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**OREL OFFENSIVE OPERATION (12 July – 18 August, 1943):
SUCCESS AND FAILURES OF THE RED ARMY COMMAND REGARDING
THE ARMORED AND MECHANIZED TROOPS USE**

Abstract. *The purpose of the study is to reveal the contribution to the development of the operational art of mass use during offensive operations of tank armies and corps as mobile groups of fronts and armies, respectively. The research methodology is to use a set of methods: dialectical, analytical, historical, biographical, comparative. This methodological approach made it possible to retrospectively analyze the use of large tank formations, units during the Red Army offensive operation, during the breakthrough of a strong deep-seated enemy defense, which has not been in any previous operation since the beginning of the German-Soviet war. The scientific novelty of the obtained results lies both in the formulation of the problem and in the complex approach to its solution, which is due to the absence in the domestic historiography of special historical generalizing works on the specified subject within the specified chronological limits. The Conclusions.* During World War II the armored troops were the main striking forces while conducting ground operations. The authors continue to explore the role of the armored troops in the delivery of front and army operations. The article focuses on the research of the large armored formations use during the Red Army offensive operation, as the

only operation of the Western, Bryansk and Central Fronts, a crucial component of the Battle of Kursk at the breakthrough of the heavily defended enemy's positions, that hadn't occurred yet in any operation since the beginning of the German-Soviet War. The approaches to strategic and operational planning, peculiarities of implementing ideas of the Supreme Command concerning employment of three tank armies and seven separate tank brigades in one offensive operation as well as the errors committed in the decision making process of Orel offensive operation have been analyzed. In the research, the war art of the Supreme Command has been examined on the background of Orel offensive operation that was preplanned, unlike Moscow and Stalingrad strategic attack campaigns, which were planned during the defensive operations, even before the start of the Battle of Kursk. Consequently, Orel offensive operation has been studied in the frame of the whole Battle of Kursk. It was not perfect due to the structure of the field staff (headquarters) as well as its preparation and cohesion. The study focuses on the investigation of the armored troops operations during the combat, the use of the separate armored and mechanized corps, which were firstly used as mobile armies and armored armies – leading front formations, which gave impact to the development of martial arts. That was the first operation of the Red Army since the beginning of the German-Soviet War, when three tank armies were involved into one attack campaign operation. The first experience of efficient exploitation of the self-propelled artillery regiments in order to support the advance of tanks and infantry has been also emphasized.

Key words: Orel offensive operation, the Supreme Command Headquarters, front, tank army, tank corps, brigade, enemy.

ОРЛОВСЬКА НАСТУПАЛЬНА ОПЕРАЦІЯ (12 липня – 18 серпня 1943 р.): ЗДОБУТКИ ТА ПРОРАХУНКИ КОМАНДУВАННЯ ЧЕРВОНОЇ АРМІЇ ЩОДО ЗАСТОСУВАННЯ БРОНЕТАНКОВИХ ТА МЕХАНІЗОВАНИХ ВІЙСЬК

Анотація. *Мета дослідження* – розкрити внесок у розвиток оперативного мистецтва масованого застосування під час наступальних операцій танкових армій і корпусів у якості рухомих груп фронтів і армій відповідно. **Методологія дослідження** полягає у використанні сукупності методів: діалектичного, аналітичного, історичного, біографічного, порівняльного. Зазначений методологічний підхід дав змогу ретроспективно проаналізувати застосування великих танкових об'єднань, з'єднань під час проведення військами Червоної армії наступальної операції та здійснення прориву міцної глибокоошелюнованої оборони противника, якої ще не було в жодній попередній операції від початку німецько-радянської війни. **Наукова новизна** одержаних результатів полягає як у постановці проблеми, так і у комплексному підході до її вирішення, що зумовлено відсутністю у вітчизняній історіографії спеціальних історичних узагальнюючих праць з означеної тематики у вказаних хронологічних межах. **Висновки.** Під час Орловської наступальної операції (12 липня – 18 серпня 1943 р.) вперше від початку німецько-радянської війни масово було застосовано великі танкові з'єднання – три танкові армії, сім окремих танкових корпусів, сім танкових бригад, двадцять сім танкових полків і п'ятнадцять самохідно-артилерійських полків в одній наступальній операції, що дало можливість домогтися переломних результатів, які мали вирішальне значення для наступного ходу війни. Танкові армії стали основним засобом розвитку успіху фронтів, а танкові і механізовані корпуси – загальновійськових армій. Особливістю застосування танкових бригад було те, що вони не дробилися і не додавалися стрілецьким полкам, а діяли на напрямку головного удару стрілецької дивізії, що суттєво збільшувало силу удару.

Ключові слова: Орловська наступальна операція, Ставка ВГК, фронт, танкова армія, танковий корпус, бригада, противник.

The Problem Statement. The situation on the German-Soviet front in July 1943, as a result of the development of the Soviet counterattack in Orel direction, for the Supreme Command Headquarters (hereinafter – SCH) there were favourable conditions for the transition to the Soviet counterattack in Orel and Belgorod-Kharkiv directions.

Without the liquidation of Orel ledge, which was heavily fortified by the German army, any advance of the Red Army troops westward on the entire German-Soviet front was impossible.

The topicality of a military-historical research of Orel attack campaign as a component of the Battle of Kursk, during the war, which was imposed by the Russian Federation in 2014, is of a theoretical and practical significance for the Armed Forces of Ukraine and should be taken into account during training in military schools for the development of a theoretical and practical base aimed at improving the forms and methods of modern operations of the Armed Forces of Ukraine.

The counterattack of the Soviet troops in the area of Kursk Arc (in German – *Kursker Bogen*) includes two offensive operations: Orlovsk (“Kutuzov”) of Western front (WF) (a commander – Colonel-General V. D. Sokolovskiy), Bryansk front (BF) (a commander – Colonel-General M. M. Popov) and the Central front (CF) (a commander – Army General K. K. Rokossovskiy) (July 12 – August 18, 1943) and Belgorod-Kharkiv front (“Commander Rumyantsev”), Voronezh and Steppe fronts in cooperation with the South-Western Front (August 3-23, 1943).

The Analysis of Recent Research and Publications. The historiography of the problem concerning the combat use of tank troops is extremely wide and multifaceted. The research on the consideration of the combat experience in Orel attack campaign as the part of the Battle of Kursk is reflected in the Soviet historiography (Strokov, 1966; Rotmistrov, 1963; Goncharov, 2006; Koltunov, & Solovev, 1970; Losik, 1979; Istoriya B i MV SA, 1953). The Battle of Kursk in the Soviet historiography is considered as one of the three main decisive battles of the German-Soviet War (the previous two – Moscow and Stalingrad). The Soviet historians studied the Battle of Kursk more objectively.

In the Soviet historiography the first research on the Battle of Kursk Arc is the article by M. Talenskii (Talenskii, 1943). The author, quoting the German General K. Dietmart, emphasizes the following: against the principles of a military strategy it is more profitable to give the initiative to the enemy and wait for a good opportunity to attack. As it is confirmed in practice, this was the strategy of the military leadership of the Red Army. He attributes the defeat of the German troops in the Battle of Kursk to the heavy defeat of the German troops near Stalingrad. Weakened so much that 2-3 blows from the East and the West will be enough to defeat it. That is actually a tracing of J. Stalin's words (Stalin, 1949). As well as the words of the author I. V. Parotkin (Parotkin, 1944).

The History of the Great Patriotic War in 6 volumes is the first official Soviet work in which a separate chapter was devoted to the Battle of Kursk. In this work there are no figures that characterize the forces and means of the Red Army during the Battle of Kursk. The authors of the book illustrated a very idealized picture of the actions of the Red Army in this battle, never criticizing the fundamental decisions of the Supreme Command.

