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**KHARKIV OFFENSIVE OPERATION (MAY 12–17, 1942):
MISCALCULATIONS IN THE OPERATIONAL COMMAND**

Abstract. *The purpose of the research – to do the study on the organization of preparation for an offensive operation and the subsequent influence on the conduct of an offensive operation under difficult conditions of the following components: the interaction organization of large formations during the offensive, the use of troops and large mobile formations in a frontal offensive operation, the material support of troops under the conditions of an offensive with bridgeheads. The research methodology is based on the principles of historical knowledge (scientism, historicism, objectivity, systemic analysis), as well as on the use of a set of methods: dialectical, analytical, historical, biographical, comparative. The scientific novelty of the obtained results consists in the comprehensive analysis of the process of preparing and conducting an offensive front operation with the use of four tank corps, which is due to the absence in the domestic historiography of special historical generalizing works on the specified subject within the specified chronological limits. An objective assessment of the offensive operation significance of the South-Western Front has been given, as an example of unsuccessful actions for the development of military art in the operations of the German-Soviet war and its negative impact*

on the course of further military events in 1942. **The Conclusions.** The main reason for the tragedy is that the Headquarters of the Supreme High Command (actually Joseph Stalin) agreed to conduct an offensive operation at the insistence of the Military Council of the South-Western direction (SWD). A characteristic feature of management was the combination of functions: the Commander-in-Chief and his chief of staff of the South-Western direction were simultaneously the commander and chief of staff of the South-Western Front, respectively. This is a vivid example of incompetent military leadership. This incompetence gave a negative result, the actions of the SWF were carried out in isolation from the Southern Front (SF), as during the preparation, and especially during the operation. The main shortcoming of the overall planning of the offensive of the troops on the SWD was the lack of a proper operational support of the SWF strike group from the south by the SF forces. This was influenced by significant shortcomings made during the preparation and implementation of the operation.

Key words: World War II, offensive operation, Wehrmacht, group, front, army, corps.

ХАРКІВСЬКА НАСТУПАЛЬНА ОПЕРАЦІЯ (12–17 травня 1942 р.): ПРОРАХУНКИ В ОПЕРАТИВНОМУ КОМАНДУВАННІ

Анотація. Мета статті—системно дослідити організацію підготовки наступальної операції та подальший вплив на ведення наступальної операції у непростих умовах таких складових: організація взаємодії великих з'єднань у ході наступу, використання родів військ і крупних рухомих з'єднань у фронтовій наступальній операції, матеріальне забезпечення військ в умовах наступу із плацдармів. **Методологія дослідження** ґрунтується на принципах історичного пізнання (науковість, історизм, об'єктивність, системний аналіз), а також використанні сукупності методів: діалектичного, аналітичного, історичного, біографічного, порівняльного. **Наукова новизна** одержаних результатів полягає у комплексному аналізі процесу з підготовки і проведення наступальної операції фронту із застосуванням чотирьох танкових корпусів, що зумовлено відсутністю у вітчизняній історіографії спеціальних історичних узагальнюваних праць з визначеної тематики у вказаних хронологічних межах. Дано об'єктивну оцінку значення наступальної операції Південно-Західного фронту як прикладу невдалих дій для розвитку воєнного мистецтва в операціях німецько-радянської війни та її негативного впливу на хід подальших воєнних подій у 1942 р. **Висновки.** Головною причиною трагедії є те, що Ставка ВГК (насправді Й. Сталін) погодилася на проведення наступальної операції за наполяганням Військової ради ПЗН.

Характерною особливістю управління було поєднання функцій: Головнокомандувач і його начальник штабу Південно-Західного напрямку, одночасно були командувачем і начальником штабу Південно-Західного фронту, відповідно. Це яскравий приклад бездарного керівництва військами.

Це дало негативний результат, дії ПЗФ проводилися ізольовано від ПФ як під час підготовки, так і особливо в ході ведення операції. Основним недоліком загального планування наступу військ на ПЗН була відсутність належного оперативного забезпечення ударного угруповання ПЗФ з півдня силами ПФ. На це вплинули суттєві недоліки, допущені під час підготовки і проведення операції.

Ключові слова: Друга світова війна, наступальна операція, вермахт, угруповання, фронт, армія, корпус.

The Problem Statement. World War II was the largest military conflict in a human history. During the Soviet-German war, the troops of the Workers' and Peasants' Red Army (the Soviet Army) conducted 17 strategic and 15 independent front operations on the territory of Ukraine (Hrytsiuk, 2010, p. 137).

The authors of the article consider one of the most unsuccessful offensive operations for the leadership of the Red Army, Kharkiv offensive operation (May of 1942).

It should be noted that the military and political leadership of the state took this tragic experience into account in the future when planning operations (Krivizyuk, 2019, pp. 66–74).

The success achieved by the Soviet Army in the operations of the winter campaign of 1941/1942 and in the spring of 1942 improved the military and political situation of the USSR compared to the summer of 1941, but the situation remained tense for the troops of the Soviet Army.

The growth of the military industry made it possible to improve the equipment and weapons of the military units of the Soviet Army (Rotmistrov, 1963, pp. 151–152).

For a further successful implementation of offensive operations, it was necessary to create large mobile units. Therefore, from April of 1942, tank brigades (*tbr*) began to be formed to tank corps (*tc*) (CAMD RF, f. 83, d. 80050cc, ref. 4, pp. 14–15, 53, 299–300). In May, according to the decision of the Headquarters of the Supreme High Command (SHC), the formation of Tank Army 3 and Tank Army 5 (TA) began (Russian archive, 1996, pp. 217–219).

After the successful counteroffensive near Rostov (*November 17 – December 1, 1941*) and Moscow strategic operation (*December 5, 1941 – January 7, 1942*), the leadership of the country and the armed forces decided to start active operations in other areas of the German-Soviet front. However, offensive operations in Kursk and Kharkiv directions, in the Donbas and the Crimea did not have any tangible success.

