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In early July 1942, the German armies on the Eastern front, as part of Heeresgruppe Süd's renewed summer offensive and southward drive towards the Caucasus (Operation 'Blau'), attacked and captured the strategic city of Voronezh. Lying just east of the great Don river, the city was taken in a concentric attack by four divisions — one armoured and three motorised — striking out from two newly captured bridgeheads. The Russian defenders were no match for the Germans and, despite Stalin sending in

reinforcements from his strategic reserve and ordering counterattacks to retake the city, the Soviets lost heavily, especially in men and tanks. However, the protracted fight for the city kept the German armour engaged in the Voronezh area longer than expected, upsetting the timetable for the main offensive and fatally delaying the operation to capture Stalingrad. This picture of tanks of Panzer-Abteilung 103, part of the motorised 3. Infanterie-Division, in the northern part of the city was taken on July 7.

THE BATTLE OF VORONEZH

The failure of Operation 'Barbarossa' to knock the Soviet Union out of the war in 1941 almost brought the Wehrmacht to its knees when the Red Army struck back during the frigid winter of 1941-42 with a series of successful counter-offensives. Despite this almost fatal setback, Hitler still desired an offensive solution, so as winter drew to an end, the Oberkommando des Heeres (Army High Command, OKH) began to develop plans for a 1942 offensive. Germany's insufficient oil reserves and inability to conduct a prolonged war determined the objective: the Caucasian oilfields. Fortunately for the Ostheer (German Army on the Eastern front), the spring thaw, general exhaustion and overextended supply lines halted Soviet operations and allowed it to catch its breath and to rebuild. Warmer weather resurrected German spirits and slowly dissipated the taint of winter defeats. A resounding triumph over a Soviet counter-offensive at Kharkov in May 1942 (see *After the Battle* No. 112) signified that the Ostheer was once again in fine mettle.

Right: Our comparison photographs for this story were taken by Sergey Popov, a resident of the city and long-time student of the 1942 battle. This is the same spot at the junction of Donbasskaya Street and Plekhanovskaya Street, near Voronezh Railway Station II, today. The multi-storey apartment block on the right still stands (see also page 35).

The German summer offensive, code-named 'Fall Blau', consisted of a three-pronged attack by Generalfeldmarschall Fedor von Bock's Heeresgruppe Süd that aimed to destroy Red Army forces in the

By Jason Mark
south and capture the oilfields. Generaloberst Hermann Hoth's 4. Panzer-Armee



SERGEY POPOV

Right: Operation 'Blau' was to comprise four phases. Voronezh was to be captured in Phase 1 after which the 4. Panzer-Armee and 6. Armee were to join in a southward advance towards Stalingrad, followed by a push into the Caucasus.

and Generaloberst Maximilian von Weichs's 2. Armee, supported by Colonel-General Gusztav Jany's Hungarian 2nd Army, would attack from Kursk to Voronezh and then continue south-east along the Don river to anchor the northern flank of the offensive on the Volga river. General der Panzertruppe Friedrich Paulus's 6. Armee would advance from Kharkov parallel with Hoth's army to the Volga, while Generaloberst Ewald von Kleist's 1. Panzer-Armee plunged south towards the lower Don with the 17. Armee on its western flank and the Rumanian 4th Army to its east.

The initial objective for Hoth's 4. Panzer-Armee was the strategically important city of Voronezh. In the summer of 1942, Voronezh — a major provincial city of 326,840 people and the administrative centre of Voronezh Oblast — was less than 200 kilometres from the front line. Straddling the Voronezh river, a tributary of the Don, the city was a vital transportation hub between Moscow — over 500 kilometres to the north — and southern Russia, with railways and arterial roads radiating in all four directions. Industrial areas in its northern and western districts contained mills, bakeries and enterprises that processed cattle products (meat, tallow, soap and hides). When the Wehrmacht crossed the border on June 22, 1941, many of the city's manufacturing facilities converted to military production: the excavator factory helped develop the Katyusha rocket-launcher, while other complexes turned out radios, diesel motors, aircraft engines, locomotives and rolling stock. On the city's outskirts were two airfields.

Armeegruppe Weichs (the northern grouping of Heeresgruppe Süd) formed the northern pincer of a double envelopment that aimed to surround the Soviet 40th and 21st Armies and then exploit to the Don river. On its northern wing was Weichs's own 2. Armee with three infantry corps; in the middle was Hoth's 4. Panzer-Armee with — from north to south — General der Infanterie Erich Straube's XIII. Armee-Korps, General der Panzertruppe Willibald Freiherr von Langermann's XXIV. Panzer-Korps and Generalleutnant Werner Kempf's XXXXVIII. Panzer-Korps, and protecting the southern flank was Jany's Hungarian 2nd Army with two infantry corps.

Opposing Weichs were Lieutenant-General Mikhail Parsegov's 40th Army with six rifle divisions and three rifle brigades, Major-General Aleksei Danilov's 21st Army with nine rifle divisions and two rifle brigades, and elements of Major-General Nikolai Pukhov's 13th Army.

Kempf's XXXXVIII. Panzer-Korps, fielding 280 panzers, comprised Generalmajor Bruno Ritter von Hauenschild's 24. Panzer-Division, Generalmajor Sigfrid Henrici's 16. Infanterie-Division (mot.) and Generalmajor Walter Hörnlein's Grossdeutschland-Division (mot.), all high-quality formations. Langermann's XXIV. Panzer-Korps, comprising the 9. Panzer-Division, 3. Infanterie-Division (mot.) and 377. Infanterie-Division (and reinforced with the 11. Panzer-Division on July 4), had 353 panzers.

The Red Army held a slight numerical superiority in armour: Parsegov's 40th Army possessed roughly 70 tanks in two brigades, while the 16th Tank Corps with 180 tanks was in the army's rear; Danilov's 21st Army was supported by the 13th Tank Corps (163 tanks) and could also call upon the 4th Tank Corps (145 tanks) and 24th Tank Corps (141 tanks) — giving a total of 699 tanks compared to 633 on the German side.



THE START OF THE OFFENSIVE

Armeegruppe Weichs initiated 'Blau' at dawn on June 28 with a 30-minute artillery barrage and air strikes. Mechanised infantry breached the Soviet defences and the armour slipped through. The terrain was almost perfect tank country: gently rolling grasslands with occasional patches of woodland, the only obstacle being the many waterways. Oberst Gustav-Adolf Riebel's Panzer-Regiment 24 of the 24. Panzer-Division seized an intact railway bridge over the Tim river — lit fuses and explosive charges were ripped off in the nick of time — and then rolled on to the Kshen river. Other divisions achieved similar progress, yet an ill-timed downpour in the evening threatened to scuttle the entire operation, the sodden ground immobilising some units for days.

Kempf's mobile formations continued to churn eastward on June 29. After crossing the Kshen and covering almost 30 kilometres with the Grossdeutschland echeloned to its left, the 24. Panzer-Division overran 40th Army headquarters in Bykovo and just missed capturing General Parsegov and his staff. Stukas mistakenly bombed the spearheads of both divisions, even though aerial recognition panels were displayed, because the pilots believed that no German unit could have penetrated so far. As night fell, the campaign's first major tank duel erupted near the villages of Bykovo and Gorshechnoye and continued into June 30. Oberst Riebel's panzers bloodied their opponents, claiming 28 tanks, mostly KVs and T-34s, though not without loss. During the engagement, Leutnant Herbert Cornelius, a platoon leader in the 5. Schwadron of Panzer-Regiment 24, narrowly escaped death:

'While I was informing my gunner about a tank I had spotted, I saw its muzzle flash. Firing at the same time as us, its shell struck our

gun mantlet and with a loud crack shoved the whole cannon deep into the turret, causing me to hit the back of my head against the turret wall and lose consciousness.'

Although the southern wing of the 40th Army held the Hungarians west of the Tim, Soviet leaders realised that unless Weichs was stopped, his panzers would gain operational freedom, fan out and trap most of the 40th Army. The situation deteriorated further for the Soviets on June 30 when Paulus's 6. Armee set off and quickly coalesced into a second pincer that threatened the entire Southwestern Front of Marshal Semen Timoshenko. The breakneck pace was maintained over the following days. By July 2, the 24. Panzer-Division had cracked enemy resistance around Stary Oskol and opened the way to the Don river and Voronezh.

In response to the German attack, Lieutenant-General Filipp Golikov's Bryansk Front was renamed the Voronezh Front. On July 2, after incurring disastrous losses, the Stavka released Lieutenant-General Maksim Antoniuik's 3rd Reserve Army to take up positions north of Voronezh. Once in situ, it was renamed 60th Army. At this point, Stalin still believed the German offensive was a prelude to an advance on Moscow.

On July 4, Langermann pivoted his 9. and 11. Panzer-Divisions north-eastward to form a cordon, together with the infantry divisions of the XIII. Armee-Korps, to protect the northern flank of the main axis of advance to Voronezh. At the same time, the spearheads of Kempf's XXXXVIII. Armee-Korps — the Grossdeutschland and the 24. Panzer-Division, followed by the 16. Infanterie-Division (mot.) — rushed towards the Don river. The only forces defending Voronezh were weak NKVD security forces, air defence units, rear service elements of the 40th Army and the immobile 75th and 53rd Fortified Regions.



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Operation 'Blau' and the race to the Don began on June 28. Seven days into the offensive, on July 4, Kampfgruppe Hellermann of the 24. Panzer-Division captured a ferry landing at Rudkino and established a bridgehead, thus becoming the first German troops to reach and cross the upper Don. Further north, Schützen-Regiment 26 captured a bridge over the Don near Yunevka/Malyshovo, but it was in such poor condition that only foot soldiers could cross. Engineers worked all

through the night of July 4/5 to repair and strengthen the span's sagging central support, and tanks of Panzer-Regiment 24 began crossing in the morning. This is Rittmeister Ulrich von Mirbach's 1. Schwadron of the I. Abteilung traversing the river. Sitting in the cupola of '131' is Leutnant Cay-Lorenz Baron von Brockdorff, leader of the squadron's 3. Zug (and future Knight's Cross winner). All three battalions of the regiment were across before noon.

BRIDGEHEADS ACROSS THE DON

The Grossdeutschland and the 24. Panzer-Division agreed to establish as many bridgeheads over the Don as possible for a concentric attack on Voronezh.

On July 4, Kampfgruppe Hellermann from the 24. Panzer-Division, under Oberstleutnant Vollrath von Hellermann, commander of Kradschützen-Abteilung 4, seized Siniye-Lipyagi and established a bridgehead over the Don at Rudkino, 35 kilometres south-south-west of Voronezh.

Further north, Oberst Maximilian von Edelsheim's Schützen-Regiment 26 and two-thirds of Oberst Riebel's Panzer-Regiment 24 captured an intact but rickety bridge over the Don at Yunevka. The latter village lay just north of the confluence of the Don and its tributary, the Voronezh river, and some 18 kilometres closer to Voronezh city than Rudkino. From there one could advance directly to the city, the main part of which lay on the west bank of the Voronezh, whereas from Rudkino one could only make an approach along the east bank of the Voronezh towards the suburbs on the east bank. It was obvious that an attack towards the city could better be launched from the Yunevka bridgehead. An advance from the Rudkino bridgehead to attack Voronezh from the east was stymied by strong resistance and was consequently abandoned.