In general, all scientific works devoted to the course of the war are marked by ideological stamps of the totalitarian era. The best of them, in our opinion, is “History of World War II” in 12 volumes (published in 1973 – 1982), (Solovyev, 1976), which contains huge scientific historical material.

Despite the ideological postulates and pre-programmed conclusions, the works of the Soviet researchers of these years were marked by considerable facts and contained much material on the tank troops. The best of them are, first of all, the works of H. A. Deborin (Deborin, 1958), the collective monograph “World War II” edited by Lieutenant-General S. P. Platonov, Major-General M. G. Pavlenko and Colonel I. V. Parotkin (Platonov, Pavlenko, & Parotkin, 1958).

Much useful information can be drawn by omitting the ideological stereotypes from other Soviet scientific literature, in which there are discussed the military theoretical views on the

use of tank troops and the participation of tank formations in the summer campaigns of 1943 (Platonov, 1958; Zhilin, 1958; Radzievskii, 1977; Lototskii, 1970).

The researches of modern historians from the end of the XXth century contributed to the study of the history of the tank troops development and use (Daynes, 2009; Daynes, 2010; Bukeyhanov, 2013; Shein, 2007; Shein, 2009).

In foreign historiography you can find the ideas of military theorists on the combat use of tank troops during campaigns operations (Manshteyn, 1999; Mellentin, 2005; Myuller-Gillebrand, 2002).

An important place among the sources of the research on the use of the tank troops are participants' memoirs, reminiscences of the hostilities (Bagramyan, 1977; Zhukov, 1983; Rokossovskiy, 1988; Shtemenko, 1975).

The article is also presented by the archival materials of the Central Archive of the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation concerning the martial art of using armoured and mechanized troops in Orel attack campaign (Russian archive: (1996). *The Great Patriotic War: Supreme Command Headquarters: Documents and materials: 1942. T. 16 (5-2)*. Moscow: TERRA, 624 p.; The Central Archive of the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation (CAMD RF), f. 148a, d. 3763, d. 139 (ref. 143); f. 500, d. 12462, ref. 794; f. 16: d. 4440, ref. 33 (d. 1073, ref. 5, d. 1073pp., sp. 5); f. 315, d. 4440: ref. 38 (ref. 39, c. 20); f. 62, d. 329, ref. 23; f. 208, d. 4440, ref. 20; f. 418, d. 10695, ref. 117).

In the domestic historical science, the analyzed problem was raised but it did not find its proper coverage on armoured and mechanized troops in Orel attack campaign. First of all, the events were analyzed, which took place on the territory of Ukraine during the liberation of the Ukrainian territory from the aggressor (Hrytsyuk, Lysenko, Pylyavets, & Sydorov, 2015).

During the solution of the scientific problem, the authors considered comprehensively the massive use of armoured and mechanized troops of the Red Army in one offensive operation. The authors systematized and analyzed the role of armoured and mechanized troops during the breakthrough of the enemy's defenses and the development of success after the breakthrough independently and in cooperation with all-military units.

Orel attack campaign enriched the theory and practice of martial arts with new techniques and methods of armed struggle, as evidenced by the numerous sources and scientific works, memoirs and popular literature.

The aim of the authors of the article is to investigate the combat use of the tanks and tank troops during the Red Army counterattack in Orel direction near Kursk Arc (in German – *Kursker Bogen*) and the contribution to the development of operational art of a mass use of three tank armies and individual tank corps as mobile groups of fronts and armies, respectively.

To achieve the goal of the study, special methods of military history and general scientific methods were used.

The Statement of the Basic Material. The plan of Orel offensive operation was worked out in advance, even before the German command conducted Operation “Citadel”. Its main task was to create and deploy strategic reserves for the successful implementation of attack campaigns to eliminate Orel and Belgorod-Kharkiv wards and in future – liberation of the left bank of Ukraine.

The Supreme Command Headquarters (SCH) monitored closely changes in the situation in Kursk Arc, promptly responded to the changes. Between May 8 and 20, 1943, the timing of the beginning of the Wehrmacht offensive was changed by A. Hitler three times, and each

time the Soviet command responded in a timely manner, giving the necessary orders to the fronts, warning them of the time of a possible enemy offensive (CAMD RF, f. 148a, d. 3763, ref. 139, p. 184), and on July 2 the SCH informed the fronts of the final dates (July 3–6) of the transition of the German troops to the attack (CAMD RF, f. 148a, d. 3763, ref. 143, p. 164).

During the defensive battle, the attempts of the German command to surround and destroy more than a million of the Red Army units failed. The Red Army aircraft in a tense fight gained dominance in the air. The Wehrmacht's offensive strategy was defeated. However, these results for the Red Army (hereinafter – RA) were achieved at a high cost. During Kursk Strategic Defense Operation (July 5–23, 1943), the irretrievable losses of the Central, Voronezh, and Steppe Fronts amounted to 70 330 soldiers, and totally – 178 000. The fronts lost 1 614 tanks and self-propelled artillery units (SAU), 3 929 guns and mortars, 460 combat aircraft (Krivosheev, 1993, p. 188, 370).

According to Erich von Manshteyn: “In general, the situation left no doubt that the enemy will sooner or later try to achieve decisive success in the area of the Army Group “South”, and possibly also on the southern flank of the Army Group “Center” by offensive including Orel Arc” (Manshteyn, 1999, p. 513).

The peculiarity of the Red Army's counterattack was that it was carried out simultaneously with the defensive operation in the southern part of Kursk ledge, which lasted until July 23.

Before the counterattack of the Red Army troops, Tank Army 2 (hereinafter referred to as “TA”) and Army 9 (hereinafter – A) of the Wehrmacht's Army Group (37 divisions, including 10 tank and motorized) functioned on Orel bridgehead, numbering 600 000 of soldiers, 6 000 guns and mortars, about 1 000 of tanks and guns and more than 1 000 of aircraft. The main part of the German army group was concentrated in the southern part of Orel bridgehead, which fought against the troops of the Central Front. The German command focused a great deal of effort on strengthening the bridgehead. A deep positional defense was created with some elements of a long-term fortification (body armor – “crabs”) (Stokov, 1966, p. 418).

For the troops of the Western Front, Briansk Front and Central Front, the territory of Orel strategic bridgehead of the German group was extremely unfavourable for the attack. The rivers were natural obstacles that flew mainly from the South to the North, and some from the North to the South. The Germans used them to the maximum for the arrangement of defensive lines and cut-off positions. Water obstacles maximally contributed to the conduct of defensive operations and greatly complicated the offensive actions of the Red Army troops. It was a very well-fortified bridgehead of the German troops group (Rokossovskiy, 1988, p. 218).

The composition of the Red Army group for Orel offensive operation was the following: the Western Front – Guard Army 11 (hereinafter – GA), Army 50 and Army 11, Tank Army 4 (from July 18), Guard Cavalry Corps 2 (hereinafter – CC) (from July 18), Air Army 1 (hereinafter – AA); Briansk Front – Army 3, Army 61 and Army 63, Guard Tank Army 3 (from July 14), Air Army 15; the Central Front – Army 13, Army 48, Army 70, Guard Tank Army 2, Tank Corps 9 and 19 (hereinafter – TC), Air Army 16.

Before the attack campaign, only the Central Front had a Tank Army (TA 2) (a commander – Lieutenant-General O. G. Rodin). The strategic reserve of the Supreme Command Headquarters, for conducting Orel attack campaign in the direction of the actions of the three fronts, included: Guard Tank Army 3, Tank Army 4, Army 11, Tank Corps 25 and Cavalry Corps 2. Guard Tank Army 3 (a commander – Lieutenant-General P. S. Rybalko) was sent to Briansk Front on July 14, and this army entered the battle on July 19. Tank Army 4 (a commander – Lieutenant-General V. M. Badanov) was included into the Western Front

from July 18, and was introduced into battle only on the 15th day of the operation (July 26). The introduction into battle of Guard Tank Army 3 and Tank Army 4 was due to the fact that before the operation, the formation of the armies was only completed – the first one – in the territory of Plavsk, and the second one – near Moscow. Besides, it was not possible to define in advance precisely the term the Red Army troops counterattack near Kursk (Russian archive, 1996, pp. 180–181).

