The Encirclement at Cherkassy-Korsun: An Assessment of the Winners and Losers

Joseph Kent Lutes

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THE ENCIRCLEMENT AT CHERKASSY-KORSUN: AN ASSESSMENT OF THE WINNERS AND LOSERS

by

Joseph Kent Lutes, Jr.

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of The Graduate College in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts Department of History

Western Michigan University
Kalamazoo, Michigan
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During the winter of 1944, two Russian armies encircled two German corps on the Dnieper River. The Germans managed to break out of the encirclement after an attempt to relieve them failed. The battle lasted only three weeks, but cost both sides greatly. Both sides carried out a successful airlift to keep their troops in action. The Germans carried out a brilliant campaign, while the Russians demonstrated that they still needed to perfect their encirclement doctrine and their propaganda.

Each side was hindered by its leaders. Hitler forced the Germans to hold ground, while Stalin forced his generals to fight a battle they should not have fought. Both men failed to follow military doctrine, and ignored the larger picture of the war.

Both sides won, and both sides lost. The Germans recovered their men, but lost ground and the use of the divisions used in the operations for a time. The Russians drove the Germans off the Dnieper, but failed to capitalize on the gains they made.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Keil und Kessel

The Technique in Practice

During World War II, the German Panzerwaffe developed a technique they called "keil und kessel". In this two phase operation they stormed through the lines of their enemies, and encircled large portions of the enemy army.

In the "keil" or wedge stage of the operation, the German troops drove through the enemy lines on a small scale. Follow up tank and motorized infantry forces drove into the gap to add their numbers to the spearhead and to hold the breach in the enemy lines open. German air force stuka dive bombers acted as the artillery for the tank troops, by diving in on targets, such as fortifications or gun emplacements designated by the tank commanders. The stukas destroyed the line of fortifications or enemy guns before the German tanks reached them.

In the "kessel" or cauldron stage of the operation, the German troops split into two groups after entering
the enemy lines and encircled large numbers of enemy troops. Follow up troops pouring through the gap in the enemy lines sought to keep the encircled troops from breaking out of the cauldron and allowed the troops of the spearhead to continue to drive into the interior of the enemy country.

The Germans made good use of this technique during their conquest of Poland and later during their conquest of France. To a greater extent, the Germans made use of the technique in their campaign against Russia. The Germans managed to encircle hundreds of thousands of Russian troops in their cauldrons and introduced to the world this new technique for armored warfare.

The Russians Learn

Unfortunately for the Germans, the Russians learned the keil und kessel techniques all too well. When the Russians finally gained overwhelming superiority over the Germans in all types of equipment and men, the Russians began trapping the German armies in cauldrons of their own. Later in the war, the American and British armies trapped the German armies in cauldrons of their own.
Hitler at Fault

One might believe that the army that developed the new technique would not allow themselves to be trapped in their own trap. The fault for falling into the cauldrons rarely lay with the German generals. Most of the time Hitler was to blame, by forcing his armies to hold the ground they were on, even while the enemy armies were moving to encircle them.

In the last months of 1942, Hitler ordered Sixth Army to stay in Stalingrad, while Russian armies moved to encircle them. During the beginning of the encirclement, the German generals believed they might have had a chance to escape, but the longer Hitler forced them to stay in the city, they lost hope of a successful escape, as their supplies and ammunition dwindled. Sixth Army ceased to exist in early 1943, when the Russians finally forced the remnants of the army to surrender.

The Dilemma at Cherkassy-Korsun

At Cherkassy, in 1944, Army Group South faced a situation similar to the one Sixth Army faced just a year earlier at Stalingrad. The Russians began encircling a group of German troops on the Dnieper River, and the German generals of Army Group South went to Hitler to get permission for them to withdraw. Hitler would not
listen, and a new disaster began to overtake the men of Army Group South. The men of the two German corps encircled at Cherkassy began their many days of suffering because Hitler wanted to hold the land they were on. Hitler cause the German disaster at Cherkassy by not listening to his generals when they told him to withdraw, but the German generals were able to lessen the disaster through their tenacity, and because of ineptness on the part of the Russians encircling the troops at Cherkassy.
CHAPTER II

RETREAT TO THE DNIEPER

December 1943-January 1944

Withdrawal Behind the River

The story of the Cherkassy-Korsun Pocket begins not on the night the Russians formed the pocket, but with the German withdrawal to the Dnieper River Line. Army Group South had staved off the main Russian offensives throughout the war in Russia and had paid dearly for their successes. Field Marshal Erich von Manstein, the commander of Army Group South, continuously argued that he needed more infantry and armored divisions to hold the Dnieper Line, or he would have to give up the river. He wanted permission to withdraw to a shorter line on the Bug River. Hitler argued that he must hold the Dnieper River, or that the Russians would cut Army Group A off in the Crimea. The fact that Hitler insisted on holding the river and would not listen to the requests von Manstein put before him, led to the crisis on the Dnieper River that culminated in the Cherkassy-Korsun Pocket.

According to von Manstein, his army group might have
held the Russians off at the Dnieper River for a period of time. His chances would have been better though, if Hitler had allowed the fortification of the Dnieper River Line to continue during the Autumn of 1943. But, Hitler felt that his commanders would fall back to the fixed fortifications as soon as they were finished, surrendering all the territory on the eastern bank of the river to the Russians. So, instead of falling back to a defendable line, von Manstein withdrew behind a river with very few fortifications, and his men had to dig in, in order to have any chance of holding the river.¹

Unfortunately for von Manstein, and the other commanders on the Russian Front, Hitler decided that he should make most of the decisions concerning the German Army for himself. He not only made the strategic decisions that affected the whole front, but the tactical decisions for armies that were hundreds of miles away as well.²

A second problem for von Manstein lay in the fact that his army group needed to hold a front of 440 miles. In order to hold a front that long his divisions would need to stretch themselves to the limit. He had a total of thirty-seven infantry divisions to hold the front.³ His infantry divisions were each responsible for a front of twelve miles. At full strength, this would not have been a problem, but each of the divisions had a front
line fighting strength of only 1,000 men. This meant that von Manstein needed to hold the front assigned to his army group with an average of only 83 men per mile.⁴

According to von Manstein, Hitler expected the units of Army Group South to hold entirely too much territory. The Russians had battered his four armies, and each retained only a fraction of its total fighting strength. None of the divisions of Army Group South had been out of the front line long enough for a total refit. The army group's equipment was not in tip top condition, and the men were tired from weeks in the front lines. Von Manstein sent a message to the high command informing them of his situation, and asking for help to hold his front.⁵

Von Manstein argued that he must use the panzer and panzer grenadier divisions available to his army to pinch off the Russian armored breakthroughs, not hold territory. He wanted his tanks as a mobile reserve that he could send wherever they were needed. He argued that he could not tie his armored units down to the land, that they were at their most dangerous when on the move.⁶

Major General F.W. von Mellenthin, chief of staff for von Manstein, referred to this as an elastic defense theory. The Russians would break the German lines, but the panzer divisions would seal the breakthrough off and restore the original front.⁷ Von Manstein believed that even though
his armored divisions were very weak that they could provide the punch needed to at least stop the Russian spearheads. He could then use his infantry to contain the armored columns, and defeat the Russians where they stood. Army Group South did not possess enough tanks to distribute them among the infantry divisions, and still have enough tanks left over to fight off strong Russian attacks.\(^8\)

Hitler disagreed with von Manstein and ordered him to use the armored elements of his armies, as well as the infantry to hold key bridgeheads on the eastern bank of the Dnieper. Hitler hoped that the Russians would not attack his lines while the armored elements of his armies still held these key points. He felt that while his armies still held the bridgeheads they used to attack Russia in prior years, that the Russians would believe that the German Army might still have one offensive left.\(^9\)

Von Manstein informed the OberKommando der Wermacht, high command of the armed forces, that Army Group South held their front of 440 miles with thirty-seven infantry, and seventeen armored divisions. He went on to state that without several more follow up infantry divisions (more than the three that were on their way) that he could not hold the front against an organized Russian
attack. He also argued that Army Group South should receive the most new equipment, since at the time they were bearing the brunt of the fighting in the east.\textsuperscript{10}

Instead of sending von Manstein more divisions, Hitler sent him his best wishes, and an experimental weapon. During the time Army Group South retreated to the Dnieper, the Germans began experiments mounting a twenty to thirty millimeter cannon on a Junkers JU. 87 and 88 for hunting tanks. The experiments on the JU. 88 came to naught, but the Germans finally succeeded in mounting twin thirty-seven millimeter cannons on the JU. 87's. Colonel Hans Rudel, at that time on convalescent leave, first tested the plane. He liked the plane, and took it with him back to his squadron. As one of the highest scoring aces in a Ju. 87, he was accorded the honor of first flying the cannon plane in combat. His group was put under command of Army Group South to help stabilize the situation on the Dnieper River.\textsuperscript{11}

Army Group South now faced the Russians on a river line, but each day brought new Russian forces within striking distance of the German lines. Three armies comprising twenty rifle and two tank or mechanized corps faced First Panzer Army. Two armies of fifteen divisions and one tank army of two tank and one mechanized corps advanced on the Dnieper between Dnepropetrovsk and
Kremenchug. Two armies of twelve rifle divisions, two tank and one mechanized corps were moving towards the Dnieper between Cherkassy and Rzhishchev. These two armies were followed by a tank army of three more armored corps.¹²

A Conference With Hitler

On December 27, 1943, von Manstein left for a conference with Hitler, hoping to convince Hitler of the need to withdraw his forces from the huge bend in the Dnieper River. Von Manstein also suggested that Hitler allow the evacuation of Nikopol. The limited withdrawal, and the evacuation of the town that he proposed would have shortened his front by 125 miles. Hitler refused to listen to von Manstein’s suggestion citing that if he allowed the withdrawal, the Russians would concentrate against the Crimea. Hitler felt that the loss of the Crimea would seriously hinder relations with Rumania and Turkey. At this point, General Zietzler, one of Hitler’s advisors, pointed out that the Crimea would eventually be lost anyway and that relations with Turkey and Rumania were on shaky ground as it was.¹³

Von Manstein then brought up the subject of German defensive strategy and questioned the wisdom of forcing the German troops on the Eastern Front to hold the land
they stood on. He also questioned the practice of turning surrounded cities into fortresses. Hitler retorted that the Russians must lose steam soon and that retreating would only force the Germans to conquer more land when they took the offensive again. He then defended his practice of declaring fortress cities by saying:

Just wait and see. We've lived through a couple of those cases when everybody said things were beyond repair. Later it turned out that things could be brought under control after all. Now, I am worrying myself sick for having given permission for retreats in the past.14

Hitler never really answered the questions brought up at the meeting, he only generalized about past successes and never addressed the problems his generals brought up. Hitler would continue to force the German troops to hold on to untenable ground. Von Manstein left the conference not being able to secure a better situation for his troops.15

New Russian Offensives

At the end of 1943, the Russians began operations to cross the Dnieper River. Thousands of Russian troops rowed or paddled small crafts across the river. Others rode on improvised rafts made of barrels, planks or benches they strung together. Russian artillery stood by on the east bank of the river to deal with any serious German resistance.16
Near Kiev, in several places, the Russians puttyed up the openings on sixty of their tanks and sent them under the water. Two brigades of paratroopers were dropped in to reinforce the infantry and tanks. General Colonel Vatutin managed to hold most of these bridgeheads and even managed to merge a few of them into one large one.¹⁷

General Colonel Koniev set up no less than eighteen bridgeheads in this fashion. In the first few days of their existence, he lost seven of them though with very heavy casualties. Koniev did manage to merge eleven of his bridgeheads into one large one. As soon as he established this large bridgehead the Germans attacked it by air, but Russian fighters managed to drive the German fighters off before they caused any serious casualties within the bridgehead.¹⁸

Throughout January, the Russians attacked the front of Army Group South relentlessly. Because of Hitler’s orders, at times, the German armies needed to hold not only the river front, but their flanks, as they protected the bridgeheads on the Dnieper that Hitler demanded held. Sixth Panzer Army held the Dnieper Front, as well as the Nikopol Bridgehead to their south, which in actuality belonged to Army Group A.¹⁹

Von Manstein was not the only commander in his army
group that felt the task assigned his men was unreasonable. The commander of Eighth Army, Colonel General Wohler, sent urgent messages to von Manstein, expressing grave doubts about continuing to hold the curving line of positions northwest of Kirovograd to which he must commit an excessive number of men. He recommended withdrawal of the interior flanks of Eighth Army and First Panzer Army by retirement to successive positions, first behind the Olshanka-Ross River Line, and eventually to the line Shpola-Zvenigorodka-Gniloy Tikich Stream. Hitler denied permission for the withdrawal citing the need to hold the salient for future offensive operations in the direction of Kiev. 20

At this time, Colonel General Wohler found himself with an overextended army short of reserves available to carry on an active defense. The armored elements of two panzer divisions formed the only true reserves available to Eighth Army. All of the divisions in the army were all well under strength, and therefore no division could count on another to ease the pressure on their front. After Hitler’s refusal to withdraw, Wohler informed von Manstein that if the Russians kept up pressure on his front that he could not hold without new forces or a shorter front. 21
The order to stay on the Dnieper River line also caused von Manstein trouble on the northern wing of his front. Fourth Panzer Army withdrew from Berdichev after intensive enemy pressure. Fourth Panzer Army withdrew further west and southwest in order to preserve some sort of continuity between the elements of the army. The Fifty-Ninth Corps, at this time very weak from so long at the front, alone made a fighting withdrawal toward Rovno. The Russians launched an attack towards Rovno with Sixtieth and Thirteenth armies.

At a conference with Hitler, von Manstein brought up the need for the appointment of a commander-in-chief for the Eastern Front. Von Manstein argued that a commander-in-chief had already been appointed for the Italian Theatre and for the Western Front, but that Hitler had never appointed a military man to command the forces of the Eastern Front. Hitler then commented that none of the commanders on the Eastern Front obeyed his commands. He then asked if von Manstein expected the commanders to obey a mere field marshall. Von Manstein retorted that he had always obeyed Hitler’s commands. Unfortunately for von Manstein, the argument ended here, without the appointment of a military commander-in-chief. Hitler then dismissed von Manstein, and ordered him to hold his
lines, ordering him not to give up any more land.25

During the morning on January 5, General Koniev launched his Second Ukrainian Front in a massive attack against the German lines near Kirovograd. Koniev had been on the defensive since December 20, while waiting for the reinforcements that Stavka had ordered for him. Since the twentieth he had received 300 tanks and 100 self propelled guns. The Russians hoped that Koniev could break through the German Front, and ravage the rear of the German forces in the Kirovograd-Pervomaisk area.26

The Russians launched their attack at 0600 jumping off from two principal concentration areas. The attacks were preceded by half an hour’s artillery preparation and several air strikes. Massed infantry then poured through the gaps the artillery and air strikes created in the German lines. Follow up infantry and anti-tank units widened the breaches in the German lines and secured the flanks for the advancing Russian armor.27

By the time the infantry attack began, the Russian fire had destroyed most of the German artillery batteries. The continuous fire also inflicted heavy casualties on the German forces in the area of the artillery barrage. The divisions covering the front facing the Russian attack were further reduced in fighting strength. Before the offensive began, Second Parachute Division
held a twelve mile front with 3,200 men. The Tenth Panzer Grenadier Division held an eleven mile front with 3,700 men. The Russians attacked these two divisions with seven infantry divisions supported by armored groups. The Russians managed an advance of six miles on a four mile front. On the northern sector of their attack, the Russians hit the Forty-Seventh Panzer Corps, and advanced thirteen miles on a ten mile front.28

The Russian armored forces then attempted to exploit their breakthroughs, mainly in the south on the front of the Forty-Seventh Panzer Corps. The German corps reserve immediately counterattacked, and with heavy anti-tank support, managed to destroy ninety some tanks in the process. The Germans estimated that they managed to contain two-hundred enemy tanks with their counterattacks and anti-tank gun concentrations. After stopping the initial Russian penetration in the north, Tenth Panzer Division reported the loss of 620 men in one day, while destroying 153 enemy tanks. However, it quickly became evident that the forces of Eighth Army could not contain the breakthroughs on the northern wing of their front alone. Colonel General Wohler sent desperate pleas for help to Army Group South.29
The Impending Disaster

Von Manstein answered the request for help by transferring the Third Panzer Division to the Forty-Seventh Panzer Corps. The Third Panzer Division sought to help the Eleventh Panzer Division stop the Russian armored forces driving southwest. This enemy thrust threatened to envelop Kirovograd from the north and west. The Germans feared the loss of Kirovograd because all their supply lines to Army Group A, and the southern wing of Army Group South went through or close to the town. 30

During his attack on Kirovograd, Koniev received new instructions from Marshall Zhukov, to launch a secondary attack with the objective of reaching Uman. This operation, conducted jointly with General Vatutin, sought to create a pocket of German soldiers in the Kanev-Zvenigorodka-Uman area. Koniev assigned the Fifty-Second and Fifty-Third Armies to the secondary operation against Uman. 31

On January 6, the Russians pierced the front of Army Group South between First Panzer Army and the right wing of Fourth Panzer Army. The Russians stopped just after piercing the army group front in order to exploit the exposed flanks of Fourth Panzer Army, hoping to destroy the army. 32 The Russians sought to demolish Fourth Panzer Army with three armies: the Eighteenth, First Guards and
First Guards Tanks Army. Koniev launched his attack on Uman between the First Panzer Army and Fourth Panzer Army. The First Tank Army and Fortieth Army drove southward, their spearheads reached a point only twenty miles from Uman, threatening the supply base of First Panzer Army. The Russians also closed on Vinnitsa, where Army Group South Headquarters had previously been located. The Russians managed to block the German railhead at Zhmerinka temporarily.

Koniev’s attack against Kirovograd met with success right away. On the night of January 7, General Kirichenko’s Twenty-Ninth Tank Corps (part of the Fifth Guards Tank Army) broke into the southern suburbs of Kirovograd, followed closely by two rifle divisions. At 0900, the following morning, Russian forces cut the Kirovograd-Novo Ukrainka road and railway line, cutting the Germans in the town off from supply. During the morning, the Eighteenth Tank Corps swept around the town, and attacked the German defenders from the south.

Kirovograd Encircled

Major General Fritz Bayerlein, the commander of the Third Panzer Division had his headquarters in Kirovograd, during the time of the Russian attack on the town. The divisional history quotes him as saying: “We’ve got to
get out, Kirovograd sounds too much like Stalingrad to me". His communications section had been decimated during a Russian artillery bombardment, and his division never received the order turning Kirovograd into a fortress city.

Bayerlein called the rest of the commanders in the city together, and outlined his plans to escape from the city. The other commanders agreed with him in principle, but would not disobey the order from Hitler turning the city into a fortress. Bayerlein stressed the fact that a panzer division was a mobile formation, and could not be tied to a city, and forced to fight a static battle.

Bayerlein arranged for the Tenth Panzer Grenadier Division to occupy the line his division held. He then formed his division, and gave the order to attack northward. His division broke through the Russian lines, and drove northward, until they finally made contact with elements of the Eleventh Panzer Division.

Orders from von Manstein placed the Third Panzer Division under the control of Forty-Seventh Panzer Corps. After fighting their way out of the encirclement, Third Panzer Division turned around, and attacked the Russian flank, in support of Forty-Seventh Panzer Division’s attempt to free the rest of the men encircled in Kirovograd. His units received no rest, and spent the
ensuing days attacking real and imagined enemy positions around the city.\textsuperscript{40}

The Sixty-Seventh Tank Brigade of Rotmistrov's Fifth Guards Tank Army burst through the lines of Forty-Seventh Panzer Corps, and attacked the headquarters unit in Malaya Viska. Nikolaus Von Vormann, and the elements of his headquarters unit barely escaped from the city. Von Vormann's adjutant, Major Maase, organized the rear guard action of the headquarters unit, and fought to the death in order that his commander survive.\textsuperscript{41}

After leaving the town in flames, the Sixty-Seventh Tank Brigade struck the airfield of Lieutenant Colonel Hans Rudel's Immelmann squadron. Rudel, at that time on a mission with his squadron escaped destruction at the hands of the Russians. Upon their return to the base, his squadron chased the Soviet tanks across the Russians hinterland. The tanks he did not destroy himself, he drove into the tank busting parties of the Forty-Seventh Panzer Corps, none of the Russian tanks survived the encounter. Few of the tankers survived the attack to tell of the disaster they faced on the steppes. Rudel destroyed seventeen tanks and seven assault guns on his own.\textsuperscript{42}
The Battle for the City

Colonel General Wohler of Eighth Army managed to set up a cohesive front, and began attacks to free the men surrounded at Kirovograd. In his effort to destroy the Russian forces facing his army, he received a great deal of help from the Luftwaffe field divisions. A detachment of the Forty-Third Flak Regiment destroyed thirty-three Russian tanks during a six hour period on January 9, blunting a Russian attack. The Russians launched a second attack against the men of the Forty-Third Flak Regiment, which ended in a Russian retreat, leaving forty-one more T-34’s burning on the field.\(^\text{43}\)

By January 9, the Third Panzer Division under Major General Bayerlein, had reached a point only nine miles from Kirovograd. Koniev’s armored elements had become more and more dispersed, making them more vulnerable to swift counterattacks by German forces. The success of the attack by Bayerlein forced Koniev to divert forces from his encircling ring around the city, to stop Bayerlein’s advance.\(^\text{44}\)

On January 9, elements of the 331st Regimental Group of the 167th Infantry Division had battled their way into the village of Gruzskoye, only seven miles west of Kirovograd. The infantrymen dug in for the night, planning to continue their attack against the Russians in the
morning. Before they could bed down for the night, orders came to them that they continue their attack to reach Kirovograd during the night.45

During the whole of the encirclement, Colonel General Wohler and Major General von Vormann had pleaded with Hitler to release the men of Kirovograd, and let them withdraw from the city. Their pleas met with success, and Hitler ordered the three divisions in the fortress to break out during the night on January 9. The Russians west of the pocket were caught in a vice between the three divisions breaking out of the pocket, and the men of the 331st Regimental Group who had launched a night attack to free the men in the pocket.46

According to Lieutenant General August Schmidt of the Tenth Panzer Grenadier Division, only one enemy tank attempted to stop the breakout, and it was unsuccessful. His division managed to bring out all their wounded, and all their weapons. The Germans of the Tenth Panzer Grenadier Division left no weapons for the Russians, and according to Schmidt, the story was the same with the rest of the divisions in the pocket. The Russians moved in the next day, and occupied the town, ending the German bid to hold on to Kirovograd.47

After Koniev met with his "success" in Kirovograd, Vatutin decided that he needed to submit an adjustment of
his own plans to Stavka. Vatutin sent his plans which contained the following ideas to Stavka:

Right wing: move up to the River Goryn, and on to Slutsk, Dubrovitsa and Sarny. Center and Left: Eliminate German concentrations in the Zhmerinka and Uman area, and to take Vinnitsa, Zhmerika and Uman.  

Stavka approved of the changes Vatutin desired and authorized him to implement them. But, Stavka could provide no further reinforcements at the time.  

**Continuing Russian Offensives**

On the northern wing of the First Ukrainian Front, Vatutin managed to push General Pukhov’s Thirteenth Army on to Sarny. Forward elements of the army reached the Goryn and Styr Rivers by January 12. General Chernyakhovskii’s Sixtieth Army drove for Shepetovka, but after initially making headway ran into stiff resistance. General Pukhov also began running into stiff resistance soon after reaching the rivers. Both armies met German defenders dug into protected river lines, whose flanks were protected by other trench lines and soldiers in defensive positions in ravines. The ruggedness of the land negated the Russian tank superiority and allowed the German infantry to face the Russians on their own terms.  

The stiffening German resistance forced Vatutin to bring his First Ukrainian Front to a halt. Fighting had
spread his armies over a distance of 300 miles. The movement on the left wing, which had advanced more rapidly than the rest of the army, created a large gap in Vatutin’s front. At Zhmerinka, the Eighth Guards Mechanized corps (of the First Tank Army) became cut off by a German counter-thrust. Vatutin cited lack of fuel and supplies and the need to reestablish a cohesive front as the reasons he ordered the halt. 51

German Reactions

Von Manstein believed he possessed enough forces to tackle one of the breakthroughs at a time, and chose to tackle the breakthrough between First Panzer Army and Fourth Panzer Army first. He chose this course of action because if this spearhead reached the upper reaches of the Bug River, the Russians stood a good chance of cutting off Sixth Army and Eighth Army entirely. 52

On January 12, Stavka issued orders to Vatutin and Koniev to wipe out the German salient at Zvenigorod-Mironovka. In order to achieve the liquidation of the salient, Vatutin and Koniev had to bring their flanks together at Shpola. If successful, the junction of the two fronts would have put the Russians in a good position to launch a new offensive to attain the southern part of the Bug River. 53
Neither Vatutin or Koniev could make headway against the German salient in the Cherkassy-Korsun area. The Germans used the hills and gullies in the area to set up a viable defense against the Russian infantry. The area was not well suited for tanks, and the Russian armored forces caused only slight problems for the Germans in the area.\textsuperscript{54}

Hitler hoped to stop the Russians on the Dnieper River for another year. He believed that if the Russians broke through the German lines on the Dnieper, that the Russian offensive would peter out as the other offensives had in the past. According to Colonel General Walter Warlimont, Hitler desired that the Russians should break through on the front of Army Group South.

Hitler: "It is rather to be hoped that the enemy will try to break through between Cherkassy and Kirovograd and thereby finally exhaust himself."\textsuperscript{55}

Warlimont could not figure out why Hitler hoped the Russians would break through on any front. He also questioned as to why the Russians would choose the front of Army Group South for their breakthrough when they could achieve the same end just as easily on the fronts of the other two army groups.\textsuperscript{56}

Hitler felt it necessary that the Germans hold on to the bridgeheads they held at Cherkassy and Nikopol on the Dnieper River. He felt that the bridgehead at Nikopol
held strategic importance even at this point of the war. He still felt that his armies were capable of carrying out an offensive, which he planned to launch from Nikopol. He wanted Nikopol held at all costs because he felt that even if he would not carry out an offensive soon, that as long as the Germans held the bridgehead, the Russians would not feel safe attacking on the army group front. The Russians would also tie down considerable forces keeping the Germans in the bridgehead, and guarding against future German offenses.\textsuperscript{57}

The Dnieper in Retrospect

Many of the predictions Hitler’s generals made upon reaching the Dnieper River came true. Von Manstein and later the generals of Army Group South came to the conclusion that they had no chance of holding on to the Dnieper River line. They all complained that they had too few men to hold the amount of territory assigned to them against the insurmountable odds which they faced.

Hitler insisted on holding the territory, especially the bridgeheads for future attacks into the Soviet heartland. The insistence on holding the bridgeheads tied down the small amount of armor that von Manstein could field against the Russians, and pinch off their armored thrusts into the rear areas of Army Group South. The
German Army never launched a major attack against the Russians after Kursk in 1943. Hitler lived in a fantasy world concerning future German attacks against the Russian Army. His armies were in no condition to carry out future attacks, but Hitler would not take the advice of his generals, and try to hold on to the territory that they had conquered, and negotiate for peace from a position of strength.

At many times during the year, von Manstein had proposed moving his army group to a shorter line in between the Bug River and the Dnieper River, which would have allowed him to shorten his lines and allow his divisions to defend the sectors assigned to them with more men. During the time Army Group South occupied this line, German engineers would construct a defensive line behind the Bug River. Von Manstein believed that his army group could hold the Bug River line against almost any attack the Russians could mount against it, if Hitler allowed the construction of a fortified line. He felt that if the Germans could show the Russians the cost of attacking a fortified river line, that the Russian generals would force Stalin to make peace with the Germans, a peace which would give up the land in Russia that the Germans had taken, but guarantee them a secure frontier to their east.
Hitler refused to listen to the advice of his generals, and the Russians forced a crossing of the Dnieper River. They then consolidated their troops into a large bridgehead the Germans could not eliminate. Even after the break in the line, Hitler demanded that the Germans hold on to the Dnieper River. After further attacks, the Russians forced the Germans off the Dnieper River at every point but Cherkassy, and assaulted three of the flanks of the troops which remained at Cherkassy.

