps' left wing had advanced as 62 Gds RD reached ht. 184.2, and 53RD captured Semenovka village.

21 and 22 July 1943

On the 21st of July, 57 Gds RD was placed under the command of the Corps. The objective of the Corps' left wing (57 Gds RD and 53 Gds RD) had therefore been updated: the grouping was ordered to strike towards Kопанки and then – after bypassing Mal. Kamyshevakha and Kamenka on the south and west – move to the flank and rear of 46ID (the German division defending the Izyum bridgehead), to engage and defeat it. The objectives of the right-wing units did not change. To achieve the objectives given by the Army Commander, the Corps Commander decided on the following:



4th Guards Rifle Corps – Plan for 21.7.43

20th and 38th Guards Rifle Divisions:

20 Gds RD [55, 57, 60 Gds RRs] and 38 Gds RD [113, 115, 110 Gds RRs] will continue attacking in the same direction. 110 Gds RR will be committed from the reserves with the goal of clearing the remainder of Zavodskoy of enemy troops.

62nd Guards Rifle Division:

The principal effort of 62 Gds RD [182, 184, 186 Gds RRs] is aimed towards capturing Andreyevka. The boundary between 62 Gds RD and 57 Gds RD is “ht. 188.8 – ht. 180.6” (both keypoints are in 57 Gds RD’s zone).

57th Guards Rifle Division:

57 Gds RD [170, 172, 174 Gds RRs] will cross the Severskiy Donets during the night hours and finish the crossing before the sunrise on the 21st. It will then conduct an attack towards ht. 180.6 in cooperation with the 23rd Tank Corps. Next, it will capture Kopanki and advance towards Mal. Kamyshevakha, bypassing it on the south and west. The left boundary is “mark 63.4 (excl.) – ht. 150.0”.

53rd Rifle Division:

53RD [12, 223, 475 RRs] will assemble a striking task force in Semenovka and will attack in the direction of “174.3 – Topalskiy” towards 60RD of the 6th Guards Rifle Corps.

The attack along the entire frontline began at 12:00 on 21 July. 57 Gds RD in cooperation with the 23rd Tank Corps advanced slowly and ran into stiff resistance, particularly in the vicinity of Andreyevka and ht. 192.4. By the end of the day, the Division’s vanguard blocked the road between Vel. Kamyshevakha and Izyum and reached the area around mark 193.8. 62 Gds RD captured ht. 184.2, but failed to advance any further. The remaining Corps units did not advance in a meaningful way and thus did not have any effect on the overall situation. 110 Gds RR successfully mopped up Zavodskoy and consolidated the gains.

The units of the 23rd Tank Corps were met with intense fire from the enemy's well-organized AT defense, suffered major losses and failed to achieve a decisive victory.

By the morning of 22 July, 57 Gds RD and 53RD were detached from the Corps' and came under command of the 6th Guards Rifle Corps. The Corps [the 4th Guards Rifle Corps] retained 20 Gds RD, 38 Gds RD, and 62 Gds RD. The enemy consolidated on his second line of defense over the last two days and was building hasty fortifications under the cover of counterattacks. As our units advanced on the 22nd, they encountered minefields and wire entanglements.

As the 22nd was coming to a close, the Corps received the order to consolidate on the ground held. 62 Gds RD was detached, but 57 Gds RD was reattached and would take over the positions of 62 Gds RD and 53RD.

5. Political Organization of the Operation

During the preparations for the offensive, each unit held [Communist] party gatherings, discussing the topic of communists leading others in combat. Veterans of two or three wars, medal holders, and those who suffered multiple wounds held inspirational gatherings. Special editions of divisional newspapers and board bulletins were published. Additionally, two people per platoon were selected to pronounce inspirational slogans during combat (the slogans were prepared in advance). Meetings were the most common form of agitation – they were held in all Corps units without any exceptions. Prepared in advance, they – for the most part – met a very high bar politically.

The message of the Southwestern Front's Military Council to the 1st Guards Army was read out loud in meetings one hour before the start of the offensive. It caused an exceptional morale boost and significantly improved the desire to get the offensive action under way. Every speech of our soldiers and commanders had a common theme of wanting to enter the battle and defeat the hated enemy as soon as possible. At a meeting in 57 Gds RR (20

Gds RD) Red Army Man²³ *Khalikov*, a sniper and a candidate for VKP(b)²⁴ membership, said: “I waited for this day impatiently. Departing for the war zone, I gave an oath to my motherland – to exterminate the German filth. In two months spent on the defensive, I killed more than 100 Germans. I swear that in the battles to come I will increase this count.”

Political workers engaged in dialog in group and individual settings. They familiarized troops with the situation, clarified the combat mission and kindled the flame of fierce hatred for the enemy. As the soldiers and commanders took part in these dialogues, they in turn would become fiery agitators for our just cause and lift the spirits of their comrades.

Some of these conversations discussed practical matters in addition to political ones. All companies of 1/57 Gds RR (and many other units) held conversations about mutual support in combat, the tasks during the river crossing, how to fight in enemy trenches, etc.

Just before the start of the offensive, a ceremony for swearing in was held. The soldiers, commanders and political workers gave their oath to the motherland to take revenge on the German-fascists scum for the destruction of our towns and villages and for the torture of civilians on our soil. Political workers, communists, and youth communists were dispersed throughout platoons, squads, and crews. Communists and youth communists were included into the assault and breaching teams with the goal of leading by example, being in front of the group, and demonstrating bravery and heroism. At the time of the Severskiy Donets river-crossing, communists and youth communists were added into the groups that were taking boats and rafts. During the operation, political workers demanded that communists take part in the most critical engagements. They [political workers] noted soldiers who stood out and told the rest of the troops about these exceptional deeds. They also held talks in individual and group settings, provided reports by Sovinformbyuro, information about the situation in the Front’s sector, and a summary of the news from other fronts of the Great Patriotic War. Special attention was given to clarifying their own objectives to each soldier and commander, and to relay-

²³ *Red Army Man* (Kransoarmeyets) was the lowest rank in the Red Army (equivalent to Private).

²⁴ *Vsesoyuznaya Kommunisticheskaya Partiya Bolshevikov* (“Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Bolsheviks”)

ing the acknowledgment by the Military Council of the 1st Guards Army for the actions of the 20 Gds RD and 53RD personnel. Political workers strived to be in the first line and lead others by example. Communists, youth communists, and political workers displayed valor, heroism, and led non-partisan soldiers along.

Communist and agitator *Dubravin* of 172 Gds RR (58 Gds RD) led his platoon under the slogan “For Stalin” to assault the enemy trenches. He personally killed 10 enemies. During the attack on Sredniy, Guards Red Army Man *Kolobov* of 113 Gds RR (38 Gds RD), a regimental party bureau member, moved to the front line, rose up, pronounced “For the motherland! Forward!” and advanced toward the enemy positions. He killed two enemies, but was then brought down and killed by an enemy bullet himself. Red Army Man *Kudinov*, a communist serving as a machine gunner in the 6th Rifle Company of 223RR (53RD), fought with valor and skill. On the 19th, as the enemy counterattacked, he stepped forward with his machine gun and shot the attacking enemies at point blank range. In just this one fight, he killed 30 Germans. Among the ranks of 57 Gds RR (20 Gds RD), the gun crew consisting of *Medvedchikov* (crew chief, a candidate for the party membership), *Zhuravlev* (gunner and a member of the party), and *Gavryuhsin* (loader) displayed no fear when facing the enemy. In the first two days of fighting, the crew disabled two tanks, destroyed 8 wood-and-dirt pillboxes and bunkers (with direct fire), and eliminated nearly 150 Germans. The entire crew were awarded medals. Guards Sergeant *Chizhov*, an MG crew chief in 113 Gds RR (38 Gds RD), moved to the front as the enemy counterattacked and awaited their approach. A frenzied gang of fascists lunged at Chizhov. Chizhov was shooting the enemies at point blank range deliberately and calmly. More than 20 enemies were mowed down by his machine gun. The counterattack was repelled, but an enemy bullet had brought down the Bolshevik hero Chizhov too. Captain *Shevyako*, a political organizer of the regimental party bureau of 55 Gds RR, spent all his time among the men on the frontline and led them in attacks on multiple occasions. Shevyako died a hero.

We could provide hundreds of instances of heroism displayed by communists and youth communists.

There are 67 low-rank agitators in 40 Gds AR, out of which 20 received decorations during the fighting and 26 were recommended for government honors.

Military decorations received:

155 in 20 Gds RD,
90 in 38 Gds RD,
31 in 57 Gds RD,
276 total.

Government honors received:

321 in 20 Gds RD,
87 in 38 Gds RD,
270 in 57 Gds RD,
678 total.

The results of the political work undertaken were evident in high personnel morale and a strong desire to take part in the offensive among the troops.

Conclusions

1. The well-planned and meticulously prepared operation to cross the Severskiy Donets and to break through the first line of the enemy defense was successful. The Corps achieved the breakthrough, but could not exploit the initial success. The lack of a second echelon had a negative impact on the flow of the offensive. 38 Gds RD was committed immediately after arriving without time to reorganize and thus failed to provide the desired impact on the flow of the operation, because by 19 July the enemy achieved force parity in the Corps' zone of advance. Our units sustained significant personnel losses, while the enemy improved his defense by committing and deploying two fresh divisions (the SS Division "Wiking" and 17TD). Besides, with the deployment of 15ID in the adjacent sector, the enemy was able to commit the entire 257ID to ours.
2. The offensive was not a total surprise for the enemy. The Corps' units were deployed close to the enemy lines as early as 7 July and it is only natural that such a large concentration of forces would not go unnoticed. The element of surprise was also missing from the commitment of the 23rd Tank Corps. Its assembly and crossing attempt on the 18th and 19th were evidently discovered by the enemy and gave him

time to gather artillery and tanks and organize his AT defense. Had the 23rd Tank Corps been committed on the first day or, at least, on the morning of 19 July, it would undoubtedly have produced better results.

3. The entire operation was planned with tight cooperation of the neighbors in mind. The lack of success in the left-hand neighbor's sector impacted the development of our own offensive. The Corps ended up acting on its own and had to commit resources to defend its own flanks at the expense of the offensive capacity.
4. Changes in the order of battle as the operation progressed and the lack of familiarity with the attached formations negatively impacted the flow of the offensive.
5. Disorganized actions of 62 Gds RD on the first day of the operation, and its lack of urgency the following day, slowed down the progress towards the first day's objectives.
6. The operation clearly demonstrated that while the tenacity of infantry units increased and their attacking capabilities improved, commanders and detachments lacked skill in the offensive battle. The commanders of all levels do not conduct reconnaissance in battle, organize observation poorly and do not have a grasp on what is going on in their sector. They do not maneuver their units to strike at the flanks or rear of the enemy strongpoints. Once a battle formation is set, it remains in place until a higher level commander's order reaches them. Displaying initiative is a rare occurrence. Success is achieved at the cost of significant losses.
7. Detachments lack skills to quickly consolidate on captured lines. Expended ammunition reserves are not replenished.
8. Artillery and engineer units performed their missions in an entirely satisfactory manner.

[Signed]

HQ Chief of Staff, Guards Colonel *Kudryavtsev*
Head of Operations Department, Guards Colonel *Dudnik*

[Maps]

- 4th Guards Rifle Corps – Repositioning for the offensive.
- 4th Guards Rifle Corps – Plan for the offensive as of 13.7.43.
- 4th Guards Rifle Corps – Rear units and supply routes as of 18:00 on 16.7.43.
- 4th Guards Rifle Corps – Plan for the organization of communications as of 16.7.43.
- 4th Guards Rifle Corps – Plan for the offensive as of 20.7.43.
- 4th Guards Rifle Corps – Enemy positions between Bol. Garazhevka – Shpakovka as of 23.7.43.

53rd Rifle Division – After Action Report²⁵

*Covering the period from
17 July through 22 July 1943*

1. Objectives

53RD (reinforced by 531MtrR, 59EngBn) was given the following mission:

- Cross the Severskiy Donets in the sector between a point 2 km east of Zavodskoy and Semenovka.
- Break through the first line of the enemy's defense.
- Capture the dominating heights 188.8 and 192.4.
- Create a bridgehead to serve as a jump-off area for the 23rd Tank Corps (which will be moving in from the Izyum bridgehead via the 60 Gds RD sector).²⁶
- The Division will then follow the 23rd Tank Corps to advance on Barvenkovo and Lozovaya.

The missions of 53RD's neighbor divisions were:

- 62 Gds RD crosses the river and advances on the right.
- 60 Gds RD advances on the left (with 44 Gds RD to be committed in the sector of 60 Gds RD).

²⁵ CAMD RF, Fond: 1166, Series: 1, File: 16 (Document begins on page 1).

²⁶ This *map* shows the plan of advance for the 23rd Tank Corps out of *the Izyum bridgehead*. The horizontal red line between Andreyevka and the woods to the east marks where the Corps was supposed to deploy into the attack formation.

Boundaries of 53RD:

- Boundary [on the right] with 62 Gds RD:
“mark 92.1 – Andreyevka – Karnaukhovka (south) – Molochnyy (excl.) – mark 191.0 (excl.) – Ryzhovo (excl.) – Novo-Morokova”,
- Boundary [on the left] with 60 Gds RD:
“Donetskiy (excl.) – Shpakovka – Kopanki – Dmitrievka – soviet farm Ilyichevka (sheep) – Soviet farm “The 8th Congress of Councils” (grain) – northwestern outskirts of Barvenkovo (excl.) – Zolotivka – mark 202.6 – Bliznetsy”.

Plans for cooperation:

- As the infantry of 53RD reaches the line “Andreyevka – ht. 197.2”, the tanks of the 23rd Tank Corps will enter the battle and advance in the Division’s zone towards Barvenkovo.
- All three divisions of the 4th Guards Rifle Corps [53RD, 62 Gds RD, 20 Gds RD] are set to begin the attack at the same time. (...)

2. Area of Operations

Prior to the offensive, the Division was on the defensive holding the northern bank of the Severskiy Donets in the sector “Chervonnyy Shakhter – Shpakovka”. We held the sector starting from 13 May 1943 and by the start of the planned offensive, the area of operations and the upcoming crossing had become familiar. The enemy held the southern riverbank (the taller one) with a series of heights forming a ridge that runs along the river 1–3 km back from the shore. The crests were 80–100 m above the water level and gave a great view of the northern bank, 10–12 km in. On the enemy side, the river bank slopes were covered with trees, providing covert approaches to the river. On the slopes facing the river, there were several settlements: Sredniy, Zavodskoy, Semenovka, and Shpakovka. Beyond the ridge, the terrain was rough, full of gullies and ravines. The area’s settlement density was medium, there were no large settlements before Barvenkovo. The terrain was wide-open with no sig-

nificant wood cover. In the divisional zone of advance the roads were unpaved and sparse, and none of them were running in the direction of the offensive. There were no water bodies in the enemy defense's depth. The northern riverbank was lowlands, completely covered by forest. The land immediately adjacent to the river (for 1–2 km) featured small lakes, swamps and marshes. The sandy roads through the forest were difficult for our transport to move through. The woods provided cover for the assembled troops and for approaches to the river. We expected significant difficulties operating in the area. The objective included the river crossing, capture of the tree-covered slopes protected by obstacles and minefields, and capturing the ridge dominating over the area around the crossing sites.

3. Preparations

Intelligence on the enemy defense

The divisional units were in the area for over two months, gathering intelligence on the defenses in the sector and, as a result, had a fairly complete view about the state of the enemy defense. Observation of the enemy weapons placed on the southern bank slopes facing the river helped in uncovering major elements of the system and determining the placement of strongpoints. We could only see 2–3 km into the enemy sector. The positions of the division were exceptionally bad with regard to conducting observation, and anything that happened on the other side of the ridge would be missed. Despite these difficulties, the observation process was well-organized and provided sufficient data about the enemy. OOB, manpower and placement of the enemy would be acquired from interrogating POWs and from scouts infiltrating the enemy positions. Just before the start of the offensive, a group of scouts infiltrated 8–10 km deep into the enemy territory and discovered the presence of a second line of defense – which confirmed previously obtained data. 257ID (with 457IR, 466IR, and 477IR, as well as the three-battalion 257AR) was defending the sector. Immediately in the Division's zone of advance – between the apiary (2 km east of Zavodskoy) and Shpakovka – were II/457IR, a company of I/457IR, and a company of 97IR (of 46ID).

The latter was stationed in Shpakovka. III/457IR was garrisoned in Andreyevka, comprising the second line of defense. The front edge of the defense went through the northern slopes of “188.8 – 192.4 – 197.2”. Principal defensive positions were concentrated on the heights 188.8, 192.4, 197.2, and in Semenovka village. Advance outposts were placed on the riverbank and were protected by a robust system of fortifications. Engineer works included a system of continuous trenches (with dugouts for riflemen), wood-and-dirt pillboxes, and a few wood-and-dirt pillboxes reinforced by armored domes. Approaches to free-standing DFPs were covered by flanking fire from adjacent DFPs. Some trenches had wire entanglements placed in front of them (1–2 stakes deep or knife rests). All gaps between ponds, paths, and accessible approaches were blocked by minefields (anti-tank and anti-personnel). 257ID held this sector for three months and built up a robust defense, covering the most likely approaches of our troops. Enemy equipment and DFPs are shown on the attached map.²⁷ Riverbed, fords, and roads were registered as targets beforehand, which allowed the enemy to rapidly concentrate artillery and mortar fire on the crossings.

Enemy Forces as of 15.7.43

The attached note (see the appendix²⁸) was only accurate for the first day of the operation. By the end of 17.7, the enemy 17TD (with 40MIR, 63MIR, 39TR, and 27AR) was transferred to the sector. As early as the morning of 18.7.43, II./40MIR was already deployed in the Mal. Kamyshevakha sector and one company of 63MIR in the Andreyevka sector. Later, detachments from I./40MIR and 477IR were sighted fighting in the Division’s zone of advance. Documents collected from fallen enemies revealed the presence of the Estonian SS Battalion “Narwa”. Overall, between 4 and 6 infantry battalions were deployed in this sector. The enemy artillery was exceptionally active and played a principal role in his defensive tactics. The enemy also took full advantage of our neighbors’ failures: 62 Gds RD on the right, and 60 Gds RD and 44 Gds RD on the left. Since these divisions did not make any progress

²⁷ This map is not attached to the archived document.

²⁸ *Force comparison* on the eve of the offensive.

on the first day of the offensive, the enemy had the luxury of concentrating artillery responsible for the neighbors' sectors against 53RD as needed. It halted our advance at the ridgeline. The majority of our Division's casualties were caused by mortar and artillery fire.

Direction of the main effort

By the time the preparation period began, we had identified the following hostile strongpoints in the divisional zone of advance with a high degree of confidence: ht. 188.8, 192.4, Semenovka, Shpakovka. The divisional zone of advance was 8 km wide. It was decided to make the main effort on the right towards the line "ht. 188.8 – ht. 192.4". The underlying reasoning was:

a) The capture of 188.8 and 192.4 and the elimination of strongpoints in the area will disrupt the enemy defense system along the entire frontline. It will also cut the paved highway between Izyum and Vel. Kamyshevka, and prevent the enemy from using it.

b) Capturing these heights will afford a dominant position over the sector stretching 5–6 km deep into the enemy defense and over the Semenovka strongpoint.

c) The requirement to cooperate with 62 Gds RD, which will develop a principal effort with its left wing.

d) Capturing 188.8 and 192.4 will create preconditions for the encirclement and defeat of the enemy near "Semenovka – Shpakovka" (in cooperation with the left-hand neighbor).

e) The following factors will allow to cover the crossings with fire and will also allow to provide reinforcing fire for the forward detachments: convenient approaches to the crossing sites and the presence of roads on both sides of the river, fords, a flat shore with tree cover, and finally the convex shape of the river.

Missions for each rifle regiment

223rd Rifle Regiment:

223RR is assigned to the main effort and reinforced by 3/12RR and a company of 59EngBn. 223RR has the mission of crossing the Severskiy Donets to the west of Ford 0.6/T, defeat the enemy outposts, and capture 188.8 by envelopment from the east and west. After that, 223RR will create a mobile detachment (based on 3/223RR) to follow and cooperate with the 23rd Tank Corps, while the rest of 223RR's units will continue the offensive and capture Andreyevka and then advance southwest in the wake of the 23rd Tank Corps. 3/12RR advances on the right flank of 223RR and covers the gap next to 62 Gds RD's sector.

475th Rifle Regiment:

475RR crosses the river between the Ford 0.6/T (excl.) and the eastern edge of Semenovka, and will then advance on 192.4 with the 1st and 2nd Battalions. The 3rd Battalion with one company and the divisional penalty company will advance towards the northeastern edge of Semenovka, while the other two companies of 3/475RR will advance towards the northeastern edge of Semenovka after 192.4 is captured. 1/475RR will then be attached to 223RR, while 2/475RR will attack Semenovka from the south.

12th Rifle Regiment:

1/12RR is in the divisional reserve. 2/12RR moved to Donetskiiy before the start of the offensive (into the sector of 60 Gds RD) from where it will follow a regiment of 60 Gds RD on its right flank. After that regiment captures Burhanovo and ht. 197.2, 2/12RR will advance on Shpakovka, capture it and clear the enemy from the woods between Shpakovka and Semenovka. After completing these orders, attach the Battalion to 475RR for a later attack on Kopanki and further southwards. [3/12RR is attached to 223RR.]

Engineer support

The preparations for the engineer support included the following activities: meticulous measurements of the river (depth, banks, bottom), preparation of the stream-crossing equipment, making gaps in own minefields and demining the enemy's, and setting up the fords for the artillery crossing. The engineers' river study began long before the offensive was scheduled. The approaches were reconnoitered: roads, passes through swamps, small bridges, shore banks incline, river depth (presence of fords), and enemy minefields adjacent to the river. Work on the water stream-crossing equipment started on 9.7.43 and was completed on 15.7. Some boats were transferred from the Izyum bridgehead and some were built in place. During the night of 16–17.7 all stream-crossing equipment was moved into the areas near the crossings. There was enough equipment to move the rifle units' personnel and their weapons across the river in 1.5 hours. Own minefields had gaps in them, which were made in advance and provided free approaches to the river. On the opposite bank, the detachments (which were sent to establish a bridgehead during the night of 13–14.7) worked on demining and made it possible for the infantry and artillery to pass through. While there were instances of stepping on enemy mines, those were rare (single digits), which meant the sappers completed their mission successfully.

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Between 10.7 and 16.7, the Division held exercises to practice water crossing. The troops took advantage of numerous lakes in the forest to hone loading, rowing and unloading of boats, ferries and rafts. They were practicing to ferry equipment, vehicles and ammunition across. In spite of the lack of real river crossing experience, the Division ended up being adequately prepared for the job.

4. Crossing the River

Artillery preparatory barrage

The artillery preparation began at 05:20 on 17.7.43 and five minutes later, the infantry stepped off the shore. The barrage lasted 1.5 hours and covered the crossing for the main part of the divisional troops. The barrage was fired according to plan and for its duration, the enemy did not engage in significant counter-battery fire. Hostile artillery and mortars instead concentrated on the crossing areas. Our artillery largely met the objective of the preparatory fire mission and provided cover for the crossing. However, in the sectors where 3/12RR and 1/475RR tried to cross, the enemy fire was so intense that their crossing operation had to be moved to a different location. As the infantry was crossing the river and then breaching the obstacles, the artillery shifted the fire deeper into the defense and attempted to neutralize DFPs that were in the way of the advancing infantry. It should be noted that the enemy positions closest to the river were not fired upon since the river is narrow in the area (50–60m) and it would have endangered our own troops. Wood-and-dirt pillboxes that were visible were engaged by direct fire of regimental artillery, but DFPs in the trenches (and especially light mortars) inflicted significant casualties. Losses from the crossing: 200 men.

Building crossings, ferrying personnel and materiel

Five minutes after the start of the artillery preparatory barrage (at 05:25), the troops emerged from their shelters, which were built 10–30 meters away from the water, and carried the stream-crossing equipment (boats and rafts) to the shore. The leading detachments immediately headed to the opposite river bank. As it was mentioned before, small scout teams (who had been sent to the southern bank on 14.7) had already cleared the mines next to the crossing sites by 17.7, so the forward detachments were able to engage the enemy outposts as soon as they landed, providing cover for those who would follow. The troops of 475RR made it to the opposite bank the fastest and were met

by a somewhat weaker enemy resistance (crossings No. 2, 3, 4). 3/12RR, trying to cross to the right of 223RR, failed and was forced to use the crossing site of 233RR instead, falling behind the schedule. The 1st, 4th, and 9th Rifle Companies of 223RR also could not cross using their assigned lane (crossing No. 1) due to intense enemy fire, ended up shifting to the crossing No. 3, and fell behind the schedule too. 2/475RR and 3/223RR made it across first. By 07:20 (two hours after the start), the Division had five rifle battalions, six regimental artillery guns, and some 82mm mortars on the other side of the river. As soon as the bridgehead was expanded sufficiently, the rifle battalions began to advance southwards, while the artillery equipment was ferried over the river either using ferries (regimental artillery) or via the ford (divisional artillery). Evacuation of the wounded back to the left shore started at the same time. The locations of the crossings were bombed by hostile aircraft repeatedly. There were no delays in ammunition supply or when hauling equipment across.

Cover of the crossings during the battle

The cover was mainly supposed to be provided by anti-air reinforcements to defend against the hostile air force, since the Division lacked organic anti-air artillery. On 16.7.43, when the 23rd Tank Corps began to cross the river, the area was covered by the Corps' own AA assets. Additionally, our fighter planes were patrolling above. This cover was ineffective – every single time the enemy planes dropped their bombs where they wanted to. Despite the intense fire of our AA batteries, the enemy managed to damage the bridge built overnight by diving attacks on 18.7. Our fighters mostly patrolled above our own formations and did not go far into the enemy territory. As soon as groups of hostile planes (Ju88, He111) appeared, the fighter would withdraw back into our airspace and would only reappear at the end of the enemy bombing run. More often than not, enemy bombers were escorted by 2 or 4 of their own fighters. Our counter to the hostile artillery fire was just as inadequate, and the crossing units suffered heavy losses from unyielding enemy fire directed against the crossing sites. Not designating a commandant from a parent HQ in charge of the crossing in the 53RD area for the dura-

tion of the 23rd Tank Corps' crossing attempt (who would keep things in order) was a serious mistake. HQ officers of several units, either permanently present in the crossing area or appearing for a brief moment, interfered in the work on the ground and transferred engineers all over the place without taking any responsibility for their decisions. As a result, the area adjacent to the crossing was in chaos, delays caused huge traffic jams (trucks, tanks, wagons, people, all sitting close together). This led to losses that could have been avoided.

5. The Breakthrough of the Enemy Forward Defense Line

17 July – Day 1

In the first few hours of the battle, the rifle battalions of 223RR, 475RR, and 3/12RR completed the crossing and engaged the enemy outposts. The troops breached obstacles placed by the enemy, and blocked and destroyed DFPs. The outposts were defeated relatively fast and after 30–40 minutes the battalions began pushing through the woods west of Semenovka towards the heights 188.8 and 192.4. By 10:00 on 17.7 it became clear: the offensive was running behind schedule. 182 Gds RR failed to cross the river, which forced 3/12RR to split from the right wing of 223RR, pivot facing to the west and fight off the enemy north of the apiary in order to protect the right flank of 223RR and the area of the crossings. Due to significant casualties in 3/12RR and the ongoing need to keep the flank of 223RR protected, two companies of 1/12RR were sent as reinforcements for 3/12RR. 2/223RR was delayed by hostile fire when crossing the river, and was trailing behind the 1st and 3rd rifle battalions of 223RR. Given the threat to the Regiment's right flank, emanating from the woods southeast of the apiary, 2/223RR shifted to the right and reached the edge of the woods northeast of "the apiary – the field camp"²⁹ after overcoming enemy resistance. These circumstances left 223RR no choice other than to advance on height 188.8 with only the two available battalions (the 1st and the 3rd) instead of four battalions as prescribed in the

²⁹ While the hand-drawn map marks the eastern reference point as "field camp", printed maps have "tenant farm" in that location instead.

attack plan. The other two were engaged in intense fighting on the line “63.4 – 188.8”, facing west, and did not take part in the attack. At 11:30 1/223RR and 3/223RR captured ht. 188.8 and consolidated the captured positions with the intent to advance on Andreyevka (the advance was contingent upon the arrival of 2/223RR and 3/12RR). 182 Gds RR failed to advance on 17.7, as a result 223RR and 3/12RR had to organize defensive positions facing to the west and south. As 3/12RR and 2/223RR could not leave their positions on the flank, the advance on Andreyevka had to proceed with the two remaining battalions (which were weakened by losses) and failed.

475RR crossed the river and slowly advanced south, facing enemy resistance. Two battalions of 457RR reached the southern edge of the woods west of Semenovka by 11:30 and captured the northern slopes of ht. 192.4, as well as the northeastern slopes of ht. 188.8. 1/475RR veered too far to the right and ended up near 188.8, leaving 2/475RR to attack 192.4 on its own (which resulted in a failure). 3/475RR and the penalty company failed to capture Semenovka; their advance was repelled by hostile artillery fire out of the area “Mal. Kamyshevakha – gully Bol. Vidnoga”. 2/12RR (which was supposed to capture 197.2 and then advance on Shpakovka) remained in Donetsk due to the 60 Gds RD’s failure to make any forward progress. The commander of 475RR ordered to maintain the attack on ht. 192.4, but after failing to capture it, the Regiment consolidated on the northern slopes of 192.4 and the southern edge of the woods west of Semenovka. 3/475RR stopped 600 m northwest of Semenovka. The gap between 3/475RR and the river remained undefended.

During the latter half of the day, 182 Gds RR of 62 Gds RD managed to cross the river in the sector of 223RR after multiple failed attempts near Zavodskoy. As the day went on, 182 Gds RR assembled in the woods north of the apiary.

By the end of the day, the Division reached the heights 185.8³⁰ and 188.8, and the slopes of 192.4. Due to the lack of flank protection, created by the neighbors’ failure to advance, the Division organized its defense facing in three directions (east, south, and west). About 1000 men were killed and wounded on 17.7. 2/457IR and one company of 1/457IR were all but wiped out.

³⁰ It is not clear where exactly this height is located. See the *map* for the evening of 17.7.

Conclusion: The Division failed to achieve its assigned objective on 17.7 due to the failure of the neighbors. As the tanks of the 23rd Tank Corps (advancing from the Izyum bridgehead) were not committed, the Division's offensive in the Tank Corps' wake did not happen.

223RR gained favorable positions through the capture of 185.8 and 188.8. 475RR had less of a success, the Regiment failed to capture 192.4 or Semenovka. 1/475RR was too close to the left wing of 223RR near ht. 188.8, while 2/475RR and 3/475RR attacked ht. 192.4 on their own and took significant losses. These failures can be explained by the loss of communications between 475RR and its support artillery after the Regiment reached the southern edge of the woods. As a result, the divisional artillery could not consistently provide timely and effective support, while the regimental artillery and mortars (which had large reserves of ammunition) were not utilized. Overnight, the units consolidated on the lines reached during 17.7 and conducted reconnaissance activities.

18 July – Day 2

By the end of 17.7 the units of 53RD consolidated on the line: “edge of the woods next to the apiary – northern slopes of ht. 188.8 – northern slopes of ht. 192.4 – edge of the woods southwest of Semenovka”.

Positions by battalion:

- 3/12RR and two companies of 1/12RR: north of the apiary,
- 2/223RR: woods marked 168.8,
- 1/223RR: eastern slopes of ht. 188.8,
- 3/223RR: northern slopes of ht. 188.8,
- 1/475RR: northern slopes of ht. 192.4,
- 2/475RR: edge of the woods southwest of Semenovka,
- 3/475RR and the penalty company: woods west of Semenovka,
- 1/12: northern river bank (in the divisional reserve).