In the Grossdeutschland sector, Oberleutnant Carl Ludwig Blumenthal, leading the 7. Kompanie of Oberst Otto Köhler's Infanterie-Regiment 'Grossdeutschland' 1, seized the village of Semiluki, 12 kilometres west of Voronezh, late on July 4 and charged its Don road bridge with one of its platoons. Despite fire from bunkers on the opposite bank,

Blumenthal and a few men sprinted across, established a toe-hold and doused small fires on the wooden structure while Unteroffizier Hempel, neck-deep in the water, tore off explosives and burning fuses with his bare hands. Blumenthal pulled back his small garrison under the cover of darkness. Although fire destroyed a 15-metre section of the

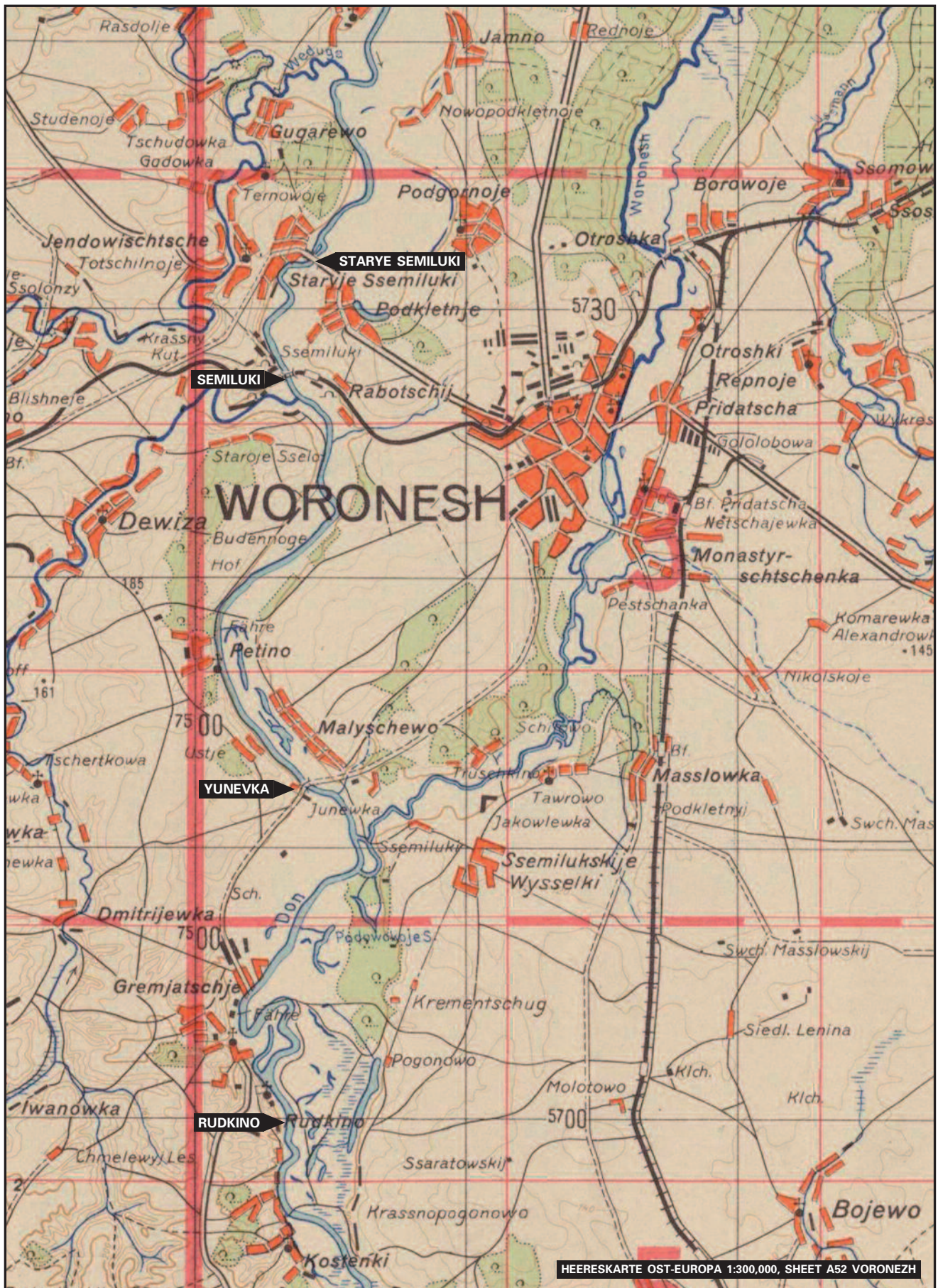
bridge, Blumenthal and his men captured the eastern approaches the following morning, July 5.

Four kilometres further south, near the Semiluki railway bridge, the I. Bataillon (Hauptmann Theodor Bethke) and III. Bataillon (Hauptmann Prüss) of Oberst Eugen Garski's Infanterie-Regiment 'Gross-



SERGEY POPOV

A single-lane pontoon bridge, installed in the 1970s, now connects the riverbanks. Malyshovo is still very rural, but its eastern neighbour, Shilovo, boasts large apartment complexes that arose concurrently with the construction of a nuclear power plant that began in 1983. (Voronezh residents voted overwhelmingly in 1990 to halt its construction).



While the 24. Panzer-Division established bridgeheads over the Don at Rudkino and Yunevka, the Grossdeutschland Division did the same further north, at Starje Semiluki and Semiluki. This enabled the two divisions to launch a concentric attack on

the city from the south-west and west. The Yunevka bridgehead was then later used by the 16. Infanterie-Division and the one at Starje Semiluki by the 3. Infanterie-Division when these formations were ordered to take over the battle.

Right: By mid-morning on July 6, the 24. Panzer-Division had captured the southern outskirts of Voronezh and the undamaged southern bridge over the Voronezh river, thus sealing off an important retreat route for Soviet troops. The following morning (July 7), a strong combat group — comprising Schützen-Regiment 21 and the armoured squadrons of Kradschützen-Abteilung 4 and Schützen-Regiment 26 — was assembled at the southern end of Ulitsa 20-letiya Oktyabrya (20th Anniversary of October Street), a few hundred metres uphill from the bridge embankment, in preparation for a push into the city. An official photographer, Kriegsberichtler Klaus Niermann of Luftwaffe-Kriegsberichtler-Kompanie 8, joined the force. One of his first shots showed an SdKfz 251 half-track of the I. Abteilung of Schützen-Regiment 26 moving up Baltiyskiy Alley, a minor road branching off 20-letiya Oktyabrya (see the town plan on page 27).



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deutschland' 2 paddled across the Don in inflatable rafts once darkness fell on July 5. The crossing took most of the night and as dawn broke on July 6, both battalions had assembled on the east bank, ready to attack eastward to Podkletnoye station. Good initial headway was stalled first by determined resistance from the station buildings, then minefields on a line of hills, and finally by flanking fire from the village of Podkletnoye, a kilometre to the north. No progress could be made until this village was taken by Köhler's Infanterie-Regiment 'Grossdeutschland' 1.

Assault guns were the first vehicles to cross Blumenthal's repaired bridge and joined the infantry outside Podkletnoye at around 0900 hours. Difficult combat in blazing heat sapped the infantrymen's strength, but they eventually cleared Soviet troops from the nearby woods and troop training grounds. Following the capture of Podkletnoye, two companies of the I. Bataillon of Infanterie-Regiment 'Grossdeutschland' 1 clambered aboard the assault guns and sortied towards Voronezh, pushing deep into the city and reaching Voronezh II Railway Station, the freight and marshalling yards. Though soon called back, they laid claim to being the first German troops in the city.

Hoth was under strict instructions not to let his mobile formations become ensnared in urban combat as they were needed for the second phase of the offensive, yet as it appeared the Soviets were abandoning the city, Heeresgruppe Süd allowed motorised troops to occupy it. Four such divisions were converging on Voronezh, but the two actually in position to take the city — the Grossdeutschland and the 24. Panzer-Division —



SERGEY POPOV

Still a nondescript back alley today.

had been ordered to pull back and head south. The task of taking Voronezh thus fell to the 3. and 16. Infanterie-Divisions (mot.).

This all happened at the moment Stalin ordered the Red Army to hold the city or recapture it.



Left: Assault groups formed by armoured personnel carriers and panzers swept north along individual streets, flushing out and eliminating Soviet defenders. This T-60 light tank was caught at the crossroads of 20-letiya Oktyabrya Street and Novo Slobodskaya/Kirova Streets. It almost certainly belonged to the 181st Tank Brigade — holding position in



SERGEY POPOV

the area of the meat-packing plant on Koltsovskaya Street — which at 8 a.m. that morning had despatched a four-tank platoon into the city on reconnaissance. 'All were destroyed', noted the brigade's combat journal. *Right:* The apartment building still stands today, though with the addition of a new wing.



Left: Panzer '214' of Panzer-Regiment 24 rolls north past Tram No. 56 on 20-letiya Oktyabrya, just south of the Y-junction with Koltsovsckaya. Note the aerial recognition flag draped across the front, a sensible precaution considering the number of Stukas in the air. Behind the tram is the Park of Culture and



Rest, known locally as the 'Park of the Living and the Dead' because it was a converted cemetery that had been in use until 1935 (marked [C] on the town plan on page 27). Right: The trams are gone, the rails removed, and the Voronezh Circus now fills the park.

PENETRATION OF THE CITY

At 0800 hours on July 5, the three battalions of Oberst Riebel's Panzer-Regiment 24 drove single file over the Don bridge at Yunevka, repaired overnight by divisional engineers. Major Dietrich von der Lancken, commander of the regiment's III. Abteilung, recorded events in a private log:

'In a small patch of woods two kilometres north-east of the bridge, the attack was readied. The regiment moved off at 1400 hours north-east towards Voronezh. To our left, separated by an enemy-occupied forest, was the II. Abteilung, while echeloned steeply backwards on the right was the I. Abteilung. Against slight infantry resistance, a hill three kilometres south-west of the outskirts, which offered an excellent view of the city, was occupied. Suddenly, ten T-34s appeared in front of the battalion. In a fierce engagement, eight enemy tanks are destroyed. A further advance into the city encountered strong resistance. Anti-tank guns, anti-aircraft guns and even dug-in tanks secured the edge of the city. In accordance with orders, the battalion hedge-hogged for the night on the high ground.'

The following day (July 6), Major Josef Fau's Kradschützen-Bataillon 53 of General-major Helmuth Schlömer's 3. Infanterie-Division (mot.) gained a foothold over the Don north of Semiluki village and erected a strong northward-facing flank across to Podkletnoye. That night, General Schlömer received the order to relieve the Grossdeutschland.

Insertion of Oberst Walter Denkert's Infanterie-Regiment 8 (mot.) into its allocated sector on July 7 was delayed by the Grossdeutschland columns moving in the opposite direction across the only bridge. Major Hans-Joachim Schepers's Sturmgeschütz-Abteilung 'Grossdeutschland' was left behind for 24 hours to support Schlömer's division. Piggybacking a company from Oberst August-Wilhelm Küster's Infanterie-Regiment 29 (mot.), its 3. Batterie pushed into Voronezh in an attempt to become the first German unit to take the city, but was recalled.