The troops of the Soviet Army managed to capture a small area and defeat only three divisions of the Wehrmacht. In the spring, the offensive actions stopped, the troops began to prepare for a new offensive. The front line stabilized (Hrytsiuk, 2010, pp. 56–61).

In Iziium area the troops of the South-Western Front (SWF) achieved some success, as a result of which a bridgehead was formed on the western bank of the Siversky Donets river in the area of Barvinkove town (Barvinkove salient), which opened up the possibility for a further offensive near Kharkiv.

The Battle of Kharkiv (the offensive operation of the SWF troops in Kharkiv direction and the counterattack by the Germans (May of 1942), according to Kyiv historians, it was not the second (as many historians believe), but the fourth battle for Kharkiv (Pyliavets, 2012, pp. 63–70; Lysenko & Pyliavets, 2013, pp. 350–351).

The Review of Recent Researches. The historiography issue of the Soviet-German war is extremely broad and multifaceted. A significant body of research papers on World War II is devoted to the issues of military art of the warring parties. In the Soviet historiography, due to the communist ideology, the operations in which the troops of the Soviet Army were defeated were usually hushed up, and exclusively victorious actions, i.e. offensive actions, were declared. First of all, such operations include Kharkiv offensive operation (May of 1942), when, after a counteroffensive near Moscow, there was a crushing, shameful defeat.

The Soviet historiography (Abaturov, & Portuhalskyi, 2008; Rotmistrov, 1963; *Sovetskie tankovyie voyska 1941 – 1945*, 1973), on the Battle of Kharkiv is the most numerous. Publications with the vulture completely secret and secret deserve special focus (Platonov, 1961; Platonov, 1951; Platonov, 1958). These publications were marked with a significant fact material and contained many true materials. Access to this information was restricted and publication of these documents was prohibited. The scientific work by Morozov is significant (Morozov, 1975), it contains an extensive scientific and historical material.

In the publications mentioned below the memoirs of the authors who were direct participants of those events were used (Bagramyan, 1977; Vasilevsky, 1978; Zhukov, 1983; Moskalenko, 1973; Shtemenko, 1975), which usually require verification as to their veracity.

The memoirs and publications of the German generals (Mellenthin, 2005; Tippelskirch, 1999), these are well-thought-out military and theoretical works in which the authors try to present the Wehrmacht troops as best as possible and bypass their own miscalculations.

In the study of the issues of the Battle of Kharkiv contemporary historiography (May of 1942) is characterized by a critical analysis of operational art issues. It is worth highlighting the following researchers: Y. Moshchansky, V. Daynes, A. Galushko, M. Kolomiets among

the Russian researchers (Moshchansky, 2009; Daynes, 2009; Galushko, & Kolomiets, 2010; Kolomiets, 2013). In the Ukrainian historiography, the researched issue was considered in the publications of V. Horelov, V. Kozak, O. Lysenko, I. Patrilyak, M. Borovyk, R. Pyliavets (Gorelov, 2005; Kozak, 2000; Lysenko & Pyliavets, 2013; Patrilyak & Borovyk, 2010; Pyliavets, 2012). The issues of military art of the warring parties were considered in the researches by V. Hrytsiuk, L. Kryvyziuk (Krivizyuk), O. Yurchuk, M. Kuznietsov more thoroughly (Hrytsiuk, 2010; Hrytsiuk, & Krivizyuk, 2011; Krivizyuk & Yurchuk, 2014; Kuznietsov, 2003).

The work of the Soviet security forces in identifying and fighting the Romanian intelligence and counterintelligence bodies during the German-Soviet war was studied V. Ilnytskyi, M. Haliv (Ilnytskyi, Haliv, 2019; Ilnytskyi & Haliv, 2020).

The article is also presented with the archival materials (CAMD RF; Russian archive, 1999) on the planning and operational art of using troops during the operation.

The purpose of the research is to do a systematic study on organization of preparation for an offensive operation and a subsequent influence on the conduct of an offensive operation under difficult conditions: the interaction organization of large formations during the offensive, the use of troops and large mobile formations in a frontal offensive operation, a material support of troops under conditions of the offensive from bridgeheads.

The Results of the Research. In the spring of 1942, Headquarters of the Supreme High Command worked out a strategic plan and conducted an active training of troops in order to keep the strategic initiative on the German-Soviet front in their hands. The Wehrmacht was also preparing for the summer campaign in order to gain the advantage over the enemy and once again seize the strategic initiative and finally destroy the main forces of the Soviet Union with a decisive offensive. The main offensive was planned in the southern direction. In order to keep the plans secret, according to the direction of the command of the German Ground Forces (GGF), the headquarters of Army Group “Centre” developed a plan for a special operation under the conditional name “Kremlin”. The plan implied as if the Wehrmacht troops were launching a powerful offensive in the western direction with the aim of defeating the central grouping of the forces of the Soviet Army and invading Moscow, with the expectation that this plan would have reached the command of the Soviet Army, who would be misled (Morozov, 1975, pp. 120–121; Rotmistrov, 1963, p. 155).

The Soviet command, headed by J. Stalin, was sure that the enemy would deliver a powerful strike to Moscow. Other members of the Staff, the General Staff (GS) and the majority of the front commanders shared this opinion that the central (Moscow) direction would be the main one, and other strategic directions would play a secondary role. But as it turned out later, the forecast was wrong (Shtemenko, 1975, p. 57; Horielov, 2005, p. 137).

The Supreme High Command of the Wehrmacht (SHCW) set a task for its troops: in the central part of the front – to hold the position, in the north – to invade Leningrad and establish a land connection with the Finns, and in the southern part of the front – to break through to the Caucasus. On April 5, A. Hitler signed Directive No. 41, in which there was required “first of all, all available forces must be concentrated to carry out the main operation in the southern sector with the aim of destroying the enemy west of the Don, and then invading the territory rich in oil on Caucasus and pass through the Caucasian ridge” (Daynes, 2009, p. 269; Shtemenko, 1975, pp. 57–58). A chief goal was invading an important operational and strategic area, which was supposed to be used as an initial bridgehead (CAMD RF, f. 15, d. 11600, ref. 1105, p. 6).