The idea of the operation “Kutuzov” of the Soviet command was to surround the enemy group, dismember and defeat it in parts by striking of the three fronts in one direction at Orel from the North, the East and the South (Rotmistrov, 1963, p. 252).

The troops of the fronts received the following tasks:

The Western Front by the troops of the left wing, consisting of Army 50 and Guard Army 11, – to break through the enemy's defenses southwest of Kozelsk and together with Briansk Front troops to surround and destroy the enemy in Bolkhov area.

In the future, developing the attack on Khotynets, to prevent the withdrawal of the enemy from Orel area to the west and in cooperation with the troops of Briansk Front and the Central Front to destroy the enemy.

Briansk Front troops, consisting of Army 3, Army 61, Army 63 and Air Army 15, and from July 14 Guard Tank Army 3, to strike two blows: one blow – from the area northeast of Bolkhov in the direction of Bolkhiv – to surround and destroy, in cooperation with the troops of the Western Front, the enemy groups in Bolkhov area and then attack Orel from the North; the second blow – from Novosil to Orel district, covering the city from the North and South.

The troops of the Central Front – on the right flank (A 13, A 48, A 70) to attack in the direction of Kromy and further to the North in order to seize Orel from the South and in cooperation with the troops of the Western Front and Briansk Front to defeat the enemy groups on Orel ledge (Platonov, 1958, p. 255).

In his memoirs K. K. Rokossovsky, Marshal of the Soviet Union, mentions that he did not agree with the decision of the Supreme Command Headquarters on the plan of Orel operation and emphasizes that the plan of the operation was to fragment the enemy group and destroy it in parts. However, it was not taken into account that such actions excessively disperse our forces. In his opinion, it would be more appropriate to inflict two major powerful blows from the North and South on Briansk on the basis of Orel ledge. But for this it was necessary to provide time for the regrouping of the Western Front and Central Front troops. An excessive haste was made, which was not caused by the current situation. As a result, the troops in the important areas fought without a sufficient training and a rapid throw did not work. The operation became long-lasting. Instead of surrounding and defeating the enemy, we, in fact, only pushed him out of Orel ledge, and the fact that the German troops were on Orel bridgehead for more than a year and managed to create a strong, deeply echeloned defense was not taken into account (Rokossovskiy, 1988, p. 218).

As if acknowledging the mistake of the Supreme Command Headquarters and confirming the words of K. K. Rokossovsky, G. K. Zhukov, Marshal of the Soviet Union, recalls that the attack of the Western Front and Briansk Front developed too slowly, and later, analyzing the reasons for the slow pace of the events, we concluded that the main mistake was that the the Supreme Command Headquarters was in a hurry to move to the counterattack and did not create a stronger group in the left wing of the Western Front, which, moreover, during the battle had to be seriously reinforced. Briansk Front troops had to overcome a deeply echeloned defense with a frontal strike, it was better that Guard TA 3 entered battle not on

Briansk Front, but on the Western Front together with Guard Army 11 (Zhukov, 1983, p. 70).

Before the operation, armored and mechanized troops in the strike groups of the three fronts consisted of TA 2, Guard TC 1, 1,5 (Bagramyan, 1977, p. 206), 9, 19, 20 (CAMD RF, f. 148, op. 10695, ref. 117, p. 23) and TC 25, seven separate tank brigades (TBr), 27 separate tank regiments (hereinafter – TR) and 15 self-propelled artillery (hereinafter – SAR) regiments. For the first time during the German-Soviet war, tanks of a direct infantry support (hereinafter – DIS) joined the infantry divisions (hereinafter – ID) of the first and second echelons (Zhukov, 1983, p. 132).

The use of armored and mechanized troops was distributed as follows: separate tank brigades and regiments were planned to be used for the DIS, centrally, in the directions of the main strikes of the infantry corps and divisions. The DIS tank groups also included self-propelled artillery regiments, which were to move behind the tanks in the second echelon. The tanks suppressed the enemy's firepower and ensured the unimpeded attack of the infantry, and the SAU supported the tanks with the fire of their guns. And all tank corps, except TC 25, were included in the mobile groups of armies, TC 25 (a commander – Major General t/v F. G. Anikushkin) were the reserve of the Western Front. Tank Army 2 was the mobile group of the Central Front (Daynes, 2009, p. 389).

Therefore, before the operation, the group of troops of the Red Army outnumbered the enemy twice in soldiers, three times in artillery, 2,3 times in tanks and 2,7 times in aviation (Platonov, 1958, pp. 255–257; Rozanov, schematic 25). To conduct Orel operation, the Supreme Command Headquarters concentrated significant forces: about 1 300 000 soldiers, more than 21 000 guns and mortars, 2 400 tanks and SAU (according to other data, there are significant differences in the number of tanks and SAU – 3 400 (Gerasimenko, 2010, p. 169) and 3 314) and more than 3 000 combat aircraft. The average density was more than 6 tanks and SAU per 1 km (Bukeyhanov, 2013, p. 18). They were opposed by a hostile group of 600 000 soldiers, more than 7 000 guns and mortars, about 1 200 tanks and assault guns, and more than 1 100 combat aircraft (Solovyev, 1976, pp. 158–159). The Wehrmacht command had high hopes of the new tanks “Tiger”, “Panther”, and “Ferdinand” assault guns, which outnumbered the Red Army tanks in armament and armor.

On the morning of July 12, after a powerful aviation and artillery attack (Pospelov, 1961, p. 277), which lasted for about three hours, the troops of the Western Front and Briansk Front started the attack simultaneously in Bolkhiv and Orel directions, and from July 15 – the troops of the Central Front, concentrating their main strike in Kromsk direction. For Guard Army 11 (a commander – Lieutenant-General I. Kh. Bagramyan) of the Western Front and Army 61 (a commander – Lieutenant-General P. A. Belov) of Briansk Front it was the beginning of Orel-Bolkhiv attack campaign (July 12–30, 1943).

Before the attack campaign, the combat reconnaissance was carried out simultaneously in all the areas of the breakthrough of the Western Front and Belorussian Front troops. The reconnaissance battalions of Guard Army 11 (VIZ 1967, No. 11, p. 46), according to other data 280 tanks and SAU (Bukeyhanov, 2013, p. 50) rapidly attacking the enemy on the night of July 12, captured his first position.

The combat order of Guard Army 11 consisted of three echelons (Goncharov, 2006, p. 313). The first echelon was intended to break through the enemy's defensive line and ensure the introduction into battle of the second echelons of corps and army. It was formed to be the strongest. The first echelon consisted of three infantry Guards Corps (hereinafter – IGC) (six infantry divisions), reinforced by three tank brigades, two tank breakthrough regiments,

two self-propelled artillery regiments and eight engineering battalions. It was supported by aircraft and most of the artillery (including the artillery of the second echelon) and Guards mortar units. To develop the success of the breakthrough the second echelon was assigned, which included four infantry divisions (which belonged to the second and third echelons of infantry corps) and Guard tank brigades. The third echelon included Tank Corps 1, Tank Corps 5 and the infantry division – the reserve of the army commander (which remained under his direct control) and was intended to increase the development of the breakthrough and strike success in depth.