A combat report prepared by Oberst Wilhelm Lengerke's Schützen-Regiment 21 of the 24. Panzer-Division reveals that division's methodical assault into the metropolis from the south:

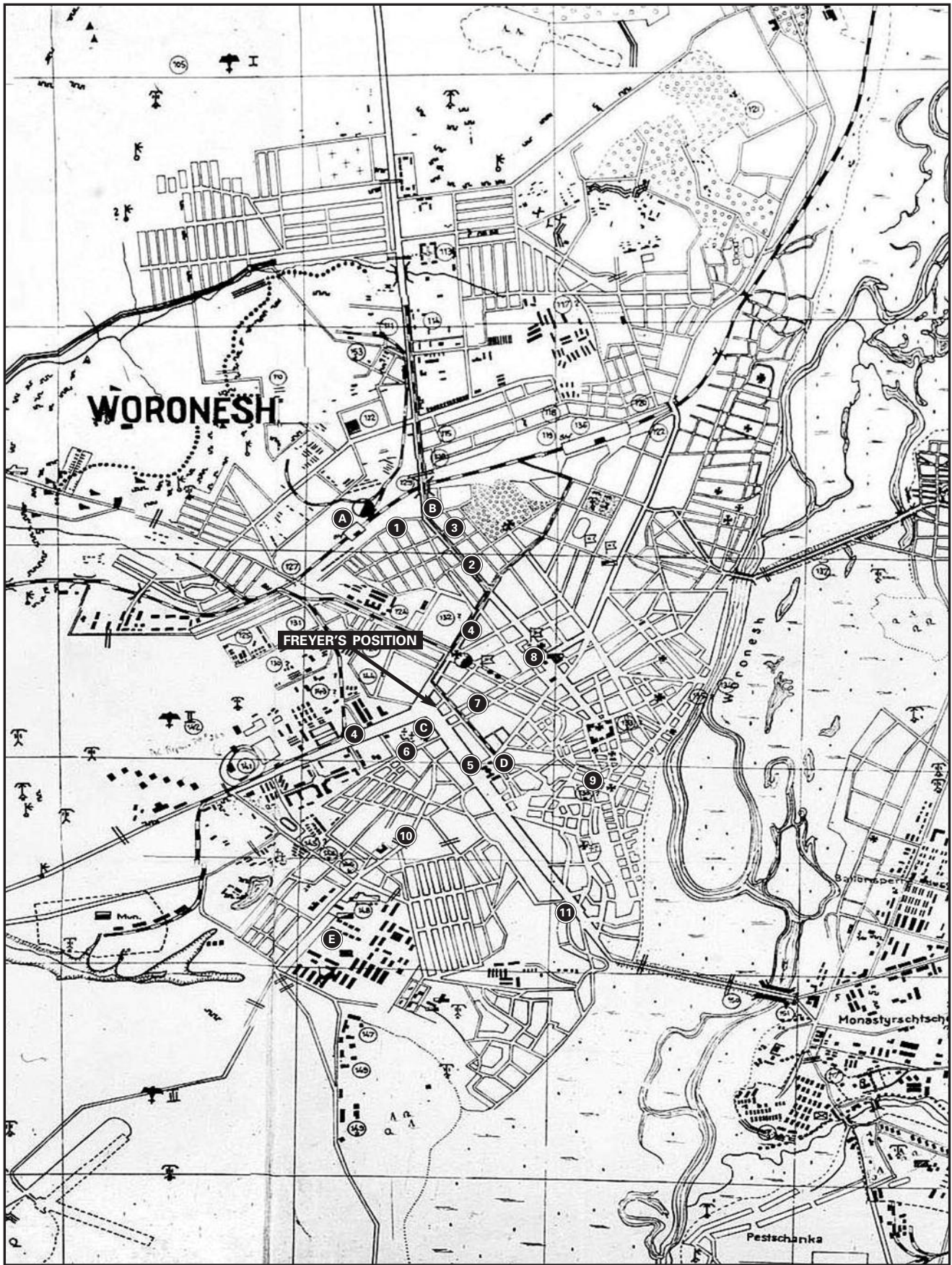
'As July 7 dawned, the armoured squadrons of Kradschützen-Abteilung 4 and



Oberleutnant Klaus Nordmann, adjutant of the I. Abteilung of Panzer-Regiment 24, flattens a sapling in Panzer III '362' while taking a short-cut across a park on the north-western corner of the Y-junction. Twenty-four hours later, the street in the distance would be a scene of carnage (see pages 38-41). Kriegsberichter Niermann used two cameras, one with regular black-and-white film, the other with rare colour stock.



Right: A hamburger restaurant and a pharmacy now fill the space.



JASON MARK

This town plan of Voronezh was produced by Vermessungs- und Karten-Abteilung 620 (a 4. Panzer-Armee mapping unit) on July 3, 1942 from a captured Red Army map, German Air Ministry intelligence and aerial photos. We have indicated the streets and locations that feature in our story. [1] Plekhanovskaya Street. [2] Donbasskaya Street. [3] 3rd Internatsionala Street. [4] Koltsovskaya Street (western part today named

Voroshilova Street). [5] 20-letiya Oktyabrya Street. [6] Novo Slobodskaya Street (today Moiseyeva Street). [7] Kirova Street. [8] 20th Anniversary of October Square (today Lenin Square). [9] Bolshaya Streletskaya Street. [10] Krasnoznamonnaya Street. [11] Baltiyskiy Alley. [A] Voronezh Railway Station II. [B] Voroshilovskaya Polyclinic. [C] Park of Culture and Rest. [D] Voronezh Aviation Institute. [E] Chizhov Military Barracks.



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Schützen-Regiment 26 were placed under the control of our combat group. Using the armoured half-tracks, other shock troops were set up to establish and maintain contact with the strongpoints and should also drive along individual streets to clear them, exactly according to plan. Single tanks were deployed at key intersections to shoot up enemy tanks.

'The operation, prepared down to the smallest detail, succeeded. By midday, after the elimination of local resistance, the southern part of the city was firmly in our hands. Although only Panzer-Schwadron Spannocchi [led by Rittmeister Emil Spannocchi] could be deployed, since the rest were halted due to fuel shortages, riflemen and panzer crews with assigned pioneers held all points reached. Reconnaissance pushed out to the railway determined that other German troops were nowhere in the city. On the other hand, the pressure of our troops attacking from the west and north-west was noticeable around midday. Before this attack, the Russians pressed against the city centre to reach the only intact southern bridge and gain the eastern bank. Numerous tanks, mostly T-34s, appeared, either individually or in Groups.'

Single panzers positioned themselves at key junctions to secure the location against enemy tanks. Niermann pictured Panzer '224' sitting at the intersection of Koltsovskaya and Plekhanovskaya Streets. As shown in the preceding frames of his film, one half-track squadron of the I. Abteilung of Schützen-Regiment 26 had already rolled past en route to the city's main square.



SERGEY POPOV

Voronezh has seen extensive development since the war and the quiet intersection of 1942 is today a busy juncture overlooked by multi-storey blocks.



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Left: Niermann's next shot shows what the commander of '224' was looking out for: a column of motorcycle sidecars and half-tracks from the same battalion, each vehicle travelling 50 metres apart, rolling north-eastwards along Koltsovskaya. Resembling a victory parade rather than an incursion into the depths of an enemy metropolis, the single-



SERGEY POPOV

column deployment shows that the Germans anticipated little resistance. Right: Six lanes of traffic now fill Koltsovskaya Street. Buildings like these, typical of 1930s Soviet architecture, are colloquially known as 'Stalinks' ('Stalin's Houses'). The former government building today houses banks, a post office and retail stores.



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By midday, with the southern half of Voronezh apparently in German hands, Niermann returned to the starting point of the day's operation at the southern end of 20-letiya Oktyabrya Street. On the right, Oberst Fritz von Broich, commander of Schützen-Brigade 24 (wearing the German Cross in Gold on his breast pocket), is briefed on the situation by his battalion commanders.

In the middle, awaiting orders, is Leutnant Hubertus Schulz, commander of the 2. Zug of the 2. Schwadron of Kradschützen-Abteilung 4 (wearing a peaked officer's cap). The SdKfz 250/3 command half-track belongs to the I. Bataillon of Schützen-Regiment 26. Visible in the distance, on the far side of the Voronezh river, is the city power station.



SERGEY POPOV

The house on the right has gone but vehicles still park on the open area today. Construction of the Voronezh Reservoir in the

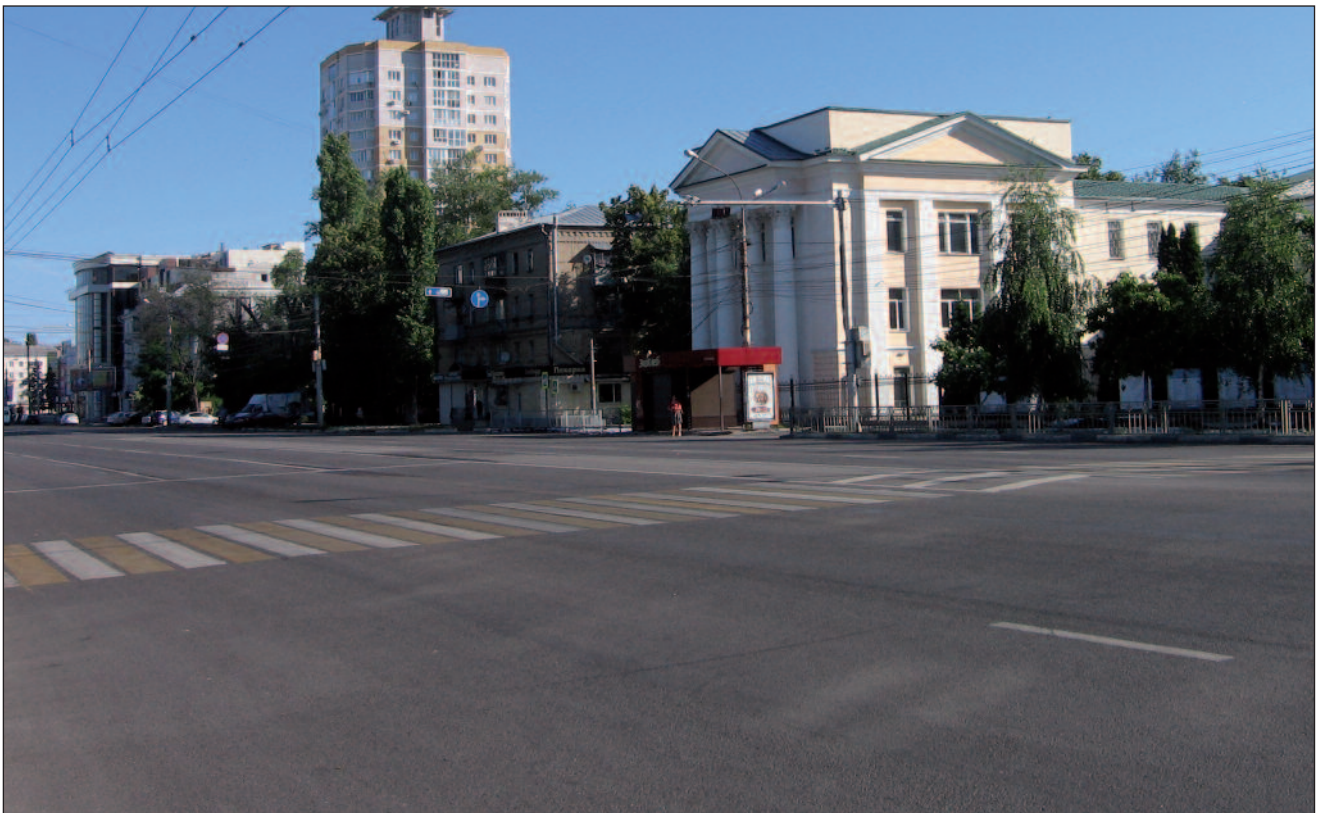
early 1970s widened and raised the river, making it far more visible today than in 1942.



JASON MARK

Shortly after midday, Leutnant Schulz was ordered to lead a combat reconnaissance into the city and link up with a patrol from the Grossdeutschland Division at the railway station. His Kampfgruppe consisted of his own platoon of eight half-tracks (one armed with a 3.7cm PaK anti-tank gun, the others with machine guns), a few other half-tracks from

the 1. and 3. Schwadrons, plus tanks from the 2. Schwadron of Panzer-Regiment 24. Here, the group pauses half-way along 20-letiya Oktyabrya, opposite the Voronezh Aviation Institute. Although the street had been swept a few hours earlier, Schulz still proceeded with caution due to reports of Soviet tanks roving the area.



SERGEY POPOV

The building on the right had been the Voronezh Engineering and Construction Institute until mid-June 1941, when it became

the Voronezh Aviation Institute. Today it is the Voronezh State University of Architecture and Civil Engineering.