The Chief of the General Staff, B. M. Shaposhnikov, was adamant not to proceed to broad counter-offensive actions until the summer. G. K. Zhukov, supporting B. M. Shaposhnikov mainly, at the same time considered it absolutely necessary to defeat the Rzhevsko-Viazemska group of the enemy at the beginning of the summer (Vasilevsky, 1978, p. 189; Zhukov, 1983, p. 252; Krivizyuk & Yurchuk, 2014, pp. 244–245).

The success of the winter offensive of the Soviet Army troops gave rise to complacency and excessive self-confidence among a large part of the command and political staff; it became a very widespread opinion that the Germans, after heavy defeats, were not able to conduct large-scale offensive operations and would not be able to achieve what they managed to achieve in 1941. A significant role was also played by J. Stalin's instruction "on the complete defeat of the German-fascist invaders in 1942" (Abaturov & Portuhalskyi, 2008, p. 76).

The headquarters of the Supreme High Command, not having a sufficient number of reserves to strengthen the troops of the South-Western Strategic Direction (SWSD), rejected the idea of a broad offensive in the south. The commander-in-chief of the South-western direction (SWD) was instructed to develop a plan for a narrower operation with the aim of defeating only Kharkiv enemy group and liberating Kharkiv with all available forces.

The action plan for the SWF troops (from April 8, 1942, Marshal S. K. Tymoshenko performed his duties, concurrently being the commander-in-chief of the SWD) (Russian archive, 1996, pp. 150–151) and the Southern Front (SF) (a commander – Lieutenant General R. Ya. Malinovsky), developed by the command of the SWD, was presented to the Headquarters of the Supreme High Command on March 30 (CAMD RF, f. 229, d. 161, ref. 799, p. 278).

According to the plan, the SWF troops carried out two strikes from Vovchansk region and Barvinkove salient on Kharkiv, with the goal of defeating Kharkiv Wehrmacht group and creating favourable conditions for the development of the offensive in the Dnieper direction (Morozov, 1975, p. 127; Kuznietsov, 2023, pp. 122–128).

According to the plan, it was assumed that in the first three-day stage, during the breakthrough of the German defense to a distance of 20–30 km, the advancing troops would destroy the nearest reserves and provide an introduction into battle for the offensive development of mobile groups. At the second stage (three to four days), it was supposed to destroy the operational reserves and complete the encirclement of the enemy group. At the same time, it was planned to cut off and destroy part of the troops of the German group in the area of Chuhuyiv, Balakliya by the forces of Army 38 and the right flank of Army 6 (Hrytsiuk & Krivizyuk, 2011, pp. 379–385).

In accordance with the set goals, the main strike was delivered by Army 6 (a commander – Lieutenant General A. M. Horodniansky) on a 26-km front (as part of eight rifle divisions (*rd*), four tank brigades (*tbr*) with the support of fourteen artillery regiments (*ar*) of the reserve of the General Command (RGC)), and was supposed to break through the enemy's defenses and ensure the introduction of a mobile group (two *tc* 21 *tc* (a commander – Major General TV H. I. Kuzmin)) and 23 *tc* (a commander – Major General TV Ye. H. Pushkin) into the breakthrough).

In the future, the army, in cooperation with the mobile group, had to develop an attack on Kharkiv from the south to attack the troops of Army 28 to surround the entire enemy group (Moskalenko, 1973, p. 179; Platonov, 1961, p. 382).

To the left of Army 6, the army group (AG) (a commander – Major General L. V. Bobkin) attacked, consisting of two *rd* and one *tbr*. It was supposed to break through the enemy's

defenses and ensure the introduction of Cavalry Corps 6 (*cc*) into the breakthrough, and at the end of the fifth day of the operation to take control of Krasnohrad and secure the troops of Army 6 from the counterattacks from the west.

The second strike was carried out by Army 28 (a commander – Lieutenant General D. I. Riabyshev) on a 15-km section of the front (composed of six *rd* and four *tbr* with the support of nine *ar* RHK) with the task of breaking through the enemy's defenses and by the end of the third day of the operation ensure introduction into the breakthrough of 3 *guard cc* and motorized rifle brigade (*mrbr*). Developing the success of Army 28 in interaction with 3 *hv. cc* was supposed to bypass Kharkiv from the north and connect with 21 *tc* and 23 *tc* of Army 6.

The offensive of Army 28 was supported by: Army 21 (a commander – Major General – V. M. Hordov) from the north and north-west, Army 38 – from the south and south-west. Army 21 was supposed to break through the enemy's defenses on a 14-km section of the front.

Army 38 (a commander – Major General of Artillery K. S. Moskalenko), which included (six *rd*, three *tbr*, reinforced by six *ar* RHK and six engineer battalions), received the task of breaking through the enemy's defenses on a 26-km section of the front and by the end of the third day to reach the line of Lebedynka, Zarozhne, Piatnytske. In the future, develop the offensive in the direction of Rohan, Ternova, and with the exit of the strike group to Vedenka, Chuhuyiv area, the troops of Army 38, in cooperation with three regiments of Army 6, will complete the encirclement, defeat Chuhuyiv enemy group and prepare for the offensive on Kharkiv (Moskalenko, 1973, pp. 179–180; Platonov, 1958, p. 582).

The grouping of troops as of May 11, 1942 was as follows:

the SWF – the troops of the front basically took the starting position for the offensive. The front included: rifle divisions (*rd*) – 29, cavalry divisions (*cd*) – 9, motorized rifle divisions (*mrd*) – 1; motorized rifle brigades (*mrbr*) – 4, tank brigades (*tbr*) – 19, separate tank battalions (*tb*) – 4 (925 tanks):

– Army 21 defended Spartak area, Miasoyedovo, Prystan forces of 8 *mrd*, 297 *rd*, one regiment of 301 *rd*, and 76 *rd*, 293 *rd* and 227 *rd* reinforced by the 10 *tbr* were concentrated in the area south of Bezliudivka.