The mobile group of the army included Tank Corps 1 and Tank Corps 5. The infantry (riflemen) divisions were reinforced by DIS tanks. The tank brigades with infantry on armor fought as advanced detachments of infantry corps (Bukeyhanov, 2013, p. 64). The introduction into battle of the second echelons of infantry corps and TC 5 (a commander – Major General M. G. Sakhno) provided for the completion of the breakthrough of the main defense line and advance into the depth of the enemy's defense 8–10 km forward.

To ensure the breakthrough of the first position of the main defense line was the commander of the army provided for the use of assault groups in advance. The assault groups included 8-10 specially trained servicemen, who were armed with anti-tank grenades, explosives and thermal substances, etc. The assault detachments were formed in the specially fortified areas of the enemy, in the regiments – as a part of a rifle battalion reinforced by a sapper squadron and a flamethrower platoon, and in the battalion – a rifle squadron reinforced by a sapper platoon and a flamethrower division, to which machine guns, mortars, anti-tank guns and also tanks and SAU were added (Bukeyhanov, 2013, p. 57).

According to the decision of I. Kh. Bagramyan, Lieutenant-General, on the morning of July 13, TC 1 was put into the battle (a commander – Lieutenant-General V. V. Butkov) in the line of Guard Infantry Division 8, which accelerated the breakthrough of the second defense line of the German troops. And the part of the forces of Guard Army 11 together with TC 5 developed attack bypassing Bolkhov, and the second part with TC 1 – in the direction of Vuzke, Khotynets (Rotmistrov, 1963, p. 254). During the battle, the loss of TC 1 was: 10 tanks were destroyed and 13 received combat damage (Bukeyhanov, 2013, p. 100). Separate tank regiments and brigades were used for DIS during the breakthrough of the tactical zone of the enemy's defense (Koltunov, 1970, p. 192).

TC 1 after the breakthrough of the tactical defense zone developed the attack. As an advanced detachment of the brigade there fought TBR 159 that pursued the enemy with its vanguard (tank battalion). After reaching Popovo, the reconnaissance from the advanced detachment encountered reconnaissance battalion 192 and MP 52 of TD 18 of the enemy troops. At this time, the main forces of the 1st TC approached the northern outskirts of Rzhavka (about 12 km north of Popovo).

To destroy the enemy during the counter-battle in cooperation with the tank brigades of TC 5 (neighbour on the left), the commander of TBR 159 made a decision (approved by the corps commander): to defeat the TD 18 units of the enemy, which were advancing in columns. To inflict the main strike on the flank in the direction of Melekhovo, Shvanovo, and the auxiliary strike – by the machine-gun battalion in the direction of Petukhivka, Sopovo. In the reserve, the brigade commander assigned a rifle platoon reinforced with tanks.

TBR 159, acting in a close cooperation with the brigades of Tank Corps 5, attacked the enemy's flank, ahead of the enemy in the deployment. As a result of the sudden strikes from the front and to the flank the enemy's columns of Tank Division 18 were dismembered, losing

a significant part of the artillery, and the tanks began a chaotic retreat in a southern direction along the Vytebet River.

During the battle, 5 tanks and assault guns, 17 guns and mortars were destroyed and about 115 soldiers of the enemy were killed. This clearly demonstrates that during the counter-battle the success was achieved due to the prejudice of the enemy in inflicting fire damage and deployment, having the initiative, skillful use of terrain for maneuver (Losik, 1979, pp. 171–172).

The transition of the Red Army troops in Orel area to the attack made the German command regroup the troops and transfer the part of Army 9 troops from Kursk direction to strengthen the grouping in Orel area. From 12 to 18 July, four tank divisions (2, 9, 18, 20) and 10 motorized divisions (hereinafter referred to as MD) were transferred from Army 9 to reinforce Tank Army 2. As well as seven divisions from other parts of the front, including three tanks (Daynes, 2009, p. 265). Although these troops suffered heavy losses, this was a significant support for the grouping of troops on Orel bridgehead. To lift the spirits of its soldiers, the German command united Army 9 and Tank Army 2 troops, which occupied Orel area under the single command of Colonel-General Walter Model, removing Colonel-General R. Schmidt from the command of Tank Army 2. A. Hitler appointed W. Model to the most problematic areas of the front. W. Model was particularly successful in defensive battles and was considered the most experienced and unsurpassed master of defense among the top generals of the Wehrmacht and was nicknamed “Hitler's Firefighter” (Rokossovskiy, 1988, p. 218).

Tank Corps 1 and Tank Corps 5 continuing to develop a breakthrough to the southeast, breaking the resistance of the German Tank Division 18 (TD) forcing the river Vytebet cut the road Bolkhov-Khotynets, south of Vuzke. This is confirmed by the data taken from the intelligence report of the headquarters of the Army Group “Center” (CAMD RF, f. 500, op. 12462, ref. 794, pp. 16–17). About 150 enemy tanks opposed the tank corps of the Red Army, supported by a large number of aircraft, trying by counterattacks to recapture the Bolkhov-Khotynets road. At the end of July 19, tankers of Guard Army 11 bypassed Bolkhov from the west and south-west and, wedged deep into the enemy's position more than 70 km and posed a threat to the main communications that connect Orel and Bryansk (Sovetskie TV 1941 – 1945, 1973, pp. 133, 134).

Under difficult conditions, the attack on the Volkhov troops of Army 61 BF developed. At the end of July 12, the army troops intervened in the enemy's defense northeast of Volkhov on a 12-km section of the front to a depth of 3 to 7 km. The task of the breakthrough of the enemy's defenses to the full tactical depth was not accomplished. During the battle, TBR 68 lost 13 tanks (CAMD RF, f. 418, d. 10695, ref. 117, p. 15). The density at the breakthrough site was 18,6 tanks and SAU (Bukeyhanov, 2013. p. 79).

On July 13 in the offensive zone of Army 61, Tank Corps 20 was put into the battle (a commander – Lieutenant-General I. G. Lazarev). Tank Corps, together with the infantry units, broke through the enemy's strong defenses and repulsed the counterattacks of the German Tank Division, which was sent from Orel-Kursk direction. At the end of the day, the Soviet troops captured a strong point of defense of the enemy northeast of Volkhov – the village of Kryvtsevo and several others. But in general the progress was negligible. And the troops of Army 3 and Army 63 on the first day of the attack could not break through the main defense line of the enemy and were able to wedge into the defense of the enemy to a depth of 6-7 km only at the junction line of the armies (Koltunov, 1970, pp. 212–213).

On the second day of the attack at noon Guard Tank Corps 1 was introduced into battle

(a commander – Lieutenant General M. F. Panov). By this time, the enemy had drawn up fresh forces, including TD 8, but by the end of July 13 the enemy's defenses had been broken through. The Troops of Army 3 and Army 63 advanced in the direction of the main strike to 15 km and expanded the breakthrough to 25 km along the front line (VIZ 1963, No. 8, p. 67).

According to the decision of the commander of the Central Front, the troops of Army 13, Army 48, Army 70 and Tank Army 2 were to reach the frontier by the end of July 17: Nagorny, Preobrazhenske, Shamshin, Novopolevo, Rozhdestveno, Kamyanka, Veselyi Posyolok, Leb-edykha, Voronets, Morozykha, Katomki. In the future, to develop the attack in the direction of Gorokhovo, Filosofovo, Ploske, Nesterovo (Russian archive, 1996, pp. 166–167).

The main task was entrusted to Army 13 and Army 70, which were reinforced by Tank Corps 9 (a commander – Lieutenant General temporarily S. I. Bogdanov) and Tank Corps 9 (a commander – Major General temporarily I. D. Vasylyv). According to the commander's decision it was planned to enter into battle Tank Army 2 after reaching of Army 13 the border Soglasny, Buzuluk, Shyroke Boloto, Saborovka. The unities and units of TA 2 were given the task to strike the main blow in the direction of Snova, Senkovo, Gremyachevo and to capture by the end of July 17 the area of Olgino, Gnylusha, Shusherovo and further to attack in the direction of Nikolske, Nesterovo (Platonov, 1958, p. 388).