After the Russians advanced from the river and pushed the Germans back in the northern section of Army Group South’s line, Hitler forced von Manstein to turn the city of Kirovograd into a "fortress". He refused to allow the men trapped in the city to retreat, until they were surrounded. Even after the hard lesson learned at Kirovograd about forcing troops to hold on to territory after the enemy had surrounded them, Hitler still demanded that his armies hold their positions at all costs. Hitler forced the German troops in the Cherkassy Korsun Pocket to hold on to the territory while the Russian forces around them consolidated their positions. His decision to hold the pocket caused the disaster the Germans faced at Cherkassy.
CHAPTER III

THE ENCIRCLEMENT

January 23-February 3, 1944

Forming the Pocket

On January 23, 1944, strong Russian forces broke through the German lines on the Dnieper River. The Russian thrust hit the German lines just north of the projecting wing which the First Panzer Army held on the Dnieper between the Seventh and Forty-Second Corps. The Russian motorized and armored divisions managed to drive as far south as the Zvenigorodka area.¹

The Russians then attacked on the Eighth Army front, at first launching only a reconnaissance in force. The attack came on a twelve mile front, which Eighth Army held with no more than one man for every fifteen yards of front. After finding the weakness in the German lines, the Russians launched deep probing attacks to ascertain the German reserve situation in the rear areas. When no reserves were found in the immediate area, orders were given for the Fourth Ukrainian Front to launch a massive attack the next morning.²
The Fourth Guards Tank Army, and later, the Fifth Guards Tank Army broke through the Eighth Army front and drove westward to link up with the Russian fighting units near Zvenigorodka. Russian forces in the north under General Vatutin and in the south under General Koniev joined west of Cherkassy completing the encirclement of the German forces there. This action left the Russians some eighty miles to the rear of the Germans encircled at Cherkassy. The Russian rear lay only fifteen miles west of Korsun, giving the Russians a sixty-five mile corridor.

The German Response

Hitler began looking seriously at the situation around Cherkassy on the evening of January 23, 1944, just after the Russian breakthroughs. Colonel General Walter Warlimont kept a diary of the meetings Hitler conducted in his headquarters. On that evening he recorded this conversation:

Borgmann: "There are 27 rifle divisions and four armoured corps in the area. Here at this point there are seventeen rifle divisions. Then northwest of Krivoi Rog there are sixteen rifle divisions and one armoured corps. At Kirovograd there are twenty-four rifle divisions and five armoured corps."

Hitler: "Is that here? That comes into it too."

Borgmann: "In the area of the break-in here
there are thirteen rifle divisions and one armoured corps, at Cherkassy four rifle divisions, one armoured brigade. In the area of this break-in, forty two rifle divisions, nine armoured corps, one cavalry corps in the first wave and two armoured corps in there; three armoured corps not yet identified."

Hitler: "How many identified armoured corps has he in this area?"

Zietzler: "He's got nine. The other may possibly come along if they come up by rail."**6**

The conversation goes on to cover the reserves the Germans could send into the area. The nearest true reserves were at Korosten. The Germans employed the division there to guard the railhead against partisan actions encouraged by the Russians. This division consisted of three experienced battalions and four battalions of new recruits. The nearest experienced reserve divisions not actively engaged in some duty were in Poland. Hitler also discussed the possibility of bringing troops from as far as France. He also considered committing the Fourth Mountain Division, employed at the time in the Alps battling partisans in Italy. He considered the divisions stationed in the west rested, and believed they could help in the fighting.**7**

Even at this point, Hitler had determined to hold on to the bridgehead at Cherkassy. He complained to his headquarters staff that his generals were retreating without reason, and causing hysteria among the troops.
Hitler cited the retreat from Stalingrad, complaining that the troops were out of control, and retreated much farther than they should have. Hitler called the retreat from the Dnieper to their new line east of the Bug River by Army Group South, idiotic.⁸

**Further Russian Advances**

During the day on January 25, follow up Russian forces launched a large-scale attack against the Seventh Corps. The right flank division fell back toward the southeast and south, and by the end of the day, the Russians held the roads leading to the flank and rear of the Forty-Second Corps. The Russians used these roads to press forward via Medvin toward Boguslav and Ssteblev.⁹

In order to protect their rear and flanks, the Forty-Second Corps established a new rearward facing front along the line of Boguslav-Ssteblev. Colonel General Theobald Lieb, the commander of Forty-Second Corps, believed that the Seventh Corps might still close the gap that yawned between his corps and the Seventh. But, this hope proved fleeting as more Russian forces moved into the area.¹⁰

The Russians attacked the center and flanks of the Eleventh Corps later in the day on January 25. Following repeated attacks, the Russians broke through the front of
Eleventh Corps on the right flank and in the center. In order to prevent an encirclement of his corps, Colonel General Stemmermann ordered his men to withdraw to the west and northwest, toward the Forty-Second Corps.\textsuperscript{11}

On the night of January 27, the SS Panzer Division Wiking received confirmation that enemy units had occupied Schpola, in their rear areas. General Gille immediately sent out a reconnaissance in force, which confirmed the fears of the division: enemy tank units northwest of Schpola and near Zvenigorodka.\textsuperscript{12}

General Gille immediately ordered his communication section to make contact with the rest of the elements of his division. More alarming news reached the divisional headquarters when the communications section established contact with the division’s Replacement Training Battalion and Pioneer Combat School, located at Ssteblev. Upon contacting the school, Gille learned that individual enemy tank units were moving into Boguslav. After this report and the recon action, Gille determined that two enemy tank forces were operating to his rear, and that they had come from two different directions. Gille determined that the Russian forces were moving from north to south, and vice versa. Gille sent word to the High Command and to the commander of First Panzer Army that the Russians were attempting to encircle the German
forces standing between Smela and Kanew. Only later, did the German High Command understand the magnitude of the encirclement the Russians were attempting. ⑭

The Pocket at Olschana

Later, during the night, Gille received word that the divisional supply services, located south of Olschana, had come under attack from enemy tanks. The divisional supply services had formed a hedgehog defence during the night, as had the combat school at Ssteblev. Both areas had experienced fierce attacks by enemy tanks and had been involved in heavy fighting throughout the night. The two groups merged early in the morning forming Kampfgruppe Heder and having been reinforced by an engineer battalion and the Narwa Battalion of the Estonian Brigade, held their ground defending Olschana. ⑮

Along with the small pocket of defenders at Olschana, the Russians created a large pocket of German defenders anchored on the Dnieper River and extending west past Korsun. The pocket contained elements of the First Panzer Army's Forty-Second Corps and elements of the Eighth Army's Eleventh Corps. Von Manstein designated the large encirclement the "Cherkassy Pocket" after the bridgehead the Germans held on the Dnieper River there. ⑯ At this point, von Manstein assembled the forces
of Forty-Second Corps and Eleventh Corps which managed to avoid encirclement. This group contained mostly the support and reserve elements of the two corps, but small groups of infantry and other combat personnel managed to outrun the Russian divisions trying to encircle them.\textsuperscript{16}

Inside the Cherkassy-Korsun Pocket

At the time of the encirclement, Eleventh Corps consisted of three infantry divisions: the Fifty-Seventh, Seventy-Second and the 389th. None of these divisions contained tanks, assault guns or adequate anti-tank weapons. Of these three divisions, only the Seventy-Second could carry on offensive operations. The other two divisions, with the exception of one regiment of the Fifty-Seventh Division, were unfit for offensive operations. The artillery complement attached to the corps comprised one assault gun brigade of two battalions totaling six batteries and one battalion of light artillery.\textsuperscript{17}

The Forty-Second Corps included: Corps Detachment B, the Eighty-Eighth Division and the Fifth SS Panzer Division Wiking. Von Manstein combined three infantry divisions to form Corps Detachment B, under the command of the commander of the 112th Infantry Division. He designated the new unit Corps Detachment B in order to
cover the identity and weakness of the unit. Von Manstein had combined the remnants of the Saar-Palantine 112th Infantry Division, the Saxon 255th Infantry Division and the Silesian 332nd Infantry Division in order to form the division sized unit. Although the unit carried a corps standard and contained three divisions, it possessed the fighting strength of one infantry division, containing three regiments with the normal complement of artillery, a strong antitank battalion, but no tanks or assault guns. The Eighty-Eighth Division consisted of two regiments totaling five battalions, but the artillery complement of the division had been badly mauled. The Wiking Division was by far the strongest division in the corps, and in the pocket as a whole, with two armored infantry regiments, one tank regiment with a total of ninety tanks and the Belgian volunteer brigade Wallonien, which contained about 1,000 men.

The pocket contained the remnants of many divisions which had become attached to the two corps and others which had just been caught in the wrong place at the wrong time. The Russians managed to trap part of the Silesian 417th Grenadier Regiment, the Engineer Battalion of the 168th Infantry Division as well as the 331st Bavarian Regiment of the 167th Infantry Division. The pocket also contained a battalion of the Silesian 213th Lo-
cal Security Division and the Ski Battalion of the 323rd Infantry Division. 19

On January 28, Lieb sent word to Eighth Army about the situation within the pocket. Lieb requested permission to withdraw his forces from the Dnieper River.

Mission requires maintaining northeast front against strong enemy pressure. Russian advance against Stéblew necessitates main effort on southern sector. Request authority for immediate withdrawal of northern and eastern fronts. This will permit offensive action toward southwest and prevent further encirclement and separation from XI Corps. 20

Lieb wanted to prevent a second encirclement from taking place. He wished to keep in contact with Stemmermann hoping that as one unit, the two corps had a chance to survive the encirclement and they would have a better chance to break out together than separately. 21

At first the Russians believed that they had trapped the entire Eighth Army and the army command element, a total of ten and a half divisions containing 100,000 men, within the pocket. According to Colonel Kvach, the chief of Koniev’s command train, General Koniev, the Commander of the Third Ukrainian Front, determined that the Cherkassy Pocket contained the entire German Eighth Army under Colonel General Wohler. Koniev correctly estimated the strength of Eighth Army at nine armored divisions, an SS panzer division, and an attached brigade. Koniev had wanted to destroy Eighth Army for a long time, the army
had caused him trouble since he took command. Eighth Army contained nine of the best armored divisions the Wehrmacht had to offer, and the destruction of the SS formations would have only added to his victory. Therefore, the Russians decided to do everything in their power to destroy the Germans, because they greatly respected the fighting capability of Eighth Army and the commander of the army. Only later did they realize the mistake they had made.²²

The First Rescue Attempt

Colonel General Hans Hube of the First Panzer Army made the first attempt to free the men of the pocket. He sent a radio-telegram into the pocket, saying simply "I am coming." In two days, his units had reached a point only nine kilometers from the pocket and in the process destroyed 100 Russian tanks.²³ According to Lieutenant Leon Degrelle of the Wallonien Brigade, this message lifted the spirits of his men, they now believed that the German High Command would not abandon them in the pocket as the Belgians believed the German High Command had done with the German troops at Stalingrad a year earlier. Degrelle also greatly respected Hube as a leader and believed that he, if anybody, could carry off the attempt to free them.²⁴
Hube’s attack almost succeeded in freeing the Germans in the pocket. Elements of the 108th Panzer Grenadier Regiment of the Fourteenth Panzer Division actually broke into the pocket, on the second night of their attack. Unfortunately for the Germans within the pocket, strong new Russian forces came up to attack Hube. The Russians attacked the Fourteenth Panzer with the Eleventh, Twelfth and Sixty-Third Cavalry Divisions. The men of the Fourteenth Panzer following up the 108th Panzer Grenadier Regiment could not hold the breach in the Soviet lines open and had to fall back. The rest of Hube’s men had to give up their positions only nine kilometers from the pocket and withdraw. With the new forces, the Russians managed to set up a fifty mile wide security zone around the pocket. The Russian commanders also brought several reserve formations with them to help guarantee that they could hold the pocket against any relief attempt the Germans might mount.

The Russians immediately began attacks to eliminate the German forces within the pocket. The Russians mounted the heaviest attacks from the south and southeast. These attacks pushed the surrounded Germans farther from the lines of Army Group South and farther from a possible relief effort.
Planning for a Second Relief Attempt

Von Manstein issued orders immediately to release forces from his front in order to launch a relief effort to save the men in the Cherkassy-Korsun Pocket. He would not allow the men of his army group to face another disaster, such as the one faced at Stalingrad a year earlier. He issued orders to release two panzer corps for the relief attempt.²⁸

Von Manstein sent word to First Panzer Army to end their defensive battle with the First Soviet Tank Army, on their left wing, and release Third Panzer Corps with utmost speed. Third Panzer Corps would move to Cherkassy with Sixteenth and Seventeenth Panzer Divisions, the First SS Panzer Division Liebstandarte Adolf Hitler and Heavy Panzer Regiment Baeke. First Panzer Division would follow the other three divisions as soon as the situation permitted.²⁹

Eighth Army received instructions to release the headquarters element of Forty-Seventh Panzer Corps and the Third Panzer Division from the army’s front. Von Manstein sent orders to the commander of Sixth Army to turn Twenty-Fourth Panzer Division over to Forty-Seventh Panzer Corps for use in the relief operation. Hitler also gave von Manstein permission to use Eleventh Panzer Division in the relief attempt if it arrived from the re-
serve areas in time. Hitler then delayed Eleventh Panzer at the Bug River, hoping that it would not be needed and that he could use it elsewhere. Eleventh Panzer Division joined the relief attempt only after the other divisions had broken through the Russian lines. 

Fourteenth Panzer Division joined Forty-Seventh Panzer in the concentration area coming out of the front lines of the army group. Fourteenth Panzer had been in the front line trying to contain the new Russian thrust which sought to keep Eighth Army from freeing the men trapped in the pocket. The division had already lost a full panzer grenadier regiment, and none of the other units were at full strength having just come out of the front lines after months of continuous fighting.

Twenty-Fourth Panzer arrived in the concentration area of Forty-Seventh Panzer Corps ready for combat, having come out of the reserve area of the army group. This division arrived in the best shape to carry out the relief effort, all the other divisions in the corps had not received rest, and two of them came out of heavily contested battles.

Two of the panzer divisions of Eighth Army designated for the relief effort were still in the midst of a heavily contested battle in the area of Kapitanovka. The commander of Eighth Army decided to replace them with infantry divisions, but to do so, would stretch the fight-
ing power of the infantry divisions to the utmost. The other two divisions were on the march toward the left flank of Eighth Army. Of the four divisions only one was at full strength, after weeks of continuous fighting, the other three divisions were in actuality only tank supported combat teams.\textsuperscript{33}

According to the diary of the Sixteenth Panzer Division, the division had endured continuous defensive fighting for over four weeks. After pulling out of the line, the division moved south, and into the rear areas of First Panzer Army. They arrived in their concentration areas during the day on February 1. Fortunately for the men of the division, their concentration area lay in a town. The diary tells of the happiness the men felt having a roof over their heads and a chance to shave and get a hot meal after almost continuous fighting. The division received two days of rest before having to begin the attack to reach Group Stemmermann.\textsuperscript{34}

Lieutenant Colonel Doctor Franz Baeke led his heavy panzer regiment into the concentration area of Third Panzer Corps. His group came directly out of the front lines and received no rest before going back into battle in order to relieve Group Stemmermann. Baeke commanded a group of thirty-eight Tiger tanks and Forty-seven Panther tanks.\textsuperscript{35}
Hitler Meddles in the Relief Effort

Von Manstein had ordered Sixth Army to release Twenty-Fourth Panzer Division in order to help Eighth Army's Forty-Seventh Panzer Corps with the relief effort. After traveling almost 200 miles to take part in the attack, Hitler changed the orders of the panzer division. Hitler ordered Twenty-Fourth Panzer to turn around and repeat the grueling 200 mile trek it had just undertaken to take part in the relief effort.36

Hitler ordered von Manstein to turn Sixth Army over to Army Group A, under the command of Field Marshall Ewald von Kleist. He made von Manstein give Twenty-Fourth Panzer back to Sixth Army in order to keep the fighting ability of this unit intact. Hitler then ordered Sixth Army into the Nikopol Bridgehead in order to hold it open for an offensive into the Caucasus. Hitler also needed the Nikopol, because it protected Army Group A. The loss of the Nikopol Bridgehead would force Army Group A to evacuate the Crimean Peninsula.37

Von Manstein contacted Field Marshall von Kleist and expressed his interest in trading an infantry division for Twenty-Fourth Panzer. Von Kleist agreed to accept the trade, because he needed a division to hold ground and he knew that an infantry division could do the job as well as a panzer division. Hitler's generals argued with
him continuously that a panzer division needed mobility and that the infantry should hold ground. The arguments always fell on deaf ears and Hitler ordered von Manstein to turn Twenty-Fourth Panzer Division over to Army Group A as planned. 38

Twenty-Fourth Panzer fought its way through the mud and arrived at the Nikopol Bridgehead. After travelling over 400 miles round trip, the division needed time in the reserve areas to refit. Almost every single tank broke down on the way to the Nikopol and because of the mud, the troops ended up pushing the trucks and untracked self propelled guns. The troops arrived in the bridgehead in as poor condition as the equipment of the division. By the time the Twenty-Fourth became battle-worthy again, Army Group A had pulled out of the Nikopol Bridgehead. Twenty-Fourth Panzer traveled to Nikopol for nothing, but the Germans could have made good use of the fire power of the division during the Cherkassy relief attempt. 39

Support for the Relief Attempt

In order to support the relief attacks, von Manstein assembled his ground attack squadrons. Hans Rudel led his Immelmann Squadron of Junker-87 dive bombers to support the Eleventh and Thirteenth Panzer Divisions of the
Rudel attacked not only the tanks barring the way, but also the slower Russian dive bombers attacking the divisions he supported.

Here there are plenty of good targets for us; air activity on both sides is intense, the Iron Gustavs in particular trying to emulate us by attacking our tank divisions and their supply units. With our slow Ju. 87s we always do our best to break up and chase away these IL II formations, but they are a little bit faster than we are because, unlike ourselves they have a retractable undercarriage.

Rudel mainly went after the tanks, the sheer number of tanks involved made them much more inviting targets, and the tanks were his assigned mission.

During the Cherkassy operation, Rudel flew the only cannon carrying Stuka available to his squadron. Early in the operation Rudel found himself with no tanks to attack, but spotted a squadron of IL 2’s in formation with P-39 Aircobras and other Russian fighters. Rudel contacted his wingman, at that time who was circling with him looking for targets, and ordered him to support his attack on the IL 2’s. He dove on the squadron and actually managed to gain on the planes during his dive. He downed one IL-2 with his cannon before the Russian fighters came after him forcing him to return to Uman.

Von Manstein transferred his headquarters train to Uman, so that he could better oversee the progress of the two corps involved in the relief attempt.
eral Hube of First Panzer Army had his headquarters at Uman, von Manstein made use of some of Hube's staff to help him oversee the relief attempt. Colonel General Wohler of Eighth Army had his headquarters near Uman and was easily accessible from there.  

Von Manstein tried twice to travel to the fronts of each of the two panzer corps of the relief effort, each time in vain. His vehicles bogged down in the mud and he had to turn around. Since he could not travel by ground, he decided to use the air arm attached to his assault groups to obtain the information he needed in order to better command the troops under his command. He utilized the airport at Uman not only to supply the pocket and to receive the wounded, but to command his assault groups, as well as to recon the area in front of his attack groups.

Matters Within the Pocket

Colonel General Lieb received orders from von Manstein to consolidate his forces on the morning of January 29.

Prepare withdrawal in direction Rossava up to Mironovka-Boguslav. Be ready to move by 1200 on 29 January upon prearranged signal. Authority for further withdrawal likely within twenty-four hours. Report new situation.

This withdrawal moved Forty-Second corps closer to
Eleventh Corps. Von Manstein, without Hitler’s permission, also granted Lieb permission to withdraw his corps from the Dnieper river. During the communication, Lieb reported his need for additional ammunition and advised his superiors that the evacuation of the wounded from Korsun airport progressed too slowly. He reported 2,000 casualties so far within the pocket.47

Lieb recorded the situation facing Eleventh Corps in his diary on the 29th of January. He reported that Stemmermann’s men faced strong Russian tank forces to the front of his corps. According to Lieb’s diary, several of the regiments of Eleventh Corps were reduced to only 100 men. Lieb also recorded that his units were now receiving supplies, but that even at this time he foresaw shortages.48

On January 31, Hitler ordered von Manstein to consolidate the chain of command within the pocket. Von Manstein gave control of all the men within the pocket to Colonel General Stemmermann, the commander of Eleventh Corps. His new command, renamed Group Stemmermann, contained all the units within the pocket. His new command had neither a staff or a signal corps. He received no help from outside the pocket, but received the disturbing order to hold his old positions on the Dnieper river. Stemmermann now had to hold the original sixty mile front
his two corps had held before the encirclement, along with a new two-hundred mile front the Russians created on his flanks and in his rear. His groups had barely held the sixty mile front originally assigned to them, and the outlook for holding an extra front over three times the length of the old front seemed dismal.49

Beginning the Airlift

During their encirclement of the Cherkassy-Korsun Pocket, the Russians cut the supply roads leading to the Forty-Seventh and Eleventh Corps. The only roads available to carry supply traffic led through Schpola and Zvenigorodka. Colonel General Stemmermann requested supply by air, and the Luftwaffe rose to the challenge.50

Group Stemmermann needed supply right away, most of their supply depots had fallen into Russian hands before the Russians completed their encirclement. According to Degrelle, large stores of gasoline and munitions fell into Russian hands on January 28, as the two encircling armies came together in the rear of Group Stemmermann.51

In order to supply group Stemmermann fully by air, the Luftwaffe established a goal of delivering seventy tons of ammunition, gasoline, tank parts, weapons, food and other supplies per day. The Luftwaffe also delivered specialized medical personnel to help care for the wound-
ed within the pocket. In order to protect the transport flights, the Germans flew light anti-aircraft batteries to the airport at Korsun during the first few days of the airlift operation. The planes also flew experienced ground personnel into the pocket to help lessen the turn around times of the planes and possibly repair some of the lightly damaged planes upon landing.\(^{52}\)

The planes began landing in the pocket on January 31, 1944. The Eighth Air Corps of the Fourth Air Fleet flew from Uman in order to supply the surrounded men. Three air transport wings took part in the supply effort. They flew from three different air fields: Golta, Proskurov and Uman. The only supply depot available to the Germans in the area lay near the airfield at Uman. Planes taking off from the other two airfields flew to Uman first to pick up the necessary supplies before going to the airfield at Korsun, within the pocket.\(^{53}\)

The planes flew the first few missions in close formation at hedgehopping altitude. Unfortunately for the pilots, the Russians had set up their anti-aircraft defenses almost immediately after their armored formations had completed the encirclement. Some German planes were shot down and others were heavily damaged early on in the supply operations. In order to cut their losses, the Germans varied their supply and return routes from
the pocket. On one occasion the commander of the third group of the Third Transport Wing decided to lead his group back to Uman at a higher altitude. He wished to avoid the heaviest of the anti-aircraft fire, but led his group into a different kind of trouble. Russian fighters jumped his group and managed to down twelve Junker 52 transport planes.

**Russian Air Support**

The Russians had assigned the Second and Fifth Air Armies to destroy the encircled men of Group Stemmermann. These two air armies were attached to the First and Second Ukrainian Fronts, respectively. The two air armies contained a combined strength of 997 aircraft (772 were operational) when the operations against the encircled forces began.

Two more air armies were assigned to attack the German air fields at Uman and to attack any relief efforts the Germans mounted to rescue the men in the pocket. The Seventeenth and Eighth Air Armies, attached respectively to the Third and Fourth Ukrainian Fronts were assigned these two tasks. These two air armies contained a strength of 1,363 aircraft.

Russian fighter coverage was especially heavy over
the airfield at Korsun. The Russian fighters came only when the German transports lacked fighter coverage. Even when the transports did have fighter coverage, it was inadequate for normal operations. But, even the light fighter coverage the German transports did have, managed to scare most of the Russian fighter pilots away.\textsuperscript{59}

\textbf{New Problems Within the Pocket}

On February 1, Lieb recorded the following entry in his diary: "Fighter protection inadequate. Ammunition and fuel running low." He made his concerns known to his immediate commander, and hoped the situation would improve.\textsuperscript{60}

On the night of February 1-2, fifty Russians who manned the heavy mortars of the Wallonien Brigade began to move towards the Russian lines around Olshanka. Only one Belgian sentry from the Wallonien Brigade stood in the way of the Russians and they killed him during their escape. The desertion not only meant the loss of an artillery battery, but the Russians gained men with knowledge of the Belgian defenses within the pocket.\textsuperscript{61}

The next day, February 2, the Russians launched an attack in the Wallonien sector. The Russians utilized the information they gained from their fellow Russians who had defected from the Belgians the night before. The
Russians attacked between Losovok and the Dnieper River at the very extremity of the Wallonien lines. Only a few dozen Belgians defended the front at this point in the line. The Russians managed to take Losovok during the day on the second, forcing the Wallonien Brigade to request permission to withdraw the Second Company which had held the line from Losovok to Moshny. The Belgians received orders denying the request to withdraw, and ordering them to retake the town.\textsuperscript{62}

Lieutenant Degrelle led the counterattack against the Russians at Losovok and received two panzers to help him with the endeavor. The tanks managed to help the Belgians, but ran into problems of their own:

Through great rivers of mud, along routes flooded with water spreading to a breadth of a hundred meters, we pushed eastward. Overturned automobiles and the hooves of dead horses were everywhere, half sunk in the slime near the trails.\textsuperscript{63}

The mud, as well as the obstacles in the road, hindered the movement of the tanks.\textsuperscript{64}

The Germans fired eighteen artillery shells to support the Belgian attack. The Belgians did manage to take most of the town, but just as success seemed in their grasp, General Gille gave them orders to evacuate the entire sector. Degrelle had to move his men fast because the infantry on his flanks had completed their withdrawal and he was still on the river, surrounded on three sides.
The Belgians were also running frightfully low on ammunition and other supplies. Most disturbing to Degrelle was the fact that he found the rest of the pocket too, had become low on ammunition and supplies. 65

During their withdrawal from Losovok, the Belgians faced many problems. The Germans had withdrawn the rest of their troops from the Dnieper River line and the Russians had infiltrated men into the section of Losovok still held by the Belgians. The Belgians not only faced the Russians directly to their front, but the enemy also had men on their flanks and in the town to their rear. The Belgians only vehicle, an old volkswagen, kept stalling and getting stuck, due to the mud and terrible weather conditions. The Belgians managed to evacuate the town and continued their retreat along with the rest of the Germans who had held the Dnieper. 66

After the third day of the airlift operations both the approach and return flights were made at higher altitudes. The groups flew between 7,640 and 9,550 feet with an escort of three Messershmitt Me-109 fighters per group. At some times, no fighters were available for the return flight. At these times, the transport planes delayed their departure until after dark, hoping to avoid most of the Russian fighters. 67

The Russians also attacked the airfield at Korsun in
order to hinder the German supply efforts. The Russians used their IL-2 low level bomber to attack the field. On February 3, the Russians launched fourteen low level attacks against the field at Korsun.68

All of the diary entries Lieb made for the first few days of the pocket express concern at the progress of the airlift. Since his entry on February 1, he noticed a gradual improvement in the amount of supplies delivered by the airlift. The heavy Russian attacks on the pocket put a strain on the ammunition supply within the pocket. On February 4, Lieb recorded a daily expenditure of over 200 tons of ammunition per day for his corps alone. He requested the airlift of 2,000 men to replace his casualties, which he reported at 300 per day. Lieb also requested the delivery of an extra 120 tons of ammunition per day.69

By February 3, 1944, the Germans had been pushed off the Dnieper River and forced to retreat toward the west. At the same time, the Russians continued their attacks from south and southwest of the pocket. The Russians widened their corridor from around fifty miles when the pocket closed, to an average distance of eighty miles.70

Stemmermann gave orders on February 3, to prepare the equipment of the pocket for the expected withdrawal. Stemmermann decided that as soon as Hitler issued the or-
der to evacuate the pocket, that his men could begin the evacuation, instead of having to collect their equipment. Stemmermann detailed over two-thirds of the men in the pocket to begin preparing the heavy equipment and vehicles for the breakout. Unfortunately for the Germans, the columns of stalled trucks were very inviting targets for the Russian fighters circling overhead.

Already the road from Gorodishche to Korsun, our last chance to breakout, was jammed by an incredible column. Thousands of trucks, spread over twenty kilometers, followed three front vehicles and skated in the black frog holes of the road, which had become a prodigious cloaca. The most powerful artillery tractors struggled painfully to open a passage. This enormous mass of vehicles was an incomparable target for planes. The Soviet machines, like strident swarms of wasps, would circle over the Kessel and dive down in squadrons every ten minutes onto the bogged-down column. Everywhere trucks were burning.  

The Germans faced the elements and the Russians in trying to consolidate their vehicles for the breakout. Many of the vehicles had to be abandoned later, because they could not move through the mud. The Germans destroyed the abandoned vehicles so they would not fall into the hands of the Russians.  