The army reserve included: two regiments of the 301 *rd* and 1 *mrbr* of 8 *otb*, which were concentrated in Chuyevo, Kryvi Balky, Kholodne area.

– Army 28: construction of defense in two echelons. The first – 175 *rd*, 169 *rd*, 244 *rd* and 13 *guard rd*, reinforced 84 *tbr*, 57 *tbr*, 90 *tbr* and all artillery on Izbytske front line, Drahunovka. In the second echelon – 38 *rd* and 162 *rd* with 6 *guard tbr*. The moving group included 3 *guard cc* and 34 *mrbr*, which was located in Yefremovka, Volokhovka, Zakharovka area.

– Army 38, which defended in the centre and on the left flank of the front with forces of 199 *rd* and 304 *rd*, deployed 226 *rd*, 124 *rd*, 300 *rd* and one regiment of 81 *rd*, reinforced by 36 *tbr*, 13 *tbr* and almost all army artillery. Two regiments, 81 *rd* and 133 *tbr*, were allocated to the reserve, the area of concentration was in Molodove area.

– Army 6 defended the right bank of the North Donets river in the area of Shchurovka, Nyzhnie-Rus, Bishkin. The main forces of the army were concentrated on Verkh. Byshkin, Hrushyno front. The defense line consisted of two echelons. The first one – 253 *rd*, 41 *id*, 411 *rd* and 266 *rd* strengthened by 5 *guard tbr*, 38 *tbr*, 48 *tbr* and all army artillery.

Tank corps (269 tanks) were concentrated: 21 tanks in Krutoyarka, Novopavlivka area; 23 *tc* – in the area of Alioshky, Bunakovo (Platonov, 1951, pp. 26–27).

21 *tc* and 23 *tc* were included into the motor group of the SWF. It was planned to introduce it into the breakthrough in the offensive of Army 6 to develop an attack in the

general direction of Liubotyn and in cooperation with the 3 *cc* and complete the encirclement of Kharkiv enemy group (CAMD RF, f. 229, op. 161, ref. 779, p. 294).

277 *rd*, 343 *rd*, 2 *cc* and three *otb*, as well as 102 *rbr* and 6 *rbr* were allocated to the reserve of the SWF commander.

The Southern front (SF) – on May 7, 1942, the troops of the front began an operation in Maika area with the aim of improving the troops condition of Army 9 and creating favourable conditions for a further offensive to capture Sloviansk. Based on this, on May 11 the reserve of the front commander and troops of Army 9 had an operational structure that met the interests of the offensive, but did not provide reliable defense of Barvinkove bridgehead.

– Army 57 with 150 *rd*, 317 *rd*, 99 *rd*, 351 *rd*, 14 *guard rd* defended the area of Tsaredarivka, Krystopivka, Novo-Pavlivka, Sofiyivka – the first echelon, the second echelon – 14 *guard rd*. The army was reinforced by three artillery regiments (*ar*). The length of the army front was 80 km. The operational length was 16 km per division, 4.6 guns and mine-throwers per 1 km of the front.

– Army 9 with 341 *rd*, 106 *rd*, 349 *rd*, 335 *rd*, 51 *rd*, 333 *rd*; 78 rifle brigade (*rbr*), 121 *tbr*, 15 *tbr* five *ar* occupied the defense on a 96 km front: the area of Sofiyivka, Alisovka north. Mayaky, Brusivka.

The operational density was 10 km per division, 10–12 guns and mine-throwers per 1 km of the front.

One regiment of Rifle Division 333 was in the army commander's reserve in Barvinkove area.

– thirteen *rd* and one *rbr* were left in defense areas of Army 37, Army 12, Army 18 and Army 56 during regrouping in the first echelon. 296 *rd*, 176 *rd*, 216 *rd* were allocated to the reserve of army commanders, respectively, and the commander of Army 56 – 3 guard Rifle Corps (*rc*) (2 *Guards Corps*, 76 *rbr*, 81 *rbr*, 68 *rbr* and 63 *tbr*).

In the reserve of the SF commander, there were 24 *tc* (24 *msbr*, 4 *guard tbr*, 2 *tbr* and 54 *tbr*), 5 *cc* (60 *cd*, 34 *cd*, 30 *guard cd* and 12 *tbr*), 347 *guard rd*, 255 *guard rd*, 15 *guard rd* and 102 *rd*, 73 *rd*, 242 *rd* and 282 *rd* transferred by the Supreme High Command Headquarters. But the reserves were allowed to be used only with the permission of the Supreme High Command Headquarters (Order No. 13986), except for 24 *tc* and 5 *cc*.

On the front line of Army 57 and Army 9, the troops occupying the southern line of Barvinkove salient, the defense was built from strongholds of resistance. The battle divisions were not echeloned, so the depth of the tactical defense reached only 3–4 km. Being in the defense for one and a half months, work on the creation of defensive and engineering barriers was carried out unsatisfactorily. In defense zones Army 57 and Army 9, the density of barriers, per 1 km of the front, was only about three tree-ground defense points, 25–30 anti-infantry mines and about 80 anti-tank mines. And along the entire 180-km front, there were only 11 km of wire fences. Therefore, neither the operational construction of troops Army 57 and Army 9 the SF in defense, nor the engineering arrangement of the area, which was accessible to tanks, provided a reliable defense of the southern wing of Barvinkove salient.

In the reserve of the Commander-in-Chief of the SWD there were 277 *rd*, 343 *rd*, 2 *cc* and three *otb* (Platonov, 1951, pp. 27–28).