In Briansk Front zone, the troops of Army 61, in cooperation with Tank Corps 20, completed the breakthrough in the enemy's defenses on July 18 and, advancing to 20 km, threatened the bypass of Bolkhov from the south-east. According to an excerpt from the intelligence report of the headquarters of the Army Groups “Center”, the German command was extremely concerned: “It should be expected that the enemy, based on the success achieved, will continue to draw up fresh forces in order to surround and destroy all German troops on Orel ledge” (CAMD RF, f. 500, d. 12462, ref. 794, pp. 16–17).

To develop the attack and accelerate the breakthrough of the enemy's defenses on July 19, Guard Tank Army 3 was introduced into the battle (731 tanks and SAU (serviceable – 713) and in cooperation with the infantry units, breaking through the enemy's defenses on the river Oleshnya, advanced 8-10 km (CAMD RF, f. 16, d. 4440, ref. 33, pp. 4). In the fierce battles, the army of P. S. Rybalko lost many tanks and other equipment. According to G. K. Zhukov it would have been better if Tank Army 3 had entered into the battle not on Briansk Front but together with the army of I. Kh. Bagramyan (Zhukov, 1983, p. 70).

And already at 2.00 on 20.07.1943 the commander of Guard Tank Army 3 received a new task: on the morning of July 20, to strike in the direction of Protasove, Otrada, and by the end of the day to cut the road and railway Mtsensk – Orel and, developing the attack on July 21 at Mtsensk from the south, together with Army 3 to complete the defeat of Mtsensk enemy group and liberate Mtsensk. After completing this task Tank Army 3 was to attack to the south in order to cut Mokhove-Orel railway and to help Army 63 in its reaching the Oka River, and later to cut Orel-Kursk railway and seize the city of Orel. In case of unfavourable conditions for the seizing Orel, to move to the west in the direction of Kromny (Russian archive, 1996, p. 180).

The next evening, forcing the river Oka in the area of Vidrada Tank Army 3 captured the bridgehead. This event created favourable conditions for Briansk Front attack. On the same day Tank Army 3 of Briansk Front captured Mtsensk (CAMD RF, f. 16, d. 1073, ref. 5, pp. 343–356). In the future Tank Army 3 turned to the South, to Stanovyi Kolodiaz, in the zone of Army 63. To attack in the new direction, the army commander used his second echelon: Tank Corps 12 and Tank Brigade 91, and the attacking corps in the first echelon

took their places behind them. Such a regrouping was appropriate and justified. P. S. Rybalko repeatedly practiced this in the future during simultaneous actions in several sometimes opposite directions. In the given example Guard Tank Army 3 acted in opposite directions not simultaneously but sequentially. The regrouping of the army troops was carried out correctly by the commander. In his memoirs, S. M. Shtemenko, Army General speaks quite seriously about the commander of Guard Tank Army 3. S. M. Shtemenko emphasized that P. S. Rybalko always acted clearly according to the plan approved by the Supreme Command Headquarters and Guard Tank Army 3 performed its tasks with honour. The actions of the army influenced the development of the attack of Briansk Front troops and played a significant role in the successful completion of the entire operation to defeat the enemy on Orel ledge (Shtemenko, 1975, pp. 236–237).

On July 24 the unities of Guard TA 3 occupied Stanovyi Kolodiaz, and the troops of Army 3 and Army 63 of Briansk Front reached the banks of the Oka and Optukha rivers, i.e., reached the front edge of the rear line of the enemy's defense, which covered the approaches to Orel from the East.

On the morning of July 25, Lieutenant General P. S. Rybalko gave the army unit the task to start the attack. Tank Corps 12 – to attack from the border of Afanasyevka, Debezhevo in the direction of Khotetovo, Stanovyi Kolodiaz and by the end of July 25 to reach the border of Khotetovo, Stanovyi Kolodiaz, Mykhailivka, Pylativka, and to capture the airfield near Hrachivka (CAMD RF, f. 315, op. 4440, ref. 39, p. 5 stars). Mobile Corps 2 was given the task to attack from the border of Debezhevo, Rozbigaevka in the direction of Yeropkino, Khotetovo, Stanovyi Kolodiaz and at the end of the day to reach the border of the river Stish, and Tank Corps 15 – to attack in the second echelon behind Tank Corps 12 (CAMD RF, f. 315, d. 4440, ref. 38, pp. 6). During the attack, the units of Tank Corps 12 and Mobile Corps 2 were forced to storm the defense due to the unpreparedness of Army 63 infantry units and, overcoming the enemy's defenses, reached the frontier of Durnovo, Dovhe, Yeropkino, and Khotetovo on July 26 (CAMD RF, f. 315, d. 4440, ref. 20, p. 14; ref. 38, p. 6).

At the end of the day on July 19, Tank Corps 1 and Tank Corps 5 of the Western Front bypassed Bolkhov from the West and South-west, deeply wedged into the enemy's defenses, making a threat to its main communications, which connected Orel and Briansk (the most important railway line for the German group) (Daynes, 2010, p. 301). At that time, the troops of Guard Army 11 advancing to the territory depth for 70 km and widening the breakthrough to 150 km along the front covered the left flank of Volkhov group of the enemy from the West and South-West, and the right flank of this group was represented by the troops Army 61 of Briansk Front, advancing to the territory depth for 20 km.

In an effort to prevent the encirclement of its group, the German command hastily threw reinforcements, including the tank divisions, and launched a powerful counterattack. Guard Army 11, notwithstanding the enemy's attack, was forced to take defense measures (Rotmistrov, 1963, pp. 54–255).

Analyzing the situation, the commander of the Western Front introduced Army 11 into the battle (a commander – Lieutenant General I. I. Fedyuninskyi) (Koltunov, 1970, p. 218). Army 11 was sent to the front from the Supreme Command Headquarters reserve for reinforcement and was given the task to attack in the direction of Khvastovychi, Tank Corps 25 – to develop the attack in the direction of Znamenske. During the fierce battles in five days Army 11 and Tank Corps 25 were able to advance into the territory depths of the enemy's defenses only for 15 km, but their activity attracted the majority of the German

troops in this area, and this activity helped Guard Army 11 in repelling the enemy's counter-attacks (Rotmistrov, 1963, p. 255).

On June 25 in the action zone of Guard Army 11 there was Tank Army 4 sent from the reserve of the Supreme Command Headquarters (consisting of Tank Corps 11, Ural Volunteer Tank Corps 30 and Guard Mobile Corps 6 – 652 tanks and SAU) (Sovetskie TV 1941 – 1945, 1973, p. 136). Guard Corps 2 was also sent to the hostilities zone of Guard Army 11 (a commander – Major General V. V. Kriukov). By involving them into the battle, the commander of the front tried to intercept the railway and Orel-Bryansk road and by the part of the forces in cooperation with Army 61 to isolate and destroy the enemy group in Bolkhov area (Istoriya BTV, 1953, p. 285). After arriving in the war zone Tank Army 4 had little time (1 day) to prepare for the hostilities. The time limit left it impossible to prepare sufficiently for the task and to organize interaction between the corps and military units. Moreover, it was under the intense strikes by the enemy's aircraft (Rozanov, 1958, p. 267). With the involvement of Army 11 and Tank Army 4, the Supreme Command Headquarters was late (Zhukov, 1983, p. 70). This became the main reason for the troops of the Western Front to fail at fulfilling the task of increasing of the first echelon strike in time and the completion of the encirclement of Volkhov and Orel enemy groups (Rotmistrov, 1963, p. 256).