Later, the road became totally unusable due to the one thousand vehicles that could no longer move. At first, the Germans tried using the fields, but within one-hundred meters of the road, the trucks bogged down in the endless mire. The Germans then made use of their
last hope for moving the vehicles, the railroad line between Gorodishche and Korsun. The Russians continued their attacks against the German vehicles on the railroad line. In order to continue using the railroad, the Germans had to continuously push the burning and wrecked vehicles from the rail-line.73

On February 3, Lieb reported to Eighth Army the continual improvement of the air supply effort. He also reported that several of the transport planes making their return trip from the pocket, carrying wounded, were shot down by Russian fighters. Lieb requested that either the transports receive adequate fighter coverage for their return trip or take wounded out of the pocket only at night.74

Lieb and Stemmermann both agreed that the main focus of their defense should face south. They needed to hold as much territory in this direction, because the relief forces were approaching the pocket from the south and southwest. Korsun, the assembly area of the pocket, lay almost in artillery range of the Russian artillery batteries south of the pocket. If the Russians managed to push the Germans any farther north, they could shell the airfield at Korsun, hindering the effort to supply the pocket, and endangering the wounded at the hospitals there. For these two reasons, Stemmermann issued orders
to weaken his northern and eastern flanks in order to strengthen his defenses facing south.\textsuperscript{75}

\textbf{Hitler Meddles Again}

Von Manstein had hoped that the two corps he assembled to relieve the pocket could launch their attacks on the night of February 2-3 and no later than the night of February 3-4. But, Hitler meddled in the affairs at the front once again. He ordered that neither of the two armies releasing units for the relief attempt could give up any territory. This order forced the army commanders to postpone the attacks of the relief columns from the night of the 2-3 to the day of February 3, in order to reshuffle their troops, so as not to give any ground. Unfortunately, a warming trend began on February 3, causing a heavy fog which delayed the attacks of both corps until late in the morning.\textsuperscript{76}
The German Breakthroughs

Third Panzer Corps launched an attack from a point west of the pocket, taking the Russian forces surrounding the pocket in the rear. Forty-Seventh Panzer Corps attacked the Russian flank, attacking from a point southwest of the pocket. Von Manstein hoped that the attacks of the two panzer corps would meet with success. He believed that the disparity in the number of units utilized in the attack would be partially offset, because the Russian forces that faced his units had been in the lines for a long period of time and were well below their normal strength, as were the units he was using in the relief corps.¹

Von Vormann launched attacks with his Forty-Seventh Panzer Corps with Third and Fourteenth Panzer Divisions. At the time of the attack, both panzer divisions still had units heavily embroiled in battle, so von Vormann could only use a portion of his two division strength at
the beginning of his attack. Neither of the two divisions had received any rest before starting their attacks.²

The relief effort met problems from the start. First snow and then mud delayed the assembly of the two panzer corps. Fog delayed the attack and Hitler had just stripped it of one of its finest divisions and delayed a second division until long after the relief attacks started. But, the relief forces did the best they could considering the weather and the assets available to them. The two corps launched attacks first to cut the communication network of the enemy and then to surround them as well. He hoped to destroy the forces surrounding the Forty-Second and Eleventh Corps with concentric attacks.³ Hitler ordered the two attacks so that he could create a pocket of his own and destroy the whole of the Russian forces involved in the two breakthroughs. Hitler also hoped that the two corps could reinforce the troops in the pocket and regain a favorable jump-off base for his projected counteroffensive to retake Kiev.⁴

Objections to the Conduct of the Relief Attempts

During a conference General Wohler, the commander of Eighth Army, expressed his doubts about the success of two relief attempts. He cited the problems with the mud
and the limited forces which von Manstein could employ to launch his attack. He recommended that instead of having Third panzer Corps attack due north, that they turn east as soon as possible to join forces with the advance elements of Forty-Seventh Panzer Corps.\textsuperscript{5}

Colonel General Wohler then went to von Manstein to request that he change the direction of attack of the Third Panzer Corps. Wohler felt that the men in the pocket could not hold out long enough for a plan of the magnitude Hitler wished to execute to work. Wohler wished to combine the two relief attempts and attack along the shortest route to the pocket in order to guarantee the survival of Group Stemmermann.\textsuperscript{6}

**Problems for Forty-Seventh Panzer Corps**

New Russian attacks further hindered the relief effort by Forty-Seventh Panzer Corps from south of the pocket. The Russians committed strong new infantry and armored forces in an attack toward Novomirgorod. Von Vormann shifted elements of two of his divisions from the relief attempt to defend the town against the Russians.\textsuperscript{7}

In the evening on February 3, General von Vormann reported that his Forty-Seventh Panzer Corps could no longer carry out offensive operations. His already weakened divisions had gained a bridgehead at Izhrennoye, but
Russians attacks continually whittled down his combat effective strength. After the days offensive, von Vormann reported his corps contained only twenty-seven tanks and thirty-four assault guns still operational. Von Vormann believed that he could still hold his ground and that his divisions were tying down considerable Russian forces.\textsuperscript{8}

Third Panzer Pushes On

Third Panzer Corps attacked toward the north in order to take advantage of favorable tank terrain. The pocket also lay due north of Third Panzer Corps, an attack in this direction meant that Third Panzer Corps lost no time in advancing in other directions.\textsuperscript{9} Third Panzer Corps launched their attack on February 3, with only the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Panzer Divisions and Heavy Panzer Regiment Baeke. Advanced elements of the Leibstandarte joined the attack on February 4, while the rest of the division, as well as the First Panzer Division could not join the attack until much later.\textsuperscript{10}

Weather Problems

The weather hindered the Russian efforts to destroy the German pocket as well. Only three airfields remained operational after the thaw. The Russians had only stationed between 50 and 100 aircraft at each airstrip.
That meant that only around 150 to 300 aircraft were available to the Russians during the beginning of the thaw, but later the Russians managed to transport most of the strength of the two air armies to the three serviceable fields. Even with the reduced air power due to the loss of use of the other air fields in the area, the Russians managed to fly 3,800 sorties against the Germans within the pocket between January 29 and February 3. In order that all forms of aircraft keep flying, the Russians concentrated several air regiments at each open field. The regiments each contained a different type of plane, each airfield had a fighter, ground attack, transport, dive bomber and heavy bomber regiment.

According to Soviet sources, Russian planes launched an attack against the German supply wing based in the Vinnitsa region. The Soviets claim eighty transport aircraft destroyed on the ground. They claim that the destruction of these transports seriously hindered the German effort to supply their troops within the pocket.

**Resistance Toughens**

During the day on February 4, the men of the Leibstandarte Panzer Division managed to take a key position known to the Germans as Height 246.3, some two miles north of Tinowka. The Russians assaulted the German po-
sitions on the height and managed to wipe out most of the sixth Company which held the left flank. Four survivors held the flank against thirty-four Russians and three T-34 tanks. Two of their number were killed and the other two, reduced to using their service pistols held the flank until a battalion counterattack drove off the Russians.\textsuperscript{14}

Von Manstein ordered Third Panzer Corps to change the direction of their attack due east. The attack would advance via Lissyanka moving toward Morentszy. Von Manstein ordered that the Third Panzer Corps launch their final attack to relieve the pocket as soon as the advanced element of the group reached Lissyanka.\textsuperscript{15}

After the first day of the relief attack, the Third Panzer Corps had moved several miles towards the pocket. The fog set in during the night and movement the next day became near impossible for either side. Because of the difficulties associated with moving through the mud, the tanks had burned up a considerable amount of gasoline. They not only burned extra fuel due to having to pull themselves out of the mud, but burned fuel trying to find ground suitable to even move across. Since trucks were unable to move through the mud, Third Panzer Corps received orders to mobilize civilian help to carry gasoline to the front. Brieth issued orders to requisition all
horses, carts and sleds in the area to aid them in moving supplies.\textsuperscript{16}

**Defending the Pocket**

At dawn on February 5, the Wallonien Brigade received orders to occupy the trench line between Staroselye to Derenkovez. This line, dug by Ukrainian volunteers in early January, extended southeast to northwest along high crests which overlooked valleys and bogs. The trench line had firing emplacements, but had been dug too deep and lacked fascines. The Belgians defended the trench with an average of ten men for each kilometer of front. In order to preserve their fighting strength at key points, Degrelle placed his men in groups and posted them along the line.\textsuperscript{17}

During the day on February 5, Lieutenant Heder decided that his Kampfgruppe could no longer hold Olschana against the superior forces of the Russians that had assailed them since January 28. On the night of February 5-6, Heder ordered his men to abandon their positions, and withdraw to the line of the Wiking Division. At 02.30 hours, the men of the kampfgruppe broke through the Russian lines and rejoined their division in the Cherkassy Korsun Pocket.\textsuperscript{18}

Hitler decided on February 5, that the two corps
trapped in the pocket might have to breakout of the pocket and come part way to meet the relief columns. On the same day the O.K.W. decided to award both of the commanding generals within the pocket the Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross "to boost morale". Von Manstein thought that the commanders should receive the award after an actual order for the breakout came, in order to avoid comparisons with January 1943.¹⁹

During the morning on February 6, the Russians began attacks against the Belgian trenchline near Staroselye. According to Degrelle, the Russians managed to scale the counterscarp during the night, crossing the Belgian trench line at a point directly between two posts. The Russians surprised and then strangled the men in these posts and moved to a windmill which dominated the high ground at this point in the trench line. The Russians managed to take the entire trench line after some hours of fighting and moved into Staroselye. The artillery of the division became useless, because of the sheer number of troops crossing the front of their lines.²⁰

The Belgians regrouped outside the town and attacked the Russians in Staroselye and also in the trenchline. They reentered the trenchline below the town and followed it uphill towards the Russians. Two German tanks arrived later to lead the rest of the Belgians directly
up the hill. Many of the Russians took to their heels as soon as the noise of the German tanks became audible. By 16.00, the Belgians managed to retake the hill and the rest of the trench line.\textsuperscript{21}

On February 6, 1944, von Manstein decided that the two panzer corps could not reach the pocket under their own power and that the men in the pocket would have to move to meet their rescuers. The reports he received from the two commanders were still optimistic, but he had to accept the truth that the mud and Russians might prove too much for his six divisions to overcome (Eleventh Panzer Division was still in route to the front lines from the Bug River). The after action reports he received from the commanders of the two panzer corps showed the abundance of equipment the Russians now had in their army stores.

Between the two corps, they reported the capture of more than 700 tanks, over 600 anti-tank guns and about 150 field pieces, but only just over 2,000 soldiers. This indicated that the enemy forces had been largely made up of motorized formations.\textsuperscript{22}

This indicates that the Russians had no shortage of equipment they could employ in their divisions.

Even though the Russians suffered terrible losses, they still managed to keep the men of the relief forces from being successful in their attempt to free the forces of Group Stemmermann. On February 6, the day von Man-
stein ordered Stemmermann to concentrate his forces, the pocket measured thirty miles from north to south and twelve miles from east to west. Von Manstein took his own initiative and ordered Group Stemmermann to make a breakout towards the southwest. Von Manstein set a date for the breakout at this point, but due to the problems the relief forces met, he kept having to move the date back.²³

The Relief Continues

February 6, saw the troops of Third Panzer Corps still making some painfully slow progress towards the pocket. Tank crewmen carried buckets of fuel back and forth to their tanks in order to insure that they could continue operations. Infantrymen walked barefoot, with their boots in their packs. They found that their boots hindered movement, while wearing boots, they had to stop every few times they lifted their foot to retrieve their boot, which stuck fast in the mud.²⁴

To Keep the Airlift Alive

Lieutenant Leon Degrelle recorded that around seventy Junkers 52 transport planes landed within the pocket per day. In the seven days that the planes were able to land in the pocket, they managed to empty the hospi-
tals of wounded men. In all, the planes took 2,825 wounded men out of the pocket. The closest hospital to the pocket lay at Uman. Along with stopping at Uman for supplies, all the planes leaving the pocket stopped at Uman to unload the wounded they brought with them out of the pocket. Unfortunately for the Germans a thaw set in, making landings at first difficult, and later impossible.

During the first few days of the thaw, German engineers were able to drain the field so that the planes could land. Later, the Germans used earth moving equipment to raise a landing strip out of the water on the field. But, the mud and rain became too much for them and they could no longer clear the landing strip to ensure a safe landing. According to Degrelle’s memoirs, the last plane to attempt to land in the pocket flipped over, after burying a wing in the mud. The plane lay on the raised air strip in mud a meter deep.

The rapidly changing weather conditions, frost at night, followed by a thaw during the day, made landing at the Korsun airport very difficult, if not impossible. The Luftwaffe chose to temporarily suspend landing operations until the weather improved for landing and the ground stayed frozen all the time. The Germans made the necessary preparations for the procurement of parachute
canisters for supplying the troops of Group Stemmermann.28

The Russians Step Up the Pressure

During the morning on February 7, the Russians assaulted the Belgian trench line near Staroselye once again. The German tanks which had supported the Belgians in retaking the trenchline had already been recalled and the 250 some survivors of the first battle of the trenches stood no chance against the attacking Russians. The Russians, after taking Staroselye, now had a clear path into the flank of the columns of Germans retreating towards Korsun.29

The Belgians spent the rest of the day trying to reestablish a cohesive line on the flank of Group Stemmermann. The Belgians sent patrols into the forests in the area, hoping to discourage the Russians from attacking through the German lines there. Skirmishes broke out throughout the forest between the Belgian patrols and the Russians in the forest. The Belgian artillery now had to fire without rest to try to guarantee that the Russians would not break through the Belgian lines which had been hastily established between Staroselye and the flank of the German column heading towards Korsun.30

Because of the proximity of the Russian advance units to the German columns, many of the Germans lost
hope of retrieving their heavy equipment from the pocket. The most powerful of the German artillery tractors spent an entire day and night moving just over thirty kilometers along the rail line. Wrecked automobiles and trucks littered the railway line to Korsun. The Belgians, the rearguard of Group Stemmermann, fired all the trucks that could no longer move through the mud.31

Appraising the Pocket of the Chances for Success

On February 7, Group Stemmermann received news that had mixed blessings for them. the O.K.H. sent Stemmermann the following message:

Relief advance by III. Panzer Korps toward Morentzy. Gruppe Stemmermann will shorten the front lines and move with the pocket in the direction of Schanderowka in order to be able to break out toward the relieving forces at the proper time.32

Stemmermann felt relief that he could withdraw his lines, but hoped that the relief attempts still would succeed, for he had mixed feelings about the success of a breakout attempt.33

The Sixteenth Panzer, following directly behind Heavy Panzer Regiment Baeke, reported that they made only twenty kilometers per day progress towards the pocket. After only a few days of fighting through the mud, the artillery complement of the division reported only two functioning artillery tractors. Therefore, the division
decided to leave their artillery behind, instead of having to destroy the guns when the engines on the last of their artillery tractors burnt out.\textsuperscript{34}

Two Separate German Airlifts

February 7, stretched the German air lift effort, because two separate groups desperately needed supply on that day. During his assault on the Gniloy Tikich, Brieth informed the headquarters of Eight Army of his acute shortage of supplies. The mud had stopped all of his wheeled supply vehicles and the amount of supplies his troops could carry to the front could not meet the demands of his units.\textsuperscript{35}

Brieth was told to expect an air drop late in the afternoon. Low clouds and heavy rain dominated the battlefield, and Brieth doubted the ability of the German airmen to deliver supplies in foul weather. Some German aircraft, however, managed to reach Brieth's group, and delivered enough supplies to keep his men fighting until troops could cut the bogged down trucks out of the mud. Adequate supplies reached Brieth during the night of the seventh. The small airlift to Third Panzer Corps met the needs of the German troops, and kept the relief effort going one more day.\textsuperscript{36}
Stemmermann Must Break Out

On February 8, Colonel General Brieth informed von Manstein that he must delay the attack he planned to reach the Gniloy Tikich Stream today because of the mud. At this point, von Manstein informed Hitler that the planned reinforcement of the pocket was no longer possible and that the forces within the pocket would have to drive further than originally planned to meet their rescuers.\textsuperscript{37}

Stemmermann in Jeopardy

The Wallonien Brigade faced a serious threat to its flanks on February 8. Russian forces had breached the German line on the right flank of the Wallonien and caused their headlong retreat. The Russians had also smashed the line that elements of the Wiking Division held on the left flank of the Wallonien Brigade.\textsuperscript{38}

The Russian spearheads, on both sides of the Wallonien Brigade managed to take the little village of Skiti, in the rear area of the brigade. The brigade command post now stood as the only area between the two Russian spearheads held by friendly troops. The men of the Wallonien Brigade managed to recapture Skiti later and managed to force an escape route through the Russian lines. The brigade received orders to abandon the vil-
lage of Skiti the next morning, February 9, and received orders to move off towards Derenkovez and set up a new defensive line on the flank of Group Stemmermann there. 39

February 9, saw the Wiking Division facing dire straits in their attempt to hold the front assigned to them. General Gille issued orders to form an infantry company out of elements of the Wiking Division not involved in combat. Four officers and two-hundred-twenty men formed the company. Armaments for the company consisted of twelve machine guns (the rest of the men carried submachine guns, rifles, side-arms and grenades). Gille deployed this unit to contain the enemy bridgehead at Ambrusino. This unit saw action between February 11-17, suffering two dead, seventeen wounded and thirty-five missing. 40

The Russians began attacking the Belgian positions around Derenkovez on February 9. The Belgians had set up a defensive horseshoe facing north, northeast and east. This horseshoe protected the road from Korsun, which started off to the south in the Belgian rear. The SS Nordland Regiment of the Wiking Division took positions to the east and southeast of the Wallonien Brigade in order to help them protect the convoys leaving from Derenkovez and moving to the collection point at Korsun. 41

The Russians attacked the lines of the Nordland Reg-
iment and drove it into headlong flight. General Gille of the Wiking Division immediately ordered the regiment to retake their old lines, because the Russian thrust threatened the Belgian rear areas. The Germans began using the men from the retreating column, who no longer had their trucks, or equipment, as infantry. 42

Men of the Wallonien Brigade, reinforced by the newly created infantry, began attacks to reestablish the line the Nordland Regiment held. The Belgians forced the Russians to retreat two kilometers, and even took "numerous" prisoners. Later in the day, men from the Nordland Regiment, coming from the opposite direction, managed to force the rest of the Russians in the area to retreat, and reestablished the protecting ring around the road to Korsun. According to Degrelle, by the time the men of the Nordland Regiment arrived in the town, the Belgians were already sitting around drinking coffee and warming themselves by their fires. 43

The Russians reported the fall of Gorodische inside the Cherkassy-Korsun Pocket on February 9. On February 14, Korsun fell to the Russians, according to their sources, and on February 15, the Russians reported that they had destroyed the last of the relief forces. 44

Von Manstein received disturbing news from Colonel General Stemmermann on February 11. This message stated
that his Eleventh Corps was now on the verge of totally collapsing under continuing Russian pressure. His two weak, and one average strength divisions had been in the German front lines since September and were now on their last legs. Stemmermann stated that his troops needed the relief efforts to reach them fast, or there would be nothing left of his group to relieve.43

Stepping Up the Relief Effort

In desperation, von Manstein ordered that Third Panzer Corps launch their final drive for the pocket on February 11. The advanced elements, Heavy Panzer Regiment Baeke and Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler, fought their way into the southern quarter of Lissyanka. Hindered more by mud than by the Russians, they managed to force their way to the banks of the Gniloy Tikich Stream. O.K.W. ordered that they ford the stream immediately while they still had momentum. Colonel General Brieth reported back that his units could not possibly cross the stream today, that they were so short of supplies that they would have to stop until more gasoline and ammunition could reach them. Brieth reported that the mud made movement next to impossible and that his tanks were burning fuel at three times the normal rate. His units were also running short of food and other supplies nec-
necessary to carry out a successful attack.\(^{46}\)

With the arrival of the Eleventh Panzer Division, Von Vormann decided that his Forty Seventh Panzer Corps could once again carry out offensive operations. Von Vormann launched the Eleventh Panzer and Thirteenth Panzer Divisions through a gap in the Russian armies. The Germans turned west and then north and reached Zvenigorodka during the day on February 12th. Von Vormann reported that his corps had now reached a point only thirty kilometers from the pocket and only twenty-five kilometers from the Third Panzer Corps.\(^{47}\)

Once more, von Vormann reported that his corps could no longer carry out offensive operations. The elements and the Russians had again robbed his corps of any offensive capacity. He once again formed a hedgehog and defended his gains. At this time, he tied down the forces of the Fifth Guards Tank Army to his front and the better part of a whole Front on his flanks. The Russians sought to hold the German troops within the town and not to let them join forces with the troops of Third Panzer Corps.\(^{48}\)

Von Manstein ordered Third Panzer Corps to resume their attack on February 12. Brieth remained stalled south of the stream, because rain and rising temperatures during the day continued to hinder the trucks bringing
supplies and ammunition to the forces of his spearhead.\textsuperscript{49} 

With the supplies that managed to reach his corps, Brieth forced the stream with Heavy Panzer Regiment Baeke and the First SS Panzer Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler on February 13. His spearhead stopped late in the day due to heavy snow and lack of supplies. Brieth had forced the stream crossing, but could move no further. Brieth had received only enough supplies to keep his spearhead moving. The supply system could not keep up with his needs and he determined that he could only support the remnants of Heavy Panzer Regiment Baeke and Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler on the north side of the river. At this time, Baeke was down to his last six operational tanks.\textsuperscript{50} Late in the day on the 13th, as more supplies reached his group, Brieth managed to force two more bridgeheads across the Gniloy Tikich, including a bridge across the stream which the First Panzer Division and elements of the Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler managed to seize intact.\textsuperscript{51}

Consolidating the Pocket

At 01:30 on February 13, the Wallonien Brigade began abandoning their forward positions around Derenkovez. The Russians had already infiltrated their positions and the men of the Wallonien had to face danger from all round them. Russian tanks arrived on the scene and Leon
Degrelle utilized the last two of the brigade’s anti-tank guns to stop them. The Russian tanks came to a halt and the Russian infantry halted behind them. The Wallonien Brigade continued with their evacuation, even loading the two anti-tank guns on the last of the trucks.\textsuperscript{52}

When the last of his men boarded the trucks, Degrelle contacted the Nordland Regiment and informed them that the Wallonien had cleared their positions and were falling back. The Nordland Regiment set fire to what was left of Ambrusino and took up new positions behind the fire.\textsuperscript{53}

**Across the Stream**

During the day on February 13, Brieth ordered the rest of his corps to cross the Gniloy Tikich. In order to fully make use of all the divisions in his corps, Brieth ordered the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Panzer Divisions, along with the 198th Infantry Divisions, which protected the left flank of his corps, to take Hill 239. Both divisions, the Seventeenth Panzer on the left, and the Sixteenth Panzer on the right made good progress during the night on the Thirteenth and into the morning on February 14. By 10:30, the Seventeenth had taken all the Russian trenches on the left approach to Hill 239. The Sixteenth broke through three Russian trench lines and
stormed Frankovka, near the base of the Hill. The 198th Infantry Division moved up behind the Seventeenth Panzer Division and occupied the trench lines which the Russians had just evacuated. Both panzer divisions met tough resistance later in the morning and Brieth needed to add some fighting power to his bid to take the hill.

**The Pocket Continues to Shrink**

At dawn of February 14, the Wallonien Brigade stood on the outskirts of Korsun. At this point the Belgians got down from their trucks and marched into the city, as if on parade. During the day, the Wallonien began burying the dead of the brigade. Every man killed up to this point in the pocket received burial at Korsun.

Russian planes made the German attempt to supply the troops with parachute dropped supplies very difficult. The German pilots had to slow down and fly at very low altitudes in order to insure success. The Russian pilots would wait until the German pilots began their drop runs and then dive on them from above, either shooting them down when they pulled out of their dive, or while they tried to complete their supply run. The Germans stopped the practice of dropping supply containers fitted with parachutes because even when dropped from a low altitude and in little wind, the parachutes tended to drift. Many
of the parachutes were carried so far off course, that the troops within the pocket could not even pick them up. Some drifted behind the Russian lines, while others ended up in the Dnieper River. Enemy ground fire made the ten minutes it took to drop the canisters very difficult for the pilots to survive the drop.56

According to Degrelle, the day the Belgians arrived in Korsun, they witnessed a German airdrop. At first, the startled Belgians believed the parachutes belonged to Russian airborne troops and prepared to meet their end, but when the chutes hit the ground, they noticed thick silver canisters attached to the chutes. Each of the canisters contained twenty-five kilograms of ammunition and or little boxes of chocolate concentrate. The troops used the bitter chocolate to help them fight off sleep.57

Later in the day, General Gille of the Wiking Division received news that Ambrusino had fallen. He stormed out of the command post, hopped into his volkswagen and tore off in the direction of Ambrusino. Under Gille, the Wiking Division managed to retake the town and reestablished their protecting screen around Korsun.58

One More Barrier

On February 14, Baeke and the Leibstandarte moved off again in an attempt to take either the town of Dzhur-
Zhentsy or Hill 239, just six miles from the western most point in the pocket. Hill 239 commanded the ridgeline just south of Dzurzhentsy and was the highest point west of the pocket. Despite all attempts by the Germans, the Russians managed to hold on to Hill 239 and the entire ridgeline, all the way to Dzurzhentsy. 59

In order to stiffen resistance against the German Third Panzer Corps, Marshall Zhukov moved the Fifth Guards Tank Army into position to stop Brieth's advance. The Fifth Guards Tank Army began their attacks against Third Panzer late in the day on February 14. Fifth Guards Tank Army succeeded in slowing the German advance, only ten kilometers from the men of Group Stemmermann. 60

Toward Korsun

Colonel General Stemmermann ordered his group to prepare for the final withdrawal from Korsun. He no longer had a large number of wounded in his hospitals at Korsun and felt that further resistance against the Russians trying to force him out of the city would cost him too many men. The 50,000 men of Group Stemmermann which still survived were forced into an area that measured seven kilometers by eight kilometers. 61

Colonel General Wohler, the commander of Eighth Army, ordered Stemmermann to prepare his group for a
breakout. His order stated that Group Stemmermann would have to reach Dzhurzhentsy or Hill 239. The message further instructed him to mass all his artillery on the breakout front in order to help force the Russian lines. The order named Colonel General Theobald Lieb of Forty-Second Corps as the commander of the assault force of Group Stemmermann, and left Stemmermann to command the rear guard. Wohler ordered Stemmermann to begin his breakout at 23:00 hours on February 16.\footnote{62}

At 23:00 on February 14, the men of Group Stemmermann completed the evacuation of Korsun, in preparation for the coming breakout. Winter had returned to the Ukraine and instead of watery mud, the retreating Germans had to deal with mud the consistency of putty. Trucks that had move through the mud, became bogged down and were pushed off the road by their former passengers. Most of the soldiers abandoned their trucks, wished their former drivers luck and made their way out of the pocket on foot.\footnote{63}

New Innovations in the Airlift

After the problems associated with dropping canisters with parachutes to retard their descent failed, the Germans tried dropping the supply canisters without parachutes. The planes had to reduce speed and fly at
very low altitude to give the canisters a chance of surviving the impact. The ammunition (seventy-five and eighty-eight millimeter shells) had no problems surviving the impact. The low height and added cushion of the snow guaranteed successful drops of ammunition. The Germans dropped gasoline in twenty-six point five gallon drums, the most stable drums they could find. On average, two out of every ten drums burst on impact, but the Germans within the pocket received most of the gasoline they needed.  

The Germans also decided to try to land their aircraft during the night. The frosts at night allowed the aircraft to land in relative safety, as long as they could see the field. In order to aid the pilots, the ground crews parked trucks and cars along the sides of the runway and when the planes came in, they started flashing their headlights down the landing strip. Landing at night took away most of the need for escorting fighters and made shooting down the German planes harder for the Russian pilots.

Russian Reactions and the Russian Airlift

The Russians also made use of their night fighters, to lessen the chances that German antiaircraft and fighters would shoot down their planes. Since many of
the supply drops took place at night, the Russians had to fly then to have any chance of interdicting supplies to the pocket. The Russian air commanders made extensive use of Il-2 Shturmoviks fighters and Po-2 night bombers.66

The thaw caused the Russians to launch an airlift effort of their own. Fuel and ammunition supplies became critically low in the formations fighting the German relief attempts now nearing the pocket. The Russians assigned the task of supplying units of the Second and Sixth Tank Armies to the 326 Night Bomber Air Division. The Russians assigned this division the task, because their airfields lay close to a railroad, which could bring supplies directly to the airfield, negating the need to send the supplies over road by truck. This division flew the Po-2 night bomber, making 822 flights over a period of nine days, in very bad weather. The bombers managed to supply the two tank armies with forty-nine tons of gasoline, sixty-five tons of supplies and 525 rockets.67

While the planes of the Second and Fifth Air Armies supplied the troops and hindered German efforts to supply the pocket, planes of the Seventeenth and Eighth Air Armies disrupted supply movements behind the German front lines. These air armies attacked German supply trains and any vehicles that attempted to move towards the Ger-
man front lines along the main highways in the area. The Soviets claim that on February 4, alone, they flew 117 sorties and destroyed one-hundred vehicles and carts along with the men and material they carried.  

The Final Supply Drops

When the area of the pocket became tenuously small, the Germans initiated a new way of marking their positions. Instead of marking the drop zones the planes were to use, the Germans marked the four corners of the pocket. As the German planes circled in the air, the men defending the pocket fired flares into the air to mark the sixty square kilometers where the planes were to drop the supplies. A successful drop meant that the men of the pocket could defend themselves for that day.