A new set of objectives was assigned for 18.7:

- 223RR in cooperation with 12RR (3/12RR and two companies of 1/12RR) will attack and capture Andreyevka and Petropolye, enveloping them from south and southwest. The presence of 182 Gds RR on the southern bank freed up 3/12RR from needing to protect 223RR's right flank.
- 12RR (3/12RR and two companies of 1/12RR) will take its jump-off positions on the frontline by 06:00 between ht. 188.8 and the corner of the woods 400 m northwest of mark 192.4. Attack and capture Andreyevka and Petropolye in cooperation with 223RR, enveloping the settlements from east and southeast.
- 2/12RR is the divisional reserve. It will move behind 12RR echeloned to the left after capturing Shpakovka.
- 475RR will utilize one battalion to capture the free-standing grove 1 km southeast of 192.4. The other two rifle battalions and the penalty company will attack and capture Semenovka, ht. 174.3, and then the gully Mal. Vidnoga, the gully Zhovtunovskoye, and Kopanki. Begin the attack at 06:00.

At 05:25, after a brief yet intense artillery preparation, the enemy counter-attacked the positions of 475RR. The attack, launched from Semenovka and the area north of Semenovka towards Ford 0.6, employed up to a battalion of infantry of 40MIR, four SPGs, and two tanks. 3/475RR's left flank was unprotected and its right-hand link with 2/475RR was weak. The Battalion was initially encircled by the enemy, but was able to break through the encirclement with the assistance from 1/475RR and 2/475RR; it then closed the gap with the left wing of 2/475RR. 475RR took losses, but continued to consolidate its lines after the enemy was repelled. The last remaining reserve company of 1/12RR was deployed to cover the crossing sites to the southwest of 63.4. At the same time, the training company took defensive positions south of "Ekhnichivka – Shpakovka" along the northern riverbank with the goal of covering the Division's left flank and closing the gap next to the sector of 60 Gds RD. As 60 Gds RD did not make any forward progress, 2/12RR received its new orders: "Move to the crossings of 475RR from the current lo-

cation in Donetskii via Goncharovka, then cross the river and capture Semenovka in cooperation with 475RR.” 2/12RR left Donetskii around 11:00. Over the course of the day, the enemy received reinforcements and used them to launch counterattacks between a company and a battalion strong against 475RR. While these counterattacks originated from ht. 192.4 and Semenovka village, the enemy also attempted to advance north of Semenovka towards Ford 0.6/T³¹. By 13:00 two companies of 1/12RR had transferred to the left flank of 475RR, which meant that the entire 1/12RR was now positioned there. By 14:00 475RR had repelled the counterattacks – suffering serious losses in the process. With only 200 active bayonets remaining, the regiment kept holding its lines gained on 17.7. At 19:00 the enemy committed a fresh battalion (II./40MIR) to the battle, attacking 475RR from Semonovka and the southern slopes of 192.4. Enemy troops infiltrated the forest and began to encircle the remains of 475RR. 3/12RR and an SMG company were deployed to clear the woods, which they did by 21:00. The enemy lost 300 men and retreated back to his original positions. The left flank of 475RR was now protected by 1/12RR and 3/12RR. In summary, 475RR was forced to defend against the counter-attacking enemy instead of conducting its own offensive. It held on, despite perilous circumstances and the threat of encirclement. 12 RR could not achieve its assigned objective either, as its elements were weakened by fighting and were used individually to defend the threatened crossing area on the left flank of 475RR. 2/12RR was en route and did not take part in the fighting. 223RR attempted to attack Andreyevka, but failed to make any progress because of heavy enemy fire. 62 Gds RD was engaged in fierce fighting in the area of Zavodskoy and did not advance further south, which meant that any further move by 223RR would leave its right flank vulnerable. Similarly, an advance by 12RR would compromise the position of 223RR. At 13:30 223RR was counterattacked from Barabashevka by an enemy force of up to a battalion. The counterattack was beaten back and the regiment held its line. By the end of 18.7 the divisional units lost 1000 men killed and wounded, and the operation’s total casualties exceeded 2000 men. The rifle regiments lost up to 80% of their infantry personnel.

³¹ “T” (“Tverdyy” – “hard”) signifies the type of soil on the river bottom.

Conclusion: On 18.7, the divisional units were mainly defending against enemy counterattacks. The delay of 60 Gds RD's advance allowed the enemy to rapidly deploy arriving elements of his 17TD against our Division's left flank and tie up 475RR and 12RR. The HQ of 475RR overreacted to the enemy forces bypassing it on the flanks, even though it was actually only small groups of enemies. Moreover, as it turned out, the enemy did not even have a force nearly sufficient to fully surround the regiment. But the lack of information led to overestimating the threat. Unverified information concerning the positioning of the regimental units forced the Division's HQ to commit the little reserve it had and withdraw elements from more important sectors. Casualties in rifle regiments were exceptionally high, but less so than the regimental data indicated: some soldiers were separated from their units during the fighting in the forest and joined other units (specifically 62 Gds RD). 2/12RR departed Donetsk at 11:00, but was too slow and had yet to arrive into the assigned area by the end of the day.

19 July – Day 3

On the morning of 19.7.43, the divisional units were positioned as follows:

- 223RR was on the northern slopes of ht. 188.8. The order of battalions was “2nd – 1st – 3rd” (from left to right).
- 475RR was in the woods 500 m west of Semenovka, facing south and east.
- To the left of 475RR were the positions of the 3rd and 1st battalions of 12RR. They ran from an area across the northwestern outskirts of Semenovka to the lake 300 m southwest of mark 63.4.
- 2/12RR reached the area 500 m southeast of mark 63.4.

For 19.7.43 the Division was assigned these objectives:

- 223RR will advance in cooperation with the 23rd Tank Corps towards “Andreyevka – Kopanki – Mal. Kamyshevakha”.
- 475RR and 12RR will advance towards “Semenovka – gully Mal. Vidnoga – Shpakovka”.

The left-hand neighbor (60 Gds RD) failed to break through the enemy frontline. The right-hand neighbor (62 Gds RD) had captured Zavodskoy on the eve of 18.7, but lost it to a counterattack by 17TD on the evening of 18.7, and thus all the efforts of 62 Gds RD on 19.7 went into recapturing Zavodskoy.

The action on 19.7 can be split into two distinct episodes: a) the attack on Andreyevka by 223RR and b) 475RR and 12RR fighting for Semenovka.

223RR was in its jump-off area at 188.8 expecting the tanks to start the offensive, but as the tanks were delayed, they attacked on their own at 11:00 and reached the southern slopes of 188.8. The first group of tanks appeared at 12:00 heading for Andreyevka. The infantry followed, but encountered exceptionally strong resistance, and the remaining troops had to seek cover next to the “Izyum – Vel. Kamyshevakha” road. The tanks incurred significant losses, yet failed to neutralize the hostile DFPs. 63MIR of 17TD was the unit engaging 223RR. Under the weight of these new losses, the Regiment could no longer maintain initiative and passed to the defensive on ht. 188.8.

2/12RR began to deploy on the edge of the woods northwest of Semenovka at 05:00 and was attacked by two enemy companies. This counterattack was repelled, but the advance was delayed by several hours.

475RR and 12RR captured Semenovka after multiple assaults from the west and the south, but with cumulative losses of 90% of their infantry personnel they could not continue to advance past Semenovka. The Division lost 3000 men killed, wounded and MIA in the three days of fighting.

Conclusion: The fighting on 19.7 revealed that given their weakened state, the regiments could not achieve their objectives without either assistance from the Division’s neighbors or receiving fresh reinforcements. The enemy amped up the resistance, launched frequent counterattacks, but failed to gain ground. The Division stubbornly held its line – sometimes with artillery firing at point blank range from uncovered positions and without any infantry protection.



53rd Rifle Division – Positions at 11:00 on 18.7, at the end of 18.7, and on 19.7.

20 July – Day 4

On 20.7.43 the Division did not attempt to advance and instead defended against the counteracking enemy. The attacks were coming from Andreyevka, ht. 192.4, gully Vyazovatyy Yar, and the woods west of Shpakovka, and were one or two companies strong. Hostile aircraft activity picked up notably. The right-hand neighbor [the 62nd Guards Rifle Division] was engaged in fighting for Zavodskoy. The left-hand neighbor [the 6th Guards Rifle Corps] remained on the defensive.

21 July – Day 5

During the night prior to 21.7.43, 57 Gds RD [which had been in the reserve of the 1st Guards Army until then] was committed into the 53RD zone of advance with the mission to advance south in cooperation with the 23rd Tank Corps. The commander of 53RD decided: “53RD will strike at ht. 197.2 and at Shpakovka moving along the river. Jump off from Semenovka. Immediate

objective is Shpakovka and ht. 197.2. The next objective is Topalskiy. Reach the boundary with 60 Gds RD by the end of the day. 57 Gds RD will advance on our right towards “ht 180.6 – Kopanki – Mal. Kamyshevakha” in cooperation with the 23rd Tank Corps.”

The regiments of 53RD received the following orders:

- 12RR jumps off from the eastern edge of Semenovka and advances on “173.4 – ht. 197.2”.
- 475RR jumps off from the southern edge of the forest north of 192.4 and advances on ht. 197.2.
- 223RR advances behind 475RR echeloned to the right and protects 475RR’s flank from threats near gully Vyazovatyy Yar.

All units ran into intense fire (particularly from the wood-and-dirt pillboxes on the northeastern slopes of 192.4) and failed to advance. The enemy launched several counterattacks from ht. 192.4, gully Vyazovatyy Yar, and the woods west of Shpakovka with up to a company of infantry. The attacks were repelled (mainly by artillery fire), but the Division could not make any forward progress. By the end of the day, the Division held the line:

- 223RR: edge of the woods north of ht. 192.4,
- 475RR: 200 m south of Semenovka,
- 12RR: eastern edge of Semenovka – the river.

The Division’s offensive effectively ended on 21.7. It lost over 3000 men and passed to the defensive on the line between points to the south and east of Semenovka. The neighbors failed to make any significant gains on 21.7. Hostile aircraft were active. 22.7 and 23.7 were spent holding the lines reached by 21.7. On 24.7.43 the Division handed over its sector to 57 Gds RD and was transferred into the Army reserve.

5. Command and Control and Coordination of Artillery

Control over the troops was satisfactory. Communications (mainly by radio) were uninterrupted. The biggest flaw was the lack of encryption for orders

and operational reports. Even if encryption was used, it was rendered useless almost immediately by repeating the same information without encrypting. The likely reason was the losses of senior aides in battalions, which meant the decrypting would be done by untrained personnel and at a very slow pace. The control was also hampered by the lack of familiarity with the terrain among the field units' commanders. The orders went unencrypted because the utilization of inadequate, unwieldy tables caused delays. The commanders' lack of skill using encrypted maps and tables was also a cause for concern. Connection to the artillery was at times faulty: 12RR was unable to call 1/36 AR for the entire day on 19.7. On multiple occasions the artillery had to be called in via the observation post of the Division Commander. The rifle regiments did not use their own mortars and artillery effectively, and instead asked for divisional artillery support where the regimental and battalion artillery would have sufficed.

6. Conclusions

1. The preparations for the operation were adequate. The commanders understood their objectives and acted accordingly.
2. Poor topography skills among the officers were a factor in the battle. The inability to establish the precise location of one's own detachment often led to inaccurate reports and provided wrong information for further decisions by the HQ.
3. It is imperative that the commanders become familiar with the terrain visible from their observation posts (as opposed to just using maps) in order to avoid wasting time during the battle and reporting inaccurate data.
4. The training for the river crossing and the crossing itself went well with minimal losses (chiefly caused by the hostile artillery fire).
5. The neighbors' failure on the very first day of the battle put the Division into a perilous situation and forced it to defend on three fronts,

which allowed the enemy to bring in reinforcements and mass his artillery fire in our sector.

6. The failure of 62 Gds RD, which caused a day-long delay in deploying the 23rd Tank Corps for the attack, allowed the enemy to refit and reorganize. Additionally, the element of surprise was lost and the Division's success on the first day was not exploited.
7. Artillery support for the offensive was inadequate as far as the neutralization of the enemy's artillery and mortars was concerned. The enemy barrages were fired with the same intensity for the entire duration of the battle. Own preparatory barrages for the offensives (other than the initial one on 17.7) were weak.
8. Because of the unfavorable terrain, the regimental commanders could not establish good observation posts and thus could not observe and control the actions of their battalions. This caused deviation from the axis of advance and uncoordinated decisions by the battalions.
9. Flares and colored smoke were used inefficiently and did not clearly mark the course of the frontline, which made it hard for the artillery to fire at targets close to our own troops and resulted in the need to apply an increased safety range.
10. There was no use in sending the regimental artillery across the river right away, since the steep riverbank was in the way of the indirect fire trajectories and there was insufficient visibility for direct fire. As a result, the artillery remained idle for some time, while still losing men and horses to hostile fire.
11. The regimental commanders were too passive in utilizing their artillery support. The connection between them and the infantry support artillery groups would often break, and the requests had to go via the observation posts of the Division Commander and the commander of the divisional artillery causing delays.

12. Privates, sergeants and officers in platoons and companies acted with valor and determination, but digging hasty trenches, movement by bounds and taking advantage of terrain was not practiced sufficiently. Troops would advance standing tall and too close together, not using appropriate formations, which lead to extra casualties. NCOs did not show enough leadership and did not distinguish themselves from privates in that regard.
13. The divisional observation post was established in a good position and allowed for observation of the action in the zone of the offensive. Often the Division Commander gave orders to individual battalions because the regimental commanders could not see them.
14. The encrypting tables are too unwieldy, take too much time to use and are impractical in a rapidly developing battle. Instead, each operation should have its own short table of terms and terrain features.
15. The radio connection was very reliable, it worked without a single interruption and was entirely satisfactory.
16. Our troops once more demonstrated their ability to fight on the offensive under difficult conditions (undertaking a river crossing). Officers and privates acted with valor and determination. The majority of the officers demonstrated that the undertaken training allowed them to acquire the needed knowledge and to build cohesion in their detachments. They were able to maintain steady control of their detachments in spite of the circumstances. However, the detachment leaders should be given more independence and be spared from having to provide reports to their superiors too often. In these battles, the following commanders and officers displayed smart commanding skills and personal valor:
 - 3/223RR Commander, Sr. Lt. *Konstantinov*,
 - 1st Rifle Company/223RR Commander, Sr. Lt. *Yakovlev*,
 - 1/475RR Commander, Cpt. *Kaygorodtsev*,
 - AT Platoon Leader of 1/475RR, Lt. *Shilkevich*,

- Leader 2nd Platoon/7th Rifle Company/223RR, Lt. *Gorokhov*,
- Chief Engineer of 475RR, Cpt. *Shapovalov*,
- and many others.

[Signed]

Chief of Staff, Col. *Solovyev*

Chief of Operations Department, Maj. *Kondratenko*

[Maps]

53rd Rifle Division – Own forces and known enemy positions prior to the offensive

53rd Rifle Division – Plan of attack

53rd Rifle Division – Positions at the end of 17.7.43

53rd Rifle Division – Positions at 11:00 on 18.7.43, at the end of 18.7.43 , and on 19.7.43

53rd Rifle Division – Positions at the conclusion of the operation

57th Guards Rifle Division – After Action Report³²

*Covering the period from
21 July through 22 July 1943*

1. Disposition and Preparations

57 Gds RD was held in the reserve of the 1st Guards Army starting from 10.7.43 and was staged around the woods southwest of Bulbovka and in Peski. The units prepared for the upcoming action by servicing equipment and transport assets, replenishing ammunition, conducting political education activities, practicing how to block wood-and-dirt pillboxes, and studying the march route to the new assembly areas. At 14:00 on 20.7.43, the Division Commander received a verbal order to assemble the Division in the woods 1 km northwest of the tenant farm³³ by 22:00 of 20.7.43 [the farm is located to the north of 188.8 and east of kurgan +1.0] and to transfer the Division under the 4th Guards Rifle Corps command. At 15:00 the Division Commander and the regimental commanders left the staging area to reconnoiter the terrain at the destination. At 20:00 (while at the 53RD command post in the woods 1.5 km south of 124.7) the Commander was assigned a mission by the 4th Guards Rifle Corps and immediately ordered his regimental commanders: “Covertly cross the Severskiy Donets under the cover of darkness and assemble in the following jump-off areas before the dawn of 21.7:

- 174 Gds RR in the woods 0.8 km north of the tenant farm,
- 172 Gds RR in the woods near the tenant farm,
- 170 Gds RR in the woods southwest of Semenovka.”

³² CAMD RF, Fond: 1176, Series: 1, File: 15 (Document begins on page 433).

³³ Literally “Collective Farm’s yard” – a small parcel of land given to members of a collective farm for personal use.

To facilitate communications and control, each regiment was assigned a liaison from the divisional HQ. By 03:00 on 21.7.43 the Division finished crossing the river and assembled in the assigned jump-off areas. The march to the new location and the crossing went without a hitch, not a single casualty was sustained. The divisional artillery set up its firing positions on the northern bank of the Severskiy Donets near the crossing site. At 04:00 a combat directive from the 4th Guards Rifle Corps was received by the divisional HQ; the HQ then began planning and documenting instructions for the subordinates (the order for the offensive, signals table, etc.). By 08:00 the regiments' HQs received their instructions.

2. Enemy Forces

The enemy utilized 257ID, 17TD, and 46ID for the fighting from 17.7 through 20.7 against the units of 53RD and 62 Gds RD, stubbornly holding his line at “Zavodskoy – hts. 166.7 – 149.6 – 168.8 – 188.8 – 199.8 – 173.6 – Shpakovka – Burkhanovo”.³⁴ The defense system along this line was built in advance and fortified with wood-and-dirt pillboxes and man-made obstacles. The enemy's divisional reserves and tanks were assembled near Andreyevka and Mal. Kamyshevakha. His major artillery positions were near Andreyevka, gully Vyazovatyy Yar, and south of Vyazovatyy Yar Grove. The enemy held favorable ground, namely a series of heights which afforded a great view of the entire zone of our operations and all crossings going over the Severskiy Donets. The Division HQ did not have any data about the enemy manpower or equipment on the eve of the operation. The defense system, the system of fire, enemy fortifications and obstacles were not scouted by the divisional reconnaissance. The defense was based on distinct strongpoints (well-fortified and defended by systems of pillboxes) placed mainly on the hill crests and slopes, roving individual mortar positions, DFPs, anti-tank positions – all covered by the artillery and mortars firing from the depth of the defense. All strongpoints were protected by wire entanglements (2–3 stakes deep) and

³⁴ It is likely that the Division was using a map unavailable to the editors, and some locations will not be marked on any of the maps present in the book.

minefields. Robust anti-tank positions established mainly on the flanks were well-prepared with engineer works and obstacles. On the eve of the offensive, the enemy was passive, outside of occasional few shells landing or intermittent MG fire. Our observation revealed that the enemy was taking advantage of the pause in the action to improve his defense and reorganize his units.

3. State of the 57th Guards Rifle Division

On the eve of the offensive, 57 Gds RD (excluding the attached reinforcements) had 4000 active bayonets. On average, a rifle company had 70 to 80 men.

- *Divisional equipment:* 301 LMGs, 105 HMGs, 202 ATRs, 15 50mm mortars, 71 82mm mortars, 17 120mm mortars, 34 AT guns, 12 regimental guns, 17 76mm divisional guns, 10 122mm howitzers.
- *Ammunition reserves:* small arms – 2.24x, ATR rounds – 1.49x, 45mm shells – 2.44x, 76mm reg shells – 2.44x, 76mm dice shells – 2.45x, 122mm shells – 1.5x, 120mm mortar bombs – 3.4x, 82mm mortar bombs – 2.65x, 50mm mortar bombs – 1.99x, grenades – 2x.

The Division's signal equipment was at 75% of prescribed levels. Personnel were fully equipped with clothes and provisions. There were six days of daily food rations.

Morale was high – our troops were looking forward to the battle and impatiently waited for the offensive to begin. The divisional personnel were 90% recent replacements from the refit in April 1943, conscripted from regions previously under German occupation. The personnel acquired some combat experience in two months of active defense on the Izyum bridgehead, but had no experience with offensive operations. 80% of the commanders (from squads to companies) were graduates of expedited commanders' training courses, but they lacked combat experience, especially on the offensive.

4. Plan of the Offensive

The 4th Guards Rifle Corps Commander ordered: “57 Gds RD will decisively break through the enemy defense line between “Andreyevka (excl.) – gully Vyazovatyy Yar” and advance towards Mal. Kamyshevakha. By the end of the day it will capture Kamenka, surround and defeat 46ID, and then consolidate the gains. The 23rd Tank Corps will advance ahead of the Division with the objective to capture Mal. Kamyshevakha and Kamenka. On the right, 62 Gds RD will attack towards Andreyevka (...). On the left, 53RD will attack towards Shpakovka and Topalskiy.”

Given these objectives, the Division Commander decided: “In cooperation with the 23rd Tank Corps, direct the principal effort by deploying two regiments on the right wing and decisively strike at ht. 193.8, Kopanki, Mal. Kamyshevakha, and Kamenka. In coordination with the units of 53RD, encircle and defeat the enemy’s 46ID. The immediate objective is ht. 193.8, then Kopanki, gully Zhovtunovskoye, followed by Mal. Kamyshevakha and Kamenka.” [The specific orders for the individual units of the 57th Guards Rifle Division follow:]

- 172 Gds RR will break through the enemy defense along the road over the southern slopes of hts. 188.8 and 192.4 with the immediate objective to capture the enemy’s first line of trenches. Next, advance southwards to capture ht. 193.8 and then Kopanki. At that point, the Regiment will pivot to the southeast and capture Mal. Kamyshevakha and Kamenka in cooperation with 170 Gds RR (encircle and destroy the defending elements of 46ID in the process). The Infantry Artillery Support Group consists of 2/128 Gds AR and 2/870 light AR, and is led by the commander of 128 Gds AR. Left boundary: “192.4 (excl.) – gully Zhovtunovskoye (excl.) – stream Viknino – 167.5 – stream Grevoka”.
- 170 Gds RR will break through the enemy defense at the line “ht. 192.4 – the pole south of Semenovka” with the immediate objective

to strike southeast and capture gully Vyazovatyy Yar and then the Vyazovatyy Yar ravine. After that, defeat the encircled enemy units in Mal. Kamyshevakha and Kamenka in cooperation with 174 Gds RR. The artillery group for infantry support consists of 1/128 Gds AR and 1/ 870 light AR, and is led by the commander of 1/128 Gds AR.

- 174 Gds RR will advance behind 172 Gds RR, echeloned to the right, with the objective to protect the Division's right flank. After reaching the line "180.6 – Kopanki" the Regiment will leave one battalion to cover the western and southern directions and continue the offensive with the rest of the forces until 172 Gds RR has achieved its objectives. Leave one company to control the highway 1 km south of Mal. Kamyshevakha, facing south. The artillery group for infantry support consists of 3/128 Gds AR and the mortar battery, and is led by the commander of 3/128 Gds AR.
- The AT Battalion will be deployed behind 174 Gds RR, echeloned to the right, to protect the Division's right flank against enemy tanks.
- The Training Battalion remains in the reserve.

The offensive was planned to start at 10:00 [on 21.7.43]. But as the artillery was not ready by that time, the Commander postponed the start to 12:00.

5. Conduct of the Operation

21 July – Day 1

At 12:00, after a brief preparatory artillery barrage, the infantry units began the attack. Right at the start of our artillery preparation, the enemy responded with strong artillery and mortar fire, mainly targeting the observation posts and the advancing troops of 172 Gds RR. The preparatory fire of our artillery did not have the desired effect: neither the hostile DFPs on the front-line, nor the batteries in the depth of the defense were neutralized. As our troops started their advance, they immediately came under interdiction fire and ran into stiff resistance from the enemy positioned in rebar concrete

bunkers, trenches, and foxholes. Fierce fighting broke out right away. By 13:30, 172 Gds RR detachments succeeded in pushing the enemy out of the forward trenches and reached the northern slopes of kurgan 1.0, ht. 188.8, and ht. 192.4 where another battle ensued. Red Army soldiers and commanders demonstrated exceptional valor and heroism in the fight over these heights and bravely assaulted hostile DFPs. They moved forward steadily, destroying DFPs and wood-and-dirt pillboxes along the way, while suffering high casualties. At 14:30, after a two-hour-long battle with support by the tanks of the 23rd Tank Corps, the detachments of 172 Gds RR captured ht. 188.8, and 174 Gds RR captured kurgan 1.0, while 170 Gds RR failed to advance. By that time virtually all divisional artillery units had successfully crossed to the southern bank of the Severskiy Donets. About 20 guns were placed into direct firing positions and started shelling the enemy DFPs at point-blank range. The Division resumed its offensive, forcing the enemy to withdraw from ht. 188.8 to the next defense line near hts. 185.2 and 184.2, where he regrouped and stubbornly held the line supported by artillery and mortar fire from Andreyevka, Mal. Kamyshevakha, and gully Vyazovatyy Yar. The enemy defense system included well-organized anti-tank capabilities, which prevented our own tanks' advance. At 18:00, hostile aircraft attacked our formations, artillery observation posts, and the crossings in groups of 10–20 planes (70 overall). Relentless fighting lasted until darkness fell.

The Division's units fought through the enemy's stubborn resistance and by the end of the day reached the following lines:

- 174 Gds RR: hts. 185.2 and 184.2,
- 172 Gds RR: 200 m north of the woods northeast of Andreyevka,
- 170 Gds RR: northern slopes of 192.4.

Day 1 conclusions: Despite some progress, the Division failed to achieve its objectives. The breakthrough did not happen, nor did the enemy's fire system get neutralized. His defense remained capable and well-organized. Main causes of that being:

- Poor organization of cooperation with other arms (artillery, tanks).
- Weak activity on behalf of both the left-hand and the right-hand neighbors, which allows the enemy to amass his fire on the Division.
- Despite the momentum and demonstrated valor and heroism, the commanding staff of all levels (from squads to battalions) did not control the troops well due to the lack of experience. Flanking attacks or tactics of blocking strong DFPs were not used.
- Poor cohesion within detachments and poor inter-detachment coordination.
- The artillery failed to neutralize the enemy's system of fire and could not provide timely response when particular concentrations were requested.

The Division Commander decided to consolidate the gains, reorganize and refit overnight, place more guns into direct fire positions, and resume the offensive in the morning.

22 July – Day 2

The enemy used the cover of darkness to regroup his forces and deploy reserves from the rear close to the frontline. At 06:00, hostile artillery fired a powerful barrage hitting our formations and artillery firing positions. That started an artillery duel lasting for 1.5 hours. At 08:00 the enemy launched a counterattack from gully Vyazovatyy Yar with a company of submachine gunners³⁵ and a feint action against 192.4 at the same time. At 09:00 the enemy launched simultaneous attacks against 172 Gds RR and 174 Gds RR from Andreyevka's northern edge. The attack was supported by the fire of 5–6 tanks. The fierce firefight lasted for 1.5 hours, but the attacks were repelled, inflicting significant losses on the enemy. Afterwards, the Division resumed the offensive, but had no success against the numerically superior, entrenched enemy. At 14:30 yet more counterattacks were launched in the same sector. The resulting fight lasted through the nightfall, and by the end of the day the enemy pushed our troops back, re-capturing hts. 185.2 and

³⁵ Soviet reports often refer to "submachine gunners", whereas in actuality a regular infantry detachment with machine gun(s) was likely encountered.

184.2. For most of the day, the Division was defending against counterattacking enemy forces, inflicting significant personnel and equipment losses upon the attackers. There were 11 counterattacks in total, most of which were beaten back. By the end of Day 2, the Division edged back a bit and consolidated on the ground held.

Day 2 conclusions: The units of the Division repelled a large number of counterattacks, costing the enemy significant losses, but the Division not only failed to achieve its objective, but also withdrew from previously captured heights. The causes are largely the same as those observed on the first day, with addition of badly positioned artillery meant to provide support by direct fire: the guns only had visibility of about 200 m due to the terrain and thus could not assist the infantry. The Division failed to notice the movements of the enemy's units, and the enemy did not reveal his troop concentrations for the upcoming counterattacks. As of the morning of 23.7.43 the Division passed to the defensive on the orders of the 4th Guards Rifle Corps Commander.

Conclusions from the two days of fighting:

1. The units of the Division could not break through the enemy defense (with the exception of a limited success on the first day), yet tied up numerically superior enemy forces for a few days.
2. Despite the failure to advance, the Division inflicted significant personnel and materiel losses upon the enemy. The enemy suffered casualties of 2000 men killed and wounded and lost large amounts of equipment and other materiel. Our artillery destroyed two gun batteries, three mortar batteries, tens of wood-and-dirt pillboxes, and tens of trucks and horse-drawn carts.
3. Own losses: 320 men killed, 1196 wounded. Lost 3 76mm guns, 3 45mm guns, 1 120mm mortar, and a number of LMGs and HMGs.

6. Summary

1. In the fighting of 21–22.7.43, the units of 57 Gds RD displayed high levels of battle-worthiness, stubbornness, bravery, and heroism. The men's morale was great, but the troops failed to achieve the assigned objective. The main reason was inadequate preparation by commanders and their staff (only a very limited timeframe of 8–10 hours was available), which affected the flow of the battle and limited the effectiveness of our command and control system.
2. There was no reconnaissance. The units did not have information about the enemy manpower, equipment, defense organization, engineer works, artillery observation or firing positions. As a result, our own artillery fired blind and failed to neutralize the enemy's firing capabilities (particularly artillery and mortars). Our rifle units had no data on the defense system they were facing and therefore could not attack in an effective formation. They failed to block especially strong DFPs or conduct flanking attacks against them.
3. The (well-fortified) main line of resistance, which was established on a series of dominating heights, was not penetrated by the attacks of the preceding offensive³⁶ and was not revealed by our reconnaissance early enough to prepare. The enemy took advantage of our reorganization on 19–20.7.43 by bringing in fresh reinforcements (two tank divisions). The Division had to attack a numerically superior enemy on a well-prepared line, which resulted in a failure to break through the defense and achieve the objective.
4. The coordination between the different participating units was poorly organized. That also applies to tanks and the air forces. Even the coordination within units was poor. Units acted on their own, with no coordination with neighbors or supporting units, which gave the ene-

³⁶ Meant is the offensive effort of the preceding days (17–20 July 1943), before the deployment and offensive action of the reserve 57th Guards Rifle Division on 21 July.

my the opportunity to concentrate his forces against each individual offensive attempt and our attacks were repelled piecemeal.

5. The lack of experience with offensive combat operations of commanders of all echelons (from squads to battalions) affected their effectiveness in controlling their subordinated units. The commanders failed to take advantage of the enemy's weak spots and often could not keep up with the situation. Battalion (and company) commanders often sat on reverse slopes unable to observe their own units, blindly following the field manual and not taking the specifics of the terrain into account. In those situations, the commands were issued over the phone, and in some cases, the control was lost altogether. Regimental HQs did not maintain sufficient control over their battalions when it mattered the most.
6. The divisional artillery could not establish its firing positions in time. After the river crossing, the artillery units deployed too close together (50–100 m), which meant that most guns could not fire. Observation posts were placed extremely inconveniently: the tall ridge blocked the view and the artillery could not provide observed indirect fire support. Those guns that were moved into direct fire positions, could not effectively support the infantry either because of the unfavorable terrain.
7. The trial provided by the two days of fighting helped to identify the better skilled, more talented sergeants and officers suited for excelling in future offensive combat operations. It prepared the core of the Division's troops for future success on the offensive – taking into account the mistakes made in this operation.