JASON MARK

After battling two T-34s, Schulz's patrol halted on Plekhanovskaya Street just before the intersection with 3rd Internationala Street, barely two blocks from the railway station. On the right is Panzer '224', seen earlier guarding the intersection at the southern end of Plekhanovskaya. Smoke billows from a fuel

storage depot north of the railway line. Schulz and his men — including Oberwachtmeister Willy Neubacher, commander of the 3. Zug — left their vehicles and advanced towards the station on foot to meet the Grossdeutschland patrol, but nobody was there. Schulz subsequently pulled back his patrol.

As part of the 24. Panzer-Division attack from the south, a half-track platoon from the 2. Schwadron of Kradschützen-Abteilung 4, escorted by some panzers, reconnoitred into the southern part of the city. Patrol leader was Leutnant Hubertus Schulz:

'We drove north into the city on a wide arterial road, the vehicles at 50-metre intervals. Watching carefully in all directions, we groped our way from intersection to intersection. Nothing moved. Suddenly, an avenue tree about 100 metres ahead of us seemed to be moving. I stopped and watched through the binoculars. I distinctly recognised two well-camouflaged T-34s, which turned their barrels on us and opened fire a little later. We threw smoke-candles and I ordered "Dismount and vehicles back!" We jumped out of the vehicles and dispersed into the houses alongside the road. Due to the distance between vehicles, the platoon split apart and every man was on his own.

'The enemy tanks advanced and one secured directly to our right. We tried to attach a hollow-charge mine, but the tank kept moving before we could arm the detonator. Suddenly the street came alive. Shots whipped from all directions. We sought protection in the partially burned-out houses.

'After a while, the tanks returned at high speed; they had been taken under fire by our anti-tank guns, set up in a cross-street. That was the end of the scare. Even small-arms fire stopped once their tank protection had disappeared.

'The platoon rallied and we proceeded on foot to the station, only encountering individual resistance nests. Since we could not find Grossdeutschland troops far and wide, we retired to our vehicles and started our return trip. This reconnaissance revealed that the city was still occupied by infantry forces that were more or less fighting in isolated groups.'

With no apparent cohesive defence, Rittmeister Ulrich von Mirbach, commander of the 1. Schwadron of Panzer-Regiment 24, was ordered to block the northern road bridge over the Voronezh river with his squadron and an attached company of panzer grenadiers:

'The grenadiers sat on the back of the panzers and safeguarded them against close-combatants, but we saw neither enemy soldiers nor civilians in our advance to the northern outskirts. The city seemed to be completely deserted. Driving to the north-east, based on

the position of the smoke-tinted sun, we reached the riverside road just short of the north bridge after just half an hour. We halt and observe if the riverbank is enemy-occupied. Leutnant [Cay-Lorenz Baron] von Brockdorf drove up alongside my panzer at the front and requested permission to take the bridge with his platoon. My answer: No, but put enemy bridge guards under fire! After the first bursts of fire, the Russians blew up the bridge! We were about 150 metres away and saw the piles of the wooden bridge whirl through the air like matchsticks.'



SERGEY POPOV

A large building (just visible on the right) prevented Sergey from taking a more-accurate comparison but the large residential complex remains though since modified by the addition of two new wings that now enclose its U-shaped courtyard.

Right: The Grossdeutschland Division — the northern prong of the concentric attack on Voronezh — had crossed the Don river at two places near Semiluki on July 4 and from these bridgeheads had conducted two forays into the city. The first, on July 6, had reached Voronezh Railway Station II, but the second on July 7 was recalled because orders had been received to hand over operations to the 3. Infanterie-Division. This explains why Leutnant Schulz did not find any Grossdeutschland troops at the station. The division pulled out of the battle, withdrawing back over the Don and moving south to re-join Heeresgruppe Süd's main offensive. Here assault guns from Sturmgeschütz-Abteilung 'Grossdeutschland' head south along the west bank of the Veduga river, a small stream running four kilometres west of the Don, near the village of Yendovishche.



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Having held the northern flank of the XXXXVIII. Panzer-Korps front for two days, the 3. Infanterie-Division was ordered to take over the Grossdeutschland Division's sector north of Voronezh late on July 6. This shot, by Kriegsberichtler Koch of Propaganda-Kompanie 694, shows the relief underway.

Panzer IIs from the 3. Kompanie of Panzer-Abteilung 103 (the tank battalion attached to the 3. Infanterie-division) cross the Veduga river near Yendovishche en route for Voronezh, while Grossdeutschland infantrymen move in the opposite direction.

Other panzers and half-tracks also pressed into the eerily deserted city. A report by Panzer-Regiment 24 perfectly captures the atmosphere:

'Metre by metre, the fighting eats its way into the city. The heat of the large burning apartment blocks, together with gun fumes, lies over the thoroughfares. The bright façades stand out from the black clouds of smoke from the huge fires caused by our bombing attacks.'

Rittmeister Rudolf von Knebel-Doberitz, commander of the 3. Schwadron of Schützen-Regiment 21, inadvertently stumbled into a tank nest:

'In the morning, after a nocturnal operation, my squadron was designated regimental reserve and sent to "get some sleep" in a large barracks block about two kilometres behind the regimental command post. Fortunately, the squadron marched there in battle formation and with reconnaissance out in front because the barracks proved to be enemy-occupied, namely by tanks.

'The squadron settled down on the upper floors of several barracks buildings, but was then virtually encircled by the enemy tanks, which surrounded the buildings and kept them under fire. In the afternoon, with the support of the 9. Schwadron of Panzer-Regiment 24 as well as the attack by our 6. and 7.

Schwadrons, the barracks complex was mopped up, from which 36 enemy tanks broke out towards the city centre. We were

able to report this break-out by radio in time, and our panzers managed to knock out all of those tanks.'



SERGEY POPOV

The Church of the Intercession seen on the bluff in the background was Sergey's key to identifying the location of these two pictures. Having stood for over two centuries, it was almost completely destroyed during the war. Today, a new church is being built in a different style a hundred metres or so from the original site. With trees and undergrowth along the riverbank blocking the view, this is the best comparison possible.



BA.BILD 101-216-0435-39

With Grossdeutschland units pulling back westward across the Semiluki bridge, the 3. Infanterie-Division required its own crossing over the Don. A Soviet engineers' bridge at Starye Semiluki, north of Semiluki, had been seized mostly intact. The Germans replaced the missing eastern half with pontoons and metal bridging sections and Panzer-Abteilung 103 began cross-

ing on July 7, as seen in this picture by Koch. The tanks maintained strict spacing in order to spread the loading on the bridge and the heaviest vehicles, the Panzer IVs, crossed the span individually, maximum speed being set at eight kilometres per hour. On the horizon, providing cover for the crossing point, is an SdKfz 10/4 self-propelled 2cm anti-aircraft gun.



SERGEY POPOV

The crossing site remains unchanged, though nowadays the vegetation is considerably lush. In 1942 there was a blown road

bridge just a few hundred metres upstream from here but today it has been replaced by a modern highway bridge.



BA BILD 1011-216-0431-25

The missed rendezvous with Schulz's patrol prompted the 3. Infanterie-Division to despatch its own combat patrol to the station late on July 7. The force consisted of the tanks of Oberleutnant Werner Kunz's 2. Kompanie of Panzer-Abteilung 103, with the men of Oberleutnant Bernhard Sittig's 7. Kompanie of Infanterie-Regiment 8 riding on the decks.

Two war photographers, Koch and Sautter, the latter also from Propaganda-Kompanie 694, accompanied the force. Squatting behind the turret of one of the tanks, Sautter pictured the column as it trundled into the city via Donbasskaya Street. On the right are outbuildings of Voronezh Railway Station II.



BA BILD 1011-216-0436-05

Travelling on another vehicle, Koch pictured Panzer '241', the mount of Hauptfeldwebel Hans Walz, platoon leader of the

4. Zug (and a future Knight's Cross holder), ploughing through the pall of a smouldering T-60.

Right: Koch's next shot captured Oberleutnant Kunz's Panzer '200' approaching an apartment complex near the intersection of the railway line and Plekhanovskaya Street, a major north-south thoroughfare that joined the Zadonsk highway north of the city. Point vehicle is '212', the deputy platoon leader of Leutnant Fritz Heller's 1. Zug.

On the opposite (northern) side of town, the 3. Infanterie-Division continued to thicken its defensive line across the inter-fluve between the Don and Voronezh rivers. Oberst Küster's Infanterie-Regiment 29 formed the mainstay, but it was backed by 88mm guns, artillery assets and two panzer companies held in reserve in tattered aircraft hangars. Major Fau's motorcycle battalion scooted north to overlook the Zadonsk highway and control the adjacent woodlands. On the western outskirts, two battalions of Denkert's Infanterie-Regiment 8 attacked along the main road into Voronezh at 1600 hours: the I. Bataillon (Major Blume) advanced north of the road and the II. Bataillon (Major Scholze) south of it, while Oberleutnant Werner Kunz's 2. Kompanie of Panzer-Abteilung 103 (Major Jobst von Reinhardt) stuck close to the roadway



BA BILD 1011-216-0438-06A



BA BILD 1011-216-431-30

“Two panzers, without troops mounted, would be up front, all others would have infantry on them. Oberleutnant Kunz drove the third panzer and I sat next to him on the turret. We should really have travelled on different panzers but this made communication easier. All available panzers were quickly occupied and covered with riflemen. The pair up front, however, remained devoid of soldiers. We took off. The first panzer only boomed a few times along the streets in the approaching darkness, and everything quickly became quiet. We moved very slowly through the city severely devastated by Stuka attacks. The closer we got to the city centre, the more ghostly the picture became. Downed wires sometimes blocked our path. Several times machine-gun fire flared up so that we had to crouch behind the panzers, but the forward barrels replied quickly and decisively. Then we drove along the north-south axis, the main boulevard and business street of the city [Plekhanovskaya Street]. The Stukas did the greatest damage here. Then the street wound down to the bottom. The road was narrow, the houses not so high. We must be approaching the river quarter. Suddenly there was a halt. The leading

A small group of infantrymen has moved up to '212', obviously happy to see the panzers. The positioning of this picture by Sautter in the sequence of his and Koch's photos; the palpable relief on the men's faces, and the presence of 5cm PaK anti-tank guns (one can be seen behind the group) are all strong indications that these men do not belong to the force's own infantry. They are more likely members of the 24. Panzer-Division who have reached this position from the other side of the city.

because the panzers required its bridge to traverse a gully and tank ditch. Against strengthening resistance, the city fringe was reached at 1945 hours, but it was impossible for every house to be properly searched. The infantrymen had only penetrated 500 metres into the built-up zone by twilight. Oberleutnant Kunz wanted to slice through to the Voronezh river with his panzers and convinced Oberleutnant Bernhard Sittig, commander of the 7. Kompanie of Infanterie-Regiment 8, to come along:

Right: The tall apartment block still stands but today sandwiched in between two new buildings.



SERGEY POPOV

BA BILD 10/11/216-0436-08A



Left: The same infantrymen gather around '212' and its dismounted crew. The star attached to the webbing of the man closest to camera may mean he is wearing it as the leader in a forthcoming night patrol, thus making him clearly visible to his comrades following behind. The casual attitude of both the panzer crews and infantrymen appears to indicate that there



SERGEY POPOV

was no Soviet resistance in the immediate vicinity. The 125th Regiment of the NKVD Railway Services was responsible for defending Voronezh's train stations, so the lack of resistance suggests they had fled. *Right:* None of the old buildings on Donbasskaya Street remain, high-rise developments having taken their place.

BA BILD 10/11/216-0436-12



With the infantrymen having shoved aside the anti-tank obstacles, Panzer '212' cautiously moves northwards past the Voroshilovskaya Polyclinic (marked [B] on the town plan on page 27) towards a T-34 (hidden by the building on the left) sit-

ting askew on an embankment of the ramp to the Plekhanovskaya Street viaduct across the railway. The T-34 and another T-60 had been knocked out by the infantry's 5cm anti-tank guns.