During the last few nights of the existence of the pocket, the Luftwaffe flew extra missions to insure that the breakout forces would have adequate supplies to fight their way to freedom. On the night of February 13-14, the Luftwaffe made their supply drop right on time, but off target. The supply drop that night fell into the hands of the encircling Russian forces. According to Lieb, the fault lay with the Luftwaffe, the pilots misjudged their approach and just dropped their supplies in the wrong area. Lieb recorded in his diary the fact that
the Luftwaffe tried to blame the forces within the pocket for the errant supply drop, claiming that the encircled forces had not adequately lit the drop zone. In any case, the men of Group Stemmermann received no supplies for the night of the 13-14.70

To Take Lissyanka

Colonel General Brieth decided that he needed to take a town closer to the pocket on the Gniloy Tikich Stream, in order to better the chances of Group Stemmermann reaching his lines. Brieth order the First Panzer Division, along with the Seventeenth Panzer Division to take the section of Lissyanka which lay on the eastern bank of the Gniloy Tikich Stream. The Germans stormed the eastern section of town, but met considerable resistance from the Russian defenders. Brieth then order the Sixteenth Panzer to move into Lissyanka and the Germans succeeded in taking the town. After securing the eastern half of Lissyanka, Brieth ordered the Sixteenth Panzer to leave a regiment to guard the airfield there.71

Final Preparations for the Breakout

In the early morning of February 15, the men of Group Stemmermann stormed the village of Sanderovka, but met determined Russian resistance after taking only half
of the town. During a later attack, the Germans with several panzers managed to take the town, though with extreme difficulty.\textsuperscript{72}

In order to increase the chance of a successful breakout, Colonel General Stemmermann ordered that the Wiking division hold the town of Novo-Buda, which elements of the Second SS Panzer Division Das Reich had taken during the night. Two regiments of the Das Reich Division had stormed the town and drove the Russians off in surprise. Das Reich captured twenty Ford trucks and several Russian heavy artillery batteries. The only major usable road leading towards the relief forces passed by Novo-Buda. The Germans wanted to hold the town in order to use it as a concentration area for the breakout and to protect the road they would use to leave the pocket. Novo-Buda also contained a fortified line the Ukrainians had built for the Germans earlier in the war. The 3,000 men of Das Reich moved off to take the next town in the path of the breakout, turning Novo-Buda over to the follow up forces of Group Stemmermann.\textsuperscript{73}

Stemmermann believed that a relatively small force could hold the fortified line at Novo-Buda against a sizeable force of Russians. However, Hitler had not allowed the fortified line to be started early enough and several gaps remained when the Russians attacked the
town. The Wallonien Brigade, attached to the Wiking Division, took part in holding the town. The 1,000 men of the Wallonien received support in holding the town from a rag tag collection of cooks, accountants, drivers, mechanics, quartermasters and telephone operators.74

At 05:00 on February 15, the Russians assaulted the Belgian positions at Novo-Buda. The German line held where the fortifications stood, but Russian armored units punched holes in the German lines where there was no cover. Fifteen Russian tanks supported the attacks, which the Germans could counter with only five of their own. The five German Panthers retreated beyond the town to take up new, more defendable positions. During the withdrawal, one of the German Panthers came gun to gun with a Russian T-34 and the two tanks destroyed each other. Degrelle rallied the retreating Belgians south of the town with the remaining Panthers. He also succeeded in gathering the last of the Belgian anti-tank guns to help him hold their new positions. The fall of the town meant that the Russians now had a clear path to attack the columns of Group Stemmermann as they moved down the road and out of the pocket.75

One group of Belgians under Lieutenant Colonel Lucien Lippert, the last of the Belgian staff officers, still held the northwest corner of the town. He began an
attack to retake the section of town lost to the Russians. Lippert crossed into the Russian held southwest corner of town and seized a group of houses near the center of town. Lippert charged into a house in the Russian section of town and was killed by the Russians defending the position. The Belgians retreated and tried to set up new positions near the center of town. The Russians then launched an attack and drove the Belgians back into their corner of town.\textsuperscript{76}

The Belgians then requested permission to evacuate the town entirely, citing heavy casualties and the presence of Russian tanks within the town proper. Without tank support in the town, the Belgians had to use their hand portable anti-tank weapons to destroy the T-34's. The Belgians made use of the panzerfaust, within the town to knock out the tanks, but the weapon caused them many problems.\textsuperscript{77}

Stemmermann ordered the Belgians to hold the town at all costs, at least until the breakout began. Stemmermann wanted to hold Novo-Buda, because men in this town could protect the only road available to him to use in his breakout attempt. Only a muddy plain stood between Novo-Buda and the escape route Group Stemmermann would use to leave the Cherkassy-Korsun Pocket.\textsuperscript{78}

Colonel General Stemmermann assigned the capture of
Sanderovka to General Gille of the Wiking Division. Gille managed to free the Germania Regiment from his division’s perimeter and assigned them the task of capturing the town. Lieutenant Colonel Werner Meyer, the commander of the Germania Regiment, decided to attack the Russian lines to the left of the town, and then attack the town from the right. His first company stormed the town and managed to force the Russians holding the town to flee. The second and third companies, which followed up the attack, managed to hold the town until the breakout began.\textsuperscript{79}

Germania gained full control of Sanderovka early in the morning of February 15. During the day, the rest of the Wiking Division passed through Sanderovka, and managed to force the Russians back three kilometers towards the men of the Third Panzer Corps.\textsuperscript{80}

Once again, the Third Panzer Corps tried to break through the Russian lines to Group Stemmermann. While moving his troops forward, the bridge through Lissyanka collapsed. Brieth assigned his engineers the task of building a new bridge through the town, while the rest of his corps moved against Hill 239. His attack broke down due to the weather, and the Russian forces defending the hill.\textsuperscript{81}
The Breakout Order

At 11:05, on February 15, Colonel General Stemmermann received the breakout order over the radio. The breakout order read, in part:

Capabilities of III Panzer Corps reduced by weather and supply difficulties. Task Force Stemmermann must accomplish break-through on its own to line Dzhurzhentsy-Hill 239 where it will link up with III Panzer Corps. The breakout force will be under the command of Colonel General Lieb and comprise all units still capable of attack.¹

Unfortunately for the corps within the pocket, the message never told the commanders of Group Stemmermann whether they would meet German or Russian forces upon reaching Hill 239. The message also failed to tell Stemmermann that Brieth had taken control of Lissyanka, or that he had captured a bridge over the Gniloy Tikich. These omissions would cause serious problems for the troops within the pocket as they escaped from the pocket.²

Late in the evening on February 15, Stemmermann called the division and regiment commanders together to
give them his orders for the breakout. He issued, in part, the following orders:

At 23:00, on 16 February, Task Force B, 72nd Division and 5th SS Panzer Division Wiking will attack in a southwesterly direction from the line Khilki-Komarovka, break the enemy’s resistance by a bayonet assault, and throw him back in continuous attack toward the southwest in order to reach Lissyanka and there to join forces with elements of III Panzer Corps. Compass number 22 indicates the general direction of the attack. This direction is to be made known to each individual soldier. The password is: "Freiheit" (Freedom).

For the attack and breakout each division will be organized in five successive waves, as follows: First Wave: one infantry regiment reinforced by one battery of light artillery (at least eight horses per gun, plus spare teams) and one engineer company. Second wave: anti-tank and assault gun units. Third wave: remainder of infantry (minus one battalion), engineers, and light artillery. Fourth wave: all our wounded that are fit to be transported, accompanied by one infantry battalion. Fifth wave: supply and service units.

The entire medium artillery and certain specifically designated units of light artillery will support the attack. They will open fire at 23:00 on 16 February, making effective use of their maximum range. Subsequently, all artillery pieces are to be destroyed in accordance with special instructions.

The radios of each division will be carried along on pack horses. To receive signal communications from corps, each division will, if possible, keep one set open at all times, but in any event every hour on the hour. The corps radio will be open for messages from the divisions at all times.

The corps command post will be, until 20:00, 16 February, at Shenderovka; after 20:00 at Khilki. From the start of the attack the corps commander will be with the leading regiment of
the 72nd Division.³

Stemmermann covered the rear guard actions with special care to make sure that his group received all the protection possible during the breakout. He gave special coverage to the relief of the Wiking SS Division near Komarovka by the 57th Infantry Division. Most of the staff officers of this division attended the meeting to make sure that they knew each phase of the plan for relief of the SS. At this time, Stemmermann turned all decisions dealing with the lead elements of the group to Colonel General Lieb.⁴

Soon after receiving command of the lead elements, Colonel General Lieb had to make many decisions concerning the breakout attempt. He went to talk to Colonel General Stemmermann about what to do with the wounded men that were too hurt to move. Their transport could not negotiate the muddy roads and even letting them try would mean backing traffic up behind them when they became bogged down in the mud. Lieb decided that 2,000 of the wounded men of the pocket would have to remain where they were. He called for the medical personnel of the pocket, along with one doctor from each division to stay with the wounded and surrender to the Russians when the time came.⁵
The German pilots flew the greatest number of missions on the night of February 15-16, the night before the breakout. The crews flew an average of four to five missions on that night alone. The transports took extra ammunition and gasoline supplies to the encircled men, to aid them in their breakout attempt. According to Lieb, the air drops put them in good shape, at least well supplied with ammunition. Lieb just worried about the ability of his corps to carry ammunition with them, because of the conditions of the roads. He doubted the ability of the vehicles to move through the mud carrying full loads of ammunition.

The missions to supply the men in the Cherkassy-Korsun Pocket ended on the night of February 15-16. However, the mission to aid the men of the pocket continued until the night of February 19-20. The transports flew missions to supply the relief forces, bringing their advance elements rations of food and ammunition to last them until they returned to the German lines.

To Take Hill 239

During the day on February 16, Heavy Panzer Regiment Baeke and the Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler made one more attempt to take Hill 239. At one point in the day, Baeke
actually managed to take three other tanks to the height of the hill. The four tanks were no match for the Russian counterattacks and they were again driven off the hill and back 400 yards.⁹

The Sixteenth Panzer Division launched an attack against the Russian screening line in front of the heights south of Dzhurzhentsy. Seven T-34’s and 400 supporting infantry stood in the first line facing the Sixteenth Panzer. This attack met with little success and the Russians maintained control of the heights south of the town, including Hill 239. The second company of the Sixteenth Panzer Division stood between the rest of the division and Dzhurzhentsy, protecting the flank of the division.¹⁰

Heavy Panzer Regiment Baeke left the lines of Group Stemmermann in Lissyanka and launched an attack against the Russians at Oktyabr. This move brought the men of Third Panzer Corps closer to the men of Group Stemmermann. It also gave the Germans a position north of the Russians between them and the pocket. Baeke then turned the town over to flanking divisions and moved again against the heights around Lissyanka.¹¹

The First Panzer Division brought their hospital trains to a point directly behind the front lines of Heavy Panzer Regiment Baeke during the day, in order to
take the wounded from Group Stemmermann to Uman. Ju. 52's stood by on a leveled field on the line of the retreat to take the wounded back to the airport at Uman.  

The Final Orders

Further messages concerning the breakout attempt reached Stemmermann during the day on February 16. The new instructions emphasized the importance of surprise and coordination:

During initial phase of operation tonight hold your fire so as to achieve complete surprise. Maintain centralized fire control over artillery and heavy weapons, so that in the event of stronger enemy resistance, especially at daybreak, they can be committed at point of main effort in short order.

The orders went on to give the time for the last expected supply drop for the troops in the pocket and to tell Stemmermann that he could expect air support at dawn, to protect his flanks.

General Gille summoned Degrelle from Novo-Buda and informed him that Stemmermann planned to breakout of the pocket at 23:00 that night. Degrelle received orders to hold Novo-Buda until all the elements of Group Stemmermann, except the rear guard, had passed his positions. After Group Stemmermann moved past Novo-Buda, the Belgians would abandon their positions and march to the head of the column to take part in spearheading the breakout
Final Preparations

The two corps in the pocket sought to breakout on the night of February 16-17 1944. Stemmermann ordered that the artillery in the pocket fire off their remaining rounds in support of the breakout effort. The two corps had no chance of moving their heavy artillery through the mud to take them out of the pocket. The prime-movers of the guns had enough trouble moving through the mud without a heavy gun to drag behind them.

Stemmermann stationed Corps Detachment B on the northern flank of the breakout and the SS Wiking Division, with the Wallonien Brigade attached, in the south. Each division in the pocket placed a regiment of artillery in the vanguard and echeloned two approximately regiment sized artillery units behind the vanguard. Stemmermann took command of the rearguard himself, leading the Fifty-Seventh and Eighty-Eighth Divisions as they withdrew to each new phase line.

On the evening of February 16-17, the Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler once again tried to cut their way through the Russian defenses and take Hill 239. In a separate effort, they tried to take Hill 222, in order to help protect the flank of the relief effort, as it returned to
the German lines after linking up with Group Stemmermann. These two key positions stood between the escaping men of Group Stemmermann and the German lines. The Germans were unable to take the two hills, due to the ice and the tenacity of the Russians defenders. The troopers of the Leibstandarte at one point managed to seize the crest of Hill 239, but were forced from the trenches they had just taken by a Russian counterattack.18

Heavy Panzer Regiment Bæke joined the Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler in another attempt to take Hill 239. Although they made some headway, they were not able to take the hill from the Russians. Other units of Third Panzer Corps took up screening positions around Pochapintsy, to the south of Hill 239. They took up these positions in order to keep the Russians in the town from launching attacks against Group Stemmermann as it passed the Russian concentrations in the town. The attack into Pochapintsy also served to scare off the Russians assigned to defend the Gniloy Tikich Stream near the town. In their retreat they panicked the troops guarding the stream further south and scared them into leaving their positions between the men of Group Stemmermann and the stream.19

Shortly before the breakout began, a crisis arose among the rear guard of Group Stemmermann. The Russians attacked the junction between the Fifty-Seventh and
Eighty-Eighth Divisions. The Russians tanks broke through between these two infantry divisions because the German divisions here had no tanks or sufficient anti-tank guns to stop the Russians. General Gille of the Wiking Division launched an attack with tanks and some of his armored infantry. The attack threw the Russians back and reestablished the rear flank of Group Stemmermann. The tanks and troops of the Wiking Division moved across the whole of the pocket to take part in spearheading the breakout attempt.20

Dash for Freedom

Group Stemmermann broke out of the Cherkassy-Korsun Pocket at 23:00 on February 16. At the time, Stemmermann commanded about 45,000 men, including many Russian auxiliaries, the pocket also contained 1,500 wounded fit for transport, which Stemmermann hoped could be rescued. Stemmermann ordered the artillery not to fire until the lead elements met resistance, so the breakout attempt began in silence and the three assault regiments cut through the Russian outpost line and the main screening line before the Russians knew what happened.21 Lieb, on horseback, witnessed the events as they unfolded:

By 23:00 the regiment (105th Grenadier Regiment of the 72nd Infantry Division) two battalions abreast-started moving ahead, silently and with bayonets fixed. One-half hour later
the force broke through the first and soon thereafter the second Russian defense line. The enemy was completely caught by surprise. Prisoners were taken along.22

Lieb noted the lack of defenders in the Russian lines and was puzzled. He later (after consulting members of the rear guard over the radio) came to the conclusion that the Russians had withdrawn a significant number of men from their southern trench line to take part in the attack on Ssteblev, which they launched the morning of February 17.23

Along with the fighting, Lieb recorded the effect of the elements on the breakout attempt.

The advance toward the southwest continued. No reports from either Task Force B on the right or the 5th SS Panzer Division on the left. That they were making some progress could only be inferred from the noise of vehicles due north and south of us, and from the sounds of firing that indicated the location of their leading elements. Over road-less, broken terrain traversed by numerous gullies our march proceeded slowly. There were frequent halts. Here and there, men and horses suddenly disappeared, having stumbled into holes filled with deep snow. Vehicles had to be dug out laboriously. The slopes were steeper than could be presumed from looking at the map. Gradually the firing decreased until it broke off entirely by 02:00. About two hours later the leading elements of the 72nd Division were approximately abreast of Dzhurzhentsy. Still no reports from Wiking and Task Force B. I could not give them my position by radio because by now my headquarters signal unit was missing and could not be located.24

Lieb reported the same problems throughout the night that Stemmermann would face, no communication with other ele-
ments of the group.  

Later during the night another regiment of the Seventy-Second Infantry Division reached a road running into Dzhurzhentsy from the southeast. The vanguard of the regiment encountered four Russian tanks and a column of trucks moving up the road. One of the Germans yelled "stoi" (halt) and the Russians allowed the Germans to pass unmolested. The Russians realized their mistake, after German cannon began moving across the road, but could not stop the vanguard, because they became heavily embroiled with the follow up units.  

The SS spearhead regiment ran into trouble as it passed east of Dzhurzhentsy. There they encountered heavy machine gun, antitank and tank fire from the edge of the village. General Gille diverted one battalion to drive the Russians back and turned his main effort due south. His troops had charged across the open plain in front of Dzhurzhentsy and Hill 239, thinking they would meet fellow German troops there. The Wiking Division then came under fire from the Russians who still occupied Hill 239. Confusion reigned among the Wiking Division, the unexpected fire from the hill threw the division into confusion and allowed the Russians extra time to fire into the ranks of troops. Gille then turned his men further south to avoid the heavy tank fire coming from Hill
239. This placed the column east of the Gniloy Tikich, and forced the column to cross the stream.²⁷

The 72nd Division too, faced problems as it passed through Dzhurzhentsy. The Russians had stopped firing as the regiment neared Dzhurzhentsy, but the Russians in the area took up the battle again as the division left the town.

Shortly after 04:00, enemy tanks ahead opened fire. They were joined by Russian artillery and mortars operating from the direction of Dzhurzhentsy, at first without noticeable effect. The firing increased slowly but steadily, and was soon coming from the south as well. We began to suffer casualties. The advance, however, continued. By about 06:00 the leading units reached a large hollow southeast of Dzhurzhentsy. Enemy fire, getting constantly heavier, was now coming from three directions. Elements of Wiking could be heard on the left, farther back. No message, and not a trace of Task Force B. Day was dawning. The difficult ascent out of the hollow began. The climb was steep and led up an icy slope. Tanks, guns, horse-drawn vehicles, and trucks of all kinds slipped, turned over, and had to be blown up. Only a few tanks and artillery pieces were able to make the grade. The units lapsed rapidly into disorder. Parts of the Wiking Division appeared on the left.²⁸

The Russians had chosen to defend Dzhurzhentsy, because the town lay in a direct line with Lissyanka. If the Russians could force the men of Group Stemmermann to turn south around the town, they would have to cross the Gniloy Tikich Stream in order to make contact with the Third Panzer Corps.²⁹

While the men of the vanguard fought to reach the
lines of Third Panzer Corps, Stemmermann kept order among the remainder of his group. He delayed the second wave for ten minutes after the vanguard moved out, in order to give the first wave time to pierce the Russian lines. He then ordered all vehicles other than tanks, self-propelled assault guns, tracked prime movers and enough horse drawn carts to transport the men wounded during the breakout destroyed.\textsuperscript{30}

The destruction of the vehicles alleviated some of the transportation problems, but the vehicles the Germans utilized still caused monumental traffic jams. Some units chose to disregard Stemmermann's order to destroy their trucks and tried to move them through the mud. Others overloaded their wagons with wounded men and supplies, trying to save everything they possessed when the Russians closed the pocket. These trucks and overloaded carts promptly got stuck in the mud and caused problems for the vehicles behind them.\textsuperscript{31}

Sanderovka fell exactly one hour after the breakout began. Russian tanks stormed the town and overwhelmed the Germans who were the rear guard of the column in this area. The Russian tanks then attacked the rear element of the two columns. The last twenty Panthers of the Wiking Division shot out of the column and took positions in a gully, bringing fire against the Russian tanks.
These tanks, outnumbered ten to one, provided time for Stemmermann to move his columns and for him to set up a viable defense against the tanks with part of his infantry.\textsuperscript{32} According to the men who witnessed the tanks moving into battle, the tankers proudly wore their silver trimmed uniforms and the black and silver "Ritterkreuz" (knights cross to the iron cross) around their throats. The last of the panzertroops of the Wiking Division died to a man on the morning of February 17, defending the rear guard of Group Stemmermann.\textsuperscript{33}

Stemmermann kept his command post at Khilki, trying to keep in contact with his subordinate commanders. His telephone lines had been severed during the night by moving tanks and troops, and had been shelled by the Russian artillery. Stemmermann resorted to sending messages by horsemen and by runner later during the night in order to even keep control of the rear guard elements.\textsuperscript{34}

Stemmermann ordered the two rearguard divisions to withdraw to the second and third phase lines within three hours of the start of the breakout. At 00:30 hours, Stemmermann followed the last wave of Corps Detachment B out of Khilki and moved with his command group to set up a new post at Dzhurzhentsy.\textsuperscript{35}
Sometime during the move to Dzhurzhentsy, Stemmermann became separated from his command group and became lost. Later during the night, an SS soldier reported that Stemmermann and his car had been blown to pieces by a Russian antitank shell.  

Colonel General Lieb, at that time riding a horse behind the last echelon of the Seventy-Second Infantry Division, never heard of Stemmermann’s fate until after leaving the pocket. Soon after passing Dzhurzhentsy, the order among the breakout forces deteriorated rapidly. The final phase of the breakout, turned into a wild surge of men heading westward to freedom.

The Belgians to the south of Lieb ran into problems of their own during the breakout. A wave of Russian tanks hit the column from one of the rear flanks and began driving over the horse drawn carts carrying the wounded. Without tank support, Degrelle led a group of his Belgians to try to avert imminent catastrophe. The Belgians began pulling the undamaged carts out of the way and taking as many of the walking wounded as possible with them. They consolidated the wounded on the undamaged carts and piled the rest of the carts in the road, as a temporary barrier against the Russian tanks. The broken carts caught in the treads of the Russian tanks
bringing many of them to a halt and created an impassable bottleneck that stopped the rest of the Russian tanks behind them.\textsuperscript{38}

Degrelle and his Belgians, with the wounded in tow, rounded a woods, leaving the Russian tanks behind. At this point, the Belgians began climbing a hill. Across the valley, hundreds of Cossack Cavalry began urging their horses down the opposite hill and into the rear and flanks of the Belgians. Three tanks charged down the hill in front of the Belgians. At first, the Belgians thought the tanks were German, until they lowered their guns and fired into the Belgian ranks. Degrelle ordered his men to follow him and fell fifteen meters into the meter and a half of snow at the bottom of the slope and buried himself in it. The rest of the Walloons joined him in the gully and waited for some miracle. The miracle came in the form of two Germans, each carrying a panzerfaust. Two Belgians grabbed the weapons and each destroyed an enemy tank. The Belgians charged across the open plain towards the last of the three tanks. The tank charged through the Belgians and began destroying the carts containing the wounded men. The Belgians escaped into the woods at the end of the plain and left the tanks and the Cossacks behind them. The Russian tanks and cavalry could not follow the Belgians through the dense
thickets of the woods. At 01:00, the rear guard of Group Stemmermann began disengaging platoon by platoon and leaving their positions in Novo-Buda. At 05:00, the last platoon left their final position in Novo-Buda and moved along the route that the rest of Group Stemmermann had already passed. These men had no problems following the trail, they moved from burning wreck to burning wreck along the road back to the German lines.

The command group of Army Group South sat in their command train at Uman awaiting news from Group Stemmermann. At 01:25 hours on the morning of February 17, von Manstein received news that first contact had been made between the forces of Group Stemmermann and Third Panzer Corps.

Lieb by-passed the Russian troop concentration around Dzhurzhentsy and mounted an attack against the ridgeline southeast of Hill 239.

Between 07:00 and 10:00 the 72nd Division made several attempts to mount a coordinated attack toward the southwest. It did not succeed. The few guns and most of the tanks that were still firing were soon destroyed by the enemy. Armored cars and motor vehicles suffered the same fate. Except for a few tanks that had managed to keep up, there were now only soldiers on foot and on horseback, and here and there a few horse-drawn vehicles, mostly carrying wounded.

The first attempt at the ridgeline failed, but Lieb
mounted others at different points along the ridgeline looking for a weak point in the Russian lines.

In the protection of a ravine I was able to collect a small force of about battalion size, mainly stragglers from Task Force B and the Wiking Division. With them I moved on toward the line Hill 239-Pochapintsy, which was visible from time to time despite the heavy snowfall, and from where the enemy was firing with great intensity. Russian ground support planes appeared, opened fire, and disappeared again. They were ineffective, and did not repeat their attack, probably because of the difficult weather conditions.

There was no longer any effective control; there were no regiments, no battalions. Now and then small units appeared alongside us. I learned that the commanding general of the 72nd Division was among the missing. My corps staff still kept up with me, but the aides who had been sent on various missions did not find their way back.43

Lieb witnessed first hand the break down of order in the vanguard of Group Stemmermann. His group still contained fighting power, but he was struggling to assemble the needed forces for the final attack.44

Lieb finally assembled enough men for a concentrated attack against the ridgeline southeast of Hill 239. He led the assault, that finally broke through the Russian lines.

During a lull in the firing I readied my battalion for the attack across the line Hill 239-Pochapintsy which unfortunately could not be bypassed. My staff and I were still on horseback. After leaving the draw that sheltered us against the enemy, we galloped ahead of the infantry and through the gaps between our few remaining tanks. The enemy tank commanders,
observing from their turrets, quickly recognized our intention, turned their weapons in our direction, and opened fire. About one-half of our small mounted group was able to get through. From the eastern edge of the forest south of Hill 239 came intensive enemy fire. I led my battalion in an attack in that direction and threw the Russians back into the woods. Rather than pursue them into the depth of the forest, we continued advancing southwest, still harassed by fire from the Russian tanks.

Lieb had finally broken through the last Russian line standing between Group Stemmermann and the Gniloy Tikich. Between 13:00 and 15:00 large groups of troops from the three divisions in the vanguard {Wiking, 72nd Infantry Division and Corps Detachment B} reached the bank of the stream. Only a handful of medium tanks reached the stream, no heavy tanks or other heavy equipment managed to make it that far.

Lieb’s group reached the stream at a point below Lissyanka, where the stream was thirty to fifty feet wide, had a rapid current and reached a depth of ten feet in most places. Heavy fire from the Russian tanks located southeast of Pochapintsy forced the Germans into the stream. Several of the officers tried to create an emergency crossing using the carts which had made it to the stream, but the current proved too powerful for the few carts that had made it that far and they were swept downstream.
Crossing the Gniloy Tikich

By 16:00, the firing against the Germans on the stream bank had ceased. Lieb crossed the stream swimming next to his horse and made his way to Lissyanka. In Lissyanka, he found the commander of the First Panzer Division and learned that there were now no more than one company of armored infantry and three companies of tanks of the First Panzer Division at Lissyanka. One armored infantry battalion consisting of two weak companies had moved out of Lissyanka and established themselves at Oktyabr.

General Gille and the Wiking Division reached the stream next. He reached the Gniloy Tikich just south of where Lieb had crossed earlier. Gille had managed to preserve the strength of his division to this point and wanted to cross the stream with as many men as possible. Gille ordered the artillery tractor to move into the stream, to serve as a breakwater. At this point, the stream measured fifty meters across and had a very stiff current. Gille's hopes to cross the Gniloy Tikich downstream of the artillery tractor were dashed by the stream, as the heavy current swept the tractor away.