Before the start of the offensive, the command of the Soviet Army concentrated a fairly powerful tank group, which included 3 *tc* (21, 22 and 23) and 9 *tbr* (5, 6, 7, 10, 37, 38, 42, 87 and 90), which numbered 925 tanks. Separate *tbr* were included in strike groups and

BPP *rd* of the first echelon. 22 *tc* was included into Army 38. The army commander used the *tc* decentralized, transferring the *tbr* to the rifle divisions (Sovetskie tankovyye voyska, 1973, p. 58).

Tank corps – the main weapon of the Soviet Army in the 1942 campaign and their main purpose was to break through the defense in the offensive line of the SWF.

Grouping of Wehrmacht troops. As a result of the regrouping of the troops, the density of German troops in the main line of defense and in the areas of the strike groups of the SWF and before the line of Army 57 and Army 9 of the SF was significantly increased. And this was contributed to by the failure of the SWF and SF Headquarters to maintain the secrecy of management and improper operational camouflage during the concentration of troops in the planned areas of the breakthrough, the German command revealed the intentions of the Soviet Army command and extremely quickly (mainly from May 1 to 11) carried out a series of measures to strengthen the defense line in dangerous directions at the expense of Army 6, Army 17 and the arriving reserves, and powerful reserves were concentrated in the operational area.

The day before the offensive, the troops of the German Army 6 (a commander – General of tank forces F. Paulus) as part of the 29, 17, 51 and 8 army corps (*ac*) and 4 *id* 6 *ac* (Romanian), which was part of Army 17, were involved in the hostilities (a commander – Colonel-General Hans von Salmutt).

17 *ac* (79 *id* and 294 *id*) defended the area of Maslova Prystan, Pischane front. 51 *ac* (297 *id* and 44 *id*) defended Chuhuyiv bridgehead on the front line of Pechenihiy, Balakliya, Cherkasky Byshkyn.

In Krasnohrad direction, there were 8 *ac* (108 *lid* of the Hungarians, 62 *id*, 454 guard division (*gd*), which occupied the defense on the border: Verkhniy Byshkyn, Hrushyne, Myronivka. 113 *id* – the operational reserve of the commander of Army 6, was located in Berestovenka area, Kozachi Maidany, Andriyivka. The units of 4 *id* of the Romanians occupied the defense on the front line of Myronivka, Pokrovske.

The units of 3 *td*, 23d *td* and 71 *id* concentrated in Kharkiv, and two regiments of this division were on the march to Balakliya, and Division 211 was reinforced by 294 *id*. On the approach to Kharkiv there were the advanced units of Infantry Division 305.

Thus, in the SWF, there were up to fifteen *id* and two *td*. And according to the SWF Headquarters it was supposed to be 12 and 1, respectively.

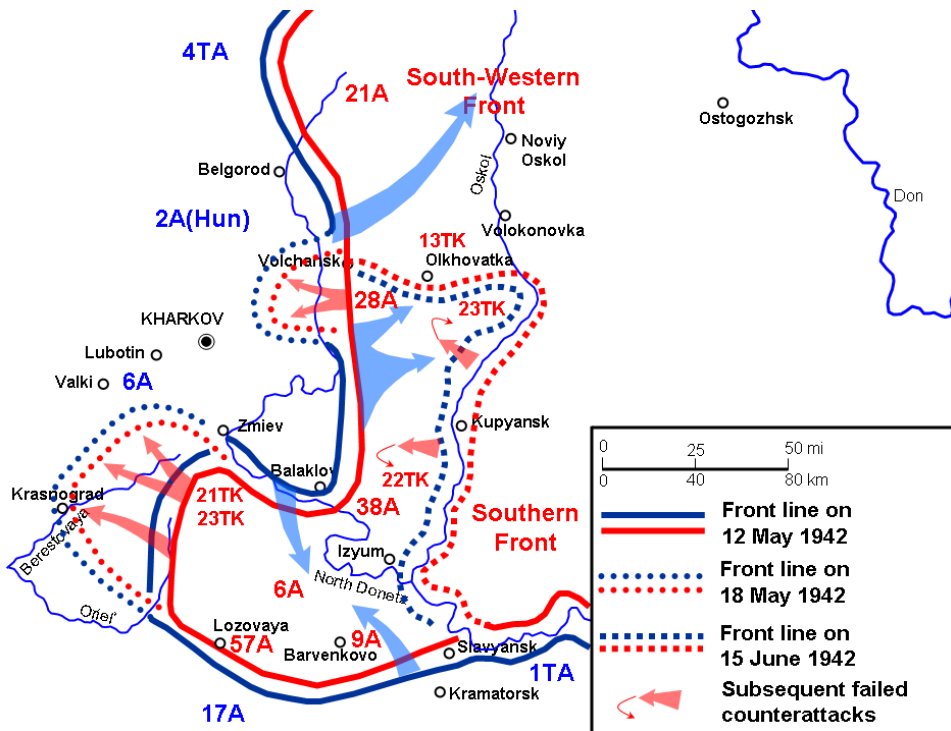
In the SF, the command of the Wehrmacht increased the number of troops by six divisions.

The operational reserve of the Germans in front of the southern wing of the Barvinkove salient was concentrated: 389 *id*, 384 *id*, 101 *lid*, 20 *id* (Romanian) and 16 *td*.

In the SF, the grouping of German troops numbered thirty-four divisions, namely: *id* – 24, *td* – 3, motorized (*md*) – 5 and *rd* – 2.

In the SWF the ratio of troops on May 12 was: in favour of the *rd* – 2.1:1, in tanks – 2.5:1, in guns – 1.3:1, mine-throwers – 1.7: in favour of the Soviet Army, and in *cd* – absolute advantage (9), the Germans had none.

In the SF – the advantage of the Soviet Army: in the *rd* 1.2:1; *cd* – 1.5:1, mine-throwers – 3.8:1. But tanks – 1:2.4, guns – 1:1.9, the advantage of the Wehrmacht (Platonov, 1951, pp. 29–32).