The situation in which there were the German troops on Orel bridgehead became increasingly difficult. E. von Manshteyn's last attempt to break through to Kursk from Belgorod by the forces of the attack group of the Army Group “South” also ended in failure. From July 16, the German troops were forced to begin retreating to the positions they held before the beginning of the attack.

Field Marshal E. von Manshteyn's, in his memoirs, confirms the decision of the German command to move to the defense in Kursk direction and on the entire Eastern Front until July 19 and connects it with the beginning of the Soviet soldiers attack in Donbass and the OKH order to transfer of Tank Corps 2 SS and two tank divisions from the army group “South” to the army group “Center” (Manshteyn, 1999, p. 514). As of July 28, 1943, Orel group of the German troops, after the transfer of tank, motorized, and infantry divisions from other parts of the front, numbered about 800,000 soldiers (Myuller-Gillebrand, 2002, p. 658).

The troops of Tank Army 4 were tasked to break through the heavily fortified defenses of the enemy and by the end of July 26 to advance to the territory depth for 60 km. I. Kh. Bagramyan, Lieutenant-General, the Commander of Guard Army 11, noting that having experience in overcoming strong deep-tiered defenses, doubted whether it was reasonable to bring into the battle such a large number of tanks without proper training. I. Kh. Bagramyan warned that the Red Army could suffer unjustified losses of tanks. He suggested using the tank army in Khotyn direction, where the conditions were better for tank operations and the direction became decisive. But the commander of the Western Front left his decision unchanged, especially since he was supported by the commander of Tank Army 4 V. M. Badanov (Bagramyan, 1977, pp. 235–236).

The subsequent events confirmed the erroneous decision of the commander of the Western Front and the rightness of General I. Kh. Bagramyan. The troops of Tank Army 4 together with Guard Army 11 had to break through the four lines of the enemy defense prepared in advance, densely saturated with firepower, manpower and barriers. On the first day, Tank Corps 11 and Mobile Corps 6 suffered heavy losses of combat vehicles, mainly caused by the fire of hidden in the ground and camouflaged tanks and the enemy's anti-aircraft guns. And only the introduction into the battle of Ural Volunteer Tank Corps 30 changed the sit-

uation. The unities of Tank Army 4 went to the railway Orel-Bryansk, creating favourable conditions for the attack of Army 61 of Briansk Front, which on July 28 liberated Bolkhov (Daynes, 2010, p. 468).

On July 30, Tank Army 4 was transferred to Briansk Front according to the decision of the Supreme Command Headquarters, retaining the previous task and the attack directions, and on August 3, Tank Army's 4 main forces crossed the Nugr River and grouped to develop the attack to bypass the enemy's Orel group from the North-West (Bukeyhanov, 2013, p. 211).

As a result of Bolkhov-Orel front attack campaign, the left wing of Guard Army 11 of the Western Front and the troops of Army 61 of Briansk Front, in cooperation with Army 11 and Army 50, combating to the west, expanded the breakthrough of the enemy's defenses on the front to 90 km, advancing in the south-western direction for 80 km (CAMD RF, f. 208, d. 4440, ref. 20, pp. 462–463).

At that time, the commander of the Central Committee continued to make attempts to reach Kromny area and on the morning of July 25 resumed the attack. Army 70 overcoming the resistance of the enemy moved in the direction of Chuvardino. The next day, General K. K. Rokossovsky put into the battle Tank Army 2, which received the task by the end of July 26 to be in the area of Krasna Roshcha, Hnezdylovo, Chuvardino (Daynes, 2009, pp. 394–395). The enemy, consistently defending itself on prepared positions, put up fierce resistance and detained the troops of Tank Army 2 and the units of Tank Corps 9 and Tank Corps 19 of the Central Front. On July 26, at 24 o'clock Guard Tank Army 3 was transferred into the operational subordination of the commander of the front to hasten the events of the troops advance (Russian archive, 1996, p. 181).

At the same time Guard Tank Army 3 was severely weakened as a result of heavy fighting on Briansk Front, where it suffered heavy losses (Shein, 2007, pp. 114–115).

By the end of July 27, the troops of the right wing of the Central Front, with the support of aircraft of Army 16, broke through the intermediate line of the German group defense and advanced for 35–40 km. The enemy, being under the attack of the the Red Army, began to withdraw the troops, which were in front of the left wing of Briansk Front and the right wing of the Central Front. To succeed, the commander of the Central Front on the morning of July 28 put into battle Guard Tank Army 3 on the left flank of Army 48. Lieutenant General P. S. Rybalko was given the task to break through the enemy's defenses on the Mala Rybnitsya River and reach the border of Khmeliova, Sebyakino, Korovyе, Boloto, Horki (15–20 km north of Kromna). (CAMD RF, f. 315, d. 4440, ref. 20, pp. 19–20). At the end of the day on July 28, Guard Tank Army 3 reached the border of Filosofovo (20 km east of Kroma) – Kalynnyk – Annensky Lozovets, but the enemy in the area of Filosofovo struck a number of powerful counterattacks in some parts and forced them to retreat to the right bank of the river. And at 21 o'clock Army units continued the offensive in cooperation with Army 48 infantry units, but the enemy's resistance grew. By the end of the day on July 29, no success had been achieved, with the exception of separate Tank Brigade 91, which seized Filosofovo and the nearby Mala Rybnitsa crossing (CAMD RF, f. 315, d. 4440, ref. 20, p. 21). Late in the evening, the commander of the Central Front ordered that on the morning of July 30 Army 48, simultaneously with Guard Tank Army 3 resumed offensive battles in the former directions, but, having met a strong fire resistance of the enemy, the armies did not succeed and at the end of the day fought on the frontiers, which had been occupied before. On the night of July 30, the enemy launched three counterattacks in the Apukhtin area (18 km to the West of Zmiivka). All counterattacks were repulsed (Russian archive, 1996, p. 179). Having a large

shortage of tanks, Guard Tank Army 3 was unable to influence the successful development of the front attack significantly.

Army General K. K. Rokossovsky analyzing the actions of Guard Tank Army 3 understood that the army soldiers had not yet recovered from a heavy fighting on Briansk front. Therefore, all the efforts of tankers were in vain to overcome the resistance of the enemy. To avoid unjustified losses, he appealed to the Supreme Command Headquarters to withdraw Guard Tank Army 3 in reserve (Rokossovskiy, 1988, p. 277).

In connection with the preparation of Smolensk offensive operation, according to the decision of the the Supreme Command Headquarters, Army 11, Guard Army 11, Tank Army 4, Tank Corps 1 and Guard Corps 2, which were the part of the left flank of the Western Front, were transferred to Briansk Front. From that moment on, the end of Operation “Kutuzov” was relied entirely on Briansk and Central fronts (Bukeyhanov, 2013, p. 228).

The enemy, taking advantage of the slow advance of the right wing of the Central Front, hastily withdrew its units to the northern bank of the Kroma River and to the western bank of the Nezhivka River, where it moved to the defense to prevent breakthrough of the Red Army troops in the northern and north-western directions. K. K. Rokossovsky, the Commander of the Front of the General Army, trying to thwart the enemy's plan, ordered Army 48 and Guard Tank Army 3 on the morning of August 1 to resume the offensive and to perform the previously set tasks, and Army 70 and Tank Army 2 simultaneously to go on the offensive and bypass Orel group of the enemy from the South (Daynes, 2009, p. 396).

At the end of the day on July 30, the Central Front troops advanced only to a depth distance of 40 km. J. Stalin, observing the development of events in Orel direction, was dissatisfied with the actions of the commander of the Central Front. At 2.40, on August 1, he sent him a directive: “Recently, due to the offensive of the troops of Briansk and the left wing of the Western Front, the enemy group has got significantly weakened in the zone in front of the Central Front, withdrawing five tank divisions, two motor divisions and up to two or three infantry divisions”.