The panje wagons carrying the wounded were then shoved into the stream in masse, in hopes of building a temporary bridge, but the wagons suffered the same fate
as the artillery tractor. Gille then singled out the non-swimmers in the division. He then began forming a human chain across the river, alternating the swimmers and non-swimmers. Half-way across the stream, the third man in the chain let go. Most of the non-swimmers in the chain were swept downstream, but the swimmers in the chain managed to make the opposite shore. Some of the swimmers in the chain even managed to save the non-swimming man next to them.52

Lieutenant Colonel Dorr arrived with the rearguard of the division, dragging the wounded he found along the way on poles and boards. He also led a group of foot soldiers of the 108th Panzer Grenadier Regiment of the Fourteenth Panzer Division, which had helped to protect the wounded men who travelled with his group.53 The men of the Wiking Division used the poles and boards brought by Dorr to move the wounded across the stream. Gille then sent his men across the stream in groups, with the swimmers helping the non-swimmers across the stream.54

Final Preparations for the Belgians

Degrelle assembled his men in a forest three kilometers to the southwest of Lissyanka. The forest provided his Belgians and the few thousand Germans traveling with him protection from the Russian tanks and
cavalry which had harassed his group since it left the pocket. Several hundred men lay in the snow outside of the forest pinned down by heavy machine gun fire. 55

Degrelle found a French speaking soldier among the Germans and asked for volunteers among all the men with him to attempt to rescue the soldiers pinned down in the snow. Degrelle organized the volunteers into ten men combat teams, with a Walloon in each to act as an interpreter and messenger. He used the combat teams to form a square around the forest until nightfall when he would attempt to rescue the men pinned down, and make the last break for freedom toward Lissyanka. 56

From the woods, Degrelle studied the valley beyond. A column of Russian tanks sat on a hill three-hundred meters away facing the woods in which the Belgians sought refuge. The hill provided the Russian tanks with a commanding view of the valley the Belgians needed to traverse to reach Lissyanka. Degrelle observed that one group of Russian tanks was firing on another of the escape groups in the next valley. 57

Degrelle moved from position to position ordering his men to stay within the tree line and not to move from their positions until the tanks moved on. Degrelle managed to control his Belgians, but some of the Germans with him charged into the valley under the guns of the
tanks. Not one of the Germans managed to cross the valley under the withering fire from the Russian tanks and infantry which appeared among the tanks just after the Germans left the woods. The Russian infantry then charged into the mass of dead and dying men cutting off their fingers to take the rings off the German soldiers. The Belgians took no action against the Russian infantry, Degrelle had ordered them not to fire, because their fire would have only given away their positions, it could not have helped the wounded men.⁵⁸

From the woods, Degrelle witnessed the Russian tanks bringing their guns to bear on another group of German soldiers charging through the next valley. An even larger group of soldiers began crossing the plain to the southeast of the forest trying to reach Lissyanka. Degrelle decided to follow the group moving to the southeast toward Lissyanka, but decided to wait for nightfall to give his men the best chance possible of reaching the town. He wished to spare his troops a trip across the Gniloy Tikich Stream, in the fifteen to twenty degree below zero weather.⁵⁹

While waiting for total darkness, the noncommissioned officers among the Belgians began rounding up the men in the forest to make the final break to cross the stream. The Belgians also rounded up the thirty Russian
prisoners they brought with them out of the pocket. The Russian prisoners had just run along with the Belgians fearing death at the hands of the Cossack Cavalry and Russian tanks more than the Belgians who had captured them. The Belgians also sheltered many Ukrainian civilians in the woods with them. Among them, many blond haired blue eyed women who did not wish to fall under Russian control again for fear of the abuse at the hands of the average soldiers and Asian Russians. The Belgians had also managed to save a number of their walking wounded and even some of the men who were confined to the carts, who were now shivering with cold and fever. Degrelle wished to take all the soldiers and other groups in his charge out of the forest, and across the stream to freedom.60

The Belgians moved from the woods under cover of darkness and moved toward the marshes to the southeast. They moved along a path their scouts had marked earlier in the night with white stakes. Degrelle then formed his men to cross the stream, utilizing a wide beam they had brought with them out of the forest.61 Four of the best swimmers in the Wallonien Brigade swam across the stream, supporting the makeshift stretcher carrying the body of their slain commander, Lieutenant Colonel Lucien Lippert.62 Just after crossing the stream, the Belgians came
Lissyanka

The rear guard moved according to plan and crossed the lines of Third Panzer Corps, as planned, even before many of the groups which had left the pocket ahead of them. They made use of the bridge which First Panzer and the Leibstandarte held and suffered none of the losses the other groups suffered while crossing the Gniloy Tikich Stream. The rear guard rejoined the rest of Group Stemmermann after passing through Lissyanka.

While in Lissyanka, Lieb received word that a reinforced regiment of Corps Detachment B had driven into the town from the north. The commander of this group reported that the commander of Corps Detachment B had been killed in action. He received more distressing news from the Chief of Staff of Eleventh Corps: "Eleventh Corps had lost contact with Colonel General Stemmermann during the morning, while marching on foot to Dzhurzhentsy". Lieb also received the report that the rear guard had crossed the Gniloy Tikich, and would soon join him in Lissyanka.

Lieb assumed command of Group Stemmermann after receiving word of Stemmermann's disappearance. He recorded his situation in his diary:
The 72nd and Wiking Divisions were completely intermingled. No longer did they have any tanks, artillery, vehicles, or rations. Many soldiers were entirely without weapons, quite a few even without footgear. Neither division could be considered in any way able to fight. One regiment of Task Force B was intact and still had some artillery support. However, this regiment also had no vehicles and no rations left. All wounded, estimated at about 2,000 were being gradually sheltered in the houses of Lissyanka, and later were evacuated by air.\textsuperscript{66}

Out of three divisions, one regiment remained battle worthy. Lieb had other men who retained the ability to fight, but for the most part, his corps was no longer fit for battle, but he had reached the lines of the relief effort and now the only thing left to accomplish was the withdrawal to the main German lines on the Bug River.\textsuperscript{67}

Colonel General Brieth appraised Lieb of the situation his corps faced and that he lacked gasoline for his vehicles and extra weapons or supplies for Group Stemmermann. His front line troops had enough food to get by, but absolutely no extra rations. Brieth had been forced to assume a defensive posture around Lissyanka, in order to fend off the Russian attacks which were increasing in potency as well as frequency. Lieb immediately requested supply by air and evacuation of his wounded. He also requested that vehicles and weapons be brought up from the rear areas to the main rescue area, just west of Lissyanka, for his men.\textsuperscript{68}
During his stay in Lissyanka, Degrelle heard of the Russian news releases that announced the complete and total destruction of Group Stemmermann. According to the men of Third Panzer Corps, the Russians began transmitting the news of the destruction of Group Stemmermann just after the fall of Korsun. The Russian commanders decided that they would destroy Group Stemmermann before it could reach the lines of Army Groups South and bring some truth to their communiques. 69

The March Back to the German Lines

Since Third Panzer Corps had no extra vehicles for the transportation of his men, Lieb once again issued orders for the men of Group Stemmermann to march westward. Group Stemmermann reached the main rescue area in the afternoon on February 18. Renewed Russian attacks against the flanks and rear of Third Panzer Corps forced the Germans to withdraw further the following day. 70

During the time the combined forces of Group Stemmermann and the Third Panzer Corps returned to the main lines of Army Group South, the German air force delivered supplies to them at airfields set up along the route. On the return trips from supplying the men of the relief forces, the transport planes picked up 2,000 wounded men from the pocket and relief forces. The Germans had
reconnoitered two landing strips along the retreat route. The wounded were taken to the hospitals around the airport at Uman. Men who were too tired to march, were taken to the airstrips to await transport to Uman.\textsuperscript{71}

The Russians attacked the Sixteenth Panzer Division in regimental strength, hoping to take the airfield the division held. The Russians attacked in the midst of a blizzard and managed to get closer to the German lines than would have been possible on a clear day. The Germans fought off the Russian attack and managed to hold the field until the wounded men of Group Stemmermann could be flown out.\textsuperscript{72}

The men of Group Stemmermann and Third Panzer Corps set off towards the German lines of Army Group South. The Russians continuously shelled the column on the way back to the German lines. With Tiger and Panther tanks to protect them, the men of Group Stemmermann moved with much less difficulty. The tanks would charge towards the haystacks along the route and flush out the Russian infantry hiding behind them. The tanks would then herd them along with the column.\textsuperscript{73}

The men of Group Stemmermann marched many miles before they came upon the first of the supply depots. The Germans had brought up extra field kitchens to help feed the men along the route. According to Lieutenant De-
grelle, forty thousand men of Group Stemmermann had come this far and they were all hungry and thirsty. One or two thousand men would "besiege" one of the field kitchens and fight for the front of the line and food. The unlucky cooks at the field kitchens risked being tumbled back into their fire and pots by the hungry men.

During the advance toward the German lines, the men of Group Stemmermann could see the cost of the advance of Third Panzer Corps. Degrelle counted some 800 Russian and 300 German tanks destroyed along the route. He also observed some of the rocket launchers the Germans referred to as "Stalin's Organs" abandoned in the snow, some still brandishing their double rows of rockets.

The thaw which had hindered movement within the pocket had also hindered the movement of the relief forces. During the time of the breakout though, winter had returned to the Ukraine bringing snow and gale force winds, freezing the mud around the treads of the tanks. The men of Group Stemmermann and Third Panzer Corps needed to keep the tanks going to help insure the success of returning to the lines of Army Group South. First, the tankers needed to light small fires under the gas tanks and engines of their tanks, to bring the gasoline and engines up to operating temperatures. The tankers then cut the snow around their treads with axes and poured
gasoline under the treads. The men of Group Stemmermann lit fires around the tanks to help thaw the mud enough to allow the tanks to move.\textsuperscript{76}

Early in the day on February 20, the storm broke and the men of Group Stemmermann moved along unhindered by the weather. The artillery which had plagued them since leaving the pocket ceased, as the corridor through which they were travelling grew wider. The Germans now began to sort out the men, which had arrived all mixed together. The Germans from the rear areas of Third Panzer Corps held placards in the air with the names and numbers of each division of Group Stemmermann. The Germans even demanded order within the divisions and separated the men of Group Stemmermann down to their companies and even to platoons.\textsuperscript{77}

On February 20, Lieb felt that he had dealt with all the major problems facing Group Stemmermann. The supply situation had been dealt with and his men were now receiving much needed transportation and weapons. Lieb received instructions from O.K.H. to proceed to headquarters in East Prussia. A Fieseler Storch arrived, taking Colonel General Lieb, General Gille and Lieutenant Degrelle, first to East Prussia and later to Berlin to meet with Hitler.\textsuperscript{78}

The Russians began assaults against the German po-
sitions around Frankovka. The men of the Pioneer Battalion of the Sixteenth Panzer Division fought off the assaults all through the day and into the night. In the mist of the early morning of February 22, the Russians launched a massive attack and managed to take the town. The Seventeenth Panzer Division assaulted the town and managed to retake it from the Russians after heavy attacks. The Germans also managed to take Hill 239. Although the hill was now to their rear, the Germans wished to hold it, because from the hill the Russians could fire on the Germans still in the section of Lissyanka on the east bank of the Gniloy Tikich Stream. With no more obstacles in their way, the men of the Third Panzer Corps, and Group Stemmermann fought their way back to the German lines on the Bug River. 79

Conclusions

Von Manstein received word later that between 30,000 and 32,000 men escaped from the encirclement. Von Manstein regretted only that most of the wounded had to be left in the pocket. 80 Many of the groups brought out wounded men, but many of the trucks the wounded needed for transportation stuck fast in the mud. 81 Only the shock units, such as the SS Wiking Division and the Wal- lonien Assault Brigade of Group Stemmermann suffered
heavy losses. Between the six divisions and the attached
brigade, Group Stemmermann suffered some 8,000 casualties
during the breakout. 82

The mud also caused the loss of most of the heavy
equipment in the pocket. Only 1,000 of the 15,000 vehic-
les in the pocket made the trek through the mud. The men of Group Stemmermann destroyed all the vehicles left to
them on the night of the breakout that could not travel
through the mud. The men of Group Stemmermann managed to
extricate the vehicles they managed to bring with them
out of the pocket only through "superhuman" effort. 83

According to one Russian source, the First and Se-
cond Ukrainian Fronts encircled and destroyed nine infan-
try, one panzer division, a motorized brigade, engineer
units and a sizable force of artillery. This encircle-
ment ended the German presence on the Dnieper River and
forced the Germans to retreat as far as the Bug River, in
some cases. 84

Russian claims for the German losses in the Cher-
kassy-Korsun Pocket exceed the number of men the Germans
claim were there. The Russians claim 55,000 dead and
18,000 prisoners. For equipment losses, the Russians
claim 500 tanks, 300 planes and most of the German artil-
ler y, including all the heavy artillery pieces. 85 The
Russians do concede the fact that the Germans managed to
extricate 3,000 men from the pocket by air. The Russians claim that only the officers and the lead elements of the SS managed to escape. They believed that only 3,000 men, due to the blizzard like conditions on the night of the breakout, managed to escape. The Russians state that Colonel General Lieb, General Gille and Lieutenant Degrelle boarded a plane during the breakout and escaped from the encirclement by leaving their men to their fate. According to the Russians, the Germans inflated the number of escapees to lessen the demoralizing impact on their men. The Russians go on to claim that the loss at Cherkassy Korsun had a very demoralizing effect on all the other units of the German army in the Ukraine.

By examining the number of survivors from each group, the German claim comes closer to the truth. The 105th regiment of the 72nd Infantry Division came out of the pocket with three officers and 216 men, out of 1062 encircled. General Gille of the Wiking Division lead 4,500 men of his division out of the pocket, seventy percent of his divisional strength when the Russians formed the pocket. General von Trowitz led his Bavarian 57th Infantry Division and the remains of the 389th Infantry Division to freedom, bringing 3,000 men of the rear guard out of the pocket. Trowitz also brought 250 wounded men out of the pocket with him, men Stemmermann had reluc-
tantly ordered left in the pocket. Lieutenant Leon Degrelle, the leader of the Wallonien Brigade brought 632 of his Belgians out of the pocket, along with 3,000 other men.⁸⁷ The Russians claim that only one percent of the men escaped.⁸⁸ Von Manstein ordered that the men of Group Stemmermann go into the reserve areas in Poland. Before Group Stemmermann moved to the rear, von Manstein personally visited the men who escaped from the pocket. Army Group South had to hold their front, now minus the six and a half divisions the Russians almost destroyed in the Cherkassy-Korsun Pocket. He managed to save the men, but had to give them a chance to rest and refit before putting them back into the line.⁸⁹
CHAPTER VI

IN RETROSPECT

German and Russian Conclusions

On the Airlift

After the return of Third Panzer Corps and Group Stemmermann to the lines of Army Group South, both sides drew their conclusions on the successes and failures during the Cherkassy-Korsun encirclement. The Germans managed to save most of their men, but saw valuable lessons about holding territory that had no military value, against very superior forces. But, the Germans failed to act on most of their lessons and continued to follow Hitler as a military leader. The Russians drew many different lessons from the encirclement, but many of their conclusions could not be put to use, because they failed to accept the truth about what the Germans actually managed to accomplish in their attempt to free their trapped comrades. Both sides should have drawn lessons relating to operations with encircled forces and about airlifts to troops on isolated battlefields.

From January 31, to February 18, 1944, Soviet Air
Force sources claim that 210 sorties were flown against the German airfields used to supply the Cherkassy-Korsun Pocket. Further, they claim that they fought seventy-five air battles over the airfields, Korsun within the pocket and the three airfields the Germans flew from to supply the pocket. The Soviets claim that German losses during the attacks on airfields for this period amounted to 200 planes, of which 125 were destroyed on the ground, they also claim to have damaged a significant number of planes on the ground, and in the air.¹

According to the reports from the commanders of the German air transport wings, thirty-two Junker Ju-52 transport planes were lost due to enemy action, technical failures and weather conditions, a significantly smaller number than claimed by the Russian sources. Russian anti-aircraft fire and fighters damaged one-hundred-thirteen more Junker Ju-52 transports, but the Germans claim to have flown these later during the operation, after the ground crews repaired them. The Germans provide no numbers for aircraft lost on the ground when their airfields came under attack and do not even mention attacks against airfields outside the pocket. They do concede losses on the ground at Korsun, but count these losses in the number of planes lost to enemy action, and damaged during the fighting.²
The men in the pocket complained several times that they lacked sufficient supplies to carry out their daily operations. Although at times the men ran out of food and the supply of ammunition became critically low, the airlift managed to keep the men in the pocket supplied with enough ammunition and food to successfully break out of the pocket. The men in the pocket were able to alleviate the food problem by trading certain items with the Russian peasants for their livestock. The German officers talk of the trades, but maintain that the German troops gave the Russians peasants something of value in exchange for the livestock they received from them.

The Germans can count the airlift to Cherkassy-Korsun as one of the few successful airlifts to encircled forces during World War II. The planes managed to deliver 2,026 tons of supplies to the troops in the pocket during the twenty days they flew missions into the pocket. The transports also managed to extract 2,825 wounded men during the first week of the pocket. When added to the 2,000 men the transports picked up along the lines of the retreat, the Luftwaffe managed to save 4,825 of the encircled men from death at the hands of the Russians or life in Russian captivity. The fact that so many men were saved by the Luftwaffe would tend to cast doubt on the Russian claim that the German officers ordered the
men of the SS to slaughter and then burn the wounded men that could not march along with the column, instead of surrendering them into the "care" of the Russian troops.4

The Russian airlift during the Cherkassy-Korsun Pocket was successful as well. The Russians were able to supply their two tank armies, which ran out of supplies during the encirclement operation and keep them on the move and fighting. The loss of the two tank armies could have compromised the hold the Russians had on the pocket and would have seriously hampered the operations against Third Panzer Corps. The airlift supplied the tank armies with 114 tons of supplies and 525 rockets. The airlift negated the need for the Russians to move their supplies by rail, or across mud choked roads which hindered the movement of trucks and moved the supplies faster than would have been possible by using any other means of supply available to them.5

The German airlift succeeded in keeping the men of Group Stemmermann supplied during the time the Russians held them in the pocket and on their trip back to the main lines of Army Group South. Although the men in the pocket complained several times that they never received enough supplies, the German air force delivered enough supplies to keep them alive and to allow them to fight off the Russians. The air force met or exceeded the
goals which the German High Command set. These goals were for the average expenditures of ammunition and food of a group the size of Group Stemmermann in the field for a day and were established based on the strength of Group Stemmermann at the beginning of the encirclement.

Group Stemmermann wanted a higher tonnage of supplies delivered daily. The group would naturally wish to have more than the average expenditure of supplies delivered for a day's worth of fighting, in case they had a harder than average day in the field. But in evaluating the airlift, one must ask what makes a successful airlift: delivering enough supplies to kill every one of your enemies facing you, or delivering enough supplies to guarantee the survival of the group you are supplying?

German Conclusions

The Germans drew many lessons from the encirclement near Cherkassy-Korsun. Although the German Army came to many conclusions concerning the encirclement, the Russians and later the Americans managed to encircle large portions of the German Army. The later encirclements all came about for the same reasons the Germans were trapped at Cherkassy, because Hitler issued orders to save the land he had captured and not to guarantee the existence of his armies.\(^6\)
The first lesson came from the realization that the circumstances leading to the pocket only came about because the High Command (Hitler) insisted that von Manstein hold Cherkassy. Even after the High Command realized the full extent of the danger the two corps faced, they waited to give the breakout order until the Russians held strong positions around the entire pocket. Each day the breakout was delayed, the Russian forces encircling the pocket grew stronger while the German forces within the pocket grew weaker. The Germans lost all their heavy equipment within the pocket because they were forced to stay in their positions on the Dnieper River instead of being able to withdraw when their commanders thought it necessary.  

Although the two corps within the pocket belonged to different armies, Hitler placed the entire command and control of the forces within the pocket under one man, Colonel General Stemmermann. However, Hitler insisted that two separate corps from two different armies carry out the relief attempt. The absence of unity of command also made itself felt at the army level because the pocket force came under the command of Eighth Army, while the third Panzer Corps belonged to First Panzer Army. The two army commanders needed to stay in constant communication to find out what each force was doing and the
progress each relief attempt was making. A unified command, over both the forces of the pocket and the relief forces, would have greatly reduced the problems the breakout force faced. A commander over a unified force would have known of the deviation in course Colonel General Lieb made around Dzhurzhentsy. He could then have notified Third Panzer Corps of the need to meet them in another place and thus avoided the fiasco of the Gniloy Tikich Stream crossing.8

The plan for the breakout also failed to allow enough freedom of action at the time the two corps were to meet. Hitler ordered Third Panzer Corps to occupy the high ground around Hill 239 on February 17 and tie down the strong Russian forces standing between Group Stemmermann and freedom. The failure of Third Panzer Corps to take Hill 239 allowed the Russians to concentrate their full weight against the forces of Group Stemmermann emerging from the pocket. A commander with full freedom of action could have issued order to guarantee the meeting point of the two groups at a place where the Russians did not have a large enough concentration of troops to beat off any attacks mounted against them. Brieth could have changed the direction of his attack and met Lieb as he led his men around the Russian concentrations on the high ground near Hill 239. Brieth would also have been
able to move his forces to the Gniloy Tikich Stream at the point Lieb decided to force a crossing. A meeting of the forces would have meant that the men lost in crossing the Gniloy Tikich might have had a chance to make it across the stream.⁹

The High Command also failed to guarantee sufficient support for the breakout. Hitler ordered the Luftwaffe to stand ready to support the breakout effort at dawn on the February 17, if Lieb contacted them. The Luftwaffe had been given no instructions to act on their own, or what to do if Lieb could not contact them. Lieb faced enough problems during the breakout, just trying to keep control of his own men and preserve the fighting strength of his group. He could not worry about directing air support against every concentration of Russian troops that his men ran across. The High Command never made provisions to allow the Luftwaffe to support the breakout, by attacking the Russian concentrations around the pocket. No provisions were made for the Luftwaffe to support the attack of Third Panzer Corps against Hill 239. Hitler also failed to use the Luftwaffe in a reconnaissance role, which could have alerted Third Panzer Corps as to the location of Group Stemmermann and could have helped in insuring that the two groups meet in a place of safety and not near the concentrated group of
Russians around Hill 239.10

The situation with Eleventh Panzer Division presents quite a puzzle. Hitler held the division up, until too late to help Forty-Seventh Panzer Corps make good early progress. Then when Hitler did release the division, he still sent it to the stalled Forty-Seventh Panzer Corps. Von Vormann had already reported that he was down to only twenty-seven functioning tanks and thirty assault guns and that all he could do now was hold the Russian Front attacking him. Instead of sending a fresh panzer division to support a failed attack, Hitler might have ordered Eleventh Panzer to join in the attack of Third Panzer Corps which was still making some headway towards the men of Group Stemmermann and which had come to a point closer to the pocket than the Forty-Seventh Panzer Corps had reached when Eleventh Panzer joined in the relief attempt.

Hitler violated "mass", the first law of military operations, which calls for assembling enough troops at the crucial spot, in order to reach their goal. Hitler divided his relief force into two groups, even though his generals protested the division. His generals believed that as one force the relief attempt had a chance, but in two groups, they could not reach the troops within the pocket. History proved his generals right, the two
groups did not succeed in reaching the pocket and this failure forced the men of Group Stemmermann to fight their way out of the pocket themselves.

Hitler wanted two groups, so that he could trap the Russians in an encirclement of his own. By trying to trap the Russians, Hitler violated "objective", the second law of military operations. Hitler should have sought to achieve only the relief of the troops within the pocket, the original objective of the relief attempt. He changed the objective of the relief force, to trying to encircle the Russians between Army Group South and Group Stemmermann. The few forces available to the relief attempt could not achieve both of the objectives Hitler set for them and ultimately failed in both objectives.

Hitler forced the German soldiers of Army Group South to endure the encirclement at Cherkassy-Korsun. Hitler refused to listen to the advice of his generals and withdraw from the area. The generals knew that Army Group South could no longer carry out offensive operations, but Hitler refused to listen. He chose not to heed the advice of men with many years of military experience behind them and chose to make the disastrous decision for himself. This decision which cost Army Group South the use of the two corps within the pocket and the
use of the two corps employed in the relief attempt. The Germans had to send these units into the rear areas for a rest and refit.
CHAPTER VII

PROMISES, THREATS, CANDY AND CIGARETTES

Russian Propaganda at Cherkassy-Korsun

The Free Germany Committee

During their attempt to liquidate the Cherkassy-Korsun Pocket, the Russians began three propaganda campaigns. One addressed all the soldiers in the pocket, the second dealt solely with the Freewilling Volunteers of the SS and the third dealt with the German troops in the front lines in Russia. The Russians wished to make the Freewilling volunteers rethink their reasons for joining the German armies and hopefully get them to stop fighting and go home. The Russians also tried to get the non-Germans of the SS to join the allied cause and fight on the side of the French troops in the Anglo-American armies. The Russian commanders sought to use their victory at Cherkassy-Korsun to demoralize the men in the German front lines in the East. The Russian propaganda campaign proved inept against the Germans in Army Group South, mainly because the Russians used lies to try to get the German troops to desert. The Russian commanders
and the men of the National Committee for a Free Germany and League of German Officers in Captivity tried many means to elicit the surrender of the men within the pocket and to make the volunteer SS divisions desert their German allies and later tried to use their victory to demoralize the whole German Army, but all their attempts ended in failure.

The inception of the Free Germany Committee and the League of German Officers came at a dark moment for the German Army. The two groups came into existence when Sixth Army was going through it's death throes at Stalingrad.¹

Sixth Army had been in the front lines since the beginning of the war. It had fought with distinction in Poland, France and during the first two years of the campaign against Russia.² The final deployment of Sixth Army came at Stalingrad. Hitler employed Sixth Army to protect the flanks of Fourth Army in their drive to the Caucasus. The Russians encircled Sixth Army at Stalingrad and sought to eliminate the Germans in the town. Hitler ordered the five corps staff and twenty two combat divisions of Sixth Army to hold Stalingrad at all cost and to wait for a relief effort to break through to them.³ The relief attempt to free Sixth Army at Stalingrad ultimately failed and the Russians destroyed the army. Field
Marshal von Paulus, the commander of Sixth Army surrendered to the Russians, he became the first German Field Marshal to surrender his command. The losses for Sixth Army at Stalingrad included 150,000 dead or missing and 90,000 prisoners.4

The Soviets realized that the men of Sixth Army offered new possibilities for their propaganda campaign against Germany. These men could attest to the fact that Hitler would allow the soldiers of Germany and her allies to die for land. The Russians needed the men of Sixth Army, because all prior attempts aimed at undermining the fighting power of the Wehrmacht in the east had failed.5 The Free Germany Committee and League of German Officers were formed of the men captured at Stalingrad and also contained many of the men who had sought political asylum in Russia. The two groups merged and worked together to strengthen their movements and gain respect among their new Russian comrades.6

The League of German Officers in Captivity first sought new recruits in the prisoner of war camps designated for officers. Their recruitment was limited to the camps at Yelabuga, Oranky, Susdal and Camp 150.7 The League of German Officers consisted of nineteen men after their recruitment campaign.8

Members of the National Committee for a Free Germany
went into the camps of the enlisted men. The men of the League of German Officers directed the work of the Free Germany Committee, but stayed out of the recruitment process.9 Twenty five men in all joined the National Committee and both groups worked on turning the rest of the German prisoners against Nazi Germany, hoping to make them pro-Communist.10

The men of the Free Germany Committee and the League of German Officers then began to take their message to the troops in the German front lines. Their slogan of the day read: "Orderly withdrawal to the frontiers of the Reich."11

The Tehran Conference seemed to mean the end of the Free Germany Committee and the League of German Officers. At Tehran, the Allies agreed that the only peace with Germany would be an unconditional peace. The Allies also used this conference to determine the spheres of influence they would have in Germany. At Tehran, they carved Germany into the zones that they controlled after the war. The conference meant that the Free Germany Committee and the League of German Officers could no longer fight for the return of German troops to the borders of Germany. The Russians still believed they could use the German prisoners of war though. The Russians believed that the Free Germany Committee and the League of German
Officers could still reinforce their propaganda. They also believed that if the Wehrmacht revolted against Hitler, that their officers might pave the way for an understanding with the revolting officers of the Wehrmacht.12

The Committee at Cherkassy-Korsun

The first real test of the propaganda value of the Free Germany Committee and the League of German Officers occurred at Cherkassy-Korsun. The men in the Cherkassy-Korsun Pocket faced the same situation that the founders of the Committee and League faced at Stalingrad, but here the propaganda met with utter failure.13

On January 31, 1944, Colonel General Alexander Shcherbakov arrived at the dacha the Russians had provided for Colonel General von Seydlitz, the leader of the League of German Officers in Captivity. Scherbakov headed the Political Administration of the Red Army as a member of the Soviet War Cabinet, also known as the Council of Five. The Fact that Scherbakov went to the meeting with von Seydlitz shows the importance of the meeting.14

Shcherbakov informed von Seydlitz of the German situation at Cherkassy and asked whether or not Hitler would order the defense of the pocket as in the case of Stalingrad. Von Seydlitz answered in the affirmative, relying
on Hitler's past decisions about holding land. Shcherbakov then asked Seydlitz if he would help convince the German troops within the Cherkassy-Korsun Pocket to cease fighting and save them the fate which befell Sixth Army on the banks of the Volga. Von Seydlitz agreed immediately and began to gather his assets behind the Russian lines on the Dnieper River.¹⁵

**Propaganda Against the Pocket**

Von Seydlitz immediately contacted Colonel Steidle and Major Buchler, who served as the representatives of the League of German Officers with the Second Ukrainian Front, telling them to act in his behalf.¹⁶ Von Seydlitz did his part in the propaganda campaign by addressing the German soldiers over radio "Free Germany."¹⁷

Von Seydlitz broadcast the message that if the German soldiers surrendered that they would be treated well. He promised that they would receive "the best treatment possible" while in captivity. The troops also received the promise that the Russians would do anything humanly possible to ease the lives of the troops during their captivity and that they would be returned home after the war. The Russians demanded one condition, that the troops surrender as whole units with their officers.¹⁸
Addressing the SS

The Cherkassy-Korsun Pocket contained not only German troops, but troops from countries Germany conquered earlier in the war. Two of the SS formations in the pocket were made up of men from conquered countries. The Wiking Division contained men from Norway, Denmark, Finland, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. The second SS formation, the Wallonien Brigade, came solely from Belgium.

Leon Degrelle, of the Wallonien Brigade, described the reasons many of the Freewilling Volunteers from Belgium, joined the SS:

We had left for the anti-Bolshevik crusade so that the name of our mother country, besmirched in May, 1940, would resound, glorious and honored, once more. Soldiers of Europe, we wanted our ancient country to rise again as brilliant as before in the new Europe which was being so painfully born. We were the men of the country of Charlemagne, of the dukes of Burgundy, and of Charles the Fifth. After twenty centuries of soul-stirring radiance this country could not be allowed to sink into mediocrity or oblivion.  