SERGEY POPOV



vehicle had encountered a large bomb crater that blocked the street. The panzers couldn't continue, so we jumped down and proceeded on foot. In the darkness we recognised that we were facing a very steep descent down the street. The river was probably at the bottom. A reconnaissance troop went towards the river. The street ended and before us lay a meadow. It was a pitch-black night. A few minutes later the patrol returned and reported that the Voronezh river flowed 150 metres away. We were the first to reach the objective.'

This bold penetration, strengthened throughout the night by more companies, spelled disaster to the Soviets as it blocked elements of Major-General Ivan Chernyakhovsky's 18th Tank Corps that had been

Right: Trees mask the view of the polyclinic — today City Clinical Hospital No. 3 — but part of the building's small triangular roof is visible above the trees on the left.



BA.BILD 101-216-0436-31A

Kunz's men spent the night on Bolshaya Streletskaia Street, a cobbled road running along the sloping Strelets Ravine leading down to the west bank of the Voronezh river. The panzer in the foreground of this picture by Koch is '213' from the 1. Zug. While four members of each tank crew slept, the

fifth kept watch. Peace reigned during the night. On the morning of July 8, Kunz's company rolled north out of the city to join the rest of Panzer-Abteilung 103 near the airfield on Voronezh's northern outskirts. In the background is the Seek of the Lost Church.



SERGEY POPOV

Many of the original houses still stand on Bolshaya Streletskaia Street though the landmark church on its corner with Vyborgskaya Street is long gone. Having been badly damaged during the war, the ruined temple was later turned into a multi-storey residential building. Then, in the early 1960s,

rumours spread among believers of the miraculous appearance of an image of the Virgin Mary on an altar that had been uncovered. Pilgrimages to the site began but, despite a petition, the authorities evicted the residents and blew up the remains. A brand-new gated community now occupies the site.



While Kunz's men were securing their overnight billets, a scene of high drama was playing out a few kilometres away. In the afternoon of July 7, three rifle squadrons of Schützen-Regiment 21, supported by a panzer company, squeezed the 110th Tank Brigade out of the Chizhov barracks complex located in the military township. Towards dusk, an estimated 36 Soviet tanks broke out towards the city centre. The German riflemen reported this escape by radio, enabling an ambush to be set up. Wachtmeister Siegfried Freyer and his long-barrel Panzer IV '434' from the 3. Zug of the 4. Schwadron of Panzer-Regiment 24

was deployed at the Y-junction formed by 20-letiya Oktyabrya Street and the dog-legged Koltsovskaya Street (see the town plan on page 27). Freyer positioned his panzer behind a wooden fence, facing south, and in the subsequent night action knocked out 11 of the Soviet tanks — an extraordinary feat that won him the Knight's Cross. No photos of the nocturnal engagement exist but the aftermath was recorded by numerous Kriegsberichter and anyone else with a camera. This is the view looking south down 20-letiya Oktyabrya from Koltsovskaya. Visible are six T-34s and two T-60s.

released from Stavka Reserve on July 4 and had moved into the city from the south the previous day. One of its formations, Lieutenant-Colonel Isaak Eisenberg's 110th Tank Brigade, was aware that panzers were present, yet after being evicted from the barracks by Rittmeister von Knebel-Doberitz's men, it still stumbled into an ambush at the Y-junction of Koltsovskaya and 20-letiya

Oktyabrya Streets. During the wild nocturnal mêlée, Wachtmeister Siegfried Freyer and his Panzer IV '434' of the 4. Schwadron of Panzer-Regiment 24 knocked out 11 tanks (nine T-34s and two T-60s):

'On July 7, I took up position with my Panzer IV long-barrel at an important crossroads in Voronezh, well camouflaged in a garden next to a house. In front of the panzer

was a wooden fence, covering us from view from the street. Our orders were to support our panzer grenadiers who were attempting to clear the town, and to protect them from enemy tanks. During the day, our only problems came from scattered Russian troops, but the actions between friend and foe in the town kept us on our toes. It was a hot day but we didn't realise that the evening was going



SERGEY POPOV

Freyer occupied the position where the trees and apartment block on the far left now stand. This location restricted his field

of fire and reduced range to less than 100 metres, but kept his panzer out of the line of fire for the maximum amount of time.



JASON MARK

Above: Lieutenant-Colonel Isaak Eisenberg's 110th Tank Brigade came rolling along Krasnoznamonnaya (Red Banner) Street, then turned left into 20-letiya Oktyabrya Street, fully aware that German armour was in the area. Their combat journal states that 'by 1800 hours on July 7, the enemy had assembled up to a battalion of medium tanks along Koltsovskaya Street and installed anti-tank guns along Kirova Street and other streets leading to the Cherniavskiy bridge.' With this knowledge, Eisenberg chose to escape under the cover of night. However, his force ran straight into Freyer's ambush, the darkness suddenly erupting in a welter of muzzle flashes, sparks and flames, and the metallic thud of solid shot puncturing armour. The Soviet drivers panicked, one T-34 ramming the back of another and scrabbling up onto its engine deck, and another colliding with a T-60 and slewing it across the road.

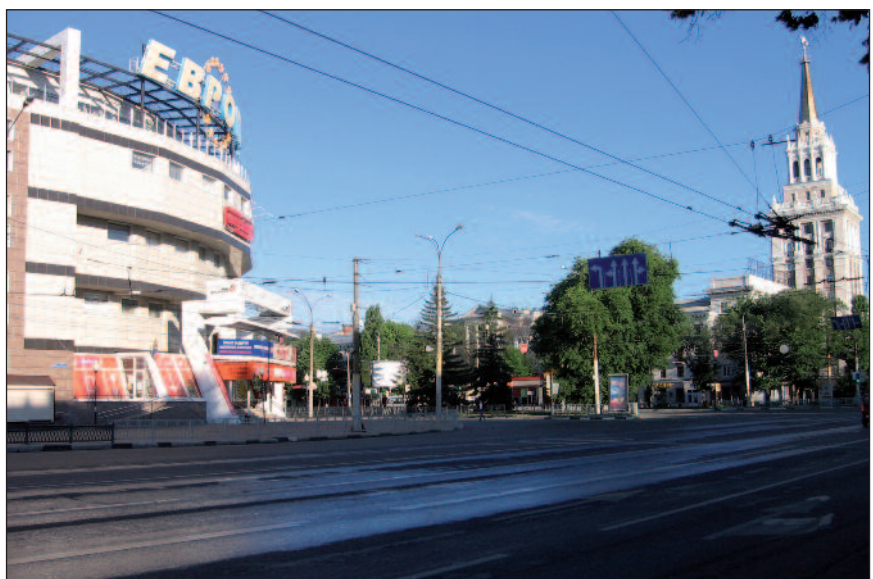
to be even hotter. At about 2000 hours, a T-34 appeared from a side street to our left and attempted to get past us at high speed. It was followed by a column of about 30 more tanks and we had to prevent this break-out. We engaged them in quick succession and knocked out the first three T-34s, then our gunner Unteroffizier Alfons Fischer reported: "The gun is jammed!" Our gun was new and had had some teething troubles because every second or third round the empty shell-case got stuck in the breach. Our driver, Unteroffizier Wilhelm Schmidt, and I jumped out of the panzer, screwed together the barrel cleaner and with it pushed the casing out of the breach. The next Russian tank fired wildly and wounded our loader Gefreiter Arnold Groll in the head. We pulled him out of the panzer and our radioman, Gefreiter Heinrich Müller, took his place to help operate our weapon. We fired repeatedly and kept on hitting targets. We had to grab the barrel cleaner a few more times and push out the jammed shells and then quickly take cover. The Russians shredded the fence in front of us with their fire, but didn't hit our panzer. We, however, hit 11 enemy tanks, the only time they got past us was when our gun jammed. The engagement lasted about 20 minutes, by then, 11 enemy tanks were on fire in front of us, the flames and explosions giving the place an eerie appearance. That is how the rest of our Schwadron found us, despite the darkness.'

Right: Normally this street is full of traffic but Sergey took his comparisons on a Sunday morning to match the emptiness of the wartime photos.



JASON MARK

The two T-34s on the left in the top picture have their turrets at six o'clock position (towards Freyer's location), but the one seen here is facing the opposite direction. In the background are another T-34 and two T-60s, making a total of seven T-34s and four T-60s. The sum of 11 corroborates Freyer's account, but Panzer-Regiment 24's order of the day incorrectly breaks that figure down to nine T-34s and two T-60s.



SERGEY POPOV



JASON MARK

Left: The Soviet view of Freyer's ambush. Panzer '434' was hidden behind the fence seen demolished in the middle distance on the right. Freyer reported that 'the Russians shredded the fence in front of us with their fire, but didn't hit our panzer.' An explanation can be found in the June 6 entry of 110th Tank



SERGEY POPOV

Brigade's combat journal: 'There were no anti-tank shells, generally there were just five fragmentation shells per tank and in some tanks there were no shells at all.' **Right:** None of the wartime structures remain, Voronezh having grown into a metropolis of over one million.



COLIN NICOL

Another view of the T-34 whose driver kept spinning his tracks so desperately that he clawed away parts of the leading T-34 and churned the rear part of his tank into the asphalt road surface. Note that the T-60 that stood alongside and the one that was pushed sideways by the T-34 on the right have both gone: all four knocked out light tanks were dragged to Koltsovskaya Street to form a barricade.



SERGEY POPOV

Generalleutnant Henrici, commander of the 16. Infanterie-Division (mot.), was ordered to relieve the 24. Panzer-Division. His division crossed the Don over the bridge at Yunevka but the attack into the city by Oberst Alexander Vial's Infanterie-Regiment 60 scheduled for the pre-noon hours of July 7 was postponed because not all elements had closed up. Eventually, two battalions, supported by anti-tank guns, self-propelled guns and artillery, moved off at 1700 hours toward the large forest south-west of Voronezh. The II. Bataillon (Major Otto Lindner) reached the hill 1.5 kilometres north of the Eierwäldchen (Egg Copse) at 1830 hours, but its sister battalion went to ground under ferocious defensive fire. However, following a rocket barrage, the I. Bataillon surged forward and likewise reached the hill. Supporting artillery knocked out two counter-attacking T-34s. Despite failing light, the regiment was ordered to comb through the city and relieve elements of the 24. Panzer-Division holding position along the city's eastern edge by 0500 hours the next morning, but Oberst Vial refused because of the fierce resistance and the expected bitter house-to-house fighting. He stated that the attack would only commence the next morning with panzer support.

With Division's permission, Vial ordered Panzer-Abteilung 116 to move its panzers into the city to support his infantry despite protests by its commander, Major Johann-Matthias Graf von der Schulenberg. Two panzer groups were formed: Oberleutnant Wilfried Palm with the 2. and 4. Kompanien (eight Panzer IIIs and four Panzer IVs) supported the I. Bataillon of Infanterie-Regiment 60 on the left, and Oberleutnant Friedrich Stöltzing with 13 Panzer IIIs of the 3. Kompanie and three Panzer IVs from the 4. Kompanie went with the II. Bataillon on the right. Schulenberg stressed that the panzer groups not be splintered and that infantrymen advance ahead of the panzers.

Kampfgruppe Vial's attack into Voronezh began at 0745 hours on July 8. Not until the city fringe was reached did the

Left: The same view from the north-west corner of Koltsovskaya Street. The western extension of Koltsovskaya was renamed Voroshilova Street after the war.



COLIN NICOL

Above: In their death throes, these three T-34s effectively blocked the main arc of Freyer's fire and enabled others to escape the death zone. Instead of veering north-east along Koltsovskaya Street as planned, the column turned west and found refuge amongst the huts north of the barracks. Eisenberg's brigade did not escape its fate for long: at the end of July 8, the 18th Tank Corps recorded in its combat journal that '110th Tank Brigade continued to escape encirclement while losing all available tanks'. Eisenberg and his Chief-of-Staff Lieutenant-Colonel Aleksey Payzanskiy escaped but four other staff officers did not, including the brigade's commissar (Senior Battalion Commissar Ivan Paliy) and chief of brigade HQ, Major Belichev. The survivors gathered in woodlands north of Maklok, a village north-east of Voronezh.