At the same time, the Central Front was significantly strengthened by tanks, having received Tank Army 3 under the command of Rybalko. “All this led to an improvement in the position of the troops of the front and created favourable conditions for the decisive offensive action. However, these conditions are still insufficiently used by the front command” (Russian archive, 1996, p. 185).

The Supreme Command Headquarters set the tasks for the front commander to immediately prepare and strike a decisive blow immediately with the forces of Army 70 and Tank Army 2 in the direction of Chuvardino, Chervona Roshcha, and Apalkova. At the same time Army 13 had the task to break through the enemy's defenses west of Koroskovo, preparing the conditions for the introduction of a breakthrough of Guard Tank Army 3 until the moment of its concentration.

Guard Tank Army 3 was to locate until August 5 in the area south of Koroskovo with the task of developing success of Army 13 and striking in the direction of Kroma to reduce the enemy's defenses on the west bank of the Oka River and thus help Army 48 move forward.

Subsequently, Tank Army 2 and Guard Tank Army 3 had to be ready to bypass Orel from the West, helping Briansk Front in defeating Orel enemy group and capturing the city of Orel (Russian archive, 1996, pp. 185–186).

Having received the order from the Supreme Command Headquarters, the Commander of the Central Front, taking into account the current situation, clarified the tasks for the front troops: for Army 48 – to stop the attack and get ready for the defense in the positions occupied;

for Guard Tank Army 3 – to withdraw troops from the battle and arrive in the area of Rybnitsya by the morning of August 3 (24–25 km to the southwest);

for Tank Corps 9 from the evening of August 1 to begin the pursuit of the enemy and not give him the opportunity to gain a foothold on the river Kroma (Daynes, 2010, pp. 304–305).

On August 4, Army General K. K. Rokossovsky clarified the task of the troops of the right wing of the front. Army 70 units were to intensify the hostilities, and Tank Army 2 and Tank Corps 9 were to strike at the enemy's rear in the general direction of Kolka, Chervona Yagoda and help Army 70 troops in curtailing the enemy's defenses. The Commander of Guard Tank Army 3 received the task at 13 o'clock to start the attack, forcing the river Kroma in the area of Kolka, Chervona Roshcha, and then to strike in the general direction of Khmelevo, Hnyle, Khotkovo, to cut off the enemy's retreat to the West and South-West from the area of Kroma, Orel, Naryshkino. The Commander of Army 13 was given the task to support artillery fire and to provide a crossing of Guard Tank Army 3 across the Kroma River, further using its success, to move forward rapidly and at the end of the day on August 4 to reach the border of Maryinsky, Chervonyi Orach, Chervona Nyva, Dolzhenki (Daynes, 2009, p. 397).

The order of the Commander of the front was received by the headquarters of Guard Tank Army 3 with a delay. The Army units went on the offensive at 3:30 p.m., on August 4. The troops of Guard Tank Army 3 carried out the offensive under heavy artillery fire and air strikes, only at the end of the day were able to reach the southern bank of the river Kroma, but could not capture the crossing at once. Only the next day at 11 o'clock the motorized infantry units of the mechanized brigades 18, 34 (MBR) of Infantry division mechanized corps (MK) 7 forced the river Kroma near Novotroitsky and captured the bridgehead on the opposite bank, but could not move deeper. The Parts of Guard Tank Army 6 and 7 captured Hlynky, but could not hold the position under a strong enemy pressure and were forced to cross to the southern bank of the river Kroma. Only by the end of the day, on August 5, Tank Brigade 88 of Guard Tank Corps 7 managed to capture the crossing in the area of Kutafino and on the night of August 6 to begin the crossing of tanks to the northern bank of the Kroma river (Daynes, 2010, p. 372).

At this time, the troops of Army 3 and Army 63 of Briansk Front liberated Orel on August 5. The Supreme Command Headquarters, seeking to consolidate the achieved success, by its directive № 30159, ordered Briansk Front commander, on August 6, to focus the main efforts on the rapid capture of Khotynets and Karachev. The Commander of the Central Front was given the task to use Tank Army 2 and Guard Tank Army 3 to strike in the direction of Shablykino in the interaction with the right wing of Briansk Front to destroy the enemy, the troops of which were retreating from Orel to the west. The task was given to involve all Briansk Front and Central Front aircraft to perform this task (Russian archive, 1996, p. 186).

At the beginning of August, the general situation in the area of Orel ledge was characterized by the fact that Briansk Front troops captured the city of Orel, but the Central Front troops were still on the approaches to Kroma until August 4 – Army 13 and Tank Army 2 fought on the bank border of the Kroma River. Analyzing the situation, the Command of the Army Group “Center” understood that due to fatigue and reduced combat capability of the troops it was impossible to stop the attack of the Red Army troops, it was necessary to leave Orel ledge as soon as possible (Bukeyhanov, 2013, p. 249).

In pursuance of the Supreme Command Headquarters, Lieutenant-General P.S. Rybalko was given the task to pursue the enemy in the direction of Khmyliov, Mytske, Shablykino and to capture: Shablykino, Novosiolki, Herasymovo, Volkovo, Robye. The troops of Tank Army

2 – to chase the enemy in the direction of Hnezdylovo, Veselyi Kut, Rabotkovo, Berezivka, Hnezdylivka and capture Rabotkovo, Borodino, Lyse (Shein, 2009, p. 187). But the tank armies failed to accomplish the task. The fierce resistance of the enemy, whose soldiers clung to the accidental, unprepared frontiers, sought to delay the offensive of the Red Army troops and thus to ensure the systematic withdrawal of Orel group, did not allow the Red Army troops to reach the boundaries, specified in the order of the front commander. The low rate of attack of tank formations caused sharp dissatisfaction in the Headquarters of the Central Front.

The Army General K. K. Rokossovsky, in his order to the commanders of the tank armies, expressed dissatisfaction with their actions. He demanded from Guard Tank Army 3, on the morning of August 7 to break through the enemy defense in the area of Krasny Orach, Dolzhenko and, developing the strike to Maslovo, Soskovo, at the end of the day to capture the area of Troitsky, Soskovo, Zvyagintsevo, Maslovo. K. K. Rokossovsky required the use of the tank formations and motorized infantry during the attack in a massive way, not attacking by small scattered groups. He ordered to bring to strict responsibility, even the trial of commanders of the units and formations that do not perform the tasks (CAMD RF, f. 62, d. 329, ref. 23, pp. 234–236).

It should be noted that the orders given by the commander of the Central Command troops for the period from July 30 to August 6 indicate his intention to achieve the fastest fulfillment of the tasks set by the Supreme Command Headquarters.

Were there any accusations against Guard Tank Army 3 fair? The Army units lacked ammunition and artillery. Interaction with motorized infantry units and units was not properly developed. This led the tankers combat without the support of motorized infantry, the tankers independently broke through the enemy's defenses. And the task of tankers was to develop an attack after the breakthrough of the enemy's defenses. After all, the offensive must be carried out with full force, at a high pace, continuously day and night, under all weather conditions, with close cooperation of units of all types of troops and security. The shortcomings of the Central Front headquarters regarding the general management of the operation are viewed. In addition, during the last three days of the hostilities on the banks of the Kroma River, the army losses were: almost 2,5 killed and wounded, 104 tanks and SAU (Shein, 2009, p. 187).

Despite the measures taken, the attack of the Central Command troops was slow. On the right wing, they advanced only for 10 km. The troops of Army 65 and Army 70 with the support of Aircraft Army 16 liberated Dmytrovsk-Orlovsky on August 12. The unit of Army 13 on the same day, having met the organized resistance of the enemy from the west bank of the rivers Vodocha and Lokna, was forced to start the defense.