Degrelle and his men hated the Russians and all they stood for. He saw Hitler, as the new hope for Europe against the Russians and Bolshevism and still believed that he could guarantee the safety of Europe, even as late as 1944. His men were in high spirits as the Russians closed the Cherkassy-Korsun Pocket. But the Russians tried to break them of their hatred of Bolshevism
and their love for Hitler.

The Russians directed a radio campaign solely against the Belgian volunteers of the Wallonien Brigade. A powerful transmitter broadcast messages in "honeyed French" describing the marvels of Stalin's regime. The speaker would then "charitably" inform the Belgians of their situation telling them they had no hope. The voice would then invite the Belgians to join General DeGaulle, the true hero of Europe, if they would approach the Russian lines carrying a white flag. None of the Belgians took the Russians up on this offer. 21

When the radio broadcasts failed, a Russian General decided to take matters into his own hands. He began his own plan designed to strip Germany of her Freewilling SS Volunteers of the Wallonien Brigade from Belgium. He took the two Belgians he had captured earlier in the fighting to close the pocket and "invited them to dine with him." He stuffed his "guests" with all the food he could find, their meal included candied meats, bread, wine, cakes and jellies. He then gave the Belgians candy and cigarettes to take back to their comrades and give them his invitation to join him at his table. 22

The two Belgians were driven back to a point opposite their lines and allowed to cross back into German held territory. The Belgians shared their candy and cig-
arettes with their comrades and laughed with them about the invitation the Russian General made to them. The Belgians loved the candy and cigarettes and dreamed of sitting down to a table that their two freed comrades described. None of the Belgians took the General up on his invitation though, leaving the Russian where they had been before, with no deserters. Degrelle says that the General was very popular with his men (Degrelle's), "but the hook was too visible under the bait for them to fall for the invitation." 23

The Leaflets Arrive

The Russians decided that their propaganda was reaching too few men, so they printed up leaflets and dropped them into the pocket. The leaflets began dropping into the pocket as early as February Tenth and continued until the night of the breakout. The leaflets described the desperate situation of the encircled men and suggested that the only way to save themselves was to join the Free Germany Committee. 24

This first leaflet told the purpose of the Free Germany Committee, who made up the committee and how to contact the committee should the troops within the pocket wish to surrender.

There exists in Russia a powerful German freedom movement, which has taken as its task, the
freeing of Germany from the tyranny of Hitler and the opening of peace negotiations. Also marching in this "Free Germany" movement is the League of German Officers in Captivity under the command of Artillery General Walther von Seydlitz. The undersigned (Steidle and Buchler) are empowered as members of the League of German Officers opposite your sector to make contact with you. We have gone through the hell of Stalingrad and therefore know your misery.25

At first, none of the officers within the pocket took the leaflet seriously. They knew that von Seydlitz had been at Stalingrad, but were not aware of his fate. At first they believed the Russians had fabricated the whole organization (Free Germany Committee).26 The leaflets also told the Germans within the pocket how to make contact with the members of the Free Germany Committee, and promised their return after negotiations.

Come to us and take protection under the League of German Officers. Make contact with us. Send emissaries to us to whom we can give exact instructions. Each emissary should make himself recognizable at the front with a white cloth and demand to speak with one of the undersigned officers. We guarantee every emissary an unhindered return to his unit. The Red Army staff have appropriate instructions.27

No sources within the pocket, or even among the authors writing from the Russian point of view, speak of any emissaries sent to the Russians to discuss surrender terms.28 The instructions spoken of in the leaflet, were to escort the emissaries to the members of the League of German Officers, and to return them to their lines when
they wished to go.\textsuperscript{29} The leaflets failed miserably to
provide the Russians with any deserters.\textsuperscript{30} The representa-
tives of the League of German Officers at the front be-
lieved that the leaflets failed because they possessed so
few of them. They complained that their message still
reached too few men of the pocket.\textsuperscript{31}

Along with the leaflets, the Russians began sending
German prisoners into the pocket under flags of truce.
The German prisoners carried letters addressed to the
German officers in the pocket. The hand written letter
from General von Seydlitz proposed that the Germans in
the pocket surrender honorably to the Russians. They
also carried pictures of the men that the Russians had
captured the day before. The pictures showed the cap-
tured men sitting at a table with General von Seydlitz.
The captured men had food and their wounds were cleaned
and dressed.\textsuperscript{32}

The German generals could not deny the authenticity
of the letters, or the fact that they came from General
von Seydlitz. The letters contained too many facts that
only von Seydlitz could know.\textsuperscript{33} The letters also served
to reinforce the Russian and Anglo-American news broad-
casts they heard, telling them of the existence of the
National Committee for a Free Germany and the League of
German Officers in Captivity.\textsuperscript{34} The generals now knew
that the Free Germany Committee and League of German Officers existed, but they did not know whether the promises they made about their captivity was true. None of the German officers in the pocket took von Seydlitz up on his offer to surrender and join the Free Germany Committee.

On January 9, the Russians dispatched a lieutenant colonel to the pocket to carry their demands for the unconditional surrender of the men within the pocket. The Russian officer arrived at the front of Corps Detachment B with his driver and an interpreter. The Germans treated the Russians to champagne and cigarettes, but offered no reply to the demands he gave them.

On February 10, Colonel General Lieb received a letter from General von Seydlitz, that the Russians delivered by aircraft. Lieb had served under von Seydlitz in 1940 and although he respected him he could not understand how von Seydlitz could serve Zhukov. Lieb saw von Seydlitz as serving as sort of a G-2 for Zhukov and although he believed that Stalingrad could have changed him, he could still not understand von Seydlitz’s motives for helping the Russians. Von Seydlitz implored Lieb to act as Yorck acted during the campaign of 1812. Von Seydlitz wanted Lieb to "go over to the Russians with his entire command." Lieb decided not to answer von Sey-
dlitz’s demand, signifying his refusal by his silence. 38

The Russians dropped leaflets into the pocket on a regular basis until February 10. At eleven o’clock in the morning of Friday, February 11, 1944, the Russian commanders delivered a second ultimatum to Colonel General Stemmermann. The Russians demanded that the Germans surrender and promised to treat them as courageous soldiers, or they would unleash an attack at 1300 hours and they would exterminate the Germans. 39

The Russian ultimatum stated that the troops within the pocket had no hopes for rescue. 40 The ultimatum told of the troubles the Germans were having even getting started in their relief attempts and of the ability of the Russians to keep the troops of Group Stemmermann encircled within the pocket:

The units of the Red Army have enclosed this Heeresgruppe in a firm ring. The encircling ring will be drawn ever tighter. All of your hopes of salvation are in vain. The German 3., 11., 16., 17., and 24. Panzerdivisions which were rushing to your aid, were smashed during the attempt and their remnants encircled and wiped out. 41

The Russians had told the truth about their ring around Group Stemmermann. The German troops of the relief effort could go no further and the ring around Group Stemmermann stayed intact. The Russians did not know however that the 24 Panzer Division had been turned over to Army Group A. The Russian message also failed to mention the
First Panzer Division, the First SS Panzer Liebstandarte Adolf Hitler, or Heavy Panzer Regiment Baeke.$^{42}$

Stemmermann instantly and categorically rejected the ultimatum. Colonel General Lieb and General Gille, the two other German Generals present when the Russians delivered the ultimatum, were in total agreement with Colonel General Stemmermann. The Russians reported to their superiors, telling them that the Germans did not even wish to discuss terms of surrender with them.$^{43}$

Fortunately for the German troops in the pocket, the German High Command sent General Stemmermann their own appraisal of the relief effort. General Speidel sent Stemmermann a more encouraging message:

Brieth’s leading elements have reached Lissjanka. Vormann advancing from Jerki bridgehead in direction of Swenigorodka. How is the situation there? All the best for a successful outcome.$^{44}$

Stemmermann could not allow himself to become too hopeful about a relief effort breaking into the pocket though, Four Russian tank armies and an elite cavalry corps stood in the way of the relief attempts.$^{45}$

The League of German Officers implored Stemmermann to accept the Russian ultimatum. The League drafted another letter signed by three junior officers and sent it into the pocket with German prisoners of war. The note reiterated the Russian views of the success of the relief
attempts, and told of the consequences of rejecting the ultimatum:

On behalf of Artillery General Walther von Seydlitz, President of the League of German Officers, we call on you most forcefully to under all circumstances accept the ultimatum of the Red Army and immediately cease all resistance. Time is running out! Your situation is hopeless!

The Red Army's ultimatum is absolutely honourable since any further resistance has nothing to do with soldierly fighting. Or do you wish to throw away your life senselessly for Hitler, who has written you off long ago?

We fighters of Stalingrad know from our own experience what it means to reject a Russian ultimatum. Only as a result of rejecting such an ultimatum, which also followed Hitler's order, an additional 120,000 men died at Stalingrad!46

The letter went on to guarantee that the Russians would treat the surrendering Germans well in captivity. The League promised to meet the surrendering soldiers and officers soon after they were taken prisoner. The League went on to promise that the men would be provided with food and medicine directly after leaving the pocket.47

On February 13, a message arrived at the headquarters of Colonel General Lieb, addressed to the commander of the 198th Division. The letter was attached, as usual, to a red, black and white pennant (the colors of the German flag). The message demanded the surrender of this division, with all the officers present at the time of surrender. Lieb found this message interesting for
the fact that the 198th Division was not even in the pocket. 48

A Note to von Manstein

Since none of their efforts directed at the commanders within the pocket proved fruitful, Colonel General Seydlitz decided to address a letter to Field Marshal von Manstein. He implored von Manstein to allow Generals Lieb and Stemmermann to surrender their troops, calling further resistance futile.

The encirclement and the destruction, at present under way, of ten divisions of your army group one year after the catastrophe of Stalingrad is not only a military defeat, it is also an incomprehensible and irresponsible sacrifice of an irreplaceable part of our people. I know, my dear Field Marshal, that you are not a faithful National Socialist. You are also not one of the so-called "Party Generals." All the service positions you have filled during the war you received on the basis of your military abilities. And that is also the reason why you must surely see the over-all military picture for what it is--Hopeless!

Even before this latest catastrophe you must have known that the arc of the Dnieper front was untenable, jutting out as it does--and you did know it. But nevertheless bowed to Hitler’s orders, the predictable results of which were the senseless slaughter of tens of thousands of German soldiers.

The German people do not ask their military commanders to continue a hopeless fight against their better knowledge simply because an adventurer (Hitler) wants them to. The German people expect and demand that the military commanders and that also includes you, my dear Field Marshal have the courage and determin-
ation to act according to their best knowledge and conviction.\textsuperscript{49}

This attempt to make von Manstein order the surrender of his troops also proved futile. Von Manstein believed that he had assembled a rescue force powerful enough to break through to the lines of Group Stemmermann and wished to give his troops the chance to do so.\textsuperscript{50}

Allaying the Fears of the SS

On February Ninth, a messenger delivered a letter to General Gille, the top ranking SS officer in the pocket and leader of the Wiking SS Division. Major General Korffes of the League of German Officers drafted this letter on behalf of General von Seydlitz, designed to strip the German troops of their SS comrades. With the letter, he hoped to allay the fears of the SS men in the pocket.

Your desperate hope, that a breakout with help from the relief attack by the German forces from the southwest will succeed is delusive. General von Seydlitz gives you the assurance that the National Committee for a Free Germany and the League of German Officers in Captivity are in the position to have all proceedings against you and your troops struck down. Of course this is on the condition that you and your troops voluntarily lay down your weapons and join the National Committee in its fight.

In the interests of protecting the lives of your soldiers, it is your duty to agree to General von Seydlitz' suggestion. I would add that today many officers and soldiers of the Waffen SS are already fighting in our ranks.\textsuperscript{51}

The crimes talked about in the letter come from early in
the war when Hitler issued an order that soldiers would kill all the commissars they overran. The troops of the Waffen SS followed Hitler’s orders, while many regular troops refused to kill the commissars in cold blood.\textsuperscript{52}

The letter went on to talk of other crimes the Russians wished to try members of the SS for:

At Hitler’s orders, German soldiers destroy and ravage Russian cities and villages in the course of evacuating them; the population is being robbed and forcibly abducted to Germany. In all this, units of the SS and Special commandos excel.\textsuperscript{53}

The letter sent to General Gille tried to allay his fears of Russian reprisals against his surrendering troops. Gille refused to surrender because he doubted the power of the League of German Officers to make good their promises to his men. Along with his doubt, Gille refused to surrender, because along with his troops and the other elite units of the Waffen SS, he felt a deep hatred towards the Russians.\textsuperscript{54}

Some German Prisoners

While breaking out of the pocket, many men fell, too exhausted to carry on. These men were taken prisoner, with the wounded. Although the Russians did manage to take 15,000 prisoners, these surrendered because of the hardships of the escape attempt and not because of the
work of the Free Germany Committee and the League of German Officers. Many of these men carried the leaflets from the Free Germany Committee and the passes that the Russians issued guaranteeing them safe passage through their lines. These men were treated no differently than any other German prisoners. This fact caused many of the Germans to believe that the Free Germany Committee and the League of German Officers had been lying to them all along.

The Campaign Against the Men in the Lines

During the breakout a Fieseler Storch came to pick up Colonel General Lieb, General Gille and Lieutenant Degrelle. They flew to East Prussia, where Hitler congratulated them on their breakout and escape from the Russians. During their stay in Prussia, Lieb, Gille and Degrelle were told of a Russian news release detailing the liquidation of the Cherkassy-Korsun Pocket. The release stated that Lieb, Gille and Degrelle had deserted their men and that only 2,000 to 3,000 men of the SS in the spearhead of the breakout attempt had escaped.

After the breakout attempt succeeded, the Russians tried to use their victory at Cherkassy-Korsun, to demoralize the Germans still in the front lines. They twisted the numbers of prisoners taken and of the losses
in men the Germans suffered to try to turn the German
soldiers against their commanders and against Hitler. 59

The Russians claimed a great victory, similar to the
one they achieved at Stalingrad, during their liquidation
of the Cherkassy-Korsun Pocket. The Russian account of
the battle stated that the pocket contained over 88,000
men and that only around 3,000 men, mainly the officers
and lead elements of the SS, escaped during the breakout
attempt. 60

The Russians publicized the fact that Colonel Gen-
eral Lieb, General Gill and Lieutenant Degrelle were res-
cued by plane during the relief attempt. Since the Rus-
sians repudiate the German claims of a breakout, they
claim that the officers were flown out before the men of
Group Stemmermann reached the German lines and that the
officers deserted their men to their fates at the hands
of the Russians. 61

The Russians also made a great deal of the death of
Colonel General Stemmermann. According to the Russian
sources, the Germans denied Stemmermann's death and
claimed that he was with them in Germany. According to
the Russians, the German officers did not want their men
to know of Stemmermann's loss and wished to downplay
their losses in the battle. 62 Von Manstein admits to the
loss of Colonel General Stemmermann during the breakout
attempt. He states that other than the loss of the wounded that this was his only regret. The Russians wished to show that no matter what rank a German held, that Hitler would let him sacrifice his life for him.

Differing Stories

The German accounts claim that the pocket contained between 54,000 to 56,000 men and that between 30,000 and 32,000 escaped. Two factors contributed to the mistake the Russians made in estimating the strength of the pocket. The Russian mistakenly identified the groups within the pocket and the strength of the formations involved.

At first, the Russians believed that they had trapped the entire Eighth Army and the army command element within the pocket. General Koniev, the commander of the Third Russian Front, believed that the pocket contained ten and a half divisions, mainly panzer divisions, with over 100,000 men. The Russians found out the truth, later, that the pocket contained the German Forty-Second and Eleventh Corps, but they claimed that in truth, the pocket still numbered around 88,000. The Russians arrived at this number, because at full strength two corps of eleven formations would number around 88,000 men. But, the German corps within the pocket had been in the front lines for months and according to all the German
sources, were well below their full strength. The German claim that the pocket contained between 54,000 and 56,000 men can be proven by looking at the histories of the groups encircled in the pocket and of the units taking place in the relief attempts.\textsuperscript{68}

Field Marshal von Manstein claimed that the pocket contained six and a half divisions.\textsuperscript{69} He began with ten divisions and a brigade in the area, but in order to preserve the fighting strength of his divisions, von Manstein had combined them into new forces as they became too weak to exist on their own. He combined the Saar-Palantine 112th Division, the Silesian 332nd Division and the Saxon 225th Division under the command of the 112th Division forming a unit called Corps Detachment B.\textsuperscript{70}

The Russians also overestimated the strength of the pocket due to the fact that the pocket contained the remnants of many divisions. The pocket contained part of the Silesian 417th Grenadier Regiment, the Engineer Battalion of the 168th Infantry Division as well as the 331st Bavarian Regiment of the 167th Infantry Division. The pocket also contained a battalion of the Silesian 213th Local Defence Division and the Ski Battalion of the 323rd Infantry Division. Tanks of the 108 Panzer Regiment of the 14th Panzer Division broke into the pocket during the first few days of its existence.\textsuperscript{71} After look-
ing at what the pocket actually contained, the German claim of 54,000 to 56,000 men seems more reasonable than the Russian claim of 88,000 men.

Out of the 54,000 to 56,000 men in the pocket, the Germans claimed that 30,000 to 32,000 men broke out of the encirclement,\(^72\) while the Russians claim only 3,000 men escaped.\(^73\) By examining the number of survivors from each group, the German claim comes closer to the truth. The 105th regiment of the 72nd Infantry Division came out of the pocket with three officers and 216 men, out of 1062 encircled. General Gille of the Wiking Division lead 4,500 men of his division out of the pocket, seventy percent of his divisional strength when the Russians formed the pocket. General Trowitz led his Bavarian 57th Infantry Division and the remains of the 389th Infantry Division to freedom, bringing 3,000 men of the rear guard out of the pocket. Trowitz also brought 250 wounded men out of the pocket with him, men Stemmermann had reluctantly ordered left in the pocket. Lieutenant Leon Degrelle, the leader of the Wallonien Brigade brought 632 of his Belgians out of the pocket, along with 3,000 other men.\(^74\) The Russians claim that only one percent of the men escaped.\(^75\) This line of propaganda failed, because the men in the lines were told the German version of the truth by their officers.
The Germans intercepted a radio transmission from Moscow, released by the "Information Bureau":

In the course of the offensive at the beginning of February from the area north of Kirowograd in a westerly direction and from the area southeast of Belaja-Zerkow in an easterly direction, the troops of the Second Ukrainian Front and the First Ukrainian Front broke through the strongly manned German defensive zone and in daring and skillful maneuvers encircled a large group of German-fascist troops north of the line Swenigorodka-Schpola.

As a result of this operation our troops have surrounded: the German 11 Army Corps under Generalleutnant Stemmermann and the German 42 Army Corps under General der Infanterie Mattenkloth.

The surrounded German Corps include: the 112 Infantry Division of Generalmajor Lieb, Oberst Barman’s 88 Infantry Division, Generalmajor Heine’s 82 Infantry Division, Oberst Honn’s 72 Infantry Division, Generalleutnant Traunberg’s 167 Infantry Division, Generalmajor Schmidt-Hommer’s 168 Infantry Division, Generalmajor Darlitz’s 57 Infantry Division Generalleutnant Geschen’s 332 Infantry Division, the SS Panzer Division Wiking under Brigadeführer Gille and the SS Motorized Brigade Wallonien under Major Lippert. The strength of the surrounded units is 70-80,000 soldiers....

The surrounded German units left 52,000 dead on the battlefield, 11,000 men surrendered. The Germans succeeded in removing scarcely more than 2-3,000 officers from the number of surrounded German troops....

During the same period 329 German aircraft, including 179 three-engine Ju-52 transport aircraft, more than 600 tanks and 374 guns were destroyed. Our troops captured 256 tanks, and 134 guns from the enemy.76

The Russians broadcast this message across Europe, hoping to force the Germans in the front lines to surrender.
Their hope proved fleeting, as no groups of Germans surrendered en masse to the Russians after these news releases. The Russians did make many mistakes in their newsreleases, misstating ranks, divisions involved and the commanders of the groups, not to mention the number of men in the pocket and amount of material lost.\(^7\)

In order to hopefully further demoralize the Germans, the Russians released another excerpt about the German defeat at Cherkassy:

> As stated by the captured officers from the surrounded units, following the failure of the attempted relief of the German forces who were in the "sack", Hitler gave another order demanding that the surrounded officers and men sacrifice themselves in order to hold up the Russian divisions for some time, since this was ostensibly necessary in the interests of the German Front. The mentioned order of Hitler's contained a direct order for the surrounded German officers and soldiers to commit suicide if their situation became hopeless. In addition the captured Germans stated that during the last 3-4 days plenty of suicides were observed. On orders from German commanders wounded officers and men were killed and burned. During the occupation of the villages of Steblew and Schanderowka for example, our troops discovered a large number of burned out trucks which were filled with the corpses of German soldiers and officers.\(^8\)

Here again, the Russians wanted to show that Hitler sacrificed men for land. They also tried to instill the fear of the SS in the regular German troops, claiming that they carried out the order to kill all the wounded. According to one Russian source their men came across
trucks full of burnt corpses. The Russians could tell that they were the German wounded because of the plaster of paris on the limbs and torsos of the men. The plaster of paris would not burn in the fires, so they could tell these men had been treated for their wounds before they died.⁷⁹

An Assessment of the Campaign

Throughout the existence of the pocket, the Russians compared the German troops there to those at Stalingrad a year earlier. The Russians wanted to show that Hitler felt that land was more important than the lives of his soldiers and wanted to show the average German soldier that they might meet the same fate as the German wounded met at Stalingrad. The Russians also claimed that the SS troops were carrying out orders issued by Colonel General Stemmermann to execute the wounded of the pocket, so that none of them would fall into Russian hands.⁸⁰

Many factors explain the failure of the League of German Officers in Captivity and the National Committee for a Free Germany to convince the men of the Cherkassy-Korsun Pocket to surrender. The members of the League of German Officers blamed the officers within the pocket for not allowing the men who wished to surrender to do so. The League of German Officers interviewed the men cap-
tured during the breakout who carried the leaflets and the passes. Some (perhaps with calculated opportunism) admitted that only their officers prevented them from surrendering. 81

Some of the members of the League of German Officers admitted that their failure stemmed from the fact that Russian captivity meant hardships and many times even death. The members of the League of German Officers knew that some of the surrendering German troops would spend time in special camps, where they would have to endure bitter hardships in order to survive. 82 The German troops may not have known of the hardships of Russian captivity, but they had witnessed many of their comrades put to death as soon as the Russians captured them. 83

The League of German Officers believed that the men in the pocket refused to surrender because they still believed in Hitler as a warlord. The members of the League believed that Germany had already lost the war and that prolonged fighting would only prolong Germany's agony. 84 The League believed they had to force the troops of the Wehrmacht to give up this belief in Hitler. 85

The campaign to demoralize the troops in the front lines failed because, in order to work the German soldiers had to lose faith in their officers. From the beginning of training in the German Army, the soldier
learns to respect and listen to his officer at all times, if he wishes to survive. The Free Germany Committee admitted that this line of propaganda ultimately had to fail because it asked the German soldier to do something that was unthinkable to him, go against the orders of his officer.  

The Russians aimed part of their propaganda entirely against the Belgians of the Wallonien Brigade. The fact that the Belgians continued fighting during the existence of the pocket and the fact that they broke out with the Germans shows the measure of the Russian failure to strip the Germans of their allies. Swiss newspapers carried the story of the Cherkassy Pocket to the rest of Europe and if it had been truly successful, would have kept other non-Germans from joining the German cause. According to Degrelle, the SS Division Wallonien crossed the Belgian Dutch border. Degrelle waited on the road and surveyed the seventeen kilometer long armored column, which he would lead back into Russia, only two months after the encirclement at Cherkassy.

The Russian propaganda, at Cherkassy-Korsun, designed to cause the surrender of the German troops, to strip Germany of the Freewilling volunteers of the SS within the pocket and to demoralize the German troops in the front lines, failed miserably. Although the Russians
managed to take 15,000 prisoners, these were mainly wounded, or men too tired to fight their way back to the German lines. The morale of the Germans in the pocket remained high, because they knew how close the relief attempts really came to succeeding. The men in the pocket hated the Russians and knew they would face a hard life in captivity. The two SS units in the pocket, the Walloonien and the Wiking were part of the German elite and hated the Russians even more than their German comrades in the pocket. The propaganda ultimately failed because it contained mostly lies dreamed up by the Russians and because the men of the pocket knew they would suffer greater hardships at the hands of the Russians than if they could hold out and try to make it safely back to the German lines. This was especially true for the men of the SS, because the Russians usually showed them no mercy when captured. Russian prisoners had faced the same mistreatment at the hands of the SS when they surrendered to them during the war. The men fighting in the front lines did not fall for the propaganda the Russians designed to demoralize them. No German troops surrendered en masse directly after the encirclement at Cherkassy-Korsun. The German troops never lost faith in their officers, and fought to the end of the war.
CHAPTER VIII

DEEP BATTLE AND BROAD FRONT CONCEPTS

And the Russian Operation at Cherkassy-Korsun

Developing the Concepts

Before World War II, the Russian Army developed a concept for penetrating enemy lines and then destroying the surrounded armies which they called "deep battle". This concept remained doctrine, until the Spanish Civil War showed problems in attaining the goals the doctrine set forth. During the Cherkassy operation, the Russian Generals involved in the operation found themselves in a situation similar to the one described in the deep battle doctrine. But, the Russian Generals ignored the concepts of deep battle. General Koniev in particular expressed great interest in destroying the pocket, before continuing operations against Army Group South. The Germans of Army Group South mounted a relief attempt to rescue the men at Cherkassy and eventually succeeded in their endeavor. The Germans succeeded in rescuing their comrades at Cherkassy mainly due to the influence of Stalin on the decisions of the Russian commanders.
In the 1920’s and 1930’s a group of Soviet officers led by Marshal Mikhail Tukhachevskii developed the concept of "Broad Front". Tukhachevskii envisioned an attack on the enemy’s entire front, in order to expose the weak points in the enemy defensive positions. After finding a weakness in the enemy lines, the attacking armies forced a breach in the defenses. A "shock army" then penetrated the breach and began attacks into the flanks and rear of the enemy forces. Broad front allowed the commanders on the scene to make their own decisions during the battle and gave them freedom to follow up the attacks that they felt would provide the best results.¹

Upon testing his broad front theory, Tukhachevskii realized that the attacks into the flanks and rear of the enemy required a very strong force. The strengthening of the shock army required thinning out the units on the entire front. Further, the strengthening of the shock army demanded that the main axis of attack take place on a narrow front and that the high command take more control over the armies and objectives. Tukhachevskii then went on from this focused attack to develop the concept he called "Deep Battle". This concept sought to employ infantry, cavalry and mechanized divisions in concert with aviation to decimate the rear areas of the enemy and bring the war to a speedy conclusion.²
Tukhachevskii designed deep battle as a two part engagement. First, a massed all arms attack would penetrated the defensive line of the enemy. Upon rupturing the front, armored units attacked targets of opportunity, including reserve artillery, supply dumps and headquarters units. The second phase of the operation called for an attack by mobile units to outflank the enemy and to penetrate deep into the operational zone of the enemy.³

A close associate of Tukhachevskii, Marshal Vladimir Triandifillov, took the second phase of deep battle one step further and sought to define exactly what elements would participate in the attack. Triandifillov also sought to coordinate the attacks of each service as they penetrated the depths of the defenses of the enemy.⁴

Triandifillov based the divisions of the shock group on a field army consisting of: four to five rifle corps with attached artillery, four to five artillery divisions, sixteen to twenty mechanized artillery regiments and eight to twelve tank battalions. Ideally, an engagement using a field army of this size, would last thirty days. The first phase of the operation called for an advance of thirty to sixty kilometers in five to six days. This phase of the operation depended on quickness and a violent attack to guarantee that the enemy not reform a cohesive front. A reserve unit consisting of mo-
bile artillery sought to break up any efforts of the enemy to re-establish their front line. The next phase of the operation would build on the successes of the first operation and in eighteen to twenty days destroy the enemy formations to a depth of 150 to 200 kilometers.\(^5\)

**Problems Develop**

At the time Tukhachevskii developed this plan, Russia could not support an army in the field, of the size this plan required.\(^6\) In order to alleviate the trouble with supplies, the High Command developed a three echeloned attack plan for the shock army. First, a mobile formation penetrated the enemy line. The second echelon consisted of an all arms attack on the enemy's exposed flank. The third echelon penetrated the enemy reserve areas to prevent any counter attack. The High Command set a goal of a two-hundred mile penetration for the three echeloned attack.\(^7\)

In 1931, the development of the deep battle concept received a mortal blow. Marshal Triandifillov, one of the fathers of deep battle died in a plane crash on the way to deliver a paper in the Kiev Military District. The death of Triandifillov left Tukhachevskii to carry on his work on deep battle alone. He did have the help of other generals who believed in the success the concept
could bring, but he had lost one of the great tactical minds in the Russian Army.\textsuperscript{8}

\textbf{Publishing the Results}

The efforts associated with defining the concept of deep battle culminated in the \textit{Field Regulations Manual of 1936}.\textsuperscript{9} In this manual, Tukhachevskii finally defined fully, his plan "Deep Battle" and presented it for the approval of his fellow officers.