The offensive of the troops of the SWF strike groups began in the morning of May 12 after an hour of artillery and aviation activity (Daynes, 2009, p. 268).

There was no suddenness in the enemy's actions for the opposing sides. The German command was extremely lucky that, due to a pilot error, the commander of Army 48 O. H. Samokhin, who flew to the front from Moscow, got to them. There were secret documents with him revealing the future offensive of the SWF from the Barvinkove salient. But the military leadership of the Soviet Army did not cancel the offensive (Moshchansky, 2009, p. 21).

Army 21 and Army 38 units achieved the best success in advancing deep into the Nazi defenses. On the night of May 12, units of the 76 *rd* of Army 21 captured small bridgeheads to the west on the banks of the North Donets River, and in the morning the division began an offensive with the main forces, and by the end of the day, parts of the division had united and formed a common bridgehead 5 km wide and up to 4 km deep.

293 *rd* and 227 *rd* of Army 21 successfully broke through the enemy's defensive line and, developing success, by the end of the day, having captured several settlements, advanced 10 km in the north direction and 6–8 km in the north-west direction. However, the units of Division 76 and Division 293 failed to create a common bridgehead during the day.

Successfully operated 10 *tbr*. "10 *tbr* in cooperation with 277 *rd* at 7.30 from the border of 103.1, 112.2 went on the offensive, and by 6 p.m. Dehtiarivka, Izbitske were under control..." (Kolomiets, 2013, pp. 23–25).

The Units of Army 28 were less successful. Heavy, bloody battles broke out in the line of its offensive. The enemy had fortified this area of defense well, creating high tactical densities and preparing settlements for a circular defense. And only soldiers 13 *guard rd*

managed to break through the enemy's defenses and defeat it in the stronghold Peremoha Victor in combat with the soldiers of 90 *guard tbr*.

As a result of the first day of the offensive, the troops of the northern strike group broke through the enemy's main line of defense, advancing to a depth of 6 to 10 km. The Southern Strike Group, having broken the enemy's resistance on the front of more than 40 km, wedged itself into the depth of the defense of the 51st and 8th German Army Corps 51 and 8 and (GAC) by 12–15 km. Army 6 and General L. Bobkin's AH units reached the second defensive line, created on the western bank of the Oril River (Abaturov & Portuhalskyi, 2008, pp. 87–89; Kolomiets, 2013, pp. 23–25).

Summing up the results of the first day of the offensive, the commander of the SWD ordered the commander of Army 6 to speed up the advance of the second echelon. For aviation – to carry out aerial reconnaissance and determine the composition and nature of actions of the German troops reserves in Kharkiv and Zaporizhzhia area. Anticipating the possibility of an enemy counterattack, the commander of Army 38 received an order to withdraw brigades of 22 *tc* (13 *tbr*, 36 *tbr* and 133 *tbr*) and concentrate them by dawn on May 13 behind the left flank of Army 38 with the task of covering Starosaltiv direction. There were no anti-tank constructions by engineering means at the specified direction. Following the order, the units of Echelon 2 of Army 28 were moved to the east of the bank of the North Donets River, and 162 *rd* on the night of May 13 began crossing to the west bank of the river in Verkhniy Saltiv area (Daynes, 2009, p. 268; Platonov, 1951, p. 36).

It should be noted that the command of Army 6 of the Wehrmacht from the beginning of the SWF offensive directed its main efforts to maintaining the first (main) line of defense, using divisional reserves for counterattacks. Corps reserves were concentrated at a depth of 4–8 km ready for counterattacks and the defense of the nearest approaches to Kharkiv, since the German command considered the northern direction the most threatening.

The units of 76 *rd* and 293 *rd* of Army 21 the next day, although they captured the bridgehead on the western bank of the Siversky Donets, they could not advance deep into the German defenses. The left flank 227 *rd* had the greatest success and advanced 12 km. The unit of Army 28 was also successful and advanced 6 km (Galushko & Kolomiets, 2010, pp. 20–22).

Divisions of Army 38 continued the offensive in their lane. Until 1 p.m. advanced 6 km and there was the combat near the villages of Chervona Rohanka and Velyka Babka. 13 *tbr* and 133 *tbr* also reached this milestone. But in the afternoon, the situation changed dramatically.

It was a surprise for the SWD command that the enemy concentrated two strike groups. The first (3 *td* and two regiments of 71 *id*) was located in Pryvillia area; the second (23 *td* and one regiment of 44 *id*) – in Zarozhne area. At the same time, the enemy made a strong counterattack (about 400 tanks with infantry, supported by aviation) against the troops of the right flank of Army 38, who were forced to retreat to the eastern bank of the Velyka Babka River, opening the left flank of Army 28.

The front commander, having analyzed the situation, ordered Artillery Major General K. S. Moskalenko to occupy the defense on the eastern bank of the Velyka Babka River (the rear defensive line), to prevent the enemy's tanks from breaking through to Stary Saltiv, which threatened to encircle the entire northern strike group and eliminate the bridgehead beyond the Southern Donets River. In accordance with this order, the army was reinforced by 162 *rd* and 6 *guard tbr* that were excluded from the reserve of Army 28 (Moskalenko, 1973, p. 190).

In his memoirs I. Bagramyan writes that he and the Glavkom were informed of the tank divisions, but intelligence did not detect any infantry units (Bagramyan, 1977, pp. 89–90).

On the night of May 13, part of the second echelon of Army 6 – 103 *rd* and 248 *rd* – began advancing. And the units of the mobile group (21 *tc* and 23 *tc*) remained in the former areas. In connection with the advance of the troops, the distance from the areas of their location to the front line increased and reached 35 km (Platonov, 1951, pp. 39–41).