The advance of the units of Guard Tank Army 3 was slow. The parts of Guard Mobile Corps 7 managed to seize the area of Troitske only at the end of the day on August 9. At the same time Tank Army 6 occupied Khmeliove, and Guard Tank Army 7 was stopped on the outskirts of Soskov. The enemy, relying on a prepared defensive line, made a fierce resistance. At the end of the day, on August 10, Guard Tank Army 3 lost about 60 tanks. The German units of Divisions 383 and 6 also suffered heavy losses and began retreating to the Vodocha River (Daynes, 2010, p. 373).

Large losses of the troops of Guard Tank Army 3 were negatively treated in the General Headquarters of the Red Army. The General Headquarters reacted immediately and sent Directive to the commanders of the Central Front and Guard Tank Army: “According to the General Headquarters, Guard Tank Army 3 in the amount of 110 tanks 10.8 in battles for height 264, 6 lost 100 tanks, that is, in fact, was destroyed by the enemy. That happened

during in the general withdrawal of the enemy and the lack of a prepared defense. At the same time, our tank group was destroyed by the enemy, penetrating only for 2–3 km into enemy's territory, that is, the tank group could have been given all possible help and support. The destruction of such a large number of our tanks within a few hours indicates not only the complete lack of interaction of Guard Tank Army 3 and Army 13, but also the inaction of these commanders, who abandoned the tanks at random without any support. For the report to the People's Commissar for Defense, I ask you to begin investigation and report the results to the General Headquarters Staff”.

During the hostilities from July 28 to August 12, the loss of Guard Tank Army 3 troops was 7729 people, including 2061 killed, 350 tanks, 5 SAU, or 42% of the total number of combat vehicles (CAMD RF, f. 315, d. 4440, ref. 33, p. 7). According to other data, the army lost 60,3% of T-34 tanks and 72,9% of T-70 tanks (Daynes, 2010, p. 374). The commander of the Central Front, because of the heavy losses of troops Guard Tank Army 3, decided to withdraw it from the battle and concentrate in the area of Sukhe, Torokhov, Apalkov. At 2 o'clock, on the night of August 12, the army headquarters received an order to subordinate to the Commander of Army 13 (Rokossovskiy, 1988, p. 277).

Guard Tank Army 3 suffered significant losses and according to the Directive of the General Headquarters № 40202 on August 13 (without Guard Mobile Corps 7) Guard Tank Army 3 was withdrawn from the Central Front to the reserve of the Supreme Command Headquarters. All tanks and SAU remained in the Central Front, and Guard Tank Corps 7 years was transferred to Tank Army 2.

This ended the participation of the troops of Guard Tank Army 3 in Orel attack campaign. By September 1, it was planned to add to its staff personnel, tanks, weapons, vehicles and all kinds of supplies

The peculiarities of Guard Tank Army 3 participation in the operation “Kutuzov” were: repeated change of its combat missions; frequent regrouping; making a breakthrough in the enemy defense alone or in cooperation with general armies.

On Briansk Front, the events unfolded as follows. On August 6, Infantry Division 11 started the attack. At the same time, Tank Corps 1 was advancing in the direction of Vysoke. From Peshkovo district the main forces of Tank Army 4 advanced to Melove, bypassing Khotynets from the East, and Tank Corps 25 advanced to Bunina. Together, they defeated Khotynets group of the enemy and liberated Khotynets. Tank Corps 1 developed the attack on Karachev, and Tank Army 4 – further to the South.

By August 18, Briansk Front, Western Front, and Central Front troops had reached the front lines of the pre-established German defensive line “Hagen” and were stopped on the line to the East of Lyudinovo, 25 km to the East of Briansk, to the West of Dmytrivsk-Orlovsk. This was the end of Operation “Kutuzov”, during which the troops of the three fronts advanced for 150 km, eliminating the enemy's Orel bridgehead (Daynes, 2010, p. 470). Orel operation lasted for 38 days.

After the end of Orel offensive operation Tank Army 4 did not join the hostilities for a long time.

The results of the Battle of Kursk were quite disappointing for the Soviet Union in terms of the ratio of losses. The total losses of the Soviet troops in Orel operation, according to some calculations, reached 429,890 people, including irreversible – 112,529, sanitary – 317,361; average daily – 11,313 people (Krivosheev, 1993, pp. 188–189), 2 586 танків (Daynes, 2010, p. 308). According to other data, 860,000 people. The total losses of the Soviet troops during the

attack campaign, the Battle of Kursk are calculated at approximately 1,677,000 killed, captured, wounded and sick, as compared to approximately 360,000 in the Wehrmacht troops (Smirnov, 1979, p. 289).

The Conclusions. As a result of Orel operation, the Red Army liquidated Orel bridgehead, inflicting a significant defeat on the Wehrmacht group and pushing its troops into Briansk area. The liquidation of Orel bridgehead of the Germans in July–August 1943 required incredible efforts and enormous sacrifices.

Significant forces of armored and mechanized troops were involved in the counterattack near Kursk. For the first time since the beginning of the German-Soviet war, three tank armies were used, as well as seven separate tank corps, seven tank brigades, twenty-seven tank regiments, and fifteen self-propelled artillery regiments in one offensive operation.

Significant drawbacks were made during the operation. During the preparation for the operation, the Supreme Command Headquarters was hasty in determining the time of its beginning. As a result, the troops went on the offensive without finishing the preparation, no more powerful group was created on the left flank of the Western Front. The troops of Briansk Front had to overcome the deeply echeloned defense of the enemy with a frontal strike. The front-line aircraft could not completely solve the problem of isolating the combat area from the approach of the enemy's operational reserves. As a result, instead of a rapid strike, the operation became protracted. The enemy, in fact, was slowly squeezed out of Orel ledge, which allowed him to regroup the troops and withdraw them in an organized manner from Orel area.

The tank armies became the main means of developing success of the fronts, and tank and mechanized corps – of general armies. But they were often used to break through several enemy defensive lines, which sharply reduced their ability to develop an offensive at an operational depth. Tank Army 2 was used for a frontal strike, and it would be more appropriate to use it on the flank, at the junction between Army 70 and Army 65, which would significantly accelerate the solution of the problems of the Central Front. Quite incompetently there was used Guard Tank Army 3 on Briansk and Central fronts. Often changing the tasks, unjustified by the situation, the army commander was unable to focus on a powerful strike, because the tank corps were scattered on the front. This caused great losses of personnel and tanks in the army. Tank armies were used for the first time in a counterattack without infantry.

Separate tank brigades, regiments and battalions, as well as self-propelled artillery regiments and divisions (from the beginning of Orel offensive operation), which were added to the infantry divisions, were used as tanks of a direct support of infantry in breaking through the enemy's positional defenses, their density increased as compared to Stalingrad Battle – 20 tanks and SAU per 1 km of the front. But during the breakthrough of a highly deep-echeloned enemy defense, such densities were insufficient. The peculiarity of the use of tank brigades was that they were not crushed or added to the infantry regiments, but acted in the direction of the main strike of the infantry division. From the added tanks in the division, an infantry support group was created, which received tasks directly from the division commander.

The supply of artillery to the tank armies during the battle was insufficient due to the lack of army artillery. This was one of the reasons for the significant combat losses of tanks.

Tank armies, tank and mechanized corps were most successful only in close cooperation with all-military units, artillery and aircraft.

In Orel offensive operation, an example was initiated when a brigade (TBR 159), which acted as an advanced detachment and acted in isolation from the main forces of the corps (Tank Corps 1), began the counterattack with operational reserves suitable not only for capture and

retention of a favourable frontier for the deployment of the main forces of the corps, but also in order to force the enemy to deploy their troops prematurely in the combat order, to inflict a strong initial strike, to inflict defeats and to ensure successful combat operations of the corps.

In the perspective of a further research issue, the authors will consider the peculiarities of the use of armored and mechanized troops during the preparation and conduct of Kursk Strategic Defense Operation (July 5–23, 1943).

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