First, a massed, echeloned attack on a narrow front would rupture the defender's conventional infantry-artillery-antitank defense. Artillery and mortars suppress defending artillery and especially defending antitank guns. Tanks move a few meters in front of the attacking infantry, just meters behind the artillery barrage, crushing wire, overrunning machine gun posts, and reducing other centers of enemy resistance. Once through the enemy lines, the attacking tanks take advantage of local opportunities to penetrate and attack enemy reserves, artillery, headquarters and supply dumps. Not tied to the infantry advance, the tanks take advantage of their speed to exploit local opportunities.\textsuperscript{10}

The attack on the enemy lines consisted of using artillery to soften his defenses and then used tanks followed by infantry to overrun his forward positions. The manual then went on to describe the operations the Soviets would undertake while in the rear areas of the enemy.

'Mobile Groups' composed of cavalry, mechanized formations, or both, would exploit their mobility advantage to outflank the enemy or develop penetration in order to reach the enemy rear areas. The object: to attack the entire depth
of the enemy defenses simultaneously, with frontal attacks, long range artillery fires, deep penetrations by mobile forces, and bombing and parachute attacks of key points. Smoke and deception operations distract the enemy from the real intentions of the attack.\textsuperscript{11}

Tukhachevskii believed in launching the attack with tanks just after an artillery barrage to lessen the losses to his armor. The tanks would move in before the defenders could recover to repel them. The tanks, then loose in the enemy rear areas would cause as much havoc as possible, destroying the ability of the enemy within the sector of the attack to continue the battle.\textsuperscript{12} Of his plans to reduce the enemy on a narrow front, he wrote:

> The impossibility of destroying the enemy’s army at one blow with contemporary broad fronts forces us to achieve this by a series of consecutive operations, combined by constant pursuit; this can replace the destructive engagement which was the best form of encounter in previous armies.\textsuperscript{13}

Tukhachevskii saw that the tank and airplane had revolutionized modern warfare and that the massed infantry attacks used during the first World War, had become obsolete. Tukhachevskii envisioned a time when the Red Army would use a material and technical based army which would permit a more effective method of achieving the army’s goals, and not the fighting for each separate position, as had taken place in World War I.\textsuperscript{14}
On June 12, 1937, before the Red Army instituted his ideas, Stalin had Tukhachevskii put to death. Stalin also ordered the execution of eight of Tukhachevskii’s high ranking assistants and ordered that the rest of them go to prison. Stalin feared the commanders of the Red Army. After his purge of the civilians, the Red Army stood as the only possible hinderance to his power and represented the largest group of possible conspirators against him. In all, Stalin executed or replaced over 500 of his commanders from the rank of marshal all the way down to the officers at brigade level, replacing the officers with men politically acceptable to him, replacements which would prove disastrous in the first few years of the war with the Germans.

Stalin replaced the experienced thinkers and planners of the Red Army with politically acceptable officers. Some officers were promoted well above their previous levels of experience, causing disastrous effects on unit development and tactics.

Soon after the death of Tukhachevskii, his idea of deep battle came to an end during the Spanish Civil War. The Russians aided the Republican forces in the Spanish Civil War, by providing them with tanks, aircraft and military advisors. General D. G. Pavlov, a tank expert,
reported to Stalin on his assessment of the tank: "The tank can play no independent role on the battlefield... the tank must be relegated to an infantry support role." Without Tukhachevskii to defend the independent role of the tank on the battlefield, Stalin put Pavlov's recommendations into practice. Pavlov chose to ignore the problems with coordinating armies of different nationalities with different weapons and training. He chose to ignore the inherent problems in the Spanish army and came down very hard on the new concept. He knew little of deep battle and chose to blame the problems on a new theory.

By late 1939, the High Command reformed the massed mechanized corps into fifteen separate divisions relegated to infantry support roles. The reforming of the divisions and change in roles for the armored elements of the Soviet Army eliminated most of Tukhachevskii's plans for deep battle.

Deep Battle Concepts Employed

Late in 1939, General Georgi Zhukov employed Marshal Tukhachevskii's theory of deep battle. On May 20, Japanese troops overwhelmed the Soviet forces at the Khalkhin-Gol River along the Mongolian-Manchurian border. After the initial success, the battle became indecisive,
and served to expose very serious flaws in the command and control structure of the Soviet forces. 21

To remedy the situation, Soviet forces were transferred to the theatre and the High Command placed Zhukov in charge of the First Army Group. Zhukov received reinforcements and launched a counterattack on August 20. Zhukov attacked exactly according to the plan Tukhachevskii laid out in PU-36 and smashed the Japanese formations facing him between two assault groups. Zhukov completely encircled the forces of the Japanese Sixth Army by August 24. He managed to contain this force until a cease fire was declared on September 16.22

Even after the success Zhukov managed using the deep battle doctrine, the Red Army High Command still would not rescind their decision to reorganize the tank forces and change their thoughts on deployment and battle. The Red Army tank forces remained tied to their role of infantry support. But, even if the Red Army High Command had decided to reinstate the deep battle doctrine, inherent problems in the army might still have stood in the way of true success using the deep battle doctrine. The Red Army may not have been developed enough to carry out the deep battle doctrine as Marshall Tukhachevskii envisioned.

The problems associated with the Red Army implemen-
ting deep battle doctrine became apparent even before the adoption of PU-36. In September of 1936, Colonel Giffard le Q. Martel, Assistant Director of Mechanization at the War Office in England witnessed an exercise involving elements of the Byelorussian Military District. The sheer number of troops and the massed material involved in the exercises impressed Martel.

Martel chronicled the events he witnessed, but also reported many obvious flaws in the Soviet plan. He reported his findings to the War Office.

The Russian Army was still a bludgeon, quite incapable of rapier work; it had the armoured spikes put on the head of the bludgeon and would strike a deadly blow when it landed; but an active and well-equipped enemy should often be able to avoid or counter the blow and would at least inflict heavy damage on a clumsy opponent.\textsuperscript{23}

Martel believed that the Soviet Union had become a potent military force, but that the army needed many refinements before the Red Army became a real military power. Deep battle came to an end after the death of Tukhachevskii and under Stalin, the Red Army implemented new programs to carry it into the next decade, but never implemented a plan to take the place of deep battle.

**Deep Battle and Cherkassy-Korsun**

The operation at Cherkassy in many ways resembled the operation that Tukhachevskii described in deep bat-
tle. The Russians penetrated the German lines and managed to keep their lines open to allow other groups to enter the rear areas of two German corps. But, the Russians failed to put the second phase of Tukhachevskii's plan into effect. The failure to put the second phase of the deep battle operation into effect and the fact that the Russian commanders chose to ignore some of the laws of warfare contributed to the fact that the Germans escaped from the Cherkassy-Korsun Pocket. Marshal Zhukov was at Cherkassy and he had used the doctrine of deep battle before to defeat the Japanese, but could not put it into effect in the Cherkassy operation. Although he did not command all the troops involved in the operation, he could have suggested how best to carry on the operations against the Cherkassy-Korsun Pocket.

The first stage of deep battle calls for an initial advance of sixty miles into the rear areas of the enemy. At Cherkassy the Russians succeeded in advancing the initial sixty miles, but then a German counteroffensive almost succeeding in rescuing the trapped force. A further Russian offensive regained the lost territory and left the Russians eighty miles in the German rear area. But, the Russians stopped after the first advance and chose to eliminate the men in the pocket, instead of continuing with the deep battle doctrine.
Russian Mistakes

The decision on the part of General Koniev to eliminate the men in the pocket violated two of the laws of warfare, the law of mass and the law of economy of force, which directly correlate to each other. The law of mass dictates that a commander concentrate most of his forces against the critical point. The critical area in the Cherkassy operation should have been aimed against Army Group South, since it contained the most men and presented the biggest problem for the Russian generals. Army Group South proved strong enough to carry out small offensive operations during the Cherkassy operation due to the limited number of men facing them. According to von Manstein, he was able to free the two corps for relief operations because the Russians suspended offensive operations against his group while they sought to eliminate the Cherkassy-Korsun Pocket. The Russians should have employed the law of mass against Army Group South, while employing the law of economy of force against the men of Group Stemmermann in the Cherkassy-Korsun Pocket. The law of economy of force goes hand in hand with that of mass. Economy of force means that while massing troops for the critical attack, a commander leaves enough of his troops in the non-critical part of the line to hold it against an attack by his enemy. The Russian
commanders should have employed the law of economy of force against the least dangerous of the German forces, the men of Group Stemmermann, which they had already surrounded and cut off from supply on the ground, and had proved to no longer be capable of offensive operations.

The second phase of deep battle calls for a second advance to take the attacking armies 200 miles into the enemy rear areas. This second advance was to make sure that the enemy could not mount an attack to retake the land they had lost, and to reform a viable defense against them. In the Cherkassy-Korsun operation though, the Russians did not mount the second offensive against the men of Army Group South.

By suspending offensive operations against Army Group South, the Russians allowed the Germans to mount an operation to free their trapped men. Von Manstein claimed that if the Russians had not suspended their operations, that he could not have freed up the troops from his front to mount the relief attacks. The Germans mounted a relief attempt when the Russian attacks stopped and managed to drive most of the eighty miles separating them from Group Stemmermann and ended up being stopped by the weather and the Russians within six miles of the pocket. The men of Group Stemmermann were then able to drive the remaining six miles to the lines of Third Pan-
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zer Corps. The first attack drove Army Group South back only eighty miles, and the two separated groups proved just strong enough to fight their way across the eighty miles which separated them.

The Russian Generals made some poor decisions about the conduct of operations at Cherkassy, but Stalin must be held responsible for the strategic and timing decisions. Stalin pushed his generals to eliminate the Cherkassy-Korsun Pocket to prove to the German soldiers that Hitler cared about land, instead of them, hopefully causing some of them to desert from the German army. Stalin chose the objective of destroying this one group in hopes of causing some desertions, when he could have commanded his generals to keep up their attacks against Army Group South. The attack they launched to create the pocket had already caused a gap between Army Group South and Army Group Centre and caused a sixty mile gap in the lines of Army Group South, where the men of Group Stemmermann had been. Further attacks had a good chance of rupturing the front of Army Group South entirely.

Although Marshall Zhukov was at Cherkassy, he did not implement the deep battle doctrine, even though he had used the doctrine to defeat the Japanese years earlier. The Russian generals did not obey the laws of warfare in their operation against the Cherkassy-Korsun
Pocket. Stalin chose to put non-military considerations in front of military ones. All these factors helped contribute to the Russian failure to bring the Cherkassy operation to a successful end and to the partial German success in the freeing of their troops trapped within the Cherkassy-Korsun Pocket.

Cherkassy-Korsun can be shown as one of the prime examples of what happens when politics dictates strategy and tactics on the battlefield. Politics can decide when to fight a war, whether the war be conditional or unconditional and what weapons are used. But, decisions affecting the conduct of the army must be left up to the commanders on the scene. Both Stalin and Hitler chose to allow political considerations to dictate what land to hold and which group to destroy, against the better judgment of their generals. Unfortunately for the German and Russian armies during World War II, the leadership of the respective countries did not follow these rules.
CHAPTER II

Retreat to the Dnieper


2. Ibid, 474-475. Von Manstein talks only about his front, but he does show that Hitler interfered in military decisions.

3. Ibid, 473. Three of the divisions available to the army group were still on their way from the reserve areas.

4. Ibid, 473. Von Manstein states that even with the arrival of the three reinforcing divisions, the average strength of the divisions did not rise above 2,000 men. He states that his men might have held the river line until winter. The river would then freeze, allowing the Russians to drive their tanks over the ice on broad fronts, instead of having to fight for a bridge, or shallow crossing spot.

5. Von Manstein, *Victories*, 473. Von Manstein had just regained control of Sixth Army at this point in time. Sixth Army passed in and out of his control at the whim of Hitler. He and Field Marshall Ewald von Kleist each commanded this army at points, each got control when their army group faced the greatest danger. Von Manstein finally lost control of the army for good later, when he wanted to withdraw an armored division from the army to commit to the relief attempt of the Cherkassy-Korsun Pocket. Hitler argued that if he moved the Twenty-Fourth, that Army Group A could not hold the Crimea, and might even be cut off there if von Manstein weakened Sixth Army.


8. Ibid, 473.


10. Ibid, 473-474. He believed that the extra divisions could come from Army Group Centre, since the withdrawal had reduced the front that army Groups Centre held. This memorandum also requested more shipments of ammunition, von Manstein hoped that his army group would not face another ammunition shortage, as they had during the withdrawal to the Dnieper River. On January 27, Hitler ordered von Manstein to remain after a meeting with his commanders on the Eastern Front. Hitler accused von Manstein of writing this just so that he could clear his name in the war diary, and put the blame on someone other than the one at fault.

11. Hans Rudel, *Stuka Pilot*, (New York: Ballentine books, 1958), 76-80. During his career as a Stuka pilot, Rudel destroyed over 500 Russian tanks, and even sank a Russian battleship on his own. His record of 2,530 operational flights was unequaled by any other pilot during the war. He was shot down more than a dozen times, and ended the war flying a Focke Wulf FW 190 with a freshly amputated leg (he lost everything below the knee), and the other leg in a cast.

12. Von Manstein, *Victories*, 475. The thirty-seven infantry, and seventeen armored divisions of Army Group South faced a total of forty-seven rifle divisions and eleven armored corps. Von Manstein earlier relates (p. 457) that the Russian divisions were nearly as depleted as his own. They still outnumbered him in numbers of divisions available though, and he constantly feared that the Russians would receive an abundance of reserve divisions from their reserve area near Orel, and begin an offensive that he could not stop.


15. Ibid, 327. According to von Mellenthin, all the disasters the German army faced in the Ukraine in the next three months were the fault of Hitler. Specifically he spoke of the disasters at Kirovograd, and later at Cherkassy.

17. Ibid, 772.

18. 772.


20. *Operations of Encircled Fores: German Experiences in Russia* (Washington D.C.: Center of Military History United States Army, 1982), 33. This section, 33-42 of the manual was prepared by a German staff officer of Army Group South. He bases the section on his personal recollections, and the documents which were saved by the army group.


22. Ibid, 506. This meant that Army Group South withdrew south, and away from Army Group Centre. Von Manstein tried to argue with Hitler that the Germans could no longer hold the Dnieper River line. He argued that an attack between the two army groups would meet with no significant resistance, and that the Russians could drive a considerable difference before the two army groups could mount a counterattack to stop them.

23. Ibid, 506.


29. *Break-Throughs*, 73. Throughout the paper, I mention the number of losses reported by each side. The casualty figures each reported suffering probably come close to the truth, but are probably low, because the commanders would want to downplay the losses to their
forces. The casualties they reported causing are probably high, because of the confusion on the battlefield, and the desire to look good for their superiors. Battlefield casualty reports will always be inaccurate, if a tank fires on an enemy and hits it, the commander will probably report a kill, many tanks could fire on the same one, resulting in a high report of kills. I have reported the numbers, because somewhere in them, at least a partial truth can be found.

30. Ibid, 73.

31. Erickson, Road, 164.

32. von Manstein, Victories, 506-507.

33. Ibid, 507.

34. Ibid, 507. Von Manstein notes that this railhead served his Army Group the best out of the railroads in the area. He states that the railroads through Rumanian territory had a lower efficiency.

35. Erickson, Road, 164.


37. Ibid, 396. According to Carell, Bayerlein withdrew because of his experiences with Rommel in the Africa Corps. Bayerlein had seen the consequences of Hitler's "last man" directives, and had no intention of spending the rest of the war in a Russian prisoner of war camp.


40. Ibid, 39.

41. Ibid, 39.

42. Carell, Scorched, 397.

43. McTaggart, "Soviet", 40.

44. Ibid, 40.
45. Ibid, 40.

46. Ibid, 40.

47. Ibid, 40.

48. Erickson, Road, 164. Vatutin fell short of his expectations, failing to take Uman.

49. Ibid, 149.

50. Ibid, 164-165.

51. Ibid, 165.

52. Von Manstein, Victories, 507.

53. Erickson, Road, 165. Stavka used Zvenigorod-Mironovka to refer to what would later become the Cherkassy-Korsun Pocket. These two cities (Zvenigorod and Mironovka) were the cities on the two flanks (which lay on the Dnieper River) of the German salient.

54. Ibid, 165. The Russian tanks were able to operate well on the flanks of the German troops. Only one German division in the salient contained any tanks at all, the Fifth Waffen SS Panzer Division Wiking.


56. Ibid, 539.

57. Ibid, 539.
CHAPTER III

THE ENCIRCLEMENT


5. Leon Degrelle, *Campaign in Russia: The Waffen SS on the Eastern Front* (Torrance, California: Institute for Historical Review, 1985), 163. The Russian corridor reached sixty-five miles only at its widest point. In some places the corridor measured only fifty miles. Degrelle plays such a large part in the story because the only officers left were he and Lieutenant Colonel Lucien Lippert. Lippert led at the front, while Degrelle motivated the men, and tried to keep morale high.

6. Walter Warlimont, *Inside Hitler’s Headquarters, 1939-1945* (Novato, California: Presidio Press, 1962), 556. Unfortunately this quote comes from the fragments of a conversation. This part of the diary may have been part of the chronicle burned during the last few days in the bunker. Other parts of the diary were destroyed in various air attacks that Warlimont survived. However, this quote does show the massive forces the men in the pocket had to face. Even after seeing the massive numbers of enemy his men faced, Hitler still would not allow von Manstein to order the withdrawal of the men in the pocket.

7. Ibid, 557. The fact that Hitler wanted to use divisions from the west shows that he did not see the Russian offensive near Cherkassy as a problem, at least at this point.

8. Ibid, 556.


11. Ibid, 17.

12. Peter Strassner, European Volunteers: 5th SS Panzer Division Wiking (Winnipeg: JJ Fedorowicz, 1988), 135. Most of the information in this book concerning the Wiking Division comes directly from the Truppenkameradschaft Wiking (Viking Division Historical Society). The Viking Society also published a book Der Kessel von Tscherkassy, to tell of the experiences of the division during their encirclement. The Wiking Division was made up of volunteer troops from Norway, Finland, Denmark and Sweden.


14. Ibid, 135. Lieutenant Heder commanded the school at Ststeblev. His battlegroup consisted of two experienced battalions, one of engineers and the other of infantry, and two battalions which were in the middle of their training. One of the training battalions consisted of engineers, the second consisted of a collection of various personnel which were to fill out the ranks of the under-strengthed battalions of the division.

15. Von Manstein, Victories, 515.


17. Encircled, 19.

18. Ibid, 19-20. The Wiking Division contained around 7,830 men when the Russians closed the pocket. The records of the Wiking Division do not tell whether or not this number included the men in the Wallonien Brigade or not. As the Wallonien Brigade was only attached to the Wiking Division, I do not believe the men of the Wallonien were included in the strength total for the division at the time.

19. Paul Carell, Scorched Earth: The Russo-German War 1943-1944 (New York: Doubleday, 1970), 403. The 213 Local Security Division, was not even a front line for-
mation. The Germans formed the local security divisions to fight partisans just behind the front lines. The men were either young, or very old, and were lightly equipped. The units in the division were normally well under the normal complement of men for the front line divisions.

20. Encircled, 20. Earlier in his diary, Lieb made mention of the fact that his communications with First Panzer Army had been cut. Lieb remained under the command of First Panzer Army, but Eighth Army may have been the only unit outside the pocket he could contact.


22. Carell, Scorched, 403.

23. Degrelle, Campaign, 163.

24. Ibid, 163. Degrelle also states that his Belgians had been in tight spots before, including another small encirclement years earlier, and had gotten out of them. He believed that the situation was not as bad as it looked. The Germans were successfully driving in to relieve the pocket, and the men in the pocket were not in any immediate danger.

25. Strassner, Volunteers, 140.


27. Ibid, 164.

28. Von Manstein, Victories, 515. The German commanders added Korsun to the name of the pocket, because this town became important to the relief effort because the only major airfield in the pocket lay there.

29. Ibid, 515. Every one of these formations was top notch. Von Manstein tells that each of the divisions had performed well, and he believed that under normal circumstances, this corps could stand up to the two Ukrainian Fronts that stood between it and the pocket. Liebstandarte Adolf Hitler literally meant Bodyguard of Adolf Hitler. This Waffen SS formation was the first one to receive arms, and first saw limited action in France in 1940.

30. Ibid, 515. Von Manstein believed that Hitler intended to use Eleventh Panzer to help hold the Nikopol
bridgehead. Hitler wanted the Nikopol Bridgehead because this bridgehead protected his army in the Crimea. Von Manstein believed that the army had no chance of holding the Crimea and that he should cut his losses, and use the divisions freed by giving up the bridgehead to help hold the lines of Army Group South. Hitler also wanted Nikopol to launch an attack into the Caucasus. He wanted the Caucasus for the oil that was there. Von Manstein believed that Ploestie in Rumania could provide the Germans with the oil they needed, and that synthetic oil could meet the needs of the German Army, and that an attack into the Caucasus was not worth the effort.


32. Strassner, Volunteers, 141.

33. Encircled, 35. Only the Liebstandarte Adolf Hitler Panzer Division possessed its full fighting strength, having just returned from a long refit in the west.


35. Strassner, Volunteers, 142.


38. Ibid, 109. According to Warlimont, Hitler lost faith in von Manstein during this period. See Warlimont, Headquarters, 389. He believed that von Manstein was making excuses for his poor generalship. Many in the Nazi hierarchy felt the same way, including Himmler and Goebbels. Interestingly enough, men on both sides of the line still held great respect for von Manstein. Von Vormann and Degrelle both expressed their faith in von Manstein. Von Manstein had always performed well for Hitler, he devised Sichelschnitt, the plan for attacking France, and took the Caucasus when other commanders had
failed in the past. He also held Army Group South together after the Stalingrad disaster.


41. Ibid, 110-111. Rudel refers to the IL II as "Iron Gustavs" throughout the story. He comments that these planes were also more heavily armored then their German counterparts the Ju.87. In fact the IL II was faster, the only advantage the Germans had was maneuverability. The Ju.87 could out dive an IL-2, a fact Rudel used to shoot down the planes during his pursuits.

42. Ibid, 111. Rudel chalked up over 500 kills during the four years he flew in the war, including single handedly sinking a Russian battleship. Most of his kills though were tanks, including many he destroyed during the fighting at Cherkassy.

43. Ibid, 111.

44. Von Manstein, *Victories*, 516.

45. Ibid, 516. Von Manstein believed in staying in contact with his troops at all times. He travelled to the front throughout the war, in order to find out what his troops faced, and what shape his units were in.

46. *Encircled*, 20. Hitler would not allow von Manstein to give further permission for Lieb to further withdraw his troops.

47. Ibid, 20.


49. Strassner, *Volunteers*, 137. Stemmermann's old staff, that of Eleventh Corps had enough problems just trying to keep control of the divisions assigned to them. He had to pass messages himself to the signal corps of the divisions under his control.


52. D. Fritz Morzik, *German Air Force Airlift Operations* (New York: Arno Press, 1961), 220. The Germans delivered light thirty-seven millimeter antiaircraft guns to the airfield at Korsun. These guns were so light that they had no effect on the Russian bombers. Morzik writes from his own recollections, and from a postwar report prepared by Lt. Colonel D. Baumann, Former commanding officer of the Second Group, Third Air Transport Wing, and from original documents from the files of the Second Group, Third Air Transport Wing. During World War II, Morzik headed the transport and airborne supply division of the Luftwaffe. He would have been familiar with all the reports coming from the pocket, and received the after action reports of all groups taking part in the supply operation.

53. Ibid, 221-A. Later, as time went on, and transportation got better, all the aircraft were able to take off and land from Uman. Uman was the largest and closest airfield in the area, and was best suited for storing supplies.

54. Ibid, 221-A.

55. Ibid, 222. See also Leon Degrelle, *Campaign in Russia: The Waffen SS on the Eastern Front* (Torrance, California: Institute for Historical Review, 1985), 165. Degrelle witnessed the shooting down of the planes, he lists the number as between ten and fifteen, and claims that the screams of the wounded men, who were being roasted alive were awful to hear.

56. Ray Wagner, *The Soviet Air Force in World War II* (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1973), 230. This work was originally written as the official history of the air force, and published by the Ministry of Defense of the USSR.


58. Wagner, *Soviet*, 230. No numbers are given for operational aircraft for this group, but it is probably considerably less that the full strength of the two air armies. The Germans had just over 1,460 aircraft in-
volved in the Cherkassy operation. Many of the 1,460 were transports, so the Russians had a considerable advantage over the Germans in number of fighters available.


61. Degrelle, *Campaign*, 166-167. Degrelle comments that the Russians from the artillery battery had spent the last three months in the area around Moshny. The Russians knew the Belgians trench system, the placement of their artillery batteries, and the telephone and radio posts of the brigade and corps within the pocket.


63. Ibid, 167.

64. Ibid, 168.


66. Ibid, 173. Degrelle commented that a Russian patrol actually preceded them out of the town. According to his memoirs, the Russians robbed the peasants of the cities and towns they freed from the Germans. While in Losovok, Degrelle came across a family that the Russians had "princely" traded a box of matches with the hammer and sickle on it to the family for all of their poultry. He comments that the German troops were strictly watched by their superiors. According to Degrelle, whenever the Germans took something from the Russian peasants, they compensated them fairly. The Germans mainly traded their extra food for the warm clothing the Russian peasants possessed. The Russians soldiers however, would take almost everything of value the peasant families had, Degrelle believed that if the Russians left the peasants with anything, the soldiers had overlooked it while searching the houses.


68. Ibid, 222.

69. *Operations*, 31. His diary entry for the day shows some of the despair he felt, and that his hopes for the ability of his corps to hold out were dwindling. Part of the entry for the day contains the line "This cannot go on much longer." Lieb saw the number of cas-
ualties per day, and the disparity in the amount of supplies used to the amount delivered per day, and knew that the numbers meant ill for his corps.


71. Ibid, 171.

72. Ibid, 171. The Russians managed to destroy a large number of the vehicles within the pocket. The Germans had to destroy most of them though, because they could not move them. The engines of the artillery tractors, which the Germans counted on for mobility, burnt out from being overworked. The vehicles which could not move through the mud on their own, were destroyed by the Germans rather than letting them fall into Russian hands.

73. Ibid, 171-172.


75. Ibid, 36.

CHAPTER IV

MOUNTING THE RELIEF EFFORT

1. Eric von Manstein, *Lost Victories* (Chicago: H. Regency co., 1958), 515. He stated that the strengths of the Russian units involved in the attack earlier in his memo to the O.K.W. The Russians still possessed a great advantage in both men and equipment in the area, but the difference between the two forces was not as large as the units involved might suggest. The two panzer corps still faced an almost impossible task, but one he was confident they could fulfill.


3. Von Manstein, *Victories*, 515-516. Hitler ordered the two attacks, rather than launch a single attack to break into the pocket as von Manstein wanted. Von Manstein believed that one attack might stand a chance, but that two attacks would hinder the effort.


5. Ibid, 36.


8. Ibid, 37. According to this source, the Germans began their attack late in the day of February 2, 1944. The Forty-Seventh Panzer Corps carried out operations for the day of the attack, and for the full day on the third. This corps managed to tie down one full Russian Front while continuing to hold the bridgehead.


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11. M.N. Kozhevnikov, Komandovaniye i shtab VVS Sovetskoy Armii v Velikoy Otechestvennoy voyne 1941-1945 (Moscow: Nauka, 1977), 168. Cited in Hardesty, Phoenix. The title means Soviet Army Air force command and staff in the Great Patriotic War. This would mean that the planes flew an average of ten sorties per day (if the Germans could not manage to down a single plane. But as losses took place, the planes would have to fly even more missions per day to equal the 3,800 mark). The distance and turn around times for the planes makes the average of ten sorties per aircraft per day seem very improbable. Either the Russians had more planes available to them during these days, or the number of sorties became exaggerated somehow, probably the same way that the number of kills became exaggerated later. Wagner, Soviet, 234, lists the 2,800 as the number of sorties flown for this period. He also comments that the Germans flew only half as many sorties. He states that the Soviet fliers engaged in 120 air battles, shooting down 130 German planes.


13. Wagner, Soviet, 236. German accounts of the airlift operation differ greatly from the Soviet accounts. The Soviets would have been trying to impress Stalin, and therefore would inflate their kill figures. The German sources might have been trying to cover up the extent of their loss, but, the fact that they met their transport goals (discussed later) seems to somewhat disprove the Soviet numbers. If so many planes had been lost, the Germans would have had serious trouble supplying the pocket.