[Signed]

Chief of Staff, Gds. Col. *Semchenkov*

Head of the 1st Department, Gds. Maj. *Tikhov*

23rd Tank Corps

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23rd Tank Corps – War Diary³⁷

*Covering the period from
12 March through 25 July 1943*

12 March – 12 July 1943

The Corps is being formed

Between 12.3.43 and 12.7.43 the 23rd Tank Corps was being formed and underwent combat training near Kupyansk. On 12.7.43 the 23rd Tank Corps had the following organization:

- **3TBde:** 68 T-34s, personnel and equipment as prescribed by the TOE.
- **39TBde:** 35 T-34s, 32 T-70s, personnel and equipment as prescribed by the TOE.
- **135TBde:** 36 T-34s, 32 T-70s, personnel and equipment as prescribed by the TOE.
- **56MRBde:** 11 APCs, 10 BA-64s, personnel and equipment as prescribed by the TOE.
- **10 Gds BtTR:** 21 Mk4s (Churchill).
- **82MclBn:** 9 T-70s, 10 BA-64, 64 motorcycles with sidecar, 9 motorcycles without a sidecar.
- **442 Gds MtrBn:** 8 BM-8s (on T-60 chassis).
- **1501ATAR:** 20 76mm guns.
- **457MtrR:** 36x 120mm mortars.
- **1697AAAR:** 16x 37mm AA guns, 16x DShK MGs.

³⁷ CAMD RF, Fond: 3418, Series: 1, File: 15 (Document begins on page 31).

- 176EngBn, 895SigBn, 105 Mobile Repair Bn, 159 Mobile Repair Bn (tracked), Corps Medical Platoon, Mobile Field Bakery: had 10% of the strength prescribed in the TOE, except vehicles.

In total on 12.7.43 the 23rd Tank Corps had:

142 T-34s, 73 T-70s, 21 Mk4s, 32 76mm guns, 32 45mm guns, 8 BM-8s, 60 BA-64s, 42 120mm mortars, 53 82mm mortars, 65 HMGs, 4000 active bayonets, and 120 motorcycles. Wheeled vehicles were at 60% of prescribed levels.

In the area of Kupyansk the Corps built up the following supply reserves:

- Ammunition: 3x units of fire
- Fuel and lubricants:
 - Diesel: 3x refuels
 - Gasoline 1st class: 3x refuels
 - Gasoline 2nd class: 5x refuels
 - Engine oil: 3x refuels
- Food: 10x daily rations

The Corps was well trained, the inspections showed a good level of preparation in the tank detachments, a satisfactory skill level in gunnery, and excellent skill levels of the tank drivers. An English military mission visited the Corps in mid-May and noted the excellent skills of the tank brigades' personnel. The Motor-Rifle Brigade however was not prepared well, especially among the junior commanders and platoon leaders.

Conclusion: As of 12.7.43 the 23rd Tank Corps was combat-ready and prepared to be deployed for action. (...) ³⁸

16 July 1943

On the 16th of July – in the early morning and under the cover of darkness – 135TBde crossed into the Izyum bridgehead using an underwater bridge in

³⁸ The Corps then received a verbal order from the commander of the Southwestern Front to displace and assemble in the vicinity of Verbovka, Glinskoe, and the northwestern edge of Izyum no later than the morning of 14.7.1943. The march to Izyum is shown *here*.

the western Severskiy Donets river bend and assembled near the optics-grade glass factory by 04:00. The crossing was completed in 40 minutes.

Over the course of the day, the activities of terrain reconnaissance, cooperation planning, and preparing the data for the final decision continued. At 12:00 the Corps Commander finalized his decision and by 15:00 issued *Order No. 15* to the troops.

The 1st Guards Army HQ issued *Directive No. 0048* to introduce the possibility of the Corps being committed in the 4th Guards Rifle Corps zone of advance near Chervonnyy Shakhter in case of a 6th Guards Rifle Corps' failure to achieve its objectives. After receiving the directive (at 17:00 on 16.7.1943) the 173rd Sapper Battalion and an operational group were ordered to Chervonnyy Shakhter. The group included the senior aide to the Chief of Operations Department, Major *Naumov* and Chief Corps Engineer, Lt. Colonel *Kolosov* with wired communication equipment and an RSB radio set. The Battalion was tasked with building a bridge for wheeled vehicles by 17.7, while 4 Pontoon Bde [of the 4th Guards Rifle Corps] would build a tank pontoon bridge. By 24:00 the 23rd Tank Corps established connection with the proposed point for the crossing site. At 07:00 30 enemy planes made three bombing runs against targets in the Severskiy Donets bend and the positions of 135TBde. One T-70 was knocked out and one enemy ME-110 was brought down by anti-aircraft fire.

17 July 1943

Order No. 15 by the 23rd Tank Corps HQ: "According to *Combat Directive No. 1148/OP* issued by the HQ of the 1st Guards Army, the 23rd Tank Corps waits for the 6th Guards Rifle Corps to reach the line "ht. 197.2 – 182.2 – 189.1 – southern edge of Kamenka", then exploits the created gap by striking in the direction of Barvenkovo and by the end of the second day captures Elizavetovka, Nikolskoe, Poltava, Alexandrovka, and Varvarovka. By the end of the third day, capture Petropavlovka and Slavyanka. 877HAR, 678AAR, 45 Gds MtrR, two companies of 11 Assault Engineers Bde, and 9ATABde are attached as reinforcements."

The enemy was holding the defense in front of the Izyum bridgehead on the line “ht. 182.0 – 185.1 – 185.4” and had built a system of fortifications constructed with steel and rebar concrete (manned by elements of 46ID); minefields and wire entanglements were also present.

The Corps Commander, taking into account the only available road and the narrow gap between Donetsk and Kamenka, decided to advance in a one-column formation to the line “Andreyevka – grove 2 km northwest of Mal. Kamyshevka” and then pivot the Corps to the south and advance in a two-column formation:³⁹

- Right column: 135TBde with 1172ATAR, 3/1697AAR, and a company of 176SigBn. 82MclBn follows behind 135TBde. The Corps reserve 3TBde follows behind 135TBde.
- Left column: 39TBde with 150ATAR, 1/1697AAR, and a company of 176SigBn. 10 Gds BtTR with 1501ATAR and a company of 176SigBn follows behind 39TBde. 56MRBde follows behind 10 Gds BtTR.
- The operational group of the Corps HQ is moving with 10 Gds BtTR.

The infantry attack started at 06:50 after an 80-minute-long preparatory barrage. Despite the intense bombardment of the frontline and the support of three breakthrough tank regiments, the infantry of the 6th Guards Rifle Corps failed to break in and reach the line that would create a large enough bridgehead for the Tank Corps to exploit.

After assessing the situation, the commander of the 1st Guards Army decided to commit the 23rd Tank Corps in the zone of advance of the 4th Guards Rifle Corps near Chervonny Shakhter instead. Executing this verbal order of the Army Commander, the 23rd Tank Corps assembled its tank brigades in the woods north of Chervonny Shakhter, while spreading the equipment along the road from Bulbovka to Chervonny Shakhter. 135TBde was forced to leave the southern part of the Izyum bridgehead, cross the river back and

³⁹ The map for this original plan can be seen *here*.

get itself to the area of Chervonyy Shakhter. 56MRBde remained in the grove southwest of Bulbovka.

Over the course of 17.7.43 the infantry of the 4th Guards Rifle Corps crossed the Severskiy Donets in the sector “Garazhevka – Zavodskoy” and fought over the possession of Garazhevka, Sredniy, and Zavodskoy. By the end of the day, Garazhevka and Sredniy were captured, but the infantry could not consolidate its gains in Sredniy and allowed enemy submachine gunners to attack from Zavodskoy to take Sredniy back. The attempt to capture Zavodskoy failed. As of the evening on 17.7.43, the 4th Guards Rifle Corps did not finish constructing the crossings over the Severskiy Donets suitable for tanks. 4 Pontoon Bde lost 19 pontoons out of 36 and only finished a 60-ton bridge next to ht. 64.7 north of Sredniy by 03:00 on 18.7.43. Thus the night was wasted, because the crossing was under fire from Sredniy and the bridgehead of only 800 m depth did not allow for the entire Corps to deploy on the opposite side of the river. The bridgehead needed to be extended, since the Corps could not deploy in a narrow swampy sector with only one road leading to Sredniy.

Conclusion: The infantry of the 4th Guards Rifle Corps failed to provide conditions for the crossing and deployment of the 23rd Tank Corps in the area of Chervonyy Shakhter during the night of 17–18.7.43.

18 July 1943

The Corps is committed to create and exploit a breach in the enemy defense for the same sector as yesterday, near Chervonyy Shakhter.

At 04:00 one tank battalion and the motor-rifle battalion of 3TBde crossed to the southern bank of the Severskiy Donets and began to regroup. The Brigade had the objective of extending the bridgehead and allowing for the entire Corps to cross. With the break of dawn, enemy aircraft discovered the concentration of tanks at the crossing site and started continuous bombing runs in groups of 15–20 planes. The bombs destroyed the pontoon bridge, which could not be repaired for the entire day due to the lack of spare pontoons. The tank battalion and motor-rifle battalion of 3TBde remained iso-

lated from the rest of the Corps and were engaged in the battle for Sredniy throughout 18.7. Sredniy was captured by the end of the day, and we inflicted the following losses on the enemy: three AT guns, one medium tank, and 220 men. The Brigade captured HQ documents of 257AR. 1697AAR shot down two Henschel-123s. The Brigade lost three T-34s burned, two vehicles, one radio set, 10 killed, and 23 wounded.

After establishing that the bridge near Chervonyy Shakhter could not be repaired, the 1st Guards Army Commander ordered the 23rd Tank Corps to be committed in the zone of 53RD near Semenovka. The objective was given at the end of 18.7.43 and yet again the time during the night was wasted. By 19.7.43 the Army HQ had only issued one written order. All maneuvers were ordered verbally using ambiguous instructions, which only reached the Corps by the end of the day so that instead of crossing the river at night, the Corps spent the night marching. Because the crossing was conducted by light, it removed the element of surprise and allowed the enemy to bomb the Corps formations.

19 July 1943

Combat Directive No. 203/OP by the 1st Guards Army HQ from 02:30 on 19.7.43: The Corps (acting in cooperation with 53RD) will break through the enemy defense and advance to the line “Kopanki – Mal. Kamyshevakha”.

39TBde reached the Semenovka crossing site at 05:00 and immediately began the crossing to the southern bank. By this time, the infantry of 53RD had reached the southern edge of the woods west of Semenovka, but groups of enemy submachine gunners remained on the eastern and western edges of the woods and in Semenovka itself. These groups harassed the crossing troops with small arms fire. The bridgehead established by the friendly infantry was limited to a grove adjacent to the river, featuring boggy ground and uncleared minefields. Two deep gullies unsuitable for tanks ran through the bridgehead. The only road leading to the southern edge of the woods went over two boggy gullies, which were not made ready for the tanks to move through. Hence, as 39TBde set up on the southern bank, it ran into minefields and impassable boggy gullies and was forced to halt. The rest of the

23rd Tank Corps' units stretched along the only road leading toward the crossing and could not proceed unless 39TBde would leave the crossing area. This resulted in a large traffic jam of tanks, trucks, and field guns idling close together. Only the absence of enemy aircraft activity on 19.7.43 prevented a disaster. It was clearly necessary to push 39TBde through. It took the combined efforts of 176EngBn, 4 Pontoon Bde, and the tank desant companies of 39TBde and 135TBde to build a corduroy road through the gullies and clear passages through the minefields. To rid the woods of the enemy submachine gunners, the 1st motor-rifle battalion of 56MRBde was rushed in at 11:00. By 11:30, 135TBde, 39TBde, 10 Gds BtTR, 2/3TBde⁴⁰, 1/56MRBde, 11ACarBn, 442 Gds MtrBn, and three batteries of destroyer AT artillery regiments crossed the Severskiy Donets and assembled at the southern edge of the woods near the dirt path leading out of the woods (1 km west of Semenovka). Our troops were under fierce fire by the enemy's artillery and mortars. A larger part of the attached destroyer AT artillery regiments of 9ATA Bde remained on the northern bank, blocking the road. 877HAR established firing positions along the northern bank of the Severskiy Donets and 62 Gds MtrR settled in positions 2 km north of the bridge. The rest of 56MRBde was moving on foot and by 12:00 only began to approach the crossing.

At 12:00 on 19.7.43, the Corps began the attack (disposed with 135TBde, 39TBde, and 2/3TBde; supported by 877HAR, 442 Sep Gds MtrBn, and 62 Gds MtrR, and in coordination with 53RD):

- 39TBde attacked towards "ht. 184.2 – Andreyevka – Petropolye – Kopanki – Mal. Kamyshevakha – Kamenka",
- 135TBde attacked towards "ht. 188.8 – ht. 197.3 – Mal. Kamyshevakha – Kamenka",
- 2/3TBde and 10 Gds BtTR remained in the Corps reserve.

By that time, the enemy withdrew to its main line of resistance "ht. 192.4 – 188.8 – 185.2 – Zavodskoy". On this line, 257ID had built a system of rebar concrete and steel pillboxes, trenches, and wire entanglements. The principal artillery group of the enemy forces was positioned as follows:

⁴⁰ 2/3TBde is also referred to as 585TBn and 1/3TBde as 584TBn in other documents.

- ht. 160.0, ht. 197.3, Bol. Vidnoga ravine, and Mal. Kamyshevakha – up to 12 batteries,
- Andreyevka and the woods 2 km northwest of it – up to 6 batteries,
- Petropolye and Kopanki – up to 6 batteries.

This created a large pocket of fire between ht. 150.0 and Andreyevka.

Due to lack of time before the offensive's start, the coordination with the infantry was poorly planned and the absence of 56MRBde meant that the tanks had to advance without adequate infantry support. The destroyer AT artillery regiments could not provide artillery support as they did not cross the river yet. As our tanks entered the pocket of fire, they were cut off from the infantry by MG fire coming from pillboxes, while the tanks themselves were hit by destructive artillery fire. The tanks would come back a few times trying to rally the infantry, but the latter was bled dry in the recent fighting and could not advance anymore, thus remaining on the northern slopes of hts. 188.8 and 184.2. Lacking infantry support, 39TBde could not hold Andreyevka and withdrew back to the woods by the end of the day. Some tanks of 135TBde broke through towards Kopanki, but were forced to fall back to ht. 188.8. Over the course of the battle it was established that the enemy deployed elements of 17TD and the tank division "Wiking" on the line "Andreyevka – Mal. Kamyshevakha". 1/3TBde and 3MRBn were fighting near Sredniy against counterattacks by enemy tanks and motorized infantry.

During the day's fighting, the Corps lost 85 tanks: 13 T-34s in 3TBde; 16 T-34s and 23 T-70s in 39TBde; 13 T-34s and 20 T-70s in 135TBde.

Reasons behind the failure of the offensive engagements on 19 July:

- The loss of the surprise element due to delays getting to the crossing site, and an unsuitable state of the bridgehead in the woods on the southern bank.
- The absence of motorized infantry, which did not cross the river in time.
- Insufficient artillery support (only 1/3 of the available artillery was engaged).

- Incompetent use of artillery in the battle: no mass fires were conducted and at times the artillery was left idling.
- 53RD infantry was cut off from the tanks by MG fire coming from pillboxes and could not advance along.
- There was no useful intelligence data about the enemy artillery system of fire and as a result the Corps was sent into a trap.
- The Corps wasted its effort trying to attack along two axes.

Conclusion: On 19.7.43 the Corps was not given an adequate assembly area to regroup for the attack, the consolidation of gains was impossible due to the absence of infantry, and the assigned direction of attack was erroneous. Overall, the Corps was used improperly on 19.7.

20 July 1943

Combat Directive No. 208 by the 1st Guards Army HQ: “The 23rd Tank Corps continues to execute its current mission.”

Under the given circumstances the Corps was not able to resume its offensive in the morning. It had to finish moving the artillery to the southern bank of the Severskiy Donets, assign objectives to 56MRBde (which had just arrived), and refit elements of 39TBde and 135TBde that were worn out by the fighting. Until 18:00 the Corps units defended against enemy counterattacks and prepared to resume the offensive. Guns of the destroyer AT artillery regiments crossed to the southern bank. At 18:00 the units were ready to begin, but the offensive was canceled by order of the South-Western Front Commander, the reason being that 53RD was bled dry and could not be expected to consolidate the tankers’ gains. During the nighttime between 20.7 and 21.7, 57 Gds RD was moved from the Front reserve and attached to the 4th Guards Rifle Corps with the goal to be committed in the 23rd Tank Corps sector. 1/3TBde continued fending off enemy counterattacks in Sredniy and lost 8 T-34 tanks. Enemy aircraft bombed the Corps formations and its command post throughout the day.

21 July 1943

Combat Directive No. 00209 by the 1st Guards Army HQ: “Proceed with the same objective, but in cooperation with 57 Gds RD”.

The Corps was ready to start the offensive at 10:00. Based on the order by the 1st Guards Army Commander, the Corps Commander decided to advance along two axes:

1. 39TBde, 10 Gds BtTR, and 150 ATAR in cooperation with 175 Gds RR (57 Gds RD): via Andreyevka, Petropolye, Kopanki, and Mal. Kamyshevakha.
2. 135TBde and 1172 ATAR in cooperation with 56MRBde (which advances in the second echelon with 457MtrR, 426 ATAR, and 442 Gds MtrR): via ht. 188.8, 197.3, Kopanki, and Mal. Kamyshevakha.

(2/3TBde and 1501 ATAR are in the reserve.)

The attack was postponed until 12:00 because 57 Gds RD did not complete the necessary preparations. By this time, the 23rd Tank Corps fleet of operational tanks consisted of:

- 2/3TBde: 30 T-34s
- 1/3TBde: 22 T-34s
- 39TBde: 12 T-34s, 13 T-70s
- 135TBde: 17 T-34s, 20 T-70s
- 10 Gds BtTR: 21 Mk4s

Resulting in a total of 21 Mk4s, 81 T-34s, and 33 T-70s.

The offensive began with a five-minute preparation barrage and a 20-minute air raid (10–15 ground attack aircraft) against Andreyevka, Petropolye, and Kopanki. Both the artillery and the air force effects were weak and failed to neutralize the firing positions or the enemy’s AT batteries. As a consequence, when the infantry reached ht. 188.8 at 12:00, the tanks got ahead of them by 12:25 and – just as it happened on 19.7 – were cut off by small arms fire from pillboxes. At that point the tanks, acting without infantry

support, started to suffer losses and were forced to come back trying to rally the infantrymen. Yet again the tanks and the infantry were taken under destructive artillery and mortar fire forming a fire pocket. Despite the tankers' heroism and the infantrymen's stubbornness (the infantry elements took major losses), the troops could only advance to the line "ht. 184.2 – southern edge of the grove 2 km east of Andreyevka" and capture the first two lines of the German trenches. Tanks, which managed to break through to the vicinity of Andreyevka, Petropolye, and Kopanki, were separated from the supporting infantry and either burnt or knocked out by hostile artillery fire. Our own artillery failed to neutralize the enemy artillery in Mal. Kamyshevakha and cover the tank attack. Any attempt to displace forward from the edge of the woods was therefore met with an overwhelming force of hostile artillery and mortar fire, causing serious losses. The situation was worsened by difficulties in controlling our own artillery: good observation posts were few and far between, and the destroyer AT artillery regiments lacked signal equipment to facilitate indirect fire. 877HAR had already spent its ammunition, was left with just 1/8x units of fire, and was not able to furnish support during the battle. Moreover, some destroyer AT artillery regiments were assigned to the reserve by the tank brigade commanders and remained idle. The Corps reserve (committed to the fight at 14:00) did not make a difference, and by the end of the day, the tanks were yet again forced to withdraw back, behind the infantry lines:

- 39TBde with the remains of 10Gds BtTR withdrew to the northern slopes of 184.2;
- 135TBde with 2/3TBde withdrew to the southern slopes of ht. 188.8;
- 56MRBde held the line: "northern slopes of ht. 193.8 – western slopes of ht. 150.0";
- 1/3TBde was engaged in fighting for Zavodskoy in the morning. It knocked out 9 "Tiger" tanks, lost 4 T-34s and captured Zavodskoy by 22:00. It then reached the positions of 39TBde by 02:00 on 22.7.43, thus finally rejoining the Corps. The Battalion was assigned to the reserve and was withdrawn to the southern edge of the Semenovka grove (near the collective farm) by the morning of 22.7.43.

Starting from 18:00, the enemy counterattacked with the force of 25–30 tanks and a battalion of infantry supported by heavy artillery fire and groups of 10–15 planes. In the fierce fighting over the course of the day, the Corps lost:

- 3TBde: 1 T-34s knocked out, 12 T-34s burned
- 39TBde: 16 T-34s knocked out, 6 T-70s knocked out
- 139TBde: 10 T-34s knocked out, 10 T-70s knocked out
- 10 Gds BtTR: 16 Mk4s burned
- 9ATABde: 8 guns
- 56MRBde and the motor-rifle battalions of the tank brigades lost 80% of their personnel killed and wounded. 56MRBde in particular lost up to 2000 men.

39TBde destroyed 5 AT guns, 12 wood-and-dirt pillboxes, and up to two infantry battalions of personnel.

Reasons behind the failure on 21.7.43:

- The repetition of the same mistakes when assigning the direction of the strike, throwing the Corps into the same pocket of AT fire.
- Artillery is underutilized and suffers from poor command and control; the volume of fire is inadequate too.
- Lack of massed attacks by own air forces.
- Infantry was unable to support the tanks, being cut off by fire from wood-and-dirt pillboxes.
- Own field artillery failed to neutralize the enemy's counterpart and anti-air artillery failed to protect against the enemy aircraft.

22 July 1943

Same objectives. To be resumed at 09:00 on 22.7.43.

The Corps Commander decided to consolidate the position on the right wing of 39TBde and resume the offensive on the left wing employing 135 TBde, 2/3TBde, and 56MRBde. Just as it happened on 21.7.43, the attack

was postponed to 10:30 due to 57 Gds RD's lack of readiness. At 09:50 the enemy attacked out of the woods northwest of Mal. Kamyshevakha with up to a battalion of infantry, aiming at the positions of 56MRBde. The attack was repelled with losses for the enemy. The attack of 135TBde and 56MRBde at 10:30 failed to yield any results, despite the stubbornness of the tanks and infantrymen, because both units were completely worn out by the preceding battles. By 18:00 the infantry remained on the same line and the tanks withdrew back to the jump-off positions. At 18:00 the enemy gathered reinforcements in the woods northwest of Andreyevka and counterattacked the Corps' lines again: with a battalion of infantry from the vicinity of the grove northwest of Mal. Kamyshevakha and with a battalion of infantry supported by 30 tanks from the vicinity of the grove northwest of Andreyevka. The attacks were beaten back by a concentrated artillery barrage, inflicting the following losses on the enemy: 1 mortar battery, 3 wood-and-dirt pillboxes, 3 tanks (burned), and 200 men. Own losses: 2 T-70s and 2 76mm guns.

23–24 July 1943

Objective: “Firmly hold the current frontline.”

During the 23rd and 24th, the 23rd Tank Corps units reorganized and towed away knocked-out tanks and trucks.

25 July 1943

Combat Directive No. 00561 by the 1st Guards Army HQ: “Disengage and assemble in the area “Glinskoe – Bulbovka” in the reserve of the South-Western Front by the morning of 25.7.”

3TBde, 1501ATAR, and 10 Gds BtTR withdrew during the night of 24–25.7. The rest of the units will withdraw the following night. 53 Gds RD replaced the Corps in the sector. By 04:00 on 25.7.43 the units were located in:

- 3TBde at the edge of the woods southwest of the boot-like patch of woods 2 km west of Glinskoe;

- 39TBde at the edge of the woods 1 km southwest of Glinskoe;
- 135TBde at the edge of the woods 2 km southwest of the boot-like patch of woods;
- 56MRBde and 457MtrR in the woods 2 km northeast of Glinskoe;
- 1501ATAR in Garazhevka;⁴¹
- 442 Gds MtrBn in Kupchinovka;
- 11 ACarBn in the woods 1 km northwest of Pimenovka;
- 82MclBn and 739ATABn at the north edge of Peski;
- the Corps HQ at the edge of the woods 500 m southwest of Bulbovka.

Over the course of the fierce fighting from 17–24.7, the Corps lost:⁴²

	Tanks (T-34/T-70)		Personnel		Lost Guns
	<i>Total Loss</i>	<i>Knocked out, repaired later</i>	<i>Killed</i>	<i>Wounded</i>	
3TBde	24	12	114	184	3
39TBde	23/19	4/1	243	172	4
135TBde	23/10		297	239	3
10 Gds BtTR	16 (Mk4)		71	11	
56MRBde			398	1332	1

Resulting in a total loss of 70 T-34s, 29 T-70s, and 16 Mk4s. As of the morning of 25.7.43 the Corps' operational tanks were:

- 3TBde: 32 T-34s
- 39TBde: 8 T-34s and 12 T-70s
- 135TBde: 5 T-34s and 13 T-70s
- 10 Gds BtTR: 5 Mk4s
- 11ACarBn: 8 T-70s

Total: 5 Mk4s, 45 T-34s, 33 T-70s

⁴¹ This is not Mal. or Bol. Garazhevka, but a village at 7062 (see *here*).

⁴² Also see the 23rd Tank Corps "tank losses" map on the next page.



23rd Tank Corps – Tank losses (18.7.43 – 23.7.43)

Conclusions

1. The 23rd Tank Corps was expected to be committed in three different sectors, which prevented the Commander from concentrating his full attention on any single one of them.
2. Marching along the frontline from one crossing to another revealed the tanks locations to the enemy and took away the element of surprise.
3. In all three sectors, the Corps was not given an adequate assembly area for regrouping before the attack. The Corps had to take on the task of expanding the bridgehead, losing tanks and revealing its intent to the enemy in the process.

4. The Corps entered the battle in a rush, immediately after completing the crossing, with no time dedicated to planning and setting objectives. Because of this, the Corps would be committed unit by unit, not as a whole.
5. The Army HQ did not assign the objective in a clear manner: “When will the Corps be committed and what crossing site will be used?”
6. All bridgeheads had terrain unsuitable for tank maneuvers.
7. Artillery reinforcements were used inefficiently: Destroyer AT artillery regiments were attached to each tank brigade, and 457MtrR was split to provide battalion-level support to 56MRBde. This prevented us from employing artillery for mass fires.
8. Attack aircraft were employed in small groups instead of concentrating them en masse.

[Signed]

Chief of the 23rd Tank Corps Operations Department, Colonel *Dolgiy*

[Maps]

23rd Tank Corps – March to the frontline (12–14.7.43)

23rd Tank Corps – Redeployment for the crossing attempts (17–19.7.43)

23rd Tank Corps – Offensive in cooperation with 57 Gds RD (19–21.7.43)

23rd Tank Corps – Tank losses (18–23.7.43)

23rd Tank Corps – Enemy defenses according to recon (24.7.43)

23rd Tank Corps – Withdrawal (25.7.43)

Southwestern Front – Tank Formations

After Action Report⁴³

Performance of the 23rd Tank Corps
(17 July – 25 July 1943)

(...)

Conclusions:

1. The rifle units of the 1st Guards Army with the attached tank regiments failed to secure a large enough bridgehead on the southern bank of the Severskiy Donets, which severely restricted the 23rd Tank Corps' ability to maneuver.
2. Only one viable crossing was prepared for the 23rd Tank Corps to get through, which was clearly insufficient – the Tank Corps was forced to halt for several hours and exposed a high concentration of stationary equipment to the enemy artillery fire.
3. As a result of the poor air cover of the first crossing site, the bridge was destroyed by enemy air attacks with only two of the Tank Corps' battalions [from the 3rd Tank Brigade] making it to the other side. The remaining units were forced to march to another crossing. The 3rd Tank Brigade was therefore weakened as two of its battalions [which remained on the southern bank of Severskiy Donets] could not rejoin the main force.⁴⁴

⁴³ CAMD RF, Fond: 232, Series: 590, File: 220 (Document begins on page 1).

⁴⁴ The after action report of the 3rd Tank Brigade and the war diary of one of its battalions is translated in the following sections. See pages 93 and 103.

4. The 23rd Tank Corps was committed in a rush without waiting for a breach in the enemy defense to form. Because of that, the Corps effectively lost its value as a rapid maneuver unit and turned into an infantry support element. Its tanks were used in small groups for the purposes of infantry support.
5. The element of surprise was lost when the 23rd Tank Corps was committed before a breach in the enemy defense was formed. Once the enemy had discovered the presence of a significant armored force, he had time to counter and brought in artillery and tank formations, resulting in a strong concentration of forces that successfully repelled all our attacks. So we had no chance to exploit a breakthrough, instead, the tanks were committed in a narrow sector against a strong defense and were taken under massed artillery fire, suffering critical losses. In two days of fighting, the Corps lost two thirds of its tanks (156). This weakened the Corps significantly and played a decisive role in failing to achieve the objective.
6. The 1st Guards Army artillery support for the 23rd Tank Corps and the artillery preparation barrage before the attack against such a strong enemy defense – as we encountered near Izyum – was clearly inadequate. The 24-hour shell allowance was set at 1/3 units of fire, which did not neutralize the enemy AT defense system, did not prevent the enemy from deploying artillery from his reserves, and allowed him to repel our attacks and hold the line with relative ease.
7. Our attack aircraft was hitting the enemy defense, but did not manage to amass enough airpower to completely neutralize the defense system in its entirety, thus not achieving the goal of easing the burden of the ground forces. This experience demonstrated how our air force is effective against marching columns and troop concentrations, but it cannot neutralize and destroy a well-prepared echeloned defense. This is why we need to employ bomber aircraft (dive bombers for example) instead of ground attack aircraft when dealing with a strong defense system.

8. Fighter aircraft activity was relatively weak, which allowed the enemy aircraft to conduct massive bombing raids against the river crossings and our troops positions – resulting in heavy losses among our units.
9. Infantry-tank cooperation was not planned with the required level of finesse. In the very first combined arms attack, the 53rd Rifle Division (tasked with supporting the 23rd Tank Corps) was incapable of providing adequate support, because of casualties suffered in earlier fighting. The 57th Guards Rifle Division (committed on 21.7.43 in the 23rd Tank Corps sector) was consistently late in getting ready for the attack. This in turn forced the delays in starting the attacks on both the 21st and 22nd, while the enemy took advantage of it by preventively attacking our positions on his own terms and thus winning the initiative back.
10. The 23rd Tank Corps was employed inappropriately. It was thrown into the battle against a strong defense system, incurred serious losses, but did not make any material progress towards its objectives. (...)

[Signed]

- Acting Chief of the Armored and Mechanized Forces of the Southwestern Front, Guards Major General of the Armored Force,
Akhmanov
- Chief of Staff for the Armored and Mechanized Forces of the Southwestern Front, Colonel *Sergeyev*
- Head of Operations Department for the Armored and Mechanized Forces of the Southwestern Front, Lt. Colonel *Nemirov*
- Senior Aide to the Chief of Department for War Experience Studies in the HQ of the Armored and Mechanized Forces of the Southwestern Front, Lt. Colonel *Smirnov*

[Maps]

23rd Tank Corps – The Corps Commander’s plan to exploit a breakthrough by moving in from the Izyum bridgehead (17.7.43)

23rd Tank Corps – Corps offensive in cooperation with the 57th Guards Rifle Division (19–21.7.43)

3rd Tank Brigade – After Action Report⁴⁵

*Covering the period from
12 July through 23 July 1943*

The 3rd Tank Brigade left the vicinity of Osinovo, soviet farm “Uchebnyy”, and Dubchanovka⁴⁶ at 20:00 on 12.7.43 following *Order No. 13* issued by the 23rd Tank Corps Commander. At 04:00 on 13.7.43 the Brigade finished assembling in the woods 1.5 km southwest of Glinskoe.⁴⁷ Between 03:00 on 12.7.43 and 04:00 on 13.7.43, the Brigade utilized all of its available wheeled vehicles and still they had to make three trips in order to move ammunition and materiel to this new staging area. *Conclusion:* being below prescribed capacity as far as transportation assets are concerned, makes it impossible to rapidly displace to a new destination.