During the first three days of the offensive operation, the SWF troops broke through the enemy's defenses, expanded the breakthrough along the front to 55 km in the northern section and 25–50 km deep into the German defense. The German group suffered heavy losses: Division 515 and Division 208, Infantry Division 62, Guard Division 454 and four separate battalions were completely destroyed. Infantry Division 79, Infantry Division 294, Infantry Division 71, Infantry Division 62, Infantry Division 44, Infantry Division 113, 108 light infantry division of the Hungarians, 3 *td* and 23 *td* suffered heavy losses. Under the conditions, it would have been the most effective means of delivering a powerful strike by two tank corps for the development of the offensive of the southern group and an extremely important help to the northern group. Marshal S. K. Tymoshenko's refusal to use other echelons and the success development echelon in the offensive lane of Army 6 during the period of May 13–14 had negative consequences for the further course of the operation. The enemy was given the opportunity to regroup its forces and organize the defense at the front lines (Platonov, 1951, p. 45; Daynes, 2009, p. 269).

Carrying out the assigned task, on May 15, Army 6 and the army group continued their offensive. The command of the Wehrmacht used the moment of weakened cover of the advancing enemy's troops from the air and intensified the actions of their aviation. During the day, they inflicted significant losses and delayed the advance of tank corps. This significantly affected the pace of the offensive and effectiveness of Army 6. Despite the difficulties, the troops of the southern group of the SWF advanced and created conditions for the breakthrough of 21 *tc* and 23 *tc* in the main direction. But at that time the tank corps located at a distance of 25 – 35 km from the area of combat lines and could not enter the breakthrough in time and develop the success of the advancing units (Moshchanskyi, 2009, pp. 82–83).

According to the offensive operation plan, the troops of Army 28 were supposed to develop an offensive to cover Kharkiv from the north and north-west in order to surround and destroy the entire Kharkiv enemy group in cooperation with Army 6. And troops of Army 38 and Army 21 were to, developing the success of the offensive, provide flanks of Army 28.

Based on the specific situation, the SWF commander gave orders to continue the offensive on the morning of May 15 to Army 21 only and two right-flank divisions of Army 28. Two left-flank divisions of Army 28 and the entire Army 38 received an order to entrench at the achieved boundaries with the task of securing the flanks of the strike group.

From the morning of May 15, the troops of Army 21 began to carry out their tasks, but after meeting the fierce resistance of the enemy, they did not succeed, and the operational situation in the northern sector continued to get more complicated (Galushko & Kolomiets, 2010, pp. 38–39).

On May 16 the battles of the Northern Strike Group were mostly defensive in their nature. The enemy made several strong counterattacks. They were repulsed, but Army 21 unit could not advance (Abaturov & Portuhalskyi, 2008, p. 103).

Due to the failure of Kharkiv offensive, the defense of the forces of the Soviet Army on the SF and SWF turned out to be radically weakened, and the German troops launched a successful counteroffensive. On May 17, the army group (Tank Army 1 and Army 17) of Colonel General Kleist unexpectedly made a powerful attack from Kramatorsk area on the flank of the advancing Soviet Army group from the south. At the same time, from the north, Army 6 began an offensive against the AG troops. Having broken through the defense front

of Army 9, it began to threaten Army 57 of the SF, and then the strike group of the SWF. As it turned out, the command and headquarters of the SWD, while planning the operation, did not take the necessary measures to secure their strike group from Sloviansk direction (Vasilevsky, 1978, p. 189; Patrilyak & Borovyk, 2010, p. 142; Tippelskirch, 1999, p. 316).

The offensive actions of the SWF stopped, and the Wehrmacht troops began to carry out their offensive operation, under the conditional name “Friderikus – 1”, during which they achieved triumph, and the command of the South-Western direction – a shameful defeat.

According to the Germans, losses of the Soviet Army amounted to 239,000 soldiers and commanders. And according to the calculations of the Ukrainian historian V. M. Kozak – not less than 320 thousand people (Kozak, 2000, p. 129). Many famous military commanders died among them – the deputy commander of the SWF, Lieutenant General F. Kostenko, the commander of Army 6, Lieutenant General O. Horodniansky, the commander of Army 57, Lieutenant General K. Podlas, Major General A. Anisov, Major General of Artillery Fedir Maliarov, Commander of the Army Group Major General L. Bobkin, Commander of Division 47 Major General P. Matykin, Commander of Division 270 Major General Z. Kutlin, Commander of Division 337 Major General I. Vasyliyev (Vasilevsky, 1978, p. 196).

Thus, as a result of the unsuccessful actions of the SWF and SF troops on the Barvinkove salient, the strike force was significantly weakened. Therefore, the military and political leadership of the USSR was forced to abandon the offensive operations planned for the summer of 1942 (Morozov, 1975, p. 131; Mellenthin, 2005, p. 198).

The defeat of the Soviet Army near Kharkiv allowed the Wehrmacht to concentrate its strike group there and begin preparations for a new general offensive on the southern flank of the Eastern Front.

From June 28 to July 24 the defensive battles of the Soviet Army in the south-western direction ended in defeat and they were forced to retreat 150 – 400 km and switch to defense on the approaches to Stalingrad and the Caucasus (Kryvyziuk, 2018, p. 53).

The headquarters of the Supreme High Command took into account the negative experience of Kharkiv operation, and during the winter campaign of 1942 – 1943, which began with the offensive near Stalingrad, the Soviet Army achieved significant strategic success (Kryvyziuk & Zabolotniuk, 2023, pp. 312).

In subsequent operations the success of the Soviet Army was paid by the Soviet people at a high price, with large-scale human losses. Losses of killed, wounded and missing many times exceeded the losses of the Wehrmacht. The military and political leadership of the Soviet Union did not count on the loss of its people.

For example, the results of the Battle of Kursk were disappointing for the Soviet Union in terms of the loss ratio. The total losses of the Soviet troops in the Oriol operation, according to some estimates, reached 429,890 people, of whom 112,529 were irreversible, and 317,361 were medical; average daily – 11,313 people, 2,586 tanks. According to other data, – 860,000 people. The total losses of the Soviet forces during their offensive operations, the Battle of Kursk, are estimated at approximately 1,677,000 killed, captured, wounded and sick compared to 360,000 of the Wehrmacht forces approximately (Kryvyziuk & Tkachuk, 2020, pp. 182–183).