15. Encircled, 38.


17. Leon Degrelle Campaign In Russia: The Waffen SS on the Eastern Front, 175. "fascines", a term Degrelle uses for the wooden or metal bridging units the Germans used to allow tanks to cross trench lines from behind. Only 300 of the Belgians took positions in the trench, the other two companies, along with the brigade
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artillery and support sections retreated towards Korsun with the rest of the German forces.


23. Ibid, 516.


27. Ibid, 165.

28. D. Fritz Morzik *German Air Force Airlift Operations* (New York: Department of the Army Arno Press, 1962), 222. The supply operations with the air dropped canisters could not begin immediately. The parachutes and canisters became available a few days after the airport at Korsun became unusable. In order to guarantee the success of the drops, the canisters had to be dropped from a low altitude. This caused the loss of several aircraft, damage to many others, and the loss of many crew members due to deaths and injury.


31. Ibid, 179.

32. *Der Kessel von Tscherkassy*, (Hanover, Germany: Trupenkameradschaft Wiking, 1963), np. Reprinted in Strassner, *Volunteers*, 137. Stemmermann received no word at this time as to when the proper time to break out
would arrive. The High Command had set dates for the beginning of the breakout as early as February 1, but kept moving the date back as the relief efforts ran into problems due to the Russians, but mainly due to the weather.

33. Strassner, *Volunteers*, 137.


36. Ibid, 199.


40. Strassner, *Volunteers*, 137. The casualty figures for six days of heavy fighting show how relatively few losses this group suffered during the breakout. This company provided security for the right flank of the division. See also Degrelle, *Campaign*, 190. Sternmermann ordered the Nordland Regiment to hold Ambrusino as the rear guard for his group as they moved out of Korsun on the night of February 12, 1944.


42. Ibid, 186-187.

43. Ibid, 186-187. The Belgians who retook the line of the Nordland Regiment were made up of ex-artillery men, and the truck drivers whose trucks could no longer move through the mud. These men had lost their heavy guns during the first few days of the thaw, because the Germans had no tractors powerful enough to pull them through the mud. Degrelle gives no indication as to the number of prisoners the Wallonien Brigade took during this action, but states that his group retreated from the pocket with 200 prisoners in tow.

44. Werth, *Russia*, 774. Gorodische did fall to the Russians on February 9, as they claimed. However, the Germans abandoned Korsun after the airfield became unusable, and to make their way out of the pocket. The Russian claim of the destruction of the relief forces is an outright lie.

46. Ibid, 232.

47. Werthen, *Sixteenth*, 200-201. Hitler released this division only after von Vormann reported that he could no longer carry out offensive operations. The Eleventh Panzer Corps had then fought through the mud from the Bug River, in order to take part in the attacks.

48. Ibid, 201.


50. Ziemke, *Stalingrad*, 233. Baeke began with 85 tanks. Many of his tanks were in the German repair yards though, awaiting treads and wheels, which they lost in the deep mud. During the relief effort, his unit reported the destruction of 400 enemy tanks. They probably destroyed less, but the number grew due to errors in accounting kills during the heat of battle. Several tanks joined Baeke after he forded the Gniloy Tikich, and more became operational during the drive back to the German lines.


52. Degrelle, *Campaign*, 190-191.

53. Ibid, 191. Most of Ambrusino was ablaze already, due to the heavy fighting in the area. The Russians had also deliberately fired certain houses to cause trouble for the Nordland Regiment. The commander of Nordland had received orders to leave nothing of any value to the Russians, so he fired the last of the homes. Most of the villagers had already retreated towards one side or the other. In fact, many villagers within the Cherkassy-Korsun Pocket followed the Germans in their retreat, fearing impressment into the Russian army, or reprisals at the hands of the Asian Russians, because they looked rather European, and feared rape or death at the hands of the more uncivilized troops.


56. Morzik, *Airlift*, 224. Although Morzik paints a very dismal picture for the chances of surviving an air drop, the German losses (cited later) were very minimal.
Many of the planes took damage during their supply drops, but most survived to fly again.

57. Encircled, 193.

58. Ibid, 192. According to Degrelle, and to the historical society of the Wiking Division, Gille greatly inspired the men under his command. According to them, his presence decided the outcome of this battle.


60. Werthen, Sixteenth, 201.


63. Degrelle, Campaign, 193-194. This action, as well as others take on February 15 served to take Group Stemmermann closer to the southwest corner of the pocket. Stemmermann spent the days of February 14 and 15 consolidating his troops in the southwest corner of the pocket, in order to launch his attack from the closest point to Hill 239.

64. Morzik, Airlift, 224.

65. Ibid, 224.


67. Wagner, Soviet, 236.

68. Wagner, Soviet, 237.

69. Degrelle, Campaign, 203.

70. Encircled, 24.

71. Werthen, Sixteenth, 200.

72. Degrelle, Campaign, 195.

73. Strassner, Volunteers, 137. Das Reich just appears in Strassner’s book, and in Degrelle’s memoirs. See Degrelle, Campaign, 196. Das Reich was not among the divisions of Group Stemmermann, and was not mentioned in
the divisions of the relief attempts. Das Reich was sta-
tioned with the Panzer Grenadier Division Gross Deutsch-
land in the lines of Army Group South near Novo-Buda
before the Russians broke through the German lines. Das
Reich probably helped support the 198th Division which
held the flanks of the Third Panzer Corps during the re-
lief attempt.

74. Degrelle Campaign, 195-196.

75. Ibid, 199-200.

76. Ibid, 200-201. An explosive bullet tore a gap-
ing hole in Lippert’s chest, killing him as he entered an
enemy occupied house. His men buried him in the house,
and retreated back to their lines. Later during the
night, a group of Belgians went back to the house and re-
trieved the body of their commander. They carried the
corpse of their commander with them as they broke out of
the pocket, and buried him in Belgium.

77. Ibid, 199. This was one of the first type of
panzerfaust. In order to destroy a tank, the man needed
to close to within a few meters of the tank and shoot for
one of the vulnerable points (the treads, gas tank or am-
munition storage). The rocket shot a flame four to five
meters out of the rear of the weapon, which would carbon-
ize anything in the path of the flame. The weapon could
not be used in a trench for the fear that the flame would
bounce off the wall of the trench, and in Degrelle’s
words, "carbonize" the user.

78. Ibid, 202-203.

79. Strassner, Volunteers, 144.

80. Degrelle, Campaign, 201-202. At this point,
the pocket measured sixty square kilometers.

CHAPTER V

THE BREAKOUT


2. Ibid, 38.

3. Ibid, 26. Stemmermann issued this order orally, and went over each phase of the order with the commander effected by the plans. He wanted to make sure the nobody got left behind, and that each commander knew the breakout plan in case communications broke down among Group Stemmermann.

4. Ibid, 27.

5. Ibid, 25. Lieb called strictly for volunteers among the medical staff and doctors to stay with the wounded. He received more than enough volunteers, even though volunteering meant surrendering to the Russians, and possibly spending the rest of the war in captivity.


8. Ibid, 224.


11. Ibid, 203.


17. Ziemke, Stalingrad, 234.


22. Encircled, 27. Lieb wrote these entries in his personal diary after the breakout from the pocket succeeded. He wrote trusting to his memory, and the memories of the other officers. The German officers preparing this pamphlet copied his exact words from the diary.

23. Ibid, 27.


27. Ibid, 235.

28. Encircled, 29. Lieb commanded the tanks of the 108th Grenadier Regiment of the Fourteenth Panzer Division which had broken into the pocket during Hube’s attempt to relieve Group Stemmermann. The parts of the Wiking Division that appeared were the regiment which Gille led south to avoid the Russians around Dzhurzhentsy.

29. Ibid, 28. The men of Heavy Panzer Regiment Baeke and the Leibstandarte had captured a bridge in Lissyanka that led across the Gniloy Tikich. The Germans would have had a much easier time if they could have crossed the bridge in Lissyanka under the protection of
Third Panzer Corps, and the Russians knew this, and wanted to make as much trouble for the Germans as possible.


32. Degrelle, *Campaign*, 212-213. Degrelle describe these men and likened them to Gods. He knew most of the men well, (the Wallonien Brigade had been assigned to the Wiking Division for quite some time) he had fought with them during the life of the pocket, and in numerous other battles throughout the Russian campaign.


35. Ibid, 235. This command post would have aided a successful breakout and helped the men of Third Panzer Corps gain control over his escaping troops.


38. Degrelle, 213.


40. Ibid, 210-211. The Russians managed to destroy many of the vehicles of Group Stemmermann, but the Germans destroyed all the slow ones, and the ones that bogged down in the mud.

41. *Encircled*, 29. This contact must have been with elements of Corps Detachment B. The other two groups were still a few hours away from making contact with Third Panzer Corps. Some units of Corps Detachment B actually fought their way into Lissyanka, and crossed the bridge held by First Panzer. These men reached freedom first, not having to force the stream, but crossing through friendly lines.


43. Ibid, 29.
44. Ibid, 29.

45. Ibid, 30.

46. Ibid, 30. All of the men of Group Stemmermann who crossed the stream on their own without the aid of Third Panzer Corps, must have come to the stream south of Pochapintsy. They found it easier to cross the terrain south of the town, rather then fight their way over the heights north of Pochapintsy or through the town itself.

47. Ibid, 30.


49. Ziemke, Stalingrad, 236-237.

50. Encircled, 31.

51. Strassner, Volunteers, 150.

52. Ibid, 150.

53. Ibid, 150.

54. Ibid, 150-151.

55. Degrelle, Campaign, 216.

56. Ibid, 216-217. Degrelle spoke German, but due to the length of the talk he gave, he requested that the German soldier translate for him to shorten the time spent conveying the orders to the assembled men.

57. Ibid, 217.

58. Ibid, 217. Only a few hundred Germans charged out of the woods, Degrelle managed to keep between 3,000 and 4,000 of the Germans with him under control, and in the woods.


60. Ibid, 219.

61. Ibid, 221.

62. Strassner, Volunteers, 151.

63. Degrelle, Campaign, 221.
64. Encircled, 41.
68. Ibid, 31.
69. Degrelle, Campaign, 222.
70. Ibid, 31.
71. Ibid, 224-225.
72. Werthen, Sixteenth, 203-204.
73. Degrelle, Campaign, 223.
74. Ibid, 222-223.
75. Ibid, 223. If these numbers are correct, the disparity between the numbers might be explained by the fact that some of the German tanks that were destroyed may have been towed into the German rear areas for repair or parts.
76. Ibid, 223.
77. Ibid, 224.
78. Encircled, 31-32. Degrelle was taken mainly because he led the Belgian "Rexist" Party in the years before World War II. The Rexist Party shared many of the same views as the Nazis. Hitler wished to save Degrelle since he felt that Degrelle could help recruit more Belgians to the Nazi cause.
79. Werthen, Sixteenth, 204.
80. Von Manstein, Victories, 517. Russian accounts of the breakout state that the Germans killed their wounded rather than leave them behind, citing the burnt out trucks along the way as evidence of this. It is hard to determine which side is telling the truth, but the fact that the Germans did bring many wounded out of the pocket lends credibility to their story.
81. Ibid, 517. According to von Manstein’s chief of staff, Major General F.W. von Mellenthin, 35,000 men escaped from the pocket. See F.W. von Mellenthin, Panzer Battles (New York: Ballentine Books, 1956), 328. Von Mellenthin may be counting the wounded in his number. Von Manstein only counted the men who went into the reserve areas in Poland when assessing the breakthrough. In all, around 4,825 men were flown out of the pocket, and about 30,000 to 32,000 escaped during the breakout. For the official German records, see Gefuhrt von Helmuth Greiner and Percy Ernst Schramm, Oberkommandos, 856. The official history of the O.K.W. lists the number of escapees at around 30,000.

82. Degrelle, Campaign, 222.

83. Von Manstein, Victories, 517.


85. Alexander Werth Russia at War 1941-1945 (New York: E. P. Dutton & co., 1964), 774. Considering the fact that only one of the units at the time the pocket closed contained tanks, and only the lead regiment of the Fourteenth Panzer broke into the pocket, 500 tanks seems quite a high number. This number might included the tanks lost by the relief forces. If so, the assertion that they destroyed 500 tanks seems more plausible.

86. Ibid, 776. Many German soldiers did not know the truth about what happened at Cherkassy. See Peter Neumann, The Black March, . Neumann escaped from the Cherkassy-Korsun Pocket with three companies of the Wiking Division, before the Russians fully closed the pocket. His group was sent to Poland before the survivors from the pocket returned. He heard the Russian side of the story from "Radio Free Germany", and from Swiss newspapers. The news seemed to have no effect on the fighting will of the German soldiers, and no large scale desertions took place at the front. The German papers never printed the truth about the losses, and many Germans are still in the dark about the truth today.

87. Von Manstein, Victories, 518. For the numbers on the Wallonien brigade, see Degrelle, Campaign, 222. For a partial breakdown by formation, see Carell, Scorched, 427, 430-431.

88. Werth, Campaign, 776-777.
89. Von Manstein, *Victories*, 517.
CHAPTER VI

IN RETROSPECT


2. D. Fritz Morzik, *German Air Force Airlift Operations* (New York: Department of the Army, Arno Press, 1962), 225. The Germans managed to repair all the planes the Russians damaged. The Germans managed to fix many of the planes during the airlift operation. According to Hardesty, *Phoenix*, 186-187, the Russians claimed to have downed 457 fascist aircraft. He claims these numbers seem exaggerated considering the reduced inventory of planes the Luftwaffe could field in 1944. The number of aircraft include the thirty-seven transport planes and any German fighters the Russians managed to shoot down during the operation. The Germans probably deflated the numbers of supply aircraft lost, so the true number for losses should come somewhere between the two numbers.

3. Ibid, 225. The tonnage of supplies delivered into the pocket works out to just over 110 tons per day (if the Luftwaffe flew the same number of missions each day). The large number of missions flown the last night of the existence of the pocket probably means that the average per day supply came out to less than 110 tons. The average of seventy tons per day was met during the entire time the pocket existed.

4. Ibid, 225.


7. Ibid, 41.

8. Ibid, 41.


10. Ibid, 42.
CHAPTER VII

PROMISES, THREATS, CANDY AND CIGARETTES


2. Kurt von Tippelskirch, Geschichte des Zweiten Weltkriegs (Bonn: np, 1951), 81, 87, 95, 100, 102, 211, 218, 231, 287.

3. Eric von Manstein, Lost Victories (Chicago: H. Regency, 1958), 520. Von Manstein gives the strength of Sixth Army as fifty two divisions. He has included in his number the Fourth Panzer Army, and the Third Rumanian Army, and two attached Rumanian divisions. Sixth Army only contained twenty two divisions, but von Manstein added the other formations to the numbers for Sixth Army to show the total extent of the loss of men.

4. Gunter Toepke, Stalingrad: wie es wirklich war (Stade: 1949), 42, 52. These numbers seem more correct than any given. Around 270,000 soldiers were encircled at Stalingrad, and a little over 30,000 sick and wounded were flown out of the pocket. Von Manstein gives a much lower number in his memoirs: von Manstein Victories, 328. Von Manstein states that only around 220,000 men were lost at Stalingrad. This number seems a little low, possibly due to the confusion associated with taking command on a new front. Von Manstein had just arrived from a very successful campaign in the Crimea, and might not have known exactly how many troops each unit at Stalingrad contained. The Russians put the number at over 200,000 dead and wounded plus the 90,000 prisoners, these numbers are quite high, and possibly come from the desire of the Russian commanders to look good in Stalin’s eyes. Toepke’s numbers fall in the middle, and seem the most unbiased of the three accounts.

5. Wolfgang Leonhard, Die revolution entlasst ihre Kinder (Berlin: 1955), 120, 158, 297. Leonhard, and other Germans sought refuge in Russia after the Nazi takeover in Germany. Some were well known, such as Theodore Plivier (author of many books, including The Kaiser Goes the Generals Remain, an anti-war book about the hardships Germany faced due to World War I. He had been exiled because of his writings, and chose to go to Russia). The Russians employed these political refugees
in their propaganda campaign, but their efforts to undermine morale, and create deserters among the German ranks failed.


8. Scheurig, Free, 89.

9. Ibid, 89.

10. Weinert, Nationalkommittee, 26. The lack of any talk of progress in further recruitment in the camps probably means there was none. Neither of the groups witnessed any large gains in membership, and it is never examined whether the men joined the movement to better their life in captivity, or if they really believed in what they were doing. When the Russians liquidated other pockets, such as Army Group Centre in White Russia, and the one containing Army Group Southern Ukraine, men from the pocket joined the two movements. Some letters sent out by the League of German Officers in Captivity contain as many as fifty signatures. Scheurig, Free, 252-255. But, when taking into account the signatures, such as those mentioned in note 53 below, some of the signatures are doubtful.

11. Count Heinrich Graf von Einsiedel, Tagebuch der Versuchung (Berlin: 1950), 88. This slogan does not seem to have achieved the results the National Committee and League of German Officers intended. The extensive propaganda campaign was met with rejection and silence along the whole German front.

12. Scheurig, Free, 142-143.


14. Ibid, 145. General of Artillery Walther von Seydlitz, Commanding General LI Army Corps. Seydlitz was captured at Stalingrad, and helped found the League of German Officers in Captivity. He led the League until the end of the war.

15. Jesco von Puttkamer, Irrtum und Schuld (Berlin: 1948), 72. Shcherbakov went on to hint that Stalin wanted Seydlitz to head the campaign against the men at Cherkassy himself. Shcherbakov desired a successful
propaganda campaign against the men in pocket, he wanted an easy victory over the two German corps.

16. von Puttkamer, Irrtum, 72. Major Buchler commanded the first flak battalion of Flackregiment 241. Captured at Stalingrad, he became a member of the Managing Board of the League of German Officers in Captivity. Colonel Steidle commanded the 767th Panzer Grenadier Regiment of the 376th Infantry Division. Also captured at Stalingrad, he became the Vice President of the League of German Officers.

17. Scheurig, Free, 146.


20. Ibid, 227-228.


22. Ibid, 165.

23. Ibid, 165.


25. Leaflet from the National Committee for a Free Germany and the League of German Officers in Captivity to the men of the Cherkassy-Korsun Pocket. From Truppenkameradschaft Wiking, reprinted in Strassner, Volunteers, 255.

26. Verrater-Das Nationalkomitee "Freies Deutschland" as Keimzelle der sog. DDR (Munich: np, 1960), 258. The title of this work in English: Traitor-The National Committee "Free Germany" as germ cell of the so-called German Democratic Republic. Just the title shows the underlying hatred many of the (West) Germans felt towards Communism, during and even after the war, and all those Germans who joined communist groups. Probably an underground publisher, who did not want to be know for printing a book on such a dark subject.

27. Leaflet from the National Committee for a Free Germany and the League of German Officers in Captivity to the men of the Cherkassy-Korsun Pocket. From Truppen-
kameradschaft Wiking, reprinted in Strassner, *Volunteers*, 255.


30. Verrater, 258.


32. Degrelle, *Campaign*, 189.


34. Scheurig, *Free*, 147.

35. Personal communication from Colonel General Lieb to Field Marshal von Manstein. Lieb's communication told of the demands of the National Committee for a Free Germany, and his own reservations about accepting the demands.

36. Ibid, 147. See also Degrelle, *Campaign*, 189.

37. *Operations of Encircled Forces: German Experiences in Russia* (Washington D.C.: Center of Military History United States Army, 1982), 22. The information in this pamphlet concerning the Cherkassy-Korsun Pocket comes directly from the personal diary of Colonel General Lieb, the commander of the German Forty-Second Corps. He carried the diary with him out of the pocket.


40. Peter Strassner, *European Volunteers*


42. von Manstein, *Victories*, 515.

43. Ibid, 189-190.
44. Rolf Stoves, Die I. PanzerDivision, 1935-1945 (Dad Nauheim, Germany: np., 1961), 506. Although the advance of the two groups had gone a ways, the two points mentioned in the message were still far from the pocket. Stemmermann did however know that the relief efforts had not been destroyed as the Russians had told him, but that they were still moving, and that the High Command still held some hopes for a successful outcome to the relief attempts. The Russian message does not mention the Leibstandarte, First Panzer, Fourteenth Panzer or Heavy Panzer Regiment Baeke. Stemmermann knew these divisions would be added to the attempt, and hoped that the might of these renowned groups (Leibstandarte, First Panzer and Heavy Panzer Regiment Baeke) would help the relief attempt succeed. In his book, Degrelle tells the story of why his Belgians held out. Degrelle, Campaign, 163. He says that he and his Belgians believed that the relief attempts could succeed right up till the end. He tells of his ability to hear the roar of the guns (these were the guns of the Third Panzer Corps, then only six miles away, and the Russians that were fighting them). His men never gave up hope, right up till the end, when the orders came down to begin breaking out to the west.

45. Ibid, 141.

46. Letter from officers of League of German Officers in Captivity to the officers and soldiers of the Cherkassy-Korsun Pocket. From Truppenkameradschaft Wiking, reprinted in Strassner, Volunteers, 259.

47. Ibid, 259.


49. Letter of February 12, 1944, from Colonel General Seydlitz of the League of German Officers in Captivity to Field Marshal von Manstein. Seydlitz had been at Stalingrad, and knew how hard von Manstein had pushed to relieve the German troops in the pocket, and that he fought Hitler tooth and nail to get his permission to allow von Paulus to breakout of the encirclement. The letter goes on to state that the German people will pronounce judgment over all responsible for the tragedy at Cherkassy (Manstein included), and that history would find them guilty of sacrificing an army for their belief in National Socialism. The people of Germany would forget that von Manstein despised National Socialism, and he would be blamed just like all the other top National Soc-
ialists for the tragedy of German arms at Cherkassy.

50. Von Manstein, Victories, 515. Von Manstein blamed the failure of the rescue attempt at Stalingrad as being too little, too late. He believed that his eight panzer divisions and the heavy panzer regiment would be enough to break through the Russian lines. The caliber of troops he had assembled also boosted his confidence, the Liebstandarte, I Panzer and Heavy Panzer Regiment Baeke were battle tried formations, that had proved their worth many times.

51. Ibid, 256. Dr. Korfes headed the medical contingent of Sixth Army. Hitler did not trust him with a field command, because he had "questionable" views of anti-semitism. Korfes became one of the members of the Board of the League of German Officers in Captivity.

52. Strassner, Volunteers, 140.

53. Letter from the League of German Officers in Captivity to General Gille of the Wiking Division. Partially reprinted in Scheurig, Free, 231-232. This letter, in different copies, was sent out to all the troops of the Wehrmacht fighting in Russia. The letter ends in a plea to stop these actions because the League of German Officers believed that Germany would lose the war, and all the killing, raping, kidnapping, looting and burning served to do was to anger the Russian people against the Germans. This warning proved correct, the Russian troops entering Germany behaved sometimes worse than their German counterparts entering Russian towns and villages.

54. Scheurig, Free, 150.

55. Von Vormann, Tscherkassy, 123. The Russians put the number of men surrendering as high as 18,000, see Weinert, Nationalkomitee, 91. Weinert goes on to state that he believes the men who surrendered did so just to join the League of German Officers or the Free Germany Committee. He offers only the fact that some of the captured Germans carried the leaflets and passes as evidence for his assertion. The fact that the officers of the League believed their only hope for an end to the war was a putsch in Germany, Scheurig, Free, 158, shows that even the officers of the League did not agree with Weinert. Most believed they had failed, and looked for new ways to bring an end to the war.
56. Ibid, 24. Von Vormann goes on to tell that most of the men who were captured during the escape from the pocket died in Russian captivity. Even those who were carrying the passes and leaflets were denied permission to join either organization. He states that the reason for this lay in the fact that they did not surrender as units, and were not accompanied by their officers.

57. Encircled, 32. Degrelle was flown out of the pocket over any of the other generals, because he led the Belgian Rexist Movement. The Rexists mirrored the Nazis in many ways, and Hitler thought of Degrelle as a "Brother in Fascism". Hitler did not wish to see him fall into Russian hands, fearing the propaganda value of Degrelle’s capture.

58. After the Russian "liquidation" of the Cherkassy-Korsun Pocket, the Free Germany movement began a letter campaign designed to make the German troops on the Eastern Front rethink their reasons for fighting. On July 30, 1944, the League of German Officers in Captivity drafted a letter to the soldiers in the German front lines. Scheurig, Free, 245-247. The interesting thing about this letter stems from the fact that Major General Trowitz, the commanders of the Fifty Seventh infantry division signed it. He led the rear guard out of the Cherkassy-Korsun Pocket, and his unit went into the rear areas, and finally to Poland. Most of the units that escaped from the pocket saw no action until the late summer or early fall of 1944. Although the Russians might have captured him behind the German lines in Poland, I find this highly doubtful. The League also signed the name of Field Marshal von Paulus to many letters sent to the German troops, leaving them to wonder at that fact that he belonged to the League, but held no position of authority, but yet outranked all the other members of the League. The use of names of men who had not been captured and the name of von Paulus seemed to take credibility away from the letters the League of German Officers in Captivity drafted.


61. Ibid, 778.
62. Ibid, 781.

63. Von Manstein, Victories, 517.

64. Werth, Russia, 781.

65. Von Manstein, Victories, 515. See also Geführt von Helmuth Greiner and Percy Ernst Schramm, Kriegstagebuch des Oberkommandos der Wehrmacht (Wermachtführungsstab 1940-1945 vol 4 (Frankfurt am Main, Germany: Bernard & Graefe Verlag für Wehrwesen, 1961), 856. The War Diary of the high command of the Wehrmacht tells that around 50,000 men were surrounded and around 30,000 men escaped from the pocket.

66. Carell, Scorched, 403. Carrell cites part of a conversation involving the chief of General Koniev’s command train, Colonel Kvach. In the conversation, the colonel states that Koniev has determined that the Cherkassy Pocket contained the entire German Eighth Army under General Wohler. Koniev correctly estimated the strength of Eighth Army at nine army armored divisions, an SS panzer division, and an attached brigade. Koniev had wanted to destroy Eighth Army for a long time, the army had caused him trouble since he took command. Eighth Army contained nine of the best armored divisions the Wehrmacht had to offer, and the destruction of the SS formations would have only added to his victory.

67. Werth, Russia, 776-777.

68. Carell, Scorched, 403.

69. Von Manstein, Victories, 515.

70. Carell, Scorched, 403. The fact that three units with the strength of a division came under the command of a colonel shows a great loss in the officers of the divisions involved. The three divisions barely equaled the combat strength of one regular infantry division.

71. Ibid, 403.

72. Von Manstein, Victories, 517.

73. Werth, Russia, 776. Werth claims that the Germans managed to extricate 2,000 to 3,000 men by air during the existence of the pocket. He claims that the German officers within the pocket abandoned their troops,
and escaped on armored cars and tanks during a blizzard. He tells that if the blizzard had let up, that none of the Germans would have escaped from the encirclement.


77. Ibid, 265.

78. Ibid, 265.


80. Ibid, 265. Since most of the groups escaping from the pocket brought their wounded with them, it seems that the Russians fabricated this order.


82. Von Einsiedel, *Tagebuch*, 86. Einsiedel describes some of the miseries he experienced during his time in captivity before he joined the League of German Officers in Captivity.


84. Ibid, 132.


86. Von Vormann, *Tscherkassy*, 50.

87. Degrelle, *Campaign*, 228. Hitler decreed that Degrelle could now raise a full armored division among the Walloons.
CHAPTER VIII

DEEP BATTLE AND BROAD FRONT CONCEPTS


5. Ibid, 52.

6. James J. Schneider, "The Rise of the Red Army and its Path to Operational Art", Strategy and Tactics, August 1991, 51. The army would require twenty-five to twenty-eight trains which would haul 650-850 boxcars per day. This number took into account only the food and ammunition requirements of the armies, the forces would truly require more trains to bring in replacement personnel, clothes, and other supplies needed to keep them in the field.

7. Simpkin, Deep, 41.


10. Ibid, 83-84. Tukhachevskii's ideas mirror those of Guderian, but his ideas were accepted practice, long before Guderian's gained acceptance in Germany. Guderian did not rely as heavily on artillery as Tukhachevskii did though, he relied on the Stukas to clear pockets of enemy resistance. His use of planes as artillery speeded up the German advance in France in 1940.
11. Ibid, 84.


15. House, Warfare, 68.


18. Ibid, 68.


21. Erickson, 533.

22. Ibid, 533.

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THE BATTLE WEST OF KIEV
24 December 1943 – 31 January 1944

German Front Line, 24 Dec
German Front Line, 31 Jan
13th Numered Armies

30 Guards Tank

BATTLE WEST OF KIEV
31 Jan

FIRST UKRAINIAN

GERMAN FRONT LINE, 31 JAN

13TH Numered Armies

30 Guards Tank

FIRST UKRAINIAN

SECOND UKRAINIAN
10 miles

Zhurzhintsy

Khilki

Korsun

Komarovskyka

Novaya-Buda

Pochapintsy

Lysyanka

MAP 7