The units of the Brigade were well-organized en route, following the requirements of covert movement and assembly. As the units settled in the staging area, the equipment was distributed and camouflaged. Roads leading into the area were blocked and detours were established. To prevent the personnel from wandering around, checkpoints were put at the edge of the forest, which also served as air warning posts. *Conclusion:* the covert movement and assembly undertaken by the Brigade prevented the enemy from discovering our formation and revealing the ongoing concentration of troops in the area.

1. Disposition on the Eve of the Operation

The enemy’s 457IR (257ID), 97IR and 42IR (46ID) were deployed for defense along the line “Sredniy – Zavodskoy – Semenovka – Shpakovka – ht.

⁴⁵ CAMD RF, Fond: 3065, Series: 1, File: 18 (Document begins on page 108).

⁴⁶ These locations are 7.5 km south of Kupyansk. Refer to the *Corps march route map*.

⁴⁷ The village of Glinskoe is situated 2 km northwest of Izyum.

185.1 – Kamenka”. These divisions were at 90% manpower, mostly men born in 1915 or younger. Both divisions operated on the Soviet-German front from the beginning of the war. (...)

Our brigade was at 100% strength with the exception of the AA MG company of DShKs, which was missing. Personnel: 1258 total, 244 commanders, 562 junior commanders, 452 privates. Equipment: 68 T-34s, 90 wheeled vehicles, 4 BA-64s, 7 motorcycles, and 1 tractor. The personnel went through four months of daily training covering modern daytime and nighttime combat techniques. Supply levels: Ammo – 3.0x, Fuel/Lubricants for tanks – 2.0x, Fuel/Lubricants for trucks – 5.0x, Food – 10x. The 126th Separate Anti-Aircraft Battalion and the 2/1607th Anti-Aircraft Regiment attached to the Brigade were at 100% strength.

Conclusion:

- The enemy built long-term fortifications taking advantage of the terrain dominating over the northern bank of the Severskiy Donets and created a defense system capable of dealing with infantry, armor, and artillery.
- The units of our brigade were overall well-trained, developed good cohesion, and had 3–4 days worth of necessary supplies.

The terrain on the northern bank is flat, gradually descending to the crossings. The large, dense forest provides cover for movement. The soil is sandy, so it's difficult for wheeled vehicles to follow tanks. The terrain on the southern bank is open with inclines of up to 25–30 degrees near Sredniy. There are woods and the incline is 30–35 degrees near Semenovka. The soil is clay loam and predominantly boggy near Semenovka. In order for wheeled vehicles to follow tanks, the road would have to be repaired. Rain makes the road impassible.

Weather during the operation: partly cloudy, but no rain from 17 through 21; rainfall on 21 through 24. Average temperatures: 20–25 degrees during the daylight, 12–18 degrees after nightfall.

Conclusion:

- The flat terrain covered by forest allowed the Brigade to reach the crossing site covertly.
- The open ground on the southern bank of the river allowed the enemy to observe the crossing and movement of our units on the southern bank.
- The combination of rainfall with loam clay soil and the steep incline near Semenovka made it difficult to supply ammunition, food, and fuel.⁴⁸

2. Battle Plan

The Corps Commander issued *Combat Order No. 15*: 3TBde will cross the Severskiy Donets near Chervonny Shakhter and advance via Sredniy, Zavodskoy, western edge of Andreyevka, Petropolye, ht. 190.6, western edge of Dmitrievka, soviet farm “The 7th Congress of Councils”, southern edge of Ivanovka, southern edge of Bol. Andreyevka, Federovka, Mal. Andreyevka, Grigoryevka, reaching Barvenkovo from the southwest. The Brigade will be committed upon the 4th Guards Rifle Corps reaching the line “Vel. Kamyshvakha – Andreyevka”.

I [the Brigade Commander] decided on the following formation:

1. Reconnaissance team: one platoon of T-34s and one SMG platoon
2. Advance guard: two platoons of T-34s and two SMG platoons
3. 584TBn
4. AT Battery
5. 2/1697AAAR
6. 585TBn
7. Command Tank Platoon
8. DShK Platoon
9. Operations Team
10. ATR Company
11. 126AAABn
12. Motor-Rifle Battalion

⁴⁸ This refers to the situation after 21 July 1943.

13. 1st rear services echelon
14. Rear guard: 1 T-34 platoon and 1 rifle platoon

The troops of the motor-rifle battalion will initially ride on the tanks and will split upon contact with the enemy: one group will form a defense line in cooperation with two ATR platoons and the AT battery, the other group will work with the tanks, maneuver and seek a weak spot in the enemy defense. 2/1697AAAR and 126AAABn must be ready to fire at ground targets as needed. The Sapper Platoon and one ATR platoon will form the reserve and will be used to mine the approaches vulnerable to tanks.

The order was developed and given to the units 1.5 days in advance, the table of radio signals – 1 day in advance. The immediate objective was shared with the entire personnel, while commanders and HQ staff reconnoitered the approaches to the crossing site. Supplies were sufficient for two days of fighting.

Following the orders of the 23rd Tank Corps Commander, the Brigade moved from the woods 1.5 km southwest of Glinskoe into its assembly area in the woods 2 km north of Chervonyy Shakhter by 01:00 on 18.7. The Brigade was assigned the mission of building the crossing, getting to the southern bank, and forming a defensive line in Sredniy facing south. There was no time given to reconnoiter the terrain on the southern riverbank or establish the locations of friendly and hostile units, thus the Brigade Commander utilized the reconnaissance data provided by the 4th Guards Rifle Corps.

Conclusion:

- The battle plan was developed taking into account all aspects of the breakthrough operation.
- There was little time to spare before the Brigade was to be committed near Chervonyy Shakhter, thus the preparations for the cooperation with the elements of the 4th Guards Rifle Corps were not complete, and the locations of friendly and hostile units were not confirmed. Brigade HQ had to go by the 4th Guards Rifle Corps data, which indicated that Sredniy was under our control.

3. Combat Report

According to the data provided by the 4th Guards Rifle Corps, there was a bridgehead established on the southern bank of the Severskiy Donets, sufficient to reorganize the brigade into an attacking formation, and Sredniy was under our control. Using these data as a basis for action, the Brigade started to cross at 02:30 on 18.7.43. The commander of 584TBn led a company of tanks in column formation into Sredniy, but ran into strong artillery fire, deployed into a line and returned fire. In the meantime, the Motor-Rifle Battalion, ATR Company, and AT Battery finished crossing too. At 06:00 on 18.7 hostile aircraft conducted a fierce bombing run against the Brigade and the bridge, which damaged the bridge, leaving 585TBn on the northern bank, separated from the rest of the Brigade.

Conclusion:

- The offensive of the 4th Guards Rifle Corps swept aside the forward security of the enemy, and on 17.7.43 the Corps' units held the line in front of the enemy's main line of resistance going through the northern edge of Sredniy and Zavodskoy.
- Those Brigade units that crossed to the southern bank were immediately ordered to capture Sredniy and Zavodskoy.⁴⁹ A representative of the Brigade HQ and the HQ of 584TBn tried to establish coordination with the units of 38 Gds RD, but could not find anyone from their HQ to talk to.

At 10:00 585TBn received a new order to take up the defense near ht. 188.8 and be ready to counter the attacks coming from: the woods 1.5 km southeast of Zavodskoy, Andreyevka, and the field camp near 197.3 (2.5 km southeast of Andreyevka). At 18:00 the enemy began to concentrate forces on the southern slopes of ht. 186.9 [south of Zavodskoy], and our tanks (with artillery support) opened mass fire on the enemy tank and infantry concentration causing heavy casualties and spoiling the counterattack.

⁴⁹ See the *attached map* for the attack on Sredniy and Zavodskoy.

*19 July 1943*⁵⁰

Overnight, 585TBn was operationally split away from the Brigade and would act in cooperation with 39TBde and 135TBde until further notice. 585TBn marched to a new crossing site and assembled in a jump-off area near the tenant farm 2 km west of Semenovka. Personnel of the Battalion began reconnoitering the surrounding area and the enemy defenses. The rest of the Brigade held the defense at the southern edge of Sredniy fighting off fierce counterattacks. Thanks to the demonstrated valor and stubbornness of our troops, the enemy fell back after suffering losses in personnel and equipment.

20 July 1943

Overnight and through the day, the enemy tried to counterattack employing small groups of submachine gunners supported by SPGs and tanks, but he was thrown back every single time. Hostile aircraft did not carry out any attacks and were only flying reconnaissance missions. (...)

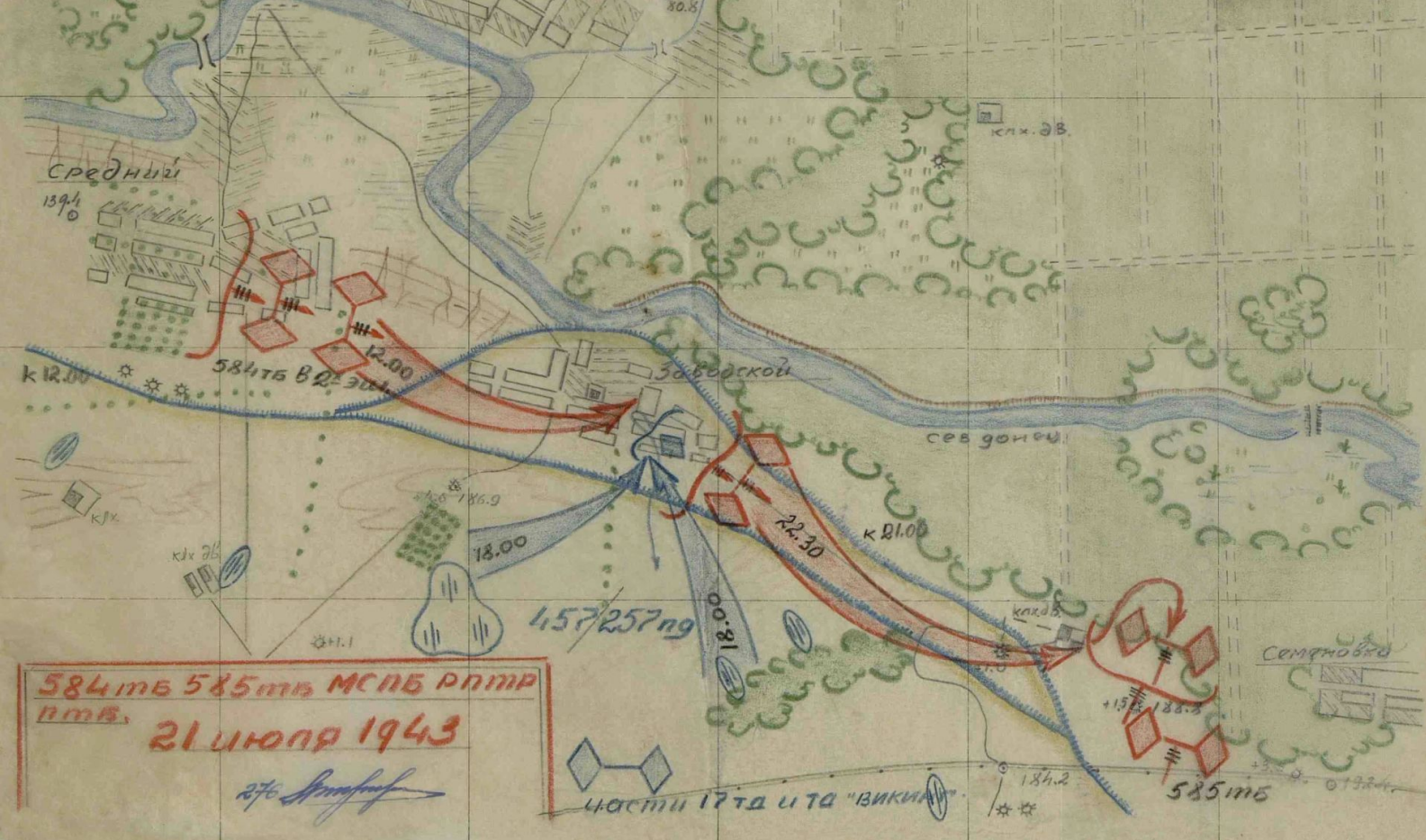
21 July 1943

The Brigade's units were assigned the following mission: "584TBn, the motor-rifle battalion and the ATR company will strike at Zavodskoy from the right out of Sredniy, while 585TBn strikes at Zavodskoy from the opposite side out of Semenovka. The objective is to kick the enemy troops out of Zavodskoy by the combined effort. The two prongs of this attack will meet at +1.0 (2 km southeast of Zavodskoy)."

The attack jumped off at 12:00⁵¹ and in a fierce battle, the enemy was pushed out of Zavodskoy. A large cache of trophies was captured and transferred to the rifle units of 38 Gds RD. Following further advance, the units met near +1.0, thus fulfilling the objective. Next, 3TBde reorganized and established defensive positions near the tenant farm 2 km west of Semenovka. The Brigade was then assigned to the 23rd Tank Corps reserve. (...)

⁵⁰ The entries 19–22 July 1943 are taken from another 3rd Tank Brigade report. See CAMD RF, Fond: 3065, Series: 1, File: 18 (Document begins on page 95).

⁵¹ See the map on the next page.



3rd Tank Brigade – 584th Tank Battalion and the motor-rifle battalion advance with the objective to reach the 585th Tank Battalion 1 km west of Semenovka (21.7.43)

22 July 1943

On 22.7.43 the units of the Brigade (with the exception of the AT battery, which was defending the crossing near Sredniy and screening against flanking attacks) were in the 23rd Tank Corps reserve, prepared to defend against enemy counterattacks. In the latter half of the day, the enemy attempted to counterattack twice, but was thwarted both times by strong artillery fire. The enemy maintained intense artillery fire against our formations and the river crossing site, thus complicating the supply. (...)

23 July 1943

The Brigade (584TBn, 585TBn, motor-rifle battalion, ATR company) left the vicinity of 188.8 on 23.7.43 at 23:30 and by 06:00 on 24.7.43 assembled in a new staging area: the woods 1.5 km southwest of Glinskoe.

4. Employment of the Brigade's Units

584TBn was fighting on its own as well as supported by infantry. Acting decisively and combining fire and movement, it captured Sredniy and the northwestern outskirts of Zavodskoy. The Battalion had to withdraw from the latter due to the lack of infantry support. Acting in cooperation with the infantry, the tanks succeeded in pushing the enemy out of the southeastern outskirts of Sredniy and captured Zavodskoy while suffering minor losses.

585TBn was assigned the mission to capture Kopanki and acted autonomously without coordinating its actions with the infantry or artillery (due to the lack of time). As a result, the tanks failed to achieve the objective and suffered heavy losses.

The *motor-rifle battalion* was employed as tank support in the second line. Working in cooperation with *584TBn* in the fight for Zavodskoy, the battalion achieved the objective while taking minor losses.

The *ATR company* was assigned to rifle companies (platoons) by platoon (squad), except one platoon, which was employed to reinforce the defense at the point where hostile tanks were expected to appear.

The *sapper platoon* was employed to map out minefields, mine-clearing, stream crossing support, and setting up command posts.

The *scout platoon* was conducting reconnaissance missions in the depth of the enemy defense employing small teams moving on foot.

The *rear services* did a good job supplying fuel and ammunition to the line units in a timely manner. Boats were used to ferry supplies across the river, and after the rain made the roads impassable, horses were used to haul the supplies.

The Brigade inflicted the following losses: heavy tanks T-6 “Tiger” – 10, medium tanks – 21, tractors – 2, trucks – 7, AT guns – 26, mortars – 6, mortar batteries neutralized – 1, LMGs – 25, wood-and-dirt pillboxes – 5, He-123s – 2, He-111s – 3, personnel – 1550.

Trophies captured: AT guns – 6, motorcycle – 1, radio sets – 2, mortars – 180⁵², rifles – 500, HMGs – 6, telephone sets – 50, rifle rounds – 10000, phone cable – 25 km, goods and food depot – 1, LMGs – 2, documents of 257AR, 6 POWs (transferred custody to 115RR of 38 Gds RD).

Own losses: 89 men killed, 192 wounded, 44 missing. 24 tanks lost.

5. Summary and Recommendations

1. A tank brigade needs its own dedicated crossing site, which it would use to conduct the stream crossing operation at nighttime.
2. In order for a tank brigade to enter action after the stream crossing, it needs an adequate bridgehead, which would allow it to reorganize covertly and afford space for maneuver.
3. Before a tank brigade is committed to exploit a breakthrough, it needs some dedicated time to establish cooperation plans with the supporting infantry and artillery.
4. Inaccurate data regarding both friendly and hostile forces locations, provided by cooperating HQs, was a serious problem.
5. Own artillery had a weak network of observation posts, which resulted in friendly fire incidents.
6. Although the enemy brought in 17TD and the SS Tank Division “Wiking” by 20–21.7.43, he employed tanks in small groups, behind the infantry formations, supporting counterattacks by fire only.

⁵² This is likely a typo.

[Signed]

3rd Tank Brigade Commander, Lt. Col. *Devyatko*

Chief of Staff, Lt. Col. *Plehanov*

[Maps]

3rd Tank Brigade – Attack of the 584th Tank Battalion and the motor-rifle battalion on Sredniy and Zavodskoy (18.7.43)

3rd Tank Brigade – 584th Tank Battalion and the motor-rifle battalion advance with the objective to reach the 585th Tank Battalion (21.7.43)

3rd Tank Brigade – Knocked out enemy tanks

3rd Tank Brigade – Lost tanks (18–23.7.43)

585th Tank Battalion (3rd Tank Brigade)

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War Diary⁵³

*Covering the period from
13 July through 23 July 1943*

13 July 1943

The Battalion was executing *Combat Order No. 012* by the 3rd Tank Brigade Commander for the Brigade to assemble at the edge of the woods 3 km southwest of Glinskoe by 03:00 on 14.7.1943 (a 72 km-long march).⁵⁴ (...)

At 03:00 on 14.7.1943 the Battalion assembled at the northern edge of the woods to the south of Glinskoe with 30 T-34s, 6 wheeled vehicles, and 186 personnel. One T-34 tank (Lt. *Karpov* in charge) fell behind after an accident.

14 – 16 July 1943

The Battalion was camouflaging its positions and preparing the equipment for the upcoming battle. At 19:00 the T-34 tank that fell behind earlier arrived at the Battalion's staging area. The Battalion Commander went to reconnoiter the river crossings near Izyum.

⁵³ CAMD RF, Fond: 3065, Series: 1, File: 68 (Document begins on page 1).

⁵⁴ The village of Glinskoe is situated 2 km northwest of Izyum.

17 July 1943

The Battalion was executing a combat order by the Corps to commit the Corps elements into the breakthrough [contingent upon the 6th Gds Rifle Corps' success in creating a breakthrough]: "Push through the breach in the enemy defenses (as part of the Brigade's formation) and move in the second echelon towards Barvenkovo. After advancing to the soviet farm "The 7th Congress of Councils", consolidate the positions and prepare to repel hostile counterattacks on the Corps' right flank."

[Upon receiving new orders] at 20:00, the Battalion displaced to the Sevskiy Donets crossing site near Chervonny Shakhter.

18 July 1943

The entire Battalion was assembled at the edge of the woods 2 km south of Chervonny Shakhter, facing towards Zavodskoy. At 10:00 a hostile aircraft attack destroyed the crossing [separating the Battalion from the rest of its brigade]. The Battalion came under fire from the enemy aircraft nine times (the attacks came in groups between 12 and 30 planes). Platoon Commander Lt. *Lemyakin* was killed in action.

19 – 20 July 1943

Following a directive of the Brigade Commander, the Battalion left the crossing area near Chervonny Shakhter and displaced towards Semenovka, where its 28 tanks crossed the river and assembled in a jump-off area on the southern edge of the woods 2.5 km north of Andreyevka.⁵⁵ Three tanks were left near Chervonny Shakhter for repairs due to mechanical breakdowns. The personnel spent the time before the attack camouflaging their positions and getting familiar with the field of fire along the frontline.

⁵⁵ The crossing northwest of Semenovka and the assembly area on the southern edge of the woods 2.5 km north of Andreyevka (= 2 km west of Semenovka) is shown in the upper part of the Battalion's *map* for the attack on 21 July. See the map annotation "16.30 19.7.43".

21 July 1943

The Battalion was executing a combat order by the Corps to the 3rd Tank Brigade (with attached 1501ATAR): “Advance by bounds behind 39TBde towards Kopanki. The attack jumps off at 10:00.” According to the order of the Corps Commander, 585TBn and 1501ATAR will proceed as follows:

- a. once Petropolye is seized by friendly forces, advance to Andreyevka,
- b. once Kopanki is captured by friendly forces, advance to Petropolye,
- c. once Mal. Kamyshevakha is captured by friendly forces, advance to Kopanki,
- d. and when the infantry units catch up and reach Kopanki: displace forward to Mal. Kamyshevakha and organize defensive positions there (1st Company on the southern edge of the settlement, 2nd on the northeastern edge, and 3rd on the southwestern edge).

Instead of the planned time of attack (10:00), the attack jumped off at 17:40. The Battalion’s 29 tanks started to advance towards eastern Andreyevka, ht. 197.3, and Kopanki with the objective of capturing Kopanki. To the Battalion’s right 135TBde advanced towards Mal. Kamyshevakha, to the Battalion’s left 39TBde advanced towards Petropolye. After leaving the jump-off area, our tanks were strafed by hostile aircraft while regrouping into an attack formation. As soon as the Battalion reached the height with the two kurgans marked +2.0 (2 km southeast of Andreyevka), it was met by a hail of hostile artillery and mortar fire coming from Petropolye, ht. 197.3, and the edge of the woods northwest of Mal. Kamyshevakha. As a result of the well-organized hostile fire, the infantry fell back and sought cover, while the tanks reached the enemy’s first defensive line on their own and suffered heavy losses. The deputy commander of 3TBde, Lt. Col. *Lyskin* ordered the withdrawal of the tanks behind the infantry lines where they would organize an all-round defense. In this fight the Battalion suffered the following losses: 11 T-34 tanks were knocked out or burned, 1 tank is MIA. 9 men were killed, 19 wounded, 31 are missing (resulting in a total of 59 casualties). The enemy suffered the following losses (losses inflicted by our missing crews are excluded): 4 tanks

(including 1 T-6), 16 guns of various calibers, 8 MGs, 3 ATRs, 3 wheeled vehicles, 5 wood-and-dirt pillboxes, and up to 400 men. 21 soldiers were nominated for government recognition for their bravery and courage.

22 July 1943

The Battalion was executing the combat order: “Attack and capture Kopanki in cooperation with 56MRBde while under operational control of 135TBde. 135TBde will contribute 4 T-34s and 9 T-70s to the attack.”

At 10:00 the Battalion received an additional directive to take defense and prepare for enemy counterattacks from the vicinity of Zavodskoy.

At 18:00 the enemy started concentrating his forces in the gardens 1 km south of Zavodskoy (three infantry battalions and 35 tanks). (...) This concentration of enemy forces was dispersed by combined artillery and tank fire with the enemy suffering significant losses. The Battalion lost one T-34 in this engagement (the tank was later recovered).

23 July 1943

The Battalion was executing a combat directive to dig in and pass to the defensive. The tank crews dug trenches for their tanks and prepared defensive positions. The enemy periodically shelled our positions. (...)

[Maps]

585th Tank Battalion – Attack towards Kopanki (21.7.43)

Уч. № 03

СЕКРЕТНО
Экз. № 2



56th Motorized Rifle Brigade – Title page of the Brigade's war diary

56th Motorized Rifle Brigade – War Diary⁵⁶

*Covering the period from
15 July through 24 July 1943*

15 July 1943

At 07:00 the Brigade Commander gathered the unit commanders and the HQ staff to explain what to expect in the upcoming operation and gave preliminary instructions for the preparations. At 09:00, the Commander left to reconnoiter the crossings over the Severskiy Donets river; it was then repeated at 12:00 when the unit commanders and the HQ staff joined him. Between 14:30 and 15:30, the enemy fired artillery at the area 200–300 m southwest of the Brigade's positions. At 19:30, up to 50 enemy planes flew over the Brigade's positions in the southwestern direction at a height of 2–2.5 km. The anti-aircraft artillery fire dispersed the enemy aircraft formations. Despite that, they managed to drop three bombs, which hit the positions of the ATR company (no losses). The 23rd Tank Corps Commander decided to attach the 7th Rifle Company (3MRBn) to 10 Gds BtTR to employ the company as tank desant.

16 July 1943

At 06:00 several enemy aircraft were seen over the Brigade's positions flying several passes (up to 25 sorties), but they did not engage. At 06:30 the Brigade Commander left for the Corps HQ to clarify the instructions regarding the new staging area (because the jump-off point for the Corps' offensive was moved to a different sector). At 17:00 a team was sent to reconnoiter the

⁵⁶ CAMD RF, Fond: 3387, Series: 1, File: 10 (Document begins on page 1).

marching route from map marker 107.2 to Chervonnyy Shakhter. At 17:40 the 23rd Tank Corps Commander issued *Combat Order No. 15*: “56MRBde will advance following 39TBde in the direction of Barvenkovo, consolidating the ground captured by 39TBde and screening against enemy counterattacks from the east. Once Barvenkovo is captured, defend the line “97.0 – 153.9”. 457MtrR, 426ATAR, and 442 Gds MtrBn will be attached to the Brigade. 877HAR will provide the artillery support.” During the night between 16–17.7.43, the Brigade HQ worked on its own orders for the upcoming operation.

17 July 1943

At 02:30 our air force began an hour-long attack against the enemy’s frontline. Our artillery preparatory barrage started with the break of dawn and lasted through 06:45, followed by the ground attack planes flying missions against the enemy frontline in groups of 5–10 planes.

The Brigade is ready for action and is waiting for the Corps order to begin the offensive.

18 July 1943

We received a directive from the 23rd Tank Corps Commander: all units of 56MRBde that are not motorized will assemble near 117.4 by 14:00. At 14:00, 1MRBn, 3MRBn, and the SMG company started to move to the new staging area. The reconnaissance company and the engineer-mine company were also sent there (employing their own vehicles). By 14:00, the order was fulfilled and the units assembled near 117.4. At 13:00 two large groups of enemy aircraft conducted a bombing raid against the crossing over the Severskiy Donets rendering the crossing inoperable.

19 July 1943

At 02:00 the 23rd Tank Corps Commander’s new order was received over the radio net: the Brigade will assemble near 124.7 by 07:00 and prepare

to cross the river there – using the crossing built near Ford 0.6 [northwest of Semenovka]. The brigade units located near 117.4 received a similar written directive. At 04:30, 1MRBn and 3MRBn, and the reconnaissance, engineer-mine and SMG companies moved out and reached the destination by 07:00 (joining other units arriving from the area near 107.2). The Brigade Commander was assigned a mission by the Corps Commander at 10:30 and then issued a verbal order to the Brigade. At 12:00, 1MRBn completed the crossing in a dispersed formation on-foot. Stiff resistance from the enemy badly hampered the advance of our troops. Despite some detachments reaching the southern edge of the forest, there were still a large number of hostile machine gunners remaining in the forest. 1MRBn was therefore given the task to mop up the forest and advance to the southern edge of the forest near the western part of Semenovka. The tempo of the Battalion's advance was slow due to difficult terrain: the woods did not allow for well-aimed fire and swampy, hilly terrain restricted the movement speed. The enemy held the dominating heights and had the battalion formations under systematic artillery and mortar fire. By 17:00, the Battalion reached the edge of the woods and consolidated. The process of crossing was very slow, because the sole bridge suitable for vehicles was too busy while the tanks were crossing. As they worked to complete the move to the southern bank, the 2nd and 3rd MRBns started on their objectives: "3rd MRBn will comb through the forest's edge along the southern riverbank and reach the northern outskirts of Semenovka, then capture Semenovka acting in cooperation with the 1st MRBn; 2nd MRBn will comb through the woods to the left of the 1st MRBn and advance to the southern edge of the woods." By the end of the day, the battalions reached the forest's southern edge and 3rd MRBn reached Semenovka where they consolidated. 200 hostile submachine gunners were killed over the course of the day, while own losses were kept to a minimum. The Brigade's command post is in the woods 800 m northeast of 188.8.

20 July 1943

Following the Brigade Commander's order, the motor-rifle battalions went on the defensive along the line:

- 1st Battalion: “tenant farm – 400m northwest of 183.3”,
- 2nd Battalion: north of kurgan +3.6,
- 3rd Battalion: western outskirts of Semenovka, facing southeast.

The mortar battalion established firing positions in the grove north of 188.8, the artillery and anti-air battalions did it on the northern bank of the river. The enemy maintained artillery and mortar fire against the Brigade’s formations. At 17:00 the enemy attempted to attack with up to a regiment of infantry. The principal effort of the enemy attack (two battalions of infantry) was directed at the sector where 1st MRBn defended. The attack was broken up before it began by strong combined arms fire. Hostile aircraft were bombing the Brigade’s formations and the area of the crossing. There were two mass attacks employing 52 planes. The crossing was destroyed and several trucks towing guns and carrying ammunition were blown up.

Over the course of the fighting, the Brigade sustained the following losses:

- Personnel: 41 killed, 167 wounded.
- Equipment: 1 120mm mortar, 4 82mm mortars, 1 20mm AA gun, 5 ATRs, 9 HMGs, 1 LMG, 21 PPShs, 22 rifles, 5 trucks, and 5 field kitchens.

At 15:00 the 23rd Tank Corps Commander issued an order: 56MRBde will advance in cooperation with 135TBde towards Andreyevka and Petro-polye. A reconnaissance mission discovered that Andreyevka was held by the enemy and the defense was enhanced by well-developed engineering works. The planned Corps offensive on 20.7.43 was canceled because of the delay of 57 Gds RD crossing the river. The Brigade Commander decided to transfer 3rd MRBn into the reserve. By 20:00, the Battalion passed its sector to 12RR of 53RD and assembled in the area 1 km northeast of 188.8. Overnight, the Brigade’s artillery battalion and 457MtrR crossed to the southern bank and established firing positions in the woods northeast of 188.8.

Conclusion: The area for deployment on the southern bank of the Severskiy Donets was too small and did not allow us to maneuver, which in turn afforded the enemy the opportunity to conduct particularly effective artillery

fire. The difficult terrain made it impossible to keep the depth of the enemy defense under observation or discover enemy troop concentrations. Hostile aircraft attacks delayed the movement of our artillery to the southern bank.

21 July 1943

Overnight the enemy artillery fired at the Brigade's formations occasionally. The 23rd Tank Corps Commander issued the following order:

“56MRBde with attached reinforcements will advance following 135TBde in the direction of Mal. Kamyshevakha, then Kamenka. Consolidate the gains of 135TBde and be ready to defend against counterattacks coming from the vicinity of Dmitrievka and Brazhevka. Upon capturing Kamenka, pass to the defensive at the line “ht. 107.5 – ht. 154.3” facing south.”

At 09:00, the Brigade's battalions received their combat orders:

- 1st MRBn will advance via: east of the grove northeast of Andreyevka – mark 197.3 – southwestern edge of Mal. Kamyshevakha – woods 1 km southwest of Kamenka – southwestern edge of Kamenka.
- 3rd MRBn will advance via: east of 188.8 – mark 190.0 – central part of Mal. Kamyshevakha – south of 183.1 – southwestern edge of Kamenka.
- 2nd MRBn will advance via: field camp “K” – northern edge of Mal. Kamyshevakha – 183.1 – southwestern edge of Kamenka.
- Upon capturing Kamenka, all three motor-rifle battalions will organize for defense on the line “ht 107.5 – ht. 154.3”.