SERGEY POPOV

The prominent water tower on Koltsovskaya Street was toppled during the German occupation of the city. Residential apartments erected in the 1950s and 1960s now occupy the site.

I. Bataillon and Panzergruppe Palm run into frantic resistance from T-34s, T-60s and masses of anti-tank rifles. Soviet tanks deployed skilfully, flanking the streets from hidden positions and throttling progress. Despite promises, German infantry clustered behind their armoured shepherds. The panzers bypassed some tanks and in this manner shot up six T-34s and two T-60s, but Red Army soldiers then began reporting all panzer movements, preventing any further side-step manoeuvres and causing the first panzer casualties: the turrets of two Panzer IVs were jammed by anti-tank rifle strikes, while three Panzer IIIs were lightly damaged by tank fire, which rendered all

Right: On July 23, 1942, during a break in the fighting, Oberst Gustav-Adolf Riebel and Major Hild-Wilfried von Winterfeld, commander of Panzer-Regiment 24 and its I. Abteilung respectively, awarded Freyer the Ritterkreuz in a small ceremony in the village of Krasnaya Zvezda, while the rest of the crew were recognised for their bravery with the Iron Cross First Class. It was a rare feat for an entire crew to wear this decoration. 'In the name of the regiment', wrote Riebel in an Order of the Day, 'I wish to express my congratulations to Wachtmeister Freyer for his high war decoration. The regiment views with pride and pleasure our Knight's Cross bearer and wishes him further success.' (L-R): Major von Winterfeld, Wachtmeister Freyer, Unteroffizier Alfons Fischer (gunner), Unteroffizier Wilhelm Schmidt (driver) and Gefreiter Heinrich Müller (radioman). Gefreiter Arnold Groll (loader) missed the ceremony because he was in hospital having his wounds treated.



JASON MARK



Informed that they would be relieved by the 16. Infanterie-Division, elements of the 24. Panzer-Division began leaving Voronezh during the night and early morning of July 8. With combat still simmering in the industrial district and barracks area, the safest route out of the city was to the south. During its two days of fighting (July 7-8), the division had suffered 125

casualties: two officers and 36 NCOs/men killed, four officers and 81 other ranks wounded, and two men missing. Here, an SdKfz 250 half-track of Kradschützen-Abteilung 4 carefully negotiates the cobbled slope of 20-letiya Oktyabrya Street. Baltiyskiy Alley, the small side street seen in the picture on page 25, is just behind the photographer.



The Chizhovskiy Bridgehead Memorial Complex (left), dedicated to the Red Army soldiers who formed a bridgehead

across the Voronezh river in August-September 1942, now stands sentinel at the city's south-eastern entrance.

Right: Arriving with the 16. Infanterie-Division were two new photographers, Kriegsberichtler Kempe and Gregor of Propaganda-Kompanie OBdH (Oberbefehlshaber des Heeres) and Propaganda-Kompanie 694 respectively. Early on the morning of July 8, Kempe pictured the crew of a 5cm PaK anti-tank gun in defilade position on the sandy verge half-way down 20-letiya Oktyabrya Street. In the distance is a T-34 that was disabled two days earlier. A gunner from the 24. Panzer-Division described the difficulty of engaging enemy tanks from such a position: 'Our anti-tank gun slipped back at least one and a half metres and had to be re-aimed after every shot because the gun spades found no real purchase in the soft and damp sand.' The gun crew seen in this picture itself destroyed a tank at 2030 hours in the evening, as Oberfähnrich Saborowski from the 7. Kompanie of Infanterie-Regiment 60 of the 16. Infanterie-Division reports: 'Two T-34s suddenly appeared from the rear. After about 200 metres, one ran over mines placed in front of the bridge and burned there after a mighty detonation. The second received a PaK hit on the right track and lost it. Nevertheless, the tank rolled on and fired its machine guns and cannon into my platoon until it hit the embankment. One of the crew got out. I took him prisoner and had one of my messengers guard him. Then I dealt with the bogged tank with hand-grenades from about 20 metres away because two more tanks on the other side of the Voronezh river provided cover fire for the stuck tank. In order to avoid further losses, I grabbed two explosive charges. Regardless of my wounded knees and enemy fire, I jumped onto the tank from behind and placed an explosive charge on it. The first charge did not set the tank on fire, so I prepared a second one. I put it behind the turret. Following a powerful detonation, the hatch was torn off and a burning crewman hurled from the turret. Immediately afterwards, the tank burned brightly and the ammunition detonated.'



BA BILD 1011:748-0081G-11



NIOD 16772

temporarily non-operational. While shelling a factory near the military barracks, Oberleutnant Palm's Panzer IV '400' was struck in the turret by a concealed T-34 and burned instantly. Palm died of his injuries. Any further advance augured little success, so the panzers pulled back.

The right Kampfgruppe with Stölting's panzers only needed to overcome a solitary plucky Soviet tank before it reached its objective, the southern Voronezh road bridge.

At 0900 hours, the 16. Infanterie-Division's second regiment, Infanterie-Regiment 156 led by Oberstleutnant Johannes Eisermann, reported that its II. Bataillon had reached the railway station from the south-east. Because Kampfgruppe Vial had made good progress, its supporting artillery changed position into the city. At 1330 hours, the I. Bataillon of Infanterie-Regiment 60 encountered stubborn resistance on the north-eastern city limits and was temporarily pinned down. The regiment's III. Bataillon, held in reserve until this point, moved off from the south with the task of clearing the city up to the railway line, but it too ran into obstinate resistance and tanks in the industrial area. Due to the tank threat, particularly at major intersections, anti-tank guns were moved into position for the night.

Once elements of the 16. Infanterie-Division made contact, Infanterie-Regiment 8 of Schlömer's 3. Infanterie-Division shuffled northward into a warren of allotments and shacks and started setting up eastward-facing defences. The rest of Schlömer's division

Standing almost on the same spot, PK Gregor pictured passenger cars and motorbikes of the 16. Infanterie-Division driving up the same incline. Its Infanterie-Regiment 156 had begun relieving Schützen-Regiment 21 on the city's south-eastern sector on July 7: the II. Bataillon replaced the riflemen in the central city, the III. Bataillon secured to the east in the southern part of Voronezh, and the I. Bataillon held position along the Voronezh river down to its confluence with the Don.



SERGEY POPOV

Looking north up the ascending avenue today.



Left: Gregor next pictured men of Infanterie-Regiment 156 marching past the knocked-out T-34. A column of Panzer IIs from Panzer-Regiment 24 idles at the top of the road. This section of 20-letiya Oktyabrya Street was ill-suited for tanks: the elevated ground along both sides formed a defile, while at the



SERGEY POPOV

bottom the road headed onto a long, exposed causeway that ran across meadowland to the Voronezh river bridge. **Right:** 'Voronezh, City of Military Glory', reads the slogan on the left. This status was conferred to the city by President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin on February 16, 2008.

began shifting the Nordriegelstellung (northern blocking position) northward onto higher ground. At 0800 hours, Major Günther Mollenhauer's II. Bataillon of Infanterie-Regiment 29, supported by the tanks of Hauptmann Haen's 1. Kompanie of Panzer-Abteilung 103, attacked over exposed ground towards the village of Podgornoye, held by weak remnants of Lieutenant-Colonel Ivan Ulitin's 232nd Rifle Division. Despite inflicting considerable casualties on Mollenhauer's infantry with a few machine guns, the depleted Siberians could not hold

back the onslaught and retreated. Shortly afterwards, movement was seen in the woods two kilometres to the north. Substantial

Soviet forces had arrived, including elements of Chernyakhovsky's 18th Tank Corps (four tank battalions and a motorised infantry bat-

Right: As the men of the 16. Infanterie-Division prepared to launch their attack on the morning of July 8, they were surprised to hear a special radio report about the fall of Voronezh, a broadcast that proved premature. Pre-battle reconnaissance revealed powerful Soviet forces, including 30 to 40 tanks, in the industrial area west of the city, around the railway station, on the airfield and tank training ground, and in the military township known as Red or Military Town N. I. Muralov. This T-34 stranded in a bomb crater on Krasnoznamonnaya Street most likely blundered into it during 110th Tank Brigade's nocturnal break-out from the Chizhov barracks. Aerial photos reveal a string of bomb craters — at least five — along this stretch of tramway.



NIOD 16783



SERGEY POPOV

The No. 2 tram, connecting the military town with the city, ran along Krasnoznamonnaya Street until 2009 when the rails were lifted.

talion), later joined by sub-units of Major-General Pyotr Zykov's 121st Rifle Division and Lieutenant-Colonel Sergey Styzika's 14th Tank Brigade. Major Mollenhauer reported:

'Tanks rolled up, but then pulled back after the first ones were knocked out. The infantry attack came in on a slope that fell gently towards the battalion's position. The battalion waited until the Russians were within 200 metres before opening fire. Then all weapons fired at once and smashed back the attack with heavy losses [for the Russians].'

Styzika's 14th Tank Brigade lost nine Lend-Lease Mark III Valentines and four BT-7s, and had 11 men killed — including two battalion commanders (Major Pyotr Fomichev and Captain Bogatyuk) — and 18 wounded.

German forces crossed the Zadonsk highway and infiltrated the botanical garden and campus of the agricultural college on the north-eastern outskirts of the city. A new defensive front was established, the 88mm and anti-tank guns forming a Panzerriegel (anti-tank barrier) behind the infantry while a mobile panzer reserve stood by in the forest east of Podkletnoye.

At 7.45 a.m. on July 8, preceded by an artillery barrage on the barracks and airfield hangars, Infanterie-Regiment 60 moved off to attack the city from the south-west. In support were two mixed groups from Panzer-Abteilung 116, until then held in reserve in woodlands near Malyshevo but now called into action with the 2. Kompanie and part of the 4. Kompanie under Oberleutnant Wilfried Palm on the left and the 3. Kompanie with the remainder of the 4. Kompanie under Oberleutnant Friedrich Stölting on the right. Kriegsberichterstatter Sonntag went with Stölting's group and he pictured a Panzer III from the 3. Kompanie driving along cobbled Novo Slobodskaya Street, just short of the intersection with 20-letiya Oktyabrya Street. Palm's group encountered fierce opposition and lost several tanks, while Stölting had an easier time, as revealed in his combat report: 'The company was subordinated to the II. Bataillon of Infanterie-Regiment 60 with 13 Panzer IIIs and three Panzer IVs. The infantry battalion advanced in its attack lane with two companies in the forward line.'



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SOVIET BREAK-OUT ATTEMPT

In the pre-dawn gloom of July 9, the remaining Soviet tanks inside Voronezh launched a desperate break-out bid, attempting to escape in two different directions, eastwards to the city's southern road bridge at Monastyrshchenka, and southwards to the Don bridge at Yunevka and the ferry site over the Voronezh at Yakovlevka, the latter two sites being well beyond the city. Bursting out of the industrial area in several groups, Colonel Vasili Konovalov's 181st Tank Brigade, followed by lorries filled with soldiers, charged south along the city streets. About a dozen tanks with mounted infantry, firing from all barrels, broke through the ranks of the I. Bataillon of Infanterie-Regiment 60 and rolled over Vial's regimental command post. Most of the tanks were destroyed inside the city limits, just three managing to pass through and continue southwards. However, before they got to any of the bridges or ferries, they encountered Infanterie-Regiment 156. Oberstleutnant Eisermann, its commander, was alerted by gun-fire. One T-34 was knocked out directly in front of his command post, another came to grief on mines on the Monastyrshchenka bridge. The crews, some wounded, were captured. Prisoners asserted that these tanks were tasked with breaking through to the south or south-west in order to facilitate the escape of about 100 infantrymen. While some trucks were captured, others hurtled toward the ferry site at Shilovo, where their men abandoned them and swam the Voronezh. A single T-34 made it to the Yunevka bridge and surprised its garrison. A Russian officer dismounted under 2cm Flak fire and guided his tank onto the narrow bridge, but he fell, wounded. An 88mm gun on the southern bank then struck the tank, causing it to reverse in panic and run over the wounded officer. Its journey ended when it careered down a slope.