Only during the November operation, losses amounted to 568 tanks and SAU, of which 167 burned during Kyiv strategic offensive operation from October 12 to November 13, 1943 (Kryvyziuk & Tkachuk, 2022, p. 248).

During the Vistula-Oder strategic offensive operation, which the command of the Polish Air Force considers to be a model of a lightning operation, the losses of the Polish Air Force amounted to only 193,125 people, of whom 43,251 were irretrievable, tanks and self-propelled guns – 1,267, average daily losses – 56 (Kryvyziuk & Tkachuk, 2021, p. 187).

80 years have passed since the events when the new “Slobozhanska offensive operation” or “Balakliysko-Kupianska offensive operation” took place in Kharkiv region (Kharuk, 2023, pp. 5–19).

Historians and experts compare the September Kharkiv offensive (2022) with the “Friderikus” operation and call the operation of the Armed Forces of Ukraine unique. A brilliant victory was won over the rashysts, who were superior in weapons and amount of soldiers.

The Conclusions. Summing up the offensive operation of the South-Western Front (May 12–17, 1942), it should be considered as an example of unsuccessful actions.

The main reason for the tragedy is that the Headquarters of the Supreme High Command (actually J. Stalin) agreed to conduct the offensive operation at the insistence of the Military Council of the SWD.

A characteristic feature of management was the combination of functions: the Commander-in-Chief and Chief of staff of the South-Western Direction were simultaneously the Commander and Chief of staff of the South-Western Front, respectively. This is a vivid example of incompetent military leadership.

This incompetence gave a negative result, the actions of the SWF were carried out in isolation from the actions of the SF, as during preparation, and especially during the operation. The main shortcoming of the overall planning of the offensive of the troops on the SWF was the lack of a proper operational support of the SWF strike group from the south by the SF forces.

Important shortcomings during the preparation are:

- the SWF commander, having a significant advantage (more than twice) over the enemy, was unable to create a decisive superiority in forces over the enemy either in the northern or the southern areas. The plan of the operation, the purpose of which was to cover the flanks and subsequently encircle the Kharkiv group of the Wehrmacht, took into account only the forces of this particular group, and even then they were underestimated. As for the group of Kleist that acted against the SF (Army 17 and Tank Army 1), it was not taken into account during planning;
- the drawback not to take into account the possibilities of a use of the SWF and the SF aircraft to support the advancing troops, as well as the lack of interaction between the aircraft of the fronts;
- insufficient knowledge of the enemy group and underestimation of its capabilities during the maneuver of reserves to threatening areas;
- lack of clarity in the work of the SWF headquarters and army headquarters;
- failure to observe the secrecy of the troops concentration allowed the German command to reveal the plan of the SWF commander and conduct a counter-maneuver in advance;
- inconsistency in the distribution of artillery and tank means between the main and secondary directions, and therefore the tactical density in the southern part of the breakthrough was insufficient;
- the newly formed Army 28 was mistakenly assigned to the strike group of the northern direction;
- a large stretching into the depth of strike groups of the SWF;
- no interaction between the military branches;
- inability to use radio communication;
- a combat training was organized in the SWF troops formally.

During the offensive operation:

- planning miscalculations were discovered late;
- an incorrect use of the second echelons and mobile groups (21 *tc* and 23 *tc*) did not allow them to enter the breakthrough in time for the development of the offensive. In the

northern and southern grouping of troops, the troops of the first echelons were not supported, weakened the pace of the offensive, which allowed the German command to use the time to strengthen its first echelon;

- aviation during the offensive was used in a decentralized manner, and the situation demanded the concentration of aviation actions;
- tank brigades were used mainly for direct support of the infantry and often acted without interaction with the infantry;
- artillery maneuvers were practically not carried out;
- engineering units were very rarely used. Neither in the armies nor the divisions there were created anti-tank reserves and blockade units to cover tank-dangerous directions;
- the unsatisfactory work of intelligence did not allow to draw correct conclusions about the actions of the enemy and this affected the result of offensive actions;
- the rear bodies did not cope with the tasks of providing material and technical means to the advancing troops.

Although it was a bitter experience for the leadership of the Soviet Army, it played a positive role in the defeat of the Wehrmacht in the future.

Operational art in the counteroffensive near Stalingrad was characterized by a large scale of frontal and army offensive operations in which a mixed tank army, tank and mechanized corps were involved. Tank and mechanized corps were used to develop success in the direction of the main strike and actions in operational depth.

The combat experience gained in the battle on the Volga served as a more important basis for the further development of the combat skills of the Soviet Army. From this experience, the troops learned the art of encirclement and destroying large groups of the enemy.

The unusual use of Tank Army 6 in Korsun-Shevchenkivky Front offensive operation in the first echelon of the front to break through the enemy's defenses, Guards Army 5 and Tank Army 6 for defense on the external front was effective and efficient. The bold and decisive maneuver of the tank troops ensured operational suddenness at the beginning of the operation, and during the operation created the necessary conditions for completing the encirclement and successfully repelling the counterattacks of the enemy's tank groups. The main forces of the tank armies of both fronts were used to develop success and complete the encirclement of the enemy.

Characteristic of Korsun-Shevchenkivsky operation is that in it the encirclement and destruction of the enemy was carried out without stopping. The encirclement of the enemy group was carried out at a fast pace, especially if we take into account the adverse weather conditions in which the combat was conducted.

Kyiv strategic offensive operation is characterized by organization, covert and rapid regrouping of mobile troops from Bukrynsky to Liutizky bridgehead. And as a result, a strategically important bridgehead was created at a depth of up to 145 km in Kyiv area, which played a huge role in the deployment of further offensive operations to liberate Right-Bank Ukraine from the enemy.

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