Following a short artillery preparation, the Brigade's attack jumped off at 12:00. The enemy resisted fiercely, relying on the strength of his fortified positions: bunkers, wood-and-dirt pillboxes, minefields, and other defensive improvements on the forward edge and in the depth of the defense. Hostile artillery, mortar and small arms fire inflicted high losses upon our battalions, yet they progressed deliberately, supported by tanks and artillery, destroying hostile personnel and equipment as they went. The enemy launched a regiment-strong counterattack supported by tanks from the vicinity of Mal.

Kamyshevakha and pushed back our troops, but thanks to the exceptional selflessness of our soldiers and their commanders, the battalions regrouped to launch their own counterattack and regained their positions. By 21:00, following an exceptionally difficult 9-hours long battle, the Brigade took over the enemy's first line of defense and reached the line: "800 m east of Andreyevka – along the road leading northeast 0.5 km south of 192.4". It passed to the defensive at this line, as it was impossible to maintain the advance due to severe losses (up to 75% of manpower), intense hostile artillery and mortar fire and extensive engineering obstacles. In the fighting, the Brigade eliminated up to a battalion of enemy infantry and knocked out one tank. Hostile aircraft were active through the entire day, conducting bombing runs against the Brigade's formations and artillery firing positions. The AA battalion, which protected the crossing, shot down four enemy planes. Over the course of the fighting, the Brigade sustained the following losses:

- Personnel: 261 killed, 838 wounded, 228 missing.
- Equipment: 1 20mm AA gun, 6 82mm mortars, 1 120mm mortar, 44 ATRs, 17 HMGs, 49 LMGs.

Conclusion: The enemy defense system was not evaluated extensively due to the lack of time to conduct reconnaissance before the beginning of the attack. As a consequence the command did not understand the enemy's deployment, which made it impossible to suppress hostile weapons (especially the DFPs) given the Brigade's limited firepower.

22 July 1943

Overnight the enemy artillery maintained its fire and shelled our defensive positions. The Brigade held the lines and fought off counterattacking forces 4–5 times stronger. Additionally, the 2nd and 3rd Battalions were fighting for the control of the grove 0.5 km west of 150.0 [1 km south of Semenovka] following the 23rd Tank Corps Commander's order. Because of severe losses among privates and mid-level commanders, the remaining personnel of the motor-rifle battalions were consolidated into companies with

junior commanders (which were put in charge of the platoons and, in some cases, the companies):

- 1st MRBn repelled two counterattacks supported by tanks from the vicinity of Andreyevka. The Battalion destroyed up to 50 enemies and set one tank on fire.
- 2nd MRBn repelled five counterattacks. The fighting devolved into a melee three times and left up to 300 enemy soldiers dead. 6 enemy tanks were knocked out.
- 3rd MRBn repelled four counterattacks from the woods 0.5 km west of 150.0. While suppressing the enemy with small arms fire, the rifle detachments (led by Battalion Signal Service Chief, Jr. Lt. *Akhmetov*) launched their own attacks twice and eliminated up to 200 hitlerites. Over the course of the day, the AT guns and the ATR company knocked out five tanks. Moreover, the 3rd battery of 426 ATAR set one T-6 “Tiger” on fire.
- The mortar and artillery battalions supported the rifle units from their firing positions at the edge of the woods.

Hostile aircraft bombed the Brigade’s formations and the woods near the crossing site around 15:00 employing 12 planes. Three of them were brought down by the AA battalion. The reconnaissance company personnel were scouting Andreyevka, 197.3, and the gully Bol. Vidnoga.

According to verified data, as of 18:00 on 22.7.43, the Brigade sustained the following losses:

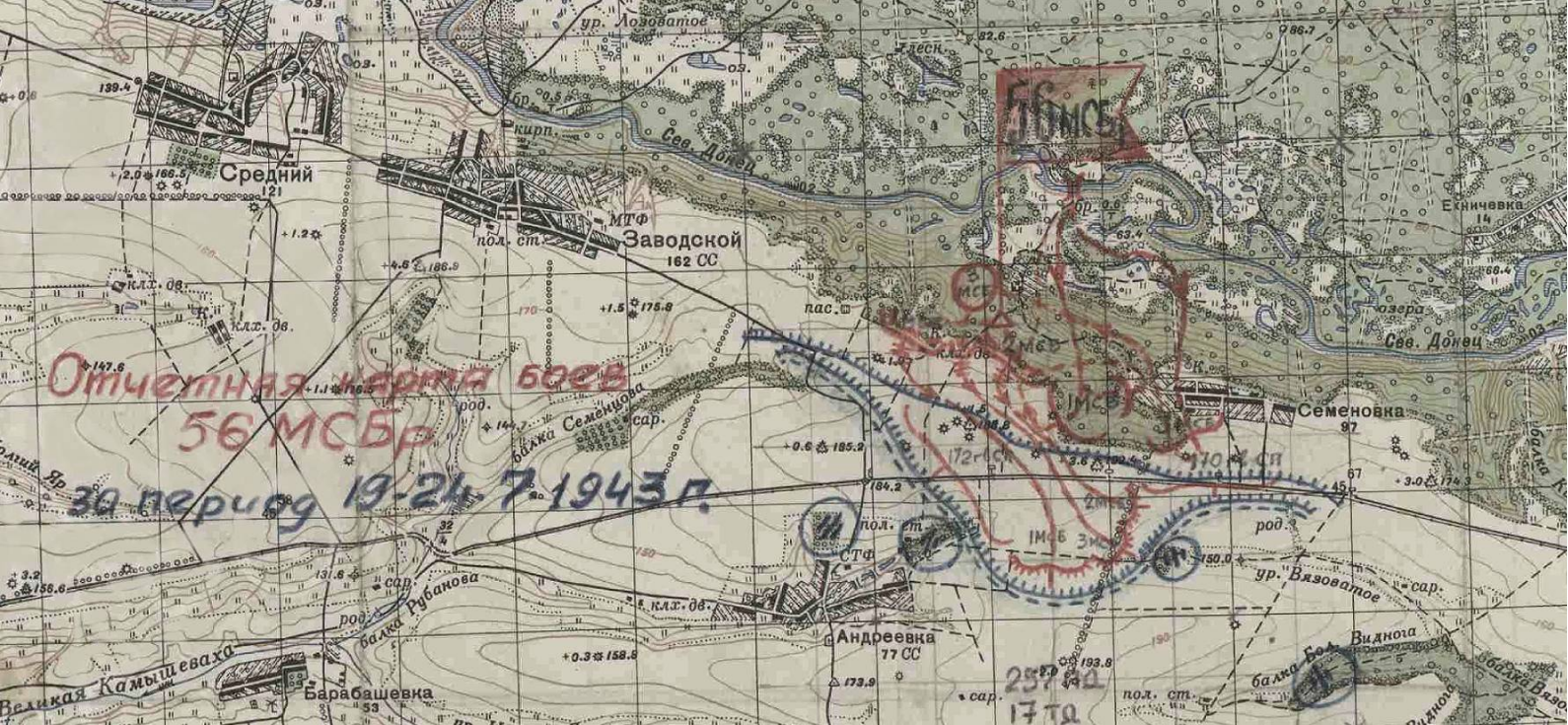
- Personnel: 264 men killed, 1152 wounded, 66 missing.
- Equipment: 6 82mm mortars, 1 120mm mortar, 1 20mm AA gun, 45 ATRs, 25 HMGs, 55 LMGs, up to 500 PPShs, up to 400 rifles, 1 APC, and 5 trucks.

Deputy Chief of Staff (Head of the Reconnaissance Department), Sr. Lt. *Zhukov* was killed during a scouting mission. The 23rd Tank Corps Commander ordered the Brigade to pass to the defensive.

Conclusion: The units of the Brigade were steadfast in defending against counterattacks and inflicted significant losses on the enemy. The battalions' personnel demonstrated exceptional valor and endurance.

23 July 1943

Reconnaissance reports indicate that the enemy has elements of 257ID, 17TD, and the Tank Division "Wiking" deployed against the Brigade and its neighbors. The enemy is defending at a well-prepared line enhanced by engineering works. The fortifications are typically wood-and-dirt pillboxes and bunkers, connected by firing and communication trenches. The forward edge of the defense is protected by wire entanglements and minefields. Moreover, the defense takes advantage of favorable terrain, with the frontline following along commanding heights. After passing to the defensive at the line "800 m east of Andreyevka – following the dirt path east – 0.5 km northeast along the same path – south of kurgan 3.6", the motor-rifle battalions gathered abandoned weapons, buried their comrades, and began digging in. At dawn the enemy was forming up for an attack in 1st MRBn's sector from 193.8 and had tanks firing at the battalion's positions. Our mortar battalion's barrage spoiled the attack. At 07:15 hostile aircraft attempted a strike against the Brigade's formations, but the aircraft were dispersed by the fire of the AA battalion, dropped a small number of bombs and withdrew to the west. Two enemy planes were shot down. After the failed counterattack, the enemy became passive and only occasionally fired artillery and mortars at our formations and the command post. Our mortar battalion and artillery battalion suppressed two hostile mortar batteries. At 16:00 the 23rd Tank Corps Commander issued an order for the Brigade to hand over its sector to 57 Gds RD by the end of 23.7.43. The transfer was not completed by the prescribed time, since 57 Gds RD was not ready and the Brigade therefore remained in place through 24.7.43. (...)



56th Motorized Rifle Brigade – Map of engagements (19–24.7.43)

According to verified data, the Brigade sustained the following losses in the fighting between 19–24.7.43:

- Personnel: 1487 killed, wounded and missing.
- Equipment: 502 PPShs, 18 HMGs, 17 LMGs, 3 ATRs, 1 20mm AA gun, 1 76mm gun, 1 82mm mortar, 1 120mm mortar, 40 TT pistols, 6 trucks, 1 APC, 4 radio sets.

Over the same period, the following losses were inflicted on the enemy: 1086 men, 540 rifles, 100 MGs, 65 guns and mortars, 26 tanks. (...)

[Signed]

Chief of Staff, Lt. Col. *Ramiltsev*

Deputy Chief of Staff (Operations), Cpt. *Yakovlev*

[Maps]

56th Motorized Rifle Brigade – Map of engagements (19–24.7.43)

10th Guards Breakthrough Tank Regiment

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Operational Reports

17.7.43 – 05:00

Combat Report No. 6

Regiment HQ, Bulbovka

1. The enemy's overnight activity was limited to AA fire against our planes, which were bombing his frontlines. The enemy's aircraft only conducted reconnaissance flights.
2. The 10th Separate Guards Breakthrough Tank Regiment is staged in Bulbovka and ready for action.⁵⁷
3. The Regiment's units are located as follows:
 - The 1st and 4th Tank Companies and the SMG Platoon: eastern edge of Bulbovka.
 - The 2nd and 3rd Tank Companies and the Supply and Repair Company: northern edge of Bulbovka.
 - The SMG Company of the 56th Motorized Rifle Brigade is assigned to the tank companies (a platoon for each company).
4. The regimental combat equipment is in good order. There are 21 operational Mk4 tanks and 3 BA-64 armored cars. Transportation equipment: 24 general purpose trucks and 11 specialized vehicles. Tank weapons: 21 57mm guns, 21 mortars, 42 "Besa" machine guns, 21 "Bren" machine guns, 42 "Thompson" SMGs. The other units have: 79 rifles and carbines, 150 PPShs, 4 duplex AA machine guns (trophy), 2 ATRs, 2 "Maxim" HMGs, and 12 "Degtyarev" LMGs.

⁵⁷ The village of Bulbovka is located 1 km northwest of Izyum and 1 km south of Glinskoe.

5. Supply level:

- Ammunition (units of fire): 57mm rounds (sub-caliber) – 2.8x, 50mm mortar bombs – 5.9x, “Besa” rounds – 2.8x, “Bren” rounds – 3.9x, PPSH rounds – 1.2x
- Fuel and lubricants (refuels): Gasoline Class 1 – 2.8x, Gasoline Class 2 – 3.2x, engine oil (MK1) – 1.8x, engine oil (other) – 1.8x
- Food (daily rations): bread/croutons – 6x, other – between 8x and 15x

6. There were no casualties overnight.

7. Command Post: southern edge of Bulbovka.

8. Communication with the Corps HQ: radio, telephone, and liaison officers. Communication with the units: messengers and verbally.

[Signed]

Chief of Staff, Gds. Maj. *Voskoboynikov*

17.7.43 – 20:00

Combat Order No. 4

Regiment HQ, Bulbovka

1. The enemy’s 257ID defends along the southern bank of the Severskiy Donets (“Zavodskoy – height 188.8 – Semenovka”) and counterattacks attempting to eliminate our bridgehead on the southern bank.
2. The 10th Separate Guards Breakthrough Tank Regiment is assigned the mission to assemble in the area 2 km west of ht.123.7 by 05:00 of 18.7.43. March route: Bulbovka, Glinskoe, ht. 153.1, ht. 133.8, crossroads 2 km west of ht. 123.7.
3. I decided to move in a single file column following the units of 39TBde.
4. The order in the column: HQ, Command Platoon, 2nd Tank Company, 1st Tank Company, 3rd Tank Company, 4th Tank Company, Supply and

Repair Company. The submachine gunners will ride on the tanks. Point of departure is the northern edge of Glinskoe.

5. AT, chemical and AA considerations: designate an air observer in each company and keep the AA machine guns at the ready.
6. I will move at the head of the column.
7. During the march, communications within the column will be conducted via a motorcycle messenger.
8. Send reports upon passing the point of departure, ht. 133.8, and after assembling is complete (use ultra-shortwave radios).

[Signed]

Regiment Commander, Gds. Lt. Col. *Voronov*

Chief of Staff, Gds. Maj. *Voskoboynikov*

18.7.43, 19:00

Operations Report No. 12

Regiment HQ, 3 km northeast of Chervonny Shakhter

1. The 10th Separate Guards Breakthrough Tank Regiment arrived from Bulbovka at 05:00 on 18.7, assembled in the area 5 km to the northeast of Chervonny Shakhter (6354) and is ready for action. 1501 Dest ATAR (which is attached to the Regiment) has also arrived and assembled in an adjacent location. 3/176 SapBn did not arrive yet.
2. Combat equipment: 21 Mk4 tanks and 3 BA-64 armored cars are operational. Transport: 23 trucks are operational, one is in the repair shop, 11 specialized vehicles are operational.
3. Supply level: ammo – 2.8x, Gasoline Class 1 – 2.5x, Gasoline Class 2 – 2.7x, engine oil (MK1) – 1.8x, engine oil (other) – 1.5x, food – 6.5x.
4. Losses: 3 lightly wounded.
5. The command post is set up at the crossroads 5 km to the northeast of Chervonny Shakhter (6254).

6. Communication with the Corps HQ: radio, telephone, and liaison officers. Communication with 1501ATAR: telephone and messengers. Communication with the units: messengers and verbally.

[Signed]

Chief of Staff, Gds. Maj. *Voskoboynikov*

19.7.43 – 04:00

Combat Order No. 5

Regiment HQ, crossroads 2 km west of ht. 123.7

1. The enemy's 257ID and 17TD defend along the line: "western edge of Zavodskoy – southern slopes of ht.188.8 – southern edge of Semenovka", and stubbornly resist the advancing forces of the 1st Guards Army. Hostile aircraft bombarded the area of the crossing in groups of 20–25 planes.
2. The 10th Separate Guards Breakthrough Tank Regiment is assigned the mission to cross the Severskiy Donets and assemble at the edge of the woods 1 km west of Semenovka by 20:00 on 19.7.43.
3. I decided to move in a single file column. Conduct the crossing one company at a time after the advance guard is deployed on the southern bank.
4. The order in the column (and for the crossing): HQ, 2nd Tank Company, 1st Tank Company, 3rd Tank Company, 4th Tank Company. Departure point is ht. 123.7 (everyone will clear out by 05:40). A tank platoon of the 3rd Tank Company will form the advanced guard (commander – Gds. Lt. *Tokar*). They will use the same departure point and clear out by 05:10.
5. 1st rear echelon: ammunition supply service, fuel supply service, quartermaster platoon and repair service. Chief of the echelon – Gds. Sr. Lt. *Vorobyev*. The echelon will follow behind the regimental column and will assemble at the tenant farm southwest of 92.1. The 2nd rear echelon will remain in place.
6. AT, chemical and AA considerations: designate an air observer in each company and keep the AA machine guns at the ready.

7. I will move at the head of the column until we reach the crossing and will remain in the area thereafter.
8. During the march communications within the column will be conducted via a motorcycle messenger, during the crossing via HQ officers.
9. Send reports upon passing the point of departure, reaching the southern bank of the river, and after the assembly is complete (use ultra-shortwave radios).

[Signed]

Regiment Commander, Gds. Lt. Col. *Voronov*
Chief of Staff, Gds. Maj. *Voskoboynikov*

19.7.43, 20:00

Operations Report No. 13

Regiment HQ, 2 km northeast of Semenovka

1. The 10th Separate Guards Breakthrough Tank Regiment assembled on the southern bank of the Severskiy Donets, 2 km northeast of Semenovka. The Regiment finished crossing at 19:00.
2. All 21 tanks crossed onto the southern bank, are operational and ready for action.
3. Supply level: ammo – 1x, gasoline – 1x, food – 2x
4. Losses: none
5. The 1st rear echelon is on the northern bank of the river, along the road 300 m away from the crossing site. The 2nd echelon is 5 km northeast of Chervonyy Shakhter.
6. The command post is set up near the tanks.
7. Communication with the Corps HQ: radio and liaison officers. Communication with the units: messengers.

[Signed]

Chief of Staff, Gds. Maj. *Voskoboynikov*

20.7.43, 07:00

Combat Report No. 9

Regiment HQ, 500 m west of Semenovka

1. The enemy keeps our formations, the crossing site near Semenovka, and the supply routes under artillery and mortar fire. Hostile aircraft conducted two attacks against the crossing area in groups of 5–6 planes (20 planes in total).
2. The 10th Separate Guards Breakthrough Tank Regiment deployed into its assigned jump-off positions (the ravine 800 m west of Semenovka).
3. 21 Mk4 tanks are operational and ready for action.
4. Supply level: ammo – 1x, gasoline – 1x
5. Losses: none
6. The command post is in the ravine 500 m west of Semenovka
7. The 1st rear echelon is on the northern bank of the river, along the road 300 m away from the crossing site. The 2nd echelon is 5 km northeast of Chervonny Shakhter (6056).
8. Communication with the Corps HQ and the attached units: radio and liaison officers. Communication with the units: messengers.

[Signed]

Chief of Staff, Gds. Maj. *Voskoboynikov*

20.7.43, 20:00

Operations Report No. 14

Regiment HQ, 1 km west of Semenovka

1. During the day the enemy fired several intense artillery and mortar concentrations against our formations. One of the fire missions was accompanied by a counterattack, which was repelled. (...)

2. Equipment: 19 Mk4 tanks are operational, 4 tanks are damaged: 1 has a broken hydraulic controls system, 1 has a penetrated oil tank, 1 has two damaged track segments, and 1 has a broken periscope. 3 tanks will be repaired by the morning of 21.7.43.
3. Supply level: ammo – 1x, gasoline – 1x
4. Losses: 3 men killed, 3 wounded (...)

[Signed]

Chief of Staff, Gds. Maj. *Voskoboynikov*

21.7.43, 09:00

Combat Order No. 6

Regiment HQ, 500 m west of Semenovka

1. The enemy's 257ID, 17TD, and the Tank Division "Wiking" defend at the line: "Andreyevka – gully Vyazovoe".
2. The 10th Separate Guards Breakthrough Tank Regiment is attached to 39TBde and will be employed as its first line with the following mission: "Break through the enemy defense in the Andreyevka sector, then advance via Petropolye, Kopanki, Mal. Kamyshevakha, and capture the southern outskirts of Kamenka by the end of the day."
3. I decided to attack with the Regiment deployed into a line of companies, echeloned to the right. The 1st Tank Company is setting the direction.
4. The 2nd Tank Company will advance via: ht. 184.2, western edge of Andreyevka, cemetery north of Petropolye, northeastern slopes of 180.6, southern edge of Kopanki, southern edge of Mal. Kamyshevakha, southwestern edge of Kamenka.
5. The 1st Tank Company will advance via: the gardens near Andreyevka, along the road to Petropolye, along the street through Kopanki, along the road between the garden to the southwest of Mal. Kamyshevakha, Kamenka.

6. The 3rd Tank Company will advance via: the center of Andreyevka, eastern outskirts of Petropolye, northern edge of Kopanki, western edge of Mal. Kamyshevakha, western edge of Kamenka.
7. The 4th Tank Company will advance via: the eastern edge of Andreyevka, the well east of Petropolye, the wind-powered water pump north of Kopanki, western edge of Mal. Kamyshevakha, the spring west of Kamenka.
8. The 1st and 2nd Tank Companies will establish vigilant observation on the right flank and prepare to defend against counterattacks from Barabashvka, Dmitrievka, and Brazhkova.
9. The attack will begin at 12:00.
10. Send reports upon capturing Andreyevka, Petropolye, Kopanki, Mal. Kamyshevakha, Kamenka.
11. I will follow behind the advancing companies.
12. Communication: by radio

[Signed]

Regiment Commander, Gds. Lt. Col. *Voronov*
Chief of Staff, Gds. Maj. *Voskoboynikov*

21.7.43, 20:00

Operations Report No. 15

Regiment HQ, 900 m west of Semenovka

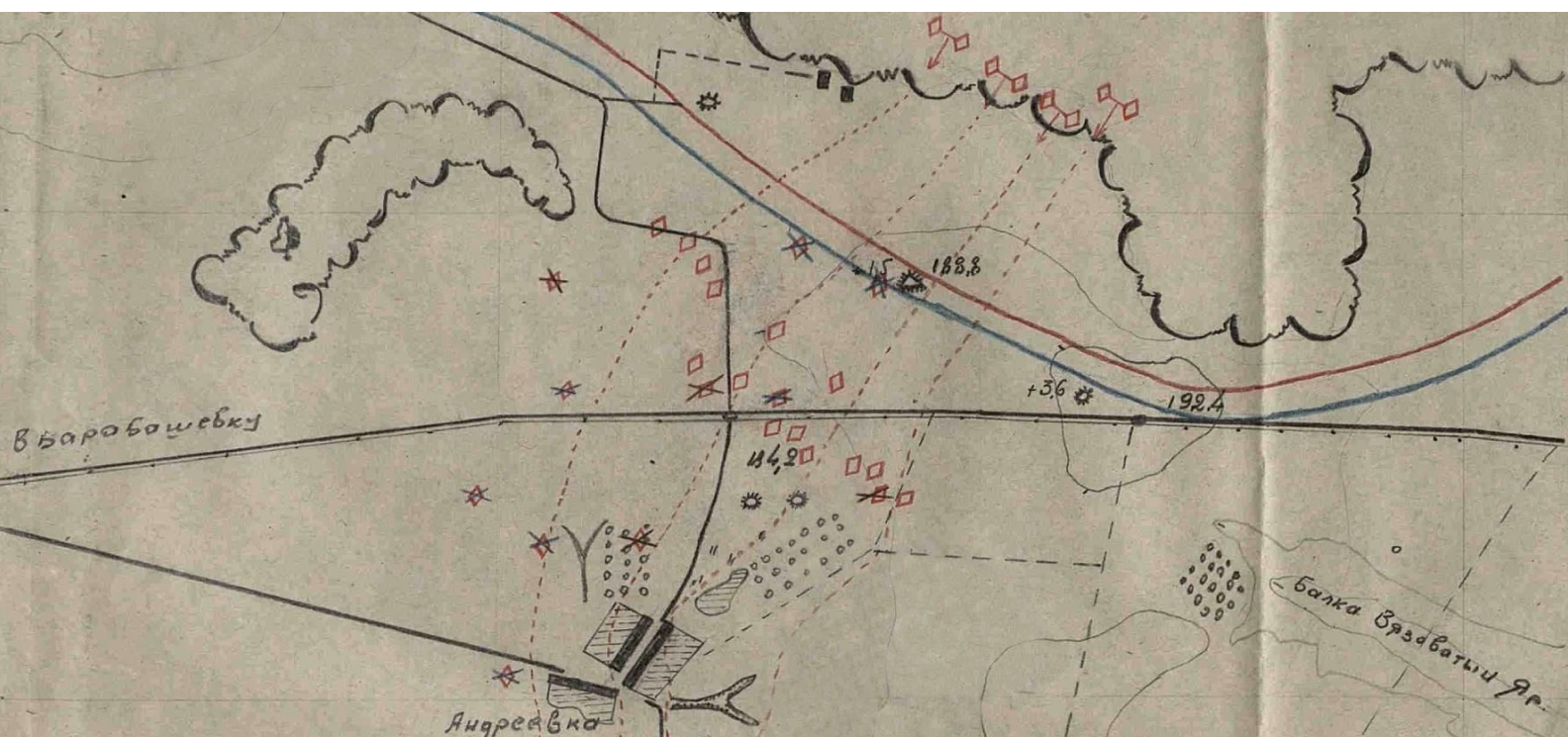
1. (...) At 12:00 the 20 operational tanks of the Regiment left their jump-off positions 900 m west of Semenovka and went on the attack towards Andreyevka. The tanks penetrated the forward defense line and broke into the depth of the enemy's defensive area, where they began destroying hostile personnel and equipment. In the day's fighting, the Regiment destroyed 18 artillery pieces with crews, 39 machine guns with crews, 7 wood-and-dirt pillboxes, 32 infantry bunkers, 9 trucks carrying infantry, and 465 men. As the Regiment's tanks advanced further, they outpaced their artillery support, also the tanks of the second line and the accompanying

infantry, and were subjected to strong AT fire from three directions. As a consequence, the tanks suffered heavy losses.

2. The Regiment has 2 operational Mk4 tanks left (in adequate conditions), and 3 more tanks were recovered from the battlefield (one of which will be repaired by the morning of 22.7.43).
3. Losses of materiel: in the day's fighting, the Regiment lost 16 Mk4 tanks knocked out or burned. All of them are on enemy-controlled territory. Personnel losses: 8 wounded, 2 concussed. The fate of the 15 tank crews from the tanks left on the enemy territory is unknown. A scouting mission with the aim to discover the locations of the destroyed tanks and to assess whether they can be recovered is underway [see the map below].
4. All remaining tanks returned to the assembly area, were refueled and re-supplied with ammunition. (...)

[Signed]

Chief of Staff, Gds. Maj. *Voskoboynikov*



10th Guards Breakthrough Tank Regiment – Tank company routes and losses on 21 July 1943

22.7.43, 13:45

Combat Report No. 11

Regiment HQ, 500 m west of Semenovka

(...)

2. Equipment: 3 operational tanks, 2 tanks are undergoing repairs and will be restored by 20:00 on 22.7.43.

(...)

6. Two crewmen from the destroyed tanks, which were left on the enemy territory, made it back to our positions.

(...)

[Signed]

Chief of Staff, Gds. Maj. *Voskoboynikov*

1.8.43, 07:00

Reconnaissance Report No. 1

Regiment HQ, Bulbovka

On 31.7.43 a group of commanders from the 10th Separate Guards Break-through Tank Regiment looked for the Mk4 tanks remaining on the battlefield from the engagement on 21.7.43 near Andreyevka. According to their observations, the following was determined:

- The enemy frontline is at the “eastern slopes of 186.9 – kurgan +1.0 – southern slopes of ht. 188.8 and ht. 192.4”.
- All tanks remain in enemy-controlled territory (secured by submachine gunners) with the exception of tank No. 21 sitting in the neutral zone, 50 m away from the enemy forward line. This tank has the enemy’s artillery and small arms registered on it.

- The enemy towed knocked out tanks of the types T-70, T-34 and Mk4 deeper into his territory.

Conclusion: The enemy tows the tanks deeper into his territory, evidently in order to repair them or use them as DFPs.

[Signed]

Chief of Staff, Gds. Maj. *Voskoboynikov*

10th Guards Breakthrough Tank Regiment

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After Action Report⁵⁸

Covering 21 July 1943

(...) At 12:00 on 21.7.43 the Regiment left its jump-off positions on the southern edge of the woods 1 km west of Semenovka in the first echelon of the 39th Tank Brigade and attacked the front edge of the enemy defense. The Regiment was deployed in line echeloned to the right: the 1st Company in the lead, the 2nd Company on the right, the 4th Company on the left, and the 3rd Company in the center. The Regiment's tanks wedged into the enemy defensive line at maximum speed and were taken under flanking fire by AT guns and SPGs from the grove 2 km southeast of Zavodskoy and the orchard 1.5 km east of Andreyevka. This led to the loss of two tanks that caught on fire and five tanks that were knocked out. After getting through the field of AT fire, the tanks broke into Andreyevka where the enemy concentrated a large number of AT guns and high caliber field artillery guns. The enemy recognized the threat to the Andreyevka garrison: the enemy crews pushed the guns into the open and fired at our tanks from the front and the flanks. The lack of HE rounds in Mk4 tanks did not allow for an effective action against the hostile artillery. By this time, the tanks of the second echelon and the escorting infantry fell back after running into an intense standing barrage and also encountering an enemy counterattack (by a force of 13 tanks and an infantry battalion) from an area near the tenant farm. The second echelon and the infantry were thus too far back to provide support to the first echelon and assist in suppressing the hostile guns. The fighting in Andreyevka village left two of our tanks burned out and four knocked out. After neutralizing the

⁵⁸ CAMD RF, Fond: 232, Series: 604, File: 13 (Document begins on page 87).

hostile AT assets around Andreyevka, the rest of the Regiment's tanks began to move towards Petropolye. They did not encounter any serious AT fire along the way and by 13:30 passed through the northwestern edge of Petropolye towards Kopanki, where they were met with strong AT fire out of the orchard to the northwest of Kopanki. Three more tanks were hit and burned down. The remaining three Mk4 tanks neutralized the AT guns in the orchard and broke into the village at 14:40, destroying enemy personnel along the way. In the village, the tanks ran into strong AT fire coming from the area around the unnamed height 700 m southwest of Kopanki. All remaining tanks were hit and burned. (...)

[Maps]

10th Breakthrough Tank Regiment – Tank company routes and losses (21.7.43)

German Army

Documents⁵⁹

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- ⁵⁹ – The abbreviations and nomenclature used to refer to German units are explained in the Appendix ("Abbreviations").
- Image descriptions and footnotes contain links to scans of the original documents.
 - Coordinates of important locations mentioned in the translated documents (villages, heights, gullies, etc.) are provided in the Appendix ("Locations", "Maps").
 - It is highly recommended to use this *German Army topographic map* from 1943 while reading the translated documents. The German spelling of location names is similar enough to their English equivalents to be identifiable.

40th Panzer Corps – After Action Report⁶⁰

*Field report on the defensive battles
at Izyum from 17. – 23.7.1943⁶¹*

I. Enemy

The *undisguised attack preparations* (concentration march movement, scouting officers, emplacing of artillery, incautious artillery and MLRS radio traffic, prepositioning of river-crossing equipment and preparations for bridging in daytime) were completely unusual for the Russians; it appeared that they wanted to deceive us. But reconnaissance noticed what seemed to be real attack intentions against the 257th Infantry Division and the 46th Infantry Division (...). Once these all too obvious enemy attack preparations ended, several days passed until the beginning of the attack. The enemy's radio traffic on the other hand was well masked (with the exception of the artillery and MLRS radio traffic) and did not provide a clear picture of an impending attack. The Russians prepared gaps in minefields; they also tried to pull away wire obstacles with tanks.

Completely new for a Russian offensive was *a strong nighttime airstrike* before the beginning of their attack. It was conducted with about 100 planes and 50 parachute flares against the sector of the middle division (the 46th Infantry Division). As a result, many telephone circuits were lost, which in turn hindered the process of directing artillery fire.