In one week, Konovalov's 181st Tank Brigade, lost 35 T-34s and 13 T-60s, as well as 72 dead, 22 wounded (evacuated to hospital) and 460 missing. Amongst the casualties were 80 officers (16 dead, seven wounded and 57 missing). The other formation of the 18th Tank Corps deployed in the city, Eisenberg's 110th Tank Brigade, had lost 33 T-34s and 13 T-60s, while 11 T-34s and eight T-60s were evacuated for repairs. Personnel losses were 40 dead, 83 wounded and 235 missing.

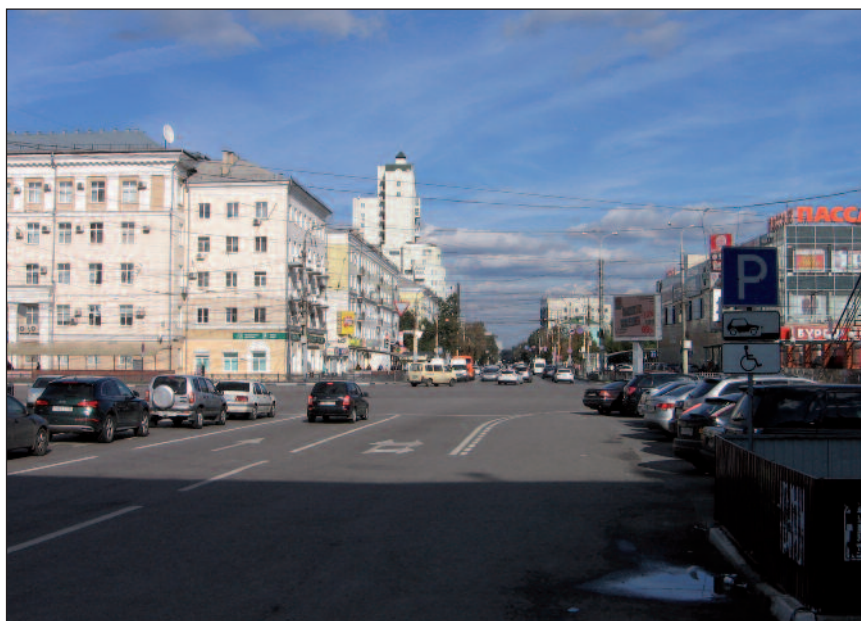
Right: Novo Slobodskaya Street was renamed Moiseyeva Street in 1967 in honour of Aleksei Moiseyev, a Bolshevik coup leader shot by the White Guards in 1919.

'My company was divided into three groups. Each light platoon was allocated one Panzer IV. Leutnant Endres led the left Panzergruppe, Leutnant Schaumann the right, while Leutnant Kinzer's was in reserve. Upon setting off, Leutnant Endres's group received fire from enemy tanks and anti-tank guns. Panzer '311' (Leutnant Endres) was hit and damaged by an anti-tank gun. Endres and his group were withdrawn behind a rise in the ground. Leutnant Kinzer was moved up from the right and took over the task of Leutnant Endres, who remained with the reserve group. The battalion progressed along its attack lane without enemy contact to the objective (eastern edge of the city). By listening in to the radio messages of Oberleutnant Palm's group, my company was aware of the resistance there. I pivoted Leutnant Endres's reserve group leftward in order to strike the resistance nest holding up Palm from the south-east, but after discussions with Oberleutnant Palm via radio, this intervention was not desired.' Shortly afterwards, Palm's Panzer IV was struck and he was fatally wounded. After reaching the eastern edge of the city, Stölting's panzers turned off and reached the southern bridge without incident. The battalion commander, Major Johann-Matthias von der Schulenberg, then ordered Stölting to concentrate his platoons along 20-letiya Oktyabrya Street, about two kilometres north of the bridge, and so they pulled back to the 'Park of the Living and the Dead', their vehicles having barely any fuel left. Panzer-Abteilung 116 only operated in Voronezh for one day, but even that was too much for Major von der Schulenberg: 'The old principle has once again been proven: panzers have no place in city fighting.' The battalion set in march to Ustyie in the evening, having lost seven Panzer IIIs and three Panzer IVs.

North of the city, two Soviet infantry regiments attacked out of the forest at dawn, striking the I. Bataillon of Infanterie-Regiment 8 and Haen's company of panzers. Twenty-seven Soviet tanks were knocked out. Ten tanks pushed along the railway into the city and suddenly appeared in the rear of the regiment's II. Bataillon. Four of them were blasted by self-propelled 7.62cm Marders of Panzerjäger-Abteilung 3.

SOVIET COUNTER-OFFENSIVE

On July 10, Generalleutnant Oskar Blümm's 57. Infanterie-Division crossed the Don near the village of Malyshevo, just north of the Yunevka bridge, and began relieving Henrici's 16. Infanterie-Division in the southern part of the bridgehead. Meanwhile, in the northern part, on the front of the 3. Infanterie-Division, the Soviet 476th Separate Tank Battalion moved against



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A self-propelled 2cm Flak gun of Infanterie-Regiment 60 that accompanied Stölting's column drives south along 20-letiya Oktyabrya Street, pictured by Sonntag. Soviet aircraft rarely appeared over the city — the 24. Panzer-Division downed two on July 7 — so the rapid-firing guns were mostly deployed against enemy strongholds. Oberstleutnant Johannes Eisermann, the commander of Infanterie-Regiment 156, recalled that all day on July 8 'there was frequent street and house combat against fiercely defended resistance nests. This fighting was very well supported by our self-propelled 2cm Flak platoon.' Each motorised infantry regiment possessed one company of light flak.

Podgornoye with its 15 KV-1s. Haen's panzer company knocked out seven of the behemoths but paid a steep price: eight dead and four wounded. An armour-piercing round took off Oberfeldwebel Willy Tiemann's head, while Feldwebel August Aretz's panzer was shot into flames: just one crew member survived. A KV punctured Feldwebel Josef Mühlmichl's Panzer III from the side. The gunner was killed instantly, Mühlmichl's feet were torn off and he bled to death within a few minutes.

Despite destroying 64 enemy tanks between July 6 and 10, the staff of the 3. Infanterie-Division assessed all of these attacks as probes and therefore expected a major assault by the tank corps assembling in the woods. When this large-scale attack failed to eventuate on July 11, the German command decided to take the railway bridge four kilometres north of the city, but was forestalled by a powerful Soviet artillery response. Due to the tense situation, the planned relief of Schlömer's division by Generalleutnant Dietrich Kraiss's 168. Infanterie-Division was delayed until the following day.

German intelligence was spot on: the Red Army was indeed preparing a major assault. This offensive was entrusted to Lieutenant-General Antoniuk's 60th Army, fresh from reserve. Colonel Pavel Kochetkov's 161st Rifle Division, supported by Colonel Fedor Korol's 111th Tank Brigade, the 476th Separate Tank Battalion and four companies of heavy KVs, was ordered to advance towards the Podgornoye workers settlement. Attacking into the north-eastern outskirts of Voronezh were Colonel Mikhail Mikeladze's 195th and Zykov's 121st Rifle Divisions, each supported by a tank brigade. Three German infantry battalions therefore faced three fresh Soviet divisions.

After preparatory rocket and artillery fire, the German defenders heard a guttural 'uraaaaa' swell from the woods at 1000 hours on July 12. The Soviet attack came in three wedges: the first along the railway struck the I. Bataillon of Infanterie-Regiment 8 with its full weight; the second down the highway pushed into the regiment's III. Bataillon while the third raced towards the II. Bataillon of Infanterie-Regiment 29 in Podgornoye. Swirling dust stained the sun-

bleached sky. The 195th and 121st Rifle Divisions, supported by 26 tanks, overran German infantry positions, but by the afternoon 88s had knocked out 14 of the tanks and the attack was repulsed. The III. Bataillon of Infanterie-Regiment 8 parried the attack down the highway.

In the west, Hauptmann Ewald von Stünzner, commander of the 3. Kompanie of Panzer-Abteilung 103, had positioned his seven long-barrel Panzer IVs amongst Podgornoye's shacks, his western flank protected by an oxbow lake. In the rush to Podgornoye, the riflemen of the 161st Rifle Division were overtaken by the 111th Tank Brigade. Leading the way were KV-1s and T-34s, followed by a second wave with Mark II Matildas and T-34s with mounted infantry. The Germans counted 40 tanks. Hauptmann von Stünzner opened fire at close range, buffeting the Soviet tanks with a squall of projectiles. Several brewed up, others veered away into a minefield, while the rest,

together with the riflemen, retreated north to the safety of the woods. Soviet artillery pummeled the village and another attack began, this time with 26 tanks. Fighting surged until 1400 hours, then the Soviets gave up after losing 34 tanks. Stünzner suffered zero combat losses and secured himself the Knight's Cross.

Soviet losses were ghastly: the 161st Rifle Division had lost a staggering 574 men killed, 1,262 wounded and 144 missing between July 12 and 14, including 40 dead officers on July 12 alone. Seven officers from the 111th Tank Brigade were killed on the 12th.

On July 13 the Soviets repeated their breakthrough attempt with weaker forces. Stukas intervened from 0300 hours. Stünzner's 3. Kompanie was replaced by Haen's 1. Kompanie, which knocked out ten tanks during the day. Even though combat had not yet concluded, Schlömer's division was relieved by the 168. Infanterie-Division in the evening. Panzer-Abteilung 103 and Panzerjäger-Abteilung 3 remained for another 24 hours.

Responsibility for holding Voronezh now fell to the purely infantry formations of Korpsgruppe Blümm (57., 75. and 323. Infanterie-Divisions) under Generalleutnant Blümm, the commander of the 57. Division. Heavy fighting — exclusively German defence against Soviet tank-heavy attacks — continued until July 24. Small-scale combat continued thereafter, punctuated occasionally by large-scale probing attacks that resulted in bloody Soviet losses, but front lines around Voronezh ossified as focus shifted southward to the mighty battles in the Don bend, Stalingrad (see *After the Battle* No. 166) and the Caucasus. The men of General der Infanterie Hans von Salmuth's 2. Armee occupied Voronezh for the next five months.

FATAL DELAY?

The German advance to Voronezh no doubt an emphatic victory that secured an eastern anchor point for a north-facing defensive line, but Hitler was convinced that the week-long delay resulting from the commitment of armoured forces to capture the city had derailed the timetable for 'Blau', squandered opportunities to eliminate major Red Army formations and fatally deferred the capture of Stalingrad.

On July 5, Hitler had permitted Generalfeldmarschall von Bock to continue with the occupation of Voronezh but attempted to stimulate the offensive by bisecting his Heeresgruppe Süd into two formations — Heeresgruppen A and B, in order to attain



Fortunately, the building at No. 88 is one of the few on 20-letiya Oktyabrya to have escaped redevelopment since the war.