⁶⁰ XXXX. Panzerkorps Abt. Ia Nr. 403/43, 5 August 1943, NARA T-314 R-968, F:589–606.

⁶¹ The three divisions of the 40th Panzer Corps were deployed for defense along the Donets: the *257th Infantry Division* southwest of Izyum, the *46th Infantry Division* south of Izyum, and the *333rd Infantry Division* southeast of Izyum. Consisting solely of infantry divisions, the 40th Panzer Corps was a tank corps "just on paper". The sectors and main line of resistance right before the start of the Soviet offensive can be seen on the *40th Panzer Corps Situation Map* for 15 July and the *Army High Command Situation Map* for 16 July.

Then, at daybreak on 17 July 1943, *strong artillery preparation fire* started along the entire front in two half-hour intervals with a 5-minute pause in between. It was a strong artillery grouping (at least 100 batteries, among them 2 artillery divisions and 3 MLRS regiments) and its units were expending a large amount of ammunition. The major part of the grouping was positioned out of range of our own artillery. The strong hostile artillery fire, which partly intensified to drum fire, destroyed the communication wires a second time, along with some radio sets, and led to the loss of several defensive installations and weapons. The *attack* itself unfolded on a wide front (12 divisions against the 65 km-long front), and the employment of a large amount of – probably mostly improvised – river-crossing equipment allowed the enemy to capture the Donets south bank in many places with unexpected speed. Moreover, the enemy crossed in places, which we had evaluated as “impossible to cross” before. The large width of the attack, and the simultaneous attempts to cross in that many places, split up our own defense and firepower (because of the large width of our frontline, the desired density of fire could not be achieved everywhere along it).

The *attack's point of main effort* lay not in the deep and wide Izyum bridgehead, which the enemy had already captured before the attack, but on the right and left wings of the Corps.

For some enemy force elements the *primary objective* was the railroad line “Slavyansk – Barvenkovo – Lozovaya” (day’s objective for the tank units was Barvenkovo), while other elements immediately pivoted to the right and left after crossing to the Donets south bank to destroy our land front south of Izyum and the Donets front west of Prishib.⁶²

For the *first attack wave*, *rifle divisions* were employed along with some tanks. A second and a third wave of rifle divisions followed. The enemy immediately started to transport tanks across the river with ferries. A *tank corps* and a *mot. mech. corps* were positioned in readiness on both sides of Izyum with the intention to achieve deep penetration after carrying out the initial break-in into our defense along the river.

⁶² Prishib is 30 km southeast of Izyum, the frontline along the Donets formed a salient there.

With surprising quickness, the enemy started to *build bridges* (namely military and provisional types) along the entire front simultaneously, with some construction proceeding under our infantry's fire. The bridge building was completed everywhere on the 1st day of the attack, despite shelling and casualties. After completion of the first few bridges, the Russians immediately started to build more alternate bridges, so that in a short time in some bridgeheads there were 3 or 4 bridges next to each other. Some bridges later turned out to only be *deceptive objects* (confirmed by reconnaissance), some were replaced by *underwater bridges*.

The Russians, after beginning the offensive on a wide front, which brought them quick successes, *remained committed to the tactics later on* and *did not concentrate forces at one point of main effort*. As a result of following this tactic and being content with *shallow bridgeheads*, where they sustained *very high casualties*, they essentially deprived themselves of the opportunity to build upon their initial successes. Over the next few days of the fighting they made little additional progress in most points. The major part of the artillery remained in their initial positions on the far river bank until the cessation of the offensive.

The middle and lower Russian *leadership* was mediocre, inflexible, and again frequently confined itself to threatening or insulting orders to continue attacking without regard to casualties. The enemy's *coordination of arms* also seems to not have improved yet.

The Russian *infantry* indeed showed blind offensive fury, stubbornly throwing themselves again and again against the same position, but their combat value in the attack bears no relation to their ability to defend ground once captured with extreme tenacity and doggedness. Where the Russian infantry made gains, these were – as so often – achieved due to their greater number by simply flooding our own thinly manned lines of resistance.

As always, we could observe the Russian infantry's effort to immediately *fortify* captured ground and *improve positions*. The enemy's *mortars*, *AT rifles*, and *especially a large number of AT guns*, were always on the spot and deployed far forward. The employment of individual light *AA guns in the*

forward line (often even attached to advance elements) was a new tactic and made employment of our own airforce more difficult. In all river-crossing places and in the rear, the enemy had *strong AA forces*.

The previously gained experience of the Corps was confirmed: The *Russians* often *shy away from advancing through a gap* in the front. It almost seems as if they prefer to attack a still existing and defended front, because they suspect a trap in every gap.

The form of their *tank employment* did not bring the Russians a single success. The time of the tank, employed *alone* without support weapons, is over in light of the development of the AT defense. Every tank breakthrough ended with the complete destruction of the involved armor. Several times the message came: "9 (or 10 or 30) enemy tanks broke through, but there is no reason to be concerned." And two hours later the message followed: "6 (or 9 or 24) of the tanks were taken out, the rest are still being searched for in the fruit orchards."

Rarely did we observe skillful leadership of a tank formation appropriate to the situation, or prior reconnaissance, or mutual support, or coordination with other weapons. In most cases the infantry riding on or following the tanks could be separated from them. But the *tanks mostly operated alone* anyway, headed stubbornly towards their ordered objective, and because of the low visibility caused by the vegetation, they almost always drove directly into our AT defense. After losing about 2/3 of his tanks, the enemy thus reverted back to his old tactics and employed tanks behind the infantry lines as accompanying artillery for the infantry units.

The enemy tank crews demonstrated a soft character – when coming under fire they quickly veered off or abandoned their tanks. Because of the tall vegetation they suffered from low visibility most of the time, which also made them easy prey for close AT combat tools. For tank crews (*enemy and own*) the continuous improvement of these AT tools poses the problem of defending against close-distance threats as long as the tanks are not accompanied by APCs.

Several times, the *employment of female personnel* was reported, not only in communication formations and in the supply services (according to defector statements one divisional communication battalion consisted exclusively of women), but also in the combat element.

The enemy's rifle regiments (advancing in 3 waves) and the supporting tank formations and mot. brigades attacked *for 6 days* with unabated vehemence. Then, on the 7th day (23 July), the attack could be seen as broken up. The ruthless, brutal Russian leadership probably led to the gradual attrition of the attack forces. Nevertheless it must be made clear to all our troop commanders again and again: In the currently reached decisive point of this war, the slightest slackening of our commanders' and troops' *will to resist* can tip the balance and allow the attacker to achieve success.

II. Own Defense

1.) Dispositions

a) The preparations for *force transfer* within the Army proved themselves particularly effective (recon, establishment of contact, and auxiliary motorization). All reinforcements, which were assigned to the Corps during the battle, arrived quickly and could be deployed without time consuming guidance.

b) Over the last months prior to the battle, the available *construction forces* and the construction material (concrete) were concentrated in the expected focus point of the defense – in front of the Izyum bridgehead. The effort had turned this sector into an endurable cornerstone of our defense, but meant that the other divisions [the 257th and 333rd Infantry Divisions] could not improve their defense sectors as much. They therefore had weaker defensive positions at the battle's start. Moreover, starting the work on the improvement of rear positions before the main defensive area had been completed at least to some extent resulted in a dissipation of the available construction forces.

c) *Placing the main line of resistance* at the Donets without taking into account the course of the river and the sometimes jungle-like river bank vege-

tation did not prove itself. The Donets is no obstacle for the Russians. (...) The general defense principles will also apply to a river defense: Occupy the heights and create an overseeable and defendable main defense area if the main line at the river cannot be occupied without gaps due to insufficient manpower. At many points along the riverbank maintaining outposts would probably suffice. Only huge rivers will pose an obstacle and will enable defense with relatively weak forces.

d) The *stockpiling of ammunition* was not sufficient (see also section II., 2., f). The field elements would need 2x the initial issue of ammunition before the beginning of a large-scale battle. Firstly, because the arrival of additional ammunition needs 24–36 hours, secondly, because newly assigned forces are likely to arrive lacking even the full 1x initial issue of ammunition, and thirdly, because counter-battery tasks and the shelling of identified or expected enemy assembly areas already consumes a lot of ammunition before a defensive battle even starts.

2.) *Defensive Battle*

a) *Surprise fire* of strong artillery and several strong air attacks before the *start of the offensive* against identified or expected enemy assembly areas proved themselves particularly effective. We can say with certainty that these severely hindered the enemy during the preparation to launch his offensive; it probably even resulted in a one day delay. *Suppression of the strong enemy artillery grouping* on the other hand, especially during its initial drum fire, *was not achieved*, partly because of the disrupted communication lines, partly because most of the artillery had remained silent before the attack, undetected by our reconnaissance (...), and partly because the major part of the enemy artillery was positioned beyond the range of our own artillery.

Before our own counterattacks, a single fire concentration of highest intensity (“annihilation fire”) turned out to be less effective than continuous, strong artillery fire combined with sudden bursts of annihilation fire, *repeated* at irregular intervals.

b) Temporarily withdrawing from the first line of defense when expecting a strong enemy artillery preparation (to increase the survivability of the employed troops) was only possible in the rare cases when alternate positions, which allowed to overwatch and defend the main line of resistance, were available. Apart from that, all 3 divisions [257th, 46th, 333rd] were convinced that such a complete withdrawal from the first line of defense lowers the troops' will to fight and therefore is not acceptable.

c) The battles have shown that an infantry division with minor artillery reinforcements is capable of defending a well prepared *sector about 15 km wide* against a large-scale Russian attack – but not more. The task of the 257th and 333rd Infantry Divisions, with defense sectors 30 and 40 km wide respectively and only 2 regiments deployed on the frontline, was therefore an impossible one. Even though the river obstacle eased defending such wide sectors: it was still an impossible task. A strongpoint-based, thinly manned line without any depth cannot be defended, no matter if it is behind a river or not. It only allows for delaying action.

d) Soon after the beginning of the enemy offensive the 17th Panzer Division was attached to the Corps. At noon of the first day it was not yet clear, given the wide front of the enemy's offensive, where the 17th Panzer Division would need to be employed. First consideration was to deploy the Division southeast of Izyum (in the Prishib salient), but later it was decided to deploy it southwest of Izyum, in the sector of the 257th Infantry Division [at Semenovka], the reason being that the enemy penetration there directly threatened the land front south of Izyum. The effort to employ the entire 17th Panzer Division as a whole, instead of splitting the Division up, wasted time. On the evening of the offensive's first day, the SS Panzer Grenadier Division "Wiking" together with its 24th Panzer Corps, were also attached to the Corps.⁶³

⁶³ Technically resulting in the following organization: The 17th Panzer Division and SS Panzer Grenadier Division "Wiking" were subordinated to the 24th Panzer Corps, which in turn was subordinated to the 40th Panzer Corps. With this, the 40th Panzer Corps additionally had a separate tank corps with two armored divisions at its disposal. The 24th Panzer Corps (with 17th Panzer Division and SS Wiking) was taken from the reserve of Army Group South and was already behind the 40th Panzer Corps when the Soviet offensive began on 17 July (as seen on the *Army High Command Situation Map* for the end of 16 July). At 16.15 on 17 July 1943, when the Army informed the 40th Panzer Corps about the subordination of these

As much as it is, in principle, preferable to hold the mobile divisions together as a grouping and to deploy them in a planned counterattack of an entire tank corps, in hindsight we have to conclude that a separate employment of the two mobile divisions could have had a better effect: the 17th Panzer Division deployed southeast of Izyum (in the Prishib salient) and the SS Panzer Grenadier Division “Wiking” deployed southwest of Izyum in the sector of the 257th Infantry Division. The reason being that the enemy’s first-day gains were bridgeheads indeed wide, but without much depth; they actually did not justify the deployment of an entire tank corps. On the contrary: to eliminate these wide, yet shallow enemy bridgeheads, it would have been more efficient to conduct several rapid counterthrusts with small mobile detachments.

We therefore decided that in this phase of the war preference will be given to the *creation of small armored reserve groups*, while deliberately accepting the drawbacks of splitting the mobile divisions up. A tank division cannot conduct rapid counterthrusts because of the time required for artillery deployment, establishing the communication net, reconnaissance, and liaison with the sector commanders. This presents an even bigger challenge in the context of an entire tank corps.

For all corps formations, which are deployed for defense, it would be ideal to create small armored and motorized reserve groups for rapid counterthrusts (“shock brigades” consisting of one battalion of APCs and one battalion of tanks, assault guns, SPGs) in addition to the mobile reserve divisions for planned counterattacks. Given the current state of the war, sufficient forces will likely never be available again on the Eastern Front. And in order to be able to carry out defensive operations without sufficient forces distributed in the depth of a defensive area, at the very least it is necessary to have *mobile, rapid reaction reserves*.

reserves, it underlined that the 24th Panzer Corps (with 17th Panzer Division and SS Wiking) was to be deployed for a counterattack in the Semenovka area to “rectify the situation on the right wing of the 257th Infantry Division.” [NARA T-314 R-968, F:186]. The *Army High Command Situation Map* for the evening of 17 July 1943 correspondingly already shows the 24th Panzer Corps moving towards the Semenovka area on the right wing of the 275th Infantry Division with its 17th Panzer Division and SS Wiking – to assemble there for a counterattack of the entire 24th Panzer Corps in the early morning of 18 July.

e) With just the three heavy field howitzer battalions of the divisional artillery regiments, two 10 cm cannon batteries, and two 21/22 cm howitzer batteries (one French) for the 90 km Corps front, the Corps had not enough heavy, and especially not enough long-range artillery at its disposal. Counter-battery fire and fire against bridges was therefore completely inadequate.

f) Attachments 1a – 1c show the *expenditure of ammunition* during the defensive battle, while Attachment 1d lists the *stock of ammunition* at the beginning of the battle:

[Attachment 1a]

“Expenditure of artillery ammunition during the defensive battle in front of Izyum – Summer 1943 (17.7 – 22.7).”

[Attachment 1b]

“Expenditure of artillery ammunition during the defensive battle on both sides of Izyum apportioned per battalion (17.7 – 24.7.1943).”

[Attachment 1c]

“Expenditure of ammunition for heavy infantry weapons.”

[Attachment 1d]

“Issue of ammunition on 17.7 (morning) and 20.7 (evening).”

g) At its current state, our *AT defense* wields exceptional power, it is absolutely superior to the enemy tanks. The *heavy Pak 43/41* with their long range and accuracy of fire proved themselves particularly effective. These AT guns also turned out to be more mobile than expected, often they could even be employed outside of their prearranged firing positions.

All *close range AT combat tools* were used to their full potential, and – if in the hands of trained soldiers – give the troops a feeling of safety and superiority against the Russian Armored Force. Aware of this strength, the infantry repeatedly allowed enemy tanks to roll over their positions and then separated the enemy infantry from the tanks.

h) The *cooperation with the Air Forces* was exemplary. Their tireless efforts, repeated again and again with a strong force committed each time, have contributed quite significantly to the defensive success. The cooperation with a specially formed *combat organization* of dive bomber, ground attack and fighter aircraft groups assigned to the Corps was a particularly close one, and it was quick to follow the development of the situation. *Night air reconnaissance* was not always sufficient and usually yielded only limited results.

With the few *air defenses* available, they repeatedly became a subject of conflict between the wishes of the ground troops for support in ground combat and the demands of the air defense command for the urgent task of air raid protection. (...)

i) Despite comradely cooperation: The *special composition of the SS Panzer Grenadier Division "Wiking"* complicates its employment in defensive operations on such a wide front, since it is prohibited – according to a “Führer Order”, which is not known to the Corps – to subordinate elements of this SS Division to command headquarters of the regular Army. However, on several occasions during the defensive battle this could not be avoided.

k) Total losses from 17.7.43 – 22.7.43 based on the final reports of the divisions:⁶⁴

	Officers				NCOs and other enlisted men			
	KIA	MIA	Wounded	Total	KIA	MIA	Wounded	Total
257ID	9	3	44 (14)	56	415	283	1760 (227)	2458
46ID	16	1	48 (15)	65	506	328	2265 (391)	3099
333ID	19	19	67 (12)	105	428	1063	1363 (108)	3180
17TD	11	1	54 (14)	66	208	122	1239 (135)	1569
SS Wiking	13	–	23 (9)	36	164	25	642 (88)	831

⁶⁴ Translation of Attachment 2. Weapon losses are listed in Attachment 2a.

m) *Final conclusion:*

The successful defensive stand against overwhelmingly superior attacking forces has once again proven beyond any doubt the current superiority of all our defensive weapons, as well as our defensive tactics. It can be assumed with a high degree of confidence, given the current strength ratios on both sides, that the defender (with minor losses of terrain) is more likely to beat and destroy the attacker in pure defense than vice versa, especially if it is possible to counterattack *surprisingly* with *strong* retained reserve forces after the opponent has worn himself out. (...)

IV. Supply

1.) Ammunition

The high expenditure of ammunition during the first days of the defensive battle could not be covered by supplies at first. The stock of ammunition (including the earmarked Army stocks) had fallen from an average of 150% in the morning of 17.7, down to an average of 70% by 20.7. It was not until 21.7 that the ammunition supply was sufficient to replenish the heavily depleted stocks again. To prevent an ammunition crisis, replenishment of the earmarked stocks to at least 2 issues is necessary, especially since it must be expected that more sustained railroad disruptions may delay sufficient ammunition supply even more in the future. In addition, the sharp drop in infantry personnel strength and the high number of infantry weapon losses will constantly increase the artillery's expenditure of ammunition when defending against a major enemy attack.

2.) Fuel

No shortages appeared because of existing reserves and sufficient earmarked stocks of fuel.

3.) Administration

a) A supply base had been in place for several months. As a result, supplying the troops with rations was possible without interruption or friction. Furthermore – for the event of an attack – stocks of additional rations and allowances for fighters at the front were stored at the Army ration supply depot and, to a lesser extent, at the Corps ration supply depot as well as the divisional ration supply depots. Because of these preparations it was possible to quickly bring up these allowances to the fighters at the front. Temporary difficulties in supplying the fighters at the front were encountered only in those places where the Russians had broken into or had broken through a defensive position. But even in those situations, the mess officers and troop paymaster officials with their supply trains found their units soon after. Soldiers separated from their unit in action usually came across a friendly unit again soon. It had been ordered by the Corps that every unit is obliged to immediately provide supplies to such stragglers.

b) The same applied to lost pieces of equipment and articles of clothing: These could be replenished from the supply base behind the front in the shortest time. Difficulties only arose due to shortages for the replacement of lost shelter halves and mess kits.

4.) Medical Services

a) Medical care, and especially the evacuation of the large number of wounded, could not be managed with own means. Hence additional support was employed:

- a group of surgeons at Surgical Hospital 46,
- one platoon of the ambulance battalion to control the transport at the Barvenkovo railroad station (...),
- a motor ambulance train currently positioned in Slavyansk,
- several provisionally equipped hospital trains of the Army Group,

- the divisions improvised and employed buses of the butcher and maintenance companies, as well as buses of the headquarters for the evacuation of wounded.

b) It is absolutely necessary to compare the two types of casualty reports already at battalion level, and to immediately resolve any inconsistencies. Otherwise it will be impossible to create consistent casualty reports later on.

c) The employment of medical personnel as infantry in alarm units during such a defensive battle is unfeasible, as pulling important medical ranks away from their primary duties undermines proper and smooth operation of the already overburdened medical installations. Therefore, going forward, medical units will only be employed for immediate local defense as a last resort.

[Signed]

The Commanding General

Sigfrid Henrici

General der Panzertruppen⁶⁵

⁶⁵ Henrici was put in command of the 40th Panzer Corps on 13 November 1942. With his promotion to "General der Panzertruppen" (Lieutenant General) on 1 January 1943 he also became Commanding General of the Corps. On 1 September 1943 Henrici is mentioned by name in the "Wehrmachtsbericht" (Wehrmacht report): "*In the defensive battle at Izyum the 40th Panzer Corps under the command of General der Panzertruppen Henrici distinguished itself particularly.*" Henrici will be heavily wounded during the fighting for the Dnieper bridgehead near Zaporozhye two months after writing the above after action report and transfer to the "Führerreserve" for recovery (October 1943). In the spring of 1944 he then serves as the head of the "Festland-Stab Krim" (Mainland Staff Crimea) and on 3 September 1944 again becomes Commanding General of the 40th Panzer Corps – which he will lead until the end of the war.

The Defensive Battle at Semenovka⁶⁶

17 July – 22 July 1943

Dispositions

The *257th Infantry Division* is attached to the 40th Panzer Corps and deployed for defense southwest of Izyum along the Donets River with two of its infantry regiments:

- 457IR is deployed on the right (at Semenovka and to the west of the village)
- 477IR is deployed on the left (at Petrovskaya and to the north of the settlement)
- The third infantry regiment of the Division (466IR) is in the reserve.

The Army Group's reserve, the 24th Panzer Corps, is positioned behind the 257th Infantry Division with two mobile divisions: the *17th Panzer Division* and the *SS Panzer Grenadier Division "Wiking"*.⁶⁷

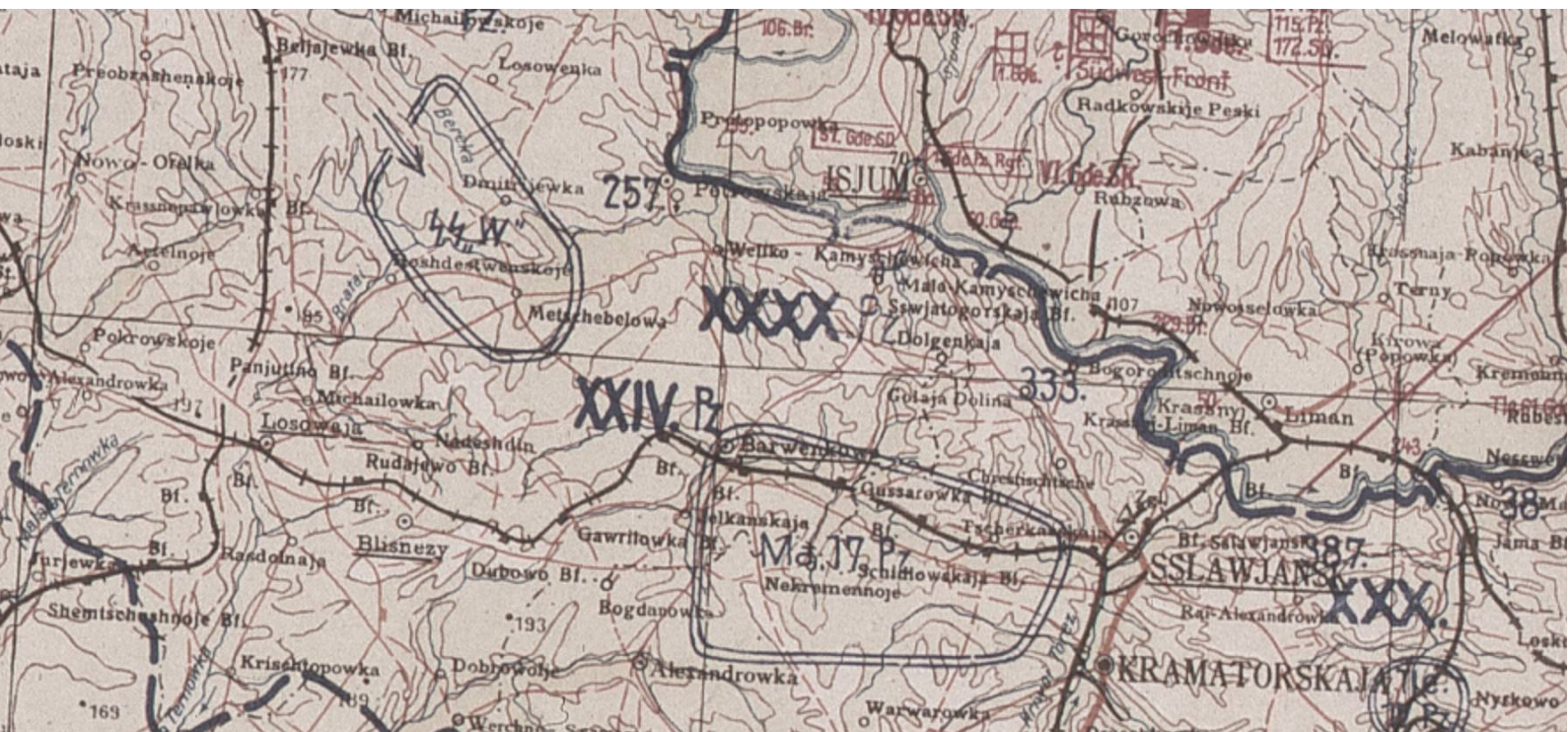
The commander of the 257th Infantry Division, Generalleutnant *Carl Püchler*, summarizes the situation before the beginning of the Soviet offensive as follows: "The wooded terrain in front of the Division's main line of resistance provides little opportunity for observation. The Donets itself poses only

⁶⁶ Editor's Note: The translated 40th Panzer Corps report of the previous chapter covered the entire Corps sector along the Donets. This chapter focuses on what happened during 17–22 July 1943 on the left wing of the 40th Panzer Corps – in the defense sector of the 257th Infantry Division, deployed in the area of Semenovka and westwards. The text is a compilation based on primary sources (war diaries, orders, reports, etc.) of the German units and formations involved in the fighting: NARA T-313 R-54–65, T-314 R-968, T-314 R-1492, T-314 R-720, T-315 R-1805, T-315 R-936, T-315 R-692, T-78 R-719, A3343, and various memoirs.

⁶⁷ See the maps on the next pages for details.

a minor obstacle: low water level, a narrow water channel, many fords, and – with rare exceptions – a restricted field of fire. Additionally, the troops are exhausted from the ongoing entrenchment work along the overstretched frontline.”

On 16 July 1943 – the day before the beginning of the Soviet offensive – the 257th Infantry Division reports to the Corps: “Heavy work noise and persistent movement were noted in front of the entire 457IR sector, especially north of Semenovka and southeast of Chervonnyy Shakhter.” Later, at the end of the day, the Corps reports to the Army: “By the evening, the increased enemy activity along the entire Corps frontline suggests – more than ever – that the enemy intends to attack.”



Army High Command – Eastern Front situation map, the evening of 16.7.43

The 24th Panzer Corps (“XXIV. Pz.”) is held as reserve behind the main line of resistance of the 40th Panzer Corps (“XXXX. Pz.”) with the 17th Panzer Division (“17. Pz.”) on the right and SS Wiking (“SS W.”) on the left. The 40th Panzer Corps’ 257th Infantry Division (“257.”) is deployed for defense along the Donets southwest of Izyum (“Isjum”) on the left wing of the 40th Panzer Corps. This map shows the situation a few hours before the beginning of the Soviet offensive in the early morning of 17.7.



257th Infantry Division – Defense sector and deployment

The city of Izyum can be seen in the upper right corner of the map. To the west of Izyum the divisional boundary between the 46th Infantry Division (right) and the 257th Infantry Division (left) goes down straight to the Donets. The dark continuous line along the river marks the main line of resistance. Details on the deployment and sectors can be seen on *this annotated map*. The *aerial reconnaissance photograph* below shows the western part of Semenovka village in the defense sector of the 257th Infantry Division.



17 July 1943⁶⁸

– 02.00 –

Around 02.00 the enemy launches an air strike against the sector of the 46th Infantry Division (257th Infantry Division's right neighbor) with about 80 to 100 planes. The Corps interprets this nighttime air attack as a clear sign indicating the start of a large-scale enemy offensive and immediately informs all other divisions.

Exceptionally heavy hostile artillery fire follows, targeting the entire Corps front. A 257th Infantry Division mortar platoon leader, deployed behind the frontline with his reserve unit, notes in his diary: "Suddenly I hear rolling thunder coming from the direction of the front. I listen carefully, because it sounds different than the usual surprise artillery attacks. It stretches along the entire frontline and is a non-stop rumbling. This is not a fire raid or a local artillery duel; this is massed fire of all calibers across the entire front. This is the prelude to a major enemy attack – the large Soviet Donets offensive, the large Russian summer offensive of 1943 has begun. Now I understand the urgency put into building defensive works with our whole battalion. Higher command must have expected the offensive. Just now, three Russian ground attack aircraft roar over our heads. (...)"

In the 257th Infantry Division's sector, hostile artillery hits Semenovka and the area to the west of the village with particular intensity (artillery, MLRS, and heavy mortars). Then, at 04.45, the enemy infantry begins its attack with the support of large ground-attack and bomber aircraft formations.

– 08.00 –

The commander of the 257th Infantry Division reports to the Corps: "Our troops are holding despite heavy casualties. By 08.00 two points of main ef-

⁶⁸ The German Army timekeeping was utilizing Berlin time, hence the time format "hh.mm" is used for clear differentiation; +1 hour gives Red Army document time, written in the format "hh:mm".

fort of the enemy's attacks were identified: 1.) the area west of Semenovka and 2.) Bol. Garazhevka [located 3 km west of Sredniy]. The enemy managed to break into our main defensive area northwest of Semenovka, but the village itself held out. There is also an enemy break-in at Bol. Garazhevka.”

Shortly later, the Corps reports to the Army: “The enemy attacked simultaneously along the entire Corps front; it is surprising that they managed to capture the Donets south bank in so many places so rapidly during the first few hours. The enemy's intention is currently assumed to be a pincer attack, an envelopment on both sides, southwest and southeast of Izyum, to destroy our forces on the land front south of Izyum.”⁶⁹

In the meantime, the Army authorized the divisions to commit their reserve regiments. The 257th Infantry Division had already deployed II./466IR behind the first line in the Semenovka area; the remaining two battalions of the reserve regiment (I./466IR and III./466IR) are planned to be employed as a counterattacking force at Bol. Garazhevka.

– 11.00 –

At 11.00 the Corps reports: “Meanwhile, the enemy penetrations at Semenovka and Bol. Garazhevka have deepened. The enemy started with the construction of a military bridge northwest of Semenovka and is now bypassing Semenovka to the west of the village, advancing towards the heights 188.8 and 192.4. II./466IR is deployed on the heights 188.8 and 192.4 to block the enemy's advance. At Bol. Garazhevka the enemy also advanced further and captured height 128.1 [situated southwest of Sredniy]: The reserve battalions I./466IR and III./466IR will be deployed there for a counterattack.”

– 16.00 –

The Corps reports: “The situation at Semenovka in the sector of the 257th Infantry Division remains unchanged, the heights to the west and southwest of the village [188.8 and 192.4] are still in our hands, but Sredniy was captured by the enemy at around 15.00.”

⁶⁹ “Land front” refers to the frontline along the Soviet Izyum bridgehead (marked *here*).

At 16.15 the Army informs the Corps that the 17th Panzer Division and SS Panzer Grenadier Division “Wiking” from the Army Group reserve will be deployed in the 457IR sector of the 257th Infantry Division for a counter-attack in the early morning of 18 July to destroy the broken-in enemy forces. The 17th Panzer Division will attack on the right (in the area “Semenovka – Zavodskoy [excl.]”); SS Wiking will attack on the left (in the area “Zavodskoy – Sredniy – Bol. Garazhevka”). The attack’s objective is the Donets south bank. The Army underlines the importance of relieving the 17th Panzer Division and SS Wiking by the end of 18 July, after the attack has been carried out, to make these two mobile divisions available as reserves again.



Army High Command – Eastern Front situation map, the evening of 17.7.43

The 17th Panzer Division and SS Wiking are moving towards the frontline on the right wing of the 257th Infantry Division – to assemble there for the planned attack in the early morning of 18.7.

– 18.00 –

At 18.00 the Corps reports: “257th Infantry Division’s counterattack southwest of Sredniy with the 2 reserve battalions (I./466IR and III./466IR) made good progress, height 128.1 has been recaptured. Otherwise the situation in 257th Infantry Division’s sector remains unchanged.”

– 22.00 –

Shortly after 22.00 the Corps reports: “257th Infantry Division’s counterattack with I./466IR and III./466IR made further progress and resulted in the recapture of Sredniy at 22.00.”

– 23.00 –

During 17 July the following three attacking enemy divisions were identified in 257th Infantry Division’s sector:

- 53rd Rifle Division,
- 20th Guards Rifle Division,
- 195th Rifle Division.

– 24.00 –

At 24.00 the Corps concludes the day of 17 July 1943: “Today’s attack along the entire front of the 40th Panzer Corps [*Donets-Front*], in conjunction with today’s attacks against the front of the 6th Army [*Mius-Front*], seem to indicate a major enemy offensive of decisive operational scale. It cannot be ruled out that the goal of the enemy’s offensive is to capture the Donbas.”

18 July 1943

– 00.00 –

During the night, the order for 17th Panzer Division's planned counterattack at Semenovka is issued:

Division Order

1. On 17.7 the enemy managed to establish a bridgehead across the Donets west and northwest of Semenovka. The western part of Semenovka is in the enemy's hands now. In the area of the ford, 1 ½ km northwest of Semenovka, a military bridge has been built. The heights 192.4 and 188.8, and the northeastern corner of the forest 1 ½ km west of 188.8 [called "Sickle Forest"] are still in our hands. All enemy attempts to expand his bridgehead on 17.7 were thwarted. It is expected that the enemy will move additional, stronger forces into the bridgehead to continue his attacks on 18.7.
2. The 17th Panzer Division is ordered to attack the enemy bridgehead in the morning of 18.7, annihilate the enemy and destroy the military bridge. Time of attack: 03.30.
3. The following 17th Panzer Division units will get ready for the attack:⁷⁰
63MIR, reinforced by one combat engineer company (with all available flamethrowers) for each of its two battalions.
 - a. The right attack group [I./63MIR] will assemble southeast of 192.4.
 - b. The left attack group [II./63MIR] will assemble south of 188.8.

⁷⁰ The 17th Panzer Division's TOE (as of 1 June 1943) can be seen *here*. A detailed list of the Division's weapons (as of 26 June 1943) is available *here*. Note the two captured T-34 tanks which are attached to II./40MIR ("II./40").

Available reserves:

40MIR (less one battalion) in the area east of Kopanki in the Kopanskiy gully. The regiment shall reconnoiter possible areas of operation in the northern direction. The rest of 17th Panzer Division's units (tank battalion, AA battalion, etc.) will maintain readiness in the rear.

4. All units shall be ready in their assembly areas by 03.00.
5. The 257th Infantry Division's units, which are currently deployed in the attack sector, will be attached to the 17th Panzer Division for the attack.
6. *Conduct of battle:* 63MIR will attack the enemy bridgehead with two attack groups after a short artillery preparation of all available artillery batteries. The attack groups will pass through the forward line of the defending 257th Infantry Division's 457IR and advance (echeloned in depth) through the wooded area west of Semenovka aiming to destroy the enemy forces located in the bridgehead. Once the regiment reaches the old main frontline, and after destroying the military bridge, the regiment will go over to defense in the old main frontline positions. The regiment shall be prepared to defend against enemy attacks prior to the beginning of its own attack; particularly important is preparing some AT defense.
7. *Artillery instructions:* Conduct a 10-minute artillery preparation with all batteries at the time of attack. After the artillery preparation: Conduct fire missions against identified targets and provide harassing fire aimed at the Donets south bank and the military bridge.
8. Radio silence will be maintained until the beginning of the attack.

[Signed]

17th Panzer Division Commander, Generalleutnant *Schilling*

– 05.00 –

At 05.10 the 17th Panzer Division reports: “The Division completed its assembly according to plan and began its attack at 03.30. By 04.45 the western part of Semenovka, the wooded area west of the village, and the forest edge north of 188.8 were reached. Now advancing further. Strong enemy aircraft activity.”

– 05.30 –

Shortly after – around 05.30 – the 17th Panzer Division reports: “The further advance meets stiff enemy resistance in the wooded area southwest, west and northwest of Semenovka; particularly out of the area of the collective farm northwest of 188.8 and out of the forest corner at 192.4.”

– 08.00 –

The 17th Panzer Division is about to start a renewed attack towards the north with air support and with a strong artillery preparation targeting the forest edges north of 188.8 and 192.4. But the Stukas are late. Because of this, the beginning of the attack is postponed to 10.30, when the Stukas will arrive.

– 11.00 –

Around 11.00, the 17th Panzer Division’s right attack group (I./63MIR) succeeds in reaching the Donets River north of Semenovka with 2 companies. But the left attack group (II./63MIR) is not successful: The advance is halted south of the forest, and the Battalion has to fight off several enemy counter-thrusts.

– 12.30 –

To exploit I./63MIR’s success north of Semenovka, the ready reserve II./40MIR is committed to action there at 12.30: II./40MIR is ordered to advance

through the forest from east to west together with I./63MIR, clearing it of the enemy's forces. The regimental commander of 40MIR, Oberst *Henrich*, leads this advance.

Meanwhile the situation worsened in the sector of 17th Panzer Division's left neighbor, close to the 17th Panzer Division's left sector boundary "Petro-polye – eastern edge of Zavodskoy". The Army summarizes in its war diary: "Facing superior tank-supported enemy attacks, the weakened elements of the 257th Infantry Division were forced to abandon both Sredniy and Zavodskoy between 09.00 and 11.00. The attacks were coming from the direction of Chervonyy Shakhter – air reconnaissance reports a new military bridge there."⁷¹ An additional enemy division taking part in the offensive was identified in the area of Zavodskoy and Sredniy: the 62nd Guards Rifle Division.⁷²

– 18.00 –

The Army reports: "During the fight in the dense, jungle-like forest 2 km northwest of Semenovka, the enemy is displaying unusual tenacity and skill. In the evening our troops are still locked in fierce fighting going on in there."

Conclusion

The 17th Panzer Division was not able to clear the Donets south bank at Semenovka of enemy forces by the end of 18 July 1943 – contrary to the Army's and Corps' expectations.

To the west of 17th Panzer Division's attack sector, the attack of SS *Wiking* had been unsuccessful too: Initially the SS Division's advance towards the Donets at Bol. Garazhevka made good progress, but the enemy began his own offensive moves simultaneously, with focus on the villages of Sredniy and Zavodskoy. After heavy artillery preparations and airstrikes, tank-supported ene-

⁷¹ Aerial photographs of a German reconnaissance flight from Semenovka via Zavodskoy to Sredniy at around 12.30 can be seen in the Appendix on p. 189.

⁷² This was in addition to the attacking Soviet divisions identified on the previous day (53rd Rifle Division, 20th Guards Rifle Division, 195th Rifle Division).

my attacks succeeded in penetrating into these villages. As 257th Infantry Division's weakened troops pulled back from both villages between 09.00 and 11.00 in response, the success of SS Wiking's ongoing attack at Bol. Garazhevka was more and more thrown into doubt by this new threat from the flank. As a consequence, the major part of SS Wiking had to pivot eastward at 13.40, receiving orders to recapture Sredniy and Zavodskoy.⁷³ After a difficult battle, II./Germania of SS Wiking recaptured Zavodskoy at 22.30, while Sredniy was retaken by I./Westland at 24.00.⁷⁴ With this, the enemy's Semenovka bridgehead had at least been broken through in a critical spot by the end of 18 July, the end of the second day of the Soviet offensive.

The situation on Corps and Army level on 18 July 1943

A debate between the Corps and the Army started, once it became clear that the attacks of the 17th Panzer Division and SS Wiking would not achieve their objective on 18 July. The initial plan of making the mass of these mobile divisions available as reserves again on the night of 18–19 July (for redeployment in other threatened sectors of the Corps) was no longer feasible, given the development of the situation at “Semenovka – Bol. Garazhevka”. The 257th Infantry Division was also evaluated as “not yet capable” of relieving the 17th Panzer Division and SS Wiking's frontline units and holding the defense area on its own again; even more so, given the expectation of continued strong enemy attacks out of the enemy's bridgehead, which the 17th Panzer Division and SS Wiking had failed to eliminate on 18 July.

Based on this estimate of the situation, Army and Corps agreed on a compromise – partial regrouping: SS Wiking will take over 17th Panzer Division's whole sector in the night of 18–19 July in addition to its current mission, while the 17th Panzer Division transfers to a threatened sector southeast of Izyum, to be employed there as a counterattacking force.

⁷³ Additionally, 17th Panzer Division's tank battalion (held in the reserve initially) was deployed to assist SS Wiking in the recapture of Zavodskoy. The Battalion received orders to secure the eastern flank of SS Wiking's attack on Zavodskoy.

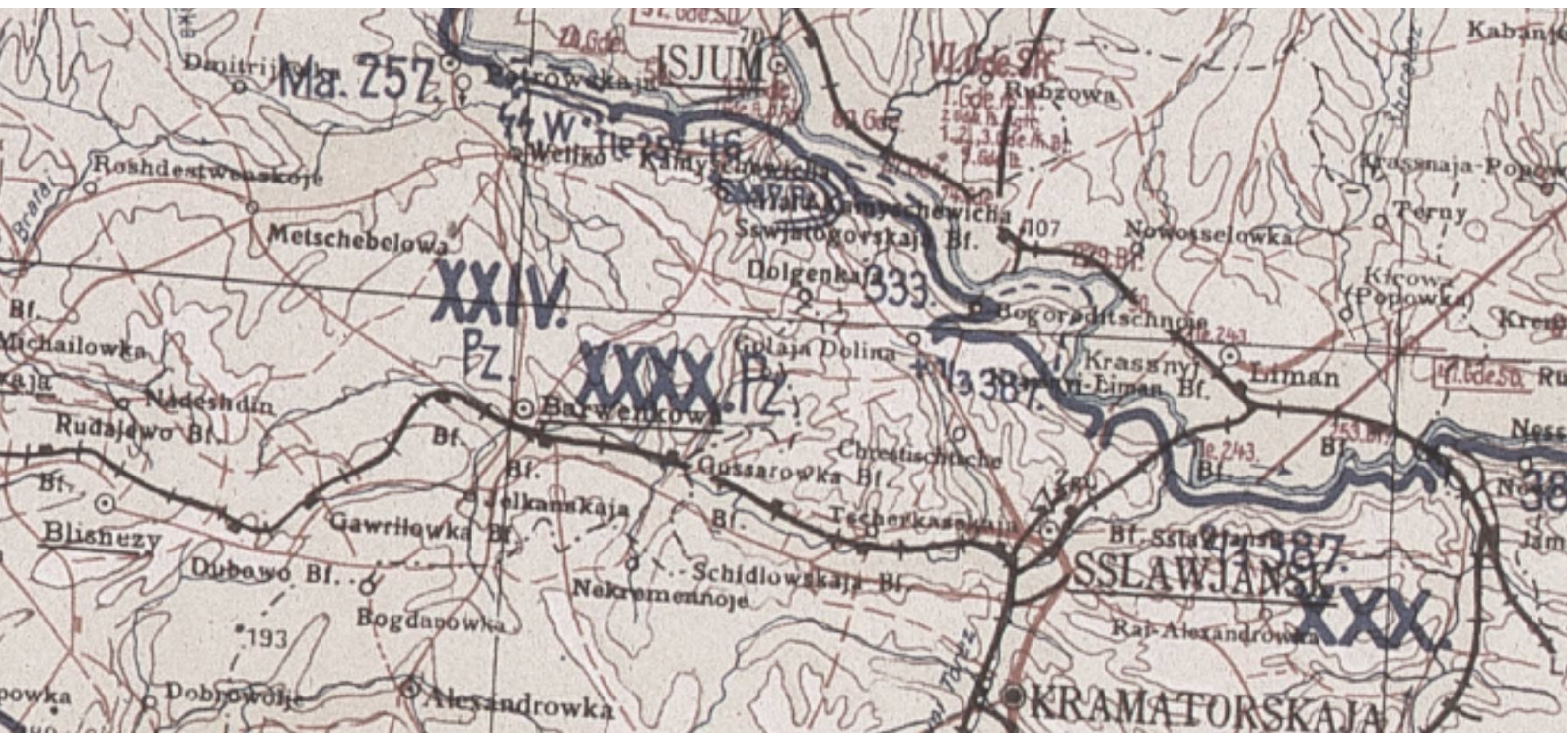
⁷⁴ *Germania* and *Westland* are the two SS Panzer Grenadier Regiments of SS Wiking, each consisting of two battalions. For details see SS Wiking's TOE from 1 July 1943.

Only a group of 17th Panzer Division elements, which are currently deployed at Semenovka (and partially locked in combat there anyway), plus some divisional support elements would stay behind at Semenovka. These remaining 17th Panzer Division elements get attached to SS Wiking temporarily.

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The partial regrouping went according to plan. On 19 July, at 00.00, SS Wiking extended its responsibility to take over the entire 17th Panzer Division sector at Semenovka. As a part of the regrouping, SS Wiking deployed its Estonian “Bataillon Narwa” for defense in the area north of Andreyevka overnight. This would be the first combat deployment of the Battalion, which had been created in the autumn of 1942 from Estonian volunteers.

Bataillon Narwa’s new sector north of Andreyevka would become a focus of the fiercest fighting for the coming 3 days.



Army High Command – Eastern Front situation map, the end of 18.7.43

SS Wiking is now deployed on the main line of resistance southwest of Izyum in the area of Zavodskoy and Sredniy, while the main body of the 17th Panzer Division is moving towards a threatened area southeast of Izyum.

19 July 1943

– 00.00 –

The third day of the Soviet Donets offensive. At 00.00 the SS Panzer Grenadier Division “Wiking” extends its responsibility to take over the entire 17th Panzer Division sector at Semenovka, while the major part of the 17th Panzer Division transfers to the southeast of Izyum to be employed there as a counterattacking force. Only a group of 17th Panzer Division elements remains at Semenovka. This group is named “Group Henrich”. It consists of the following units:⁷⁵

- 40MIR HQ (under the command of Oberst *Henrich*)
- II./40MIR
- I./63MIR
- 27EngBn (less one company)
- II./27AR (two light batteries, one heavy battery)
- 1 company of 27ATBn
- 1 AA battery (8.8cm) of 297AABn

Group Henrich and the 257th Infantry Division units deployed in the sector (plus an assault gun battery of 203StugBn) get temporarily attached to SS Wiking. SS Wiking’s own infantry battalions are deployed on the current main line of resistance as follows:⁷⁶

- **I./Westland** is tasked with the defense of Sredniy (the Battalion had recaptured the village at 24.00 on 18 July).
- **II./Westland** is tasked with the defense of Zavodskoy (the village had been recaptured by II./Germania at 22.30 on 18 July).

⁷⁵ For details on these units see the 17th Panzer Division’s *TOE* (as of 1 June 1943) and this detailed list of the *unit’s weapons* (as of 26 June 1943). Note the two captured T-34 tanks which are attached to II./40MIR (“II./40”).

⁷⁶ For details on these battalions see SS Wiking’s *TOE* from 1 July 1943.

- **II./Germania** is deployed in the area of the so-called “Sickle Forest” (the forest 1 ½ km west of 188.8).
- The Estonian “**Bataillon Narwa**” was deployed north of Andreyevka in the evening hours of 18 July (relieving 257th Infantry Division units overnight). Bataillon Narwa’s 2nd Company and the 3rd Company (with the 1st Company’s 1st Platoon as reinforcement) are positioned on the frontline, while the 1st Company remains in the reserve – taking positions in the rear. The Heavy Company’s AT guns are spread out about 400 m behind the frontline, in the area between the frontline and Andreyevka village in the gully (Bataillon Narwa was equipped with additional 3 Soviet heavy AT guns transferred from the Finns). The Heavy Company’s mortars and infantry guns are positioned in front of the village on both sides of the road, on a line with the Battalion’s HQ (located in the fruit plantation northeast of Andreyevka). It is the first combat deployment of Bataillon Narwa, which had been created in the autumn of 1942 from Estonian volunteers.

SS Wiking received the following mission for 19 July:

“The Division (with attached Group Henrich and the attached elements of the 257th Infantry Division) holds the lines of resistance which were reached on 18.7 and continues to clear the Donets south bank between Semenovka and Bol. Garashevka of enemy forces.

Group Henrich – as previously ordered by the 17th Panzer Division – shall continue to clear the forest area near Semenovka of the enemy presence. (...)”

– 04.00 –

SS Wiking reports for the early morning of 19 July: “Starting from 02.15: intense enemy counterattacks from 139.4 [west of Sredniy] and the area between Zavodskoy and Sredniy.”

– 10.00 –

Soldiers from the Estonian *Bataillon Narwa* (deployed north of Andreyevka) recollect: “Shortly before ten o’clock the 3rd Company’s outposts heard the noise of the enemy’s tanks. Soon they noticed the tanks moving in their direction. The men grabbed the signal guns and shot flairs into the air to signal a tank attack. The tanks breached the wire obstacles in front of the 3rd Company fast, rolling them down at high speed, while repeatedly firing the main guns and the MGs. It seemed that they did not have a firm understanding of the Company’s positions, because after driving around aimlessly they turned 90 degrees and headed towards Andreyevka village.

Our commander had chosen good AT gun positions and soon after the enemy tanks had turned [to head towards Andreyevka village], each AT gun had a separate tank in sight. The distance decreased – 300 meters, 250 meters, 200 meters – then there was the order to open fire and soon eight tanks were engulfed in flames. The first Estonian heavy AT gun had hit the tanks in front and then aimed at the middle of the tank column, where the second heavy AT gun had already made a devastating impact. The third heavy AT gun and the light gun group blocked the tanks’ retreat route. Only three tanks were able to retreat to our main line of resistance by driving backwards, where two more of them fell prey to our tank hunters and were destroyed with magnetic mines. Thus, only one enemy tank was able to go back and bring the sad news to their command. This first attack had lasted a bit more than half an hour. The enemy’s artillery fire stopped, but the intense and disturbing mortar fire continued. The steppe grass was burning, and the thick gray smoke from it spread over our entire defense line (...).

After a couple of hours, the Russian artillery began to fire heavily, which lasted for over an hour. This was followed by another enemy tank attack (...).”

– 14.00 –

At 14.45, SS Wiking sends its short *Interim Report* for 19 July to the Corps: “Group Henrich defends against enemy counterattacks coming from the area near the Donets northwest of Semenovka. The enemy conducts tank-assaults

on Andreyevka, Zavodskoy, and Sredniy. Number of destroyed enemy tanks will be reported later. Strong enemy attacks on Sredniy out of the area at 139.4 (west of Sredniy), from the north, and the northeast were repelled and then cleared through a counterthrust. Strong enemy artillery activity. We will continue with our mission for 19.7.”

– 18.00 –

The Corps’ *Daily Report* for 19 July 1943 and SS Wiking’s sector is sent to the Army at 18.50:

- a. For the entire day the enemy attacked with strong artillery and tank support. The attacks targeted Semenovka and Andreyevka (from the forest around the collective farm) and also Sredniy [and Zavodskoy]. While all enemy attacks could be repelled in the course of the forenoon, the enemy succeeded at 15.20 in capturing Semenovka from the west and subsequently managed – after pivoting to the southwest – to break through towards Andreyevka with the support of tanks. Hereby 28 out of 30 enemy tanks were taken out in the area of Andreyevka [this was achieved by an assault gun battery of 203StugBn and elements of SS Wiking]. The enemy’s offensive in the southern direction from the area of the collective farm is still active. Around 17.00 the enemy also managed to break into Sredniy again. Countermeasures are currently being taken.
- b. Whilst in the first half of the day the consensus was that the Russians did not seem to bring up any significant additional forces from the depths of their rear area, it changed as the day progressed. From prisoner statements and the observed enemy’s actions it became apparent that the Russians have crossed the Donetsk with 2 tank brigades northwest of Semenovka and with 1 tank brigade south of Chervonnyy Shakhter (in addition to the infantry forces). It appears that the enemy deployed a tank corps in the “Semenovka – Sredniy” sector.⁷⁷

⁷⁷ Later identified as the “23rd Tank Corps with over 200 tanks”. Besides this tank corps, another enemy division was identified on 19 July: the 38th Guards Rifle Division.

– 19.00 –

Shortly thereafter, at 19.15, SS Wiking reports: “Continued enemy tank assaults on “Sredniy – Zavodskoy” and Andreyevka. (...) On 19.7 we took out 72 tanks, mostly T-34.”

– 24.00 –

At 24.00 the Corps summarizes 19 July, the third day of the Soviet Donets offensive:

“On 19.7 the enemy continued his attacks with strong forces at the points of penetration which were achieved during the previous two days. While the continued strong attacks on the eastern flank of the Corps [the area southeast of Izyum] were expected due to the known enemy force concentration there, the events took an unexpected turn on 19.7: an entire enemy tank corps appeared in the Semenovka bridgehead. It is even more surprising because no movements had been detected there in the depth of the enemy rear area.

Today’s surprise attack at “Semenovka – Sredniy”, in conjunction with the enemy’s already achieved deep penetrations southeast of Izyum on the eastern flank of the Corps, clearly demonstrate the enemy’s intention: A pincer-attack on both sides of Izyum, a double envelopment, to destroy our defense on the land front [south of Izyum].”

The Army’s and Corps’ plans for 20 July 1943

Based on the development of the situation, the Army decided that the left neighbor of the 257th Infantry Division would take over 257th Infantry Division’s quiet left sector (the sector of 477IR)⁷⁸ on the night of 19–20 July. This would (a) make 477IR available in full for employment in the threatened “Semenovka – Sredniy” sector and (b) shorten 257th Infantry Division’s line of

⁷⁸ The sector of Grenadier Regiment 477 can be seen in the upper left corner of *this annotated map*.

defense considerably – to enable the Division to hold it on its own again.⁷⁹ This in turn would allow to relieve the remaining elements of the 17th Panzer Division (Group Henrich) and also to pull back SS Wiking's units from the frontline.

II./477IR became available first on 19 July⁸⁰ and was dispatched to the south of Semenovka: Estimated time of arrival – in the early hours of 20 July. The Corps intends to then employ II./477IR in a counterattack on Semenovka in the morning of 20 July to relieve the units of Group Henrich, which have been partly trapped in the forest near the village since losing the control of the village on 19 July.

⁷⁹ The new, shortened 257th Infantry Division sector will therefore be the former sector of its Grenadier Regiment 457 as seen on *the annotated map* of the deployment at the beginning of the Soviet offensive.

⁸⁰ Being *the leftmost battalion* of Grenadier Regiment 477, II./477IR handed over its sector first.

20 July 1943

SS Wiking receives the following mission for 20 July 1943:

“The Division will attack Semenovka with the newly arrived II./477IR in cooperation with the elements of the 17th Panzer Division currently deployed in the forest at Semenovka [Group Henrich]. The purpose of II./477IR’s counterattack is to allow for the relief of those 17th Panzer Division elements, as they are partly trapped in the forest at the moment. Time of attack: Dawn. Once the mission succeeds and the 17th Panzer Division elements are no longer trapped in the forest, the 2nd line positions south of Semenovka will be occupied and held by units of the 257th Infantry Division [giving up on Semenovka and the forest north and west of it, while still holding the positions at the main line of resistance along the Donets to the northeast of Semenovka. The relieved 17th Panzer Division elements (Group Henrich) will then return under the control of the 17th Panzer Division in the southeast].”

Apart from this mission, the Corps order is to generally hold the current line of resistance in the Division’s sector on 20 July and to prevent the enemy from making any further gains. Furthermore, everything shall be prepared to relieve the major part of SS Wiking out of the frontline by the morning of 21 July, with the 257th Infantry Division taking over again.

– 02.00 –

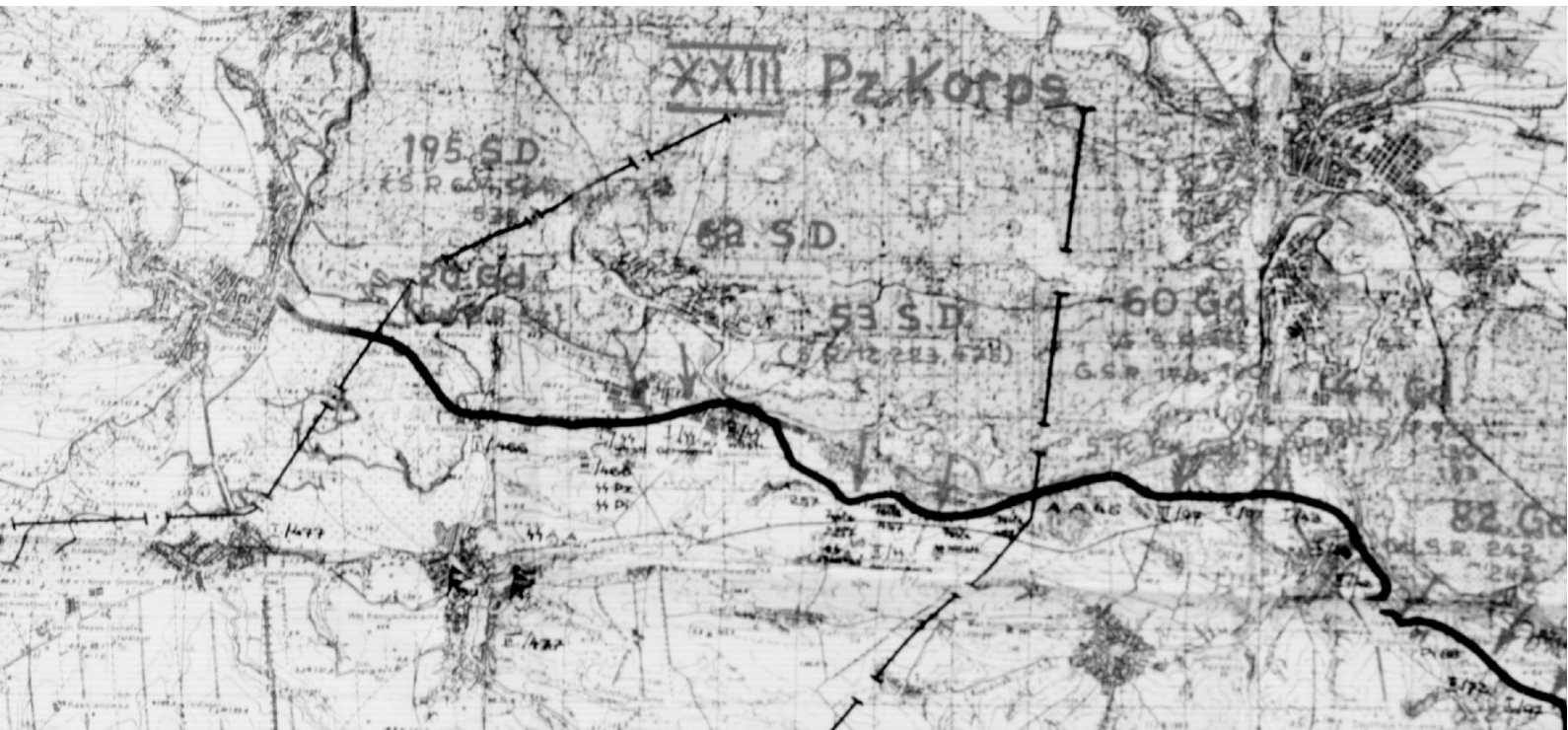
During the night, elements of SS Wiking manage to fight their way back into the western part of Sredniy, but in response to strong enemy counterattacks and heavy hostile artillery fire, they have to abandon the village at around 02.00, forming a defensive front south of it.

– 05.00 –

II./477IR arrives south of Semenovka according to plan and begins its attack on Semenovka at dawn. But it cannot penetrate through, the attack is unsuccessful. Because of this, the planned relief and transfer of Group Henrich to the southeast of Izyum is still not possible and postponed.

– 08.00 –

At 08.00 the Corps issues a situation map showing the current main line of resistance:



40th Panzer Corps – Situation map, 08.00 on 20.7.43

The map shows that Sredniy and Semenovka were lost, while Andreyevka, the “Sickle Forest”, and the eastern part of Zavodskoy are still held at 08.00 on 20.7. Also note the attacking Soviet formations identified up to date: the 53rd Rifle Division, 62nd Rifle Division, 20th Guards Rifle Division, 195th Rifle Division, and the 23rd Tank Corps. The considerably shortened sector on the left wing of the Corps can also be seen on this map (essentially the old regimental sector of 257th Infantry Division’s 457IR with the left boundary east of Petrovskaya).

– 10.00 –

At 10.00 the enemy starts an attack from Semenovka to the northeast. The attack is repelled. At 13.50 the enemy attempts three attacks from Semenovka against Group Henrich's right wing. All of these attacks are repelled too.

– 14.00 –

At 14.40, SS Wiking reports to the Corps that preparations for the reorganization of the defensive area and the relief of Group Henrich, plus the relief of the major part of SS Wiking by the 257th Infantry Division (according to the orders) are underway.

Shortly prior to that, at 14.30, the 257th Infantry Division also reported that preparations for the takeover were ongoing. The commander of the Division, Generalleutnant *Püchler*, who monitors the reorganization himself in situ (in the grove 1.5 km south of Semenovka), was hit in the shoulder by a shell fragment, but insists on staying with his troops despite being lightly wounded.

– 19.00 –

In the evening of 20 July, at 19.10, the Commanding General of the 40th Panzer Corps calls the commander of SS Wiking (SS-Brigadeführer *Gille*):

Gille briefs the Commanding General that the enemy's attacks in the SS Wiking sector had lasted all day on 20 July, but that all of them were repelled. When the Commanding General asks when the remaining 17th Panzer Division elements at Semenovka (Group Henrich) will finally be relieved, *Gille* further explains that everything is prepared to finally relieve them as ordered by the Corps, but some elements (namely the 2 weak battalions plus the combat engineer remnants under the command of Oberst *Henrich*) can only be pulled out at darkness. Thus, Group Henrich will finally be relieved on the night of 20–21 July.

– 19.30 –

At 19.30 the Commanding General calls SS Wiking (SS-Brigadeführer *Gille*) again: The situation southeast of Izyum has worsened and the own forces currently deployed in the threatened area are completely insufficient (an enemy breakthrough towards Slavyansk needs to be prevented). The Corps therefore orders SS Wiking that in addition to Group Henrich, elements of SS Wiking are also to be transferred to the southeast on the night of 20–21 July.

The Army sees this new order as acceptable for SS Wiking, since it was planned to relieve the major part of SS Wiking out of the main line by the morning of 21 July anyway (with 257th Infantry Division's units taking over again). Only SS Wiking's Bataillon Narwa will remain at the frontline north of Andreyevka for another day as no 257th Infantry Division unit is available to relieve it yet. SS Wiking is furthermore ordered to hold an armored reserve behind the 257th Infantry Division to have some of its units in readiness for immediate tactical commitment at Semenovka if needed. The reason being that the Army currently sees the Semenovka area as a “sore spot” of the Corps sector.

– 24.00 –

At 24.00 the 40th Panzer Corps concludes 20 July 1943 with the following war diary entry:

“On the 4th day of the large-scale offensive against the Corps front, the commendable conduct of our troops continued to deny the enemy his desperately sought operational breakthrough. It is expected that the enemy will carry on with strong attacks against our entire front, not only because the appearance of additional enemy formations has been observed in front of the Corps, but also because of the Russian tendency to doggedly follow a decision once it is made.”

21 July 1943

– 00.00 –

The 5th day of the Soviet Donets offensive. The Commander-in-Chief of the 1st Panzer Army issues a message to be announced to all troops of the 40th Panzer Corps (among them the 257th Infantry Division, 17th Panzer Division, and SS Panzer Grenadier Division “Wiking”):

“The troops of the Corps are now in the 5th day of the heaviest, most heroic defensive fighting. The conduct of the troops and leaders is beyond all praise. I am proud to lead such men and can only reverently admire the successes achieved during these five days.