Left: Set up at the crossroads of Novo Slobodskaya/Kirova and 20-letiya Oktyabrya Streets, the crew of 8.8cm Flak gun *Berta* peer into the afternoon sun, ready to intercept Soviet tanks approaching from the west. Their gun shield boasts an impressive kill tally of 11 aircraft, 40 tanks and 15 bunkers, though it is likely that this score sheet represents the entire four-gun battery. Photo reporter Karl Hubert Müller-Schwanneke of



SERGEY POPOV

Propaganda-Kompanie 670, attached to the 2. Armee, took several photos of this gun and its crew, one of which featured on the cover of the Luftwaffe periodical *Der Adler*. The shield-and-oakleaf emblem represents the I. Flak-Korps and the white 'T' shape on the other mudguard probably denotes the flak battalion, though it is unknown which one. **Right:** A perfect comparison by Sergey, looking eastwards into Kirova Street.

widely spaced objectives, namely Stalingrad and the Caucasus — and shifting the main effort southward. General Paulus of the 6. Armee was ordered to send General der Kavallerie Georg Stumme's XXXX. Panzer-Korps south to link up with the 1. Panzer-Armee near Millerovo, 300 kilometres south of Voronezh, and as soon as Hoth's 4. Panzer-Armee handed responsibility of Voronezh's defence to the 2. Armee, it was to overtake the 6. Armee.

Problems arose when Golikov's Voronezh Front committed Major-General Aleksandr Liziukov's 5th Tank Army to strike Hoth's long and vulnerable northern flank west of Voronezh. An attack by a single tank corps (Major-General Pavel Rotmistrov's 7th Tank Corps) on July 6 swelled to three tank corps (Major-General Andrei Kravchenko's 2nd Tank Corps and Major-General Aleksei Popov's 11th Tank Corps joining the fray) two days later. Tank clashes raged along this defensive front between Livny and Voronezh for over a week. Von Langermann's XXIV. Panzer-Korps staved off the Soviet thrusts and even counter-attacked with the 11. Panzer-Division on July 12, clobbering the 2nd and 7th Tank Corps and effectively terminating Liziukov's attack. Between July 6 and 15, the 5th Tank Army suffered nearly 8,000 casualties and lost 341 tanks, including 130 T-34s, 59 KV-1s and 51 Matilda IIs. Their sacrifice, however, had unforeseen and long-term ramifications for the Germans.

Hitler had wanted Hoth's 4. Panzer-Armee sent south immediately after being extracted from Voronezh on July 8, but von Bock was reluctant to release the mobile formations due to 5th Tank Army's counter-offensive. Hoth and von Bock compromised by despatching the XXXXVIII. Panzer-Korps south, but kept the XXIV. Panzer-Korps for another week, a necessary tactical decision that threatened to upset German operational plans. And so began the second phase of 'Blau' on July 9, not with an overwhelming armoured wave formed by Hoth's entire 4. Panzer-Armee, but with a northern pincer comprising just three divisions of Stumme's XXXX. Panzer-Korps: the 3. and 23. Panzer-Divisions and the 29. Infanterie-Division (mot). It was not until July 12 that Kempf's XXXXVIII. Panzer-Korps (with the 24. Panzer-Division and 16. and Grossdeutschland motorised divisions) re-joined the main southward assault near Nikolaevka and Ostrogozhsk.

Right: The 250-room Hotel Voronezh operated from 1940 to 1942 and again from 1951 to 1989. Today, the building houses the Regional Council of Trade Unions.



Further down Kirova Street, Kriegsbericht Koch pictured motorcyclists from the 13. Kompanie (infantry gun) of either Infanterie-Regiment 60 or 156 trying to disentangle a piece of wire wrapped around the rear wheel. The distinctive building in the background is Hotel Voronezh on Ploschad 20-letiya Oktyabrya (20th Anniversary of October Square). At 9.45 a.m. on July 8, the II. Bataillon of Infanterie-Regiment 156 hoisted the red war flag there on what they called the 'town hall turret'.



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20th Anniversary of October Square attracted a constant stream of visitors, PK photographers heading there even before the city was secured. This photo was taken by Luftwaffe reporter Niermann during 24. Panzer-Division's sweep of the city on the morning of July 7. Six months later, on January 24, 1943, four Soviet armies launched the Voronezh-Kastornoye

offensive and soldiers of the 60th Army pushed into the city the next day. Before withdrawing, German forces demolished many government buildings around the square and left behind a soldiers' cemetery on the adjoining Koltsovsky Square (off to the right). The Soviet conquerors hoisted the Red Banner of Victory from a balcony of the Hotel Voronezh.

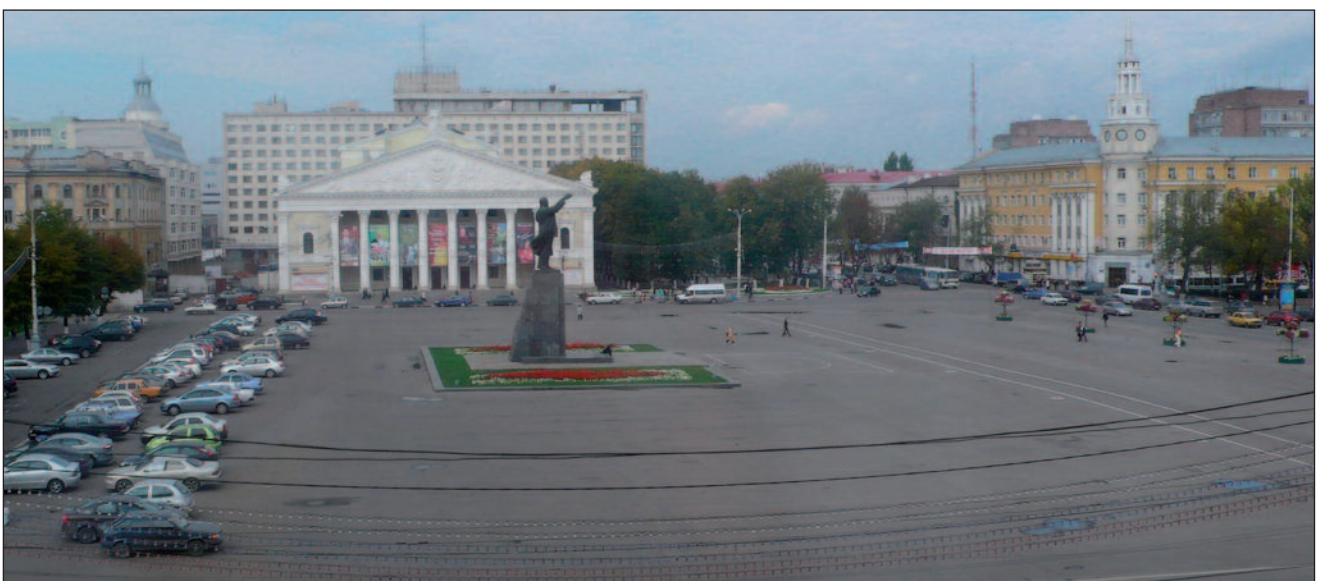
Hitler was certain that Red Army formations were fleeing in disarray and that von Bock had missed a golden opportunity to annihilate vast numbers of them. By July 12, Hitler and the OKH believed the Soviets were planning to hold the Millerovo—Kamensk—Shakhtinskii—Rostov line and that it was essential that Hoth break this line as soon as possible. Generaloberst Franz Halder, Chief of the General Staff of the Army, recorded in his diary: 'The Führer expressed his utmost displeasure over the delay in the move to the front of [the divisions] of the 4. Panzer-

Armee. He blames the failure on the fact that the 24. Panzer-Division and the Grossdeutschland, against the Führer's orders, were sent into Voronezh, causing a delay that could have been avoided.'

As such, the OKH issued a new directive: Hoth's 4. Panzer-Armee was to join Heeresgruppe A and proceed towards Kamensk with the objective of engaging and destroying the enemy north of the Don, while Paulus's 6. Armee covered this movement to the east and created the conditions for an advance towards Stalingrad. Bock vehemently dis-

agreed because his armoured formations were being dispersed. Hitler, already agitated by von Bock's hesitation and intransigence, had had enough: he relieved von Bock of command and replaced him with Generaloberst Weichs. New orders issued to both army groups on the evening of July 13 re-oriented the entire offensive southward and south-westward and ultimately set it on course for Stalingrad.

The week-long delay at Voronezh doubtlessly contributed to the failure to seize Stalin's namesake city in a surprise raid.



SERGEY POPOV

The square has undergone several name changes in its history. Originally called Equestrian Square, then Starokonnaya, it was renamed 20th Anniversary of October Square in 1937. The statue of Lenin erected in 1940 was removed by the Germans

during their occupation. A new monument to Lenin was erected in 1950 and six years later the square received its modern name — Ploschad Lenina (Lenin Square). The colonnaded building is the Voronezh State Opera and Ballet Theatre.



NIOD 16789

The ravages of war left 92 per cent of Voronezh in ruins. This picture was taken from the rear window of a building on 20-letiya Oktyabrya Street looking north-east across the city centre in November 1942.

SOVIET RECAPTURE OF VORONEZH

By mid-January 1943, Voronezh was at the apex of a very long bulge as a result of a succession of Soviet offensives that toppled Axis defences south to north like dominos. First Operation ‘Uranus’ at Stalingrad from November 19-23, then ‘Little Saturn’ on the middle Don in mid-December, and lastly the Ostrogozhsk-Rossoshk operation beginning on January 12, 1943, which ripped apart the Hungarian 2nd Army, the direct southern neighbour of the 2. Armee. The disintegration of the Hungarians prompted the Stavka to hurriedly plan a new attack to encircle and destroy the 2. Armee in the Voronezh area. The Voronezh-Kastornoye operation — the fourth phase of the general Soviet winter offensive of 1942-43 — was implemented by the 13th Army of Lieutenant-General Max Reyter’s Bryansk Front and three armies (the 38th, 60th and 40th) of Golikov’s Voronezh Front.

On January 24, 1943, the 40th Army (now led by Lieutenant-General Kirill Moskalenko) attacked the underbelly of the 2. Armee’s salient and created the impression that the offensive would unfold only along this axis. German intelligence failed to detect the preparations of Pukhov’s 13th Army and Lieutenant-General Nikandr Chibisov’s 38th Army. The OKH authorised the 2. Armee to withdraw from its exposed positions at Voronezh on January 25, yet the army suffered a catastrophic reverse when the unexpected assaults from the north began. Two of its three corps were encircled when the Soviet pincers met at Kastornoye on January 28. Busting out of the encirclement and retreating westward in the middle of the Russian winter caused considerable losses and the 2. Armee barely escaped destruction, yet its impotence left a weak point in the Axis line that opened the way to Kursk for the Soviets. The entire German southern wing seemed on the point of dissolution. To precipitate a total collapse and force the Germans back to the Dnepr river, the Stavka approved two operations — ‘Skachok’ (Gallop) and ‘Zvezda’ (Star) — to liberate the Donbas, Kharkov and Kursk, and shove German forces back

over the Dnepr. Large swathes of territory were liberated, as were several major cities — though Kharkov was recaptured by Generalfeldmarschall Erich von Manstein — but the resulting bulge centred upon Kursk set the scene for operations in 1943.

Riflemen of Zykov’s 121st Rifle Division (the same formation that had fought in the attack to recapture the city the previous July) entered Voronezh on January 25, 1943. Large detachments immediately began combing the city for ‘lone wolves and enemy spies’, while teams started clearing obstacles from the streets, bridges and buildings.

Recapturing the city cost Zykov just ten dead and 19 wounded. The ghost city lay in ruins with 92 per cent of all of its buildings destroyed. Voronezh was conferred the status of ‘City of Military Glory’ by President Vladimir Putin on February 16, 2008.

Jason Mark is the author and publisher of several acclaimed books on Stalingrad and other battles on the Eastern Front. This article is based on his Panzerkrieg, Volume 1. German Armoured Operations at Stalingrad. Panzer-Abteilungen 103, 129 and 160 (Sydney, 2017), available from www.leapinghorseman.com, specialist military bookstores and Amazon.



SERGEY POPOV

There are two main war memorials in Voronezh city today. One is the Chizhovskiy Bridgehead Memorial on 20-letiya Oktyabrya Street (see page 42), the other is in the Patriots Park along Prospekt Leninskiy (Lenin Avenue) on the east bank of the Voronezh river. Here our photographer Sergey Popov stands in front of the impressive Chizhovskiy memorial.