Soldiers of the Corps, you only need to hold out on your own a short time longer, new friendly forces are approaching. Keep your honor and hold your ground as before. (...) ⁸¹ The Russians shall not take the Donbas from us.”

[Signed] Generaloberst *Eberhard von Mackensen*

Added to the above Army message is a note by the Commanding General of the 40th Panzer Corps:

“I was instructed to ensure that this message gets to the troops safely and does not fall into the hands of the enemy. Destroy immediately after announcement (...).”

[Signed] General der Panzertruppen *Sigfrid Henrici*

The situation at Semenovka in the morning of 21 July 1943:

1. By the morning of 21 July the major part of SS Wiking had been pulled out of the main line of resistance with 257th Infantry Division’s units taking over again. Only SS Wiking’s “Bataillon Narwa”

⁸¹ Ideological segment omitted by the editors.

remains deployed for defense in the area north of Andreyevka, because no 257th Infantry Division unit is available to relieve it yet.

2. SS Wiking received orders to hold an armored reserve in readiness behind the 257th Infantry Division for immediate tactical commitment. The reason being that the Army currently sees the Semenovka area as a “sore spot” of the Corps sector. On 21 July elements of SS Wiking’s tank battalion I./SS 5TR are thus deployed as a ready reserve in Vel. Kamyshevakha.
3. Additionally, SS Wiking was ordered to deploy its recon battalion as a contact battalion behind the right wing of the 257th Infantry Division. It occupies a boundary position between the 257th and 46th Infantry Divisions in the small forest 2 km southeast of Semenovka.
4. A composite AT battalion (called “Menzel”) from the left neighbor corps was transferred to the Semenovka area with its 2 heavy AT gun companies (one taken from the 15th Infantry Division, the other from the 328th Infantry Division). The HQ and one company are deployed in the Petropolye area, the other company is deployed at Barabashevka.
5. Artillery positions were reorganized by the morning of 21 July: One artillery group is now deployed between Andreyevka and Barabashevka, another group between Barabashevka and Vel. Kamyshevakha, and a third group east of the line “Andreyevka – Petropolye”, because a continuation of the enemy attacks especially from the vicinity of Semenovka is expected.

– 11.00 –

The Army reports: “From 11.00, the enemy is attacking with substantial forces, targeting the elements of SS Wiking and the 257th Infantry Division, which are deployed in the area southwest of Semenovka.” The enemy also attacks at Zavodskoy and Sredniy (supported by strong artillery and MLRS fire).

At 15.30 the 2nd (light) Tank Company of SS Wiking's tank battalion I./SS 5TR is dispatched to Andreyevka on order of the Division with:⁸²

- 7x Pz. III long,
- 4x Pz. III 7.5 cm short,
- 2x Pz. IV 7.5 cm long.

The task of the 2nd Tank Company is to support Bataillon Narwa, which at this moment is the aim of another strong tank-supported enemy attack. To reinforce the 2nd Tank Company (which is only equipped with 2x Pz. IV long) a platoon of the 3rd (medium) Tank Company is additionally dispatched to Andreyevka at 16.00. This platoon is equipped with:

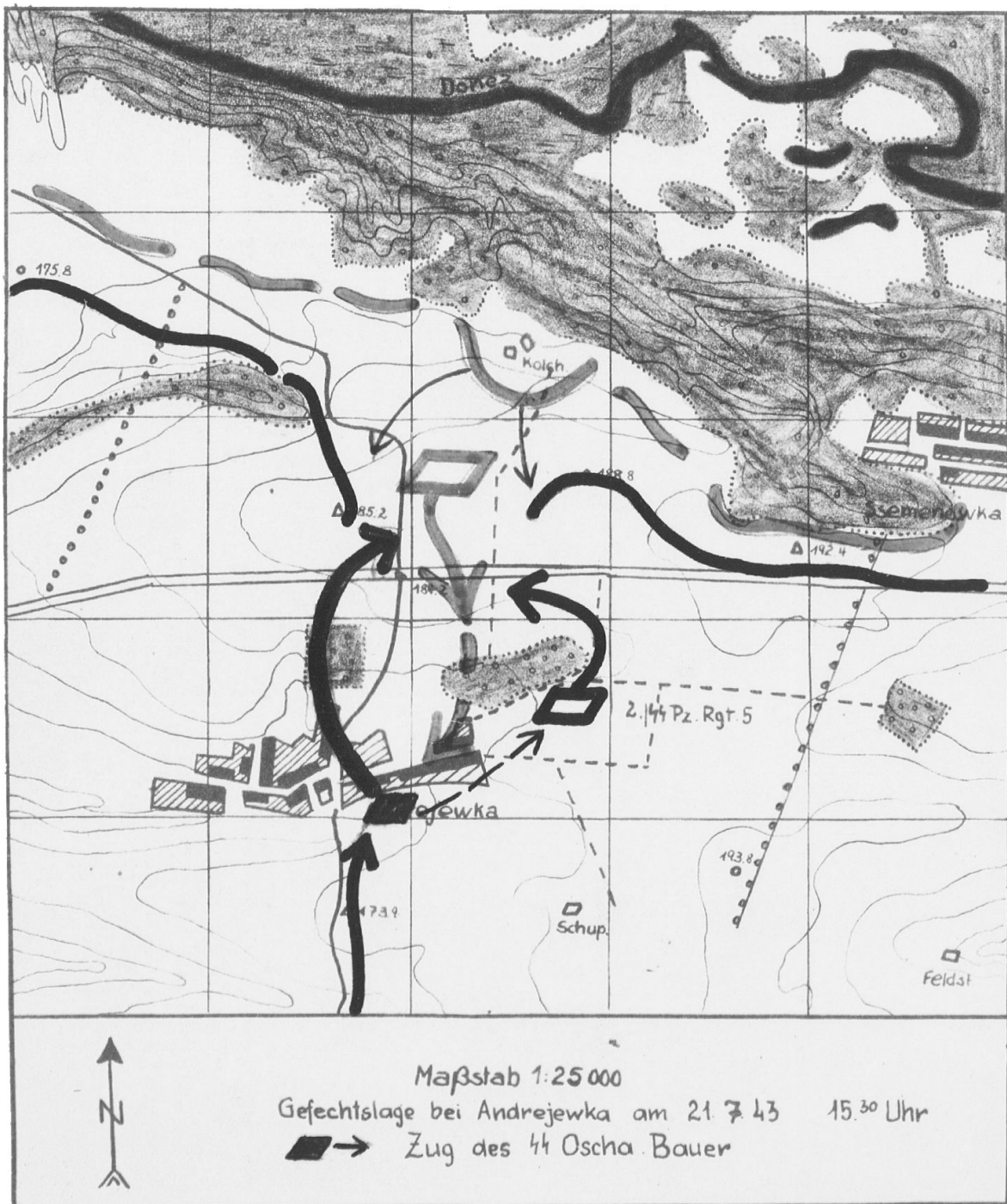
- 4x Pz. IV 7.5 cm long.

On the march to Andreyevka, the platoon's leader tries to get in radio contact with the commander of the 2nd Tank Company, but radio communication cannot be established. When the platoon reaches Andreyevka, they find the village under heavy enemy artillery fire and spot the 2nd Tank Company positioned along the path leading eastwards out of the settlement. The Company's lead elements are located at the fruit plantation right to the northeast of the village. The platoon leader thus directs his tanks towards the houses in the eastern part of Andreyevka, to personally report to the 2nd Company's commander. At this time an enemy tank group appears on the high ground west of point 188.8; the group has broken through the infantry and is now advancing towards Andreyevka. The 2nd Tank Company launches a counterattack against these enemy tanks immediately.

This happens before the platoon of the 3rd Tank Company is able to make contact with the 2nd Tank Company, the platoon's leader therefore does not receive any instructions from the commander of the 2nd Tank Company and

⁸² The TOE of SS Wiking's I./SS 5TR from 1 July 1943 can be seen *here* ("I./SS Pz. Reg. 5"). The 1st and 2nd Companies are *light* ("le"), while the 3rd Company is a *medium* ("m") tank company. Note: The numbering in German TOEs proceeds from right to left. The tank types and quantities are listed below the tank company symbols (parallelograms).

has to act independently. He instantly realizes the favorable situation of his platoon. On his own initiative, he decides not to follow behind the 2nd Tank Company, but instead leads his platoon into the northern part of Andreyevka, then crosses the fruit plantation north of the village and attacks the flank of the enemy tank formation, which by now is already engaged in heavy fighting with the 2nd Tank Company. A one-and-a-half-hour tank battle follows.



I./SS Panzer Regiment 5 – Situation at Andreyevka on 21.7.43, 15.30 hours

– 18.00 –

In the one-and-a-half-hour tank battle at Andreyevka, the 2nd Tank Company and the platoon of the 3rd Tank Company took out a total of 27 enemy tanks. Of these, the platoon of the 3rd Tank Company (with its 4x Pz. IV long) left 13 enemy tanks burning on the battlefield (11x T-34, 1x Mark IV ‘Churchill’, and 1x T-70), while suffering no losses itself.⁸³ Command estimates that probably even more enemy tanks were knocked out or damaged by the platoon of the 3rd Tank Company, but it could not be reliably confirmed during the chaotic fighting.

– 22.00 –

The Army summarizes 21 July 1943:

”From 11.00, the enemy attacked with substantial forces, targeting the elements of SS Wiking and the 257th Infantry Division, which were deployed in the area southwest of Semenovka. About 50 enemy tanks without infantry managed to break through towards Andreyevka; 37 of these tanks were taken out. Bataillon Narwa had huge losses there. This battalion is fighting exceptionally.⁸⁴ At Zavodskoy and Sredniy several enemy attacks (supported by strong artillery and MLRS fire) were repelled, but in the afternoon [at around 18.00] Zavodskoy was lost – with this the enemy has a continuous bridgehead there again. We are now holding the defensive positions south of the village.”⁸⁵

⁸³ Because of the fact that the platoon leader did this with only 4 tanks at his disposal “on the basis of an independent decision with the most outstanding commitment of his person [always driving at the head of his platoon during the attack] and without sustaining any losses”, he is later considered worthy of being awarded the Knight’s Cross of the Iron Cross: “Together with his platoon he was instrumental in breaking up the enemy tank assault, which had already advanced deep into our main defensive area.”

⁸⁴ Around noon on 21 July, the commander of Bataillon Narwa, SS-Sturmbannführer *Georg Eberhardt*, was heavily wounded and died shortly later. There are conflicting accounts of the events leading to his death. He was posthumously awarded the Knight’s Cross of the Iron Cross on 4th August 1943.

⁸⁵ See the map on the next page.



40th Panzer Corps – Situation at Izyum on 21.7.43

The map shows the German withdrawal from Zavodskoy to defensive positions south of the village. It also shows the Soviet breakthrough north of Andreyevka that was followed by German counterattacks on 21.7.

– 24.00 –

The commander of the 257th Infantry Division summarizes 21 July, the 5th day of the defensive battle:

“This day saw a massed attack by the entire enemy tank corps. Our infantry let the enemy tanks roll over their positions without panic, separated the enemy infantry from the tanks and threw the infantry back. The remaining enemy tanks withdrew after the major part was taken out by the AT units in our rear, while some tanks had already been stopped before our main line by artillery fire. After this defeat, the enemy ordered (according to an intercepted radio call) that tanks are only to be employed behind the infantry from now on. In the evening our current main line of resistance is in our hands again. The day was another big defense success of our Division, infantry-wise reinforced by Bataillon Narwa. (...) The Division and SS Wiking together took out over 100 tanks on just this day.⁸⁶ One AT gun crew of 257ATBn alone took out 7 tanks.

⁸⁶ The Corps only reports 70 destroyed enemy tanks, which is more consistent with the data from the Soviet documents, counting 71 tanks lost on this day.

The following new attacking enemy formations were identified today: the 57th Rifle Division (in the Semenovka area) and the 10th Separate Breakthrough Tank Regiment.⁸⁷ Despite that, the 257th Infantry Division agreed to pull Bataillon Narwa out of the main line during the night, the reason being that this Battalion has suffered heavy losses taking part in especially hard battles.”

⁸⁷ German intelligence did not identify this tank regiment and the 57th Guards Rifle Division as “guards” formations.

22 July 1943

– 00.00 –

The 6th day of the Soviet Donets offensive. With the last of SS Wiking's infantry battalions (Bataillon Narwa) being on its way out of the main line of resistance, the 257th Infantry Division is now on its own again infantry-wise for the first time since the beginning of the Soviet offensive.

The 257th Infantry Division is supported on 22 July only by:

- elements of SS Wiking's artillery regiment (SS 5AR),
- half of SS Wiking's tank battalion (I./SS 5TR),
- and 2 heavy AT gun companies from the left neighbor corps (AT Battalion Menzel).

On 22 July, at 00.00 hours, the 257th Infantry Division command staff also formally assumes full control over the Division's old, but now considerably shortened sector again. The Division reports to the Corps that it expects the enemy to continue his offensive action in the Semenovka area on 22 July.

– 04.00 –

With daybreak the enemy begins to attack 257th Infantry Division's frontline with the support of ground attack aircraft and strong artillery.⁸⁸ The enemy's tanks stay behind the infantry initially (about 30 tanks are spotted west of Semenovka and 30 west of Zavodskoy).

The Soviet air force constantly attacks all over 257th Infantry Division's sector with low-flying airplanes.

⁸⁸ 257th Infantry Division's main line of resistance and deployment on 22 July 1943 (08.00) can be seen on *this* situation map.

- 12.00 -

All enemy attacks during the first half of the day broke down in front of the 257th Infantry Division's current main line of resistance under collective defensive fire.

- 15.00 -

The 257th Infantry Division reports to the Corps that it observes assembling enemy forces northwest of Semenovka and southeast of Zavodskoy. This – as well as continued strong hostile artillery fire – seem to indicate that more enemy attacks are upcoming. During a Stuka airstrike west of Semenovka, explosions and strong smoke development out of the wooded area are observed.

- 17.00 -

At 17.00, after a sudden artillery and MLRS drum fire, the enemy infantry renews its offensive action along the entire 257th Infantry Division front. The attack's two points of main effort are very close together: southeast and southwest of Zavodskoy. The enemy employs very strong infantry forces in this area. Because of the bad experiences of the previous day, the enemy's tanks now stay behind.

Until 20.00 the enemy infantry attacks repeat twice (thrice at the points of main effort) and always with a strong artillery and MLRS preparation along the entire front of the 257th Infantry Division.

- 22.00 -

By 22.30 all points of penetration through the current main line of resistance have been cleared by counterthrusts, but the 257th Infantry Division had to employ its very last available forces for combat: personnel from supply trains

and staff personnel of the Division. The Division reports that on this day all enemy formations identified so far (with the exception of the 195th Rifle Division) participated in the attacks:

- 20th, 38th, 62nd Guards Rifle Divisions,
- 53rd, 57th Rifle Divisions,
- 23rd Tank Corps with the 10th Separate Breakthrough Tank Regiment.

– 24.00 –

The 257th Infantry Division estimates that the enemy's fighting force is severely weakened by the end of 22 July, with several of the enemy's formations being destroyed.

Reconnaissance later observes that the enemy begins to fortify his bridgehead, captured on the southern bank of the Donets during the 6-day-long battle.

Conclusion

The 40th Panzer Corps concludes in its final report on the defensive battles from 17 July to 23 July 1943:

“The enemy's rifle regiments (advancing in 3 waves) and the supporting tank formations and mot. brigades attacked for 6 days with unabated vehemence. Then, on the 7th day (23 July), the attack could be seen as broken up. The ruthless, brutal Russian leadership probably led to the gradual attrition of the attack forces. Nevertheless it must be made clear to all our troop commanders again and again: In the currently reached decisive point of this war, the slightest slackening of our commanders' and troops' *will to resist* can tip the balance and allow the attacker to achieve success.”

The 257th Infantry Division, deployed on the left wing of the Corps (at Semenovka and westwards), summarizes in its after action report:

“Since 17.7 the Division had been defending against 6 infantry divisions (some of them were guards rifle divisions), 1 tank corps with 3 tank brigades and 1 motorized rifle regiment, and 1 separate breakthrough tank regiment. An enemy breakthrough was thwarted(...). Despite vastly outnumbering us in artillery and tanks, mass employment of the air force, and an infantry force several times larger than ours, the enemy did not succeed in breaking through our main defensive area – not even in a single instance.

The new main line of resistance is in the worst case about 2 km behind the old main line. On the right and left boundaries it stayed at the Donets, where it was before the start of the enemy offensive.⁸⁹ (...)

There were several episodes of field artillery batteries engaging the attacking enemy with direct fire.

Units of the Division were responsible for knocking out 80 enemy tanks; some of these were taken out in close combat. The Division’s AA company shot down 2 planes and contributed to bringing down 2 more. The losses table, attached to this after action report, demonstrates the intensity of the enemy’s attacks.⁹⁰ The low number of MIAs – most of them were probably killed in the artillery drum fire – reflects the excellent fighting spirit of our troops. The enemy’s losses are so high that a large part of his formations must be considered as severely weakened or destroyed, especially his armored formations.

The Division – although weakened by losses and heavy physical strain – is prepared to face inevitable renewed enemy attacks with a tougher and more determined fighting spirit than before. But it is essential that

⁸⁹ The map on the next page shows this new main line of resistance.

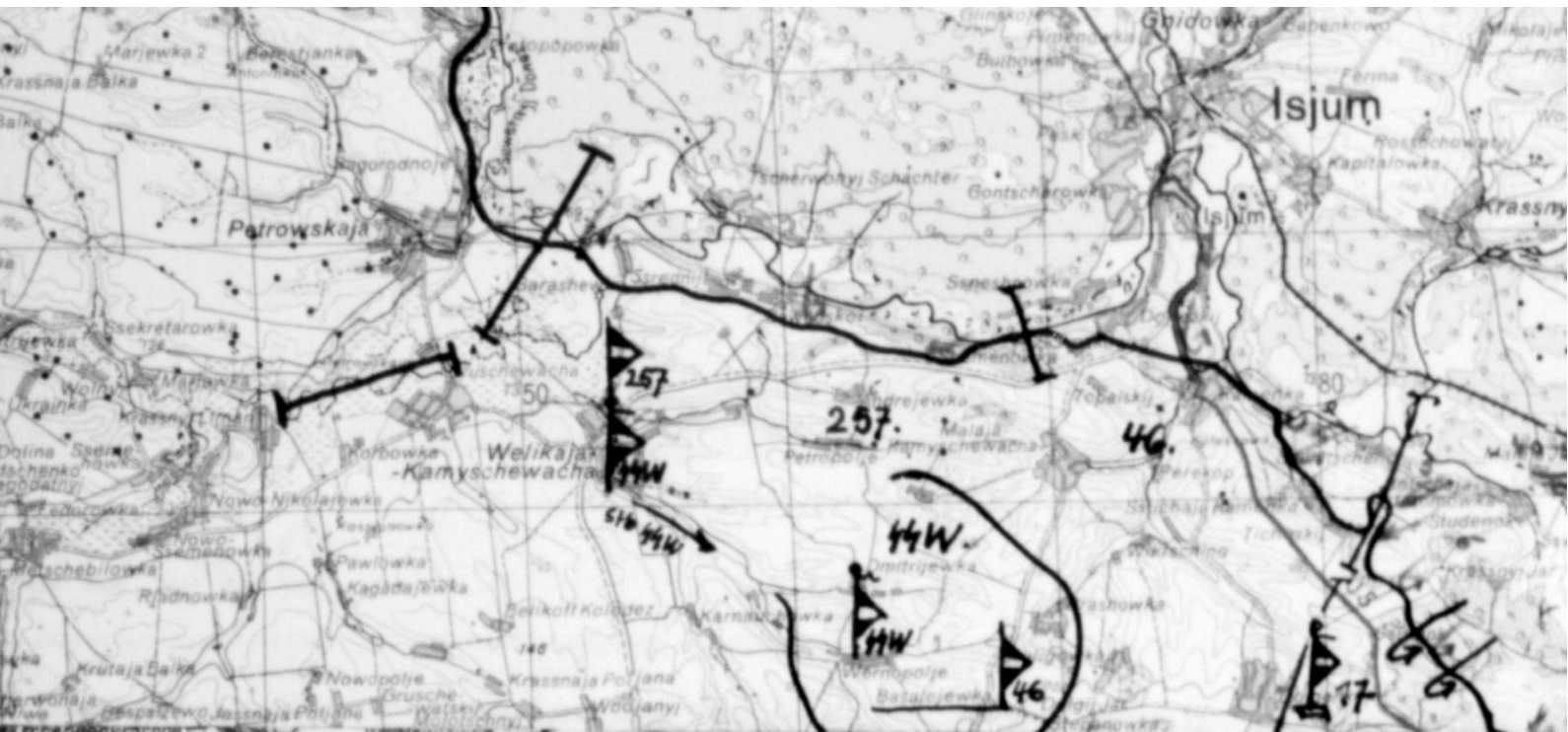
⁹⁰ This detailed 257th Infantry Division losses table for 17–22 July 1943 can be seen *here* (“*gefallen*” = KIA, “*verwundet*” = wounded, “*vermisst*” = MIA).

Total losses (killed, missing, wounded) during this period, based on the final reports of the participating divisions, were: 257th Infantry Division – 2514 men, 17th Panzer Division – 1635 men, SS Panzer Grenadier Division “Wiking” – 867 men. For details see p. 140.

the currently assigned reinforcements (artillery and AT defense) remain available for the foreseeable future. And we need more ammunition, in particular to counter the hostile artillery.”

[Signed]

257th Infantry Division Commander, Generalleutnant *Carl Püchler*



40th Panzer Corps – Situation as of 22.7.43⁹¹

⁹¹ Also see the *Army High Command Situation Map* for 23.7.43 showing the main line of resistance before and after the Soviet offensive (the dashed line marks the main line before 17 July, while the continuous line shows the course of the new main line of resistance after the Soviet offensive).

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Abbreviations

Red Army

Gds	“Guards” honorific title
RD	Rifle Division
BtAD	Breakthrough Artillery Division
TBde	Tank Brigade
MRBde	Motorized Rifle Brigade
ATABde	Destroyer Anti-Tank Artillery Brigade
EngBde	Engineer-Sapper Brigade
PBde	Pontoon-Bridge Brigade
LABde	Light Artillery Brigade
GABde	Gun Artillery Brigade
Gds MtrBde	Guards Mortar Brigade
RR	Rifle Regiment
AR	Artillery Regiment (organic divisional artillery)
MtrR	Mortar Regiment (organic or Supreme High Command Reserve)
Gds MtrR	Guards Mortar Regiment
HAR	Howitzer Artillery Regiment
LAR	Light Artillery Regiment
ATAR	Destroyer Anti-Tank Artillery Regiment
GAR	Gun Artillery Regiment
CAR	Corps Artillery Regiment
AAAR	Anti-aircraft Artillery Regiment

TR Separate Tank Regiment
Gds BtTR Separate Guards Breakthrough Tank Regiment

RBn Rifle Battalion
MRBn Motorized Rifle Battalion or Motorized Rifle-Machine
Gun Battalion
TBn Tank Battalion
EngBn Engineer-Sapper Battalion
ATBn Destroyer Anti-Tank Artillery Battalion
ATRBn Anti-Tank Rifle Battalion
AAABn Anti-Aircraft Artillery Battalion
Gds MtrBn Guards Mortar Battalion
SigBn Signal Battalion
MclBn Motorcycle Battalion
ACarBn Armored Car Reconnaissance Battalion

Additional information:

- *Light Artillery* – divisional 76.2mm guns
- *Guards Mortar* – artillery units equipped with multiple rocket launchers (MLRS). They were designated as “Guards” at formation.
- *Guards Breakthrough Tank* – heavy tanks (KV or Churchill tanks). They were designated as “Guards” at formation.
- *Separate* – a designation for a unit that has its own services and can perform missions independently (it is omitted for units that qualify unambiguously, like rifle regiments for example). These units are assigned unique numbers.

German Army

ID	Infantry Division
TD	Panzer Division [= Tank Division]
AR	Artillery Regiment
IR	Grenadier Regiment [= Infantry Regiment] ⁹²
MIR	Panzer Grenadier Regiment [= Motorized/Mechanized Infantry Regiment]
TR	Panzer Regiment [= Tank Regiment]
AABn	Anti-Aircraft Battalion
ATBn	Anti-Tank Battalion
EngBn	Engineer Battalion
StugBn	Sturmgeschütz Battalion [= Assault Gun Battalion]

Additional information:

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

Examples:

- 2./457IR = 2nd company of Grenadier Regiment 457
- II./466IR = 2nd battalion of Grenadier Regiment 466
- 4./257AR = 4th battery of Artillery Regiment 257
- I./257AR = 1st battalion of Artillery Regiment 257

⁹² On 15 October 1942 all German Army infantry regiments were renamed with the title "Grenadier". Reason for the introduction of the "Grenadier" title was to raise the morale of the infantry (instead of being a mere "rifleman", one now held the title of a "Grenadier"). It was only done on regimental level (and below), on divisional level the designation "Infanterie" was kept. Hence it was still "Infanterie-Division", despite them now consisting of "Grenadier" regiments.

Miscellaneous

AA	Anti-aircraft
AT	Anti-tank
ATR	Anti-tank rifle
DFP	Defensive fighting position
HE	High-explosive
HMG	Heavy machine gun
HQ	Headquarters
KIA	Killed in action
LMG	Light machine gun
MIA	Missing in action
MLRS	Multiple rocket launcher
OOB	Order of battle
SMG	Submachine gun
SPG	Self-propelled gun
TOE	Table of organization and equipment

Locations

This section contains coordinates of several important locations (villages, heights, gullies, etc.) mentioned in the translated documents. Generally, the German spelling of location names is similar enough to their English equivalents to be identifiable, it is therefore recommended to use this German Army topographic map from 1943: *Izyum M-37-99 (1:100,000)*.⁹³

<i>Settlements</i>	<i>Heights</i>
Andreyevka: 6244	63.4: 6446
Barabashevka: 5642	64.7: 5749*
Bol. Garazhevka: 5449*	107.2: 7054
Bulbovka: 7056	117.4: 5854
Chervonny Shakhter: 5850	123.7: 6254
Donetskiy: 7246	124.7: 6452
Ekhnichevka: 6846	128.1: 5446
Izyum: 7452	133.8: 6458
Kamenka: 7444	150.0: 6644*
Kopanki: 6440	173.4: 6644
Mal. Kamyshevakha: 6840	183.1: 7042
Petropolye: 6042	184.2: 6244
Peski: 7052	185.2: 6245*
Semenovka: 6444	188.8: 6244
Shpakovka: 6846	192.4: 6444
Sredniy: 5648	193.8: 6443*
Vel. Kamyshevakha: 5442	197.2: 6844
Zavodskoy: 6046	197.3: 6442

⁹³ Locations with coordinates that are marked with * can be found on this Soviet 1:50,000 map instead.

Other Locations

Apiary:	6246
Ford 0.6/T:	6446
Gully Bol. Vidnoga:	6642 ⁹⁴
Gully Kopanskiy	6640
Gully Mal. Vidnoga:	6642 ⁹⁵
Gully Vyazovatyy Yar:	6644 – 4268
Gully Zhovtunovskoye:	6440 ⁹⁶
Izyum bridgehead:	7446 – 7452 ⁹⁷
Mouth of the Bereka river:	5249*
Tenant Farm (near +1.0):	6246

⁹⁴ Unmarked (northern wooded arm)

⁹⁵ Unmarked (southern wooded arm)

⁹⁶ Unmarked (starts east of 197.3)

⁹⁷ The Izyum bridgehead is marked in darker red on *this annotated map*. German forces referred to the frontline along the Soviet Izyum bridgehead as “land front (south of Izyum)”.

Maps and Aerial Photographs

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Red Army Maps

Southwestern Front

Southwestern Front – Izyum-Barvenkovo offensive operation (17–27.7.43)

4th Guards Rifle Corps

4th Guards Rifle Corps – Repositioning for the Izyum-Barvenkovo offensive.

4th Guards Rifle Corps – Plan for the offensive as of 13.7.43.

4th Guards Rifle Corps – Rear units and supply routes as of 18:00 on 16.7.43.

4th Guards Rifle Corps – Plan for the organization of communications as of 16.7.43.

4th Guards Rifle Corps – Plan for the offensive as of 20.7.43.

4th Guards Rifle Corps – Enemy positions between Bol. Garazhevka – Shpakovka
as of 23.7.43.

53rd Rifle Division

53rd Rifle Division – Own forces and known enemy positions prior to the offensive

53rd Rifle Division – Plan of attack

53rd Rifle Division – Positions at the end of 17.7.43

53rd Rifle Division – Positions at 11:00 on 18.7.43, at the end of 18.7.43 , and
on 19.7.43

53rd Rifle Division – Positions at the conclusion of the operation

23rd Tank Corps

23rd Tank Corps – March to the frontline (12–14.7.43)

23rd Tank Corps – The Corps Commander's plan to exploit a breakthrough by
moving in from the Izyum bridgehead (17.7.43)

23rd Tank Corps – Redeployment for the crossing attempts (17–19.7.43)
23rd Tank Corps – Offensive in cooperation with 57 Gds RD (19–21.7.43)
23rd Tank Corps – Tank losses (18–23.7.43)
23rd Tank Corps – Enemy defenses according to recon (24.7.43)
23rd Tank Corps – Withdrawal (25.7.43)

3rd Tank Brigade

3rd Tank Brigade – Attack of the 584th Tank Battalion and the motor-rifle battalion on Sredniy and Zavodskoy (18.7.43)
3rd Tank Brigade – 584th Tank Battalion and the motor-rifle battalion advance with the objective to reach the 585th Tank Battalion (21.7.43)
3rd Tank Brigade – 585th Tank Battalion attacks towards Kopanki (21.7.43)
3rd Tank Brigade – Knocked out enemy tanks
3rd Tank Brigade – Lost tanks (18–23.7.43)

56th Motorized Rifle Brigade

56th Motorized Rifle Brigade – Map of engagements (19–24.7.43)

10th Guards Breakthrough Tank Regiment

10th Breakthrough Tank Regiment – Tank company routes and losses (21.7.43)

German Army Situation Maps

15 – 16 July 1943

- Army High Command – Eastern Front, evening of 16.7.43
- 40th Panzer Corps – Defense sector at Izyum (257th, 46th, 333rd Infantry Divisions), 15.7.43 [**Annotated Version**]
- 257th Infantry Division – Deployment, 15.7.43 [**Annotated Version**]
- 24th Panzer Corps – Deployment behind the 40th Panzer Corps as reserve with 17th Panzer Division and SS Panzer Grenadier Division “Wiking”

17 – 23 July 1943

- Army High Command – Izyum area, evening of 17.7.43
- Army High Command – Izyum area, evening of 18.7.43
- 40th Panzer Corps – Situation at Izyum on 20.7.43 at 08.00
- 40th Panzer Corps – Situation at Izyum on 21.7.43
- I./SS Panzer Regiment 5 – Situation at Andreyevka on 21.7.43 at 15.30
- 40th Panzer Corps – Situation as of 22.7.43
- Army High Command – Eastern Front (South), evening of 23.7.43

German Aerial Reconnaissance Photographs

2 July 1943 (18.35)

- Semenovka village
- Area around Semenovka
- 1 km south of Semenovka

18 July 1943 (12.30)

- Semenovka village
- Western part of Semenovka
- Soviet military bridge between Semenovka and Zavodskoy
- Northern part of Zavodskoy
- Area between Zavodskoy and Sredniy
- Northwestern part of Sredniy

German Army Topographic Maps

Topographic Maps from 1943

- Izyum M-37-99 (1:100,000)
- Izyum M-37-99-C (1:50,000)
- Izyum Z-50 (1:300,000)